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Collective Mobilizations among Immigrant Workers in Low-skilled Sectors: A Study of Community Organizing of Immigrant Workers in the UK

Zhe Jiang
Loughborough University
Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Oct 2013
I confirm that the work presented in the thesis is my own and has not been submitted to any other institutions. Where the information is derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Student: Zhe Jiang  Signature:
Abstract

Contemporary labour immigration into the UK has been underpinned by two structural positions: the uneven development within the capitalist system and an intensification of competition driving towards flexibility and precarity. Immigrant workers are overwhelmingly concentrated in secondary sectors of the labour market with low pay, long working hours and poor health and safety and closely associated with non-standard work and informal economy where unions are often not available. How these immigrant workers in highly exploitative industries respond to work-related exploitations poses a great challenge to traditional trade unionism. While community unionism has received increasing attention from researchers and practitioners, an institution-centric approach is dominated in the scholarship which tends to overemphasize the role of institutional entity, such as trade unions and NGOs, in shaping collective agency and consider it as the centrality to immigrant workers’ activism. In contrast to such union-centred research, this study adopts a social movement perspective to explore whether and how community organizing approach can empower immigrant workers and enhance union organizing when globalization compromises its validity.

By conducting the multi-method (interviews, surveys, participant observations and videos) ethnographic studies in an immigrant domestic worker self-help group-Justice for Domestic Workers in London over a year and a post EU-enlargement Polish association and local Polish neighbourhood in South Somerset over five months, the research shows that gendered and cultural space rather than traditional industrial entities could offer a political context in which immigrant workers start recognising structural class exploitations and develop an agency and activism for changes. This suggests that the collective mobilizations of immigrant workers in informal and individualised sectors may require creative leaps of sociological imagination in nurturing such communities of coping, wherever they may be occurring - in social clubs, cafés or churches.

Community, however, is not a naturally harmonious and unified group setting. The internal divisions and competitions within immigrant communities pose limits to how
far ethnic cohesion can serve as a basis for collective mobilization of immigrant workers. The research points to the potential tensions between immigrant community organizations and trade unions to compete for membership and social influence in the coalition building. There is a risk that the institutional goals of immigrant community organizations, in terms of securing funding and expanding its organizational influence, may take precedence over substantive goals of support provision. The research also suggests that academics and practitioners need to rethink the criteria that define the success of worker organizing. To win union recognition and achieve collective bargaining agreements in the workplace is a rare case in community organizing of immigrant workers. A distinction should be made between capacity-building from the perspective of workers and organizations involved in community organizing of immigrant workers. There might be a contradiction between organizational developments and grassroots empowerment. Instead of merely focusing on political outcomes as the existing research indicates, more attention should paid to outcomes in social and cultural arenas and how gains in one arena facilitate or hinder gains in another.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Collective mobilizations among immigrant workers: practical significance

I came to the UK to work for a famous British actress who had previously employed me in India. I worked from 6am to 3am each day with no day off, often having to cater for big parties and being called names such as 'stupid Indian'. When I couldn't stand the long hours of work and verbal abuse, I stood up for myself and my employer dumped me in the country house. There I had loads of work without breaks. I wasn't allowed to leave the house and I was completely isolated. I wasn't paid for 6 months and they took away my passport. They would always tell me that this was their country and that they have the power here, not me. I cried every night and prayed 'Please God - show me the way.' (Ruby, Filipino domestic worker, 34 years old, 8 years in the UK)

They are scared of making complaints. There used to be several people who disagreed and argued with the boss about this production output. They are gone now. The company just let them go by saying that they are not efficient. They are scared that they may not be able to find any other job if they lose the job here. There are a great number of people who have been working there for 5 years doing basic things, exhausting, no pay rise. (Marek, Polish worker in the food processing factory, 53 years old, 5 years in the UK)

Ruby, a Filipino domestic worker in London, worked for 21 hours a day without payment for 6 months and suffered verbal abuse and social isolation. These working conditions are not uncommon in the individualized domestic work sector. Immigrant domestic workers are subject not only to non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage and long working hours, but also discriminatory verbal, physical and sexual abuse in the UK. Their dependence on employers for legal status makes them even more vulnerable within employment relationships. Marek, a Polish immigrant worker, has spent 5 years working in an anti-union food processing factory without a pay rise. His work is laborious and low-paid. This factory is typical of food processing factories employing East European immigrant workers in rural England, many of which are non-unionized. The potential victimization from employers leads to the breakdown of labour solidarity in the workplace. Given the fact that the majority of
contemporary immigrant workers in the UK are concentrated in low-skilled sectors, such as domestic work, cleaning, care work, refuse collecting and machine operating, which are characterized by high levels of exploitation and low rates of unionization (Coleman 2010), the potential for their collective mobilization is a topic of considerable importance for industrial relations scholars.

In recent years, following the decline of union membership and the erosion of union influence, trade unions have acknowledged that their future is dependent on building up their membership and encouraging organizing activities across all sections of the labour force (Heery and Adler 2004). It is estimated that in 2010 as much as 13.5 per cent of the UK labour force were foreign-born migrants (Rienzo 2011a). Immigrant workers constitute important untapped resources for union membership. Nevertheless, it is not an easy task for trade unions to organize contemporary immigrant workers. Recent immigrant workers are often concentrated in dispersed and individualized sectors or low-skilled sectors which are non-unionized (see Chapter 2). There is often a lack of a group setting in the workplace where immigrant workers can share grievances and seek collective solutions. The potential for victimization from employers also diminishes the likelihood that they will join collective mobilizations.

Moreover, immigrant workers are often associated with non-standard work such as temporary work, agency work and seasonal work (Benner 2002; Forde 2001; Forde and Slater 2005). Given that these immigrant workers are no longer directly employed or may constantly change workplaces, they are emotionally distanced from the people who determine their working conditions. Subcontracted work breaks the mutual dependency between workers and employers which has been central to labour organizing in the past. Furthermore, immigrant workers’ social experiences, such as their lack of union experience, lack of union trust and their temporary and transnational characteristics (see Chapter 8), pose challenges to the union organization of immigrant workers.
Academics and unionists have generated extensive debates on whether immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors can still be collectively organized and how trade unions can adjust their organizing strategies to the job structures and social demands of immigrant workers. On one side of the debate is the view that migrant workers are predominantly the victims of global economic restructuring with little opportunity for agency in organizing against exploitative conditions (Wallerstein 2004). Accompanying this position is the argument that increasing fragmentation and individualization of migrant jobs leads to the dissolving of labour consciousness and collective action (Castells 1996). On the other side of the debate is a more optimistic position which stresses that migrant workers are subjects who are capable of fighting against their disadvantaged socio-economic positions. Here, the role of organized labour and NGOs is seen as potentially significant in transforming migrant workers into proactive social actors who can successfully take action to reshape their working and social environments (Hern and Bergos 2010; Pero 2008; Wills 2008).

The intention of the study is to consider immigrant workers as active social actors by analyzing the community organizing efforts of immigrant domestic workers in London and Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset. In order to fully uncover the social process of the community organization of immigrant workers, a social movement perspective (Tilly 1978) is adopted. Social movement theory is particularly useful for this research because it constitutes a significant shift in the focus of research on community unionism. It directs our attention away from union recruitment and the organizing of immigrants toward the social process of immigrants’ collective mobilization efforts that may go beyond the economic relationship between immigrants and employers in the workplace and include gendered and cultural dynamics. It may be too early to conclude that trade unions have lost their momentum in worker organizing, but our attention should be oriented away from union recruitment of migrants toward the social process of immigrants’
collective mobilization efforts. By using Tilly’s model (1978) as the conceptual framework in this study (see Chapter 4), the research does not intend to assert that all components – interest formation, mobilization structure, political opportunity and collective actions - are causally necessary in immigrant workers’ community organizing efforts, but to identify the specific mechanisms that can be potentially found across multiple community organizing cases. In doing so, we can enhance our understanding of the complexity and richness of the community organizing efforts of immigrant workers. By treating immigrant workers as the central agency in collective mobilizations, the following questions will be addressed:

1) Interest formation (how immigrant workers formulate interest in collective terms): what are the socio-economic conditions that stimulate or impede the formation of collective interest among immigrant workers within the workplace? What strategies do immigrant workers adopt to facilitate the interest formation?

2) Mobilization opportunity and structure (how immigrant workers get mobilized and in what context): How does the local socio-political climate affect the work and life experiences of immigrant workers? Is ethnic community a boned entity that can serve as a basis for community organizing? How do immigrant workers utilise different levels of community networks to combat exploitations? What is the role of non-traditional actors, such as ethnic organizations, churches and self-help groups, in organizing immigrant workers, and what tensions and power relations exist between different civil organizations?

3) Collective action (outcomes of mobilizations): What forms of collective actions do immigrant workers carry out, and how do we assess the outcomes of these actions?
1.2 Immigrant workers and community unionism: theoretical significance

Given the fact that the traditional workplace-based union organizing approach may not be suitable for recent immigrant workers, researchers have started exploring whether other civil organizations or immigrant organizations could fill this gap by collectively representing vulnerable immigrant workers. Some writers (McBride and Greenwood 2009) argue that a community organizing approach which emphasizes coalition building between trade unions and community organizations based on broad social justice, can be effective in helping unions reach migrant workers. In the recent debate on community unionism, the role of ethnicity-based links (Holgate 2005) and faith-based organizations (Wills et al 2009a) have been identified as important for the construction of migrant workers’ solidarity. Much attention has been drawn to the negotiation of representations between trade unions, churches and migrant community organizations, and how industrial relations can be managed within these spaces (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009). Nevertheless, there is a tendency in these arguments to overemphasize the role of institutional entities such as trade unions, ethnic community organizations and NGOs in shaping collective agency. Institutional structures as such are perceived as central to the formation of migrant workers’ activism. Much discussion of community unionism is situated within the scholarship on union revival (Frege and Kelly 2004). Trade unions, rather than immigrant workers, are treated as a point of departure in the discussion on the community organizing of migrant workers (Martinez Lucio and Connolly 2010). The existing community unionism literature can be subject to the following criticism.

First, the relevance and centrality of trade unions in the community organizing of immigrant workers cannot be taken for granted. Some recent descriptions of the organizing of migrant workers at grassroots level suggest that these workers may not have close links to trade unions (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009). Ness’s (2005) examination of the collective organizing of migrant greengrocery workers, delivery
workers and black-cab drivers in New York argued that it was migrant workers themselves, instead of unions, that originated organizing drives. By treating unions as the starting point, we might lose sight of immigrant workers’ informal networks and communities and their impact on the ability to create effective collective actions. ‘Communities of coping, defined as informal and oral-based supporting networks formed during the labour process or in ‘off-stage’ areas, have been well documented in a range of service jobs with high emotional labour costs (Benner and Wrubel, 1989, Korczynski 2003). Service workers offer each other social support and thus socialize the emotional costs of labour. These studies resonate well with Scott’s (1985) writing on the hidden transcripts of workers’ resistance, which refer to small, local and culturally nurtured forms of resistance operating at the discursive level without directly offering concrete resistance to systems of exploitation. Some studies also suggest that communities of coping can make workers less open to employer control and offer foundations for resistive collective mobilization (Simms 2005). In this study, trade unions are not treated as a point of departure but an optional form of social and institutional resources conducive to community organizing. By adopting a bottom-up perspective, the study investigates the role of both formal institutions and self-initiated informal communities in mobilizing and empowering immigrant workers.

Secondly, the focus on the role of institutional dimensions of immigrant communities often carries with it the presumption of existing social networks and ignorance of important internal differences within the community. Such an approach builds on the romantic conception of ideal immigrant groups and imagines the perfectly functioning immigrant community as a bonded entity with a common language, customs and culture that define its members separately from outsiders. It assumes that there is an existing collectivity among co-ethnics and that immigrant workers would be ideologically and emotionally bonded with their ethnic organizations. However, Gans
(1979) has offered a new concept of ‘symbolic ethnicity’ which describes a situation in which ethnic minorities do not need either ethnic identity or organizations but resort to the use of ethnic symbols representing ethnic identification without any concern for preserving cultural distinctiveness. The immigrant community does not foster a single model of ethnic identity based on cultural consensus, but rather provides a symbolic space and conceptual domain in which members can construct their own understanding of self and group. These studies have pointed out the potential fragmentations within the immigrant community derived from the integration of ethnicity, class, gender and other cultural dynamics as well as the multiple choices of the actors themselves. Therefore, studying the immigrant community does not require scholars to prioritize its collectivity and unity. For immigrant workers, in particular, multiple identities, spaces and cultures might exist ‘in-between’ the receiving societies and their home countries (Bhabha 1994; Dwyer 1999). The notion of ‘immigrant community’ is thus misleading if used to connote a traditional bonded entity. The research explores how gendered, religious and migrant dynamics have an impact on the formation of labour solidarity among immigrant domestic workers and how ethnicity articulates with class, age and gender to foster or impede the formation of collective identity among Polish immigrant workers.

Furthermore, when discussing the coalition building between trade unions and community organizations, extensive literature has criticized the bureaucracy and conservatism of trade unions (Gaido 2008) and how their institutional inertia produces the mismatch between their recruiting and organizing strategies and the actual needs of immigrant workers (Holgate 2005). The willingness and ability of unions to prioritize the community organizing agenda has been questioned, especially in the UK where industrial relations have a strong tradition of collective bargaining. Nevertheless, little academic attention has been given to the nature and relevance of immigrant community organizations in the community organizing of immigrant
workers. It is often assumed that immigrant community organizations have close connections with immigrant workers at ground level and thus are authentic representations of immigrant workers’ interests (Tapia 2012). Cooper (1980) argues that it is probably unrealistic and utopian to imagine that the impact of bureaucratization could be precluded if the origins and development of community organizations were rooted in the modernization process. The study analysed different types of immigrant community organizations in terms of their organizational structure, mobilizing mechanism and funding source, and considered how they might have different impacts on the ability to mobilize and empower immigrant workers.

Finally, the majority of research on community unionism assesses the outcomes of community organizing from an organizational perspective, focusing on the benefits that community connections can bring to trade unions, such as union recruitment and recognition (Heyes 2009, Wills 2001). Without addressing the meaning of empowerment perceived by immigrant worker themselves, a community organizing strategy might risk becoming a ‘problem solving’ strategy for the union membership crisis instead of a promising approach to helping migrant workers mobilize. Moreover, political outcomes make up the majority of the research into community organizing outcomes, and often refer to changing or implementing public policies and setting or influencing political agendas (Fine 2005). There are another two arenas - the social and cultural arenas of community organizing outcomes - which have been largely ignored by the existing research (Earl 2000 2004). The major problem with focusing exclusively on political outcomes is that psychological empowerment, the development of social capital, collective identity formation and other dimensions of social life influenced by community organizing activities have been excluded from theorizing organizing outcomes (Earl 2000 2004; Goodwin and Jasper 1999). To define what constitutes community organizing outcomes is often a difficult task. The difficulty in defining outcomes is due in part to the fact that community organizing
can influence many arenas, such as political, cultural and social arenas, simultaneously. As Cress and Snow (2000:1064) stated, outcomes can vary greatly, ‘extending from state-level policy decisions to expansion of a movement’s social capital to changes in participants’ biographies’. The study proposes that more attention should be given to grassroots empowerment: ‘building a positive self-image and self-confidence; developing the ability to think critically; building group cohesion; encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society’ (Banerjee 1995:3), among immigrant workers, especially when the mobilization group is still young. Instead of merely focusing on political outcomes as the existing research suggests, more attention needs to be paid to those outcomes in the social and cultural arenas and how gains in one arena can facilitate or hinder gains in another.

By conducting a critical ethnographic study of the community organizing efforts of immigrant domestic workers in London and Polish workers in South Somerset and examining the social processes of their collective mobilizations, the research contributes to knowledge in four important ways. First, it helps to fill an empirical gap concerning mobilizations among apparently fragmented immigrant workers. Second, it highlights the potential importance of communities of coping based on non-class dynamics beyond workplaces as an element in community organizing that may be pertinent for immigrant workers in informal and anti-union sectors. Third, it balances the prevailing trend that glamorizes ‘community’ as a bonded and unified entity and thus can act as a solid basis of labour organization, by pointing out the divisions within immigrant communities and the potential danger that organizational developments might take precedence over grassroots empowerment in some community organizations. Finally, it points to the importance of widening the definition of pertinent outcomes from community mobilization among immigrant workers.
1.3 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two explores the origin of labour migration and looks at what jobs immigrant workers undertake in the UK, the socio-economic context in which their work is embedded, and its implications for the union organizing of immigrant workers. It concludes that immigrant workers are overwhelmingly concentrated at the bottom end of the labour market, where they experience low pay, long working hours, and poor health and safety, and are closely associated with non-standard work and the informal economy where unions are often not available. Therefore, the traditional workplace-based union organizing approach might not be effective in organizing immigrant workers.

Chapter Three gives a brief historical review of collective mobilizations among immigrant workers in the UK and an analysis of the relevance of class to recent immigrant mobilizations. Having acknowledged that class is still an important explanatory variable in the study of immigrant organization, the chapter then explores how contemporary class-based immigrant mobilizations differ from traditional class-based organizing in terms of the core issues, space and main social actors involved in the organizing process. A cultural analysis of class, particularly Thompson’s (1963) conception of class as process, relationship and culture, is elaborated as an appropriate approach with which to explore class-based organizing among immigrant workers.

Chapter Four discusses community unionism which emphasizes coalition building between trade unions, community organizations and NGOs designed to organize workers based on a broad social justice agenda and its relevance to immigrant mobilization efforts. As opposed to the dominant institution-centric approach in the existing community unionism literature, a social movement perspective is adopted in this research to explore collective agency among immigrant workers. Drawing on
Tilly’s (1978) social movement framework, the research constructs community unionism upon three main elements: collective interest; mobilization structure and opportunity; and collective actions to uncover the social process of the community organizing of immigrant workers.

Chapter Five sets up the research methodology and practices of the thesis. The research is epistemologically located within a critical and feminist framework with the overt purpose of investigating and addressing the issues of exploitation at work and social injustice faced by immigrant workers in low-paid industries. By examining the legacy of ethnographic research in the study of Industrial Relations, the research emphasizes the importance of shifting from the workplace to the ‘community’ in order to contextualize workers’ resistance as a result of global economic restructuring and the large inflow of immigrant workers. Detailed research techniques such as interviews, participant observations and videos are explained in depth. The researcher also reflects on her social perspectives and emotions and discusses how they have an impact on the research process.

Chapter Six presents the empirical findings from case one. It offers a grounded account of MDWs’ community organizing efforts facilitated by a MDW self-help group, Unite the Union and Kalayaan, a charity organization offering advocacy and advice to MDWs in London. The research findings are structured around three themes: interest formation; mobilization structure and opportunity; and collective action.

Chapter Seven and Eight present the empirical findings from case two, the community organizing of Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset, which are also structured around the aforementioned three themes. While Chapter Seven focuses on the formation of collective ethnic identity and informal mobilization resources among Polish immigrant workers, Chapter Eight elaborates the formation of labour solidarity
and the ‘formal’ dimension of the mobilization structure – coalition building between trade unions and community groups. It also assesses community organizing outcomes from both worker and union perspectives.

Chapter Nine offers a comparative analysis of two cases in order to analyze different modes of intersection between class and cultural dynamics, such as gender, ethnicity, religion and migrant status within immigrant mobilizations and their impact on the formation of labour solidarity. It also compares different types of mediating institutions/networks and explores how they mediate the social process of solidarity formation. The community organizing outcomes of the two cases are discussed from a wider social movement perspective to incorporate both capacity building and concrete gains from both worker and union perspectives.

Chapter Ten concludes the thesis by drawing together the theoretical and practical conclusions which have arisen from the research. The research indicates that the further development of collective mobilizations in the informal and flexible economy may require creative leaps of sociological imagination in nurturing labour consciousness, wherever they may occur - in ethnic social clubs, women’s groups, churches, or at school gates in the wider community setting. Moreover, the research contributes to community unionism literature by contesting the unity of immigrant communities and emphasizing the role of ‘communities of coping’ in the community organizing processes. It is also suggested that we should rethink the criteria that defines the success of community organizing by incorporating both organizational and worker perspectives and different arenas of outcomes, such as political, social and cultural arenas. This chapter also discusses the theoretical and methodological limitations of the study.
Chapter 2: Immigrant workers and the UK labour market: challenges to trade union organizing

2.1 Introduction
The topic of the collective mobilization of immigrant workers in low-paid sectors is broadly located in the context of global economic restructuring and the decline in trade union membership in the UK. In order to explore the origins and social process of immigrant workers’ collective actions, it is important to begin the discussion by exploring the source of labour migration and contextualizing the labour market in which immigrant workers are embedded. These influence and reflect the socio-economic positions of immigrant workers in the host society, which constitute the material and ‘objective’ dimensions of labour mobilization. However, in order to fully understand the dynamics of the ‘immigrant’ labour market, the role of trade unions cannot be neglected because it plays a significant part in shaping immigrant workers’ employment experiences and bargaining power. In theory, trade unions can either exclude immigrant workers from mainstream union activities due to concern about the ‘race to the bottom effect’ or incorporate immigrant workers into the existing union movement in order to foster international labour solidarity. How trade unions locate themselves on ‘a continuum ranging from exclusion to inclusion’ (Kahmann 2006:186) will have a direct and profound effect on immigrant workers’ bargaining power within their employment relationships. Therefore, it is also essential to review trade unions’ responses to the inflow of immigrant workers and examine whether it is viable for immigrant workers to resort to traditional unionism as a means of addressing employment issues.

The chapter looks at which jobs immigrant workers undertake in the UK, the socio-economic context in which their work is embedded and its implications for
union organizing of immigrant workers. It starts with a discussion on the origin of international labour migration. Both Piore’s (1979) dual labour market theory and Wellerstein’s world system theory (1974 1984 2004) imply that international migratory process is structurally embedded in the inherent dynamics of capitalist systems and that the movement of labour from developing countries to developed countries is persistent. Structural theories indicate that a large proportion of immigrant workers are located at the bottom end of the job hierarchy and are highly exploited. This is confirmed by immigrant workers’ labour market performance in the UK, which is discussed in detail in the second section of the chapter. It then explores trade unions’ historical response to the inflow of immigrant workers into the UK and the challenges posed to union organizing by immigrant workers. The chapter concludes that immigrant workers are overwhelmingly concentrated at the bottom end of the labour market and experience low pay, long working hours and poor health and safety, and are closely associated with non-standard work and the informal economy where unions are often not available. Therefore the traditional workplace-based union organizing approach might not be effective in organizing immigrant workers.

2.2 Explaining international labour migration

In order to examine whether immigrant workers can be collectively mobilized, and if so how, it is essential to understand the origins and dynamics of international labour migration because they reflect the socio-economic characteristics of immigrants in the labour market. To understand why international labour migration to developed economies remains a phenomenon of paramount importance, there are two separate processes that need to be taken into account: the initiation of the new inflow of immigrants which is related to globalization and transnationalism; and its continuation at a high level which is linked to the inherent dynamics of the migratory process.
Regarding the first process, Piore’s (1979) dual labour market theory offers a compelling explanation of why there is a continuous demand for immigrant labour in highly developed countries. Piore’s (1979) main argument is that the modern economy is characterized by a dual labour market consisting of a primary and secondary sector. The primary sector requires considerable skill levels and workers are largely protected by institutional job-security arrangements, while the secondary sector is characterized by insecure job opportunities, poor salaries, low prestige and few prospects of upward mobility. This hierarchy of jobs is very important for the motivation of the workforce because it is the accumulation of social prestige, rather than merely earning a wage, that induces people to work. Within the secondary sector, employers may need to offer better working conditions and self-development opportunities to compete for local workers or automate jobs for which there is a labour shortage, using technology.

However, positions at the bottom of this job hierarchy create a fundamental dilemma as they can never be eliminated. If the positions currently occupying the bottom rung were somehow removed, then the jobs above them would be at the bottom. Immigrant labour can provide a solution to this dilemma as immigrants come from outside the country and are therefore removed from the social-economic context in which this job hierarchy is located (Piore 1979: 27-35). Even if they recognize that the job confers low social status in the host society, they may accept it as they do not view themselves as full members of the receiving country. They are more likely to define themselves as members of their home community in which foreign labour and currency remittance may be regarded as a considerable social honour. The huge gap between the living standards in highly developed countries and the countries that send immigrants makes the wages in the receiving society attractive to poor immigrant labour. As Waldinger and Lichter (2003) suggest, in ‘the dual frame of reference’,
migrants feel better paid than their counterparts back home while also being unentitled to the state-provided support to citizens in the receiving society.

Piore (1979) argues that the segmented labour market reflects the characteristics of the workforce, but one must suspect that employers exercise some element of choice in recruiting workers to fit the pre-existing jobs. This indicates that the dual labour market has come to characterize the modern capitalist economy because of the inherent duality in economic activities: the duality between capital and labour. Capital is a fixed factor of production and thus cannot be laid off, while labour is a variable factor and can be released if the demand falls. When the demand can be divided into the categories of basic demand and variable portions, capitalists will try to use capital-intensive methods to meet the basic demand and labour-intensive methods for the fluctuating component. Workers in capital-intensive primary sectors get highly-skilled and stable jobs with good quality equipment. Employers invest a substantial amount in training them and equipping them with the necessary skills. In contrast, in the labour-intensive secondary sector, workers do low-skilled jobs and employers can fire them at will because there is little or no cost to the employer. Employees are responsible for all the costs of unemployment. It is this economic duality that leads to the segmented labour market (Piore 1979: 36-39).

The dual labour market theory offers a useful analytical tool for explaining the dual occupational structure in advanced economies. As Cornelius (2001) claims, the demand for foreign labour is ‘structurally embedded’ in more advanced industrial societies, which cannot function without access to the cheap immigrant workforce. Sassen’s ‘global cities hypothesis’ (1991) has also dismissed the idea that ‘post-industrial’ countries only need highly-skilled labour. She argues that, during the period of economic restructuring, a small number of cities, such as New York, London and Tokyo, have emerged as ‘global cities’ which function as the ‘command and control’ centres in the global economy. In these cities, the economic shift from
manufacturing industry to finance and other knowledge-related industries has created a marked income and occupational polarization, with rapid growth at both the top and the bottom of the labour market and radical decline in the middle. Alongside the increase in professional workers in leading sectors of the economy, a large number of immigrant workers have been employed to provide services in both companies and private residences for the expanding rich professional and managerial class, and to meet the increasing demand for informal economic activities (see also Cox and Watt 2002; Samers 2002). As Sassen noted (1991: 286), ‘what are perceived as backward sectors of the economy may or may not be remnants from an earlier phase of industrialization; they may well represent a downgrading of work connected to the dynamics of growth of leading sectors of the economy’. The demand for low-waged labour in turn draws a great deal of immigrant labour from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere.

Since the formulation of this hypothesis, a great many scholars have explored the extent to which this hypothesis is empirically valid in a cross-national context. In the 1990s, criticisms were raised on the grounds that there was a trend towards the professionalization of the London workforce with a rapid increase in workers at the top of the job hierarchy and a decline in all other occupational groups (Buck 1994; Hamnett 1994 1996; Hamnett and Cross1998). Hamnett (1994 1996) attributed this trend to a more generous welfare system and a lower level of immigration in the UK, as opposed to the US. However, following political and economic change in Britain, new evidence (Goos and Manning 2003) echoes the ‘global cities hypothesis’ and suggests that London has recently been subject to the process of occupational polarization.

As opposed to Piore’s (1973) theory that links the origins of migration to the bifurcation of the labour market within a specific national economy, Sassen (1988 1991) and Castles and Kosack (1973) analyze migration in the context of the uneven
development of economic and political power in the global economy and argue that it is this perpetual inequality that mobilizes labour for capital. The intellectual roots of this analysis can be traced back to Wellerstein’s world system theory (1974 1984 2004). Such a world system - of which capitalism has been the only long-lasting historical instance from the sixteenth century to the present day - has many economic groups, political units and cultural patterns which are all unified by the division of labour, featuring three zones - core, semi-periphery and periphery - tied together by the internal exchange of essential goods as well as the flow of labour and capital (2004: 23). Each major zone of the world system has a different degree of profitability of the production process and its characteristic ‘labour control’. There is a constant flow of surplus-value from the producers of periphery products to the producers of core products. In addition, the penetration of capitalist economic relations to the periphery areas creates a mobile population that is prone to move abroad. Moreover, the differentiated strength of multiple states is important to maintain the world system as a whole because the stronger states which contain a large share of core products tend to protect and reinforce the surplus inflow to core areas (Wellerstein 2004: 23-41).

World system theory treats migration as an inevitable process derived from the dynamics of market creation and the uneven development of means of production within the global economy. It offers a very comprehensive and useful theoretical framework for explaining the labour inflow from less developed economies to highly developed countries. Wallerstein (2004) has clearly recognized and clarified the importance of the inherent dynamics of capitalism and its profound implications for international migration. However, the conditions that initiate migration may be quite different from the conditions that perpetuate the phenomenon across time and space.
Although wage differentials, recruitment efforts and market penetration may drive people to migration, the conditions that arise in the course of migration may function independently and hence affect the continuity of the migration process. These conditions include migrant networks and related institutions involved in the ‘migration industry’ (Castles 1998: 29), promoting the accumulation of social capital that binds ‘migrants and non-migrants together in a complex web of social roles and interpersonal relationships’ (Boya 1989: 639). Family connections, household patterns and community ties can not only provide the financial and cultural capital that makes migration possible but also facilitate the settlement of immigrant communities in the host society (Castles 1998: 27-30). The migration chain is usually started by employer recruitment or migrant pioneers, but once the movement is established, the migrants may follow the ‘beaten path’ (Stahl 1993) and are often helped by people who are already settled in the host society. Governments may have difficulty controlling the migrant inflows once international migration begins, as this network of connections cannot be easily stopped, regardless of what position the government adopts. The study of the role of networks, particularly ‘hometown ties’, in maintaining international migration is mostly influenced by Massey and his colleagues’ work on the Mexican migration project (Massey et al 1987, 1998). Additionally, some scholars have pointed to the significance of social actors such as government officials, traffickers, lawyers, estate agents, labour recruiters, and interpreters, as well as friends, families and communities in maintaining migrant inflows (Collyer 2005; Krissman 2005).

2.2.1 Commentary: powerful capitalist system, powerless labour migrants

Obviously, there is no single theory that can fully explain the process of international labour migration. Various theories claim to analyse the origin and persistence of migration at different levels. They do not necessarily contradict each other unless one adopts a rigid position at one level only. They may work together in a complex way
within a specific context. Both dual labour market theory and world system theory imply that the international migratory process is structurally embedded in the inherent dynamics of capitalist systems and the demand for immigrant workers in secondary sectors and low-paid industries is persistent in developed economies. Overall, they provide a grand unified structural theory of international migration.

Nevertheless, criticisms can be raised regarding the idea of two-step reductions in world system theory: a reduction of complicated social and economic structures to the determination by world market opportunities; and a reduction of state structures and policies to the determination by the dominant capitalist class’s interests (Skocpol, 1977: 1078-1079). World system theory recognizes the importance of states in maintaining the unequal exchanges between countries, yet state policies are interpreted as politics oriented towards market-class interests. By adopting this position, the complex and contradictory political process of immigration policy-making cannot be fully explained (Castles 2004). The importance of civil society and human agency is also neglected in its main argument. It does not consider the roles of other important variables, such as pre-existing institutional patterns and rebellions from below, in shaping national immigration policies and migrants’ roles in the labour market. The role of trade unions, in particular, needs further discussion as it plays an important part in shaping immigrant workers’ bargaining power in the global economy. With their emphasis on the dominance of the powerful capitalist system in the organization of trade and labour throughout the world, the structural theories lack a notion of human agency and imply the disempowerment of labour migrants.

In contrast to structural theories, studies on migrant networks indicate that migration is a complex nexus of institutions, resources, cultural networks and agents and draw our attention to coping strategies within migrant communities for combating their structural disadvantages in the receiving society. They highlight social and cultural factors in the international migratory process, as opposed to economic determinism
which is implied in structural theories. These two different theories together offer a balanced view of international migration dynamics to include analysis of both structure and agency. By arguing that the structural theories of migration tend to lose sight of the subjective dimensions of labour migrants and cultural factors in the migratory process, we do not deny the existence of an ethnically-segregated labour market and immigrant workers’ structural disadvantages in the labour market, which have profound implications for their identity formation and coping strategies in the receiving society. It is essential to understand what type of work immigrants undertake and the socio-economic context in which they do it in the host society.

2.3 Immigrant workers and the UK labour market

The proportion of foreign-born migrants who are in employment in the UK has been steadily increasing since the 1990s and reached 13.5% of all people in employment in 2010 (Rienzo 2011a). The International Passage Survey (IPS) showed that most (38%) long-term migrants who had stayed in the UK for one year or more migrated to the UK for work-related reasons in 2008. While labour migration has become prominent in relation to its quantity, it is important to examine the performance of migrant workers in the labour market.

2.3.1 Sectoral concentration and spatial patterns

Both world system theory and dual labour market theory suggest that immigrant workers undertake the worst jobs and occupy the lowest stratum of the host society. As Castles and Kosack (1979) argue, local workers and immigrant workers together constitute the working class, yet immigrant workers are weaker and more exploited and thus can be treated as an ‘underclass’. Wolf (1982) also supports the idea that capitalism does not produce a single and uniform working class, but creates a variety of social classes of workers with different modes of production. Immigrant workers are overwhelmingly concentrated at the bottom end of the job hierarchy in the UK.
The report on the employment of immigrant workers in 2007 (Table 2.1) demonstrated that category A8 born immigrant workers were mostly concentrated in manufacturing, distribution, hotels, restaurants and the construction industry with the number of people in these industries accounting for 61% of all A8 born immigrant workers. For other non-UK born workers, 29% worked in public administration, education and health, while a further 21% worked in business services and 20% in distribution, hotels and restaurants in 2007. According to Coleman’s (2010) research, as opposed to the relatively even distribution of UK workers among different occupations, immigrant workers were largely working in elementary occupations, such as domestic work, cleaning, care work, refuse collecting and machine operating, which are labour-intensive and low-paid. The increase in the share of immigrant labour has been greatest among process operatives (e.g. food, drink and tobacco process operatives, plastic process operatives, chemical and related process operatives), rising from 8.5% in 2002 to 29.4% in 2010 (Rienzo 2011b).

Table 2.1: Percentages (and rank) working in each industrial sector aged 16 and over: by country of birth, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrial sector</th>
<th>UK born</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>All born</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Other non-UK born</th>
<th>Percentages and rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and fishing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution, hotels and restaurants</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and communication</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business services</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration, education and health</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2: Immigrant workers and the UK labour market: challenges to trade union organizing

Located at the bottom of the job hierarchy in the UK, immigrant workers are often poorly paid and receive few benefits in their workplaces. Table 2.2 shows that a much lower percentage of employees who were in clerical and manual occupations could get access to an occupational pension, sick-pay scheme, private health cover, profit-sharing and share schemes compared with professionals and management.

Table 2.2: Workplace inequalities in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of employees</th>
<th>Higher professionals/ management</th>
<th>Routine non-manual</th>
<th>Manual skilled</th>
<th>Manual semi/ unskilled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Pension</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Sick scheme</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to private Health</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company car/ van Profit sharing/</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share scheme</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Regarding the spatial pattern of immigrant workers, London remained the most common destination for immigrants with approximately one third of the total immigrant population locating themselves in London between 2004 and 2008.
(Rincon-Aznar and Stokes 2011). However, the proportion of new immigrants migrating to London has fallen over time and there is a growing trend for immigrant workers to start moving to towns and rural areas (Champion 2008). In comparison, immigrant inflows increased slightly in the East Midlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the South West and Yorkshire and the Humber between 2002 and 2009 (Table 2.3).

The increasing migration to rural areas was partly linked to the fact that there was a demand for cheap labour in agriculture, manufacture and hospitality, which were the three most popular sectors for employing immigrant workers in rural areas (CRC Briefing Paper: 2007).

Table 2.3: Geographical distribution of immigrant inflows (percentage by region), National Insurance Number Registrations. 2002-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All countries of birth (excluding UK)</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Insurance Number registrations
Notes: Excludes individuals who are allocated a National Insurance Number but who reside overseas.


This trend contrasts with the scholarly interest which focused on the idea of ‘city as a context’ (Brettell 1999) in the migration process. Much emphasis has been placed on the characteristics of urban immigrant workers, the challenges and opportunities they face and the strategies they employ to overcome these difficulties (Cadge et al 2009; Sassen 1991; Wills 2008), while scant attention has been paid to the role of the rural
political economy in structuring the migratory processes or how the rural environment shapes the subjective dimensions of the migrant experience and the coping strategies used by immigrant workers. However, the pattern of migrant arrivals, in particular in relation to the local workforce, is concentrated on specific rural areas in the UK (CRC Briefing Paper: 2007). Migrating to rural areas is a very different experience compared with migration to a city, due to differences in the nature of industry, the local socio-economic climate and the formation of neighbourhood. It is argued that immigrants in rural areas are more likely to experience overt racism than those in areas of higher population density (Maynard and Read 1997). Some scholars suggest that smaller non-metropolitan locations may feel a greater impact from migration, given the dramatic demographic shifts entailed and a lack of experience in dealing with immigrants (Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2000). Rural dynamics might create a different form of ‘community’, identity and belonging among immigrant workers as opposed to those in urban settings. Therefore it is important to differentiate the role of different localities in shaping immigrant workers’ experiences and their coping strategies. Rural dynamics, in particular, need further exploration given the fact that academic work to date has hardly touched upon them.

2.3.2 EU enlargement and labour immigrants

There is no doubt that global capitalist logic and network connections help to drive and even maintain migration to advanced economies, yet multinational regimes are also crucial to facilitating the free movement of labour. In any discussion of economic immigration in the UK, the European context cannot be ignored. The main impetus for the growing number of European immigrants is the free movement of people which was a corollary of the Single Market and the process of European integration. The expansion of the EU in 2004 to include ten New Member States (NMS) (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) made it possible for workers from these countries to take up jobs in old
member states (EU-15). In the majority of EU-15 counties, immigration barriers for NMS were quite different following the enlargement of the EU in 2004. Ireland, Sweden and the UK were alone in allowing NMS workers to move freely across national borders (Barrell et al 2010: 374). Unlike most EU-15 countries’ NMS policies that restricted NMS migrants’ access to the labour market for at least two years, the UK provided NMS migrants with general access to the labour market as long as they registered for work and residence permits. Boeri and Brucker (2005) suggested that restrictions imposed by the EU-15 led to a diversion of NMS migrants from traditional countries bordering the NMS (Austria, Germany and Italy) to those EU-15 countries with liberal immigration policies. Table 2.4 suggests that the impact of EU enlargement was particularly significant within the UK. The UK was the most popular destination for NMS migrants to EU-15 countries in 2004.

Table 2.4: Change in NMS Population Resident in selected EU-15 countries in the two and a half years following EU enlargement May 2004 (thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Austria</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Total emigrant population</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
<th>% of working age pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>167.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>313.8</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total NMS</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>265.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>471.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of total population: 0.10  1.49  0.09  0.45  0.11  0.10  0.07
% of working age population: 0.15  2.17  0.14  0.72  0.16  0.15  0.10


Apart from Britain’s liberal approach to the inflow of NMS migrants, the substantial economic gap between NMS and the UK was another crucial factor that drove
workers from NMS to migrate to the UK in search of improved employment opportunities and a better life. Table 2.5 indicates that, even six years after the accession, there remained a significant gap in GNP per capita income between A8 countries, especially Poland, and the UK, which served as an incentive for migration from A8 countries to the UK. As Table 2.6 shows, the UK labour market was healthy by international comparison, with an employment rate of 72 per cent and an unemployment rate of around 5 per cent in 2005. These were the highest figures among G7 countries and well above the employment rate of EU-15 countries. The average annual long-term international migration\(^1\) inflow of EU citizens to the UK for 2004-2010 was approximately 170,000 compared with 67,000 between 1997 and 2003 (Vargas-Silva 2012).

Table 2.5: GNI per capita in the UK and A8 countries (2004-2010)

\(^1\) Long-term migrants refer to people who move to a country for at least one year.
In terms of previous immigration from A8 countries to the UK, there has only been a significant history of Polish migration to the UK, especially after the Second World War, which was fuelled by military and civilian displacement, with a Polish born population of over 162,000 recorded in 1951 (Sword 1996). However, only very small inflows of Polish migrants arrived in the UK until the beginning of the twenty-first century and there was even some return migration after the collapse of communism. According to the 2001 census, there were less than 61,000 Polish-born individuals living in the UK, 57 per cent of whom were aged over 64 (Drinkwater et al 2006: 4). In contrast, immigration from other A8 countries to the UK before 2004 had been very limited. Since the EU enlargement, the number of economic immigrants from A8 countries has been dramatically increasing, with Polish immigration to the UK peaking at 96,000 in 2007 (Vargas-Silva 2012).

In terms of the socio-economic characteristics of recent A8 immigrants (Table 2.7), they were overwhelmingly in the age group 16-35. Overall, the male/ female ratio was 53:47, but the proportion of women rose in the later period, and in the third quarter of
2008, the ratio was 50:50 (Trevena 2009). The number of A8 immigrants who were married dropped significantly after the enlargement. All these features are indicative of a growing inflow of economic immigrants from A8 countries. Non-A8 immigrants were mostly concentrated in service industries while this trend was less pronounced for A8 immigrants, a relatively high proportion of whom were employed in production industries. It is clear that the proportion of A8 immigrants, including Poles, who were employed in managerial and professional jobs declined greatly (34.8% to 10.4% for Poles and 37.4% to 7.1% for other A8 immigrants) since the 2004 enlargement. This indicates that an increasing percentage of A8 immigrants have taken elementary and routine jobs after the EU enlargement. This de-skilling trend was accompanied by an increase in working hours and a dramatic decrease in average earnings from £11.45 to £6.03 per hour for Poles and from £11.25 to £6.07 per hour for other A8 immigrants. Clearly, with the liberalization of the labour market for A8 countries in 2004, there have been a growing number of economic immigrants from A8 countries, especially Poland, migrating to the UK to fill jobs in low-skilled and low-paid production industries and service jobs in the ‘flexible’ economy.
2.3.3 Non-standard work, flexible economy and immigrant workers

The process of economic restructuring has meant that Fordist industrial mass production has yielded to Post-Fordist ‘flexible specialization’ (Piore and Sabel 1984). Leadbeater’s (2000) account of this new economy predicted that once dominant Fordist command-and-control systems of management would be the main impediment to competitiveness in a more global and flexible market. Thus the development of the new economy has led to demands from a great many employers for an element of ‘numerical flexibility’ to be built into their workforce in the face of an economic climate that is now characterized by huge uncertainty. This trend has also been facilitated by the deregulation of the labour market and the weakening of trade unions.

Table 2.7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Characteristics of Working Age Immigrants by Cohort of Arrival in the LFS: 2001-2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre 2000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% aged 16-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% aged 26-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% aged 36-59/64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% living in London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% living in East/South East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% living elsewhere in UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age left FT education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Variables (excludes full-time students)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employment Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Production industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Construction industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Retail/hospitality industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Other Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Management/Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Intermediate occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Semi-routine occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Routine occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average earnings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commentators have argued that the world of work has become more fragmented and that growing job insecurity and widening social divisions are the inevitable consequences of the structural economic changes (Reich 1993; Beck 2000; Leadbeater 2000). Particular concern has focused on the widespread use of non-standard work, including part-time jobs, casual and seasonal jobs, temporary workers and agency workers (Benner 2002; Forde 2001; Forde and Slater 2005).

The 1998 workplace employee relations survey (Table 2.8) showed that as many as 90 per cent of workplaces subcontracted one or more services and 44 per cent of workplaces hired fixed-term contract employees. Temporary agency workers were used in 28 per cent of workplaces. A more recent survey indicated that 93 per cent of workplaces had outsourced at least one service and as many as half had outsourced four or more services by 2002 (White et al 2004:25). Recent research from the 2004 British Workplace Relations Survey found that building service maintenance was subcontracted out by 52 per cent of workplaces, while the figures were 52 per cent for cleaning, 34 per cent for training, 29 per cent for transportation, 29 per cent for security, 28 per cent for payroll and 15 per cent for computing services (Kersley et al 2006:106). These figures imply that the flexible and precarious nature of employment is spreading among workplaces in which employees no longer enjoy the protection of traditional collective institutional arrangements.
To meet these flexible demands, firms often rely on immigrant workers, both legal and illegal, as they are easier to ‘hire and fire’ than native workers. Jayaweera and Anderson’s review (2008) of Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) data on immigrant workers and vulnerable employment suggests that a significant proportion of temporary workers are immigrant workers. 11 per cent of recent migrants (12% of A8 migrant workers) who were employed in the UK stated that their work was not permanent in some way. This compared to 6 per cent of the LFS sample as a whole. Among respondents in the LFS survey who had left a job in the last three months or were not working and had left a job in the last eight years, a large proportion of recent migrants (10.4%), compared to the entire sample (6%) claimed that they had left a job because their temporary jobs had ended. Among migrant workers who reported that their work was not permanent in some way, 6.5% were doing seasonal work while 30% were agency workers. This was in comparison to the LFS sample as a whole, in which 17% of temporary workers were agency workers. In the case of those applying for registration with the WRS between May 2004 and September 2007, 50 per cent claimed to be employed in temporary work. All of these facts represent a compounding of indications of job insecurity among recent immigrants.
The high concentration of immigrant workers in non-standard work is partly attributable to the ‘temporary’ nature of recent immigrants. As Table 2.9 demonstrates, almost half of all migrants arriving in the UK stated that they intended to stay in the UK for up to two years in 2008. The proportion of A8 migrants who intended to stay in the UK for four years or more decreased from 23 per cent in 2007 to 12 per cent in 2008 (Migration Statistics 2008). This new mobility has been characterized as ‘transnational migration’ (Pries 2003), whereby immigrant workers do not confine themselves to one nation-state but frequently cross borders in search of jobs. The high degree of flexibility in the length of stay permitted in the UK and the prominent ‘temporary’ nature of recent migration has made immigrant workers compatible with the demands of non-standard work. Moreover, employers prefer to take on immigrant workers for the development of the flexible economy as it is easy to exploit those who are coded as ‘other’ (Waldinger and Lichter 2003:40). Some scholars (Houseman et al 2003) predict that agency work is merely a reflection of the changing method of work screening, and thus a large proportion of agency workers are able to make the transition to permanent employment as the labour market tightens. However, the empirical evidence suggests that the growing number of agency jobs is associated with increased outsourcing of discrete operations to employment agencies and the narrowing of the internal market; in this case, agency work provides few opportunities to make the transition to stable employment (Forde and Slater 2005). This indicates that the majority of immigrant workers might continue to suffer from the poor working conditions and job insecurity that are characteristic of non-standard work.
The nature of short-term contracts and increased competition means that contractors are forced to cut back on employees’ wages and standards of work. Among the recent migrants who appear in the LFS data, those who were in temporary work were less likely to work ‘standard’ hours (31-48 hours a week) than those in permanent jobs, at a rate of 61.3% compared to 73.4% (Jayaweera and Anderson 2008). It is reported that 8.4 per cent of all recent migrant workers worked more than 48 hours per week, compared to 7 per cent of the entire sample in the LFS data (ibid). A8 migrants, in particular, worked long hours, with 15.6 per cent working more than 48 hours per week, which was twice as many as the sample as a whole (ibid). The West Midlands migrant worker survey shows that 44 per cent of migrants between 22 and 25 years old and 29 per cent of those between 31 and 35 years old got paid less than the adult minimum wage (ibid).

Besides, given that these immigrant workers are no longer directly employed, they are emotionally distanced from the people who determine their working conditions. Subcontracted work breaks the mutual dependency between workers and employers
which has been central to labour organizing in the past. In addition, a large proportion of workplaces that hire vulnerable immigrant workers have no union presence. TUC research revealed that 64 per cent of vulnerable workers who were not union members were employed in workplaces where there were no unions (TUC Commission on vulnerable employment 2008). It also showed that, in the formal economy, over 25 per cent of vulnerable workers had a union in their workplaces but they were not union members (ibid). These workers either knew little about trade unionism or had no opportunity to come into contact with unions because of language and cultural differences. All of these obstacles put migrant workers in a difficult position with regard to labour relations as they have no collective protection from unions and thus have very little bargaining power in the ‘triangle’ industrial relations.

2.3.4 The feminization of labour migration

It has been acknowledged that the increasing incorporation of women into the paid labour force is a significant feature of globalization (Mahler and Pessar 2006). There has been an increasing proportion of female migrants coming into Europe since the 1970s. By the 1990s, nearly 52% of all migrants were women (25 million out of 48 million) (Mora 2006: 7). In 2010, female migrants accounted for 45% of all migrants in the UK (Vergas-Silva 2012).

There are two different approaches to explaining the origin of international female labour migration. The first approach treats the feminization of labour migration as part of a process of ‘internationalizing gender division of reproduction labour’. Globalized worksites require not only a concentration of professional workers in the leading sectors of the economy, but also a large supply of cheap labour to provide services for the expanding professional and managerial class. Much research has pointed to the increasing reliance on immigrant female domestic workers from developing countries to service the affluent lifestyles of highly-paid professionals in
rich countries (Anderson 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Lutz 2007). These women ensure that houses are cleaned, laundry gets done, home-cooked meals are served, children are taken care of and families are entertained. Their work offers a solution to the ‘care deficit’ (Bettio et al 2006) created by professionals in the wealthier states who work extremely long hours in formal workplaces. In this sense, the migration of domestic workers is a form of demand-based migration.

The second approach defines the increasing feminized migration as the feminization of survival. According to Sassen (2000), there are systematic links between the growing presence of women in these global circuits and unemployment and government debt in developing countries. She argues that a combination of systematic high unemployment, poverty, bankruptcies among large numbers of firms, and shrinking state resources to meet social needs have heightened the need to rely on women for alternative means of economic survival. Illegal trafficking in women for prostitution, the organized export of women as brides, nurses and domestic workers, and the remittance of an increasingly female immigrant workforce have all gained prominence as survival options. A good example is the case of the Philippine government exporting female workers and utilizing the remittance to mitigate high unemployment and government debts. Through the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration, established in 1982, the Philippine government organized and oversaw the export of nurses and domestic workers to areas of high demand around the world. Filipino overseas workers collectively sent home one billion dollars a year on average (Sassen 2000: 521).

Regarding the occupational distribution of female migrants, a greater share of foreign-born female workers were employed in professional and assistant professional jobs and at the low-skilled end of processing and elementary occupations (Rienzo 2011b). Approximately 30% of foreign-born female workers in assistant professional jobs were nurses (ibid). It was also reported that a significant number of immigrant
female workers undertake gendered forms of work such as domestic work (Anderson 2000), working in the social care sectors (McGregor 2007), sex work (Bales 2003) and working in other low-paid service sectors such as cleaning, catering and the hospitality industry (McIlwaine et al 2006) in the UK. It is suggested that gender segregation is obvious in the informal labour market. Women are mostly engaged in health care and cleaning in private households and the sex industry, while men are predominantly employed in the construction industry (Krenn and Haidinger 2008).

Table 2.10: Occupational distribution for female workers, 2010

In the UK, it was estimated that over 3.2 million people took up jobs in the household sector and women made up three-quarters of the total household workforce in the UK (Mora 2006: 13). Around 57% of domestic-sector workers in London are foreign-born (Kilkey and Perrons 2010). According to Kalayaan’s (a charity organization which offers advice and advocacy work for immigrant domestic workers in the UK) registration record for 2010-2011, the vast majority of migrant domestic workers
(MDW) were Filipino, Indian and Pakistani, while the rest were from other Asian and African countries. Their employers include business people and executives, diplomats, actors, solicitors, doctors and British residents returning from abroad with their domestic staff. Domestic work is an extreme example of an individualized employment relationship in which immigrant female workers are located and it differs from conventional work in a number of ways.

First, MDWs work in private households and thus there is no group setting in which they can share work-related grievances with fellow employees in the workplace, as workers usually do in traditional workplace scenarios. This clearly operates against the likelihood of trade union organization. For live-in MDWs, home and work collapse into one space - one that is under the constant gaze of their employers. There is often a lack of separate and autonomous space unreachable by the employers, in which MDWs could forge a sense of solidarity by sharing common experiences at work. Additionally, because of its close association with women’s unpaid household labour, domestic work has become devalued as a form of real work. Being treated as a ‘member of the family’ may obscure MDWs’ status as workers and allow employers to solicit unpaid services.

Moreover, being enmeshed in integrated class relations, and gendered and racialized structures of oppression, MDWs may experience greater exploitation than workers in any other occupation. MDWs may not only be subject to long working hours and non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage, but can also suffer discriminatory verbal, physical and sexual abuse (Lalani 2011). According to Kalayaan’s 2010-2011 annual report, 55% of their clients experienced psychological abuse, including threats and intimidation from employers, and 17% suffered physical assault, while 5% of immigrant domestic workers were raped by their employers. More than half of them did not have a personal space in their employers’ house and 34% had to sleep on the floor. Many were paid less than £100 a week and were not allowed to take days off.
The specific nature of migrant domestic work apparently creates the ‘perfect’ conditions in which to undermine collective mobilization. Commentators suggest that the peculiarities of working in small and often paternalistic workplaces have created significant barriers to collective mobilizations due to all the aforementioned conditions (White 1980). Anderson (2000) argues that the maternalist dynamic of domestic work - being positioned as ‘part of the family’- often conceals the implicit hierarchy of power relations at work, which will in turn lead to confusion that enables subtle exploitation to take place. Some have argued that the ‘innate’ characteristics of women may hinder the formation of their collective agency. Included in these characteristics are their greater likelihood of building personal and emotional ties with employers (Munro 1999:13), their desire to avoid conflict (Shute 1994), their primary concern with the personal sphere of private life and fewer group bonding experiences compared with their male counterparts (Lee and Weeks 1991). Others have argued that domestic work is often stigmatized as ‘servant’ and slave work with loyalty, obligation and patronage being the salient aspect of the employer/employee relationship, thus veiling the exploitative employment relationship in which MDWs are situated (Mehrotra 2010). Thus traditional workplace solidarity is most unlikely to emerge among MDWs, which poses serious challenges to union organization.

Given the fact that the vast majority of immigrant workers are concentrated in low-skilled industries which are characterized by low wages, long working hours, poor health and safety, and are closely connected with insecure working arrangements such as agency work and non-standard work, they constitute the most exploited working group. The issue of legal status and the increasing feminization of labour migration have further reinforced their disadvantaged positions in the UK labour market. They are the workers most in need of collective representation. However, whether British unions welcome immigrant workers, and how unions can adjust their
organizing strategies to the job structures and social demands of migrant workers requires further discussion.

2.4 Trade union and labour migrants

2.4.1 Unions’ response to immigrant workers: from exclusion to inclusion

Generally trade unions in industrialised countries have an ambiguous relationship with immigrant workers which can be located on ‘a continuum range from exclusion to inclusion’ (Kahmann 2006:186). While labour movements have a tradition of international labour solidarity, organized labour has historically displayed hostility towards the inflow of immigrant workers (Ness 2005: 40; Milkman 2006:118-119). The rationale for this exclusionist position is to limit the supply of labour as the large inflow of immigrant workers might serve as a ‘labour reserve’ which tends to have a depressing effect on wage levels in general. Immigrant workers are more willing to accept low-paid jobs because of ‘a dual frame of reference’ (Waldinger and Lichter 2003); in other words, they feel that they are better paid than their counterparts back home even though their wages are actually much lower than the average level in the receiving country. Moreover, a surplus pool of non-unionised workers upon which employers can draw as a substitute workforce can substantially weaken the bargaining power of unions against capitalists. Thus, conventional wisdom assumes that the inflow of immigrant workers inevitably empowers the position of employers vis-à-vis organized labour (Avci and McDonald 2000: 197-198). It has generally been assumed that trade unions favour exclusionary and restrictive policies toward immigration (Freeman 1997; Layton-Henry 2004).

According to Penninx and Roosblad (2000:4), trade unions face three dilemmas concerning immigrant issues. First, they have to decide whether to resist immigration or try to influence state migration policies. Second, once immigrants have arrived in the host country, unions must consider whether to include immigrant workers as
union members. A large proportion of immigrant workers are locked in precarious employment and seemingly need union representation, particularly in a country like Britain where protection through employment laws is quite limited (Forde 2001, Stanworth and Druker 2000). Finally, having recruited immigrant workers, unions then need to think about whether to design special policies to meet the demands of immigrant workers alongside their general policies for all members.

Historically, organized labour has favoured restrictionism: ‘They have sometimes tried to make their labour more valuable by reducing the quantity available, either by restricting the entry into a craft or occupation or by the limitations through such methods as the encouragement of emigration’ (Wigham 1956:97). In the thirty years after the Second World War, a number of trade unions were openly hostile to immigration and excluded immigrant workers from some sectors (Wrench 2000 2004). When the British government was active in recruiting labour migrants through the European Voluntary Worker scheme (EVWs) immediately after the War, the Trade Union Congress and the National Union of Mineworkers, in particular, insisted on strict conditions: immigrant workers should only be employed in places where no British labour was available; if redundancies were made, immigrant workers should be the first to go; and they should join trade unions and receive the same salary and conditions as local workers (Wrench 2000:133). By constraining the over-supply of immigrant labour and successfully incorporating them into unions, trade unions secured wage levels and working conditions in the Post-War period. With regard to the waves of colonial migration during the 1960s, trade unions had some sympathy for these workers and favoured an anti-discrimination rhetoric, but this was accompanied by a lack of effective policies with which to address the issue (Castles and Kosack 1973). However, contrary to traditional wisdom, unions did not strongly oppose migration controls in a situation of comparative strength within the domestic society during the 1970s (Avci and Mcdonald 2000). There were some high-profile
union interventions such as the Grunwick disputes between 1976 and 1978, regarding trade union recognition, which involved a large number of Asian female workers.

The expectation that trade unions will support restrictive migrant policies assumes that effective barriers to immigrants entering the host country do exist. Nevertheless, a huge number of ‘guestworkers’ brought their families over and eventually settled in the UK during the 1970s. Since the late 1980s, there has been a surge in the migration movement towards Western Europe, particularly after 1989. The EU enlargement in 2004 further stimulated a large section of labour migrants moving from eastern and central Europe to the UK. Taken altogether, the free movement of people facilitated by the transnationalization of the labour market, declining transportation costs and improvements in communication technology that maintains the transnational networks which promote migration flows makes this assumption questionable. In particular, during times of economic recession, states cannot fully suppress the transnational socio-economic forces sustaining migration flows that the states themselves initiated by liberalizing migration rules during periods of prosperity (Haus 1995). If it is impossible to fully regulate the immigrant flows, one may alternatively expect that trade unions might abandon their hostile position toward immigrants and instead adopt a second-best outcome approach: namely organizing immigrant workers (Haus 1995; Quinlan and Lever-Tracy 1988). There is growing scepticism among unions that restrictive migration policies are a useful tool for constraining the inflow of immigrants and combating the problem of undocumented workers: ‘Most undocumented workers enter the UK legally and therefore even if borders are truly secured it would not have a decisive impact’ (TUC 2007:10).

Furthermore, simultaneous changes within the labour movement and a membership crisis have increased incentives for trade unions to organize immigrant workers. As Table 2.11 shows, historical union membership reached its peak in 1979 and subsequently declined dramatically until 1995. A slight decrease in union membership
has occurred since 1995 with the number of union members dropping to 7.2 million in 2007. This can be largely explained by the unfavourable political and social climate under the Thatcher government and New Labour who were unwilling to absorb the social costs of economic turbulence. The 1980s were characterized by Crouch (1986) as a period of ‘union exclusion’ when unions were denied legitimacy and access to political influence. Despite the fact that Labour’s return to power in 1997 enabled trade unions to partly re-acquire ‘insider’ status, there was no ‘going back’ for the unions due to the challenges posed by globalisation, which saw states lose full control over the environment of economic production within their territory (Rogers 1995: 368), and economic restructuring with a sharp decline in manufacturing industry which was always the traditional power base for trade unions.

Table 2.11: Trade union membership levels, 1892-2007

Trade unionism in the UK became institutionalized in relation to a constituency of male manual workers in large enterprises with standardised modes of residence and consumption throughout the twentieth century (Hyman 2000:624). While this group of workers are no longer fully representative of the working class in modern day
Britain, trade unionism has lost its relevance to the majority of employees in the UK. Rogers (1995) described this as a ‘representation/participation’ gap; a gap between the extent to which employees want to participate in shaping their working life and the extent to which they are represented by collective organizations which can help them. In the context of globalization, unions need to reconsider the ‘who’, the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of interest representation (Hyman 1997). Therefore, in a period of relative union weakness, membership and recruitment in growing sectors of the economy and untapped resources takes on greater significance. There is an urgent need for trade unions to organize immigrant workers not only because of ideological reasons but also self-interest. The crisis and the erosion of union influence have stimulated a ‘renegotiation of union identity’ (Heery and Adler 2004: 64), in that unions have increasingly recognized that the future of trade unionism depends on a more inclusive strategy that accommodates the interests of previously marginalized categories of workers in the UK. Two typical examples of inclusive strategies adopted by unions include the establishment of a Polish branch within the GMB in Southampton in 2006 and the Migrant Workers Support Unit, which was set up by Unite the Union with the aim of identifying and developing opportunities to organize migrant workers in 2007.

2.4.2 Challenges to union organizing

Despite the fact that immigrant workers have received increasing attention from trade unions, it is not an easy task to organize recent labour immigrants. During the Post-War period, the available evidence suggests that the unionisation rate among immigrant workers did not differ very much from that of the local population (Quinlan and Lever-Tracy 1988; Rex and Tomlinson 1979). This had been facilitated by the fact that immigrant workers were largely concentrated in manufacturing sectors with a high union density (Castles and Miller 2003). However, these conditions no longer exist.
The most obvious problem is that occupations or industries in which recent immigrant workers are concentrated have a low union density. Table 2.12 demonstrates that the accommodation and food service sector had the lowest union density of less than 5% in 2011, despite being one of the most popular sectors in terms of attracting immigrant workers, as discussed in the previous section. It is suggested that immigrant workers in the occupations or industries with lower union density might not be familiar with unions and have little idea of the functions of a union (Wial 1993: 677). In this sense, a union that tries to organize immigrant workers by simply targeting workplaces with high levels of worker dissatisfaction, and promising workers higher wages and better social benefits might fail.

Table 2.12:  Trade union density by industry, 2011

Contemporary labour immigrants have also assumed a ‘post-industrial’ form and are increasingly located in private service industries. Service workers are more likely to be employed in smaller and more geographically dispersed workplaces than workers
in manufacturing industries (Wial 1993:678). This indicates that worksite organization might not be sufficient to encourage other workers in the same jobs to organize via the geographical spill-over effect. The widespread use of temporary and agency workers in migrant jobs has also diminished the possibility of collective action. It has been argued that temporary workers who are dependent on obtaining a work permit are afraid of being associated with unions, as they rely on their employers to extend their stay (Schmidt 2006:194). Subcontracting allows the same work to be easily shifted along the industrial line. This puts immigrant workers who work in the same general occupations but in nominally separate industries into wage competition. Under this situation, industrial unionism is inadequate as unions are often unable to organize across labour markets to overcome the problem of wage competition. Although there are some general occupational categories within the low-paid service economy, workers lack a well-defined sense of craft consciousness (Fine 2005:158). Migrant jobs are characterized by increasing fragmentation and individualization which may result in the disintegration of any collective class identity. As Castells (1996:45) commented:

> Labour is disaggregated in its performance, fragmented in its organization, diversified in its existence, divided in its collective action … Labour loses its collective identity, becomes increasingly individualized in its capacities, in its working conditions and in its interest and projects.

All these features suggest that craft unionism and industrial unionism which were characteristic of British unionism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Reid 2004; Wigham 1956) might not be effective in organizing contemporary immigrant workers. The structures of immigrant jobs seem to pose substantial challenges to traditional union organizing strategies. However, this does not mean that immigrant workers are unorganizable. Milkman’s (2006) research on immigrant workers and the labour movement in Los Angeles found that immigrant workers generally had a more favourable attitude toward trade unions than most other workers,
because class-based collective organizations such as trade unions were more compatible with immigrant workers’ experiences, beliefs, values and world views, and their shared marginal status in the receiving society could foster a sense of unity. A similar argument can be found in Rex and Tomlinson’s (1979) research on Indian and Asian immigrants in Birmingham. Recent research among NMS migrants in the UK found that fifty per cent of migrants surveyed about working conditions and union membership declared an interest in joining trade unions (Anderson et al 2006). Therefore, unions should not take the existing job structures of immigrant workers for granted. Instead, union activities should be aimed at trying to change these structures via different kinds of collective actions. In order to successfully organize the ‘unorganized’, unions need to take the distinctive features of immigrant jobs into account and add new elements to their existing organizing strategies.

2.5 Conclusion

Contemporary labour immigration into the UK has been underpinned by two structural positions: the uneven development within the capitalist system and an intensification of competition that has resulted in a precarious employment relationship. The vast majority of immigrant workers are concentrated in the informal sector of the economy or the bottom end of the formal sector, which is characterised by high exploitation and low union density. Despite the fact that trade unions have increasingly recognized the importance of organizing immigrant workers due to their own membership crisis in the context of global economic restructuring, the informal, dispersed and individualized characteristics of immigrant workers’ job structures pose great challenges to traditional workplace-based union organizing. The trend towards a growing feminization of labour migration and the ‘transnational’ and ‘temporary’ features of recent labour migrants further add to the difficulties facing union organizing of immigrant workers. We are led to ask the question of what role organizations can play in filling the ‘representation vacuum’ and how trade unions
can add new elements to their organizing strategies in order to adjust them to the job structures and social needs of immigrant workers.
Chapter 3: Collective mobilizations among immigrant workers: an anti-essentialist approach to class organizing

3.1 Introduction

In order to explore the social process of collective mobilization among immigrant workers, the first and most important question we need to ask is, on what basis can immigrant workers be collectively organized? Chapter One suggests that the class base among immigrant workers in the UK still exists, but that the temporary and dispersed nature of ‘migrant’ work and migrant workers’ special social characteristics pose challenges to traditional union organizing. This raises the question of whether recent immigrant workers can still collectively mobilize around class issues or whether it is necessary to look for an alternative cultural basis, such as gender or ethnicity, for collective mobilizations. The chapter starts with a brief historical review of collective mobilizations among immigrant workers in the UK and an analysis of the relevance of class to recent immigrant mobilizations. Having acknowledged that class is still a relevant and important explanatory variable in the study of immigrant organizing, the chapter then explores how contemporary class-based immigrant mobilizations differ from traditional class-based organization in terms of the core issues, geographical space, and the main social actors involved in the organizing process. Finally, a cultural analysis of class, drawing particularly on Thompson’s (1963) conception of class as process, relationship and culture, is elaborated as an appropriate approach with which to explore the class-based organization among immigrant workers, for whom collective class awareness cannot often be directly created by the production process in a particular worksite, due to the complicated and contradictory socio-cultural context in which they are embedded.
3.2 A historical review of collective mobilizations among immigrant workers: the relevance of class

The following section briefly reviews the changing forms of collective mobilizations among immigrant workers in the UK, as well as their objects of contention, and then analyzes the relevance and importance of class in immigrant organization.

Between 1945 and the 1970s, there were two main types of migration to the UK: migrant workers from the peripheral European countries through the ‘guestworker system’; and colonial workers (Castles and Miller 2003: 69). The common feature of immigration into the UK during this time period was the predominance of economic motivations on the part of employers, employees and governments (ibid: 76). These workers provided un-skilled manual labour for industry and construction. In the UK in 1971, the 1,780,000 immigrant workers represented 7.3 per cent of the working population in the building and machine-tool industries, commerce and service industries (Susser 2002: 79). During the same period, Western Europe experienced an ‘area of collective actions’ in which factory workers played a central role together with feminists and students (Ginsborg 2003). In labour disputes of a general nature, in which indigenous workers fought for better wages and working conditions, immigrant workers showed full solidarity when their legal status and other conditions allowed them. This was the case for many colonial workers in the UK, rubber industry and chemical workers in Germany, and coal miners in Belgium (Castles and Kosack 1973).

However, this working class unity between indigenous workers and immigrant workers had limitations. Castles and Kosack (1973) identified that there was a tendency for the unions to defend immigrants’ interests only where they coincided with those of indigenous workers. As immigrant workers were often concentrated in certain types of work and suffered from forms of exploitation which only affected
indigenous workers negligibly, their unity of interest disappeared. In the case of the Red Scar textile mill strike in 1965, most of the English workers refused to support the strike which was initiated by Asian workers as they had easier jobs with better working conditions. Trade unions refused to defend the Asian workers by labelling the strike as ‘racial’ (ibid). Gilroy (1987) highlighted the discrimination that immigrant workers experienced in the British trade union movement, while Grillo (1985) discussed that experienced by immigrant workers in France.

Partly reflecting the social and political climate in the ‘era of collective action’, immigrant worker mobilizations were, for the most part, centred around material issues such as wages, working hours and other working conditions. However, these issues were not the only ones that prompted immigrant workers to mobilize. Since the 1970s, European and colonial immigrants had tended to bring their families over and settle in the UK permanently. At the same time, the settlement process and the emergence of second and third generations led to the development of ethnic minority community structures and consciousness. Encouraged by their legal status as British citizens, immigrants have increasingly mobilized around political representations, racism and discrimination, and cultural rights. The discontent felt by younger members of ethnic minorities exploded into riots in many inner-city areas in the 1980s (Benyon 1986). The riots were largely caused by deteriorating community relations brought about by high unemployment, poor housing, high crime rates and racist attacks (Castles and Miller 2003: 259), and a lack of political leadership against racism (Benyon 1986). The riots are seen as defensive movements by ethnic minorities, aimed at protecting their communities and asserting their identity and culture (Gilroy 1987). Black minorities also started to seek inclusion in structures of political representation. A famous instance in this regard was the debate on Black Sections held by the Labour Party in the 1980s and 1990s (Solomos and Back 1995).
The general socio-economic environment also began to change after the 1970s. Industrial production gradually lost its centrality to the Western economy, which increasingly turned to a Post-Fordist model centred on the service economy. This transformation meant a shrinking base of recruitment and support for traditional working class organization and politics, which were put on the defensive by the New Right led by Margaret Thatcher. The social process was also accompanied by an ideological rethinking, which was termed ‘the retreat from class’ by Wood (Wood 1986). In the context of the decline of class politics, ethnicity and ethno-cultural recognitions have increasingly become the main political discourse through which to address the issues of immigration and ethnic minority in the UK. A multiculturalist approach to the integration of immigrants became the prevailing public and policy attitude in the 1980s and 1990s (Pero and Solomos 2010). During this period, immigrant workers and ethnic minorities were encouraged to organize around ethnicity, establishing civil society organizations and NGOs which were seen by the government as important tools for promoting social cohesion and maintaining the status quo.

Since the 1990s, particularly after the EU-enlargement in 2004, the UK has been experiencing a new flow of economic immigration from non-colonial countries. This new wave of immigration workers are characterized by: a sizable population from developing countries with no direct colonial links to the UK; a greater linguistic diversity; a proliferation of small groups; a greater variety of legal statuses; and a more fluid duration (Vertovec 2006). Due to poor educational backgrounds, language deficiencies or a lack of legal status, new immigrant workers are overwhelmingly concentrated at the bottom end of the labour market, as indicated in Chapter Two. Their ‘temporary’ nature makes them particularly compatible with the demands of the flexible and precarious labour market. High levels of exploitation in the workplace have induced immigrant workers to organize around class issues. Examples in the UK include the London living wage campaigns organized by London Citizens and the
immigrant domestic worker organizational activity led by Unite the Union and Kalayaan, a charity organization which offers advice and advocacy for immigrant domestic workers in the UK (Anderson 2010). However, these ‘conflictive’ mobilizations among new immigrant workers have signalled the relevance of other axes of mobilization, such as gender, ethnicity and religion, in conjunction with class, for contemporary immigrant mobilizations. Unlike class-based organization among immigrant workers during the ‘era of collective actions’ in the 1970s, recent immigrant workers have increasingly organized themselves beyond the union framework by connecting with ethnic organizations, women’s groups, churches and other progressive organizations within a wider community setting.

In sum, this brief review of collective mobilization among immigrant workers in the UK suggests that immigrant workers have operated as proactive social actors and their efforts at mobilization during the past few decades have been very diverse. Class has been the fundamental basis for their mobilization, although it lost its primacy within immigrant worker organization in the 1980s and 1990s, when mobilization became predominantly organized around racism and ethnicity. With the continuing large inflow of economic immigrant workers into the UK, far from being obsolete, class-based organization may again become salient in order to help immigrant workers improve their socio-economic positions in the labour market and wider society. Nevertheless, an innovative class-based approach to organization, which emphasizes the intersectionality of class, ethnicity and religion, is needed to adapt to the job structures and social characteristics of new immigrant workers in the post-industrial context.

3.3 An anti-essentialist approach to class organizing

This section analyzes how class intersects with other axes of identities in contemporary immigrant mobilizations.
3.3.1 More than work issues

As discussed in Chapter Two, immigrant workers are mainly concentrated in low-skilled sectors and are vulnerable to exploitation in employment. A number of common issues have emerged from the experiences of immigrant workers, including the denial of basic employment rights, the failure to provide proper pay slips, summary dismissal and sub-standard accommodation (CAB 2004). Therefore, an improvement in wages and working conditions is the key area that might empower immigrant workers within the receiving society. However, it would be insufficient to limit immigrant workers’ demands only to wages and working hours, while neglecting other sources of oppression. Because they are enmeshed in integrated social relations and class and racialized structures of oppression, immigrant workers might face other significant challenges apart from poor working conditions.

An international comparison of public attitudes towards immigrants showed that concern about immigration is particularly widespread and intense in the UK (Transatlantic Trends 2010). The Citizenship Survey, 2009-2010, showed that the majority of British citizens opposed immigration. Indeed, when asked whether they would like to see levels of immigration reduced, over 50% chose the option ‘reduced a lot’, while over 75% chose either ‘reduced a lot’ or ‘reduced a little’. The same question yielded similar results in the British Social Attitudes survey in 2008. Research also suggests that racial harassment is on the increase in inner cities which are characterized by persistent economic disadvantages, high unemployment, a poor physical environment and a proportionally larger concentration of black and ethnic minority residents (Lemos 2000). It has also been argued that racial discrimination and stereotyping operate as the main barriers to career development for black and ethnic minority staff in workplaces and that the existence of a ‘glass ceiling’ was evident (Julienne 2001). Research on immigrant cleaners in London has demonstrated that cleaners also looked to unions for support in relation to a wider set of grievances
that operate beyond the scope of the workplace, including labour market opportunities, racism and a lack of respect (Wills 2008). Therefore one of the key challenges facing immigrant workers in the UK, apart from working conditions, is racism.

In addition, a lack of legal documents makes immigrant workers even more vulnerable to exploitation. According to Pinkerton et al’s (2004) research, estimates of irregular immigrants in the UK ranged from 310,000 at the lower end and 570,000 at the higher end, with a median estimate of 430,000. A recent London School of Economics report gave an estimate of 725,000 irregular migrants at the end of 2007, with around two-thirds of that figure living in London. Research (Evans et al 2005; Mckay 2009) has shown that undocumented migrant workers tend to work both in the informal and formal low-paid sectors of the economy such as hospitality, care, cleaning offices, coffee shops, parking lots, hotels, laundry shops and restaurants, some of which were ethnic enterprises. Employers have more power over these immigrant workers than over other workers as the majority of them rely on their employers for the continuation of their stay in the UK. Employers can force them to work long hours, cut back on their wages or sack them at any time. Some undocumented immigrant workers undertake jobs that are extremely poorly paid or even unpaid. This may take the form of forced labour backed by threats of violence against their families, or linked ‘agents’ who arrange travel and work for them in exchange for very high fees that have to be paid later (Pai 2008).

By emphasizing the complex experiences and multiple identities of immigrant workers, the intention is not to argue that class is no longer the most important foundation of political mobilizations for immigrant workers. As Chapter Two indicates, the high levels of exploitation in ‘immigrant jobs’ offer a class basis for immigrant workers’ collective mobilization. Moreover, even the issues of racism and migrant status cannot be separated from socio-economic conditions. Race and colour
are not in themselves sufficient to explain the existence of prejudice towards immigrant workers. Despite the clear opposition to overall immigration in the UK, more specific polling questions revealed that attitudes depend on the type of immigration in question. A 2010 survey found that 72% of respondents supported the admission of more doctors and nurses from other countries to cope with increasing health care demands (Transtlantic Trends 2010). Hainmueller and Hiscox’s (2010) research on attitudes towards high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants in the US revealed that both high-skilled and low-skilled natives strongly preferred high-skilled immigrants over low-skilled immigrants. This indicates that concerns among poor natives about competition for jobs and constraints on welfare benefits were more relevant than concerns among rich natives about increased taxes (ibid). As Castles and Kosack (1973) suggested, the hostility towards immigration comes particularly from working class natives and is caused by fears about having to compete with immigrants for jobs and social benefits. Immigrant labour is even cheaper and easier to manage compared with local labour and is thus particularly appreciated by employers in low-skilled industries. There is a more specific reason why the working class are prejudiced against immigrants. Immigrant workers are brought in to alleviate a labour shortage, which would otherwise force the improvement of pay and conditions for indigenous workers, particularly those in unskilled and undesirable jobs.

Immigration is encouraged because it is profitable to employers… In the same way, immigration may contribute to a worsening of the housing situation in certain areas, and may permit landlords to force up rents. Immigrant workers are first perceived by indigenous workers as competitors for jobs, for housing, and for scarce social facilities…Fear of competition is an important cause of working-class hostility to immigrants. (Castles and Kosack 1973:425-453)

It has also been argued that the increasing number of undocumented immigrant workers has been facilitated by the institutional framework of the British economy which encourages casualisation. As some observers claim, the large number of
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immigrant workers in the informal economy is less the cause but rather more the effect of the ‘informalization of employment relations’ (Beck 2000:50).

If racist attitudes towards immigrants and the increasing number of undocumented immigrants are partly a product of socio-economic conditions, then a change in those socio-economic conditions is required in order to tackle the issues of racism and illegality, above all by improving immigrant workers’ employment situations and quality of life and eliminating the insecure and precarious employment relationship. This highlights the importance of organizing immigrant workers around class issues while addressing other challenges facing immigrant workers, such as discrimination and their status as migrants. There have been some innovative class-based initiatives towards immigrant workers which also tackle issues beyond the workplace in the UK. For example, ‘Justice for Cleaners’ campaigns, organized by an alliance of Unite the Union and immigrant community groups, not only helped immigrant cleaners to improve their working conditions and combat the precarious employment relationship in the subcontracting cleaning sector, but also fought for the regularization of irregular immigrants (Pero 2008). It is important to recognize that the class experiences of immigrant workers extend beyond workplace activities and are complicated by other axes of identities.

3.3.2 Beyond workplaces

Only by limiting collective mobilizations of immigrant workers to narrow workplace-based organizing, can we claim that immigrant workers are often ‘unorganizable’ because they are concentrated in dispersed and anti-union workplaces and sectors, and are associated with non-standard work, as indicated in Chapter Two. However, immigrant organization does not necessarily take place within workplaces. In 1850, Marx and Engels identified the local community as one site with which workers should connect. They proposed that workers should ‘make each community
the central point and nucleus of workers’ associations in which the attitude and interests of the proletariat will be discussed independently of bourgeois influences’ (Marx and Engels 1850: 282). From the 1940s to the 1970s, community studies were central to class analysis, particularly in relation to the debates on class consciousness and class imagery. A good example is the study of a mining community in Yorkshire by Dennis et al (1956). Their community study, *Our Life is Coal*, demonstrated how shared harsh working conditions generated an occupational identity among miners, and how a close-knit family and community structure fostered a communal solidarity. Miners’ distinctive way of working and living was thus the source of cultural values that placed more emphasis on communal values rather than individual concerns, which in turn informed perceptions of class and developed miners’ loyalty towards collective working class organizations such as trade unions and the Labour party.

The changing structure of the workforce resulting from the inflow of immigrant workers and the feminization of the workforce raises the question of whether a collective working class community still exists and, if so, whether it could serve as the social foundation for union movements. According to Kerr and Siegal’s (1954) isolated mass hypothesis, industries will be highly strike prone if workers form a relatively homogeneous community which is isolated from the general community and is capable of cohesion. Ness (2005) argued that immigrant workers are more likely to be prone to collective actions against capitalists because they are socially isolated and lack the social networks that could possibly develop through wider exposure to mass society. It is this isolation from mainstream organizations that causes immigrant workers to rely to a large extent on the narrower social networks developed through interaction with fellow workers of the same ethnicity.

Research documents that the settlement patterns of immigration streams into the UK share a distinctive geography, with new immigrants gravitating toward neighbourhoods containing clusters of people from similar backgrounds (Robinson
and Reeve 2006). This type of settlement pattern reflects the poverty and hostility that immigrant workers face, which restricts their entry into more popular neighbourhoods and better housing and further reinforces the residential segregation between the local community and the immigrant community (Bowes et al 2000). Segregated communities of immigrant workers can offer immigrant workers a sense of identity and security that comes from living alongside people who share similar experiences of work and cultural identities, particularly when hostility from the local society exists (Cole and Robinson 2003). The ethnic clustering of immigrant workers can therefore offer space for unionists and activists to organize immigrant workers within the local community setting. The SEIU (Service Employee International Union) found that, although janitors often worked in non-union worksites and frequently changed workplaces, they still formed a community, as many janitors lived in the same neighbourhood or even the same buildings and rode on the buses to work together (Milkman and Wong 2001). By adopting a neighbourhood approach to organizing, the SEIU successfully mobilized a significant number of janitors to join the ‘Justice for Janitors’ campaign in Los Angeles (ibid). Therefore trade unionists and labour activists might need to expand their horizons in order to mobilize immigrant workers based in residential neighbourhoods or other group settings beyond the workplace where immigrants often share similar experiences of work and occupational identities in the post-industrial context.

3.3.3 Non-traditional actors

The topic of collective mobilization among immigrant workers has received scant attention from scholars of industrial relations, although immigration, ironically, is fundamentally a labour problem (McGovern 2007). This is partly linked to the conventional wisdom that immigrant workers are concentrated in dispersed and fragmented industries where trade unions are generally weak. Such perceptions have narrowly placed the discussion of immigrant worker organization within the existing
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Trade union framework. In the context of global economic restructuring and the diversification of the workforce, Heery and Frege (2006) point to the need for academics to pay more attention to new actors in the field of industrial relations, particularly in relation to specific segments of the workforce. There is an increasing volume of research which has started to explore the role of non-traditional actors in helping immigrant workers to combat exploitation at work and encourage their political engagement (Anderson 2010; Pero 2008). The following section discusses how three important types of non-union actors - ethnic organizations, faith organizations and self-help groups - can potentially organize immigrant workers around class issues.

3.3.3.1 Ethnic organization

It has been argued that immigrant workers often choose not to join trade unions because of language barriers or a lack of awareness about trade unionism, and thus they are more likely to resort to ethnicity-based networks for help in times of hardship (Holgate 2005). Research shows that many ethnic community organizations offer an employment surgery to immigrant workers and they may also have the capacity to support labour collectivism (Holgate et al 2012; Pero 2008). Therefore ethnic organizations could function as important social and institutional resources for supporting the collective organization of immigrant workers who are often employed in non-union worksites and may not join a local union due to language deficiencies. Some ethnic organizations have been actively organizing immigrant workers to combat exploitation at work and to support trade unionism in the UK.

The Indian Workers’ Association (IWA) is a good example of an ethnic organization which has been at the forefront of the struggle within trade unions. The aspect of the IWA’s activities which distinguishes it from the majority of other ethnic organizations is its commitment to trade unionism and its political agenda (Josephides 1991). Established in the 1930s, the IWA was originally largely concerned with the
independence of India. However, the IWA later became increasingly concerned with workplace issues and played an important role in improving working and living conditions for Indians in the UK after the independence of India in 1947. The IWA was particularly concerned with the fact that certain industries were not open to Indians. This led IWA activists to engage with both management in those industries and trade unions who pursued discriminatory policies towards Indians, especially in the 1960s and early 1970s (ibid). There were some industries which employed Indian workers, such as the foundry industry, because there were no strong unions in these industries and thus the agreement between management, unions and government that controlled the employment of immigrant workers did not apply. Despite the lack of a strong union voice, the Indian workers, particularly those involved in the IWA, were determined to form a powerful union in the workplace. In 1967, the IWA successfully organized a strike together with the British Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) at Coney Foundry over the issue of 21 Indian workers being made redundant (Duffield 1988). The strike lasted for four weeks and the management finally gave in and took back 10 out of the 21 Indian workers (ibid). Subsequently, the IWA was also involved in organizing Asian women in clothing factories which had a long tradition of poor working conditions and thus were commonly designated as ‘sweat shops’. They worked with the TGWU to organize strikes in a series of clothing factories for higher wages, union recognition, and the reinstatement of Asian women who were made redundant in the 1970s (Josephides 1991). The IWA attempted, whenever it could, to offer leadership and support when there was industrial action, particularly when Indian and Asian workers were involved, by raising funds, talking to other members of the community, arranging public meetings, leafleting, putting workers in touch with TGWU and standing on picket lines. Although the IWA organized campaigns to combat discrimination against ethnic minorities, they believed that the task of tackling discrimination was inseparable from the creation of a unified working class movement, as illustrated by the General Secretary of the IWA’s
declaration, in the 1970s, that ‘we do not advocate separate black unions; that would be to play the capitalists’ game of dividing the working class’ (ibid). Clearly, despite the fact that the IWA was established along ethnic lines, it nonetheless showed loyalty to its working class members.

Pero’s (2008) research on the political engagement of Latin American migrants in London also shows that The Latin American Workers Association (LAWA), which was established within the TGWU in 2004, privileged political initiatives in the socio-economic sphere and material justice instead of the maintenance of ethnic and cultural identities. The LAWA articulated a particular blend of class and ethnicity. The association promoted the ethno-cultural recognition of Latin Americans, but did so within the class-based framework of trade union movements. As the founder of the LAWA emphasized, ‘the objective and the essence of the struggle, as well as what unites us with other immigrant groups, is a question of class’ (Pero 2008:23). This led the LAWA to actively organize training on employment rights for its members and support the ‘Justice for Cleaners’ campaign, which involved organizing workers in the cleaning sector who were predominantly migrants and subject to exploitative working conditions, in London. LAWA organizers were aware that Latin American immigrant workers were not just ethno-cultural subjects, but also workers, and hence intended to develop their political identities on a class basis.

Although some ethnic organizations, such as the IWA and LAWA, framed the issues concerning immigrant workers less in terms of ethnicity, but more in terms of class, and actively supported immigrant workers’ labour struggle and trade union movements, it is important not to glamorize the role of these ethnic organizations in developing labour activism and promoting progressive social agendas. The LAWA was criticised on the grounds that it adopted a servicing approach which consisted of providing individual support to immigrant workers at its headquarters (Pero 2008:25). As the founder of the LAWA was determined to form a political rather than a civic
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Charity organization and avoid relying on public funding, the LAWA was already struggling to keep up with the demands for assistance after a few months of being active (ibid). Moreover, there is also a potential tension between the extent to which an ethnic organization stresses its ethnic commitment or its political commitment to a working class movement. Progressive ethnic organizations might have to contend with the contradiction of recognizing the political importance of class, and yet organizing along ethnic lines. The most marked tension occurred in the IWA in the 1960s because IWA leaders had different opinions on the nature of the IWA (John 1969). While some wanted the association to be a welfare/social group, others emphasized the political work of the IWA. The Southall branch of the IWA withdrew from the IWA centralized organization in 1962 on the basis that the Southall leader did not want his group to be aligned with the Communist Party, but defined it as a mass movement bringing together Indians of all political persuasions. They believed that all Indians have something significant in common, but that the IWA centralized organization was more concerned with the class interests of Indian workers. Josephides (1991) described this as a class split within the IWA.

Therefore the argument is that ethnic organizations might be valuable institutional and social resources for labour organizing among immigrant workers, particularly when immigrant workers are employed in non-union workplaces, but we also need to be sensitive to the potential limitations of ethnic organizations due to the risk that ethnic and cultural concerns might take precedence over class issues.

3.3.3.2 Faith organization

Studies of immigration and religion in the US have highlighted the positive role of church in providing psychological and social support to immigrants and facilitating their adaptation process (Foner and Alba 2008; Hirschman 2004). Even though immigrants often worship with their co-ethnics, they develop skills and networks through religious activities that integrate them more deeply into the civic and political
culture of the host society (Foley and Hoge 2007). Scholars have examined religious congregations as empowering community settings (Maton and Salem 1995) and as a mediating structure for social justice (Todd and Allen 2011). Others have also highlighted the role of religion as an important social and institutional resource in the community organizing of immigrant workers in low-paid sectors to fight for higher wages and better working conditions (Jamoul and Wills 2008; Wills at al 2009a). Religion is particularly important for the collective organizing of immigrant workers for two reasons: first, immigrant workers are often poorly served by the trade union movement and thus they are more likely to be members of religious organizations (Phizacklea and Miles 1987); second, religious organizations have the numerical and financial resources to organize marginalized immigrant workers who lack social and political resources within the receiving society.

Faith-based community organizing has been recognized as an effective way to generate political participation and empower low-paid immigrant communities in the US (Warren 2001). The Industrial Areas Foundations (IAF) is one of the most prominent faith-based community organizing networks in the US and the ground-breaker in this model of organizing. It was established by Saul Alinsky, the father of community organizing, in the 1930s. The IAF used the term ‘broad-based’ rather than ‘faith-based’ to describe their organizing networks because other institutions, such as trade unions and educational organizations, were involved and it did not pursue a religious agenda. The IAF was not particularly interested in the cultural and belief systems of the churches, but treated faith organizations as mobilization vehicles for political engagement. Faith organizations played the largest role in the network, compromising 85% of institutional membership (Warren and Wood 2001). These organizations have worked on a wide range of socio-economic issues including employment training, living wage ordinances, housing development, school reforms and citizenship classes. However, these improvements within communities are not their immediate goal. The core belief of the IAF networks was
Chapter 3: Collective mobilizations among immigrant workers: an anti-essentialist approach to class organizing

that these improvements follow from generating participation and training leaders to form organizations committed to the needs of communities (Warren 2009). The faith-based organizing model has also been applied in the UK.

Wills et al’s research (2009a) on the role of faith organizations in immigrant lives and labour in London revealed high levels of religious affiliations among immigrant workers in low-paid sectors. As many as 48% of the 429 people they interviewed were actively involved in faith organizations. In contrast, only 20% of interviewees joined trade unions and only a handful reported that they belonged to other social and community organizations. Some faith organizations have been at the forefront of service delivery to immigrant workers by offering employment advice and language classes (ibid). More importantly, the religious community served as the basis for political mobilizations among immigrant workers. London Citizens – a broad-based alliance of some 120 faith, educational, community and trade union organizations - launched living wage campaigns for cleaners in financial, hospitality, higher education and creative industries (ibid). London Citizens argued that the core values of faith organizations, such as human dignity and social justice, were pertinent to labour organizing (Jamoul and Wills 2008). They have successfully secured a London living wage, which was higher than the National Minimum Wage, for cleaners working in financial and education sectors, of whom the majority were immigrant workers. The faith organizations involved in the organizing process included a significant number of Catholic churches, as well as patchy representation of Anglican, Methodist and Pentecostal groups and some Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim organizations (Wills et al 2009a). They were motivated to join wider community organizing of workers due to a mixture of religious values, the imperative to demonstrate the power of faith and the desire to take action over shared material needs and concerns (Jamoul and Wills 2008). By aligning with trade unions and the wider community, faith organizations filled the political vacuum in the low-paid
labour market and actively engaged with the matters of industrial relations and public policy in relation to work.

Despite the fact that immigrant workers are more likely to turn to religious organizations for advice and support when they are poorly served by trade unions, religious organizations face important constraints in relation to the political mobilization of immigrant workers. First, many are explicitly apolitical or even anti-political in orientation. Political mobilization might be the unexpected byproduct of non-political agendas (Wong 2006). In addition, the ideological commitments of religious life may mean that some religious organizations are hostile to certain sections of immigrant communities, such as gays and lesbians (ibid). This imposes limits on the extent to which religious organizations can foster solidarity and unity among immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors. Moreover, research shows that although labour issues are pertinent to faith organizations, some trade union leaders have been reluctant or even hostile to getting involved in the coalition building of trade unions and faith groups in order to organize marginalized immigrant workers (Wills et al 2008). As Holgate (2009) argues, resistance from trade unions was a product of secular antipathy to faith and the perception that religious leaders are authoritarian and misogynist men. In the London Citizens alliance, only Unite and Unison have become partially involved.

3.3.3.3 Migrant self-help group

Self-help groups are defined as small and voluntary groups, consisting of individuals with common needs, interests and objectives, whose main purpose is to provide reciprocal help and solve shared problems (Katz and Bender 1976, Levy 2000). They emphasize interactive communication, shared responsibilities, the exchange of multiple resources and reciprocity, as their members play a dual role as service recipients and providers (Orford 1992, Levy 2000). Katz and Bender (1976) highlight the fact that self-help groups typically start from a condition of powerlessness, and
that members spontaneously agree to engage in some actions in which they can personally participate. Compared with formal service providers, the advantages of self-help groups include: easy accessibility; high responsiveness to the needs of the community; a lack of bureaucratization; promotion of community unity and solidarity; and the enhancement of a community sense of empowerment (ibid).

In the field of immigration, research suggests that although many public and private organizations offer diverse types of social resources to immigrant workers, the use of these services and programmes was extremely low among this population, particularly if the severity of their needs is considered (Cho 1998; Leslie 1992). In contrast to their low utilization of formal services, the primary source of support and help for immigrant workers is their informal social network (ibid). Such social networks provide material aid, such as food, clothes and provisional housing, in situations of extreme need. They also provide immigrant workers with a group setting in which they can seek emotional comfort, discuss common issues and experiences, and express mutual affection and trust. More importantly, interpersonal contacts are important sources of information about employment opportunities, legal requirements and the education, employment and health services that are available (Hernandez-Plaza et al 2006). Sakine et al’s (2009) research on community activism among Turkish-speaking migrant women in the UK revealed that self-help groups empowered migrant women as social actors by producing a change in the women’s attitude to self-development and their positions as citizens. These positive changes reaffirmed the women’s belief that they could affect social changes and encouraged the political engagement of migrant women (ibid).

Besides, such communities of coping - informal and oral-based support networks formed during the labour process or in ‘off-stage’ areas - have been well documented among workers in a range of service jobs with high emotional labour costs (Benner and Wrubel, 1989, Korcsynski 2003). These service workers offer each other social
support and thus socialize the emotional costs of labour. These studies resonate with Scott’s (1985) writing on the hidden transcripts of workers’ resistance, which refer to small, local and culturally nurtured forms of resistance operating at the discursive level without directly offering concrete resistance to systems of exploitation.

Despite the increasing attention being paid to migrant self-help groups and hidden and informal forms of resistance among immigrant workers, the discussion of communities of coping has so far largely centred on their ‘accommodative’ dimension of passive coping strategies among workers, designed to make work and life more bearable. Scott (1985:191) argues that ‘it would be more accurate, in short, to think of hidden transcript as a condition of practical resistance rather than a substitute for it’.

Some studies also suggest that communities of coping can make workers less open to exploitation and offer foundations for resistive collective mobilization (Simms 2005). Hernandez-Plaza et al (2006) also argue that, although the main purpose of migrant self-help groups is not to propel social changes, they nonetheless create conditions which might be conducive to stimulating political involvement among migrant workers.

Anderson’s (2010) research on the collective mobilization among immigrant domestic workers in London explores how a migrant domestic worker self-help group, Waling Waling (a Tagalog word for a flower that grows hidden under stones in the mountains), forged citizenship from below and waged successful campaigns with other support groups to change the immigration status of domestic workers in the UK. At a meeting in November 1984, immigrant domestic workers recognized their common experiences and decided to continue to meet up regularly to facilitate mutual support. They initially helped each other to cope with mental stress and offered emergency aid when fellow workers were experiencing hardship. As time went by and they grew in confidence, they began to organize events and trips, motivated by the idea that members should have a ‘normal’ life, whatever their immigration status.
In 1987, Kalayaan, a charity organization which offers advice and advocacy to immigrant workers, was founded. Waling Waling became a self-help organization and worked closely with Kalayaan to campaign for changes in the visa policy for domestic workers and improvements in their working conditions. What was particularly innovative about Waling Waling was that they did not organize themselves around ethnic lines, but instead their organizing activities were shaped by the material reality of the arrangements of domestic work in private households.

Although migrant self-help groups and communities of coping might serve as a basis for immigrant workers’ resistive mobilization, we also need to be aware of the potential limitations of self-help groups. There are two key features that are essential to the functioning of self-help groups: members have a dual role as service recipients and providers; and the bureaucracy and professionalism that characterizes formal service organizations is absent. However, research has identified a risk that some self-help groups tend to move away from their original informal organizational form towards professionalization as they gain in strength and status (Nayar et al 2004). Governmental funding often accelerates this process because self-help groups might be instrumentalized by state planning and consequently lose autonomy and self-determination (ibid). Therefore it is important not to presume the organic and grassroots nature of immigrant self-help groups or overemphasize their potential role in nurturing community solidarity and promoting immigrants’ political engagement.

3.4 Class and culture

Contemporary immigrant mobilizations have signalled an anti-essentialist approach to class organizing, focusing on the processes rather than the structures of class. Eder (1993) argued that variations in collective actions are not attributable to class itself, but the changing nature of the medium connecting class and actions. He defines the variable mediating class structures and collective actions as culture. For him, a crisis of class politics is thus not a crisis in the sense that collective actions no longer have a
class base because class has disappeared in contemporary capitalist society; it is a crisis because collective action might not find a legitimate basis in a given class position. The link between class positions and collective actions might become less obvious because the intervening variable ‘culture’ could develop its own logic within modern societies. The cultural context which gives meaning to class structures has become much more complicated in the globalization era. Immigrant workers today are embedded in multiple social structures, such as class, gender, nationality and ethnicity, which would have a significant impact on how they perceive the employer-employee relationship. The boundaries between public space and private space and between worksites and reproductive sites are no longer clear-cut. All these changes may prevent workers from paying attention to production relations at a certain point when cultural dynamics overshadow class dynamics. However, this does not imply that immigrant workers cannot be collectively organized along the class line, but suggests that the social processes of class-consciousness formation are more complex, contradictory and uncertain.

The problem of a cultural context is not new to the discussion of class. Aronowitz (1990: 112) defines culture as ‘the lived experiences of a people sedimented in institutions, practices, habits of everyday existence conditioned by the mode of adaptation to the environment’. He further argues that cultural forms are necessary for the reproduction of society and maintaining the division of labour and social hierarchy, but culture can also offer a site where collective labour is constituted ideologically and socially. In *The Making of The English Working Class*, Thompson (1963) argues that experiences which have historical and cultural specificity function as a medium for connecting production relations and class consciousness. Production relations cannot mechanically produce the formation of collective class awareness. He suggests that class formations emerge and develop as people live their productive relations and experience their determinate situations within the ensemble of social relations, with their inherited culture and expectations. For him, class implies
connections which extend beyond the immediate process of production. The relationship among people who occupy similar positions in the relations of production is not directly given by the process of production. Therefore Thompson’s version of working class history includes not only real wages and trade unions, but also their political and religious traditions, families and communities, leisure activities, workshops and weaving-sheds, and so on. Between the objective production relations and the discovery of class consciousness lies the multiple and contradictory realm of cultural experience.

Thompson has been accused by Anderson (1980) of being a culturalist whose definition of class is far too voluntarist and subjectivist without referring to the dominant mode of production. However, it is inaccurate to claim that Thompson has relegated production relations to a secondary role in class formation. His theoretical statements imply that the capitalist mode of production is the fundamental cause of the formation of the working class. There is extensive analysis of the economic life and production relations of workers throughout chapters six to ten in *The Making of The English Working Class*. Sewell (1986) argues that Thompson is not a culturalist who privileges culture over other types of exploitation but an ‘experientialist’ whose perspective privileges the point of view of concrete historical agents over that of the theoretically self-conscious analyst. Hall (1981) also criticizes Thompson’s conception of class consciousness by characterizing it as a form of ‘populism’ which treats the construction of a socialist politics out of popular culture as unproblematic. Yet the counterargument is that Hall’s criticism failed to ‘acknowledge theoretically as well as practically that the process of class formation cannot either be taken for granted or circumvented by substitution, and that the outcome of the process is finally determined by political practice and self-activities of classes in the making’ (Wood 1982:68). If we adopt the perspective of the separateness between popular culture and active revolutionary consciousness, nothing would exist between the objective constitution of classes by modes of production on one hand, and ideal revolutionary
class consciousness on the other hand, except a vast spectrum of ‘false’ consciousness. Instead of treating ‘partial’ and ‘imperfect’ class consciousness as false consciousness, Thompson (1963) suggests that these forms of popular consciousness have validity when located in their historical circumstances. Therefore he treats class as a processual, relational and cultural concept. His approach to class analysis is particularly valid in exploring cases where no well-defined expressions of class consciousness can be given directly by the mode of production. As Wood (1982:51) commented:

The emphasis on class as relationship and process is especially important precisely in dealing with cases where no well-defined expressions of class consciousness are available to provide uncontestable evidence of class…Indeed, Thompson is arguably the one Marxist who, instead of evading the issue, has tried to give an account of class which can be applied in such ambiguous cases.

Thompson’s approach to class analysis is particularly useful for this study because well-defined class consciousness among immigrant workers cannot be easily fostered due to the nature of the work in which they are embedded and their particular cultural context, involving aspects such as their migrant trajectory and ethnic experiences, that could mediate between exploitative labour processes and the formation of class consciousness. To build on Thompson’s work and community studies from the 1940s and 1970s, the research extends the focus from the occupational and geographical working class community to the ethnic and gendered class community, to explore how gender, ethnicity and religion intersect with class in the process of class formation among immigrant workers in the low-paid and informal sectors. As the above section indicates, the existing literature on collective actions by migrant workers suggests that exclusive gender and ethnicity networks can come into articulation with labour solidarity in the broader sense of a labour oppositional force moving beyond particular productions sites (see also Chan and Ngai 2009). It also suggests that workers’ cultivation of a collective spirit reveals the powerful influence
of kinship, ethnicity and gender, and that workers could transform their soft supports – ethnic enclaves, the spirit of sisterhood, and personal relationships - into ‘hard’ resources for industrial struggle with little or no formal help from trade unions (ibid).

The research particularly looks at whether cultural networks on the basis of gender, ethnicity and religion could offer a collective social space, separated from the production site, in which solidarity among dispersed immigrant workers can be cultivated, and under what conditions, and in what modes, migrant workers can be collectively mobilized along class lines through those cultural networks.

3.5 Conclusion

The historical review of collective mobilizations among immigrant workers in the UK suggests that immigrant workers actively organized themselves around class issues and joined trade union movements in the 1970s and, far from being obsolete, class-based organizing is essential if new immigrant workers are to improve their working conditions and socio-economic positions within the wider society. However, recent immigrant workers’ class-based mobilization signals an anti-essentialist approach to class organizing which emphasizes the processes rather than the structures of class. Although the class base exists among recent immigrant workers, their class identity cannot be taken for granted. Embedded in the post-industrial context, gender, ethnicity and religion networks might potentially create a wider workers’ network from which to nurture workers’ solidarity in the broader sense of a labour oppositional force moving beyond particular productions sites. The next chapter will discuss a new type of organizing approach – community unionism - and analyze in depth how it is relevant to recent immigrant workers.
Chapter 4: Community organizing of low-skilled immigrant workers: a social movement perspective

4.1 Introduction

Given the fact that the traditional workplace-based union organizing approach may not be suitable for recent immigrant workers, as has been elaborated in Chapter Two, researchers have started exploring whether other civil society organizations or immigrant organizations could fill this gap by collectively representing vulnerable immigrant workers (Holgate 2009). Industrial relations scholars and practitioners (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009; McBride and Greenwood 2009) have also started exploring ‘community unionism’ which emphasizes coalition building between trade unions, NGOs and community organizations aimed at organizing immigrant workers based on a broad social justice agenda rather than narrow workplace interests. In particular, this chapter discusses the meaning of community unionism, the dilemmas that it faces, and its implications for collective mobilizations among immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors.

The chapter starts with a brief introduction to how community unionism differs from the main union organizing efforts and consequently how it could potentially meet the social demands of immigrant workers. By reviewing the historical interaction between labour and community and recent empirical studies of community unionism development in the US and the UK, it is argued that there is no single model of community unionism per se and that it is an adaptive and flexible concept. As opposed to the dominant institution-centric approach in the community unionism literature, a social movement perspective is adopted in this research on the grounds that overemphasizing the institutional dimension of ‘community’ might downplay the
grassroots collective efforts of immigrant workers to combating exploitation, and neglect the internal divisions and differences within the community that lie under the surface of community cohesion. Drawing on Tilly’s (1978) social movement framework, the research constructs community unionism upon three main elements: collective interest; mobilization structure and opportunity; and collective actions, to uncover the vertical social process of community organizing of immigrant workers.

4.2 Community unionism

As discussed in Chapter Two, recent immigrant workers are largely concentrated in dispersed and informal economic sectors and may have little knowledge of trade unions or be put off by the language barrier. Therefore a non-conventional approach to organizing them is required. As opposed to the ‘partnership’ model that proposes to find mutual ground with employers from which to secure the needs of union members and promote economic success (Ackers and Payne 1998; Guest and Peccei 2001), a number of writers and practitioners have argued that, in order to organize a previously marginalized section of the workforce, such as women workers and immigrant workers, unions have to recreate themselves as social movements in which unions foster activism, leadership and organization among workers; doing so can offer a nucleus around which recruitment can occur (Greer 2008; Turner and Hurd 2001; Waterman and Wills 2001). The TUC established an organizing academy in 1998 to foster a culture of organizing within unions, with a major objective being to shift the priorities of unions towards organizing and expanding organizing to non-union sites for the previously neglected workforce (Heery et al 2000a: 405). The ‘organizing model’ is described as a method of good practice which ‘represents an attempt to rediscover the social movement origins of labour, essentially by defining the union as a mobilizing structure which seeks to stimulate activism among its members and general campaigns for workplace and wider social justice’ (Heery et al 2000b:996).
The new organizing model suggests that unions should involve the use of ‘levers’, such as community, media and the political press when union recognition is resisted by employers, and this approach is known as ‘community unionism’.

### 4.2.1 What is community unionism?

Community unionism is defined as a type of trade unionism that develops genuine community coalitions, grassroots worker mobilization and recruitment without using the traditional tool of striking, and frames issues in terms of social justice rather than the workers involved (Lopez 2004:12-13). It differs from mainstream union organizing efforts in a number of ways.

Table 4.1: Comparison between mainstream union organizing efforts and community unionism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of collective organizing</th>
<th>Mainstream union organizing</th>
<th>Community unionism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue focus</td>
<td>Work-related concerns</td>
<td>Broad social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Trade union</td>
<td>Trade unions, civil rights organizations, immigrant organizations, churches, environmental organizations, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing approach</td>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Grassroots connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Workplace-based</td>
<td>Multi-employer, area-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing aims</td>
<td>Union recognition; collective bargaining</td>
<td>Public policy agenda; Broad social movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, the cornerstone of community unionism is the coalition building between unions and community in the organizing process and the expansion of organizing efforts into
coalition-building at a regional level (Banks 1991:18). As opposed to the traditional
union-centred organizing approach, community organizing involves a variety of
labour and non-labour organizations, including advocacy groups such as civil rights
and minority rights groups, progressive church organizations, environmental groups
and unions (Wial 1993). It is argued that coalition building enables unions to increase
the scale of organizing activities and get involved in community-union initiatives and
thus propel unions into the policy making arena (Pastor 2001; Wever 1998).
Moreover, such links could also broaden the range of interest and agendas that unions
seek to represent and thus broaden their appeal to poorly represented sections of the
workforce. Through obtaining access to social networks of immigrant workers outside
of workplaces, unions may gain an opportunity to reach non-unionized immigrant
workers. Research shows that unions that adopt the community organizing approach
are more successful in recruiting members from precious excluded minority and
gender groups (Sherman and Voss 2000).

Secondly, community unionism is characterized by a multi-employer and area-wide
organizing approach. The legitimacy of adopting a geographically-based organizing
approach rather than a worksite-based approach lies in the fact that immigrant
workers nowadays are more mobile across occupations and industries than they are
geographically, and thus worker solidarity can potentially flourish along geographical
lines (Wial 1993: 690). As Stirling claims, ‘from a conceptual point view, community
unionism offers a significant avenue of investigation for those arguing the notion of
space and locality need to be added to social theory in general and conventional
industrial relations analysis in particular’ (2004:1). Castree et al (2004) have also
argued that much can be learned from the rethinking of the spatial organization of
trade unionism. A few analysts (Amin 1999; Cox 1995 1998) argue that globalisation
has not completely wiped out the importance of locality and, instead, the recasting of
the geographical scale may offer real opportunities for progressive organizing.
According to Cox (1995) and Pastor (2001), capital is not as internationally mobile as economic globalization theory assumes because a broad range of firms might be locally dependent, owing to a geographically-based infrastructure of skills, technology and social capital. Moreover, ‘space’ does not have unitary interest but, instead, it involves large numbers of social actors with diversified interests. There is no straightforward relationship between the uneven development of firms and the uneven development of places. The redistribution problem depends on the power relations in that place, which can only be fully understood contextually and comparatively (Ellem and Shields 1999). The local dependence of firms at least offers a possibility for redistribution within some ‘local’ arenas. There are local super-profits available, which can be divided up to the advantage of communities, although this is not necessarily done, but it does at least offer an entry point for activists.

Furthermore, the social logic of the social movement model and community connections is based on the ‘bottom-up’ strategy of building a genuine union that is the collective creation of immigrant workers. The recent literature describes the grassroots organization of immigrant workers who previously had no close connection to a tradition of unionism (Moody 2007). Moreover, community unionism is distinguished by a new form of solidarity in which the identity of ethnicity, nationality and gender stand in for craft or industry as the strongest bonds between workers. The community organizing approach implies a need for unions to identify areas of economic interest which overlap with other social, racial and cultural interests with which immigrant workers are particularly concerned. It is suggested that the degree to which unions can take an organic view of immigrant workers’ social demands can largely decide the outcome of organizing activities (Ness 2005).

Finally, in union organizing research, whether the organizing is perceived as successful or not is mostly assessed on the basis of whether unions have obtained
recognition in workplaces, but this is rare in the case of community organizing of immigrant workers as they are mostly concentrated in dispersed and informal economic sectors. The most frequent successful organizing outcome within the community organizing approach is the legislative and policy victories which have been evident in the high profile case of the London Living Wage Campaign (Wills 2004). This newly emerging community organizing model also challenges the very definition of what unions are. Trade unions always have two faces: the sword of justice; and vested interests (Flanders 1970:15). On one hand, as an economic interest group, unions utilize the collective bargaining framework to improve members’ wages and benefits and take wages out of competition. On the other hand, the social movement dimension to unionism requires unions to identify workers’ collective identities and promote workers’ visions of economic and social justice. It is the first, rather than the second, aspect that is now turned most frequently to public view and accepted as normal by the unions themselves (Flander 1970; Voss and Sherman 2000). However, the community organizing approach requires trade unions to take a broad social movement perspective to assess the organizing outcomes. It is suggested that both institutional and ‘agency’ interpretations of ‘empowerment’ and the outcomes of both short-term campaigning and long-term activism should be included in any assessment of community unionism. As Chapman and Wameyo (2001:15) noted:

A campaign’s success is frequently evaluated against a short-term goal, such as winning immediate legislative or policy victories …Incorporating other dimensions of success, such as gains in the strength of grassroot organizations or increased opportunities for civil societies to get involved in future decision making, allows a more complete analysis and understanding of a campaign’s effectiveness and potential for long-term impact.

4.2.2 A historical review of labour and community
In the early historical period, trade unions grew up from the guild framework. By the end of the fourteenth century, there were numerous local guilds in existence, which later became known as friendly societies. These local guilds offered ‘support for members in the period of poverty, sickness, old age and death, as well as a framework of regular social occasions including annual gathering and processions to local churches’ (Reid 2004:6). In urban areas where there were enough people in a given trade, the guild was organized along occupational lines. At the end of the eighteenth century, friendly societies prospered, especially in northern manufacturing districts. Reid (2004:32) identified a record of 7,000 friendly societies in the UK at that time. As the strong regionalism of local friendly societies posed challenges to any co-ordinated effort with the ambition of wider coverage, permanent trade union councils emerged as result of major industrial conflicts. They functioned as a local forum for labour and political issues, offering advice and assistance for local labour disputes and also a critical part of social life for the distinct working class culture (Hobsbawm 1987; Savage and Miles 1994). It was trade union council activists that established the TUC in Manchester in 1860 and they continue in a low-profile form up to the present day. Obviously, trade unions were grounded in local communities at the very beginning of their development.

Some sociologists (Calhoun 1982) have argued that the introduction of the factory system and urbanization in the nineteenth century changed the social foundations of collective actions from actions based on a communal relationship to the emergence of ‘reformist’ working class actions, as the Industrial Revolution brought about the destruction of old communities and their replacement by loose social networks. These kinds of arguments about the dichotomy between community and class in the industrialization era were challenged by the fact that many traditional communities survived well into the nineteenth century. Occupationally homogenous and geographically concentrated working class communities in mining villages and textile
towns have been well documented by a few writers (Beynon and Austrin 1994; Gilbert 1992). This kind of community was often the place where workplaces, co-operative societies, trade unions, working men’s clubs, churches and schools were linked together (Jackson 1968). It is argued that the closely knit industry-based community which developed ‘that necessary habit of mutuality’ (Williamson 1982: 230) was central to collective actions of workers (Supple 1989). The analysis of mining communities is representative, advancing the core argument that the culture of a working class mining community which was characterized by isolation, tight bonds and occupational homogeneity could facilitate solidarity and unity among miners against exploitation by employers (Dennis et al 1969; Gilbert 1992; Williamson 1982).

Communities which are isolated and characterized by monolithic class structure could enforce as well as reinforce ‘militant’ social and industrial attitude; the very inward looking nature of his daily social and cultural preoccupations helped perpetuate both his suspicion of the rest of the society and a formidable loyalty and solidarity in the face of adversity which was such a marked feature of miners’ life and miners’ disputes. (Supple 1987: 478)

Through their unions and co-operative societies they built their own institutions distinct from those of the coal company. Through family and kinship they built defensive walls against chance and circumstance, constructing a way of life which was theirs and not simply a reflection of the coal company’s plans. (Williamson 1982:6)

However, it is important not to glamorize this type of working class community because ‘it was not a homogeneous community free of division, nor did the idea of community carry the same meaning for everyone’ (Williamson 1982: 231). One key feature of the mining community was the separation between men and women, with women often being excluded from many community activities (Dennis et al 1969). There was also suspicion towards migrant workers within mining communities (Jackson 1968). These studies mostly focused on communities that developed on the
basis of geography and occupation and explored the interaction between work and place in generating a distinctive way of life among the working class. They are salient with respect to how the interaction between work, gender and ethnicity could shape workers’ subjectivity and inform the debates on labour consciousness. Historically, then, some important trade union activities were based on community and played a significant role in shaping working class community life.

During the twentieth century, a new form of interaction came to replace the previous community-based trade unionism. The Labour Representation Committee was established in 1900 after years of efforts by working people, trade unionists and socialists. In 1918, Labour declared its full-blown party status by admitting individual members while maintaining its role as a federation of pressure groups, among which the parliamentary committee of the TUC remained the most prominent. Along with the socialist ideology, there was a radical commitment to ‘the political, social and economic emancipation of people’ (Reid 2004:272). By the 1920s, the Labour Party was already making a considerably stronger showing. Through the Labour Party, unions successfully re-scaled working class politics up to the national level, creating a new political movement around the redistribution of wealth and provision of public services. At the end of the Second World War, the Labour Party won a formidable victory and had the credibility and support to develop welfare systems. As opposed to the community organizing that occurred in the earlier stages, unions successfully created a wider political movement in which they could point to the success of the Labour party in order to gain legitimacy and recognition at the national level. They began to shape community life by direct representations of workers in workplaces and indirect representations of people through political power instead of building community-based welfare organizations at the local level, as had been done before.
However, as time progressed, former industrial areas fell victim to the trend towards de-industrialization and were subject to fiercer global competition. With the erosion of the former mainstay of dockers, miners, and car workers, and the growth in professional-managerial and service workers, the working class became reconstituted in a way that affected its cohesion and unity. It was argued that the change in industrial structures and rising living standards for the majority affected the sense of community, deprivation, cultural difference and identification with the institutions of labourism (McIlroy 1995:94). The radical restructuring of the working class moved from areas of union strength to those of union weakness. Privatization and severe attacks on the trade union movement propelled by the Thatcher government further weakened trade union movements. Nevertheless, even under the unfavourable climate which has prevailed since 1979, the union continued to play an extended political role in the struggle to defend both jobs and community. In the early 1980s, there were TUC/Labour party demonstrations on unemployment, while the People’s March for jobs took place in 1981 and 1983, and a variety of initiatives such as the Campaign for Economic and Social Advance were launched. Despite all these spirited attempts and the high profile miners’ strike, the heartland of the labour movement was in disarray and unions lost their widespread political influence in British society.

Even with the return of the Labour government in 1997, New Labour retained much of the neo-liberal agenda developed by the Conservatives, particularly in terms of the retention of market-oriented economic policies, while introducing mildly redistributive social policies. Trade unions did not make great gains from the return of New Labour. Manufacturing employment continues to decline and unions are making slow progress in recruiting workers in non-union sectors. Moreover, trade unions’ strength in the public sector is threatened by ongoing privatisation. More positively, however, the Labour Government and the Coalition government have prioritised community governance as the most important theme of local government reforms,
which emphasizes the role of local authorities in the strategic coordination of local services and community development (Davies 2008). The key vehicle for this local coordination was the Local Strategic Partnership, introduced under the Local Government Act 2000, which brought together various public agencies and voluntary and community groups to coordinate activities at regional level (Laffin 2008). Community governance has also been embraced by the Coalition government through a range of initiatives which aimed to transfer powers to local communities (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012). A renewed emphasis on localism and community empowerment offers trade unions good opportunities to engage with locally coordinated activities on the issues of job creation, quality employment, skills training, equality and social integration. By working with local groups on a wide range of concerns related to broad social justice, trade unions might be able to build a presence in the community, reach ‘unorganizable’ workers and improve their profile and influence.

Nevertheless, the community governance model in the UK differs from the ‘representative localism’ model (Hildreth 2011) favoured by many Western European countries, which refers to the decentralization of powers to independent, locally elected authorities emphasizing accountability to local residents. The discourse of localism invoked by New Labour and the Coalition government over the past two decades has been inspired by the neo-liberal notions of limited government and enabling a state based upon a critique of inefficient public bureaucracies (Peck 2001). In addition, these local reforms embody a fundamental tension between a rhetorical emphasis on local responsibility and central monitoring through targets, audits and inspection (Coaffee and Hedman 2008). These two features impose limits on the degree to which community governance strategies can strengthen local groups and the community as part of a wider political project based on principles such as social justice, equality and solidarity.
Clearly, trade unions have engaged with the community in a variety of ways since the very early stages of unionism in the UK. The early development of trade unionism was deeply rooted in local working class communities. During the twentieth century, the trade union voice was often represented in the wider community through the Labour Party. From the 1970s onwards, trade unions faced great difficulties in organizing workers, following the decline of manufacturing industry and the attacks on the public sector. However, a renewed discourse of localism and community governance has opened up possibilities for trade unions to work with local community groups on the issues of poverty, equality and social justice. The weakness of the localism model in the UK indicates the likelihood that contradictions and dilemmas exist within local community organizing initiatives. Unions’ recent experiences of engaging with communities in the UK and the US will be examined in the following section.

4.2.3 A review of empirical studies of community unionism

The discussion of community unionism originates from the US where a number of strong networks for coalition-building have developed. The Industrial Areas Foundation is a community-based network which consists of faith organizations, labour locals, schools, immigrant associations and other community groups. The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now is a collection of community organizations that provide advocacy and support for low-income people. Jobs with Justice is a national network of local coalitions which brings together trade unions, churches, student activists and community groups to fight for working people. Labour-community coalition networks like these have been behind successful living wage campaigns in at least 100 US cities (Wills and Simms 2004). To date, however, community unionism is still relatively new in the UK. Much academic attention has been given to the high profile case of the London Living Wage Campaign coordinated
by London Citizens since 2001 (Wills 2004). London Citizens is a broad-based community organization including community and voluntary sector groups, faith organizations, schools, universities and local union branches. Together they have campaigned to put pressure on employers and those in power to accept that workers should receive a living wage which is higher than the National Minimum Wage. It has done this by bringing together diverse communities under the general notion of campaigning for social justice. The campaign has achieved considerable success and has secured increased pay and improved working conditions for low-paid workers in the hospitality industry and cleaners. A significant proportion of those workers are immigrants. The revised London Living Wage in 2011 was £8.30 per hour as opposed to the National Minimum Wage of £6.08 per hour. As well as national networks, a number of local coalitions were also initiated. The following section will briefly review different modes of community organizing within the existing empirical studies of community unionism, in terms of issue focus, organizational relationship, and organizing outcomes.

As discussed above, the improvement of wages is the core issue that many community-initiated campaigns have chosen to focus on and fight for. In response to low levels of pay and non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage, local coalitions were formed between trade unions and black and minority groups to raise consciousness about the NMW among immigrant workers and local textile sectors in the UK (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009). A number of local community initiatives also existed in the US to tackle work-related issues such as employment training, job promotion and employment opportunities for immigrant workers (Benner 2000; Tufts 1998; Wever 1998). In addition, ethnic discrimination in the workplace and within the host society was another key issue addressed by labour-community coalitions (Fine 2005). An example was the establishment of the black workers’ section within UNISON to address racist and discriminatory behaviours from various sources
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(Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009). There was also the coalition building between Waling Waling, a migrant domestic workers’ organization, Kalayaan, a NGO offering advocacy for migrant domestic workers in London, and UNITE, which waged a successful campaign to change the immigration status of domestic workers in the UK (Anderson 2010). Clearly, the social foundations base, on which the community organizing is initiated, is not restricted to narrow workplace employment issues, but extends to broad social justice agendas covering questions of ethnicity, gender, immigration status and other cultural dynamics.

One key focus of community unionism literature is the organizational relationship between trade unions and non-labour organizations in the coalition building process. Increasing attention has been given to the role of faith organizations in generating social capital, a sense of solidarity and psychological strength, which has profound implications for the union organizing of disadvantaged workers (Wills at al 2009a). It is suggested that immigrant workers are more likely to be members of religious organizations if they have been poorly served by trade unions (Phizacklea and Miles 1987, Wrench and Virdee 1996). Drawing on the research on black Caribbean, Indian and Kurdish communities in the UK, Holgate et al(2009) argue that alternative spaces are often lacking in secular civil society to support migrant workers and faith institutions can offer them ‘safe space’ in which to socialize, gain comfort and receive advice. Based on the core values of human dignity and social justice, churches have been actively participating in the London Living Wage Campaign to support vulnerable workers (Wills et al 2009a; Jamoul and Wills 2008). Fine (2006) has emphasized the role of community-based worker centres, which are often embedded in specific ethnic communities or sometimes based on multiple ethnicities to tackle the difficulties faced by poor people such as language barriers, immigration rights, employment issues, discrimination, sexism, housing and health care, in collective organizing of immigrant workers and propelling social changes. According to a
survey on black and minority communities in the Yorkshire/Humber region (Perrett and Martinez Lucio 2009), 28 per cent of community organizations reported that individual immigrant workers referred to voluntary-sector community support groups for employment support and advice and 27 per cent referred specifically to the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB), while only 13 per cent turned to trade unions for advice. This indicates that the trade union is not the most important source of support for immigrant workers.

Nevertheless, even advocates of community unionism recognize that forging solidarity across different institutions with different organizational and ideological traditions is not easy, and that tensions between trade unions and community organizations might arise. It is argued that a fundamental mismatch exists between American trade unions and worker centres because unions have institutionalized themselves to evolve into complex organizations with established internal structures and modes of operation, while worker centres are non-bureaucratic and grassroots-based social movement organizations engaging with wider issues of social reproduction and economic and political incorporation (Fine 2007). Craft (1990, 155) also commented:

Union officials may find these organizers to be more threatening because they focus on empowering the grassroot membership to organize themselves for dealing with adversaries. Community organizers see their roles as educators and mobilizers, not as unionists, and they do not always respect the hierarchical structure of authority.

Holgate (2009) notes that conflicts arose from institutional competition in the London Living Wage campaign and London Citizens subsequently established a workers’ association and began to organize workers independently.

With regard to the scope and sustainability of the labour-community coalition in the UK, a recent survey on the relationship between trade unions and civil society
organizations (Heery et al 2012) demonstrated that cooperation was more frequently reported than either indifference or conflict. Over half of civil society organizations (N=131-137) stated that they campaigned alongside trade unions on issues of joint concern. It was also suggested that there was a continuous relationship between trade unions and civil society organizations as a third of civil society organizations regarded trade unions as natural allies and 40 per cent stated that cooperation was ongoing (ibid). Coalition building has taken different forms. The research indicates that one of the most frequent forms of interaction is a joint campaign to shape public policy, while one of the least favoured is targeting individual employers to persuade them to support bargaining or organizing (ibid). Trade unions have also developed a ‘coalition of service’ with community organizations. Here, cooperation took the form of the joint development of language training and an advisory service for immigrant workers (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009). A good example was the cooperation that took place between the Polsi Association in the Wakefield district and the GMB Yorkshire region to organize ESOL classes and an advice bureau for Polish workers. It has also been observed that cooperation can take the form of a ‘coalition of protesting’ in which organizations campaign together against human abuse abroad or seek to protect asylum seekers (Heery et al 2012). In terms of the organizational relationship, Fine (2006) categorized community unionism into four types: community organization/no union partner; unions/no community partner; community/labour partnership with community organization dominant; and community/labour partnership with union dominant.

The outcomes of community unionism are also contested and diverse. There have been a few cases in which trade unions have successfully enhanced recruitment and organizing via the coalition with communities. It was reported that the ‘Justice for Janitors’ campaign in the US brought 5,000 new members into the Service Employee International Union and organized 90 per cent of the building services market in
downtown L.A. and Century City (Bank 1991). Through providing education and advice to immigrant workers at the union learning centre in Southampton, the GMB successfully recruited 500 out of the 600-700 immigrant workers who attended classes up to March 2008 (Heyes 2009). However, there was also considerable scepticism in relation to the potential of learning initiatives to generate union recruitment and retention, on the basis that educational courses are designed to enhance workers’ employability rather than union awareness (McIlroy 2008). Additionally, the community union has also secured union recognition in greenfield worksites via community links (Wills 2001). In this sense, community unionism and workplace-based unionism are not mutually exclusive; instead, the labour-community coalition can potentially strengthen workplace-based unionism. The community organizing approach also resulted in the establishment of the Polish migrant branch within the GMB in Southampton. Nevertheless, unions also face challenges imposed by the development of workers’ independent organizations out of traditional unionism. For a period of time, a strong temporary worker cooperative grew out of Solidarity, which was a community organization built on a strong foundation of churches and organized labour in Baltimore (Fine 2006). This points to the possibility that community unionism might empower disadvantaged working people at ground level and develop collective labour activism, both of which have no obvious link with union membership and organizational enhancement. The critiques on the effectiveness of community unionism have also been documented for the Living Wage Campaigns in the US in relation to the problems of implementation (Luce 2004, 2005), the relatively small number of workers covered (Freeman 2005), and the limited impact on overall poverty rates (Neumark and Adams 2003).

Clearly, the existing community unionism literature does not present a coherent picture of a community organizing strategy. Engagement along such lines is highly fragmented and diverse. There is no single model of community unionism *per se.*
There is a lack of clear framing of issues in terms of communities. The joint concerns of the labour-community coalition vary from employment issues to ethnic discrimination, to sexism to immigration status. The coalition strategies encompass different forms of campaigning, protesting or servicing. There are no specific criteria which can be used to define the successful outcomes of community unionism. It would be biased and partial to assess the outcomes purely from the union perspective.

4.2.4 Contesting the notion of ‘community’: a corrective to the institution-centric approach

The concept of community unionism is built on the idea that unions’ connections to a community can facilitate the formation of collective interest and the mobilization process. There has been a tendency for the scholarship to use value judgements in their studies. Communities are seen as naturally harmonious and stable and characterized by neighbourliness and communication. Urry (1995) criticized this ideological notion of community by arguing that it could invoke a positive image of unity while concealing the fragmented relations more commonly found in a variety of social settings. A critical examination of the theory and practice of community unionism depends on an understanding of what ‘community’ refers to.

Mostly commonly, the term ‘community’ is used as a surrogate for community organization in the union-community coalition within the community unionism literature. Much attention has been drawn to the negotiation of representations between trade unions, NGOs and immigrant community organizations, and how industrial relations can be managed within these spaces (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009). There is a tendency for them to overemphasize the role of institutional entities such as trade unions and NGOs in shaping collective agency and consider it as central to immigrant workers’ activism. Much discussion of community unionism is embedded in union revival scholarship which explores how unions can be revived by
connecting with new labour market constituencies and creating new modes of actions (Frege and Kelly 2004). As Martinez, Lucio and Connolly (2010:20) comment:

It suggests that this positive turn (the interest in the study of migration, race and ethnicity within Industrial Relations) in the agenda of Industrial Relations has been, in the main, driven by a concern over a condition of organized labour, with the issues of immigration being the basis for union renewal.

This institution-centric approach is open to three types of criticism. First of all, focusing on immigrant community organizations carries a danger of over-emphasizing the ‘formal’ dimension of community while losing sight of complicated and individualised ‘personal communities’ which are ‘inhabited and enacted in the practices of everyday life and provide other forms of support’ (Alexander et al 2001: 790). There might be complex networks of family, neighbours and friends which fragment and transcend the abstract cultural community. Research (Gill and Bialski 2011) suggests that, for newly arrived Polish immigrant workers in low-paid industries in the UK, their networks are more fragmented, contingent and informal than is usually expected. The formation of community ‘from below’ contests the ascription of tidy and bounded identities of difference and reveals the messier contours and intersections of individuals and groups at the level of everyday life.

The focus on the role of institutional dimensions of immigrant communities often carries with it the presumption of existing social networks and the ignorance of important internal differences within the community. Such an approach builds on the romantic conception of an ideal immigrant group and imagines the perfectly functioning immigrant community as a bonded entity with a common language, customs and culture which define its members separately from outsiders. It assumes that there is an existing collectivity among co-ethnics and that immigrant workers would be ideologically and emotionally bonded with their ethnic organizations. However, Gans (1979) has offered a new concept of ‘symbolic ethnicity’ which
describes a situation whereby ethnic minorities do not need either an ethnic identity or organizations but resort to the use of ethnic symbols representing ethnic identification without being concerned to preserve cultural distinctiveness. Bucker’s study (2003) on the Jewish community in Denmark suggests that ethnicity as a feature of one’s social position has given way to ‘symbolic space’ as a dimension of self-perception. The immigrant community does not foster a single model of ethnic identity based on cultural consensus, but rather it provides a symbolic space and conceptual domain in which members can construct their own understanding of self and group. Research on Polish immigrant workers in Brussels, London and Leicester (Grzymala-kazlowska 2005; Ryan et al 2009; Vershinina et al 2011) also reports the inter-group rivalries, exploitation, cheating, distrust and lack of deep cultural connections within the ‘new’ Polish community. These studies have pointed out the potential fragmentations within the immigrant community which are derived from the integration of ethnicity, class, gender and other cultural dynamics, as well as the multiple choices of the actors themselves. As Alexandra et al claimed:

A reification of ‘community’ at an institutional or territorial level ignores internal variations … such as those around age, class and gender, but also around issues of languages, internal structures of marginalization and private feelings of trust/distrust. (Alexander et al 2001: 792-93)

Therefore studying the immigrant community requires that scholars do not make prior assumptions about its collectivity and unity. For immigrant workers, in particular, multiple identities, space and culture might exist ‘in-between’ the receiving societies and their home countries (Bhabha 1994; Dwyer 1999). The notion of ‘immigrant community’ is thus misleading if used to connote a traditional bonded entity. Further to this, an approach which involves researching ‘lives in context’ is needed to explore local, heterogeneous and contingent networks of family, friends and neighbours.
performed through ties of emotion and trust and to challenge the abstract and ‘imagined’ notion of ethnic community based on shared values and cultural identities.

Moreover, when discussing the coalition building between trade unions and community organizations, there has been much debate on the readiness and commitment of trade unions to become engaged in community organizing. Extensive literature has criticized the bureaucracy and conservatism of trade unions (Gaido 2008) and how their institutional inertia produces the mismatch between their recruiting and organizing strategies and the actual needs of immigrant workers (Holgate 2005). Hyman (1971: 14-17) pointed out the danger that ‘institutional needs’ can come to act as the main determinants of policy, supplementing or even replacing the manifest goal of the organization. The willingness and ability of unions to prioritize the community organizing agenda has been questioned, especially in the UK where industrial relations have a strong tradition of collective bargaining. Voss and Sherman (2000: 310) argued that the prevailing method of representing members was ‘business unionism’, in which union business agents “serviced” workers, resolving shop-floor and other problems for them. Wills (2001) also commented:

In a country where the vertical model of workplace trade unionism is so deeply rooted and the divisions between unions and the community often seem so wide, there is a long way to travel before stronger horizontal structures and connections are established. (Will 2001:479)

Nevertheless, insufficient academic attention has been given to the nature and relevance of immigrant community organizations in the community organizing of immigrant workers. It is often assumed that immigrant community organizations have close connections with immigrant workers at ground level and thus are authentic representations of immigrant workers’ interests (Tapia 2012). Therefore, by aligning with community organizations, unions can gain trust from immigrant workers and further develop their union identifications. This taken-for-granted assumption is
challenged by the immigrant community research (MacKenzie et al 2012) that shows that there is a risk of the institutional goals of organizational sustainability taking precedence over the support provision of immigrant community organizations, and that tensions exist among different immigrant community organizations because they are competing over social resources or political influence. Cooper (1980) argued that it is probably unrealistic and utopian to imagine that the impact of bureaucratization could be precluded if the origins and development of community organizations were rooted in the modernization process. Kelly (2003) also questioned the nature of immigrant associations by claiming that they are not necessarily ideal collectivities characterized by commonality, unity and feelings of group-wide obligations that will endure, but more like a formal expression of the community as a result of the benefits that can be attained through their formal status. The aims of constructing an immigrant association may be: to meet the expectations of the host society; to fit into the political space created by UK political institutions; and to enter into the dialogue between the state and the immigrant group (ibid). This leads us to ask the question of whether the needs of immigrant workers can be best met by immigrant community organizations and whether immigrant community organizations could serve as the basis of union organizing, or are they just a contingent group of immigrant workers without shared identity and solidarity?

Finally, the institution-centric approach that tends to privilege the organizational relationship in isolation from the views and lived coping practices of immigrant workers might downplay the grassroots collective efforts that immigrant workers adopt to combat exploitation. The issue of empowering immigrant workers should not only be addressed by formal representation but also through a broad understanding of the views and behaviours of workers themselves. The recent literature contains descriptions of grassroots organizing activities of immigrant workers who had no close links to trade unions (Moody 2007). By examining the collective organizing of
immigrant greengrocery workers, delivery workers and black-cab drivers in New York, Ness (2005) claimed that it was the workers themselves, rather than the unions, that originated organizing drives and that the unions could either facilitate or impede these organizing efforts initiated by immigrant workers. In this study, trade unions were not treated as a point of departure but an optional form of social and institutional resources conducive to community organizing. It may be too early to conclude that trade unions have lost their momentum in immigrant worker organizing, but our attention should be oriented away from union recruitment of migrants toward the social process of immigrants’ bottom-up mobilization efforts. Pero and Solomos (2010:10) have pointed out the danger that the overemphasis on institutional structures might result in ‘a paradoxical situation of having started off recognizing migrants’ political agency, but ended up explaining it away with another structural account’. They suggest that other explanatory factors including migrants’ social values, political socialization, emotions, networks and migrant trajectory should be taken into account to fully understand their political agency.

The institution-centric approach might also lead to a narrow view that evaluates the outcomes of community organizing only against a union’s organizational goals, such as the growth of union membership and recognition. The existing research has highlighted the benefits which community connections can bring to trade unions (Heyes 2009, Wills 2001). Pero and Solmos have pointed out that, ‘it would be important to gain insights into what migrants seem to get out of mobilizing, especially when concrete gains and changes appear out of reach from the outset’ (2010:14). The argument is that more attention should be given to grassroots empowerment: ‘building a positive self-image and self-confidence; developing the ability to think critically; building group cohesion; encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society’ (Banerjee 1995:3), among migrant workers, especially when the mobilization group is still young. Without addressing the meaning of empowerment
perceived by migrant workers themselves, the community organizing strategy might risk becoming a ‘problem solving’ strategy for the union membership crisis instead of a promising approach to helping migrant workers mobilize. The assessment can usefully be broadened to include improvements in migrant workers’ working conditions via public policy (Fine 2005), and the degree to which workers are organized into stronger networks which are capable of challenging employers and contesting state power.

4.3 Community unionism: a social movement perspective

As opposed to the institution-centric approach, this study goes beyond representations of immigrant workers as passive ‘victims’ and ‘objects’, and considers them as ‘subjects’ and social actors. In order to fully uncover the social process of the community organizing of immigrant workers, a social movement perspective is adopted. Social movement theory is particularly useful for the research because it constitutes a significant shift in the focus of research on community unionism. It directs our attention away from union recruitment and the organizing of immigrants toward the social process of immigrants’ collective mobilization, which may go beyond the economic relationship between immigrants and employers in the workplace and include other cultural dynamics.

4.3.1 A review of social movement theory

Over the past four decades, political scientists, sociologists and social psychologists have developed a large body of work on social movements and collective actions. As opposed to traditional psychological approaches to the study of collective actions which focus on micro-level analysis, the work of many social movement scholars (Gamson 1975; McAdam 1988; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1997; Oberschall 1973; Schwartz 1976; Shorter and Tilly 1974; Tilly 1978) has generated a renaissance in the
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sociological study of social movements which shifts social movement analysis away from a socio-psychological perspective to more political and structural accounts. The formation of collective interests, the assembly of mobilization resources and the outbreak of collective actions are major cognitive and social processes through which individuals are transformed into collective actors involved in social movements. These questions entail analysing ways in which different groups acquire power and deploy resources in the construction of both cooperative and conflictual relationships with related actors. The political process mobilization model (McAdam 1982, Tilly 1978) which emphasizes the role of organization and political realities in the process of social movements can serve as an insightful theoretical tool in understanding the community organizing of immigrant workers in a broad socio-economic context where many social actors are involved. Other authors in the field of social movements who voice the call for the development of a new socio-psychological approach to collective action studies (Klandermans, 1984, Snow et al 1984) could also help us to gain a clearer and deeper understanding of how immigrant workers formulate interests in collective terms. This would enable us to transcend the imprecision that has marred the debate about the decline of workers’ collectivism and the long-standing argument that immigrants have a low propensity towards collective actions and trade unionism in the receiving society.

As Tilly’s (1978) mobilization theory favours the collective action of ordinary people and discusses different facets of collectivism including all core analytical units, interests, mobilization, organization, political opportunity and collective actions, in social movement theory, it could serve as a general framework for the study of immigrant workers’ collective actions from a social process perspective. His theory relies on the Marxist line of analysis on mobilization which has dealt most effectively with open conflicts. Marx divided the entire population into ‘ruling class’ and ‘working class’ based on their relationship to the means of production. The ruling
class, the owners of the means of production, hire workers to exploit their capacity to work so as to produce surplus value. It is this kind of inevitable exploitation of labour by capital that leads to the conflict between different social classes. However, compared with orthodox Marxists who tell us to identify the major classes and interests emerging from the organization of production, Tilly has attached considerable importance to political processes and interests which are not obviously based on class conflicts. This enables us to explore community organizing of immigrant workers at the intersection of class, gender, religion and ethnicity.

Although Tilly’s (1978) model offers a general framework for exploring the dynamics of social movements, his use and interpretations of key mechanisms and components in social movements have attracted criticism from other social movement scholars. Some commentators argue that there is a lack of methodical causal analysis to establish the relationship between a mechanism and a type of outcome. As Koopmans (2003:117) noted, ‘most of the time, the authors do not show similar effects of one mechanism in widely different contexts, but different effects of the same mechanism in different contexts’. By using Tilly’s model as the conceptual framework in this study, the research does not intend to assert that all five components - interest, mobilization, organization, political opportunity and collective actions - are causally necessary in immigrant workers’ community organizing efforts, but to identify the specific mechanisms that can be potentially found across multiple community organizing cases. In doing so, we can hope to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and richness of the community organizing of immigrant workers. Moreover, some commentators (Oliver 2003) stress that the mechanisms themselves, such as identity formation, call for an explanation. The following section presents a discussion of key components in Tilly’s model by relating them to other works on social movements.
4.3.1.1 Interest identification

Interest identification mainly deals with the question of how mobilization originates. Kelly (1998) draws on sociopsychological work about social movements (McAdam 1988; Klandermans 1984; Gamson 1992; Snow et al 1984) to argue that a sense of injustice, which occurs when individuals who previously accepted the authority of their rulers come to believe that some of their rules are unjust and illegitimate, is the fulcrum of collective action. Injustice can arise when management violates the established rules or shared beliefs (Batstone et al 1978: 47-48, see in Kelly 1998). The key point here that Kelly has not clarified is whether such a sense of injustice is simply the consequence of the ‘suddenly imposed grievance’ (Walsh 1981) through accident which is contingent and unstable within the workplace, or is a result of relatively constant structural tensions which should be analysed in a broader social context. There is no denying that the ‘suddenly imposed grievance’ can largely stimulate the outbreak of collective action, yet the structural tensions behind the sudden grievance cannot be ignored as the accumulated disadvantaged social experiences could give rise to a sense of injustice at a certain point when a sudden grievance occurs. The analysis of structural tensions can be related to the ‘formation of mobilization potentials’.

According to Kriesi’s (1985) analysis of political potential, ‘mobilization potential’ refers to a group of people with a common identity and a set of common goals. The mobilization potential is the reservoir that the movement can draw from and can therefore set the limits within which social movements can be successful. Human and organizational resources which are not directly involved in ‘the sudden imposed grievance’ but belong to the mobilization reservoir can be potentially utilized to support the mobilization effort. During the

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2 Klandermans and Oegema have identified four aspects of mobilization: formation of mobilization potentials; formation and activation of recruitment networks; arousal of motivation to participate; and removal of barriers to participation, which are not only very different activities undertaken by social movements but also require different theories of analysis. (see Klandermans and Oegema 1987)
process of community organizing, it is very likely that immigrants’ mobilization potential may go beyond the economic relationship within the workplace and reach a wider community where a large number of people are in similar structural positions.

At the societal level, there are two dominant paradigms regarding the relationship between immigrants and collective actions. The first is a class-based approach that suggests that the underprivileged socio-economic and structural positions of immigrants are the underlying motives for their mobilization and have a direct effect on their degree of mobilization (Castles and Kosack 1973; Rex and Tomlison 1979). The second approach – the ethnicity approach - argues that ethnicity can be the basis of collective action that is independent from class. It denotes the shared experiences, such as discrimination, that distinguish immigrants from the rest of the society. As Chapter Two argues, the structural conditions underpinning labour immigration - the uneven development of the capitalist system and an intensification of competition resulting in the precarious employment relationship - have had a decisive effect on immigrant workers’ positions in the labour market. It is the common disadvantaged socio-economic positions of immigrants that may potentially mobilize them to join in collective action. Nonetheless, we should never deny the importance of ethnicity and other cultural dynamics in mobilizing immigrant workers. They might stand in for class as the factors that stimulate immigrant workers’ motivation for joining collective actions to fight for employment rights, as has been discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Despite the importance of macro and structural factors in the formation of mobilization potential, not every individual who is suffering from structural disadvantages is willing to participate in collective actions. The immediate impetus to collective action remains a cognitive one. If the structural strains remain relatively constant, as discussed above, one of the central problems of social movements, then,
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is how the ‘sudden imposed grievance’ and political opportunities are defined by individuals to facilitate collective actions. One very important psychological process that motivates individuals’ participation in social movements, as Kelly (1998) identified, is the ‘grievance interpretation’, which means that individuals first have to feel aggrieved and blame an agency for their problems, as well as believing that there is a prospect of success for the social movement. In McAdam’s words (1988), the process of ‘cognitive liberation’ is crucial to individuals’ participation in collective actions. Three key cognitions are identified through this psychological process. First, people who normally accept the authority of their rules begin to question the legitimacy of those institutional arrangements and their rulers. Second, people who used to believe that these institutional arrangements are inevitable begin to realize their rights and demand a change. Finally, people who ordinarily consider themselves powerless and hopeless begin to believe that they have the capacity to change the situation (McAdam 1988: 132).

Having elucidated structural strain and individuals’ cognitive liberation, the next question to address is what could link macro and micro processes, or in other words, how a group of people with collective interests emerge. McAdam’s (1988: 134-135) explanation of the approach with which to link these processes is that of the ‘micromobilization context’, which is defined as ‘the small group setting in which the processes of collective attribution are combined with rudimentary forms of organizations to produce mobilization for collective action.’ Much research has confirmed that social networks play a vital role in the process of individual participation in social movements (Morris 1984; Freeman 1973; Opp and Gern 1993). The related group setting and social networks for immigrant workers can be informal and formal groups at the workplace, friendship networks, work centres, trade unions, political ethnic organizations or non-political ethnic organizations. The reason why these group settings are important for the formation of collective interests is that they
offer a context in which all the socio-psychological processes can occur. In the absence of interpersonal links, especially in the case of immigrants who are relatively more vulnerable and isolated, they are likely to feel powerless to change the situation even if the present conditions are in their favour. Research has supported the positive relationship between the feeling of personal efficacy and collective action (Neal and Seeman 1964; Pinard 1971). Moreover, once an individual is integrated into a formal or informal network, they become embedded in an interactive structure which might provide them with a political consciousness towards a given protest issue. This function of networks – identity creating and strengthening - is referred to as the socialization function by Passy (2003:22). Finally, the setting may provide leadership which is crucial to promoting a sense of injustice about what has happened to the workforce. The importance of activists and political entrepreneurs for the spread and development of social movements has been discussed in Marwell and Oliver’s (1993) work. They are the active components that facilitate cognitive framing and structural mediation. Network analysis, to some extent, can bridge the gap between the structural and individualist accounts of social movement participation.

4.3.1.2 Mobilization and network analysis

As discussed above, social capital and network analysis can offer a useful insight into the mobilization of collective actions. Since the work of Putnam (1993, 2000), the concept of social capital has been gaining in importance as a crucial explanatory variable for political participation. According to Lin (1999:35), social capital can be defined as ‘resources embedded in a social structure which are assessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions’. Social capital theory argues that lively associational life can generate social capital in the form of a tolerant, diversified and cooperative culture, which in turn contributes to the democratic political system. A great many social movement scholars have also discussed the significant role of social networks
as the conduits of: information and resources; organizational support to social movements; and cultural ties essential to solidarity building and collective action (MaAdam 1988; Snow et al 1980; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Diani 1997). McAdam (1988) has summarized three structural facts that are associated with the functions of networks in social movements. One of the first and most frequently cited facts about social ties and activism is that activists are frequently drawn into a movement by people they know. Gerlach and Hine (1970) found that people were more willing to join religious movements if they were introduced by people whom they trusted on other grounds. In addition, most social movements develop within established social settings as they offer the leadership, communication channels and social trust that are needed to launch a collective action. Finally, the emerging movements tend to spread and expand along established lines of interaction.

At the individual level, social capital theory implies that participation in voluntary organizations could generate social trust among members, which can spill over into their trust in political systems and political participation (Togeby 2004:510). Participation in voluntary organizations can potentially help members to develop a set of socially valued skills such as public-spiritedness, co-operation and solidarity which may contribute to the establishment of more tight-knit communities (Putnam 1993). At the macro level, it is worth noting that ethnic or other civil organizations can play a significant role in supporting migrants’ mobilization efforts for employment rights. Considering that low-skilled immigrants are faced with a new social environment and have little economic, social and cultural capital in the host society, immigrant organizations or other related civil organizations and social networks are crucial to their mobilizing efforts as they are able to process far more economic, human and social resources than vulnerable and weak individual migrant workers or the loose migrant organizations within the workplace. A civil society typology and social capital approach suggests that these social networks can serve as a counterweight to
social actors that threaten their interests and hence empower immigrant groups in the receiving society. Fennema and Tillie’s (2004) research has confirmed the positive relationship between ethnic social capital and the degree of immigrants’ political participation, and implied the importance of exploring the horizontal links between ethnic organizations at the societal level and their implications for the collective mobilization of immigrant workers.

Although many social movement scholars have emphasized the importance of networks in the mobilization process, they have paid insufficient attention to the communication process across different kinds of networks (Tolbert 1991). Most analysis tends to concentrate on the positive potential of social networks, stressing social cohesion while neglecting possible conflicts between different social ties. They mainly explore the density of networks and its impact on the mobilization process, rather than the overlap or mutual influences across these ties. Different networks and organizations may have different organizational goals and internal dynamics, and thus it is very likely that they may also come into conflict and enter into new alliances at a certain point in the movement, which might impede the mobilization progress. Therefore the dynamics of inter-organizational links and the communicative mechanisms by which actors steer their way among their various affiliations warrant further scrutiny.

4.3.1.3 Opportunity and forms of collective actions

The fourth component of Tilly’s model is the external opportunity and the balance of power between rulers and subordinates. The central tenet of the political opportunity approach to collective actions is that mobilization is not the direct outcome of social structural tensions, but is mediated by available opportunities and the political environment in which the mobilizing group operates (Koopmans 2004). Tarrow (1998:19-20) defines political opportunity or constraints as, ‘dimensions of the
political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics’. The opportunity systems consist of an institutional side, which relates to ‘how the societal-specific and institutional frameworks impact on the way in which voluntary organizations function and what kind of relationship they can or cannot have with the political actors’ (Odmalm 2004: 472), and a discursive side, which includes the established notion of what is considered as legitimate and reasonable in a specific social context (Koopmans 2004). ‘Opportunity’ relates the group to the government and other social actors. The positions and behaviours of other actors may be located somewhere on a spectrum from repression (raising the cost of collective action) to facilitation (lowering the cost of collective action).

Finally, collective actions take different forms, varying in size, intensity and duration according to the balance between interest, organization, mobilization and opportunity. Very often, much discussion of collective actions in the field of Industrial Relations study is centred on high-profile strikes, campaigning and protesting. This implicitly assumes that workers are generally passive and obedient for most of the time and only occasionally become active under certain circumstances. However, this only appears to be true when it comes to the ‘public transcript’ of collective actions. As opposed to the public transcript of open confrontation, the ‘hidden transcript’, according to Scott (1990), contains thoughts and feelings of powerless groups that cannot be made public at the particular time and space. By reading into hidden transcripts, it can be seen that there is a continuum of resistance that exists in the everyday life of workers. Scott, in Weapons of the Weak (1985), argues that for peasants specifically and workers generally, resistance and rebellion is embedded in workers’ everyday life and can take various forms of collective action that can be categorized into ‘hidden transcripts’.
Chapter 4: Community organizing of low-skilled immigrant workers: a social movement perspective

The existence of ‘hidden transcripts’ reminds us that collective actions of resistance are more than what can be observed in the public arena. As feminist researchers (Hanisch 1971) suggest, the personal is also political. ‘Hidden transcripts’ are particularly important for low-skilled immigrant workers because they are often not visible in the public arena due to the nature of the industry in which they are embedded and their immigrant status. Recent research on the emotional costs of labour in service industries suggests that ‘communities of coping’ – informal and oral-based social networks in ‘off-stage’ areas - play a crucial role in helping workers seek solace from each other and deal with management control and could even potentially function as the basis for trade unions organizations (Meyerson 1989; Korczynski 2003; Sutton 1991). Nevertheless, the nature of everyday forms of resistance has been widely debated. As Piven and Cloward (1977) argue, everyday resistance can be a strategy of accommodation rather than transformation because workers might simply seek enough material rewards and social satisfaction to make life more bearable. They do not necessarily recognize the structural causes of their work problems and try to propel progressive changes. Scott (1985), however, does not suggest that workers are inherently conservative. Small actions can often be transformed into large and more radical actions if they are not successful. Large-scale action can also represent the cumulative form of everyday resistance. Therefore it is essential to explore both high-profile collective actions in the public arena and the locally and culturally relevant everyday coping strategies and resistance of immigrant workers in the social process of community unionism. The study of collective actions requires no prioritising by scholars of its formal and institutional dimensions – leadership, organization structure and public visibility: ‘Without seeing and comprehending the background of everyday resistance, those rare moments of potentially revolutionary collective actions are ahistorical and uncontextual’ (Brook 2000 :9).
Chapter 4: Community organizing of low-skilled immigrant workers: a social movement perspective

Tilly’s model (1978) highlights key components of social movements which can serve as the framework for exploring the social process of community unionism. McAdam’s (1988) mobilization context and network analysis emphasize the importance of both social interactions among members and inter-organizational links in shaping the way individuals interpret grievances and the assembly of mobilization resources. Network analysis is a particularly useful tool for investigating the role of trade unions and community organizations in the coalition building of community unionism.

4.3.2 Conceptual framework and research questions

Based on Tilly’s social movement model and McAdam’s micro-mobilization context, we reconstruct community organizing upon three elements: interest formation, mobilization structure and opportunity, and collective actions. The formation of collective interest is the social process in which immigrant workers frame their socio-economic disadvantages into collective worker interests against employers in the community setting. Mobilization structure refers to various institutional components, the differences in the way that individual member organizations frame the issue to themselves, and consequently the potential negotiation and conflicts between different organizations. Opportunity can be interpreted as the national/local socio-economic climate shaped by the government and public perceptions in which community organizing of immigrant workers is carried out. The research treats immigrant workers as a point of departure in studying community organizing of immigrant workers and thus trade unions are considered as political opportunities that might either benefit or hinder collective actions among immigrant workers. Collective action refers to the forms of collective actions that are carried out in community organizing and how they have an impact on organizational developments and grassroots empowerment of immigrant workers.
In line with the above conceptual analysis, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and richness of immigrant workers’ community organizing efforts, the following questions will be addressed:

1) Interest formation (how workers formulate interest in collective terms): what are the socio-economic conditions that stimulate or impede the formation of collective interest among immigrant workers within the workplace? What strategies do immigrant workers adopt to facilitate the interest formation?

2) Mobilization opportunity and structure (how immigrant workers get mobilized and in what context): How does the local socio-political climate affect the work and life experiences of immigrant workers? Is ethnic community a boned entity that can serve as a basis for community organizing? How do immigrant workers utilise different levels of community networks to combat exploitations? 1) What is the role of non-traditional actors, such as ethnic organizations, churches and self-help groups, in organizing immigrant workers around employment issues, and what tensions and power relations exist between different civil organizations?

3) Collective action (outcomes of mobilizations): What forms of collective actions do immigrant workers carry out, and how do we assess the outcomes of these actions?

By addressing these three themes in community organizing of immigrant workers, the research does not intend to assert that all three are causally necessary in all community organizing efforts, but to identify the specific mechanisms within each that can be found across multiple community organizing cases. The study of these mechanisms can enhance our understanding of the complexity of, and variations within, the community organizing of immigrant workers in different social settings.
Moreover, we do not attempt to generalize the interests and needs of immigrant workers and the standard mode of community unionism, but to make contingent comments based on the research constituencies.

4.4 Conclusion

The community organizing approach, in theory, matches the working and living experiences of immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors, as they often rely to a large extent on the narrower social networks developed within or outside of workplaces through interaction with fellow workers of the same ethnicity. This contrasts with the fact that local workers are atomized in the mass culture and lack a support network for survival (Ness 2005). However, it is important not to glamorize such community organizing strategies because internal differences and divisions within immigrant communities and tensions between different organizations in the coalition building might exist under the surface of ‘imagined’ unity and solidarity. How the community organizing approach functions differently in different social settings, under what conditions community unionism can empower immigrant workers and how immigrant workers and unions can be empowered warrants careful scrutiny through comparative studies of community unionism.
Chapter 5: Research methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology and research methods employed to explore the collective mobilization of immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors. It firstly clarifies the post-positivist epistemological position which is linked to a critical social agenda with the explicit purpose of addressing social injustice in a highly exploitative industry and liberating immigrant workers from various oppressive structures. Ethnography, a research method that has traditionally been married to a critical agenda, is adopted to explore the complicated and dynamic social process of solidarity formation among immigrant workers and their mobilization. By examining the legacy of ethnographic research in the study of Industrial Relations, the research emphasizes the importance of moving away from the notion of ‘workplace’ towards that of ‘community’ in order to contextualize workers’ resistance as a result of global economic restructuring and the large inflow of immigrant workers. Detailed research techniques such as interviews, participant observations and videos are explained in detail. Finally the researcher reflects on her social perspectives and emotions and discusses how these have had an impact on the research process.

5.2 Post-positivism: towards a radical and emancipatory social agenda

The research is epistemologically located within a critical and feminist framework with the overt purpose of investigating and addressing the exploitation and social injustice faced by immigrant workers in low-paid industries. It is particularly concerned with challenging the exploitation embedded in the integration of class, gender and ethnic inequalities, with the aim of moving away from research on immigrant workers towards research for immigrant workers. It is more than a study of obviously socially marginalized groups because the researcher utilizes particular skills
and resources to break out of the confines of existing research in defence of the voices and experiences of immigrant workers whose stories are otherwise suppressed and out of reach. Instead of affirming the status quo, the research is committed to negating the repressive influences that lead to the unnecessary social domination of certain groups and aiding the emancipatory goals of marginalized and excluded groups. The emancipatory research is seen as a process of

…establishing a dialogue between research workers and the grassroots people with whom they work, in order to discover and realize the practical and cultural needs of those people. Research here, becomes part of a developmental process, including also education and political actions. (Reason 1988:2)

A critical approach in this regard has a ‘normative’ dimension with an obvious political orientation toward progressive social changes and a desire to use the work to help facilitate such social changes. It is reminiscent of idealism in its aim of liberating humanity from various oppressive structures (Cox 1996).

This approach developed out of the critical thinking which rejects three basic propositions of positivism: an objective external reality; the division between subjects and objects; and value-free social science. According to critical theorists, the social world does not operate in accordance with immutable social laws, but is constructed by a set of ideas and a body of experiences arranged by certain people in a specific time and place. Physical entities and material objects do not exist on their own, but are shaped by human consciousness. However, as opposed to the post-modernist critical perspective which does not take the societal context into account, denies objective standards and emphasizes only a plurality of meanings and identities, the research takes a Marxist-oriented dialectic realist position (Fuchs and Sandoval 2008:113-114) that adopts a dialectic understanding of reality as a dynamic totality and stresses the unity between object and subject. Reality is perceived as objective in terms of the social structural forces that impinge on the lives of individuals and groups and subjective in terms of individuals’ varied interpretations and perceptions.
of these social structures. The approach is materialistic in the sense that it addresses social phenomena not in terms of absolute ideas but rather in terms of resource distribution and social struggle, but it is also constructive in the sense that it recognizes that those structural forces are embodied in human relationships. A good example of these Marxist-oriented studies is Thompson’s (1963) study of the shaping of early eighteenth-century English law in the dialectical clash between class and culture. While recognizing the role of class structure in creating and reinforcing stratification systems, Thompson treats ‘class’ as a relational and historical social process which is embodied in value systems, ideas, norms and institutional forms.

By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness… I do not see class as ‘structure’, or even as a ‘category’, but as something which in fact happens in human relationships…Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences, feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from theirs…We can see a logic in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predict any law. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way. (Thompson 1963:8-9)

For Thompson, the objective (class in itself) and subjective dimensions (class for itself) of class are not distinct and separate aspects but co-exist in a dynamic process in which the struggle of the working class is also created. Therefore, class should be considered as being simultaneously in a state of flux and a social process in which both class and cultural dynamics are likely to be involved. By adopting this position, the research not only focuses on elaborating the disadvantaged socio-economic positions of immigrant workers in the receiving societies, but also explores how they understand and perceive the exploitation embedded in their labour process and community life and further explores what, if any, forms of solidarity and resistance are possible in such environments. This approach is particularly valid for research on immigrant workers as they are diverse in terms of nationality, gender, ethnicity, age, language, education background and migrant trajectory. Despite the fact that they may
be employed in the same workplaces, which are often small, dispersed and highly exploitive, the labour solidarity among them cannot be taken for granted. The social construction of a worker community among them might go beyond the economic terrain within the workplace and involve other gendered, racialized and cultural dynamics which could either facilitate or challenge the formation of worker solidarity.

On the basis that the social world is constructed rather than discovered, there is no fundamental distinction between research subject and object. Due to the emphasis on exploring the experiences and cultures of individuals and groups, the critical paradigm favours a close interaction between researchers and participants. As Glucksmann (2000: 22) suggested, ‘all “instruments” of knowledge incorporate a particular attention between subject and object of knowledge, researcher and research materials, which shapes the resulting knowledge’. In the critical paradigm, knowledge is not and cannot be neutral either politically or ideologically or morally. Knowledge is always biased because it is produced from the social perspectives of the researcher. Therefore knowledge discloses conscious and unconscious inclinations towards certain interests, classes, nationalities and parties. The researchers’ propositions are not treated as factors which should be controlled, but regarded as stimuli whose effects on the research process should be observed and reflected. As Sullivan (1996:106-107) argues, ‘if our status is presumed as given at the outset of study rather than a formation of relationship in relation to another, we may miss the opportunities to learn how we are being constructed and the effects such constructions have on the other literacies that we then ‘uncover’.

Critiques might be advanced by positivists who would argue that collections and interpretations of the fieldwork from the perspective which derives from a researcher’s own social position and personal experience might bias the ‘truth’. Again, critical theorists can defend themselves by arguing that the development of relationships between the researcher and the researched is a very important part of the
research process and feelings should be allowed back in to accounts of research as a means of combating false versions of ‘objectivity’. Objectivity does not arise from the use of a particular method, but instead:

Objectivity is a not an absolute value enshrined in the application of certain research procedures and practices but arises from the struggle to free oneself from prejudice and bias … ‘objectivity’ is not a condition that can be assured by compliance with procedures, but an honesty and truth that can only be achieved by conscious critical efforts and with difficulty. (Schratz and Walker 1195:122)

‘Rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:17). Having made their social and political positions clear, critical researchers are honest with their audiences, who may judge whether their research methods and findings are invalidated by the researcher’s social values and identities. Further to this, the social perspectives and emotions of the researcher will be elaborated in a separate section.

5.3 Ethnographic research: understanding solidarity and mobilization process

According to Hammersley and Atkinson, ethnography can be defined as a research method which ‘involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on issues that are the focus of the research’ (1983:1-2). Friedman and McDaniel (1998:117-119) have argued that ethnography is particularly useful for researchers who are examining a topic which has little related research because ethnography can provide a way to identify critical issues and map out uncharted terrain. Moreover, ethnography is uniquely suitable for addressing the research question which involves aspects of culture and social organization which cannot be deduced from individuals’ attitudes and behaviours and therefore is an essential tool for those interested in studying collective organizing and I therefore believe that it is of great significance for labour relations.
As the research focuses on low-skilled immigrant workers who are overwhelmingly concentrated in the dispersed service industry or undertaking part-time and temporary work in manufacturing industries or agriculture, they are often not situated in a trade unionized institutional framework. Little academic attention has been paid to their collective organizing efforts to defend worker rights in the study of Industrial Relations. Even within the existing literature on the relationship between trade unions and immigrant workers, trade unions are usually treated as a point of departure and these types of studies can be categorized as ‘problem-solving’ studies (Cox 1981) whose aim is to make the framework of trade unions and industrial relations run smoothly by effectively dealing with particular sources of trouble. The general pattern of trade unions and the relationship between unions and workers is not called into question; therefore the challenge posed by immigrant workers can be considered in relation to the specialized areas of activity in which they arise. On the contrary, this research approaches practices from a perspective that transcends the existing centrality of trade unions and the prevailing order of industrial relations and puts forward reasons for the possible alternatives. As Cox (1981:129) explains:

Critical theory, unlike problem-solving theory, does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing. Critical theory is directed to the social and political complex as a whole rather than to separate parts.

It has been argued that ethnographic research has been traditionally married to a radical agenda which aims to give voice to the research subjects (Thomas 1993). Therefore the use of ethnography can help us better understand MDWs’ resistive efforts at the grassroots level - efforts which have, for too long, been neglected within institution-centric approaches.

The research aims to explore the collective mobilization of immigrant workers, which consists of interest formation, interaction with political opportunity and the mobilization process. It is a complicated and dynamic social process which is highly
context-dependent. The utilization of interviews or surveys cannot help us to grasp the full picture of under what conditions, based on what kind of identities, and with whom, immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors can successfully organize themselves, but might generate a plurality of meanings and identities which are fluid and detached from social contexts. As Hodson and his colleagues (1993:398) noted:

Worker solidarity has resisted study by conventional survey techniques because solidarity is a complex phenomenon that emerges from specific situations and histories. Worker solidarity is also a group phenomenon and such phenomena resist explorations with face-to-face interviews or telephone surveys that entail an inherent methodological individualism.

Escobar (1992:77) has particularly emphasized that anthropologists are well-situated to explore how ‘cultural practices/texts’ are related to the redistribution of social power and, by implication, to what extent such practices can serve as a resource for community organizing or collective actions. Burdick (1995) has further pointed out that the power of ethnography lies in its ability to reveal and explore the social heterogeneity existing within movement constituencies, in terms of both individuals and groups, and then help us identify the social forces which facilitate or impede those movements.

By exploring heterogeneity in the social composition, cultural practices and political positions of both mobilized and unmobilized social constituencies, ethnography has the potential to illuminate the process of growth, shrinkage, rupture and disintegration of social movements. (Burdick 1995:362)

Therefore it can be argued that ethnography is suitable for exploring the dialectical relationship between consciousness and community practices among immigrant workers and the oppressive social structures imposed on them. It also matches the critical agenda by making visible the perceptions and grassroots activities of immigrant workers which have for too long been under-researched.
5.3.1 Ethnographic research in industrial relations study

Industrial relations has a strong tradition of deploying in-depth case studies and ethnographic research which allow researchers to examine the ways that workers experience the labour process and observe the interaction between workers, union representatives and managers in detail. Such ‘workplace ethnography’ (Edwards and Belanger 2008) has a long history, with early works including Mathewson’s (1931) study of ‘output restrictions’ and Roy’s (1952) participant observation studies which explored the social interaction that took place within a small work group of factory machine operatives. In the UK, Bastone, Boraston and Frenkel’s (1977) study on shop stewards and strikes and Edwards and Scullion’s (1982) exploration of the social organization of industrial conflicts enhanced our understanding of workers’ accommodation and resistance within workplaces. This tradition began with studies of manufacturing industries which continue to offer insights into the contemporary nature of work (Delbridge 1998), but have also been applied in other industrial settings such as medical centres (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004) and food-processing factories (Holgate 2005).

The research particularly refers to Beynon’s (1973) work, *Working for Ford*, Fantasia’s (1988) book, *Culture of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers*, and some feminist-influenced ethnographic research, such as Pollert’s (1981) study on working class women’s experiences on the production line in a tobacco factory. The reason why they provide important insights for this research is that they pioneered a style of in-depth study within workplaces from the perspectives of workers. The intention of the study as described by Beynon (1973:14) was to ‘portray how the men who worked for Ford in Liverpool in the 1960s experienced working on the line, how they made sense of their lives and of the wider forces operating in the society’. In this example, he recognized that class positions are embodied in social values, perceptions and consciousness. Fantasia
(1988) has also explored the complicated and multi-faceted dynamics of American working class consciousness and collective actions in three vivid cases. Throughout these works, class is read as a dynamic social process in which class in itself has the potential to transform into class for itself. As applied to research methodology, an examination of the formation of working class solidarity is essential to understanding resistive collective actions. Moreover, Pollert’s (1981) work started to bring out the complexity of the interaction between working class and gender identities and discussed how ‘cultural’ dynamics affect material reality in lived experiences. This suggests that the awareness of both material structures and cultural meanings is important for formulating and conducting research on workers who are embedded in different social categories. Immigrant workers, in particular, are very likely to have complicated and contradictory identities derived from the integration of their class positions, migrant trajectories, gender and ethnicity. Therefore the class process that takes place among them might incorporate more dynamics and uncertainties, which further points to the need for breaking the binarisms (class/non-class and public/private) in mainstream IR.

Despite the emerging academic awareness of recognizing that collective worker resistance is patterned by broad societal dynamics, it is clear that these ethnographic studies were mainly conducted in workplaces. This is not surprising given that classic theories (Marx 1971) and early literature on rank and file activism (Kimeldorf, 1999; Scott 1985) suggest the grievances upon which collective assistance are based are forged at the point of production and therefore the workplace and its dynamics are the natural starting point for understanding why and how workers contest power at work. Workplace dynamics are still highly relevant to the collective resistance of workers today, but we need to be aware of the changes in how the work is organized in the era of globalization. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter Two, the secondary sector of the economy is overwhelmingly occupied by immigrant workers who can never fit neatly into any separate social category, such as class, gender, nationality and ethnicity.
Therefore workplace social relations not only involve an employer/employee relationship, but also other non-class dynamics which could either facilitate or challenge the formation of labour consciousness. By merely observing workers’ experiences within workplaces and their interaction with managers and other colleagues, we could risk losing sight of other ‘cultural’ processes in class formation. It is argued by Holgate et al (2006:325) that:

Mainstream IR has often reduced workers’ experiences to the manifestation of class relations which are defined purely by economic relationships in workplaces and theorized at a single point of conflict between managers and employees. …Industrial relation needs to be brave enough to accept this complexity without sacrificing its traditional materialistic focus.

Furthermore, we have witnessed the decline of traditional manufacturing industries and the emergence of dispersed and informal service work in the UK. It is almost impossible for researchers to carry out long-term observations on a particular group of workers in the workplace based on the fact that a great many immigrant workers are undertaking temporary and seasonal work. Securing the necessary access to undertake research on immigrant workers in specific workplaces can also be difficult. French (2008) is particularly concerned with the resistance from employers: ‘Fieldwork experience shows employers are particularly sensitive when researchers seek to examine unionization of migrant workers, frequently refusing to be interviewed themselves, and rarely granting any form of access to migrant workers’. It is thus time to go beyond organizational boundaries and become more sensitive to the value of the wider community, such as migrant self-help groups and associations, the local migrant neighbourhood, churches and social clubs to contextualize immigrant workers’ collective actions. Unlike traditional ethnographic research, this study locates immigrant workers in a wider community setting which consists of workplaces, self-help groups, social clubs, churches, restaurants and other informal social networks. In adopting this community-based approach, we do not want to make an assumption that class has lost its primacy in collective actions, but instead argue
that this approach can provide us with a holistic picture of the social processes of collective mobilization among immigrant workers. This could help us to understand and seek answers to two important questions in the study of workers’ collective resistance in the era of globalization: the relevance and primacy of class to immigrant workers and workers generally in individualized and informal sectors and the role of cultural dynamics such as gender, ethnicity and nationality, in this class process.

5.4 Case design and access

The legitimacy of using case studies in this research lies in Yin’s account that emphasizes the value of case studies when ‘a “how and “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control’ (Yin 2003:9). As opposed to traditional institutional analysis in Industrial Relations, this study adopts a more contextualized and processual approach to examine more closely the social process of organization and mobilization which leads to different outcomes and consequences within a real-life context. The emphasis on the ‘contextualization’ and process, which is characterized by the blurring of the boundaries between phenomena and context, means that other research strategies such as surveys and experiments are not suitable for this research. Despite the fact that history also places significant emphasis on ‘contextualization’, it mainly deals with non-contemporary events. Therefore, in order to conduct a detailed examination of a contemporary phenomenon embedded in a real-life context, a case study is the most appropriate research strategy.

Researchers have established common agreement which strongly suggests that the selection of cases should be made on ‘theoretical sampling’ rather than ‘random sampling’ as is the case with survey research (Eisenhardt 1989, Patton 1990, Yin 2003). Patton (1990) introduced the concept of ‘purposeful sampling’, indicating that cases should be selected from potential cases which are information-rich and could offer deep understanding of the research issues. In Chapter Four, the importance of
interest formation, the mobilization structure and political opportunities in community organizing were discussed. It was decided to search for cases which are diverse in terms of these three factors: the issue around which community organizing is built; the organizational relationship within coalition building; and different local political opportunities (urban/rural). Selecting cases which offer all three of these core elements could help us to map out the different modes of community organizing of immigrant workers and further explore under what conditions collective mobilization is more likely to succeed and achieve benefits for workers. Furthermore, as the study is broadly located in the context of global economic restructuring and the emergence of increasingly flexible, informal, and precarious economic sectors, it was also decided that the cases should be selected from those industries.

The fieldwork started with extensive discussions with researchers, union officials and community activists who have been heavily engaged with migrant organizing in the UK in order to identify potential cases. Not only was a broad online search conducted, but also a large number of phone calls were made and letters sent to small, local community activist groups in the initial stages. The researcher was aware that focusing too much on high-profile cases or organizations that constantly attract public and media attention might risk losing sight of new and non-institutional mobilization efforts made by immigrant workers at the grassroots and local level. A very important issue arose from this initial searching, namely that it was almost impossible to find any completely bottom-up self-organized collective mobilization initiatives led by immigrant workers for labour rights without the presence of unions or community organizations. The vast majority of collective efforts were, to a certain degree, linked with union activities or had support from community organizations with a combination of top-down and bottom-up elements. The researcher managed to find a very limited number of worker self-organized initiatives at local level, but by the time the researcher tried to contact them, they no longer existed and the people involved
were impossible to trace. Two cases were confirmed after purposeful sampling and their key characteristics can be summarized as follows:

Table 5.1: Main characteristics of two cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>First case</th>
<th>Second case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>London (urban)</td>
<td>South Somerset, particularly Yeovil (rural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of organizing</td>
<td>Self-organized; class-based</td>
<td>Community organization led; locality-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue focus</td>
<td>Employment rights and visa</td>
<td>Employment rights and social inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing relationship</td>
<td>Dominated by a grassroots self-help group (Justice for Domestic Workers); trade union and NGOs play a marginal role</td>
<td>Local strategic partnership with migrant charity organizations; unions, churches and other NGOs involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization structure</td>
<td>Flat management, ideology-based</td>
<td>Hierarchy; resource-centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of the key community organization)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Female and group centred</td>
<td>Male and dominated by individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time factor</td>
<td>Relatively new (3 years)</td>
<td>Almost 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of industry</td>
<td>Domestic work</td>
<td>Manufacturing and food processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin of migrants</td>
<td>Non-EU, mostly Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indonesian and Moroccan</td>
<td>A8 migrants (mostly Polish)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first case is a collective mobilization initiative led by a migrant self-help group, Justice for Domestic Workers (J4DW), in London with support from Unite the Union and NGOs. They have been mainly engaged with lobbying and campaigns to defend domestic workers’ visa rights and fight for employment rights at both national and international level. The second case is a collective effort initiated by a migrant charity organization, the Midwest European Communities Association (MECA) in Yeovil, in partnership with local government, the GMB, housing associations and the police to tackle exploitation at work and the ethnic discrimination faced by A8 immigrant workers, particularly Polish immigrant workers, at the regional level. Due to the limitations of time and resources, these two cases were studied over periods of 12 months and 5 months respectively.

The researcher initially approached these two cases by making contact with the two migrant groups, J4DW in London and MECA in Yeovil. This institutional access helped the researcher to map out the key issues facing immigrant workers, the bodies involved in organizing them and obtaining access to a group of immigrant workers. However, it was recognized that following the institutional route could produce a potential bias which might have the effect of neglecting different voices in the community. Consequently, the researcher became widely involved in a variety of migrant groups, local migrant social clubs, restaurants and churches where a greater number of immigrant workers and community activists could be reached. For the second case, the researcher lived in a local Polish neighbourhood for more than two months so as to get a holistic picture of the Polish community in South Somerset. The importance of both institutional and grassroots access was fully considered in the study.

The researcher designed different research protocols for the formal institutions and grassroots migrant organizations involved in these cases. For formal organizations such as trade unions, the purpose of the research and concrete research questions were
clearly stated from the outset, while for immigrant workers and migrant organizations, I was initially not explicit about the exact nature of the research. I informed participants that my research was about their working and living conditions and how they cope with these conditions collectively. Their relationships with unions and NGOs were only raised at a later stage. One reason for not revealing too much detail was that staff in grassroots migrant organizations, self-help groups, and immigrant workers themselves were not very familiar with some of the terminology I used such as trade union organizing, social movements, coalition building, organizing structure, etc., and so they were very likely to be put off by these terms. More importantly, by clarifying those categories to the research subjects, I would run the risk of categorizing complicated social processes into ‘boxes’ which goes against the grassroots worker perspective adopted in this study. Their thoughts and reflections might be constrained by the terms coined by academics and elite activists. Therefore all those key elements were utilized to facilitate purposeful sampling instead of being treated as presumed social categories with which to explain the collective mobilization of immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors.

5.5 Multi-method and multi-sited research strategy

As the cases were contextualized in a ‘community’, it was clear that ethnographic research was needed to study different sites and layers within a community. The sites in each case included informal migrant networks and groups located in dispersed geographical settings and formal institutions which were involved in organising immigrant workers. The study on migrant communities presents a challenge to traditional ethnographic research as it questions the notion of ‘locality’. Migrant workers might maintain good contacts and connections with people or groups which are located in different regional and national settings. The research follows the trajectory of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) and was fully aware of two important layers within the immigrant community: 1) physical space which consists
of trade unions, migrant organizations, churches, restaurants, social clubs, and shops in the receiving society in which immigrant workers are involved; 2) social networks formed through their migrant trajectory or other collective memory which might not be visible as a physical entity. The study of these different layers requires a range of complementary research techniques. Using a variety of methods can help enrich the data by offering new insights into the study (Whitfield and Strauss 1998).

There were six strands of data in this study. Firstly, the researcher worked as an assistant English tutor for J4DW teaching English and helping to provide advice on employment rights for two months. She then spent a further two months working as an administrator at MECA. These activities helped the author to map out the key issues facing immigrant workers and better understand the structures of migrant organizations and the activities that they are involved in. Second, semi-structured and unstructured interviews were carried out with immigrant workers, community activists and union officials in classes, meetings and social gatherings. Third, a number of participant observations were conducted in J4DW English, IT and art classes, anniversary parties, Christmas parties, campaigns, social trips, union meetings, J4DW monthly meetings, parliamentary meetings, and MECA English classes, MECA committee meetings, regional migrant forums and cultural events. Fourth, surveys were distributed to 27 J4DW members to investigate their migration patterns and working conditions. Fifth, writing and paintings created by J4DW and MECA members in their English and art classes were analysed. Finally, videos made by four immigrant domestic workers about their work and lives in London were also used as supporting materials. Each is discussed in turn.

5.5.1 Interviews

A total of 45 semi-structured and unstructured interviews lasting from approximately 25 minutes to one and half hours were conducted with immigrant workers, union officials and community activists. Initially, the researcher intended to carry out
semi-structured interviews with an interview guide, asking immigrant workers the same questions, but it was soon found that some immigrant workers, and MDWs in particular, did not feel comfortable about this type of ‘ask and answer’ conversation. In order to create a more relaxed and pleasant atmosphere which was not forced into a framework determined by the researcher, some interviewees were simply given the space to talk widely about their migrant trajectory, work and life experiences and the way they dealt with any problems they encountered. The researcher was initially concerned that the unstructured interviews might be unable to generate the rich data required for the project. However, this kind of informality and focus on ‘listening’ proved to be essential in establishing trust and rapport between the researcher and immigrant workers. It was noticed that several interviewees said ‘thank you for listening to me’ after the interview. This was more salient among MDWs as they often suffered from social isolation. They may previously have had no one with whom to share their stories and grievances and nowhere to go. Once the trust had been established, the researcher always had the opportunity to go back and ask them a few more questions at a later stage. Different types of interviews were used according to the reactions of the interviewees, the establishment of a relationship based on trust and the social situation in which the interviews were carried out. For union officials and community activists, semi-structured interviews were utilized.

In the J4DW case, 14 interviews were carried out with MDWs and the interviewees were diverse in terms of their nationality (mostly Filipino and Indian), age (from 24 to 54), marital status and length of stay in the UK (from 1.5 years to 8 years). Because J4DW does not keep formal records, it is not possible to say whether the characteristics of this group differ in any significant way from the J4DW membership as a whole. However, it is obvious that the majority of members who attended classes and meetings were Filipino and Indian. Of the 14 interviews, 9 were recorded in full while the other 5 were unrecorded or only partly recorded. This is because some MDWs were uncomfortable about being recorded or they did not wish some of their
distressing personal stories to be recorded. 7 semi-structured interviews with Unite the Union education officer and 4 of the founders of J4DW were conducted, among which an interview with Unite’s organizing officer was unrecorded because the conversation took place in a union meeting where there was too much background noise to produce a clear recording. An interview with the Chair of J4DW was unrecorded since it was conducted as an ongoing process throughout my research, wherever possible, during classes, social trips, meetings and lunch breaks. For the unrecorded interviews, the researcher usually slowed down the conversation and took comprehensive notes. The interviewees were invited to read the notes immediately after the interviews and, subsequently, the full transcripts to confirm their authenticity. When the researcher worked as a volunteer providing advice on employment rights, a group discussion that took place with 12 domestic workers about their working conditions in the class also informed the study.

In the second case, 15 interviews were conducted with Polish immigrant workers, of which the majority were MECA members while the others were approached in other Polish social clubs, the Polish Association, churches and the local neighbourhood in South Somerset. The researcher tried to balance the backgrounds of interviewees in terms of their age, gender, educational background, and length of stay in the UK, etc. A great many interviewees came to the UK between 2006 and 2008, and thus were categorized as ‘new’ Poles who arrived after the EU enlargement in 2004. The majority of them were under the age of 34, which matches the general age trend of new Polish migrants. It is estimated that, among those Poles who applied to WRS between 2004 and 2009, at the time of registration 81% were aged 18 to 34 (Trevena 2009). Most of the interviewees were women but this was not a reflection of the overall gender pattern, however, which was split equally between male and female. This is largely because those Polish migrants who actively engaged with community meetings, classes and social life tended to be women. A more detailed possible explanation for this will be provided in the analysis section. Of these interviews, 13
were recorded in full while only parts of the other two were recorded because of the background noise from the social gathering where the interviews were conducted. A total of 9 fully-recorded semi-structured interviews were carried out with GMB union officials, community activists and local government officers. In addition, one Lithuanian migrant worker and one Portuguese community activist were interviewed because they were widely involved in the organizing of Polish immigrant workers and therefore could offer valuable insights.

Approximately 30 informal conversations with immigrant workers, union officials, community activists and others who were involved in immigrant communities which lasted from a few seconds to almost an hour were conducted at social gatherings, classes and meetings on a continual basis. Although the researcher realized that those people could make a valuable contribution to the data, it would not have been practical or appropriate to conduct formal interviews with them as they had other responsibilities that they were committed to. By using these snippets of information from informal conversations, the researcher managed to gradually build up a more complex picture of the overall culture within the two cases. Therefore these informal and unrecorded conversations also serve as important sources of data in this study.

Table 5.2: Profile of immigrant worker interviewees (case one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Length of stay in the UK</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Married with three children</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>10 Oct 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Divorced with one son</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>16 Nov 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married with no children</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>21 Nov 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married with two children</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>21 Nov 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sri Lankan</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Divorced with one child</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>28 Nov 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>12 Dec 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Divorced with no children</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>9 Jan 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>6 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>13 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>13 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Married with three children</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>13 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>27 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married with one son</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>17 April 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>17 April 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.3: Profile of immigrant worker interviewees (case two)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Length of stay in the UK</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Married with one child</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Food processing factory</td>
<td>23 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Nurse in NHS</td>
<td>23 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Former care worker and currently employed as community worker</td>
<td>25 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Cleaner in NHS</td>
<td>27 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Married with two sons</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>Meat processing factory</td>
<td>27 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Married with two sons</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Casting factory</td>
<td>27 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Casting factory</td>
<td>27 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Married with one</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>29 March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Divorced with one daughter</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Married with one son</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Single with Polish girlfriend in the UK</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Single with Polish boyfriend in the UK</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Single with Polish boyfriend in the UK</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Divorced with one daughter</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.5.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation has traditionally been the key method for ethnographic research. Gold (1958) divided the role of ethnographer into four categories: complete participant; participant-as-observer; observer-as-participant; and complete observer. The researcher took on the role of participant-as-observer, which entailed immersion in immigrant communities while still allowing an awareness of the researcher’s status as a researcher.

It was initially decided that the researcher should go into the field and observe what was happening without becoming too involved, but as the research evolved, the researcher found it difficult to maintain the role of a complete observer. When I was attending J4DW’s classes and monthly meetings, I was constantly asked to give my own opinions and views on their activities and future agendas. Some MDWs approached me privately to talk about their problems and seek advice and support. I received phone calls from a few MDWs during ‘off-research’ time asking me to offer emotional support and advice about their problems. A good illustrative example is the case of an Indian domestic worker who called me several times at night because she did not feel safe to stay in the house with her employer who had a mental disorder. When J4DW and MECA were in need of volunteers, I helped them with English classes and poster and banner making for forums and campaigns. I helped to book train tickets for J4DW social trips when members had no idea of how to purchase discounted tickets online. I wore a J4DW T-shirt and marched with them on campaigns to show support for domestic workers. At a number of social integration meetings held for Polish migrants, I helped to prepare pancakes and serve tea and
coffee together with Polish participants. For some immigrant workers involved in the research, my role was not constrained to that of ‘researcher’, but expanded to being their ‘friend’ and ‘advisor’. By being an active participant, the researcher demonstrated a fully committed presence which bred credibility and trust. Moreover, by engaging with these activities, the social distance and unequal power relationship between the researcher and research subjects can be partially bridged. It is acknowledged that the committed participant role often carries with it the risk of overidentification and hence ‘going native’. The researcher was aware of this dilemma and had to constantly use her skills to balance the ‘native’ and ‘researcher’ roles. The techniques used will be elaborated in detail in the reflexivity section.

Regarding the selection of participants, phenomena and context for observation, on one hand, the researcher relied on key informants and the technique of ‘snowballing’, but on the other hand, the researcher was aware that undue reliance on key informants might risk losing sight of the views of other members within the social community. The key informant in the J4DW case was the Chair of J4DW, while the key informants for the second case were the Chair of MECA and a Polish community activist in the neighbourhood where I lived. They introduced me to a few immigrant workers and individuals involved in organizing immigrant workers with whom I was able to have conversations, which opened up more possibilities to establish research contacts. However, it was noticed that sometimes their ‘over-appreciation’ of the research could direct the researcher’s attention to the people and events that they thought could help with the aims of the research. For instance, the chair of J4DW stated several times: ‘** has got a ‘good’ story. You could have a talk with her’; ‘What do you want from us exactly? I can arrange it’. This kind of access is very likely to produce biased data determined by a specific group of people. In order to cope with this, the researcher made significant efforts to approach community members in various locations and through different channels at the grassroots level, even though doing so was time-consuming.
Because the researcher explained her status clearly in all the social settings, this made it easier to take notes. In most situations, the researcher had a notebook and pen in hand and scribbled notes down on a continual basis during the discussion. However, sometimes it was not possible or appropriate to have my notebooks and pen with me, for instance while I was engaged in a casual conversation with people over a cup of coffee or wine at parties or other social gatherings. In these contexts, as long as I could pick up on things that were relevant to the research during the conversation or activity, I would politely ask for a short break and then write notes in the corridor or even in the toilets. The notes were then augmented at the end of the day when the researcher returned home. Not only were the events and participants recorded, but also the researcher’s feelings and emotions were included in the research diary.

Table 5.4: Participant observations in case one

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESPECT annual conference</td>
<td>18 Sep 2010</td>
<td>12pm-3pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW English and IT class</td>
<td>25 Sep 2010</td>
<td>12pm-4pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unite the Union community meeting</td>
<td>2 Oct 2010</td>
<td>10am–4pm</td>
<td>Unite the Union, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union learning meeting</td>
<td>3 Nov 2010</td>
<td>10am-3pm</td>
<td>TUC, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW English and IT classes</td>
<td>14 Nov 2010</td>
<td>11am-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW monthly meeting</td>
<td>21 Nov 2010</td>
<td>12pm-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary meeting: tackling modern slavery and domestic servitude: priorities of UN</td>
<td>2 Dec 2010</td>
<td>4pm-6pm</td>
<td>Committee room 4, House of Lords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW art workshop</td>
<td>12 Dec 2010</td>
<td>2pm-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW Christmas party</td>
<td>19 Dec 2010</td>
<td>1pm-5pm</td>
<td>Unite the Union London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW monthly meeting</td>
<td>23 Jan 2011</td>
<td>12pm-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW English and IT classes</td>
<td>13 Feb 2011</td>
<td>11am-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW monthly meeting</td>
<td>20 Feb 2011</td>
<td>12pm-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW art workshop</td>
<td>27 Feb 2011</td>
<td>11am-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar on trade unions in globalization crisis organized by Unite the Union</td>
<td>5 March 2011</td>
<td>11am-4pm</td>
<td>Unite the Union Eastbourne centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW IT classes and meeting with domestic worker organizations from Nepal and Pakistan</td>
<td>6 March 2011</td>
<td>12pm-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary meeting on the impact of funding cuts on women in the UK</td>
<td>7 March 2011</td>
<td>3pm-6pm</td>
<td>House of Commons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW English and IT classes</td>
<td>13 March 2011</td>
<td>1pm-4pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW monthly meeting</td>
<td>20 March 2011</td>
<td>12pm-5pm</td>
<td>Faraday House, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4DW second</td>
<td>27 March 2011</td>
<td>1pm-5pm</td>
<td>Unite the Union,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5.5: Participant observations in case two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MECA English classes</td>
<td>22 March 2011</td>
<td>5pm-8pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECA advice surgery</td>
<td>22 March 2011</td>
<td>8pm-10pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration meeting (pancake party)</td>
<td>23 March 2011</td>
<td>6pm-8pm</td>
<td>South Somerset Mind, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census advice session for Polish people</td>
<td>26 March 2011</td>
<td>11am-4pm</td>
<td>Taunton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECA English classes</td>
<td>29 March 2011</td>
<td>5pm-8pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECA police advice session</td>
<td>29 March 2011</td>
<td>8pm-10pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECA monthly committee meeting</td>
<td>30 March 2011</td>
<td>6pm-8pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Somerset Mind drop-in session</td>
<td>31 March 2011</td>
<td>10am-4pm</td>
<td>Youth club in Chard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invited visit to a country house whose</td>
<td>26 March 2011</td>
<td>1:30pm- 4:30pm</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner employed Polish gardeners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invited to dinner with a Polish family</td>
<td>27 March 2011</td>
<td>3pm-7pm</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invited for coffee in a Polish home</td>
<td>2 April 2011</td>
<td>11:30am-1:30pm</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Somerset Mind volunteer celebration event</td>
<td>4 April 2011</td>
<td>3pm-6pm</td>
<td>South Somerset Mind, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECA advice session</td>
<td>5 April 2011</td>
<td>7pm-9pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West Migrant Workers Forum</td>
<td>6 April 2011</td>
<td>10:30am-1pm</td>
<td>Taunton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Domestic abuse’ advice session</td>
<td>6 April 2011</td>
<td>6pm-8pm</td>
<td>South Somerset Mind, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendip Migrant Workers forum</td>
<td>7 April 2011</td>
<td>3pm-6pm</td>
<td>Shapton Mallet, Mendip District Council Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holy Ghost church visit</td>
<td>20 June 2011</td>
<td>10am-12am</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to Polish café</td>
<td>20 June 2011</td>
<td>1:20pm-2:20pm</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visit to Polish shops</td>
<td>20 June 2011</td>
<td>3pm–5pm</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECA English classes</td>
<td>21 June 2011</td>
<td>6pm-8:30pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advice session organized by Polish Association (Sami Sobie)</td>
<td>22 June 2011</td>
<td>6:30pm–9:30pm</td>
<td>Albemarle centre Taunton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECA Polish classes</td>
<td>23 June 2011</td>
<td>6pm-8pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish Mass at Holy Ghost church</td>
<td>26 June 2011</td>
<td>5pm-6:30pm</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
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### MECA language certificate awards and celebration event

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MECA language certificate awards and celebration event</td>
<td>28 June 2011</td>
<td>5:30pm-8pm</td>
<td>Victoria Hall, MECA, Yeovil</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yeovil CAB visit</td>
<td>29 June 2011</td>
<td>2pm-3pm</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advice session organized by Polish Association (Sami Sobie)</td>
<td>29 June 2011</td>
<td>6:30pm–9:30pm</td>
<td>Albemarle centre Taunton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Awareness Day in Bridgwater</td>
<td>1 July 2011</td>
<td>9am-4pm</td>
<td>Bridgwater arts centre</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polish Mass at Holy Ghost church</td>
<td>10 July 2011</td>
<td>5pm–6:30pm</td>
<td>Yeovil</td>
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### 5.5.3 Photography and videos

Visual art was also used as supporting materials to explore the notions of identity, belonging, and community among MDWs. The use of visual art was not included in the initial research proposal, but developed during the research process. Therefore the work was experimental and utilized as complementary data to interviews and participant observations. It was found in initial interviews that the issues of identity and community were subjects that interviewees found difficult to clearly articulate their feelings about, especially when these identities were embedded in other social contexts beyond J4DW. In interview situations, it was possible to capture some key dimensions of their identities but they were often abstract and detached. For domestic workers in particular, their stories were often private and personal which meant they could not be easily verbalized or made visible in public spaces. During J4DW monthly art workshops, the researcher found that J4DW members showed great interest in painting and drawing pictures and used these to express their migrant
trajectory and experiences of work. Based on this, the researcher considered incorporating participant-generated videos into the study and the proposal soon received positive responses from four volunteers.

The researcher initially struggled to explain the type of data needed for the research. The main concern of the research is to explore on what basis and where the collective identities of immigrant workers can be forged and how this further serves as the basis for collective mobilization. It was difficult to assign precise topics for the video to the research subjects and the researcher subsequently recognized it was possible and indeed necessary to ‘lose control’ and allow participants to speak for themselves using their camera lenses. Four MDWs were loosely asked to make a video of the events, objects, people and social scenes that best represented their identities as migrant domestic workers in London. They could then either make a few short, separate videos of different identities embedded in various community settings or make a single coherent story. They were allowed to keep the video cameras for a month and decide on the length of the videos. The final videos made by the research subjects varied in length from 10 minutes to one and half hours. Two of them merely showed social scenes while the other two included explanations of the video-maker’s views and feelings about the setting depicted.

Due to the limitations of time and resources, the video project was ultimately not expanded to a larger group, but the existing four videos offer some important insights into MDWs’ ‘community’ identities which would otherwise be hidden in interviews and observations. The researcher held follow-up discussions with the video-makers to explore the meanings behind the images and why they were significant, and also utilized the themes that emerged from the videos to generate discussions during conversations and interviews with MDWs at a later stage, so as to examine whether there were common themes among MDWs. In addition, it also functioned as an ‘enabling methodology’ (Gauntlett and Holzworth 2006), giving research participants
more control over the research process and at the same time allowing for considerable reflection and thought about different ways to communicate their own meanings and understandings. This could change the power balance between the researcher and subjects and provide a mechanism for subjects to teach the researcher.

Moreover, the researcher frequently took photographs when visiting migrant shops, cafes, churches and community centres and participating in migrant social gatherings. On one hand, these provided a useful record of observations and could remind the researcher of the mood generated in that particular setting and prompt her memory when writing notes and interpreting data. On the other hand, they were also used as a way to stimulate discussion in interviews and informal conversations. The photographs made it easier to introduce topics or themes to the subjects without any awkwardness or multiple meanings associated with language. Particularly when the subjects had been involved in those settings before, the photograph could elicit detailed accounts of their experiences and perspectives which could not be attained by asking questions.

Finally, the art materials, such as poems and paintings, made by J4DW members in their art workshops, were also analyzed to see whether they contradicted or added to the findings derived from interviews and observations. They were also used to examine whether art can serve as a radical political context which could potentially facilitate collective mobilization, as will be explained in detail in the analysis section.

5.6 Reflexivity

Ethnographic research ‘recognizes the centrality of the subjectivity of the researcher to the production and representation of ethnographic knowledge’ (Pink 2007:23). The researcher needs to consider his or her position regarding the discourses being studied, while keeping the voices of the participants central and examining their agency and power (Lather 1991; Weis and Fine 2004). Moreover, for ethnographic
researchers, a close and regular engagement with participants also raises both practical and ethnical challenges related to relationship boundaries and issues of attachment on leaving the field. The following section discusses the researcher’s methodological reflections, focusing on the construction of power relations and the role of emotions and empathy during the research process.

5.6.1 Power relations

As an Asian, female, single, migrant and middle-class researcher, my personal identity can never fit neatly into any social category. This helps me to better understand immigrant workers’ complicated and contradictory identities derived from different social dynamics. Being a migrant in the UK myself enabled mutual understanding between me and the research subjects in relation to the language barriers and cultural differences that newcomers face in the receiving society. I was willing to talk about my personal migrant experiences in interviews and informal conversations and it was obvious that some immigrant workers were interested in seeking my views and feelings regarding the migration process. Very often, they asked me questions such as: ‘do you also miss your family?’; ‘do you plan to go back later?’, and ‘how did you learn English here?’. These kinds of sharing practices facilitated a relaxed atmosphere in interview situations. It also shifted the power differences between myself and the interviewees as, by sharing my experiences, I was not perceived as an outsider who would judge their migrant trajectory, views and behaviours, but instead, a person who could potentially understand and share their emotions.

Born in a Chinese middle class family, I was brought up by a nanny in her fifties until the age of seven. Such experiences helped me to better understand the emotional bonds between immigrant domestic workers and their employers’ children. When some MDWs mentioned that their employers’ children were closer to them than their real parents, it reminded me of my strong emotional attachment to my nanny. I even celebrated New Year with my nanny’s family instead of my own family for several
years. I could well understand that domestic workers transferred their maternal and caring feelings which would otherwise be given to their own children to their employers’ children. I still remember that, on one occasion, my nanny’s grandson was reported missing because nobody picked him up from school in the evening. During the same time period, my nanny picked me up from school and cooked dinner for me. She felt very guilty about her grandson going missing and my family later helped her to search for the boy. I did not realize at the time the emotional sacrifices that my nanny made when I was small, but during the research process, the conversations with MDWs prompted me to reflect on personal experiences, which further enhanced my understanding of MDWs’ emotions and identities.

Nevertheless, being a middle class researcher with no experience of working in factories or the domestic industry created social distance and power differences between me and the research subjects. I was aware of the possibility that immigrant workers might treat me as someone who was more authoritarian and socially privileged than them. In order to cope with these power inequalities, I decided to enter into the field as a PhD student rather than with the status of a professional researcher. I did not want to give immigrant workers the impression that I only needed them for my research. Instead, I wanted them to know that I would be happy to listen to their stories and learn from them as well as incorporating them into the research. Adopting the status of a PhD student made me seem less authoritarian and created more flexibility and space to engage with different people. I tried to avoid creating the suspicion that I was siding with the Chair of their organization or any other community leaders and then encouraged immigrant workers to talk about whatever was on their minds without any pressure or anxiety. However, there was a negative side to presenting myself as a PhD student. During an interview with an official from a local trade union council, someone suddenly entered the room. The official told them, ‘don’t worry, she’s just a student.’ I did feel at several points that my authority and identity as a researcher was being threatened or undermined. After that I started to
introduce myself more formally as a researcher when I met with union officials and staff from other formal institutions.

It was notable that one Polish female interviewee felt uncomfortable about the presence of a Polish translator during the interview. Although her English was not very proficient, she nonetheless thought she should speak for herself. A small quarrel broke out between the interviewee and the translator during the interview because the woman thought the translator had not correctly translated her ideas. In this situation, I politely asked the translator to stop translating and allowed the interviewee to explain her ideas herself although it took a long time and she sometimes had to refer to a dictionary. Consequently, I realized that bringing a Polish translator into an interview might potentially put pressure on interviewees and make them feel less self-confident. Therefore, after that I only invited a translator when the interviewee requested it.

When dealing with vulnerable workers, the purpose of interviews was not only to obtain rich data for the research, but also to give workers a chance to fully express their own ideas and voice their demands. In this sense, interviewing can be also a process in which immigrant workers are empowered.

Despite great efforts on my part to become an ‘insider’ in immigrant communities by creating more equal power relations, actively sharing my experiences and participating in their daily activities, I also realized that ‘going native’ could be dangerous. The research has a dual aim which is to give a voice to immigrant workers and to bring the work to an academic audience. I was conscious of the importance of balancing these two roles, although the ‘insider’ perspective is the foundation of ethnographic research. As Fetterman suggests (2010:22):

I always ground my work in an emic understanding of the situation and group. … Although time-consuming, this approach ensures the validity and usefulness of the data I have collected. At the same time, the job is not done until I step back and make sense of the situations from emic and etic perspectives.
When doing research on vulnerable immigrant workers in highly exploitative industries, researchers can be emotionally affected by their, often moving, stories and experiences. I was always prepared to write field notes in any social setting because it was so easy to become ‘one of them’ when listening to their stories and attending their social functions. I always made sure that I was emotionally ready before I entered into any fieldwork setting and consistently wrote notes about both activities and feelings during observations. Without this awareness, the researcher would simply become a sympathetic person while neglecting the researcher role. On one occasion, J4DW invited me to join their management committee, but I eventually rejected the invitation. I felt privileged to be trusted by the MDWs; however, I wanted to maintain a more ‘neutral’ and flexible role as a researcher without giving too much advice on their agendas.

5.6.2 Emotions, empathy and exit

When working with vulnerable subjects, emotion and empathy play a significant role within the data collection. As Watt (2009:196) summarized, ethnographic researchers often have guilty knowledge, dirty hands and heavy hearts. Far from devaluing the research practice, emotions could actually facilitate the development of rapport between me and the research subjects. When I first entered into the field and approached some immigrant workers for interviews with the help of key informants, I clearly felt that they were not psychologically ready to talk about their personal stories and experiences, despite having given their consent to be interviewed. I stopped the interview process for a while and started working as a volunteer for J4DW and MECA and widely participating in their daily activities. I spent most of the time listening to them rather than asking questions in the early stages. I felt the deep ‘loneliness’ among MDWs because of their social isolation. They urgently needed attention and care. I always maintained eye contact with them and, where appropriate, gave them hugs during the conversation. I tried to give my attention as a committed
presence, alongside them and feel empathy with them. They showed appreciation for this. Some MDWs mentioned, after I had spoken with them, that it was nice to share their story with me. I felt privileged to be trusted by some MDWs who admitted that they had never shared their stories with anybody else including their families. Initially I worried that I might not be able to gather sufficient data for my research by doing this, but later I could clearly see that it was beneficial. I became aware that participants often sought me out to tell me how they were getting on with their work and lives. This kind of empathy made these vulnerable people feel that I was a warm and reliable presence in an inhospitable and strange world and that I was not just using them for research. Without such a shared emotional space that offers the possibility of trust, it could have been difficult to establish a shared narrative space.

However, part of the commitment to taking on emotionally-laden research is the realization that these benefits come with possible burdens and challenges that might not have been foreseen in the initial research plan but that the researcher needs to be willing to take on board. One of the challenges is emotional exhaustion during a research venture. This comes from the number of people a researcher needs to meet, the number of conversations that have to be conducted within a short time period, as well as the content of the conversation. A lot of background research on immigrant workers’ work and life was done in advance, but once I started getting involved in their daily activities and listening to their personal stories, my emotions changed. I was aware of the negative emotions generated by constantly listening to participants’ distressing stories involving experiences such as being locked in the house, given no food, having to sleep on the floor, getting divorced and being raped. However, it would have been impossible to imagine the depth of such feelings before entering into the field. Initially, these emotions were not present but they accumulated gradually over time. There were times when I was exhausted and needed to distance myself from my work for a while and think about other things. I would describe this as feeling like the research subjects were living inside my head and the thoughts and
emotions did not end when the interviews and conversations did. One domestic worker had been verbally abused by her employer and accused of abusing her employer’s son. She asked me whether I could be the emergency contact person for her in the UK if something bad happened to her because she was new here and did not know anybody else. She constantly called me to update me on her situation, and I frequently thought about her situation when I was not working.

Sometimes I even faced a ‘moral dilemma’ whereby I felt that I had a clear obligation to help my participants on humanitarian grounds, but it might be inappropriate or even illegal as a researcher to do so. One Filipino domestic worker escaped from her employer because she could no longer put up with the abuse that she suffered. However, her visa was due to expire soon and she still had not received the salary from her employer that she was owed. She turned to me for help and asked whether I or my friends could offer her a reference letter confirming that we would hire her as a full-time domestic worker in the following year in the UK. Clearly, any such letter would be fake as I had no plans to employ domestic workers. However, she needed this reference letter to renew her visa and then look for a new job. It was a difficult decision for me. On one hand, I felt I should help her because of the injustice of the situation that she was in and the fact that she had no one to rely on. She did not have enough time to bring a claim to an employment tribunal and recover the salary she was owed before her visa expired. On the other hand, producing a fake letter would have been illegal. I was hesitant and told her that I would let her know what I had decided in the following week. Unfortunately, I did not need to make this decision because she died during that same week. She caught the flu, but did not go and see a doctor because she was afraid that someone would find out that her visa would expire soon and thus she might face the risk of being deported. I felt guilty about her death during the next few days.
In order to cope with this kind of emotional stress, I utilized some methods to reduce the negative impact that the research had on me. One effective method was to keep a personal diary, and record my emotions and how I made important decisions during the research process. Being open and honest about my true emotions helped me to balance my role as both an insider and a researcher and regain the determination and energy necessary to go back to work. When I found myself emotionally overwhelmed, I often stopped the research for several days until I felt mentally ready to continue. I also found talking with people who were doing similar work useful, as they were able to help me both emotionally and academically.

Such emotions were also linked to having to leave the settings where I conducted the case studies. Due to the limitations imposed by time and resources, I decided to withdraw from the two cases after observation periods of 12 months and 5 months respectively. These moments represented the ‘end’ of my fieldwork but I clearly felt that some immigrant workers, especially MDWs, would have liked me to stay on and help them. The continuing changing legal and social climate towards immigrant workers means that there is still much to be learnt and reported. I continued to receive a lot of emails and phone calls from immigrant workers asking for advice. For the purposes of my project, my immersion in the immigrant communities has come to an end, but at the same time, it is still unfinished business because people are still suffering. I felt guilty about taking so much time away from them without helping them to change their material situations, in spite of the fact that listening to and understanding their experiences was a psychological relief and empowering for immigrant workers, as was obvious during the interviews and informal conversations. I was also involved in their campaigns to show support for domestic workers. I am considering ‘giving something back’ to these communities by exposing their working and living conditions to the public and giving a voice to these people. One potential proposal would involve organizing a migrant exhibition based on photographs, videos, transcripts and other art materials used in the research in community centres.
or museums later on, although this may not form part of my PhD project and needs further discussion with participants. Continued negotiation and discussion about how to disseminate research findings has offered a ‘right of return’ and could possibly lead to further pieces of research in the future. In this sense, leaving is not a final ‘goodbye’ but simply ‘farewell’ for now.

5.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the reasoning for adopting a post-positivist critical approach with the aim of causing a shift away from research on immigrant workers towards research for immigrant workers. Linked to this critical agenda, ethnography was utilized to give voice to immigrant workers and explore their collective mobilization efforts outside of traditional trade unionism. The researcher was also honest about her personal experiences and emotions during the research process and reflected on how they have influenced the data collection and analysis. Being open and honest in this way enables readers to evaluate the validity of the research evidence presented.
Chapter 6: From Labourers of Love to Labourers with Rights: Community Organizing of MDWs in London

6.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a grounded account of MDW’s community organizing efforts facilitated by the MDW self-help group, Unite the Union and Kalayaan, a charity organization offering advocacy and advice to MDWs in London. Findings of this chapter are presented to address three main themes of research questions set out in Chapter Four. 1) Interest formation: what barriers do MDWs face in formulating the collective interest within the workplace? What approaches have MDWs adopted to overcome those barriers and develop collective worker identity? 2) Mobilization structure and opportunity: what tensions exist among different civil organizations in terms of how they frame issues facing MDWs, and how this has an impact on the coalition building between these organizations? 3) Collection action: what are forms of community organizing actions and how do we assess the outcome of these actions?

The chapter starts with an introduction to migrant patterns and working conditions of MDWs in the UK. It then analyzes how maternalistic and servant dynamics and ‘dual frame of reference’ veils the exploitations of MDWs at work. Next, it elaborates three social processes – ‘communities of coping’, political education and radical art through by which MDWs were transformed from ‘mothers’ and ‘servants’ into ‘workers’. The competing framing strategies adopted by different organizations involved in community organizing are then discussed. Finally, it assesses organizing outcomes from a wider perspective which accentuates both organizational developments and grassroots empowerment of MDWs.
6.2 ‘I couldn’t see any hope’: migrant pattern and working conditions

In this study, the MDWs are referred to as legal immigrant workers who were legally employed abroad and then came to the UK on a domestic worker visa with their employers abroad. These employers include business executives, diplomats, actors and actress, solicitors, doctors and rich British residents returning from abroad with their domestic staff. To qualify for a domestic worker visa, they have to have worked for one fixed employer for at least one year with the employer agreeing to move to the UK and bring them as well. The vast majority of MDWs in this research have reported that they entered the UK with their employers from Middle East, India and Pakistan. All the MDW interviewees had worked as domestic workers in other countries before moving to the UK. Their decisions to migrate to the UK were seldom made on their own but subject to their employers’ mobility. This could partially explain MDW’s limited knowledge about the British society and lack of social networks after arriving in the UK.

As an extreme example of an individualised and informal sector in the globalized era, domestic work differs from conventional work in a number of ways. Firstly, MDWs work in private households; thus there is no group setting in which they can share work grievances with fellow workers in the workplace as workers do in traditional workplace-scenario. This has a fundamental and negative effect on trade union organization. Moreover, being enmeshed in integrated class relations, and gendered and racialized structures of oppression, MDWs experience greater exploitation than do workers in any other occupation. They are not only subject to the non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage and long working hours, but also verbal, physical and sexual abuses.

6.2.1 Wages and working hours
Non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage is prevalent in the domestic work industry. According to a survey completed by 27 J4DW members, their average monthly salary was about 800 pounds before tax with the lowest monthly salary being 200 pounds. The corresponding working hours for this salary level were between 12 and 20 hours per day, for 6 or 7 days a week. During a discussion with 12 MDWs in an employment advice session, the lowest salary reported was 100 pounds per month before tax. Non-payment was also common. According to the UK employment law, if one is a member of his/her employer’s family, living in their home and helping to run family business or household chores, one is not entitled to the National Minimum Wage. This blurs the MDWs’ status as ‘workers’ and allows employers to solicit unpaid services. One Indian domestic worker (Interviewee 12) described it thus:

My next employers were doctors. I worked as a nanny and a housekeeper, a live-out job from 7:00 am to 7:30 pm excluding travelling time. I was allowed no food and worked from Monday to Saturday. I have been cheated on my wages. I wasn't paid 4 months’ salary and deductions were made from my wages supposedly for tax and NI when the employer just pocketed this money.

Overworking is a common issue among MDWs. Some workers were required to be ready to serve their employers at any time of the day for all manner of the tasks including bringing them a cup of juice to their employer. 72% of Kalayaan’s clients reported that they had to work ‘on call’ (available at any time) and 69% had no vacation (Klayaan 2010-2011). Their employers sometimes threatened to make them redundant when they made complaints.

At night, I had to wait for my employer to open the door even at midnight though she had a key. Everyday was like a torture so I tried to ask for day off. ‘I am very tired. I need a day off. Please let me have a day off on Sunday’, I told my employer, but she asked me to get off of her life. ‘Don’t wait for Sunday. You can go now!’, she told me. (Interviewee 14)

A Pilipino domestic worker (Interviewee 9) reported that for almost 5 years she slept for approximately 4 hours a day while earning 200 pounds a month. In an
employment advice session, when MDWs were asked to list the most important employment problems that they were concerned with, unpaid wages and prolonged working hours were the most voted ones. Many domestic workers suffered from health problems due to the heavy workload.

...again 200 pounds per week. I got shoulder pain there. I felt I can’t work anymore. My shoulder is always painful since then. You know, money is an important question, but health is more important. If I am ill, I can’t work anymore. (Interviewee 3)

Normally start to work at 7am-10.30pm, Monday to Saturday. It was hard work and salary was only 150 pounds a week. I became very ill and the doctor said I was overwork and advised me to rest, but how could I rest? I had to work even if I was very ill. (Interviewee 10)

6.2.2 Physical control

Physically abuse also exists as an extreme form of bodily control in the domestic work industry. According to Kalayaan’s 2010-2011 report, 17% of their MDW clients had experienced physical assault and 5% had been sexually abused. A few MDWs interviewed mentioned that they had been slapped and kicked by their employers for no obvious reason and a few suffered from sexual abuse.

The old lady would kick me and slap me. I had to put up with all these abuses because I needed a letter to support my visa application. I suffered a lot of abuse at the hands of abusive employers. Worst of all, I have been sexually abused. (Interviewee 12)

The majority of MDWs in the study reported that they had experiences of not being given a separate room and sleeping on the floor in employers’ houses. Even for those who had private room, it was often very small. One Moroccan domestic worker (Interviewee 10) made a video showing the contrast between her employer’s luxurious house and her tiny bedroom. It was demonstrated that the employer had a very spacious storage room for her designer clothes, handbags, shoes and hats, but
offered the domestic worker an unventilated room with only the space for a single bed. The bathroom was so tiny that she could not turn around when she was taking a shower. She claimed that every time when she was in the bathroom, she wanted to cry because she was not treated as a human being with dignity. Domestic workers who worked there before her had never made any complaints, but she asked the employer to change her room. The request was rejected and her employer merely offered to replace the old mattress in her room.

Employers also imposed hygiene rules on MDWs. For example, some workers were asked not to cook strong smelling food.

They said I could cook whatever food I want, but they also said they didn’t like any smell in the house. How can I cook, then no smell? So I could just put rice in the boiling water and eat it. Sometimes I put some food into the microwave. (Interviewee 3)

6.2.3 Emotional abuse

Verbal discrimination and insults for no good reason were common. This not only came from their employers, but also sometimes from their employers’ young children from time to time.

She would always shout at me and always call me silly, stupid girl even with nothing. The children would beat, kick and throw things at me. (Interviewee 14)

I came to the UK to work for a famous British actress who had previously employed me in India. I started working at 7:00 am until 3:00 am often having to cater big parties. She would call me ‘stupid Indian’. (Interviewee 12)

Many interviewees reported that they were not trusted by their employers and would be accused of being thieves when items were lost or misplaced. They felt their
commitment and loyalty to their employer’s family was never fully appreciated and paid off by trust and respect.

Sometimes they are looking for something. They questioned me. I don’t know what happened. They thought I was hiding something. They don’t trust me. Why? They let me work in the house but don’t trust me. That’s the point. I’ve worked in the house for long time, not just for money. They said it’s up to you. Sometimes they lose something, they thought it was me. I cried thousands of times. (Interviewee 1)

I found another employer but she accused me of stealing £225 and very expensive leather jacket. But she found the money in her wallet and the jacket was just in the dressing room. (Interviewee 10)

When some MDWs made complaints or took resistive actions against this abuse, their employers threatened them with groundless charges.

I have been sexually abused. I was threatened if ever I told anyone about this, I would be accused of hurting their child, the baby that I adored like mine. I had to put up with this abuse and torture. (Interviewee 12)

Some employers did not allow MDWs to go home on holidays or during an emergency. One extreme case was that of a Moroccan domestic worker (Interviewee 10) who was not allowed to go home when her mother was at deathbed.

In 2006, my mother was very ill then she passed away. I beg my employer to let me go home, but she told me that there's no need to go home because she already dead. There's nothing I could do as daughter. That was the most painful thing that ever happened to me. All I wanted was to see my mother for the last time. She had my passport; so there's no way I could go home. Instead she booked me to travel with her to Thailand. So all I could do was to cry.

6.2.4 Social isolation
As MDWs came to the UK with their employers, they had little social network available to them in the receiving society upon their arrival. It was commonly reported that MDWs were not allowed to go out without being accompanied or supervised by their employers. Some employers imposed a ‘no friend policy’ which meant that MDWs could not bring any friends home even when their employers were away. As domestic workers who were new to the UK and could not speak English well, it was also difficult for them to establish social ties with the local community. One Pilipino domestic worker videotaped a few scenes of dog-walking and explained these represented her most cheerful moments in those two weeks because she was able to go out and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air. The rest of the time, she was stuck to housework at home and not allowed to go out alone. The following was part of her video:

*Image from the video taken by one Pilipino domestic worker on March 11 2011.*
*She explained: ‘we work behind doors. It’s like a cage. We can’t go out freely’.*

*Image from the video taken by one Pilipino domestic worker on March 11, 2011.*
*She explained: ‘I like walking dogs. They are so cute. I can go out...away from the house.’*
Being isolated from family, friends and local society, the person with whom MDWs most communicated was their employer. It was clear from the interviews and informal conversation that MDWs were keen to have a separate space which allowed them privacy, freedom and relaxation. One Filipino domestic worker (Interviewee 9) recorded a scene of her domestic worker friend walking by the river in Regent’s Park which lasted for almost 10 minutes. When being asked whether there was a meaning behind it, she said that it was more than walking and that it was a means of peaceful relaxation. It gave them a space where they did not have to listen to employers and could think about their own concerns such as their family, children, friends and themselves. This was an indication of MDWs’ demands for a separate physical and emotional space away from employers, in which they had the possibility to heal the wounds caused by their slave-like work.

6.2.5 Dependence on employers

Despite the aforementioned abuses, MDWs often chose to stay with their employers largely due to the need for visa renewal and the fact that their employers confiscated their passports. MDWs were given a domestic worker visa for one year when they first came to the UK. In order to renew their visa, they needed a letter from their employer to prove that they would continue to be employed as a full-time domestic worker for the following year. This helps to explain why they can always put up with the abuses until the employment letter was issued. In addition, their passports were often detained by their employer to prevent them from escaping the house. In the case of MDWs who work for diplomats, they have no right to change their employer even if they are in an exploitative and abusive situation.

One day, she asked me to bring a spoon in Hyde Park and said that I shouldn’t come back in our flat until she rings me, which I can’t help but wonder why. When I came back at night, I noticed that my suitcase was opened. My stuffs
were not in the right order anymore. My identification card in my wallet was outside of my suitcase. I already knew that something’s going on. (Interviewee 9) MDWs are a particularly vulnerable group of workers who are subject to notoriously low payment, abusive working conditions, debilitating racism and sexism. They have thus become the working group in considerable need of collective representation. However, trade unions are not effective in their dispersed workplaces. Therefore the above conditions will call forth alternative vehicles and mechanisms via which the MDWs’ rights are articulated. Now, I will turn to the case of J4DW as an exemplar of domestic workers seeking collective representation beyond the trade union.

6.3 J4DW: a self-help group for immigrant domestic workers

Justice for Domestic Workers (hereafter J4DW) was established by eight MDWs who were also the members of Unite the Union in March 2009. It is a self-help group based in London which offers a supportive group setting in which their members could share their working experiences, find their voice, make links between personal problems and broader economic and social injustices, and build community and collective power. It is affiliated to the hotel and restaurant branch of Unite the Union and Kalayaan (‘freedom’ in Pilipino), which is a charity organization providing advice, advocacy, and support services for MDWs in the UK. In November 2010, J4DW registered itself as a company. Among those on the management board of J4DW are domestic workers from the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Morocco and Nigeria who were directly elected by J4DW members, the founders of Kalayaan, the Deputy General Secretary for Equalities and Organizing of Unite the Union and one community priest. There are over 500 members registered with the organization, but only roughly 30-50 active members regularly attend in their weekly

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3 The reason why J4DW registered itself as a company is not that J4DW is running commercial activities. Where an organization’s income does not exceed £5,000 it is not able to register as a charity with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. J4DW couldn’t afford £5,000 to start with charity. Another reason is that ‘J4DW is a campaign organization and we challenge the law and if we register as charity, there are limitations in campaigning’ (organizer of J4DW).

4 It’s the accumulative number of J4DW members since its establishment.
classes and monthly meetings. What is particularly innovative about J4DW is that MDWs organize themselves around the material reality of domestic work instead of ethnicities. Even the community priest, an important founder of J4DW, was a labour activist who emphasized the importance of trade unions in supporting and organizing MDWs so as to improve their working and living conditions in the UK. He actively encouraged MDWs who were involved in church activities to join J4DW and unite for their own interests.

Domestic workers’ exclusive access to leadership and democratic decision-making processes characterize the communication strategies informing J4DW’s activities. Immigrant domestic workers who approach J4DW for support are encouraged to become members and attend monthly self-regulated group meetings. They are also encouraged to join Unite the Union for free IT and English classes, and art workshop, whereas union membership is not compulsory. J4DW has organized the following activities for their members: Free ESOL, IT and art classes every Sunday; organizing courses offered by union; immigration advice; legal surgeries with qualified solicitors; employment rights advice; emergency support for those running away from employers; organizing social activities; working with research institutes to produce reports on the working conditions of immigrant domestic workers; parliamentary lobbying; raising public awareness about issues facing immigrant domestic workers by sharing their experiences with the media (such as BBC Four: Dispatches and The Guardian) and attending migration conferences and forums. J4DW has not received any funding from the government or other social bodies so far. Its functioning largely relies on member fees which are currently one pound per person per month.

6.3.1 Challenges for formulating the collective interest within workplaces

The employer/employee relationship has been central to all types of labour exchange, but its importance is magnified by the emotional demands of labour and the ‘private’ nature of worksites in the domestic industry. Domestic workers are not only expected to
perform specific work-tasks but also provide emotional support and social relations. Workers were often positioned as labourers of love rather than ‘real workers’ in material sense; thus the consequent danger of losing sight of their rights as workers looms large. Even though all the workers in the study were recruited on a standard contract which confers basic employment rights, the contract seldom served as the basis for the interactions between MDWs and their employers and their relationship are often characterized by maternalistic and/or servile ideologies. MDWs’ dual frame of reference also discouraged them from challenging exploitations.

6.3.1.1 Maternalistic dynamics

The first form of maternalism is the framing of ‘being part of the family’. Structurally, this is characterized by employer’s benevolence through giving gifts and providing financial and emotional support, which is in fact false generosity or an emotional camouflage that conceals the exploitative relationship. To understand the strength of the framing of maternalism, it is necessary to understand the MDWs’ roles within their own families. Many workers described a position in which they gave generous love to their family and their employer’s family, but suffered from huge personal emotional loss. In the case of a few MDWs in the study, their husbands left them after they went to work abroad. The MDWs interviewed had been separated from their family and children for a time from one to six years. It is common for interviewees to report that they were no longer recognized by their children when they visited home. There was one extreme case in which a Pilipino domestic worker (Interviewee 9) was not recognized by her parents after she had worked abroad for many years. In the J4DW monthly meetings, MDWs frequently used the adjective ‘loveless’ to describe their situation. When being asked about the most difficult part of life as a domestic worker in London, most of them emphasized that ‘being an immigrant domestic worker is emotionally and mentally difficult (interviewee 2)’ instead of highlighting work exploitations. Some MDWs had never been married and had no children.
Chapter 6: From Labourers of Love to Labourers with Rights: Community Organizing of MDWs

It’s mixed feeling. When you think your family back home and you are alone, just friends, but friends are different from family. In the past 9 years, I just went back twice. I saw their (parents’) grey hair. It has been ages. They couldn’t even recognize me. There is something that they don’t know me at all. I’ve changed a lot. If you don’t spend time with your family, the bonding you had before is not there. We think too much about our family, not ourselves. I’m going to become 30 very soon. I am thinking …can I still see my grandchildren? Sometimes you can dream of that. I only had one boyfriend for how many years, I don’t know. It didn’t work out. (Interviewee 9)

Care and attention is what MDWs urgently need. This explains why they defined whether an employer was good less in terms of the wages and benefits they received but more the family relationship they experienced in their employer’s homes. A few were satisfied with the work because of the care and attention they received from employers despite the low salary.

We have a good relationship. That’s why I don’t care about the loss of salary (at that time, her monthly salary was 200 pounds). I don’t care about that. I like the feeling of being part of the family. A lot of domestic workers are like slaves. That’s why I don’t care about the salary. I was lucky (laughing).(Interviewee 6)

In addition, employers also instilled ‘being part of the family’ ideology to domestic workers by giving gifts, providing clothes and offering pocket money. This one way gift-giving exerted a symbolic power over domestic workers in the form of obligation and gratitude. In general, workers’ initial response to employer’s friendliness focused on the positive side, an indication that they had absorbed loyalty towards their employers. Many workers in the study interpreted the provision of used clothes and toiletries by employers as a demonstration of kindness and generosity. Some were touched by their employers’ kindness in offering some gifts for their family when they went back for holidays. This sense of loyalty was instilled in MDWs’ psychological framework, making them less likely to feel discontented with employers and resist the domination. Some domestic workers were happy with their employers due to the occasional financial support by them.
My employer is very nice because sometimes he gives me money. Sometimes he gives me help and support (He earned 300 pounds month and worked for 12-17 hours a day). (Interviewee 8)

Another very emotional aspect of maternalism is the role of ‘motherhood’. Most MDWs who had children at home transferred a significant degree of their ‘motherhood’ to their employer’s children. Forming strong emotional bonds with their employer’s children also blurred the line between ‘working’ and ‘mothering’. Some domestic workers were even willing to compromise their employment rights they are entitled to for the comfort derived from being a good ‘mother’ to their employer’s children. By taking good care of their employer’s children, they felt consoled and had a sense of being compensated, for the lack of opportunity to their own children as a mother.

They asked me to sleep on the floor of the baby’s room, but I don’t care. I like the baby. He is so small. If he wakes up at night, who can take care of him if I am not there? You know, he likes me a lot. He’s closer to me, not his real mother. I don’t want to have problems with my employer. I am so afraid if they don’t allow me to see the baby anymore. I left my baby since she was born (tears). (Interviewee 5)

Among four MDWs who made videos about their work and life, one Indian domestic worker only recorded her employer’s son and claimed that her employer’s child was the most important part of her life in London. She explained that she could never imagine having her own children in her life because she was already 42 years old and could no longer find a husband in India. She said she would be happy to stay with her current employer and take care of this little boy until he has grown up.

On the other hand, many MDWs interpreted the definition of motherhood as including breadwinning for their own children. Because their employment was essential for the survival of their family and their children’s education back home, a great many MDWs were wary of negotiating working conditions with their employers or participating in collective mobilization for the fear of losing their job. Losing their job would mean having no shelter and no food for them and no education for their children back home as
well. It would also equate to ‘bad motherhood’ and would cause feelings of guilty regarding their own children's situation. The majority of MDWs sent a large proportion of their salaries back home and only kept a very limited amount of money for themselves, often as little as 50 pounds per month (Interviewee 8).

No job is the most terrible thing. I used to be jobless for three months. I can’t send any money back home. My children were eating small bread, not big breads, but slices, no hot food available. They can’t have tea or coffee because we can’t afford it … (tears). I am not a good mother. If we lose jobs, where can we stay? What can we eat? It’s all about job security. We need a job. That’s the most important thing. (Interviewee 4)

Finally, as MDWs’ daily work contains a lot of emotional elements, they might develop strong emotional ties to their employers which veiled the exploitative employer/employee relationship. Many workers mentioned that they were expected to listen to their employers’ stories and problems and show support. Some workers even had sympathy for their employers’ situations because they (such as bankers and solicitors) needed to work for extremely long hours. One Indian domestic worker had been underpaid because her employer had just got divorced from her husband and had financial difficulties. She said she well understood that and would not leave her employer. She wanted to help her employer to go through that difficult period and then decided what to do next. In these cases, the employer was not treated as a person who exploited their labour power by MDWs, but as their ‘friends’ and companion in the life.

6.3.1.2 Servant mentality

J4DW monthly meetings always included a section for new members to introduce themselves, in which most new J4DW new members described themselves as ‘domestic servants’ rather than ‘domestic workers’ and showed low self-esteem. ‘Like I said, I always call myself a domestic servant. That’s how I felt before. It’s just like slaves (Interviewee 9).’ This suggests the importance of the ‘servant mentality’. This mentality is partly generated from MDWs’ working experiences in their previous
destination countries or home countries. An Indonesian domestic worker (interviewee 13) shared her working experience in Qatar. She was locked in a room every night after she finished the work at midnight and unlocked every morning from 4:30 am, so that she could start working again. She could not think of any appropriate way of combating such slaved working conditions whereby she was treated like a slave at that time because the abuse was common there and the court system favored their employers. She said she became used to the way that they were treated as ‘servants’ who were subject to the dispositions of their masters. The ‘servant’ mentality could also be reinforced by public perceptions of domestic work in their home countries. Several Indian domestic workers mentioned that when they told their Indian friends about their work, a common response was ‘oh, you are a servant’. They felt uncomfortable about this, but did not known how to frame the issue differently along the axis of employment rights.

After moving to the UK where domestic workers can expect to enjoy the same employment rights as other workers, many MDWs carried the ‘servant’ mentality with them because they had little chance of accessing information and advice on employment rights. The ‘live-in’ conditions and long working hours reduced their chances of going out, meeting friends or joining social groups. Only 5 out of 27 domestic workers in the survey had joined unions, ethnic organizations, women’s organization or churches before joining J4DW. Their negligible involvement in public activities was also attributable to their employers’ strong resistance toward any activity that might empower them. By locking them in houses, they were prevented from getting access to any institutions or groups which might equip them with the necessary knowledge to contest the power at work. Many MDWs kept their membership of J4DW as a secret from their employers because their employers did not allow them to go out to learn English. Because of this social isolation, the majority of MDWs interviewed

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5 A few studies (Shah 2004; Degorge 2006) indicated the fact that the justice system in most Middle East countries discriminates against migrant workers.

626 years old, single, Indian, 3 years in the UK (informal talk).
stated that they had no idea of what employment rights were available to them after arriving in the UK.

I know nothing about London at that time. I don’t have days off. I got up at 5:30 in the morning and slept at 10 pm. I don’t know anything about wages and rights. So I didn’t make any complaints. Then when I went out, I met Pilipino. They asked me, ‘are you living in London?’ I said ‘yes’. I asked them about rights and wages in London. They said the national minimum wage is 250 pounds per week. I said, ‘ah, is it true?’ I have been silly, 200 pounds per month (the salary of her first job in the UK). Oh my god, I can be rich by staying in London, 250 pounds a week. I can send a lot of money back to Philippine. I felt I was a little envy of them. (Interviewee 6)

At the individual level, MDWs have developed some coping and resistance strategies to restructure their power relations with their employers. Some sought relief from the pressures they were under their pressures by appealing to God. ‘I was just sitting there. I just think god could help me (Interviewee 1)’. Some tried to neutralize the meaning of their work by emphasizing the positive contribution they made. ‘I don’t mind. It’s part of our life (exploitation and discrimination). I don’t focus on that because it may cause you sad (Interviewee 2)’. On one hand, coping with the exploitative working and living conditions at the individual level is essential for domestic workers to keep up the spirits, but, one the other hand, it also means upholding the status quo.

6.3.1.3 Dual frame of reference

Waldinger and Lichter (2003) introduced the notion of the ‘dual frame of reference’ through which immigrant workers locate their wage earning potential in relation to their situations in the receiving society and home countries, in their explanation of migrant divisions of labour in Los Angeles. Although immigrant workers had limited choice about their means of support and could not easily get access to the benefit system in the host country, they could clearly earn much more money than would have been possible in their home countries. The dual frame of reference was frequently reported in interviews and informal conversations with MDWs. Although the
non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage was prevalent in this industry, many domestic workers considered their salary as acceptable compared with their wages they would receive back home.

We need a job to survive. It’s still better than nothing. I can have savings now. This is good. It’s hard work, but this is much better than the work in India. (Interviewee 3)

Everyone is nice. In Indian, I earn 300-400 (Indian currency) a month. It’s my salary. Here 300 pounds, 18000 (Indian currency). (Interviewee 8)

Some domestic workers suffered from even worse working conditions back home but were still not able to support their family adequately. As one Moroccan domestic worker put it:

I took the responsibility to help my family. I was forced to work in a Garment Factory from 8 am to 7pm plus over time for 2 hours for 5.5 days a week. My salary was only 40 DHS/week (about £4/week). My salary was not even enough to provide a better living and totally nothing left on me. When I was sick, I had to borrow from friends for my medications. I didn't even see sunlight. I never experienced any social life. I was like a slave trapped in a building with no escape because my family would starve. (Interviewee 10)

By undertaking hard domestic work in the UK, many domestic workers at least managed to feed their families and support their children’s education. The chair of J4DW shared her personal story about her migrant trajectory. She returned to the Philippines after working as a domestic worker in Hong Kong for several years because she could no longer tolerate the sexual harassments and abuse from her employer. However, once she was back and started working in a factory, she realized that the money was far from enough to give her children a secure future. She did not want her children to become street boys and girls without proper education and thus she decided to become a domestic worker abroad again. There are few ‘exit’ choices for MDWs because there was a lack of decent work in their own countries for them, even for those who have achieved a college degree or hold professional certificates. This could
partially explain why MDWs were so tolerant of what their employers offered to them in the UK.

I took an exam for a scholarship offered by the government. Luckily I passed the exam. I studied Computer Technology. After I graduated from the college, I applied for a job in Philippine, but my salary wasn’t enough to help my family. Before I always thought why I have to go there washing clothes. I’ve got a computer degree. But time goes. I think I am used to it because domestic work gave my family a decent life. There is no reason for me to hate it. I think you do it everyday, it gives you acceptance. It’s 9 years already. I’ve got very good salary now. I think coming here is a good idea.’(Interviewee 9)

6.3.2 Redefining employer/employee relationship and formulating the collective interest

As the maternalistic and servant mentality and dual frame of reference veil the layer of capitalist exploitations, the labour consciousness among MDWs is something that has to be worked for rather than assumed. To transform from ‘mothers’ and ‘servants’ who were subjected to the particular dispositions of individual employers to deliberate subjects who were aware of and prepared to fight for their rights, a radical shift in their understanding of their positions and relationships with employers was needed. J4DW utilized three social processes to reshape MDWs’ understanding of their working reality and develop their labour consciousness.

6.3.2.1 Communities of coping

First, J4DW has created a space for the formation of ‘communities of coping’ among MDWs. One of the main purposes of the group was to provide a space, away from employers, for care and sharing. As the majority of MDWs stay in their employer’s houses and suffer social isolations, a separate space that offers safety, care and love is what MDWs urgently need. J4DW is characterized by non-hierarchical, flat and democratic structures that builds on ‘trusting connections’ among participants. Their recruitment method involves an immigrant domestic worker asking another domestic worker, usually their friends, to join them for making sense of an issue. Some MDWs
claimed that they got to know J4DW and trade unions through their neighbours or community priests who showed sympathy for their harsh working conditions. This approach adds a personal dimension to networking and discussion of the organization, making MDWs feel more comfortable about discussing issues than they would with strangers. Establishing a relaxed and trusting atmosphere is essential to encouraging this particularly vulnerable group of workers to talk frankly about their experiences and extend social capital. There was one J4DW member who appeared scared and was silent at the first time I met her. However, in the following month’s meeting, she was actively sharing her working experiences in the company of her.

J4DW monthly meetings were always characterized by informality and a sharing culture. Members were allowed to bring their children, partner, friends or their employer’s children to the meeting. It was common to see that babies were crawling on the floor during the meeting. These babies were known as ‘J4DW babies’ because their mothers had been bringing them to classes and meetings since they were born. Members could sit anywhere, even on the table, and could interrupt the speech at any time if they had any questions or anything else they wanted to say. The meetings often started with self-introductions by all the people who were present alongside jokes and casual interactions. There was a specific section which allowed all the members to share the information about their work, what seminars or training they had attended, how they felt about recent classes and social trips and anything else in their lives. People who were initially shy and silent were always encouraged to talk by the chair of J4DW. Different emotions, such as crying, smiling and empathy, were frequently expressed during the meetings. When emotions became overwhelming, we could see people started clapping or using some strong words such as ‘bastard’. There were 40-50 MDWs present at the monthly meetings, an indication of MDWs’ attachment and commitment to J4DW. For members who could not attend the meeting for work-related reasons, their friends often passed the information on to them over the telephone.
J4DW also offered emergency aids to those MDWs who escaped from their employers’ houses and had nowhere to stay. Short-term accommodation and clothes were often provided by their fellow workers. Telephone numbers of J4DW directors were given to all members in case they had a personal emergency and wanted to have a talk with someone they knew. Social trips to different cities of Britain were regularly organized to facilitate communication and friendship among MDWs. There were two MDWs who changed their jobs and moved to the outskirts of London. Although it cost them 25-30 pounds for the return journey from their employers’ house to J4DW on Sundays, which was not a small amount of money in relation to their income, they still attended the training and social activities every week. As one of them explained, ‘this is like my family. I feel warm here. This is the only place I feel released and I know who I am. They know my birthday. They will celebrate it for me. This can never happen before’. Such loose ‘trusting connections’ allowed them to receive love, care and attention from their fellow workers. This emotional healing process could help to reduce their emotional reliance on their employer’s family. The majority of interviewees emphasized the mutual support and sisterhood in J4DW.

We are like sisters. I didn’t encounter any problems because we are helping each other. One has the problem; we are helping them. We help one another and unite as one. (Interviewee 6)

When MDWs were asked to draw a picture about the changes of their lives after joining J4DW in the art workshop, some domestic workers highlighted the creation of a unified community based on sisterhood, which presented a strong contrast with their previous socially isolated life.

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7 50 years old, married with two children, Pilipino, 5 years in the UK (informal conversations).
This mutual care and support among MDWs has expanded beyond the organizational space of the J4DW. The vast majority of J4DW members surveyed expressed the view that they made more friends and gained a sense of security from J4DW. They started socializing with those friends in their houses, restaurants, churches and parks after work and through this process, they established their own social circle for emergent needs and emotional comforts.

J4DW is already an important part of my life. Sometimes we go to other places on the weekend. I want to come with them. I want to enjoy with them. (Interviewee 1)

Facilitated by the non-hierarchical, trusting space offered by J4DW, MDWs thus tended to organically form ‘communities of coping’. The staff of J4DW believed that ‘communities of coping’ are essential to supporting MDWs at the ground level if high-profile political actions fail. The chair emphasized that J4DW would not follow the path of Wangling Wangling, a MDW self-help group in London, which worked with Kalayaan and Unite to campaign for domestic worker visas, but stopped being active anymore after the campaign on domestic worker visas succeeded and many members attained citizenship. Instead, the chair claimed that J4DW will continue to exist as a voluntary self-help group offering emotional comfort and mutual support...
even after campaigns and lobbying are successful in the future. Moreover, it has been argued that communities of coping can offer foundations for resistive collective mobilization (see Chapter Four), but the processes underpinning such a development remain unclear and contingent on other social factors. J4DW’s other two processes helped to facilitate this development.

6.3.2.2 Politicised learning

There are two other social processes through which sisterhood and mutuality developed within communities of coping are transformed into communities of and for workers. Informal English and political learning provided an interactive context in which labour consciousness was prioritized and further developed. English and IT classes were taught by the J4DW chair and other volunteers every Sunday in a venue offered by Unite the Union. The first salient purpose of education was to equip MDWs with the necessary linguistic knowledge and skills so as to improve their employability in the labour market and help them achieve career progression. More importantly, the chair of J4DW emphasized the importance of educating immigrant domestic workers to help them create their own values of world and improve their political consciousness. She shared her personal experiences of critical learning. ‘I was very depressed when I was writing “Cry of a Migrant”. Then they found me. I got a series of training and became much more politically active. I know the importance of education.'

The nature of workers’ learning has been debated. Some argue that it can facilitate a ‘counter-hegemonic’ struggle to bring about social democratic changes in work (Allman 2001) while others claim that learning can accommodate workers to exploitative and hierarchical structures, thereby reproducing existing power relations (Fenwick 2004). Therefore the social function of workers’ learning is flexible and responsive to circumstances. The chair and directors of J4DW were fully aware of the

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8 The chair of J4DW wrote an essay about her personal story as a migrant worker, ‘Cry of a Migrant’ and won the first prize at a union festival organized by Unite the Union.
complexities of learning activities and tried to promote a transformative agenda by carefully selecting educators and taking control of the pedagogy.

They were conscious of the danger that professional educators themselves might be part of the structures that workers need to resist. Therefore all tutors were either domestic workers or Union members. Thus ideologically, their learning activities had an obvious radical orientation. However, this does not mean that they did not deliver quality skill and career training at all. The classes contained a certain degree of complexities. On one hand, they tried to equip MDWs with the necessary English skills to cope with their employment problems and possibly help them to look for better jobs. On the other hand, the constant discussion about their current working conditions and labour rights that they were supposed to have was conducted during classes. The educator had an obvious political aim of stimulating workers’ sense of injustice and encouraging them to take more active and resistive actions. For instance, when members described their job as that of a ‘servant’ during the conversation sessions, the educator would develop the process of reframing by asking MDWs to use the term ‘worker’ to describe themselves. The chair of J4DW emphasized that language and skills training is essential because developing members’ personal value and self-esteem is the very first step in developing collective agency. Speaking better English and developing other social skills could make MDWs feel more confident about themselves and possibly further increase the solidarity among them. This process was evident in some workers’ learning experiences.

The whole environment of hospitality, confidence and solidarity I have found at weekends at Faraday House, my education venue, is really amazing. It has transformed my life completely. Before I was a lonely woman, mistreated by my employers because of my poor English skills. I had no hope to get out of a circle of ignorance and misery, no opportunities to improve my education level and no chance to meet other people and make friends. After joining the ESOL and IT classes, I became a happy person who can work collectively for my fellow domestic workers in the UK. I can also communicate with my family back in the Philippines via internet every weekend as everybody else does. I can now
communicate in English and I feel the support, the friendship and comradeship from my tutors and fellow domestic workers.\(^9\)

The story-telling method was utilized in both English learning and J4DW monthly meetings to encourage members to talk about their work-related experiences. The advantage of this was that personal stories contained a lot of details and emotions that readily elicited resonance from fellow workers. Starting from their lived experiences, educators also avoided imposing mechanical and elitist terms on MDWs. Educators have organized group discussions on employment rights in which members were encouraged to talk about issues like wages, holidays and health. They drew on their personal experiences to understand the oppression and its social origins. The continuing discussion which was aimed at understanding their own situation and seeking the ways of changing it played a crucial role in fostering their critical labour consciousness.

**6.3.2.3 Radical art**

Finally, radical art has functioned as a key method deployed to develop solidarity among MDWs. J4DW has sought to create a political art context in which people can take social actions in their monthly art workshops. Typically, members were given the tasks such as drawing pictures and writing poetry about their work and life in their home countries and receiving societies. One example was the ‘life river’ painting task in which members were invited to display the joy and obstacles in their migrant trajectories. One domestic worker drew a crocodile in the river to represent the inhumane treatment she received from her employer who forced her to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and detained her in his house. This elicited the reflections and discussion among other domestic workers about their employment situations which contributed to a better understanding of the structural exploitations they face collectively.

\(^9\) The speech made by interviewee 11 at the J4DW second year anniversary party.
Life ‘river’ drawn by one immigrant domestic worker, taken by Joyce Zhe Jiang, on March 20 2011

Clearly, some domestic workers’ identities and political awareness were stimulated and developed through activities in the politicalized art context. As can be seen from the winning card in the J4DW Christmas card competition, the main concerns of J4DW members can be summarized as ‘solidarity’, ‘national minimum wage’, ‘long hours of working’, ‘paid holidays’, ‘social life’ and ‘family reunion’, most of which are work-related. It also highlighted the aims of J4DW activities as fighting for decent work for their members and promoting workers’ solidarity.
Best card design in J4DW Charismas card competition, Dec, 2010

J4DW’s anniversary celebration, which was open to the public, and social gatherings, including a range of artistic performances such as solidarity songs, dancing and dramas in which MDWs’ experiences of exploitation and abuse at the hand of recruitment agencies and employers were theatrically represented. For example, their self-composed Christmas song highlighted the heavy workload they struggled with on a daily basis and expressed their demands to fight for better wages and the desire to eliminate the gap between rich and poor. At their second anniversary party, they performed a drama piece to vividly illustrate their migrant trajectories and their feeling of sadness about being separated from their children, involving a combination of acting and singing. Such performances afforded socially isolated MDWs an opportunity to take the central stage in public, and gave voice and visibility to domestic workers who would otherwise have remained hidden. They successfully organized an exhibition featuring these art materials at London Museum to improve the public profile of their organizing activities. More importantly, the use of radical art transformed a community
of coping into a creative space in which MDWs started reflecting on the existing unequal power relations and recognizing the structural dynamics of their work oppression by sharing grievances through art.

Jingle bells, laundry smells, sweeping night and day
O what hell it is to work for stinking rates of pay
Jingle bells, laundry smells, sweeping night and day
O what fun it is to dream of decent rates of pay
Dashing through the halls, with a trolley and a tray
Hovering each room, tidy, clean and spray
Picking up the mess, scrubbing every floor
Every surface, every loo, storerooms by the score, oh!
Dashing through the rooms, with a back ache all the way
Never time to rest, lifting all the day
Dashing time to rest, lifting all the day
Emptying the trash, changing every sheet
Disinfecting as you go and smile at all you meet, oh!
We wish you a happy workforce
And a decent living wage
With respect and decent wages and not family exemption
The greatness of life, there’s no poor and rich
So share out the happing endings, we need a fair wage
So bring us dome living wage
And a bank holiday
Christmas song composed by MDWs at a Christmas party in 2010

Unite education officers had previously proposed that radical art should be utilized in a few other union education projects, but it had never succeeded as workers in other groups showed little interest in creating art works. The education officer offered a possible explanation for this which is related to the gendered nature of this self-help group.

They are source of inspiration. They have more organizing spirit. They are more committed to what they are doing. It is outstanding to see they come every Sunday, to see they work together. This is unbelievable. Listen, we have been for long time thinking of setting up art classes, painting and drawing. If you compare this class on Sundays and classes on Saturdays (cleaners), this is a big gap.
Cleaners are dominated by men, but actually it’s not dominated by anyone. Sometimes you just see 5 people on the weekend. In this classroom, they all come. It’s unbelievable. I think here, 99% are women. I think they have big potential. They are inspirational for us as trade unionists because they are teaching us how to organize people. We are not teaching them at all. They are teaching us.

J4DW initially functioned as a community of coping in which MDWs could fully express their emotions and feelings and freely share grievances at work. The vast majority of members developed a strong psychological attachment to J4DW. The chair of J4DW mentioned that although several members were offered better jobs in other cities such as Brighton, they rejected these offers and chose to stay in London because they wanted stay closer to their friends and attend J4DW activities. More importantly, politicised learning and radical art have transformed communities of coping into communities of and for workers. Many domestic workers claimed that J4DW, instead of churches or ethnic community centres such as the Pilipino centre, was the first place where they would go to if they had any problems at work, because they learned employment rights and enjoyed the unity of J4DW. A few interviewees mentioned that churches enabled them to gain comfort and peace, but were never as useful as J4DW in helping them to deal with their employment problems. The chair of J4DW shared her story of working in a Pilipino centre. Her money, which she had saved by working for many years to bring her children to the UK, was stolen by a key person in that organization. However, the organization covered up the incident in order to protect its reputation. The story illustrates the distrust and division within the ethnical community. In contrast, J4DW offered a safe, honest and communal space where workers could come to be emotionally healed and educated as ‘workers’.

6.3.3 Framing: ‘human trafficking’ vs ‘workers’; ‘victims’ vs ‘agents’

To generate an activist agenda from MDWs’ shared situation entails ‘discursive framing’ (Snow and Benford 1988: 198-204), which might not be totally agreeable to all member organizations with their different objectives and principles. The research
has detected two differing forms of framing. One, put forward by J4DW leaders and Unite, emphasized a framing of MDWs as workers and active social agents, while another, put forward by the NGO, Kalayaan, perceived MDWs in terms of human trafficking, and by implications emphasized the victim status of MDWs. Although both J4DW and Kalayaan are female-dominated organizations supporting MDWs, the former was established and is led by domestic workers while the latter is run by middle-class female professionals. MDWs felt that their needs were addressed by Kalayaan, but that their antifeminist ‘worker’ awareness was granted less legitimacy in some projects aimed at them but not defined by them.

Kalayaan treated exploitation in the domestic industry as a form of trafficking of women and slavery (eg, Kalayaan, 2010). This was in line with the United Nations’ definition of ‘human trafficking’ which was substantially widened in 2001 and includes three core elements: the movement or harboring of a person; use of deception and coercion; and placement into the situation of exploitation. This broad definition treats trafficking as covering all forms of exploitation, whether for labour or sexual purposes, and offers an opportunity to place the exploitation of immigrant domestic workers on the human rights agenda.

This approach assumes that MDWs are mostly ‘enforced migrants’ rather than voluntary migrants, and illegal rather than legal. However, the majority of domestic workers entered the UK legally with a domestic worker’s visa. In the survey, 24 out of 27 domestic workers surveyed were staying in the UK on a domestic worker visa. The coexistence of legal immigrant status and extremely harsh working conditions indicates that their exploitations has very little to do with the migratory process of human trafficking.

Under the ‘trafficking’ framing, MDWs’ entry into the UK occurs against their real wills but is enforced by the use of threat or deception. There are many cases where MDWs had moved to the UK because of economic difficulties at home, but it is
nonetheless hard to conclude that this was ‘forced migration’. ‘Labour migration’ not only means being separated from family, hard work and loneliness, but also the possibility of creating a more secure and bright future for their families. Thus there are two sides to this migratory process which cannot merely be defined as ‘forced’ and ‘painful’. Certainly, the majority of MDWs in this study have re-built their lives, shown great tenacity and made great a huge contribution to their families from home countries.

My husband is a farmer. I used to be a farmer too, but the money is not enough to have the food and support children’s education. That’s why I came here to work. I sent my money back home. Now my children are in the college. I am happy. (Interviewee 1)

But for many years now, I am always far away from my Family. I miss that moment that I should be celebrating Christmas with my own Family, but I know I have to make sacrifices for my children. I am sad and lonely away from them, but I am also happy because I could provide them everything they could ever ask for. Every Christmas I am their best Santa Claus. (Christmas poem written by J4DW member)

Against the traditional stereotyping which treats MDWs as women forced into the unequal global division of labour, working abroad as domestic workers can also represent a form of ‘liberty’, ‘independence’ and ‘hope’ for some. Working abroad might also offer migrant women an opportunity to challenge traditional gender roles as the fact that they are the main ‘breadwinners’ at home might improve their status in their households and within wider society. Some MDWs saw working abroad as an effective means of evading their lazy or violent husbands or abusive fathers at home. Therefore, paid domestic work in the UK helped them gain economic independence and escape family problems back home.

He is lazy. He’s always in the bar, watching movies, travelling by taxi, using my money. I worked in Gulf for two years. Then I went back in 1993. He made some drama. I was fed up by that. (Interviewee 3)

My parents died early. My brother and sister all passed away. I’ve got husband. He doesn’t love me, but my money. I worked hard but he took all my money,
doing nothing. I had nothing in India. I have nothing in the UK. It’s almost the same. I want to stay in the UK permanently, forever. I want to build something here. Things are becoming much better. (Interviewee 7)

Therefore it is clearly problematic to simply frame MDWs as ‘forced’ migrants. It is more helpful to consider forced and voluntary migration as a continuum which depicts the various degrees of choices and freedom available to MDWs. Forced and voluntary migration are highly socially constructed terms at both ends of the continuum. Human trafficking falls at the far end of forced migration. Connecting the situation of domestic workers to the issue of human trafficking might produce stereotypes and divisions among MDWs.

Furthermore, organizing strategy centred on the category a human trafficking framework takes the ‘victim’ image of MDWs for granted without recognizing their role as active agents. Domestic work is often defined as demeaning ‘dirty work’. However, some J4DW members described their job as ‘shameless and nothing wrong (Interviewee 2).’ They interpreted their work as an appropriate way to improve their lives and make a meaningful contribute to the hosting society as well, and therefore denied the legitimacy of the label of dirty work. ‘You maybe White, They maybe Black, We maybe brown...that's what makes this country beautiful and that's what makes the economy attractive’ (speech by the J4DW organizer on the Unite organizing course). Most MDWs in the study had never heard of the word ‘trafficking’ or did not feel comfortable about being framed as the victims of human trafficking. ‘I really don’t like this human trafficking thing. I don’t feel comfortable about it. We are different from those people in the sex industry. We are workers and have different needs. We need a different approach (One director of J4DW).’

The human trafficking framework, and its implicit imagery of the MDW as a victim suggests an approach to improving the plight of MDWs that emphasizes the worst cases of torture and abuse, and then brings them to the media, court or lobbying meetings to ask for changes on humanitarian grounds. J4DW and Unite, by contrast,
dissociated themselves from the concept of human trafficking, sought to overcome the feelings of powerlessness among MDWs and to organize them around exploitation at work instead. In order to keep domestic workers informed of their employment and other legal rights in the UK, J4DW cooperated with a research institute to produce a leaflet on employment rights in different languages which could be distributed to various wealthy areas of London. They also undertook research to investigate the discrepancy between the terms and conditions of their members’ employment contracts and the actual realities of their working lives, which highlighted the non-compliance with the national minimum wage and other employment rights within the domestic work industry. The research findings were used as lobbying materials with which to ask for the adoption of favourable visa policies and employment regulations towards MDWs. This class-based approach transcends even ethnic and cultural differences, and differences between immigrants and the local population. J4DW members have emphasized the fact that their different nationalities, cultures and religions have never pushed them apart; instead, they are ‘united as workers’. On 1st May 2010, J4DW and Unite the Union joined the TUC May Day march, demonstrating their support for the proposed ILO convention on migrant workers. In June 2011, J4DW members represented worker groups in the UK by attending the annual ILO international labour conference in which the text for a convention on the rights of domestic workers was adopted. J4DW is now working with Unite the Union on campaigns to urge the British government to rectify the ILO convention on the working conditions of domestic workers.

Unite the Union also adapted their working methods in order to organize this particularly vulnerable and dispersed group of people. As some of them could not open a bank account, there was a union fee collector who collected cash from members in the J4DW monthly self-regulated meetings. They arranged the classes and meetings on Sundays because the majority of MDWs had to work long hours during the week and even on Saturdays. They sometimes offered one-off funding to
J4DW for campaigns and other activities while fully respecting their autonomy and independence, without intervening in their decision-making. Many J4DW members joined Unite the Union after attending J4DW English classes although they often had no previous knowledge about trade unions. For £12 per month (full-time workers), £6 (part-time workers), or £1.50 (jobless), Unite provided them with free English, IT and art classes every Sunday and employment rights advice. Thus, MDWs who could not afford union fees could still receive free English and IT education organized by J4DW in the venue provided by Unite. Unite also took an organic view of MDWs’ needs and was fully aware that visa status is essential to legitimizing MDWs’ worker status and protecting their basic employment rights. Therefore Unite has actively supported MDWs’ demonstrations against the announcement of unfavourable domestic worker visa policies by the coalition government in February 2012.

Despite the competing ways of framing the domestic-worker issues among different organizations, these entities still have been able to work together to advance MDWs’ interests. There were divisions in terms of how to frame the situation of MDWs within Kalayaan. They interpreted MDW issues as workers’ rights on some occasions. ‘Some of those rights are very little to do with the actual process of trafficking. Some of them, are obviously, are about the actual process of trafficking, but what we are very wary of is the way in which, at this moment, trafficking is seen as a subset of immigrant policy, whereas, actually, we would far rather see it as an issue about workers’ rights’.10 TGWU (now part of Unite) worked with Kalayaan for a long time to campaign for domestic workers’ rights. In 1998, the government changed the immigration rules for MDWs recognizing them as workers and granting them basic rights under employment law as a direct result of ten years of campaigning in which these three entities were involved. Kalayaan has also collaborated with Oxfam and the TUC to request that the Low Pay Commission amend the National Minimum Wage

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legislation to remove any doubt about domestic workers’ entitlement to access this basic right. As a Unite London organizer put it, ‘the two can meet because we are both concerned with social justice of immigrant domestic workers’.

6.3.4 ‘I feel I am braver now’: Mobilisation for whom, and for what?

The final question to consider is how successful such collective efforts have been. Here, we consider institutional gains and the sense of subjective empowerment, and both short-term outcomes and long-term activism, in the assessment of gains made.

Campaigns are ongoing to urge the British government to support the ILO convention on International Domestic Workers and to ask for the visa policy to be changed, and it is hard to predict the outcome of these campaigns. Nonetheless, J4DW has largely improved its public profile by strategically utilizing media to publicize the situation of its members. Noticeably invitations from the media, and attendance at conferences and forums have enabled J4DW to give their views on this issue. J4DW has been actively involved in British and European parliamentary meetings to try to influence politicians. More importantly, grassroots empowerment has been achieved in the following ways: ‘building a positive self-image and self-confidence; developing the ability to think critically; building group cohesion; encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society’ (Banerjee 1995:3). It is clear that the majority of J4DW members feel more confident and empowered to deal with their own problems and engage in public events related to immigrant domestic workers.

We are sharing experiences. We teach each other knowledge, learning and improving. I feel more confident to talk. Before I was so lonely, so weak; I don’t know what to do if I have problems. I have no idea with whom I can talk. Now I know what rights I have. I feel I am braver now. I made many friends here. (Interviewee 4)

Yeah, of course, more confident ... If J4DW was established in 2007 and I were here, I could stand out to speak out because I know there will be somebody who supports me, but before I was alone. I have plans, but you need someone to give you advice. When you are alone, you are confused, not sure. (Interviewee 1)
I feel now I can make a difference now, not just controlled by any one. There are some people standing beside me. I want to do something. (Interviewee 3)

With the support from J4DW, two Filipino domestic workers have successfully brought their unfair dismissal cases to employment tribunal and won compensations. After that, a separate working group, led by two MDWs involved, was established to help other their fellow workers become familiar with the procedures for bringing a claim to an employment tribunal.

Not only has their individual capacity to challenge exploitative conditions been enhanced, but they have also increasingly engaged in collective activism. Nearly all the MDWs in the study expressed their enthusiasm for and interest in joining campaigns related to MDWs or general workers, although some workers were unable to do so because of time limitations and resistance from their employers. Some went on to join other trade unions, women’s organizations or ethnic organizations after joining J4DW. The social capital created has thus been extended to other progressive organizations in the UK. As one Filipino domestic worker (Interviewee 2) claimed:

I like campaigns. I’ve already joined the demonstration last year. I feel we were strong, bright and active… had some social influences. It’s good to do something in a group. We listen to other people and other problems. Different people can bring more ideas. If we are sitting alone, what will happen? Nothing. We might cry, complain, but nothing will change. I like joining people; joining groups. We can make other people listen to us. We should let those people know they need to pay us salary; they need to comply with those terms and conditions.

It is notable that this Filipino domestic worker mentioned that she was not very interested in joining campaigns but wanted to focus on earning more money for her son’s education when she first joined J4DW. The change that occurred through her involvement in J4DW is palpable.

An important debate in the study of community organizing is whether this alternative method of labour organizing may complement or threaten the process unionization. In this case, community organizing has actually been pivotal for enhancing the role of
trade unions in the informal and marginalized sector. J4DW and Kalayaan have supported and expanded the domestic worker unionizing activities of Unite the Union. The majority of MDWs who approached J4DW and Kalayaan were encouraged to join trade unions. Unite has successfully recruited a number of ‘neglected’ MDWs.

These organizations have close relationship with domestic workers. They function as meeting places for domestic workers. If we go and recruit them directly, we won’t get them. For example, I, a white, male, middle—class union officer go and recruit them, they won’t feel comfortable. They are psychologically distanced from me. We approach J4DW first. They understand each other. We could find potential members by working with them. If you have a look at our record, you can easily find 50011 people. (Unite the union London organizer)

The potential problem that community organizing might prioritize the ‘migrant’ and ‘female’ identities of MDWs while undermining class consciousness was not evident in this case. J4DW is run by workers themselves. Instead of constructing MDWs as recipient clients, it aims at building workers’ capability of being the innovators and engines of their own organizing. The leaders who come from the domestic worker community are democratically elected by workers, which has created a model of substantial and authentic representation of the workers themselves. In supporting their grassroots activism without curtailing their autonomy, trade unions have not only enhanced worker-directed organizing capacity in a highly exploitative industry but also enhanced the labour movement at a time when the process of globalization is compromising its validity.

Trade unions also face the challenge of how to manage their relationship with J4DW as it gathers strength and status. Now that J4DW has become an independent group rather than a specific branch of Unite. J4DW leaders have emphasized the importance

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11 The 500 members were not all from J4DW. Unite recruited 500 MDWs through their connections with different community organizations. Some of them are Eastern and Middle European Migrants who do not have visa problems.
of both sustaining strong links with the union and maintaining the group’s autonomy. As one founder of J4DW summarized:

If we look back over the years of campaign, some crucial points really stand out. One is our relationship with trade union. That was a very crucial point to us, and secondly, is the fact that we organized workers themselves, in their own separate groups. They set up autonomous groups with their own officers, their own bank accounts, and total independence from any other group.

They are afraid that domestic workers’ concerned issues might be diluted if they become part of a trade union which has its own organizational priorities. The staff of J4DW believed that their self-help group should not operate as a modern bureaucracy but should maintain its self-governing and voluntary nature in order to enhance grassroots empowerment. Whether the union perceives itself as an institutionalized interest group or part of a wider social movement may directly affect the sustainability of the coalition between the union and the MDW self-help group.

The development of J4DW also poses challenges to Kalayaan because these two organizations both focus on supporting MDWs in the UK and are thus competing for public funding. The directors of J4DW reported that they struggled with funding applications as a lot of social bodies thought that J4DW belonged to Kalayaan and thus offering funding to Kalayaan automatically meant that J4DW was funded as well. However, this was not always the case. There were a few complaints from J4DW members that Kalayaan’s professional staff were slow in replying to their requests and they only offered legal assistance on Mondays and Tuesdays when the majority of MDWs had no time to go out. This raises the question of to what extent a charity organization dominated by professionals can fully represent the interests of the people that they target. When Kalayaan changed its approach and increasingly positioned itself as a service provider, a division within Kalayaan emerged. Some founders of Kalayaan helped MDWs to establish J4DW as a self-help group, and allowed space for MDWs to empower themselves and decide their own agendas.
These differences and tensions were revealed in the shifting of J4DW’s activity space from Kalayaan to Unite the Union. As one founder of J4DW, a community priest, explained:

Kalayaan at that time, would see themselves as expert advice centre. They’ve got a good number of specializations from different institutions. They haven’t had the time, and probably the space is another problem. So lack of time and lack of space…Initially, we were ideally situated in that centre. We had our own cooking facilities. We brought different food. Every second Sunday of the month, they had their official meeting downstairs. Sometimes nearly 300 people were in the meeting. So even during weekdays, there was always a place where they could go and stay and have their food, meet each other. That is a good meeting place really. But the Kalayaan staff have a different approach now. They have their own reasons, but we know they do give expert advice.

J4DW directors were aware that the purpose of this self-help group was to empower MDWs and stimulate their labour activism, and thus establishing strong links with the grassroots domestic worker community was their most important aim. This could explain why key personnel in J4DW were all full-time domestic workers themselves and there were no paid positions. There was a resistance among its leadership to transforming J4DW from an activist group into a bureaucratic organization. They were concerned that organizational influence and personal interest could come to dominate the group’s agenda if they lost their grassroots connections and became a charity organization. Clearly, long-term activism was the goal that J4DW strived for to continue the fight for as long as there are still MDWs who are suffering.

6.3.4.1 Transformation or reproduction?

When discussing immigrant workers’ collective mobilization, we are always led to consider the question of whether it achieves a transformative agenda or merely accommodates workers into the existing unequal labour process. Clearly, the transformative features of this case are three-fold. Firstly, we have witnessed the development of a collective working class community based on their highly exploitative labour process from an individualised and dispersed community. A
‘worker identity’ has been instilled in the psychological framework of MDWs who used to be ‘mothers’ and ‘servants’ in the private sphere, which is a solid foundation for resistive mobilization. Secondly, there have been obvious resistive actions against employers carried out by bringing claims to court, lobbying and campaigning with the main aim of fighting for higher wages and promoting better regulation of the domestic work industry. These actions are not regarded as ‘radical’ and transformative in the orthodox Marxist sense, which is obviously linked to the overthrow of the capitalist system. However, if we take a broader perspective towards transformation, these efforts could be seen as a strong attack on the dominant power of employers within the labour process. We still cannot deny the more radical possibility because, once labour consciousness has been nurtured, collective actions are contingent on other social factors such as political opportunity and the occurrence of a ‘sudden critical event’. The organization is still young and thus it is too early to define the exact nature of this group and how far it can go in promoting a radical agenda. Finally, the case is transformative based on the fact that it offers a viable alternative to the trade union organizing of workers. In the study of industrial relations, workers’ organizing has long been located within the trade union institutional framework. Nevertheless, this case offers a new possibility consisting of a grassroots self-organizing approach without the predominant leadership from unions, and has proved its validity in the era of globalization.

However, we also need to exercise caution in not being over-optimistic about the collective activism of these workers. Many MDWs claimed that employability was still their prime concern and it was difficult for them to join radical campaigns and leave their family responsibilities behind. Some workers expressed the view that it was more realistic to go to an agency and look for a new job when they had problems at work because they could not afford the time and other sacrifices required for long-term campaigning. A few felt inspired by a domestic worker’s story about setting up a domestic worker agency after years spent working as a domestic worker.
herself, which was shared in one J4DW monthly meeting. They considered it a promising career path for themselves. Thus, it is clear that they had complicated identities which ran counter to resistive activism.

They give us free English classes and IT classes, but sometimes people ask me: can I get a job by joining the unite? How can they help me to get a good job and good salary? I always feel it’s very difficult to answer these questions. If we go to agencies, we can get a job sometimes. If Unite the Union and J4DW can do something similar or work with agencies, it will be good. Work, job, they are the important thing in every one’s mind. If I lose the job, who is going to pay me? Who’s going to support my family? Losing the job is the worst thing. I don’t want be jobless again. You know what we need. We need a shelter, job and food. (Interviewee 4)

Therefore negotiation and development of worker solidarity is a continuous process in which addressing workers’ needs in everyday work and life is always the very first step. Arguably, this lead to a more radical agenda at some point. Very often, both transformation and reproduction elements are intertwined in this process. As one founder of J4DW put it:

We became very practical; began to address the problems they were meeting in their everyday life, how to get good salaries here, how to be secure about their housing and how to be secure in their job situation. So over the years we built up the strong organization.

6.4 Conclusion

The research shows that MDWs face more challenges to collective organizing than do workers in traditional working scenarios. With maternalist and servant dynamics veiling work exploitation, MDWs initially showed little awareness of questioning unequal employment relationships. Labour solidarity is not a category that could be presupposed but one that has to be engendered and developed among migrant workers concentrated in small and dispersed servile workplaces.

There are three important processes utilized by J4DW to transform MDWs from ‘mothers’ and ‘servants’ to workers. Firstly, a gendered and cultural space away from
Chapter 6: From Labourers of Love to Labourers with Rights: Community Organizing of MDWs

their workplaces was created for the organic development of communities of coping where MDWs can seek comforts from fellow workers and develop trust and friendship. Furthermore, politicised learning and radical art served as a key step to transforming a community of coping into a community of and for workers. MDWs’ community organizing efforts points to the possibility of nurturing migrant workers’ labour consciousness and further organizing them based on worker identity in dispersed and informal industrial sectors.

However, MDW community organizing differs from traditional union organizing in three important ways. Firstly, the core issues which they were engaged with were not confined to work-related issues such as wages, working hours and other job benefits but also extended to their visa status and citizenship rights. These different issues cannot be seen as separate economic and social needs, but are linked with and affected by each other to reinforce MDWs’ disadvantaged positions in the labour market. To combat exploitations at work, it is essential for MDWs to gain legal worker status and secure the right to change employers in the UK; otherwise they would go underground and not be entitled to employment rights. Secondly, instead of organizing workers in their workplaces, J4DW created a community space based on sisterhood in which MDWs could share work grievances and seek collective solutions. The gendered dynamics also affected the leadership style and organizational culture within J4DW. Characterised by a self-governing and flat structure, and a sharing and democratic culture, J4DW created a model of authentic representation for MDWs. It opens up new possibilities for the creation of alternative labour organizing by rejecting the traditions of authoritarianism and hierarchies plaguing classical trade unions. Finally, due to the difficulty in establishing collective bargaining in MDWs’ workplaces, campaigning for the favourable changes in public policy was considered as a more feasible organizing strategy for MDWs.

In this industry, you don’t have a framework of organizing. They are working in private households. We can’t adopt traditional organizing approach. We build
campaigns around issues. It’s about identifying important issues. Then we campaign for legislation, indeed, code of practices. Legislation plays an important role in supporting this group of people. (Unite food, drink and tobacco organizing officer in London)

The case also offers a corrective to the institution-centric approach which narrowly treats migrant workers as referent subjects for the organizational development of trade unions and NGOs. It shows that there is a danger that MDWs may be exploited not only by the international division of reproductive labour under global capitalist restructuring but also, paradoxically, in the discourse of some NGOs intended to liberate them from victimization. Nevertheless, we should not dismiss the role of institutions in facilitating collective organizing efforts among MDWs. Unite has played an important role in the organic development of MDWs’ communities of coping and politicized learning. It offered free premises for J4DW classes and meetings and donated one-off funding to their campaigns without getting involved in J4DW’s decision-making. Union membership was also not compulsory for MDWs who attended classes. Without being burdened by institutional imperatives, Unite has been able to take an organic view of MDWs’ demands and speak and act with moral authority. This suggests that only when trade unions and NGOs take an organic view of migrant workers’ needs and recognize their political agency, can the voices of migrant workers be amplified in the public sphere. Otherwise, community organizing might simply amplify the voices of trade unions or third sectors instead of migrant workers themselves.
Chapter 7: Collectivity or fragmentation: exploring the context and meaning of ‘community’ among Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset

7.1 Introduction

This chapter and Chapter Eight present the findings of a case study, community organizing of Post-EU Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset. This chapter focuses on the mobilization opportunity and the ‘informal’ dimension of mobilization structure among Polish immigrant workers. The following questions are addressed: 1) How does the rural socio-political climate affect the migrant experiences of Poles? 2) Is Polish community a harmonious and bonded entity in South Somerset? 3) What kind of informal community networks (based on kinship, friend or neighbourhood) do Polish workers utilise to combat exploitations?

Unlike the existing literature on community unionism which often takes community unity and the centrality of formal community organizations in community organizing for granted, this chapter investigates how the meaning of an ‘ethnic community’ was constructed among Post-EU enlargement Polish immigrants in rural England and how important the construction of ethnic identities was within the Polish community in relation to employment advice seeking and community organizing. The chapter starts with an introduction to the rural context of Polish immigration with a particular focus on the nature of industry, the local neighbourhood and the social climate for immigrant workers in South Somerset. It then analyzes how Polish immigrant workers construct trustful and supportive informal communities that often consist of a small number of co-ethnic friends. Following that, the tensions and conflicts within the wider Polish community and their implications for the community organizing of
immigrant workers are explored. Finally it concludes that division and intolerance within the Polish community imposes limits on how far ethnic community cohesion – rooted in common values, a shared sense of place and nationality, and ethnic networks of trust - can become the basis of community organizing. It is also found that, unlike Polish professionals who are more likely to utilize formal organizational resources to resolve employment issues and problems in their everyday life, Polish factory workers largely rely on personal networks, such as co-workers and neighbours as sources of informational support in times of hardship.

7.2 Contextualizing ‘new’ Polish immigrant workers in rural South Somerset

Since the EU enlargement in 2004, the opening of the labour market to nationals of A8 countries has resulted in one of the most intensive migration inflows in British history. The Polish community appears to be the fastest growing migrant group. By the end of 2007, Poles had become the largest immigrant group in the UK, rising from thirteenth place in early 2004 (Pollard et al. 2008). According to WRS figures, during the period between 1 May 2004 and 31 March 2009, Polish applications accounted for 66% of the total amount (Trevena 2009: 7). The geographical distribution of new Polish immigrants differed significantly from previous Polish immigrants. Although London and the South East were still the most popular destinations for Poles, all the regions of the UK have received a significant number of Polish immigrants. 23% of all WRS registrations between May 2004 and September 2006 were from A8 immigrant workers in rural areas of England (Pollard et al. 2008). The British countryside has thus become an important recipient of Polish immigrants, as has been noted: ‘the pattern of migrant worker arrivals, particularly in proportion to the local labour force, is highly concentrated in some specific rural areas’ (CRC Briefing Paper: 2007). In the South West of the UK, which is considered as a wider coverage of rural areas, the number of immigrant workers increased by 35.4% from 2004 to 2006, compared with 12.8% in
London and 27.3% in the South East (South Somerset District Council: 2007). In South Somerset where the research was located, the number of non-British workers increased by 55.4% from 2004/2005 to 2006/07 according to National Insurance Number registration data (South Somerset District Council: 2007).

7.2.1 The nature of industry

Migrating to a rural area is a very different experience compared with migration to a city for a number of reasons. Firstly, the nature of work in rural areas typically differs from that in urban settings. Green and Hardill (2003) have identified several key characteristics of rural labour markets: a limited range of job opportunities both quantitatively and qualitatively; the relative importance of self-employment and small businesses; a greater than average prevalence of part-time work; seasonalised/casualised labour markets; the importance of informal networks in accessing employment and relatively low wage levels. While immigrant workers are largely concentrated at the two opposite ends of the labour market, among the affluent professionals and low-paid service workers in urban settings, the rural labour market is dominated by low value-added industries such as food-processing, manufacturing, agriculture and hospitality and underrepresented in dynamic knowledge-intensive economic sectors. The top 10 occupations listed in the following table accounted for two thirds of immigrant workers coming into the South West of England (SLM 2007). It clearly demonstrates that the majority of immigrant workers worked in relatively low-paid and low-skilled industries with process operatives standing out as the most popular occupational category, absorbing more than a quarter of immigrant workers registered through the WRS.

Table 7.1: Top ten most frequent occupations across the South West, 2004-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process operatives</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Storage</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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This was consistent with the finding from this study that the vast majority of Polish immigrant workers were working in food-processing factories in South Somerset. The key workplaces identified which employed a large proportion of immigrant workers were meat factories in Langport and Yelmister, cheese factories in Shapton Mallet, Castle Cary, Wincanton and Ilchester, a bakery in Sherborne, a food-preparation factory in Chard, and hospitals and the care sector in Yeovil and Taunton.

Occupational distribution of Polish immigrant workers in the research (South Somerset):

The majority of Polish immigrant workers in food-processing factories reported that they were paid the National Minimum wage. It can be seen from table 7.2 that more than three quarters of immigrant workers earned less than £6 per hour nationally and regionally.

Table 7.2: Usual hourly rate of pay of migrant workers, South West and the UK, 2004-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual hourly rate</th>
<th>South West (%)</th>
<th>UK (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than £4.50</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£4.50 to £5.99</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£6.00 to £9.99</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£10.00 +</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Migrant Workers</td>
<td>42,345</td>
<td>562,615</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It was commonly reported by Polish factory workers who lacked proficiency in English and did not have a degree that a factory job was almost a ‘dead-end’ job for them because they were very unlikely to get a pay rise or promotion.

Company will try to avoid responsibilities anyway. I have been working there for 3 years already since I came to the UK, but still I get 5.93 pounds per hour, no pay rise, never. I am very good at my job, but ... (Interviewee 19)

The first two years, I was very happy for this job because I thought I will go up and something changes. I will do something more, not just the same thing, but…(Interviewee 22)

Apart from the low pay and lack of opportunities for promotion, Polish immigrant workers also suffered from job insecurity. Most of the interviewees reported that they had to work for the factory for at least 6 months before they could get a permanent contract, but it could never be guaranteed. Some newly arrived Polish immigrant
workers tended to be employed on short-term rather than long-term contracts, carrying out seasonal work during their initial stay in England.

We don’t work in the same place for long time. The agency drove us to a place in the morning and we worked there for a few days. Then we moved again. I don’t see the same person for long time. They changed. (Interviewee 15)

Nearly all the Polish immigrants in the study sought jobs via an employment agency or ‘word of mouth’ within the Polish community, to the extent that some low-skilled jobs, such as working in a food-processing factory, have become ‘migrant jobs’. For agency workers without permanent contracts, it was often reported that the employment agency dictated the hours that they had to work each day by threatening Polish workers with losing their jobs in the near future if they did not comply.

It seems that they are in a position that once Polish people get a job, they (agency) can dictate how many hours they work. They might ask them to work for long hours because they might tell you there is no work in the following week. (Polish speaking community advisor for MECA and South Somerset Mind in Yeovil)

Despite the exploitative working conditions, it was never difficult for Polish immigrant workers to find a job. A great many interviewees claimed that they were able to get a job straight away in a food-processing factory if they went to an employment agency. Polish immigrant workers were particularly welcomed and appreciated by local factories. One casting factory worker (Interviewee 21) shared her experience, below:

When I was in this agency, I also saw some English people there. They worked in restaurants before. They were also looking for jobs, but the staff from the agency gave the job to us. The English guy there also said the factories don’t want to recruit any English workers. For example, in my factory, the inspector committee, there are totally 5 people. 3 of them are Polish.

However, it is clear that first and foremost it is the ‘attitude gap’, especially compared with young British people who are unmotivated and unwilling to take low-skilled jobs, rather than the ‘skill gap’ that employers regard Polish workers as filling in the rural
labour market. Polish immigrant workers were often regarded as hard working and obedient by employers.

Majority of them are Polish. Before they hired Pakistani and Arabian people, but because of the difference of production output, you know Polish people are working very fast and they are willing to work. After a lot of Polish people moved to the UK, these factories started employing Polish workers. I can’t say Polish workers are really willing to work that fast, but they are enforced by supervisors. (Interviewee 19)

Employers, they see migration good as they are low paid workers. (The Chair of trade union council in Yeovil)

As cost reduction is essential to low value-added food-processing factories in order to survive in the market, employers are often unwilling to invest in training and development for employees. The majority of food-processing factory workers reported that they had no chance of learning English or improving their skills in the workplace. Due to a lack of education and training, Polish factory workers had fewer ‘exit’ choices and hence stayed at the bottom of the labour market.

These people who work on the production line don’t have good education. They don’t have opportunity to improve skills because the factory job doesn’t require them to speak good English. Maybe they don’t see themselves doing something else. (GMB Polish Southern region education project worker)

It’s not just in Somerset. It’s like the rest of the country. ‘3P’ industries, packing, picking, plonking. They are working in farms. They are working in factories, packing and plonking. That is the British terms to describe migrants’ work. If you don’t have skills and don’t speak the language, you do 3P jobs. (Portuguese community link worker from South Somerset district council)

The GMB Yeovil organizer also mentioned that they had shifted their learning and organizing priorities away from food-processing factories because they did not value their workforce.

The issue around education and training of GMB … Back to 2005, we take an active part in companies which are not only union-recognized. There is a
company which we have fought for long years and we will continue to fight because they value their workforce. So we are going to work on the education initiative there rather than some big companies which produce food for big supermarket because they do not necessarily need the educated workforce. (GMB Yeovil Organizer)

7.2.2 Neighbourhood

In comparison to urban areas, accommodation has proved to be more difficult to secure in rural areas. This is largely due to the short supply of long-term accommodation and its high price in relation to quality. Accessing various facilities (such as entertainment) and services (such as language learning) is also problematic for immigrant workers in rural areas. These difficulties are attributable to transportation problems and the high costs of services. It is suggested that the cost of learning in rural areas could be twice as much as it is in cities (Jentsch et al. 2007). Therefore the majority of Polish immigrant workers working in South Somerset lived in Yeovil because barriers to housing and services were less prevalent in Yeovil compared with other parts of the county (see Table 7.3). The price of decent housing was also more affordable than in the rest of Somerset.

Table 7.3: Barriers to housing and service in the UK, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Somerset</th>
<th>South West</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population weighted Score</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Somerset Intelligence Network, 2010.

Polish immigrants were concentrated in the most deprived area of Yeovil - Yeovil East, West and Central - which came within the four most deprived wards in South Somerset (South Somerset District Council 2008:6). The index of Multiple
Chapter 7: Collectivity or fragmentation: exploring the context and meaning of ‘community’ among Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset

Deprivation 2010 showed that Yeovil Central and West fell within the most deprived 20% of Super Output Areas (SOAs) in England (see Table 7.4). In Yeovil Central, there were three Polish Shops, one Polish cafe, one Polish association and one church offering Polish mass.

Table 7.4: Index of Multiple Deprivation in Yeovil, 2010

Source: Partnership Intelligence Unit, 2011.

In rural areas, a ‘lack of personal transport’ is, in particular, a key barrier to work. This imposed limits on Polish workers’ choices of both work and neighbourhood. Due to the long distance between their workplaces and residences and the absence of convenient public transportation in rural areas, Polish workers either lived near their workplaces or stayed with co-ethnics in the town who owned or had access to a car. Nearly all Polish factory workers in the study rented cheap private housing with basic facilities with their co-ethnic colleagues, friends or family. At the time when the researcher visited a Polish female factory worker’s (Interviewee 23) flat for the
interview in Yeovil, she did not even have a washing machine. She was saving the money to buy more furniture for the flat where she lived with her 6 year old son.

I know a lot of people are working in surrounding areas, but they live in Yeovil. It is because of the cheap price here. Basically, they will live close to people who have cars. They share the car. That’s why they live in the same area. (Polish speaking community advisor for MECA and South Somerset Mind in Yeovil)

Due to the lack of affordable cheap accommodation, over-crowding was also a big issue. As a Polish mental health advisor for South Somerset Mind noted, ‘sometimes people come and 5 people living in one room’.

The theme which frequently emerged from informal discussion with local British citizens was their lack of awareness of the presence of immigrant workers. This could be partially explained by Polish migrants’ tendency to cluster together with compatriots, which offers them little opportunity to socialize with local people. During a social integration meeting organized by South Somerset Mind at Chard youth club, several local people reported that they had not seen immigrant workers very often and that Chard was a typically British town. This contrasted with the fact that Chard was actually home to 2,000 Portuguese12, most of whom worked in meat processing and packing factories. A British landlady who had one Polish tenant claimed that immigrant workers were not visible and she had no idea about the Polish shops, cafes or clubs in the town although her house was located in a Polish neighbourhood in Yeovil East.

Lack of knowledge about housing rights coupled with the inability to speak proficient English prevented many immigrant workers from resolving housing-related problems

satisfactorily. Some property owners charged them unnecessary fines when they moved out. One Polish lady was asked to pay £150 because the carpet was ‘too dirty’. However, this was not her fault because the carpet was already very old when she moved in. With help from a British community advisor, she finally got the money back.

They sign a contract with a landlord. They don’t know anything about checking the details of the contract and condition of the house, and later when they leave the house, they need to pay fines. A lot of people don’t know when they sign a contract, they need to stay in the house until the contract expires. If they want to leave earlier, they have to pay back. A lot of people have this problem. So this is the barrier of language. (Portuguese community link worker from South Somerset district council)

Workers on temporary contracts might become homeless if they lose their jobs. Homelessness was one of the biggest problems for Polish immigrant workers and other migrants from central and Eastern Europe who came to Yeovil seeking a better life. They ended up sleeping on the streets or staying in Yeovil’s night shelter, a hostel for the homeless. When the researcher visited the night shelter on 30 June 2011, there were four Polish people and four English people there. The chair of the night shelter claimed that some Polish workers did not want to admit their situation and were too proud to go home. They were afraid that their compatriots in Poland would look down upon them because they had not managed to make a good life in the UK.

7.2.3 Community cohesion

It has been argued that, in rural areas, the local established people’s concern for the protection of local values may stimulate and strengthen exclusion and discrimination toward immigrant workers (Dey and Jentsch 2001). In Yeovil, there were challenges in relation to community crimes and social cohesion between the immigrant community and the local community. The Community Cohesion Survey in 2008 (Table 7.5) showed that fewer people in Yeovil believed that people from different backgrounds got on well together, compared with the rest of the country, and more than 35% of Yeovil residents thought that there was a problem with people not treating one another with respect and consideration (Somerset Intelligence Network 2010). To address the issue of community crime affecting the Polish community, two Polish Police Community Support Officers were employed in Yeovil and Taunton.

Table 7.5: Community Cohesion in the UK, 2010
Chapter 7: Collectivity or fragmentation: exploring the context and meaning of ‘community’ among Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset

Source: Somerset Intelligence Network, 2010.

More than half of the interviewees reported that they had been discriminated against by local people in their workplaces or other social settings. It is notable that the discrimination did not only occur between immigrant workers and local people, but also within the migrant community, which will be further elaborated in the next section.

We are standing there. If we work a bit slowly, the English people turn around, say ‘fucking Polish people. Then we turn back and say ‘fucking British people’. The Polish supervisors use some dirty words if they are not happy. (Interviewee 19)

For example, I was in one club with my friend from Lithuania. She was dancing with all people, girls and guys. They asked her where you are from. She said from Lithuania. They said we can’t invite you because you are not English. (Interviewee 27)

A few factors have been identified which could explain the tensions between the immigrant communities and the local community. Firstly, Yeovil has traditionally been a working class town. One in nine Yeovil people live in areas which are amongst the most deprived in the country. Yeovil East, in particular, was designated as the main ‘priority ward’ for South Somerset. 3% of areas in South Somerset were among the fifth most deprived in England (Somerset Intelligence Network 2010). Compared with the UK generally, Yeovil has relatively higher proportions of people in the 15-44 age group (see Table 7.6). There are fewer people at the older end of the age spectrum. In fact, Yeovil has one of the youngest populations of any town in Somerset (Somerset Intelligence Network 2010).

Table 7.6: Population combined by sex and age in Somerset
Chapter 7: Collectivity or fragmentation: exploring the context and meaning of ‘community’ among Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset

With a relatively large supply of economically active working people, tensions could arise between local people and immigrant workers over competition for jobs. Local people may perceive immigrant workers as rivals for jobs, housing, social benefits and education. Local people’s anxieties about the ‘race to the bottom’ effect brought about by the influx of immigrant workers were evident in some of the interviews.

You know, that school in that corner. Their teaching quality is becoming worse and worse. They don’t care because they know anyway they can take in those Polish kids, but it’s affecting our children. I’m not against any individual immigrant, but… I don’t like the coalition government, but the only good thing they have done is migration policy. (Local British resident in Yeovil)

Moreover, Yeovil has historically been characterized by a less diverse population and therefore local residents were not used to a multi-cultural environment. Although a
large number of immigrants from eastern and central Europe entered this region after 2004, it took a long time for local people to adjust to the increasingly diverse living environment that resulted from this.

There were not a lot of migrants in this area before 2004. Now immigrant workers have been here for a few years, but people still can’t get used to it. It’s a slow and gradual process. (Secretary of Yeovil trade union council)

A few participants reported that local residents were protective of local values and culture which were very different from the more open, tolerant and diverse culture found in urban areas.

They like to stick in their own village, their own people, and even someone like me who come from London would be considered as an ‘outsider’ not like fitting in with anybody else. (A British newcomer to Yeovil from London)

Finally, the media portrayal of new immigrant workers fuelled local tensions and created a hostile environment. The impact of media representations of immigrant workers is reported to have been most apparent in areas of deprivation and locations where community tensions already existed (ICAR 2004). A number of immigrant community activists and Yeovil Trade Union Council officers claimed that local media reporting of immigration issues in Yeovil was often unbalanced, giving prominence to crimes perpetrated by immigrant workers while neglecting to report crimes against immigrants. The language was often generalized, perpetuating stereotypes and popular myths about immigration and reinforcing perceived inequalities and biases, as noted by the Portuguese community link worker from South Somerset district council:

This is the worst part of England. You know BNP and also the politics of current government …If you see the papers, local papers would say how many jobs go to migrant workers last year, but they don’t mention that those jobs are low-paid jobs. They didn’t say, for example, there are thousands of jobs available on the internet or job centres, but none comes from English community. No one wants to work in those places. Just Polish, Portuguese or other migrants are willing to
accept the job. You can see that in local papers, but not in national press. Like I said, they just attacked migrants, but they don’t tell the truth. Why British employers are giving jobs to migrants? Because they are willing to accept everything; because they don’t speak the language. We sometimes have people with good skills, like engineers, doctors and architects, people with very good skills from Portugal. Here they are subject themselves to humiliations doing low-paid jobs.

In May 2011, a local newspaper reported an attack against a British man by Polish immigrants, even though the police had not confirmed the nationality of the attackers. The negative press coverage reinforced perceived biases towards immigrant workers.

In rural south Somerset, Polish immigrant workers were concentrated in low-skilled ‘migrant jobs’ such as food-processing factories where the union presence was low and the chances of being educated and promoted were minimal. Due to the lack of personal transportation and the under-development of public transportation, the vast majority of Polish workers rented cheap private housing with their compatriots in the most deprived areas of Yeovil. This reduced their chances of socializing with local people and further deepened the segregation between the immigrant community and the local community. They also faced discrimination and safety issues caused by the unfavourable local social and political climate. Clearly, the main concerns of Polish immigrant workers went beyond the employment relationship and extended to wider community issues such as housing, safety, education and discrimination, which were not the core issues engaged with by traditional union organizing. This lack of support from trade unions and local connections leads us to ask how immigrant workers seek advice and help to resolve employment and general everyday life problems, and whether their ethnic communities can fill this gap by helping Polish immigrant workers to deal with exploitation and discrimination.

7.3 ‘They won’t cheat on me’: creating personal community
What emerged from the findings were two versions of an ‘ethnic community’ among ‘new’ Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset. On one hand, Polish workers developed individualized and personal networks of family, friends and neighbours which were often small social circles characterized by trust and intimacy. On the other hand, there was also a notion of the abstract cultural community in which suspicion and distrust was commonly reported.

7.3.1 Community as family

The vast majority of interviewees suggested that ‘family’ played a significant role in the initial arrival of migrants, providing them with informational and emotional support in times of hardship. The general migration pattern of Polish migrant families was that Polish men moved to the UK first, to find work, and once they had some stability, they brought their partner and children over.

There was a great influx of eastern European migrants, especially Polish people in 2005. They treated England as streets with the gold. Most of them came alone without children. Then after they stayed here for 3 or more years, they started thinking of bringing their children and family here. In 2007, a lot of them have well settled down. (The chair of MECA)

Majority of people have the plan of staying here permanently. You know, firstly, just one person, usually man comes here to work, then he brings his family here... A lot of Polish families are actually living here. (Interviewee 18)

The importance of family to Polish women was particularly notable, as in many cases they relied on their partner to enable them to migrate to the UK and to provide informational support.

… because I love my husband. When he started his job here, I was in Poland for a few months. I decided to be with my husband. He said yes. He took me and my daughter. This country is not my favourite country. I prefer more Italy, too much rain here, windy. (Interviewee 22)
Chapter 7: Collectivity or fragmentation: exploring the context and meaning of ‘community’ among Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset

First of all, my boyfriend, he was here. My boyfriend has lived in England for 5 years. He can tell where to go. (Interviewee 28)

A 19-year old Polish girl (Interviewee 27) arrived in the UK with the support of her uncle and aunt who had already been settled in the UK for several years. They offered her free accommodation and found her a factory job in the first few months after her arrival. Although she has since moved out of their house and found a new job as a care worker, family and kinship was still considered as the most reliable source of support and care in times of hardship.

Family support was not gender-specific, however. A Polish man on a temporary contract in a food-processing factory (Interviewee 15) first came to the UK because his girlfriend was working in South Somerset and he relied on her for financial support during his first few months in the UK. A few Polish male interviewees claimed that they no longer felt lonely and gained a feeling of stability after bringing their family to the UK.

Such family support was important, not only in cases where Polish workers had settled in the UK with their families, but also in the wider context of other family members living in Poland. Many interviewees used cheap mobile phone networks and Skype for regular contact with their relatives in Poland. These transnational connections also functioned as a source of emotional support for Polish immigrant workers.

I talk with Polish friends here, my husband. Sometimes I call my mother and sisters in Poland. I always talk on the internet, send message. (Interviewee 22)

Evidence of strong familial attachment was also found among Polish immigrant workers with more cultural capital (qualifications and skills). One Polish woman working as a mental health advisor (Interviewee 17) claimed that she could not imagine working in Australia or Canada, even though she had previously been offered a chance
to work there, because she was not willing to go too far away from her parents and would therefore remain in Europe:

‘If I work in the UK, I can drive back. I love driving’.

It is notable that Polish immigrant workers distinguished between the emotional support and informational support obtained from their family connections. Young Polish immigrant workers, in particular, were more likely to consult with their friends for information when they encountered problems at work, even though they maintained close ties to their family or partner.

…talking with friends, my colleagues. Sometimes family, but mostly friends. (Interviewee 16)

I talk with friends. Family is always there. They won’t cheat on me, but they don’t know what is going on. (Interviewee 27)

We are living in a house with my girlfriend and colleagues. We talked sometimes if I have problem. He’s my colleague in the factory. And I talk with my girlfriend. When I have problems with English, I take my Polish friend. He can talk in English. (Interviewee 25)

Although family and kinship networks are based on loyalty and trust, they also carry obligations and are therefore a source of stress and constraints. Domestic problems emerged after female immigrants who had subsequently joined their male partners. Because they could not speak English very well and had no social life in the UK, they depended on their partners for everything. When the researcher was invited to attend a domestic abuse advice session organized by the South Somerset branch of Mind in Yeovil, many Polish women shared their personal stories of being abused by family members. A Polish community activist reported that there had been a few domestic abuse cases in which women had been beaten badly by their husbands, but they refused to report it to the police because they were scared of losing their only source of income
and shelter and also owing to the fact that divorce was not regarded as socially acceptable among some Polish people.

When the wife and children come and join them, usually they don’t go to the work because they need to look after the children. They are the one who don’t speak language and they are very dependent on their husbands. This causes some issues. They are at home, the isolation. If they don’t speak, they don’t mix. (Interviewee 17)

For some Polish male workers, the idea of ‘community’ was transformed by the arrival of their families. It was found that they partially reoriented their energies towards the domestic sphere after the arrival of their families.

They need to take care of their children. When their children are young, it’s ok. But when they grow up, they need your help with maths, literature. It might be easy to help if you are in your home country, but here, it’s very difficult to help in English way. (Portuguese community link worker from South Somerset district council)

In all these English classes or meetings, mostly women … Men are busy with working and too tired from work, but also because when their family arrive, their wife and children, they can’t speak English well, so these men need to take care of their family. They don’t really have time for socializing or participating in these meetings. (Polish mental health advisor from South Somerset Mind)

One Polish man who worked in the manufacturing industry (Interviewee 24) mentioned how his life had changed after his family came over. Previously he went out with his co-ethnic friends in his spare time and sometimes took part in activities organized by local ethnic organizations, but now he was needed to help with his child’s homework. During one English class organized by Midwest European Communities Association (MECA), in which most of the students were Polish women, the English tutor asked one Polish woman why her husband did not accompany her to the class. She said that he was cooking potatoes at home. If she went out studying or socializing, her husband had to stay at home and take care of their child. The burden of adapting with their families...
to new ways of living in the UK imposed a degree of constraint on participation in public life for some Polish men.

7.3.2 Community as friends

The construction of ‘community’ around friends was another common theme. Nearly all Polish immigrant workers in the study interacted with a specific group of friends for socializing and obtaining support, and these networks were based on a varying number of co-ethnic relations. Polish immigrants with a good educational background and adequate language skills tended to develop social ties beyond the Polish community. However, they accounted for a very small proportion of Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset.

It varies here. I’ve got a lot of Portuguese friends, a lot of English…It’s because I could speak English, then you can socialize with anyone, but if you can’t communicate, it’s hard. So basically Polish people communicate with Poles. They try to stick together. (Interviewee 26)

The vast majority of Polish factory workers had limited contact with local people. Very rarely, they turned to English friends for information or advice when they had problems. This was partly because the factory workers were overwhelmingly immigrant workers and thus Polish workers had few opportunities to practice their English and make English friends. Even in a mixed environment, in which both English and Polish workers were employed, they did not develop mutual supportive links beyond the workplace.

We don’t know a lot about them, the English. They have their own life. They don’t bother to change friends. At the job, it’s fine. We talk sometimes. But after work, we have our own life.(Interviewee 21)

Only Polish friends. Who know good English, they have English friends. My English is not good. (Interviewee 25)
It’s very difficult. I think, probably they are not trying to be friends. Because for example, my English colleagues, receptionists, I have never been to their house just for a cup of tea. (Interviewee 16)

They largely relied on their co-ethnic friends for socializing and support. There were two main sources of co-ethnic friends: colleagues and neighbours. The majority of interviewees mentioned that they made very good Polish friends at work and that they were reliable sources of support. These co-ethnic co-workers offered them financial and informational support.

I work now in the nursery home. This is a completely different job. One Polish girl, only one. If I don’t understand something, I ask her. She is very good because she has lived here for something about 4 years. She speaks good English. (Interviewee 27)

A Polish man who was working in a meat processing factory (Interviewee 15) shared the story of how his Polish co-workers and close friends helped him financially when he and his girlfriend had a baby. He also had close connections with several co-workers outside of work. Very often, they went to the park or a club together after work.

Because Polish immigrant workers were concentrated in Yeovil East, West and Central, it was easy for them to find other Polish people in their neighbourhood. Many interviewees reported that they socialized with Polish neighbours regularly and that these neighbours were able to help them with child care and offer advice and information in times of hardship.

I am working at night shifts. So it would be rather difficult for me to take care of my kid. I had a friend, my neighbour, who could take care of him. (Interviewee 23)

Interviewer: What do you do in your spare time?

Interviewee: I will go to my friend, my neighbour. Sometimes we drink a glass of alcohol, a bottle of beer. Sometimes we talk and watch TV. (Interviewee 22)
During one interview, conducted in a Polish lady’s (Interviewee 23) house, the lady’s Polish neighbour came to remind her that she needed to fill in her census form and benefits claim forms. The lady said that this kind of visit was common as they always tried to keep each other informed of any new information regarding their work and life in the UK.

Nevertheless, the overall number of co-workers and neighbours who were regarded as intimate, reliable and supportive by Polish immigrant workers was relatively small. The quality of the relationship depended on whether there was a mutual link and common interest or value. The interviewees generally reported they only had very few close friends from work.

We are fine (with Polish colleagues), but not close to everyone. We are close to two person. (Interviewee 20)

You can find (Polish) people are really generous, you know, supportive and helpful, but this is like in a very small circle. You’ve got 2 or 3 or 4 friends you can rely on and you know that they can support you for anything. (Interviewee 17)

In some instances, Polish workers indicated a lack of close relations and the existence of tensions between Polish housemates.

Interviewer: Do you have good relationship with your housemates?

Interviewee: Not really, to be honest. The Polish couple are very strange. They don’t want to have good relationship with us I think. Another couple used to live here. We spent a lot of time together. You know, we were like a family. We can all sit in the living room playing games. But this couple, all the time, they spent the time in the small room. They eat there. They dry clothes there. (Interviewee 28)

A few respondents who were active in English learning and community activities were more likely to make friends in the colleges that they attended. However, they commonly reported that they were not close to all their Polish classmates. Very often, they socialized with one or two classmates at the most, after the class. Therefore, friendship based on learning was somewhat contingent and uncertain.
Relying on family and friends, the vast majority of low-skilled Polish immigrant workers tended to utilize personal networks rather than organizational resources as the first option for consultation and support when they experienced hardship. As shown in the diagram depicting the social circle of socializing and support drawn by interviewee 25 (the shorter the distance between different factors, the closer they are), his Polish girlfriend and 5 Polish friends were seen as the most intimate social circle and they carried more or less the same weight. The second layer of his social circle included MECA, the Church and the pub. They provided an ethnic organizational space or informal collective space in which he received training, gained advice and socialized with co-ethnics. The English supervisor at work still came within his socializing and consulting scope, but was considered as the most distant layer of support. This was an indication of the lack of local connections and Polish workers’ lower levels of interest and trust in ethnic organizations compared with their personal networks.

Social circle of socializing and support drawn by Interviewee 25 on 21 June 2011.

7.4 ‘Poles are mean to each other’: intolerance and tensions within wider Polish community
Despite the fact that most Polish immigrants interacted with co-ethnic friends and relied on them for support and information, they tended to distinguish their close ties from the perceived wider ethnic community. Polish immigrant workers in the study generally reported a lack of solidarity within their co-ethnic community and a feeling of suspicion and distrust towards Polish members of the wider community. The idea that ‘Poles are mean to each other’ (Interviewee 23) frequently emerged in the study.

7.4.1 Social class stratification

Firstly, this intolerance was associated with the social class stratification that exists within the Polish community. Placing too much emphasis on ethnic solidarity very often means that class stratification among co-ethnic groups is overlooked. The horizontal ties of ethnicity were fragmented by class divisions between Polish workers which were shaped by different occupational niches in South Somerset and different class and educational backgrounds in Poland. The first source of class stratification was linked to the transnational construction of social class whereby individual Polish workers dynamically interpreted their position with reference to the stratification systems in the UK and Poland. Although Polish factory workers generally shared similar working and living conditions in South Somerset, they came from different class backgrounds in Poland. There were a small number of Polish workers who had gained a university degree or other professional qualifications back home, but had to work in factories in the UK. Research in Gloucestershire (Gloucestershire County Council 2007) found that 39% of immigrant workers who had received a university education and a further 15% with a vocational qualification generally earned less than £6 per hour. They tried to distinguish themselves from other Polish factory workers from poorer backgrounds by emphasizing their different lifestyles and reasons for migration.
I don’t want to identify with them. Of course, some people, they are fine. I know a lot Polish people who are not only living in Yeovil but generally in the UK, they are not good people. I move to England because I want to learn new things, meet new people, not for money, but most of these people, they just come here for money. They don’t want to learn new things here. Sometimes they are from the lowest class. They used to be in the prison. They used to steal. They have problems with the law. They run away from Poland because they think they will be safe here. They drink a lot. They are alcoholic addicted. If they earn 6 pounds an hour, they can buy good alcohol. I don’t understand them. That’s why I don’t want to identify with them. You know, I don’t want to say I am better than them, but I think money is not everything. (Interviewee 28)

The other type of class tension came from the social distance between Polish professionals, such as doctors and engineers, and Polish factory workers in South Somerset. It was commonly reported that Polish professionals remained distanced from the wider Polish community and tried to go beyond co-ethnic networks and develop social connections with the local society instead.

There is a Polish word called ‘burak’. It means that someone who’s not well-educated, an idiot. The intelligent ones don’t get along well with them. They’ve got a sort of mentality which I don’t like. I have a very good Portuguese friend who is very intelligent, but he never mixes with other Portuguese people. It seems that intelligent ones in Polish community also don’t want to mix with others. I feel most of people just take care of their own business, but they don’t care much about others or help others. (Polish speaking community advisor for MECA and South Somerset Mind)

Polish workers with a good educational background were found to be more likely to use formal organizational resources to resolve their work and everyday life problems while Polish immigrant workers with limited education often resorted to personal networks such as Polish neighbours and co-workers for help, as discussed above.

Interviewer: If you have problems at work or in your life, how do you deal with them?

Interviewee: My boyfriend has lived in England for 5 years. He can tell where to go. Even with my boyfriend, I go to a Polish club, MECA in Yeovil. I know they can help me. To be honest, Polish people don’t like this club. I think they are good,
in my opinion, because they try to do something to help Polish people. (Interviewee 28)

7.4.2 Inter-group competition and exploitation

The previous research on undocumented Polish migrant workers (Jordon 2002) has revealed that the competitive situation within the informal market resulted in exploitation and danger within the Polish community. Although the legal status of post-accession Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset and their migration experiences differed from previous undocumented Polish immigrants, inter-group competition within the community was still an issue. It was frequently reported that there was no solidarity along ethnic lines in the workplace and that more tensions existed between Polish factory workers rather than between Polish workers and English workers. Many interviewees emphasized the difficult relationship they had with Polish supervisors.

Sometimes they (Polish supervisors) are pretty difficult. Like last night, one of them is really difficult, blaming me for no reason. I actually put a complaint to the main supervisor, the manager, but nothing happened. English people usually know what they are allowed to do, what they are not allowed to do because they are too afraid of protocol while the Polish side, they wouldn’t care much about regulations. They will scream at you for no reason, like threatening you with the job if you don’t go fast. So it’s a bit more difficult with them. Polish people are just mean to each other as supervisors are toward them. I mean, I’m not saying every one of them is, but by and large, it would be the way. (Interviewee 23)

Such difficult relationships could be partly explained by the fact that it was felt that some Polish factory workers were promoted not on the basis of their productivity and efficiency, but due to their ability to regulate workers and push their fellow workers to work hard, as well as their language skills.

People got promoted to the supervisor not because they are good at the job, because they can bully people to work fast. (British solicitor and volunteer advisor for the Polish association in Taunton)
I heard of stories that some people were promoted to supervisors just because of language. Actually they abused workers. It’s just awful. (The chair of the Polish association in Taunton)

Interviewer: How did Polish workers get promotion?

Interviewee: If you know English, practically you speak as good English as your supervisor, or they would like you to keep people in a debate so they wouldn’t need to deal with them. They like you to keep them frightened. It’s not official. But they would like you to keep Polish people, if you are Polish, too scared of lodging a complaint, keeping them fighting and fighting among each other. (Interviewee 19)

Even among Polish factory workers, many interviewees claimed that Polish workers deliberately undermined each other because of jealousy.

They try to separate, like small groups, and they don’t want to interact with others. You know, it’s a shame, but it’s the reality. But I think it is because people are jealous of others, what people have, the work, and this is one of the things, just don’t make people integrate into one.’(Interviewee 17)

For the most parts, the biggest problem with Poles in this country is that inability to unite themselves. There is a lot of awful mistrust, jealousy. (Second generation Polish priest in Yeovil)

I saw this in the factory. If there is one Polish person who has been promoted, then a lot of Poles won’t talk with him or her because of jealousy. They criticize each other a lot. I never expect that. I thought they had same language and culture and they should stick to each other. (Polish speaking community advisor for MECA and South Somerset Mind)

There was one particular case that was still under investigation when the researcher visited. A Polish lady had lodged a complaint that she was being bullied by a Polish male colleague (Interviewee 24) in a manufacturing company. However, this Polish man claimed that he was innocent. In addition, nobody else, including English workers, had ever raised any complaint against him before. The Polish community advisor who dealt with this case commented:

I’d be prone to believe him rather than her because it is the Polish mentality, the way they do things. Because he worked there longer, right? So he had a better
position and drives a better car. He earns better money, so people would work towards bringing him down, working towards making his life more miserable because this is Polish mentality. Why should he have more than I do? I have to do something so that his life would be more difficult.

It was reported by one key informant involved in Polish organizing that a small explosion in one Polish shop was premeditated by other Poles because of the huge competition between the four Polish shops in Yeovil. This shop was finally closed and there are currently three Polish shops remaining.

A few respondents claimed that some Poles were reluctant to pass on employment information to others because they were afraid that someone else might take their place. One Polish female worker (Interviewee 23) who had been in the UK for just four months strongly recommended other new Polish immigrants not to listen to advice from other Polish people, because they would continually spread gossip which had no truth in it, but was intended to frighten them or make them feel uncomfortable.

The exploitation by Polish employment agencies was also important. It was reported that some Polish agencies did not pay wages as promised and treated workers with a lack of respect.

There is one agency. People are not treated in a decent way or with the respect. For people who don’t speak, they can’t say ‘can you speak to me in a nice way?’, because they are afraid if they say something, they might not be able to get the job. This is what happened to my clients. They lost their job and later became homeless. I just don’t understand, the same nationality, because there are Polish people in the agency. Your own nationality like Polish can be really horrible to others. (Polish mental health advisor in South Somerset Mind)

It’s a Polish agency. They brought me here. I wasn’t paid as much as they promised. They took my travel expenses and house expenses before they paid me wages. The money was really ridiculous. (Interviewee 26)

A culture of inter-group competition and exploitation of fellow workers has prevented the growth of mutual help and solidarity among immigrant Poles. This trend was even
more obvious among young Polish immigrants. As one Polish cleaner (Interviewee 18) put it:

What we’ve learned since our childhood is competition. We have to compete for education opportunity, later the job, money, and other social resources. Competing is our mentality.

7.4.3 English is more than a language

Despite the fact that low-skilled Polish factory workers largely relied on co-ethnic friends for information and support, they were aware that they had to improve their language skills and develop social networks with the local community to enable them to find better jobs and improve their quality of life. Speaking good English was regarded as one of the most important skills required to achieve both employment and social mobility. As discussed above, many respondents felt that one of the essential requirements for Poles to gain promotion to the middle management tier in factories is proficiency in English. More importantly, in the migrant context, English was seen not simply as a language, but more as a mark of social honour and social status. A lack of proficiency in spoken English was considered shameful for immigrant Poles in their home communities. One Polish male worker had been in the UK for three years but had never visited home because he was afraid that people in his home town would laugh at him if they found out he still could not speak English properly after living in England for that length of time.

The opportunity to learn English became the main factor in terms of choosing jobs and making friends for a few Polish workers, particularly young Poles. They interpreted a ‘good’ job as one in which they could communicate with English people and thus improve their language skills.

When I came to Yeovil, I found there were so many Polish people, in Tesco, for example, Polish shops, in every place. This was something strange for me, very
Chapter 7: Collectivity or fragmentation: exploring the context and meaning of ‘community’ among Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset

strange. I really want to have English friends, friends who speak English language. Now I changed my job. I must talk in English. This is good. (Interviewee 27)

I was more close to Vanessa (English). She helped me English.’ (Interviewee 28)

The majority of young respondents reported that they preferred to go to local cheap pubs rather than the Polish cafe to relax and socialize because the drinks were cheaper, and more importantly they, had more chance of becoming acquainted with English people there.

If you are here, you can’t just go to Polish shop, watching Polish TV at home. Then you can stay in Poland. (Interviewee28)

Clearly, learning English enabled Polish immigrant workers to become more confident and able to express themselves, thereby further advancing their interests. This was evident in one group interview where a translator was present. However, one interviewee was not happy with the translation even though she could not speak English fluently. She insisted that she should speak for herself because she thought the translator distorted and misunderstood some of her points. It was clear that learning English constituted an essential step in giving voice to disadvantaged immigrant workers. Nevertheless, this strong desire to learn English and become integrated into the host society made some Poles emotionally distant from their fellow Polish workers. When confronted with a specific employment or everyday life problem, some tended to use English people’s reactions as a reference point instead of aligning with other Poles.

If I can speak English well, I will go to my English supervisor directly and explain the situation. (Interviewee 23)

7.4.4 Division between old and new Polish migrants

There have been several waves of Polish immigrants to the UK. The Post-War generation was established from former soldiers who fought during the Second World War. Their history was linked to the history of Poland during and after the War,
including the establishment of communism in 1944. This group of people were prevented from returning or chose not to go back to Poland. Therefore they settled in the UK, built Catholic churches, and set up Polish clubs and community centres through which to organize themselves. Burrell (2006) identified some key features of Post-War migration: 1) a long history of coming to the UK; 2) a very high regard for the idea of ‘nation’; 3) knowledge of Polish history; 4) active participation in church and religious activities; 5) recognition of the Polish language as the mother tongue of future generations; 6) a sense of community. The second wave of Polish migration was contextualized with reference to the post-communist transformation and EU enlargement. Two key elements of this group narrative are important: a feeling of struggle; and individual rather than group experience (Galasinska 2010:943). The newest group comprises Post-EU enlargement Polish immigrants who are characterized by ‘temporary, circular, unpredictable, open-ended, strategically adaptive migration activities’ (Garapich 2006: 15).

In South Somerset, there was a mixture of all these groups. It was often assumed that Polish workers would turn to co-ethnics who had settled in the UK for help and advice, but this perception could be challenged by the lack of mutual understanding between the new economic Polish immigrants and the original Polish ethnic minorities, mostly the Post Second World War generation and their children. The respondents in the study frequently showed indifference towards Poles who had been long-established in the UK and considered them irrelevant to their life here. Some interviewees mentioned that they sometimes saw older Poles in Polish shops and they might ask them something about Poland’s current situation, but nothing beyond that. A volunteer at the Holy Ghost church in Yeovil, who was the son of Post Second World War Polish immigrants, claimed that he was very willing to tell ‘new’ Polish immigrants how he learnt English and adapted to the local society, but ‘new’ Poles did not show much
interest. The vast majority of interviewees did not have regular personal contact with old Poles. They did not feel any emotional attachment to the established Poles because they were culturally and socially different. This was even salient in the use of everyday language.

We went to a Polish club for Christmas. It was a very moving event. There is nothing to build on that because this is that generation. They have different experience and different issues. They are completely different kind of reality from the new generation. There is little link between them. I mean, even the language is different. For the old generation, the language evolves and develops. When I speak Polish, I try to use Polish-only words. When I came here, they try to mix Polish with English. Sometimes they change English to Polish, which is brand new to me. I even noticed the difference in language. There are so many new words. (Interviewee 29)

A few ‘new’ Polish immigrant workers reported that they were not made to feel welcome by older Poles or their children in the UK.

There was a Polish couple who are about 50 years old and they lived there for long time. When the agency brought us to their house, they felt, you know… because we have to live there but they were not welcoming at all. To be honest, I am a bit shamed of my community. We can be so awful to each other sometimes. (Interviewee 26)

Some children of the Post-War generation were very active in supporting and organizing the new Polish community in South Somerset, but they still felt they were not fully embraced by post-EU enlargement Polish workers. They were always considered as Anglo-Poles and ‘outsiders’.

I often have to explain to new Poles why I could speak Polish. They always saw me as English because they didn’t realize I always consider myself as Polish. I was born in England, but I didn’t choose to be born in England. I was born in England because of history. So it’s difficult for them to accept me fully as a member of their community, as a Pole. (Second generation Polish priest at Holy Ghost church in Yeovil)
They see themselves separately. This is very interesting actually. To me, when I started working with Polish people, they would not consider me as Polish. I had this conversation so many times in the factories. They call me Anglo-Pole. I say to them. My first language is Polish. My parents are Polish. I was born here. Then they said ‘you are not Polish’. I said ‘do you have children?’. ‘Yes’. ‘Are they in England?’, ‘Yes’, I said why there is a difference. They are two different streams from my own experiences. (Second generation Polish factory worker and Polish community advisor)

There were several reasons why there was such a social distance between new economic Polish migrants and the earlier Polish ethnic minority group who settled in the UK. First, their migration experiences were contextualized in different historical and social settings. Post-War migration was largely due to political reasons associated with the communist regime. The earlier generation Poles always underlined that, unlike the new generation, they came here not because they wanted to, but because they had to.

They were in exile. They had no choice. There’s no going back. They had to make their way out here. (British solicitor and volunteer advisor for the Polish association in Taunton)

Because of this circumstance, the Post War Polish settlers struggled with the political and emotional consequences of being in exile. However, recent economic Polish migration has occurred in the context of EU enlargement and was voluntary. These Poles were mostly driven by economic motivations and came to the UK in search of a better life. They were mobile and temporary because they always had the option to return or to go to other countries. These differences in migratory experiences resulted in their different national and ethnic identities.

We come from completely difference cultural backgrounds and thinking. In terms of linkages, there is very little. There are different ways of thinking about Poland as a country. For the old generation, this is a country they love in heart. Because they were not allowed to return, this is always going to be a great one. New generation, they choose to leave because there are no chances for them. They left intentionally.
You can’t enforce people from two different worlds to be united. It’s not going to happen. (The Chair of the Polish association in Taunton)

The old ones, they mostly don’t keep in close touch with new Pole. There is a generation gap. I don’t feel close to them. I guess you can compare. Back to those days, those Poles were living in exile. They struggled to maintain their national identity. Every now and then, they can get a book or song from Poland. This is how it feels. The Polish people, here and now, don’t try to maintain their standards. They want to be close to most of British people because British people usually have higher positions. What they care is all about money. (Interviewee 18)

Secondly, because of their reasons for migrating, new Poles and old Poles had different concerns and priorities. There was a lack of understanding on both sides. Old Poles were keen to develop their community space so as to organize social and cultural events. By doing this, they were able to maintain their national and ethnic identity during the period of exile. They were very committed to community life, taking out a bank loan and paying it off annually in order to buy communal property. Although some of these Polish community centres and clubs were dying out because their membership was shrinking, some old Poles were still very sceptical about recruiting new members from the new Polish community. Some felt that these new Polish migrants might give them a bad name. They were reluctant to change their cultural focus to service delivery in order to attract post-EU enlargement Poles. However, there was little interest in the established Polish community facilities from new Poles in any case. The study of Polish immigrant workers in Wiltshire (Wall et al. 2006) has shown that many ‘new’ Poles were aware of the established Polish club in Trowbridge, but did not attend it.

They don’t know how to meet new generation’s needs or they don’t want to. For the old generation, most of them did social clubs and cultural events. For this generation, it’s more about advice and practical things. The old generation doesn’t want to do it. They don’t want to sit like us and do the paper for them. They think they should do it by themselves because they have done it. Nobody else helped them. New generation is not very interested in cultural events or seminars. They
would rather have party at home or watch TV. Now they’ve got Polish TV. (The Chair of Polish Association in Taunton)

I’ve been to Polish clubs a lot. I feel they support each other. They don’t like new Polish migrants. They think they are money-driven and have no sense of community. (Second generation Polish factory worker and community advisor)

Finally, in comparison to old Poles, post-EU enlargement Polish migrants were mobile and temporary. More than half of the respondents were unsure how long they would stay in the UK and indicated that they might return to Poland after they had earned enough money. For them, the option to go back or go somewhere else always existed. As a Polish community advisor in Taunton pointed out,

New economic migrants, they don’t have the sense of ‘this is my future’. Although post Second World War Poles remain Polish, they always see themselves dominated by here. They don’t see themselves returning to Poland. A8 generation, they might not stay here permanently. They can choose within EU. It’s about attitude. I think this is the difference that would separate post Second World War Poles from A8 Poles.

Clearly, there was a lack of trust and understanding between new Polish immigrant workers and old Poles due to differences in their migration experiences, priorities and commitment to community. They did not seem to show any inclination to unite in support of each other. Even though some Polish organizations set up by the Post-War generation had started recruiting new members from the post-EU enlargement community because of the membership crisis, there was little interest from new Poles.

7.5 Conclusion: contesting imagined cohesive ethnic community

By exploring the context and meaning of ‘community’ among Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset, the research indicates that community unity cannot be presumed but is a process of social construction. Despite the fact that the vast majority of Polish workers interacted with co-ethnic friends and consulted with them about important issues in their lives, they had only a few close, reliable friends in comparison
to the size of the wider Polish community. Polish immigrant workers had a
dichotomous perception of their own community ranging from a close and trustful
relationship with a small circle of co-ethnic friends to suspicion and intolerance toward
the wider Polish community. Polish migrants’ daily life was bound by specific, close
networks of family members and friends, but social structures such as class, age and
proficiency in English created internal social boundaries that influenced the formation
of social networks among Poles. What seemed striking was that Poles had a very
negative image of their own ethnic community. Instead of defending their own
community, they undermined it. In the Post-EU enlargement migrant context, being
Polish was not seen as a culturally distinct and bounded ethnic identity which needed to
be preserved, but instead a barrier to achieving work and social mobility. There was
tendency, particularly among young Polish immigrant workers, to step outside of the
ethnic community and develop local connections. Rather than maintaining a sense of
pride in their own cultures and identities, many ‘new’ Poles were eager to shed their
ethnic origins and integrate into mainstream society. The divisions and intolerance
within the Polish community also imposed limits on how far ethnic community
cohesion – rooted in common values, a shared sense of place and nationality, and ethnic
networks of trust - can become the basis of community organizing.

Moreover, organizations were often not the most important sources of support for
Polish immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors. Unlike Polish professionals who
were more likely to utilize formal organizational resources to resolve employment
issues and general problems, low-skilled Polish factory workers largely relied on
personal networks, such as co-workers and neighbours as sources of informational
support when they experienced hardship. Although they generally maintained close
ties with family members in the UK and Poland, these family members mainly offered
emotional or informational support during the initial period of their stay in the UK.
When they had been settled in the UK for several years, co-ethnic friends became an increasingly important source of companionship and support. Finally, under the unfavourable social and political climate, safety and discrimination, in addition to employment problems, emerged as the two main issues affecting the Polish community. These issues are not traditionally engaged with by trade unions. In order to fully address Polish workers’ concerns, other organizations and providers of expertise need to be involved in the organizing process.
Chapter 8: Coalition building: contesting the relevance and nature of immigrant community groups and exploring community organizing outcomes

8.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how three important mechanisms of community organizing – interest identification, mobilization structure (with a focus on institutional mobilization resources), and organizing outcomes - work in the case of community organizing among the Post-EU enlargement Polish community in South Somerset. The following questions are addressed.

Interest formation: What barriers do Polish workers in food-processing factories face to the formation of collective interest within the workplace?

Mobilization structure: 1) How important are Polish community organizations and churches in organizing Polish workers based on employment issues? 2) Are there any tension and conflict between the various organizations involved in community organizing? 3) What kind of coalition building strategies do trade unions adopt in order to organize Polish workers?

Collective actions: How do we assess the outcomes of community organizing from worker and union perspective?

The chapter starts with a discussion on the difficulties of formulating the collective interest among Polish workers in food-processing factories. It then explores whether Polish community organization and churches can fill the representation vacuum, where trade unions are absent, and collectively organize Polish workers. Following
this, it explores how trade unions adapt their organizing strategies to the job structures and social demands of immigrant workers. Finally it assesses community organizing outcomes from both worker and union perspectives.

8.2 Challenges to formulating collective interest in food-processing factories

As discussed in Chapter Seven, the rural labour market is dominated by low value-added industries such as food-processing, manufacturing, agriculture and hospitality, and is underrepresented in terms of dynamic knowledge-intensive economic sectors. Polish immigrant workers in the study were overwhelmingly concentrated in food-processing factories on greenfield sites. A combination of employers’ hostility towards unionization and worker non-engagement imposes limits on the organizing of workers in non-union worksites.

It was reported that Polish workers were generally paid low wages (National Minimum Wage) and suffered from the lack of health and safety precautions in food-processing factories.

I can let you have a bit feeling about how fast we have to work. It’s a production line. I am standing there. It’s a 3 step job. I take the hearts and livers out of the meat, and then I need to go several steps and put them on the hanger and come back, 3 steps. Roughly it takes something between 10 seconds and 15 seconds. It’s crazy. You need to cut it very carefully. You can easily hurt yourself sometimes. I am very good, very experienced at this job but I have accidents sometimes. Once I got slipped and fell down, but normally these accidents won’t be recorded. You know why, the only way they deal with these accidents is to call an ambulance if it’s something serious or ask you to go home if it’s minor, but people don’t want to do that because they are going to lose the payment for the rest of the day. Company will try to avoid responsibilities anyway. I have been working there for 3 years already since I came to the UK, but still I get 5.93 pounds per hour, no pay rise, never. (Interviewee 19)

In spite of the harsh working conditions, it would be inaccurate to over-emphasize the extent of discontent among Polish immigrant workers. Many Polish respondents
claimed that they were happy with the wages they received in the UK because they were much higher than salaries in Poland which were only enough to cover rent and food.

I don’t have anything to go back to Poland. I don’t have a house. I don’t have a job waiting for me. And like I said, things are becoming increasingly difficult. The price of everything is rising, but your wage stays the same. (Interviewee 23)

Many Polish immigrants with poor educational backgrounds or who were middle-aged thought that there were more employment opportunities for them in the UK.

I am 48 years old now. In Poland, it would be very difficult for me to find a job. I was in unemployment in Poland before I moved here. You know, old people just can’t find a job in Poland. (Interviewee 20)

Even some Polish immigrants who were well-educated and had university degrees or professional qualifications still considered their jobs in factories acceptable. They thought that this ‘deskilling’ choice was worthwhile because their quality of life had improved considerably, compared with that in Poland.

When I was driving to work today, I was so happy. It’s exactly one year since I came here. I got my own car. I got a good job and good friends. I’m going to pass college exams very soon. I’ve got everything in my life. I thought if I stayed in Poland, it’s not like that I can’t find a job. I can find some job. I still live with my parents in their flat because I can’t move. The money you earn is not enough if you want to rent a room. (Interviewee 28)

Polish immigrant workers generally showed low awareness of employment rights in the UK due to the absence of rigorous employment legislations in Poland.

In Poland, there is no working law or protection at all. People won’t feel too surprised about the working situation here. In Poland, you might work in an even worse situation but get much less salary. The salary is almost 5 times more than the salary in Poland. The salary in Poland is just enough to pay rent and food, not to mention bills. People would be starving. In this case, they might think the job
is not that bad because you see if they go back and work in Poland, what is waiting for them? (Polish community activist)

Moreover, the lack of ‘exit’ alternatives also reinforced Polish workers’ dependence on their employers. Because most of the Polish immigrants working in food-processing factories were from poor educational backgrounds and lacked proficient language skills, they had limited upward occupational mobility. It was commonly reported that job security was their primary concern because their employer could easily replace them with new Eastern European immigrant workers. However, working in a food-processing factory provided them with few opportunities to practice their English and improve their professional skills, which effectively confined them to the bottom of the labour market. A great many Polish workers were afraid of lodging complaints or joining collective actions because of their concerns about ‘employability’.

No matter what happens, No matter how horrible working situation is, they have to stay there because they don’t speak English. They are scared that they may not be able to find any other job if they lose job here. There are a great number of people who have been working there for 5 years doing basic things, exhausting, no pay rise. Some of them, they feel they need to learn English to improve work, life or whatever, but they don’t have the chance to learn because they are working for long time, say 10 hours per day and in the factory. They’ve got Polish people around them. It’s a vicious circle. (Interviewee 19)

They think if they make a complaint, they might lose the job. If they lose the job, they will lose the house. So it is a chain. So probably lots of people don’t even think about it. They are quiet. I’ve got the job. I’m ok. (Interviewee 17)

Furthermore, a significant proportion of Polish factory workers were temporary agency workers. They were not attached to a specific worksite over a period of time, but frequently moved on to different workplaces. These changes in workplaces and colleagues reduced the chances of creating labour solidarity among Polish workers in a particular workplace.
I don’t know my colleagues well. In the morning, the agency drove us to different workplaces. We work in one place for several days; then we change gain. (Interviewee 15)

The relative absence of serious discontent among Polish immigrant workers in the non-union context is also attributable to the hostility they encounter from employers. It was commonly reported that Polish workers got promoted to supervisory positions, not because they were skilled at the work, but because they were willing to push their fellow workers to work hard. This made them believe that if they worked hard and kept on the side of the management, their jobs would be safe and they would get promoted, which resulted in the breakdown of labour solidarity.

Interviewer: How do Polish people get promoted?

Interviewee: If you know English, practically you speak as good English as your supervisor, and they would like you to keep people in a debate so they wouldn’t need to deal with them. They like you to keep them frightened. It’s not official. But they would like you to keep Polish people apart. (Interviewee 23)

It was reported that, if workers lodged complaints and tried to bargain over working conditions, the management would get rid of them for some ‘non-existent’ reason. This functioned as a ‘demonstration effect’ which intimidated discontented workers into keeping quiet.

There used to be several people who disagreed and argued with the boss about this production output, they are gone now. The company just let them go by saying that they were not efficient. They can’t fulfil the tasks properly. You know, it’s just an excuse. Because they are making troubles and they are difficult to deal with, that’s why they disappeared. (Interviewee 19)

Therefore, due to potential victimization by employers and the fear that their colleagues might be reluctant to engage in resistive actions because they wanted career progression, it was reported that Polish factory workers generally believed that collective actions would not succeed and result in positive changes.
It’s just the way people think. If they leave the job, someone else will do the job. They feel there is no possibility of making significant people accused. They can do nothing with them. We talk with some people, say, ‘you can actually join trade union’, but they said ‘no, we won’t go’. (Polish community activist).

Finally, unions are weak in the food-processing industry and thus many Polish workers did not see evidence of the ‘union effect’ on pay rises and other aspects of the employment relationship within this industry. This wider context of failure contributes to the difficulty of constructing efficacy. Some Polish workers accepted the harsh working conditions because the plight of workers was more or less the same throughout the industry as a whole.

The similar situation is going on in every factory here. So they might think it makes no sense to fight because the whole situation is like this. (Interviewee 26)

Clearly, Polish workers’ low expectations regarding jobs, their belief that collective actions could not make a difference, and employers’ hostility towards unionization together impose constraints on union recruitment and organization of Polish workers in non-union food-processing workplaces. We are led to ask whether other organizations can fill the representation vacuum, where trade unions are absent, to help Polish workers combat exploitation at work. The following section will explore whether Polish community organizations and churches can offer a group setting, outside of the workplace, in which Polish workers can share grievances and develop collective worker identities, as well as how trade unions can draw on ‘community’ resources to reach Polish workers in order to organize them.

8.3 Midwest European Communities Association (MECA): the organic development of community of coping among Polish workers?

MECA was initially founded as a Polish self-help group by a British retired school teacher and community activist and a Polish professional who was working in South Somerset Racial Equality Council in 2006. The initial idea for establishing a Polish
self-help group was proposed by the British retired school teacher who also worked as a volunteer for Yeovil night shelter. He found that an increasing number of homeless Polish immigrant workers were turning to the night shelter for help in 2005, and they had various problems such as unemployment, language barriers, mental illness and homelessness. He started teaching them English at the night shelter and later thought that it would be useful to establish a Polish self-help group to help Polish workers cope with the language barrier, employment problems and other wider community issues collectively. The proposal was supported by a Polish professional who was experienced in dealing with Polish community issues in South Somerset. Together they set up the Somerset Polish Community Association that targeted Polish immigrant workers in South Somerset in 2006. There were no paid positions in this Polish association. English classes and advice sessions were all run by five volunteers in the initial stages. In 2008, the name of this Polish association was changed to the Midwest European Communities Association in order to attract more members from different European countries and increase their chances of receiving public funding.

In 2009, the Somerset local strategic partnership and South Somerset Together (Strategic Partnership) applied for money from the Migration Impact fund from the Home Office, which was derived from a levy on the visa application fee charged to economic migrants and students coming to the UK. The Partnership secured £314,094 for five projects funded over two years. One of these five projects was to appoint a chief officer of MECA. The position of Chief Officer was widely advertised in the community and 20 applications were received. According to the Chair of MECA, the retired British school teacher, the current Chief Officer was finally selected because he had previously worked for South Somerset Racial Equality Council and was also the co-founder of MECA. In 2011, the paid positions included one full-time Chief Officer, one full-time school link worker, one part-time school link worker and one
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part-time administrator. The key activities and programs managed by MECA included: community English classes with between 20 and 50 students every Monday evening in Shepton Mallet and every Tuesday evening in Yeovil; advice surgeries on employment issues, community safety, housing issues, school education and integration every Monday evening in Shepton Mallet, every Tuesday evening in Yeovil and occasionally in Chard, Taunton and Mendip; a school link worker who helped Polish parents who lacked adequate language skills and British schools to deal with Polish children’s educational issues; organizing community activities such as football matches and an international festival of culture; offering paid Polish translation services; and participating in regional migrant forums. In order to gain access to English classes and the advice surgery, Polish immigrant workers first had to join MECA by paying an annual subscription of £20 for individuals, £30 for couples, £35 for a family with one child and £40 for a family with two or more children. Between January 2010 and January 2011, a total of 315 immigrant workers, of which 268 were Polish, approached MECA for advice and to attend classes.

8.3.1 Leadership

Regarding the selection of the MECA Chief Officer, the Chair of MECA mentioned that a number of applicants had no idea about the organization’s activities and lacked the necessary skills for the position, although they showed great passion for the work. Clearly, they believed that leadership and organization was a very complex task that required a high level of expertise and skills. Therefore, the paid workers, the Chief Officer, the Polish school link worker and the secretary were all well-educated Poles with university degrees. The Chief Officer had a bachelor’s degree from a university both in Poland and the UK. The secretary (who left MECA in May 2011) was doing a part-time master’s degree in literature at a Polish university and had married a British man with a son. All of them spoke fluent English and had established wide social
connections with British society, which made it easier for them to bring their community issues into the public sphere. It can be seen that the criteria on which the organizational leader was selected were mainly based on competency and skills, despite the Chair’s awareness of the need to develop leaders within the Polish community.

There is no denying that professional leaders are more likely to be effective in their jobs and have a clearer vision of how to develop an organization and expand its social influence. This has been confirmed by the fact that MECA has attracted more members from various nationalities and cultures, with 15% of their clients in 2010 being non-Polish, and has become much more active and salient in the local and regional migrant forum. MECA’s Chief Officer has chaired the Mendip Migrant Worker Forum since its establishment in January 2011 and was widely invited to give his views on the Polish community at regional cultural events, and in labour speeches and local newspapers. However, the representation of the Polish community by elite Polish professionals might have the effect of silencing and misinterpreting the voices and demands of Polish working class people. The vast majority of Polish immigrants and other A8 immigrants in Yeovil and surrounding areas who approached MECA for advice and help were factory workers from poor backgrounds with little knowledge of English, while all the paid workers on the MECA staff were middle class professional advocacy workers who had no previous experience of working in manufacturing or food industries. The resultant huge social distance between them creates difficulties in forging mutual understanding and trust between organizers and Polish immigrants. This can be seen in the sarcastic comments and doubts about MECA expressed by some Polish immigrants.

They (Poles) are just making sarcasm about it. They said, ‘yeah, go to ** (the Chief Officer of MECA), he’s gonna help you; just make sure you pay 20 pounds and they start laughing.’ (Interviewee 23)
They used to organize a Polish party, but no good Polish music. There is no cheap Polish vodka. The drinks were very expensive. I have to say they don’t know how they can actually attract normal Polish people. (Interviewee 18)

To be honest, Polish people don't like this club. (Interviewee 28)

Moreover, as the Chief Officer had the power to decide whom they were going to take on for the other paid positions, such as the Polish school link worker and secretary, the MECA leadership was rather narrow and individualised. A few Polish volunteers and members left MECA because they felt that MECA was not an authentic representation of their concerns and interests and the individualistic leadership style did not allow scope for members to voice their opinions. As one Polish volunteer (Interviewee 18) commented:

Don’t go there. It’s horrible. The chair person was bossy, always asking volunteers to do this, do that. He was very nice to people who are helpful to him, important person in the government or whatever, but he doesn’t have a heart for what he is doing now. He was always late for the meeting for ridiculous reasons. He picked the person he likes.

His comment on MECA’s coercive leadership style was consistent with the feedback from a Portuguese community worker who had previously worked with MECA.

Honestly we’ve just got one Polish Association. We don’t have a very good relationship with it. We have good relationship with most people there, but not with the chief. Like I said at the beginning, within a community, someone wants to be a boss or something like that. I don’t like this kind of people. You know, I don’t care; people are white, yellow or blue. I work for people, not for someone else. You know someone working in the community, but actually for other reasons. (Portuguese community link worker from South Somerset district council)

When viewed through the lens of a public-private split, MECA organizers remained in the public sphere, but were separated from the private sphere of the community they were trying to deal with. While organizers made huge efforts to improve the public profile of their organization, they largely neglected the importance of fostering
a trustful and inclusive relationship within their own community. The division within MECA occurred when the Chief Officer proposed changing the association’s name to MECA in 2008. Some Polish volunteers opposed this suggestion because they thought they there were already too busy helping the Polish community and would not have enough time for people who spoke other European languages. Nevertheless, the name was finally changed with the aim of improving the association’s public profile, so as to attract public funding, and several Polish volunteers left afterwards.

There was no specific scheme for identifying and developing potential activists and organizers within the community. They tried to include more immigrant workers in the management committee, but candidates were rarely selected from their own Polish membership. Instead, elite immigrants who had experience and access to resources were the main targets. In the committee meeting of 30 March 2011, those present included the Chair of MECA, the Chief Officer of MECA, a Polish doctor, a retired British CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) advisor and a Lithuanian member. There were no Polish factory workers on the management committee. During the meeting, the Polish doctor resigned because she was too busy with her work at the hospital. The Chief Officer proposed inviting a Polish speaking community activist to join MECA’s management committee, based on the fact that he had done a great deal of voluntary work with Polish workers and, more importantly, he had a business background and thus could potentially help with the commercial reconstruction of MECA if they decided to make it into a social enterprise later on. Even among the members of the management committee, the Chief Officer dominated the decision-making process. The Chair and other committee members might offer advice but did not have a significant impact on decision-making in relation to MECA’s agenda. Clearly, MECA is characterized by an individualistic, top-down leadership style.
8.3.2 Funding sources

As MECA is a non-profit organization committed to providing quality support to immigrant workers, it is difficult for them to find stable sources of funding. They have to devote considerable attention to the task of creating and maintaining a stable flow of resources to support their work, some of which came from membership fees. However, it was reported by a few Polish interviewees that the membership fees had prevented them from joining MECA. Because immigrant workers were required to pay the fee first and only then could they access advice and support from MECA, some immigrant workers were not willing to take this risk in case MECA was unable to do anything substantial to resolve their concerns. A few claimed that they were disappointed with the service because there were always so many people on the waiting list for advice and their problems were often not resolved in time. A Polish woman (Interviewee 20) complained that she registered with the Lingo Link project, which offered one-to-one language tutoring between English people and immigrants, but MECA had never found local people who were able to teach her English. As a Polish immigrant activist who was involved in MECA activities commented:

It was not a proper way to attract and organize people. They know nothing about MECA. They don’t know whether MECA can help them, but they are required to pay the fee first. It doesn’t work for a lot of Poles. We need to help them first and later encourage them to join if they are happy with the support.

In addition, the membership fee also excluded the poorest of the poor. Those immigrant workers who were jobless or working in extremely low-paid jobs might not be able to afford the fee although they were the people who most needed help and support. In order to support the poorest people, who are excluded from the support offered by MECA, a Polish volunteer who used to work for MECA but disagreed with its focus on organizational developments and membership expansion, initiated an informal and voluntary support network which emphasized the exchange of
information, voluntary social support and the development of community awareness in Yeovil. The network was loosely structured and did not have a stable membership base. The Polish workers who spoke good English helped fellow workers to fill in forms or represented them in negotiations with their employers or other social bodies to try to resolve disputes. If a small group of Polish workers had problems and issues in common, they arranged informal meetings at their houses or in local cafes to exchange information and collectively seek solutions.

In 2009, MECA worked in partnership with South Somerset Mind, a community police officer and South Somerset Racial Equality Council as South Somerset Strategic Partnership to bid for money from the Migrant Impact Fund from the Home Office and successfully secured funding for two years. However, as the coalition government confirmed that the Migrant Impact Fund would end on 1 October 2011, MECA again faced a crisis over obtaining further funding and resources. One potential proposal they were considering was to transform MECA from a charity organization into a social enterprise. This would allow MECA to commercialize its services by charging members more money for advocacy work, English courses and other training to support their organizational development in the future.

The Chief Officer justified the feasibility and desirability of the proposal by arguing that commercializing their services would not only contribute to the longevity of the organization, but would also professionalize courses and training which would improve the quality of service and enhance the organization’s reputation within the immigrant community. Nevertheless, it was obvious that commercialization would not bring them closer to the working class immigrant community because the current membership fee was already unacceptable to some Polish immigrants. Further to this, it was hard to say whether MECA still represented the ‘real voice of community’ as they claimed if a large section of the immigrant population - low-paid workers - were
excluded. The Chair of MECA also raised some doubts about the commercialization of English classes and advice sessions because he thought these might take MECA too far away from its original mission to help disadvantaged immigrant workers.

Due to its limited funding, MECA largely relied on volunteers for teaching English and providing services. Although some volunteers did the job because of their social values, others had very pragmatic considerations. A Thai volunteer explained that she was working as a volunteer largely because she needed some work experience in accounting to enable her to apply for a better job elsewhere. At that time, it was very difficult for her, as a new graduate with an accounting diploma, to get a good job. Another Polish volunteer (Interviewee 27) claimed that she volunteered there because she wanted to gain some administrative experience in order to get an office job in the future. Clearly, these volunteers devoted considerable efforts to the development of the organization, but they attached much greater importance to their personal development than community empowerment.

State funding also imposed some constraints on their approaches to organizing. As the aim of the Migration Impact Fund was to help local communities to deal with pressures on public services brought about by immigration, MECA needed to prove their ability to provide services and promote integration in order to qualify for the funding. Therefore they have never been involved in any resistive collective actions against British employers. What they seek to achieve is mutual understanding between British employers and immigrant workers, and between immigrant communities and local people through peaceful and civilized coordinating and lobbying. In order to promote cultural exchanges between English people and Polish immigrants, MECA also set up Polish courses for local people although the number of people who registered for the courses remained low.
To sum up, MECA faced the twin difficulties of building an organization based on membership subscriptions and the necessity of seeking outside support beyond membership fees. Individual members who were mostly low-skilled immigrant workers could not afford to give much financial support while the broad migrant community they worked with was also poorly endowed with resources. Unless voluntary support could be relied on, basic organizational maintenance was an on-going problem. In order to seek resources from the government and local authorities, they needed to make ideological concessions.

8.3.3 Issue focus

Since its establishment, MECA has positioned itself as a non-profit and non-political organization committed to providing quality support to Polish migrants and other A8 migrant workers in South Somerset. It was set up as a professional service provider to offer information and facilitate social integration and inclusion. Its core values included ‘committing to the principle of equality and justice; offering support that is non-judgmental and respectful of individual lifestyles; offering support that does not discriminate against individuals or groups on the ground of race, religion, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, income, citizenship or political affiliation’. As can be seen from its aims and values, MECA was not an ideologically based organization, but open to all potential partners and members. MECA did not intend to differentiate between working class migrants and middle class migrants, between new migrant workers and established migrants, and between migrants of all different cultures and nationalities. As long as people were ‘immigrant’, as opposed to local, they could be potential members of MECA. The association tended to adopt a broad definition of ‘migrants’ and tried to incorporate all the issues related to migration, such as English classes, educational issues, job seeking, social benefits and cultural exchanges. By expanding their membership base and broadening the issues
with which they were concerned, MECA managed to attract migrants from various backgrounds and secure a source of funding from membership fees.

However, it failed to develop a ‘community’ consciousness among its members. In accordance with the institutional aim of MECA - providing advice - staff did not have enough awareness of nurturing ‘community’ identity though meetings and training. They concentrated on delivering technical knowledge rather than building relationships among their members. For instance, the main focus of English classes was on vocabulary and grammar. Very rarely did the tutor get students to talk about their concerns at work and in their lives generally during conversation practice sessions. Other training, including health and safety and first aid training was also primarily aimed to equip immigrants with the necessary knowledge and skills for employment and life, instead of psychologically empowering their members. In the interviews with MECA members, very few of them mentioned that they had close friends among their MECA classmates. During an informal talk with students after a MECA English class, a few Polish workers claimed that they did not have close relationships with other Poles in the class because they did not feel that they had much in common and thus did not share their personal happiness or grievances with fellow students.

In line with the organizational values of MECA, which meant individual migrants had differing needs and concerns and that efforts to collectivize community issues might infringe upon individuals’ lifestyle choices, MECA adopted an individualistic reactive approach to dealing with community issues. There were no collective meetings among their members to discuss community issues and decide on community agendas; instead, individuals approached the association to discuss their personal concerns. MECA utilized a range of methods, such as talking directly with employers or school teachers, referring cases to the Citizens Advice Bureau or trade unions, and
familiarizing migrants with legal procedures and paper work, to resolve the personal concerns of their members. Nonetheless, they never had any intention of collectively organizing Polish immigrant workers to fight for their rights. This was also one of the key reasons that several volunteers left MECA and planned to establish another Polish self-help group. They thought that MECA’s services were too expensive and their approach was too conservative, and thus a more appropriate approach would be to offer free advice to Polish immigrant workers and to organize workers if they had a common grievance.

There were some occasions where MECA framed the common issues faced by immigrant communities at migrant forums and meetings with government officials. The mostly commonly used framework for this was ‘ethnic discrimination’. This type of discursive framing was evident in the speech made by MECA’s Chief Officer at a Bridgwater cultural event to raise awareness of the police force’s ineffective response to investigating a physical attack on a Polish man by local people in July 2011. He also emphasized the importance for Mendip district council to recruit people of different nationalities to promote diverse understanding and skills in the Mendip Migrant Worker Forum in April 2011. There are several reasons why the issue was framed along ethnic lines. Firstly, the Chief Officer had previous experience of dealing with ethnic discrimination in South Somerset Racial Equality Council, and thus ‘ethnic discrimination’ was the terminology he was most familiar with. One organization insider raised some doubts about how the community issue was framed: ‘I would say, sometimes they have overreacted. It’s just misunderstanding, but not discrimination’. Secondly, community tension between migrants and local people became a paramount issue in local areas, as discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore framing issues in this way was also a response to the local social and political climate.
Clearly, the issue of ‘class’ was not highlighted in MECA’s services and activities. Exploitation at work had not been framed as a common and fundamental issue facing immigrant workers by MECA, despite the fact that work-related problems were the prime concerns for a large number of immigrant workers. Research carried out by MECA suggested that, for Polish immigrant workers, jobs and income was their top priority, followed by medical care and housing advice. MECA maintained good relationships with local responsible employers to encourage them to offer health and safety training for their immigrant employees. However, MECA’s Chief Officer mentioned that it was almost impossible for them to get access to the factories of less scrupulous employers and negotiate with them. They usually referred these cases to trade unions. Yet according to the GMB Yeovil organizer, MECA did not actively encourage their members to join trade unions because they were afraid of losing control over their own community.

To summarise, MECA appeared to be a bureaucratic and reserved advocacy organization. This was not only because of the pressures caused by government funding, but also the bureaucratic, legal and technical approach that professionals brought to the organization.

8.4 Polish Church: failed to serve as the basis of collective mobilization

One historical feature of the Polish diaspora in the UK has been the Polish Catholic Mission. It has effectively formed the ‘backbone’ of Polish community life for a long time. Throughout the period of communist occupation in Poland, the Polish Catholic Mission fulfilled the function of preserving Polish national identity and providing a forum where Polish religious activities could take place. Thus, this study examines the role of the Church in fostering community identity among post EU-enlargement economic Polish migrants.
8.4.1 Church: an ideological or social space?

Post-EU enlargement Polish immigrant workers generally showed little commitment to religious activities. Firstly, the attendance at a Polish Catholic service in Yeovil (5%) was much lower than the equivalent church attendance in Poland (60%) (Gill 2010: 1166). In Yeovil, a Polish Catholic mass was provided at the Holy Ghost church every Sunday from 5pm. Roughly 120 to 130 Polish people attended the Polish mass every Sunday, which, according to the Polish priest, represented only about 5% of Polish immigrants living in Yeovil. One Polish community advisor reported that, when he attended the church at Easter time, which was generally very important to Poles, only 20 to 30 Polish people were present.

The reasons why Post-EU enlargement Polish immigrants were not deeply involved in religious activities are numerous. One key reason was related to the makeup of Post-EU enlargement Polish immigrants. As the Polish priest in Yeovil explained:

> It’s the reflection of the kind of people who have left Poland. Poland itself is a very strong Catholic country, but generally speaking, the kind of people who left Poland are young, able-bodied. I would also say a certain proportion of people leave because they see no future for themselves in Poland. So they came to work here. Very often, they are the people who don’t have much contact with church in Poland.

Alongside cultural differences between these new economic Polish migrants and Post-War Polish migrants, new economic migrants’ demanding working hours also played an important part in preventing Polish workers attending Polish mass regularly. Complaints about lack of time frequently emerged from the interviews, as illustrated by the following comments from a female Polish worker (Interviewee 26):

> I’m Catholic, but I don’t go to church that often because I don’t have time. I work 6 days a week. I think there are different priorities here. It changes. We need to work. If you come here to support our family, work is your current priority.
A few Polish male factory workers reported that they would rather sit at home watching TV or go out with friends instead of going to church after work. This could explain why there were more women and children rather than working men present at Sunday mass. During the two Polish Masses in Yeovil in June and July 2011, almost two-thirds of Polish people there were women. Another essential feature of new Polish immigrants’ social life was the diversity of places where they met up and made connections. Apart from Polish shops and Polish cafes, British pubs, parks and cinemas were popular places for young Polish immigrants to relax and socialize with their friends. Church was no longer the focal point of contact for a large number of young Poles. Many interviewees showed an appreciation of British lifestyles, such as going for drinks and a chat in pubs or having picnics in parks and started adopting these lifestyles themselves. These places offered them opportunities to form networks of attachments without associating with the church.

Moreover, even those Polish immigrants who went to church regularly were much less committed to religious activities compared with Post-War Polish immigrants. As the Polish priest in Yeovil summarized:

My feeling is the post Second World War generations felt a clear obligation to support the church in spiritual and material ways. The new generation of Poles, they are not that happy to give money to support the church.

This echoed the comments on the Polish church made by the Chair of the Polish Association in Taunton:

Church has got a great chance here to mobilize people. Church does offer a place where people come together, but we have to be careful because there are issues with finance. We struggle here in Taunton. The Polish church has to offer finance to pay for all expenditure and priests. People don’t understand that. They don’t want to contribute. They feel the church should really contribute greater than…
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It was possible to distinguish a number of different rationales for attending the Polish mass. The first group of people could be regarded as ‘sentimental’ (it is what we have been used to since childhood). For the second group, church attendance was linked with ‘social acceptance’. People who did not go to church regularly might be regarded as abnormal and strange by fellow Polish people. This was particularly salient in a small place like Yeovil as people tended to know each other.

Personally they don’t feel comfortable not doing it because everyone is following it. It might be a bit socially accepted because this kind of social circle … I don’t know how many young people are living here, but when they are old, it’s a mark of social acceptance to go to the church because if you don’t go to the church, people will talk. Yeovil is not big. If you don’t go to the church, people will know it. Then people start gossiping. My brother brought his child for communion to church not long ago. Now he’s got this stupid idea in his mind. (Interviewee 18)

The final group attended church for reasons related to instrumental considerations. Some Polish workers associated with the church for the material gains that the church offered. They only went to the church when they needed material and financial support and, once they got it, they disappeared. One Polish female factory worker (Interviewee 23) mentioned that she stopped practicing her religion in the UK because she did not feel the church could help her to solve the problems she experienced both at work and in life generally in a practical sense. There were few references to national identities or the specific character of Polish Catholicism. Therefore there was a decline in both ‘quantity’ and ‘quality’ in terms of participation in religious activities among Post-EU enlargement Polish migrants.

Finally, some respondents mentioned that they started going to English mass rather than Polish mass in the UK because they preferred the English Liturgy. As one Polish woman (Interviewee 28) claimed:

I like English mass because they use books. When I was a kid, when I was watching movies, I saw people using church books. It’s amazing when I first saw
church books here in English mass. I said: ‘oh my god, they’ve got books here. It shows everything. What is going on?’ It’s really nice to me.

Those who had adequate language skills often had no particular preference for Polish or English mass. They were most likely to attend the one which best fitted in with their time schedule.

The Polish church was of considerable value in helping Post-Second World War Polish immigrants to recover from the trauma and losses they had suffered during their time in exile and in maintaining their national identity. However, the church’s value as a mainstay of ethnic culture was under threat as new economic Polish immigrants flowed into the UK. Churches failed to project a common identity within the new Polish immigrant community, which imposed constraints on the church’s ability to mobilize Polish people. Nevertheless, it still served as a social space for the wider Polish community. As a British volunteer advisor and solicitor for the Polish association in Taunton commented,

Even if you are not dedicated, if you feel isolated, you got a community. Even if that is a religious community, you can effectively begin to network. You’ll do it. You don’t have to be a further believer. You just give your contact to your fellow countryman.

Although the church has lost its primacy in the social life of many young Poles, as discussed above, it was still seen as an important place for socializing, where a considerable number of Polish people concentrated, especially those who had families. The Polish priest in Yeovil suggested that most Polish people who attended Polish masses were those with families. For any organization that aimed to reach Polish immigrant workers, the church was a good starting point. A good example was the Polish association, ‘Sami Sobie’, in Taunton Deane. Its founders started this organization from the social meetings that were held after the Polish mass at the end of 2007.
We’ve used a good opportunity at that time and we grasped it. There was a Polish mass in a Catholic church. Obviously, a lot of people went there and got together. So we used that opportunity to organize something after the mass. So we organized informal meetings with people. That’s how our ideas got developed. We found their problems, what they need. Because some people are really involved more, so we had a committee. (The Chair of ‘Sami Sobie’ in Taunton)

8.4.2 Polish church and trade union: a good match?

Responding to the economic and social needs of these new Polish immigrants, some Polish religious organizations have been at the forefront of service provision. For instance, Polski Bristol, an organization led by local priests and agencies, worked with the TUC to offer employment advice and ESOL classes in a Bristol Polish church between 2004 and 2005. The Polish priest in Yeovil frequently had to work as a translator for individual Polish workers and local service providers. Therefore some churches were open and tolerant in terms of working with secular organizations such as trade unions to solve their members’ problems. However, a few issues emerged from the coalition building between churches and trade unions related to organizing Polish workers.

Despite the fact that churches and trade unions might be able to find common grounds to organize Polish people based on employment issues, the cultural division between trade unions and churches still existed. As one GMB Polish regional education project worker commented:

I don’t like the particular way the Catholic Church works. I think the churches sometimes don’t want to be too political. There is a conflict of interests because unions are anti-religious. They are socialists. I think catholic churches in Poland are against so called socialism and communism. All these historical connotations began to have an impact on how things might be.

The idea of working with churches to organize immigrant workers seemed to be alien to a few local union organizers. They showed an interest in exploring this potential
connection, but did not have a clear plan of how to engage with faith-based organizations that were beyond their professional expertise and social values.

Mostly they are very insular. They have people who attend on the regular basis, but they don’t engage with things out of the church at all. I’m sure there is Polish mass in Yeovil. They may take a different view, but I don’t think church engages with other things generally. Yeah, it could be good to have some connections with them, but we haven’t tried this in this area. (GMB Yeovil organizer)

From the church’s perspective, the extent to which they were willing to engage with employment issues and labour organizing largely depended on church leaders and priests. Institutionally, they might not consider involvement in employment issues to be core activities of their churches. As the Polish priest in Yeovil pointed out:

Church isn’t afraid of getting involved with organizations which are not religious. I’ll give you an example. TUC, when they have annual conferences, probably a quite large number of delegates are Catholics. So the church also wants to and try to affect the good, something like trade unions. The members of the church are already doing that. You know, that’s down to the members of the church to do that. The church itself has connections, but it sticks to its primary purpose, but at the same time, individual members in the church are organizing themselves working and helping and involving in a lot of things.

The cultural division between trade unions and churches has imposed limitations on the depth and sustainability of their coalition building in supporting Polish workers. It was reported that the role of churches in supporting Polish workers to a large extent existed at the level of distributing information about trade unions and providing the venue for community-wide meetings in which trade unions, churches and local agencies were all involved. This study has found little evidence that churches played a pro-active and political role in organizing the Polish community.

We had some meetings organized by Polish community in Exeter. It’s called migrant network. The church would facilitate the venue. So this link would work rather this way. Maybe the priests are part of the network. They will talk with people and signpost those people who have workplace problems to union. It’s more like distributing leaflets, just purely commercially, advertising us to the
community, who we are, our contact details. This is not like mobilizing collectively in the workplace. I don’t think people in churches would treat it seriously, but it’s just my personal opinion. (GMB Polish regional education project worker)

Some union organizers suggested that churches have not been effective in promoting trade unionism among Polish workers in low-skilled sectors. Despite the time and effort expended in reaching out into the Polish community and helping them solve employment-related issues through the church, trade unions have not actually recruited many Polish members. For example, the cooperation between Polski Bristol and the TUC largely ended in 2006 because the new Polish migrants started to settle in the UK and their concerns slowly turned away from work and employment. According to the secretary of Polski Bristol, less than one-third of Polish workers who approached them for advice actually identified with a union and went on to join a union.

The research found that there were two barriers that might impede the role of churches in supporting and organizing new Polish immigrant workers. First, there has been a decline in religious commitment among young Polish immigrants since 2004 compared with Post-war Polish immigrants. Diverse places such as Polish shops, cafes, British pubs and parks have provided alternative social spaces for them to form networks and organize themselves outside of the church. Churches failed to project a collective cultural identity among new Polish immigrant workers. The church was no longer the focal point of contact for young Poles. Secondly, the cultural divisions between churches and secular trade unions could further inhibit coalition building in the long-term.

**8.5 Trade unions’ community organizing strategies**

**8.5.1 Union propensities among Polish immigrant workers**
For the Polish immigrant community, it was obvious that their attitude towards unions in the UK was greatly influenced by their knowledge and experience of trade unions in Poland. A few respondents had negative perceptions about trade unions because of their unpleasant union experiences in Poland.

Trade union in Poland, they are incapable of doing anything significant. There is no significant action from trade unions. The trade union tried to be a political party, but it didn’t work like that. You know people have less trust on trade union than before. Polish people don’t believe the power of trade union. (Interviewee 18)

Polish trade union didn’t have a good reputation. Polish people are reluctant to join trade union in this country. The way they see you, actually they don’t trust. We need to build that trust because otherwise they might think we are like trade unions in their home countries, probably not something they are happy to engage with. I don’t know how to change that perception. My reputation as a unionist is good. Everybody has my phone numbers. They can contact me at any time, call a meeting or ask for advice, but after that if they still don’t join GMB, I don’t know what we can do. (GMB Yeovil organizer)

Many interviewees had no knowledge of what trade unions are and what trade unions can do for them. Some were hostile to anything related to socialism and collectivism after their experience of the communist system collapsing in Poland. Some showed misunderstanding of trade unions in the UK because they associated them with the governmental bodies that protected the interests of workers in Poland. As the GMB Polish Southern regional education project worker commented:

It’s difficult. People don't realize what trade unions are because we’ve got very difficult relationships in the communist time. Everything related to socialism is a very … In spite of the fact that I might be a socialist, I won’t call myself socialist overtly. I would call myself a humanist or somebody who cares. It’s still very strong. The relationship is that once people find out we can represent them in workplaces and we can win employment tribunal cases for them individually, that’s fine. But persuading them what we do… I think there is still a great deal of a lack of understanding of what trade unions are… In Poland there is an institution, a governmental body… In Poland we’ve got workplace executives. If people have problems, you can report to this person. They’ve got the executive
role, so they can basically shut up the workplace if there are issues. I think people associate union with the similar roles as this executive role. Very often we need to explain what our limitations are and how we need to go through procedures and obey employment law. We can’t just talk and act. I think for migrants, it’s a slow education process.

In addition, Polish immigrants who were employed in low-paid factory jobs were scared of joining trade unions because they could not see themselves working anywhere else. Due to their limited language skills, fewer alternatives were available to them. They showed little interest in unions because they were afraid that their colleagues might report them to their employer and thus they might lose their job. This lack of confidence and feeling of powerlessness was a strong trait among the new Polish immigrant community.

People have pressure. If they join trade unions, they are afraid that someone will find it out somewhere sometime, then they will lose the job. I know it won’t happen, but it is just the way that Polish people think. (Interviewee 19)

It’s difficult. I think flexible workers are less confident. It’s something particular in that territory. (Chair of Yeovil Trade union council)

Finally, the majority of Polish workers took a very instrumental approach to deciding whether or not they should join trade unions and to what extent they should get involved in union activities. As a British community advisor for the Polish association in Taunton suggested, they usually only decided to join unions when they had employment problems which could not be solved without the professional support of a union.

Very often, they don’t see the point. When we asked them: ‘Can you join the union?’, we came across a lot of positive responses. But they didn’t seem to join the union when the time was good. When time is bad and they have problems, they start thinking of joining the union. (British Voluntary community advisor and solicitor as well for the Polish association in Taunton)

They only judge trade unions in terms of their effectiveness. Then they became union members, but some of them found that they can’t help them to deal with
problems effectively. Some of them were put off by trade unions. (Chair of the Polish association in Taunton)

Problems arose from this instrumentalist mentality. They mostly focused on the material benefits that trade unions could bring to individuals, but there was little commitment to solidarity building and collective organizing. As the GMB Yeovil organizer commented:

They treated us as solicitors or advisors, but not as workplace representatives.

The new Polish immigrant community in Yeovil and South Somerset generally showed a low level of understanding and trust in relation to trade unionism. There was a huge social gap that trade unions needed to fill, so as to incorporate Polish workers into the union movement. In order to reach Polish immigrant workers and develop their union awareness, a variety of community organizing strategies were adopted by trade unions in South Somerset.

8.5.2 Coalition strategies

8.5.2.1 Learning

Education and training have featured prominently among union strategies for recruiting and organizing immigrant workers who have poor language skills. Since 2004, GMB has developed links with community organizations and established itself as a facilitator of ESOL provision. They have also promoted learning and training among immigrant communities through community organizations or in workplaces.

‘The Community Learning Project’ was developed by the GMB local branch and Yeovil college in 2006 with the aim of offering IT courses at a time and place to suit students’ needs. Basic IT courses were offered at a cost of £15 for ten two-hour sessions. Although it was not specifically designed for immigrant workers, members of the Somerset Portuguese association in Chard were involved in the project and
gained a certificate on completion of the course as permanent proof of the course undertaken. ‘Community’ unions developed a relationship with the Smart Group, an employment agency operating in Dorset and Somerset. The Smart agency was the key stakeholder in the learning project and many of their temporary workers took the ESOL courses through the project in 2006. However, during the research on the Polish community in Yeovil in 2011, a number of respondents reported exploitation when employed by this agency, in the form of extremely long working hours and salary deductions. This contrasted with the ‘positive image’ established through their partnership with the community in offering immigrant workers English classes in 2006. The current staff of the Smart Agency had no idea of their previous learning projects and claimed that they were no longer involved in any language provision. Their inconsistent support for the immigrant community can be partially explained by career changes of key individuals within the agency.

Moreover, ESOL and professional learning also helped GMB to win union recognition in non-union workplaces. For instance, Nicholas & Harris in Salisbury, where 70% of employees were from Eastern Europe, was not union recognized when GMB started recruiting and organizing immigrant workers there in 2007. GMB was first approached by a group of 20 immigrant workers who lodged complaints against this employer. Meetings were then organized in local pubs, cafes and other places outside the workplace to discuss their concerns over employment problems. GMB persuaded the company to provide language and professional training to their employees by means of paid day release. This led to learning agreements and a recognition agreement signed in 2010.

For example, bakery, Nicholas & Harris. We were approached by a group of 20 people to ask for help. Once we got this number of people, we went to the workplace working on recruiting and organizing. If we have 5 people, a couple of people asking the same questions about the same employer, we’ll try to find out whether more people have the same issue. So this is how this works. We can call
a meeting. We don’t necessarily go to the workplace. We can call a meeting in the town, where they live. We can meet in the cafe, pub or rent a room somewhere, giving them briefings and telling them what we can do. Why it is important for them join collectively. (GMB Polish Regional education project worker)

The facilitation of education through community organizations was very different from that which took place in workplaces in terms of the consequences of identifying union activists and further organizing immigrant workers. While the former was helpful in extending education to immigrant workers who were unemployed or domestic workers and further facilitating their integration into the local community, it was not as effective as the latter in increasing union recruitment and strengthening union organizing. Because immigrant workers who approached community organizations were diverse in terms of their employment status, it was hard to organize them alongside those with common employment concerns.

In workplaces, we identified union activists because we would elect union reps, but not in community centres because they are random people from different workplaces. So they don’t have common issues. We do these classes every year. When we start the class, we do introduction on what trade unions are and what we can do for them, but we don't organize them as such in classes. (GMB Polish regional education project worker)

8.5.2.2 Advice surgery

In Yeovil, GMB held a monthly surgery at MECA, offering employment advice to their members for free. According to the GMB Yeovil organizer, in many cases where Polish workers were abused, GMB successfully secured them an employment tribunal and helped them to obtain compensation from their employer, even though these MECA members were not members of GMB. They treated these advice sessions as a good opportunity to reach out into the Polish migrant community and potentially recruit more immigrant members. As the GMB Polish project worker put it:
If any organization would like us to go and advise on employment rights, if we have resources and time, we would engage with them. The benefit is to recruit them and organize them in the workplace. If there are, for example, a couple of migrants come to talk about the same employer, then we could go and talk with them, inform them of the rights. This is kind of community centre which would be a link for us to reach out to migrants. (GMB Polish project worker)

However, these advice sessions proved to be less valuable than anticipated and difficult to sustain for several reasons. Firstly, the union’s priority was still workplace organizing and the level of their engagement with the migrant community, to a certain degree, depended on the efforts and commitment of local organizers and project workers. Some of these workers continually offered help and advice to the immigrant community on humanitarian grounds because they were personally sympathetic to immigrant workers. Nevertheless, their enthusiasm was sometimes compromised by their heavy workload, especially during times of recession. They already had to deal with a large number of existing union members in relation to redundancy and deteriorating working conditions. According to the British voluntary community advisor and solicitor at the Polish association in Taunton, the union’s attitude had changed dramatically since September 2008 because of the recession. Whereas previously he would readily give them a call to ask for their help with employment advice, since September 2008, the union has struggled to cope with the existing workload in terms of the work-related problems of existing members.

I’ve travelled long distance (MECA) to help Polish people who are not the members of GMB. Morrison, the supermarket, we have been very successfully dealt with one case where one guy was unfairly dismissed. We have been there several times. We do it not only because we want to use this opportunity to recruit new members but also because it’s a decent thing to do that. But we can’t spend all the time doing that. (GMB Yeovil organizer)

Moreover, Polish workers’ low awareness of trade unionism prompted doubts and scepticism within the union. Some union officials started to question the effectiveness of recruiting and organizing immigrant workers through advice sessions in
community organizations. According to the GMB organizer and project worker in Yeovil, the majority of Polish workers approached them for free advice. There was little evidence that their union identity was developed in these advice sessions. They did not show much interest in joining unions. It was reported that the drop-in surgery did not seem to encourage Polish workers to join trade unions, but instead they treated unions as cheap resources with which to solve their individual employment problems.

You’ve got individuals from different workplaces. They want instant advice. Once they got the instant advice, they didn’t see why they should pay membership fee to get another service. It would be not fair to continuously to offer free advice to Polish workers who are not GMB members because other people are paying for it. Even just the advice, it’s actually active representation. (GMB Polish project worker)

Finally, Polish immigrant workers’ concerns have been gradually changing since 2004. There were an increasing number of Polish workers who required advice on social benefits, school and community life, while the demand for employment advice was declining. In order to help these workers, unions needed to develop expertise beyond work and employment issues. However, both the GMB Polish project worker and the Yeovil organizer reported that unions often focused on some other issue which would bear fruit for them in the near future because it was time-consuming and expensive to develop expertise beyond employment issues.

That would be one step too far for me because I don’t have time to engage with that. We could have a method to provide these services, but we might need professionals to work on the full time basis. But anyway there are other organizations which can offer information on that. Are we going to expand on that? How much money we need to do that? I don’t know. Trade union itself in this area... I don’t see they will recruit such professionals. So I don’t see how we can engage with that. (GMB Yeovil organizer)

It was found that union advice sessions within community organizations mainly served the purpose of helping unions to distribute union information and informing
migrant workers of their rights, but there was little evidence to show that they could facilitate the nurturing of Polish immigrant workers’ union identity.

8.5.2.3 Separate organizing

In 2006, GMB set up a separate migrant branch in Southampton, through which immigrant workers, particularly Polish immigrant workers, could discuss their employment and community issues in their own language. The legitimacy of establishing a separate branch lay in the fact that language was a major stumbling block for immigrant workers to become integrated into the union movement and they had common wider concerns beyond the workplace because of their immigrant status. However, after 5 years, the branch has almost faded away with membership shrinking from 500 at its peak time to 200. The branch meetings are now virtually non-existent. A few problems arose from the separate organizing of the Polish community. First, establishing an immigrant branch across the South West region made it physically unfeasible for union officers to cope with the demands from Polish immigrant workers who were geographically dispersed. At the time of writing, GMB was attempting to transfer these Polish immigrant workers to their local branches while the previous secretary of the migrant branch would still help local union officers with translation.

It’s an ambitious plan when we set it up a few years ago. This branch embraces migrants from different parts of the region. Therefore they didn’t have common issues as our members would have in the workplace. So in fact, we were dealing with individual cases across the region. There is an official site. But if someone has problems in Kent, the same person needs to go there to represent him or her. So physically it’s not sustainable. There was a plan. This is what is happening now. We are supposed to be a transition branch. People will be assigned to this branch, but once they are established in union, they will move to local branches. It was very difficult to keep up with the demand because we are responsible for people in all parts of the region. (The previous secretary of GMB migrant branch)
Another significant obstacle in the process of the separate organizing of Polish immigrant workers and maintaining their activism was the diversification of their concerns. Very often, the branch meetings were organized around wider community issues such as social trips, community safety, education of Polish children and social benefits, while employment problems were diluted. The attendance rate at branch meetings was very low because people did not have common concerns. They were working in different workplaces and industries and therefore it was very difficult for them to share workplace grievances with each other and seek progressive changes. There was little evidence to indicate that the labour consciousness and union identity of these Polish immigrant workers were developed in the meetings.

In our migrant branch, this (maintaining migrant workers’ activism after the recruitment) is not very easy because like I said, they don’t have common issues. So branch meetings were virtually not existing. The only things we could discuss are issues based on community problems, maybe creating Sunday school for children, some sports activities, or maybe going to London for a day, but not actually work-related problems, unless a group of people from the same employer would like to come to branch meeting to discuss their workplace. (The previous secretary of GMB branch)

8.5.2.4 Regional forums and networks

At the regional level, Southwest Councils set up a Strategic Migration Partnership, which included a regional strategic board for migration to provide a strategic lead on issues related to refugees and migrant workers. The board oversaw the work of the South West Migrant Forum, a group of regional stakeholders and local authorities that dealt specifically with migrant workers. At the local level, a number of areas in the region developed local multi-agency forums to address the issues faced by migrant workers at the county or district level, such as the Mendip Migrant Worker Forum. All these forums were at different stages of development, but led the way in developing a partnership approach to migration.
South West Strategic Migration Partnership

The researcher was involved in the meetings of the South West Migrant Forum and the Mendip Migrant Worker Forum in 2011. The stakeholders in the South West Migrant Forum included Bristol City Council, the Citizens Advice Bureau, local authorities, Job Centre Plus, the South West Regional Development Agency, Universities South West, the Southwest TUC and the Home Office. No trade unions were involved in this forum. The issues discussed in the forum mainly focused on the recent change in the coalition government’s migration policy and funding cuts, and how this would affect immigrant workers living in the South West. Meanwhile, the Mendip Migrant Worker Forum involved local councils, immigrant voluntary groups, the police, housing associations, education providers and the Citizens Advice Bureau, but again trade unions took no part in the discussion. The issues discussed ranged from ESOL classes, community safety, housing problems, and domestic abuse of children to diversity and fairness of recruitment procedures in local councils. Some arguments were related to ethnic discrimination, such as how local councils could
work with migrant voluntary groups to attract more immigrant workers or ethnic minorities to apply for jobs in local councils. However, there was very little discussion of exploitation by employers. There was a tendency for the role of trade unions not to be properly recognized and employment problems became diluted in these multi-agency forums. As the Chair of the South West Migrant Forum, the Regional Secretary of the South West TUC, pointed out:

It's a pity that trade unions are not invited. Trade unions are so easily to be neglected. They might also be very busy with their own activities and don't have time to be here. What I feel is that they have talked a lot about housing, school and community safety, but the employment and exploitation problem was largely neglected during the discussion. Actually the origin of all problems comes from work and exploitation. Trade unions are supposed to be very helpful in supporting low-skilled migrant workers to help them solve the work problem collectively. In that case, they won't have a series of other problems.

The absence of trade unions from migrant forums can be partially explained by their existing workloads. According to the GMB Polish project worker,

We don’t have this time because they can’t work 24 hours. Very often, community meetings are usually set in late evenings to suit people who work. I think this might be an obstacle.

8.6 Assessing community organizing outcomes

8.6.1 Worker perspective

A certain proportion of Polish workers who attended MECA English classes and training reported that doing so has improved their language proficiency and professional skills and thus they have become more employable in the labour market. One young Polish female worked initially worked in food-processing factories after she arrived in the UK. However, after receiving training in English at MECA, she improved her English skills and got a job in a care home. Some Polish workers also resolved employment disputes with help from the GMB officers who organized
regular drop-in advice sessions at MECA. GMB officers successfully got one Polish worker, who was made redundant because of her health problems in a meat factory, reinstated. Another Polish lady, aged 55, who worked for a meat-processing factory, had fallen off a ladder when carrying a heavy bag of meat. She hurt her back badly and was unable to work any more. The company tried to get out of its responsibilities, but MECA advisors successfully helped her to obtain compensations. Therefore advice surgeries and the training in English organized by MECA and GMB have helped to improve conditions for Polish workers within the individual labour processes. Nevertheless, this kind of individualistic service delivery needs the sustainable investment of financial and human resources. There is a tendency for MECA to gradually commercialize its activities and classes due to the limitations imposed by resources, and thus provision of service delivery to disadvantaged Polish workers might shrink in the near future.

Despite the fact that MECA has largely improved its public profile and attracted an increasing number of invitations from local media and migration forums and networks to give its views on the Polish immigrant community, there was little evidence to indicate that the self-confidence and self-esteem of individual Polish members has been enhanced. It was commonly reported by MECA members that they still had no clear idea of the employment rights and social benefits that they should be entitled to in the UK and they were not confident about sharing their experiences in the public sphere or negotiating working conditions with employers after receiving training from MECA.

Interviewer: How do you think of the classes organized by MECA?

Interviewee: It helps.

Interviewer: Do you feel you are more confident to deal with the problems at work?
Interviewee: I don’t know. It’s difficult.\textsuperscript{14}

The Polish mental health advisor in Yeovil claimed that some of her clients who were MECA members came to her because they were not well respected by key organizers in the association and thus had low self-esteem.

\textasteriskcentered (the chief officer of MECA) has been in MECA for long time. She attended classes and cooked Polish food and cake for their Polish events. She made the cake for MECA in this event (Bridgwater Cultural event), but \textasteriskcentered didn’t even say thank you. It’s always like that. Nobody recognized her work. She was not comfortable. (South Somerset Mind mental advisor)

It seems that friendship and trust has not been successfully developed among Polish workers either. It was frequently reported by Polish members who regularly attended MECA English classes and professional training that they had no close connections with classmates after class. Some had developed close social ties to one or two MECA members who provided reliable sources of support in times of hardship. Clearly, MECA was not the main space where they socialized and made friends with fellow Polish workers and sought comfort. It was surprising to see that, while MECA has been expanding its organizational influence, the grassroots empowerment of Polish workers has not been achieved.

Interviewer: Have you made a lot of friends here (MECA)?

Interviewee: You know, we talk, but just say hello and nothing. They are not my real friends. (Interviewee 22)

Furthermore, there was a scarcity of evidence to show that Polish workers have developed a sense of collective activism to combat exploitation. Through MECA, Polish members have not been given the opportunity to collectively frame their concerns and seek solutions. There was a lack of an interactive group setting in which Polish workers could share work grievances and more general problems. Polish

\textsuperscript{14} An informal talk conducted with one Polish female work at a meat processing factory during MECA language certificate awarding and celebration event on 28 June 2011.
members generally showed a lack of interest in joining trade unions or other progressive organizations. The majority of MECA members claimed that MECA was the only organization that they had joined in the UK. Many of them had never heard of trade unions and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

8.6.2 Union perspective

It is very difficult to formulate specific criteria against which community organizing can be assessed because, as the above section discusses, unions had different ways of engaging with communities around a wide range of issues. I would suggest that a wider assessment framework rather than narrow definitions should be adopted to assess community organizing outcomes for trade unions. Consequently the measure of successful organizing outcomes for trade unions has been enlarged by a more nuanced range of criteria in addition to union recruitment and recognition.

These successful organizing outcomes are ranked as basic, intermediate or advanced. The basic successful outcomes are: the improvement of union visibility and the union profile, and the enhancement of trust in unions among immigrant workers. This means that the community organizing strategy can successfully help unions reach out to immigrant workers who are working in small workplaces or are unemployed, and establish contacts with immigrant associations. Therefore immigrant workers can gain access to trade unions and develop their trust in unions and identification with them through interaction with unions. The second outcome of community organizing is the ability of unions to recruit members through community engagement. Maintaining a significant level of membership can give trade unions a positive image and act as a form of the ‘demonstration effect’, which helps unions to encourage other immigrant workers to join the union or bring it to employers’ attention to gain union recognition. The most significant outcomes are: the ability of unions to extend their presence in the economy through the achievement of union recognition agreements and collective
bargaining; their ability to integrate immigrant workers into the mainstream union movement and maintain their activism and commitment; and their ability to enlarge their political agenda through engaging with wider working class issues beyond the workplace.

Table 8.1: Successful organizing outcomes for trade unions

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<th>Basic</th>
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<td>Union visibility</td>
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Very often, unions’ community organizing strategies cannot achieve significant changes within a short time period because there is a huge social distance between unions and immigrant workers due to the nature of their work and their biased perceptions about unions. As the Secretary of the South West TUC put it:

Well, it's very hard to measure the success in terms of union membership and influence. For trade unions, we can't be too short-sighted. In long term, it's good to build the trust with migrant communities.

In the study, unions confirmed that approaching immigrant organizations through learning, advice sessions or migrant forums, was the most efficient way for them to reach out into the immigrant community because union officers themselves could not speak Polish and unions were not recognized in many food-processing factories. However, trust in unions was not achieved among the wider Polish community. There was scant evidence that Polish immigrant workers’ union awareness and propensity to join unions can be greatly improved though advice sessions or learning. In relation to
GMB’s partnership with MECA in providing advice sessions, the GMB Yeovil organizer mentioned that although he had continually been in attendance there and they were happy with the free service, not many Polish people had an interest in getting to know what trade unions are and how they could join them.

One important reason was that unions had no control over courses and thus the content was likely to consist of pure language learning without any discussion of employment or learning about unions. Very often, the course content was designed by education providers or community organization leaders to facilitate immigrants’ employability, while union officers were only able to meet learners before, during or after class to explain the functions of trade unions and the areas of help that they could provide. GMB local organizers in Yeovil emphasized that to what extent union identity can be nurtured among Polish immigrant workers largely depends on community leaders. Conflicts often arose because some community leaders would see members’ joining unions as a loss of control over their community. It was often reported that community organizations might treat unions as resources for their own organizational development.

Very often, community organizations treat us as resources for their operations. But we can’t see they would actively encourage people to join the union. They don’t want to break up with us because they need our expertise. There are problems coming from that if people are not aware that union can help them in the long term, or if there is something really difficult in their career and they are not union member. Basically they are misled by their community leaders. People should be aware of the fact that they won’t be presented if they are not union member. I think this message was not put across clearly enough. (GMB Polish education project worker)

They do have various aims to promote for their own organizations. Some of them have got the funding. They need to show the achievement to maintain the funding. Certainly they have the objectives to meet in order to prove the value of their service. If they come to GMB, then they might not join MECA, because we provide all services that MECA can offer. He (the Chief Officer of MECA) is
holding it to his chest. He is very reluctant because he sees himself losing the control of his community. I don’t know whether it is protectionist because of their own purposes or what. (GMB Yeovil organizer)

This exacerbated the difficulty of recruiting union members from these immigrant community organizations. Recruitment and organizing were described as the planned and deliberate outcome of community learning initiatives and drop-in services for unions. Nevertheless, in the case of GMB’s partnership with MECA, according to the GMB Polish project worker, from an advice session for around 20 to 30 Polish workers, only 2 or 3 at the most would join GMB. Regarding the community’s cooperation with Polski Bristol, union recruitment was less productive than anticipated. The secretary of Polski Bristol claimed that less than one-third of Polish workers who approached them for classes and advice ultimately joined trade unions.

Last week we had 4 people join GMB from MECA, which is a big group I’ve seen for a while. In the past 7 years, our membership in this region has been growing. So it’s not true that people are not joining trade unions. They are. But we don’t see a great percentage of migrant worker membership. Like I said, those organizations are using us for their service. ** (GMB Polish project worker) told me that the perception of Polish people she met is that GMB provides services for nothing. So they don’t see the point to join GMB. (GMB Yeovil organizer)

People don’t feel obligated to join the union. As much as we try to encourage them to join, it’s not easy. With many people coming in, maybe we can recruit one or two people. (GMB Polish regional project worker)

Therefore the community organizing outcomes for trade unions in most instances proved to be very basic, which means that immigrant community engagement helped them successfully reach out to immigrant workers whom they could not get access to in workplaces. Nevertheless, the further recruitment and organizing of these people seemed to be difficult due to the organizational divisions between immigrant community organizations and trade unions. There were a few exceptions where unions had successfully recruited a significant number of immigrant workers.
Establishing a learning centre and migrant branch of a union proved to be effective in recruiting Polish immigrant workers. Because unions took control of learning and advice sessions, they were able to emphasize the importance of trade unionism and develop potential members’ union awareness. Up to 2008, 500 out of 600 to 700 immigrant workers who approached GMB learning centres joined GMB. At the GMB migrant branch’s peak, it had 500 members. However, it was very difficult to maintain their activism. As discussed in the above section, there were many divisions within the immigrant Polish community. It was hard for people to find shared concerns and organize themselves around those concerns, especially when they were working in geographically dispersed workplaces. Organizing immigrant workers separately might also potentially lead to division and fragmentation between local working class people and immigrant workers.

There were a small number of cases where unions had successfully recruited members, won union recognition and maintained their activism, such as the Nicholas & Harries case. The way that the union worked was to firstly approach immigrant community organizations to identify the potential for targeting a specific employer. If they found that there had been complaints about the same employer from several immigrant workers in the advice sessions, they would then call for a meeting outside of the workplace. The activists would be identified. Until they had enough members, unions would negotiate with the company regarding a recognition agreement. In this sense, the organizing approach was still workplace-based, although they first identified worker activists within immigrant community organizations and used community space, such as labour clubs, local cafes and pubs as venues for meetings.

The study produced little evidence that immigrant communities and unions were deeply integrated with each other to organize for changes on wider migrant issues, such as migration policy, social benefits and schooling. Unions still seemed to focus
on work problems and did not engage much with wider community issues in relation to immigrant workers in the South West. Immigrant community organizations operated largely as a point of contact through which unions could reach immigrant workers, but seldom functioned as a means of nurturing collective identity or useful mobilization resources for the union movement. Approaching immigrant workers via the community and then organizing them in workplaces was still the key community organizing strategy that trade unions adopted.

I think we need to stick with workplace organizing, but we have to have more expertise in order to organize migrant workers. We definitely need people who are employed by the union can have such expertise. We need more strength in respect of how to represent them in the workplace. I think that makes sense, rather than organizing them in the community. Organizing them in workplaces has some points of reference on union itself, in order to be able to organize these migrant workers. (GMB Polish speaking regional education project worker)

8.7 Conclusion: the limits of coalition building

The research shows that Polish workers’ low expectations, their belief that collective actions cannot make a difference and employers’ hostility towards unionization together impose constraints on union recruitment and organization of Polish workers in non-unionised food-processing workplaces. This suggests that the development of collective mobilizations among Polish factory workers may require their labour consciousness to be nurtured in wider community settings outside of the workplace. Advocates of the community organizing approach emphasize the importance for trade unions of working with immigrant community organizations to gain a good understanding of immigrants’ needs so unions can adapt their strategies to meet their expectations.

However, this study points to the possibility of tensions between immigrant community organizations and trade unions in competing for membership and social
influence. There is a risk that the institutional goals of immigrant community organizations, in terms of securing funding and expanding organizational influence, may take precedence over the substantive goals of support provision. In the study, MECA planned to commercialize its English classes to resolve its financial crisis, although the membership fee was already unacceptable to many low-paid Polish workers. Over the past six years, it is notable that MECA has changed in nature from a voluntary self-help group to a bureaucratic and professional service provider that has an increasingly visible profile in the public sphere while starting to lose its close connections with the grassroots immigrant communities that they are supposed to represent. Middle-class led and individualistic leadership appeared to play an important role in contributing to this change. Its incorporation into formal structures also brings an obligation to perform roles that are at odds with MECA’s original ethos and the purpose of grassroots immigrant community organizations. In addition, the Polish church also failed to project a collective cultural identity among Polish workers and lost its primacy in young Poles’ social life, although it remained an important socializing space for Polish workers with families.

Despite the fact that unions can effectively reach out to a proportion of immigrant workers via community organizations and churches, there seems to be little interest from both unions and community organizations in becoming engaged with issues beyond their areas of expertise. Unions still largely focus on workplace issues owing to a lack of expertise and energy in relation to wider community issues, especially during times of recession. Based on the fact that their investment in community organizing will be slow to pay dividends, unions often do not place community organizing at the top of their organizational agenda. MECA often framed the issues of the Polish community around ethnic discrimination in response to local political opportunities, resulting in misunderstanding from some local people and an
unbalanced media discourse. Seldom are they inclined to encourage members to join trade unions or other forms of collective mobilization, although they offer individual advice to people who are abused at work. Some church priests are progressive and open to the trade union movement, but generally churches as institutions are not involved in labour actions and political campaigns in the South West. All these factors pose challenges to the validity of the community organizing approach.

There is little evidence to support the idea that unions successfully recruit a significant number of immigrant workers though coordinating classes and advice sessions in community organizations or churches. There have been a small number of cases in which unions successfully recruited a large number of immigrant workers and won union recognition in non-union workplaces. They utilized community spaces, such as local cafes, pubs, the trade union council, labour clubs or town halls, to organize workers before they had enough strength to win union recognition in the workplace. In this sense, ‘community’ is a valuable and useful dimension which complements unions’ strategy of workplace organization. Nevertheless, the functions of ‘community’ remain primarily as offering a point of contact for both immigrant workers and unions, and facilitating venues for union activities. These community organizations themselves have failed to produce a collective worker identity or an ethnic identity within the Polish community. It was striking that although MECA was expanding its scale and organizational influence, community solidarity was not fostered and individual members remained lacking in confidence and self-esteem. The argument is that ‘community’ is a process of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ and thus nurturing a collective labour identity among immigrant workers of low socio-economic status would be essential for organizing and mobilizing them. Union control of the community ESOL learning agenda and advice sessions to encourage
grievance sharing and union identification serves as a significant step to developing collective agency among immigrant workers.
Chapter 9: Discussion

9.1 Introduction

The case studies presented in this research show that community organizing is a complex and dynamic social process and raise a number of issues that are important for solidarity formation and the outcomes of community organizing of immigrant workers. By comparing case one (Chapter 6) and case two (Chapter 7 and 8), this chapter attempts to draw out the significance of these interconnected themes. The chapter starts with a discussion on the difficulty of formulating collective worker interest among immigrant workers within the workplace. It then explores how the intersection between class and other social dynamics, such as gender, ethnicity, religion and migrant status, have facilitated or impeded the formation of labour solidarity in the mobilization process. Next, it analyzes how related institutions/networks mediated the social process of solidarity formation. Finally, it challenges the narrow view that evaluates community organizing outcomes against the objective of union membership and union recognition, and proposes that a wider social perspective should be adopted to incorporate both concrete gains and capacity building into the assessment of community organizing outcomes. A distinction is made between capacity building from the perspective of workers and organizations.

9.2 The barriers to the formation of collective interest within the workplace

Both case one and case two suggest that it is not easy to formulate the collective interest among immigrant workers who work in dispersed service sectors or low-skilled production factories. There are a number of common reasons which can explain why MDWs and Polish immigrant workers in the food-processing industry
were initially disinclined to join collective mobilizations. First of all, the dispersed nature of immigrant work does not allow the creation of a group setting in which they can share work grievances with fellow workers and collectively seek solutions within the workplace. Domestic work is an extreme example of an individualized and dispersed industry that has resulted from global economic restructuring. Working in private households and living in employers’ houses, MDWs were denied the opportunity to share employment problems with fellow workers. For Polish workers who undertook temporary work and frequently changed workplaces in the food-processing industry, it was very difficult for them to maintain regular contact with colleagues.

Second, in spite of harsh working conditions, it would be inaccurate to overemphasize levels of discontent among immigrant workers. The ‘dual frame of reference’, through which immigrant workers evaluate working conditions in the UK in relation to their working situations in their home countries, was frequently reported by MDWs and Polish workers. Although non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage and overwork was common in the domestic worker industry, some MDWs still thought that working conditions in the UK were acceptable because their salaries would have been even lower in their home countries and they would have had to work even harder. It was also frequently reported by Polish workers that their working and living conditions in South Somerset were much better than those in Poland. Even some Polish workers with a good educational background were satisfied with their factory jobs in spite of the obvious low-skilled nature of the work.

Furthermore, there was a prevailing feeling of powerlessness among immigrant workers. Although MDWs had individual coping strategies for dealing with work-induced stress, these strategies were often passive. For example, some mentioned that they cried and prayed to God when they had disputes with employers.
or struggled to put up with abusive treatment from employers. Their extreme social isolation meant that they could not easily get access to trade unions and local service delivery organizations. They generally believed that they were too weak to fight against their rich employers. Many Polish workers were also afraid of joining trade unions or other collective actions due to the threat of victimization from employers. It was reported that Polish workers who lodged complaints and tried to bargain over working conditions were made redundant by the management for ‘non-existent’ reasons. This functioned as a ‘demonstration effect’ which intimidated discontented workers. Trade unions were weak in these ‘immigrant industries’ and thus many immigrant workers did not see the ‘union effect’ on pay rises and other dimensions of the employment relationship in this sector. This wider context of failure contributes to the difficulty of constructing efficacy.

Finally, workplace-based unionism does not appeal to immigrant workers because their concerns are not only directly linked to their worker status as employees but also to addressing other facets of migrant experiences and social life, such as legal status, ethnic discrimination and community cohesion. These various issues cannot be seen as separate economic and social needs, but are linked with and affected by each other to reinforce immigrant workers’ disadvantaged positions in the labour market. Case one indicates that it is essential for MDWs to gain legal visa status and possess the right to change employers in the UK in order to combat exploitation at work; otherwise they would go underground and lose basic employment rights. Although Polish immigrant workers enjoy free access to the British labour market, case two suggests that ethnic discrimination is an important issue affecting Polish workers’ employment and social life in rural England. Once Polish workers began to settle in the UK, their concerns also extended to wider community issues such as housing, education and community cohesion. In a practical sense, it means that trade unions or social activists have to develop a wide view of immigrant workers’ interests and
prepare to become involved in wider social and political agendas beyond narrow workplace-based issues. Without a wider political vision, unions could lose their appeal to immigrant workers and the issues of immigrant workers’ exploitation cannot be fully addressed. This echoes Hyman’s (1999:94) emphasis on ‘imagined solidarity’, in conjunction with which he argues that unions have to organize workers based on more organic solidarities that acknowledge the diversity of worker interests and identities instead of mechanistic workplace-based solidarity.

Compared with Polish factory workers, MDWs face greater challenges in terms of organizing themselves to combat exploitative employment relationships due to the specific nature of domestic work. Workers were often positioned as labourers of love rather than ‘real workers’, with the accompanying danger of losing sight of their rights as workers. It was found that the relationships between MDWs and their employers are often characterized by maternalistic and servile ideologies. Many MDWs defined whether an employer was good less in terms of the wages and benefits they received and more in terms of the family relationship they experienced in their employers’ homes. In general, MDWs’ initial response to friendliness by an employer focused on the positive side: an indication of absorbed loyalty towards employers. Once this sense of loyalty was instilled in MDWs’ psychological framework, they were less likely to feel discontented with employers and resist their domination. The servant mentality is also a salient feature, which is partly generated by their experiences as domestic workers in their previous destination countries or home countries. Many MDWs got used to the way that they were treated as ‘servants’ instead of ‘workers’. In contrast to Polish factory workers, whose interactions with their employers were guided by labour contracts, the emotional demands of domestic work often blurred MDWs’ ‘worker’ status. As the maternalistic and servant mentality veil the layers of capitalist exploitation, a radical shift in understanding of their positions and relationships with their employers is needed.
9.3 Mobilization structure

9.3.1. The intersection of class, gender, ethnicity and religion

If collective worker interest is unlikely to be formulated among immigrant workers within the workplace, the literature on community unionism asks us to consider whether there may be other community settings from which collective worker interest can be formulated and labour solidarity may grow. Both cases show that solidarity among immigrant workers is multi-faceted and other bases of solidarity, such as gender, religion, ethnicity and migrant status, articulate with the formation of labour solidarity in the collective mobilizing process. However, the entanglement of different solidarities can be double-edged. Other bases of solidarity could either facilitate or impede the formation of labour solidarity among immigrant workers.

Table 9.1: The entanglement of different solidarities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Migrant status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour solidarity</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>Little relevance</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Little relevance</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>Impeding</td>
<td>Case two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case one indicates that gender, religion and migrant status played important roles in facilitating the formation of labour solidarity among MDWs in the post-industrial context. J4DW has achieved what it has by creating a gendered and cultural space for the organic development of communities of coping, and then using these communities as the basis for the development of collective and resistive organizing. These gendered ties have articulated with the formation of labour solidarity in three important ways Firstly, communities of coping based on gendered ties and sisterhood
outside of the workplace rather than traditional industrial entities offered a group context in which MDWs could share grievances and seek solutions collectively. Moreover, it was found that these female immigrant workers were more open to non-traditional and innovative organizing strategies. J4DW members showed much greater interest in learning about politicized art compared with Justice for Cleaners members who were mostly male immigrant workers. Furthermore, the gendered dynamics also affected the leadership style and organizational culture within J4DW. With its self-governing and flat structure, and culture of sharing and openness, J4DW created a model of authentic representation for MDWs. The entanglement of the identities of labour and gender opens new possibilities for the creation of alternative labour organizing, rejecting the traditions of authoritarianism and hierarchies plaguing classical trade unions.

Community priests also supported trade union organizing of MDWs in case one. One key founder of J4DW who initiated this MDW self-help group was a community priest. He was also a labour activist who emphasized the importance of trade unions in supporting and organizing MDWs so as to improve their working and living conditions in the UK. Working in the church, he was more likely to meet MDWs who were usually invisible and further encouraged them to join J4DW and trade unions.

It is often assumed that immigrant workers who are illegal or have temporary legal visa status are less likely to get involved in collective mobilizations because they might face the risk of being deported or losing their residence permit. Nevertheless, case one shows that MDWs who have temporary domestic worker visas can be amenable to labour organizing based on the fact that they are subject to high levels of physical, emotional and material exploitation due to their insecure and precarious visa status. The class basis of collective actions – a highly exploitative employment relationship - is particularly salient in domestic work. Although MDWs generally had
no obvious labour consciousness initially, their labour activism was greatly stimulated after conscious politicised learning. However, there was also a tendency that once MDWs got a permanent residence permit or citizenship, they became less active in union activities and labour organizing. This trend was reflected in the development of Wangling Wangling, a MDW self-help group in London. It originally worked with Kalyaan and Unite to campaign for visas for domestic worker, but was no longer active after many members attained citizenship and settled in the UK.

In case two, in contrast to the prevailing assumption that the immigrant community is a culturally bonded entity and thus ethnic solidarity is an important basis for labour organizing, it was found that Poles had a very negative image of their own ethnic community. Instead of defending their own community, they undermined it. In the Post-EU enlargement migrant context, being Polish was not seen as a culturally distinct and bounded ethnic identity that needed to be preserved, but instead an impediment to achieving employment and social mobility. Rather than maintaining a sense of pride in their own cultures and identities, many ‘new’ Poles were eager to distance themselves from their ethnic origin and step outside of ethnic networks. A culture of inter-group competition and exploitation of fellow workers prohibited the formation of mutual help and labour solidarity among immigrant Poles. Polish factory workers generally showed low levels of trust and were disparaging towards the local Polish association that was led by middle class Polish professionals. The local Polish association failed to nurture community awareness among Polish workers and seldom framed the issues of the Polish community along class lines. The division and intolerance within the Polish community imposed limits on how far ethnic community cohesion – rooted in common values, a shared sense of place and nationality, and ethnic networks of trust - can provide an important basis for the formation of labour solidarity. Moreover, as opposed to the domestic worker industry, which is dominated by immigrant workers, there is a mixture of East European immigrant workers and
local workers in food processing factories. It was widely reported by Polish workers that verbal abuse and discrimination occurred between immigrant workers from different East European countries and between immigrant workers and local workers in the workplace. Therefore ethnic divisions led to the breakdown of labour solidarity in the food processing industry.

Case two also indicates that religion might potentially create a wider workers’ network in which to nurture their labour solidarity. The church still served as an essential socializing space for the wider Polish community. For any organization which aimed to reach Polish immigrant workers, church was a good starting point. The founder of the Polish association ‘Sami Sobie’ in Taunton Deane created this organization from the social meetings that were held after the Polish mass at the end of 2007. Responding to new Polish immigrants’ economic and social needs, some Polish religious organizations have been in the front line of service provision. Polski Bristol, an organization led by local priests and agencies, worked with the TUC to offer employment advice and ESOL classes in a Polish church in Bristol between 2004 and 2005. Despite the fact that churches and trade unions might be able to find common grounds on which to organize Polish people based on employment issues, to what extent churches were willing to engage with employment issues and labour organizing largely depended on church leaders and priests. Institutionally, they did not consider involvement in labour organizing to be core activities of their churches. It was reported by local GMB officers that the role of churches in supporting Polish workers, to a large extent existed at the level of distributing information about trade unions and providing venues for community wide meetings in which trade unions, churches and local agencies were all involved. Churches did not tend to be pro-active in the labour organizing of the Polish community in South Somerset.
Unlike MDWs, Polish immigrant workers do not face problems connected with their legal status and have free access to the labour market. Their visa status allows Polish workers to bring their family members to the UK. Case two shows that many Post-EU enlargement Polish workers have started to settle in the UK and their major concerns have been gradually shifting away from employment issues towards wider agendas such as social benefits, housing and education. This has had the effect of diverting their attention away from work issues and labour organizing. They also had more ‘exit’ choices when they were unhappy with their working conditions. They had the legal right to change employers and industry sectors.

9.3.3.1 Modes of intersection

Immigrant workers’ collective mobilizations in this study indicate an organizing approach based around the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity, religion and migrant status. The above discussion points to a possibility that labour solidarity might grow out of other forms of solidarity. This section explores how other social factors intersect with class in facilitating the formation of labour solidarity. It is argued that this intersection broadens the agendas of immigrant collective mobilizations. Multiple oppressions derived from the intersection between class and other social factors mean that the main agendas which immigrant mobilization engages with extend beyond work-related issues. In addition, other forms of solidarity can potentially offer a bonded group setting in which labour solidarity may grow and provide leadership during the mobilization process.

Table 9.2: Different modes of intersection of class, gender, ethnicity and migrant dynamics
Chapter 9: Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour solidarity</th>
<th>A bonded group setting; leadership</th>
<th>Little relevance</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Multi-faceted agendas</th>
<th>Case one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-faceted agendas; A fragmented group setting</td>
<td>A group setting of small scale</td>
<td>Multi-faceted agendas</td>
<td>Case two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case one suggests that the issue of legal status has a decisive impact on the employment rights of MDWs. Without a secure visa status, MDWs depended on their employers to remain in the UK and were thus more likely to be exploited and abused. Therefore, in order to effectively organize MDWs, visa status is equally important as workplace issues. This could explain why J4DW, Kalayaan and Unite launched campaigns together to urge the British government to introduce a more favourable visa policy for MDWs.

Moreover, case one shows that J4DW, the informal MDW self-help group based on sisterhood, was one of the very few places beyond the reach of their employers where MDWs could seek comfort from each other and collectively discuss their common issues. It functioned as an important point of contact through which trade unions and labour activists could reach MDWs who were often invisible in the public sphere. More importantly, the gender-based social capital among MDWs, which was developed from the caring and sharing culture of J4DW, was transferred into labour solidarity at a later stage. However, this transformation was not a linear and automatic process. Political and radical learning served as a key step in transforming a community of coping based on sisterhood into a community of and for workers. The gendered ties created a safe and bonding group setting in which MDWs could freely share grievances about work and where conscious political learning took place. This kind of group setting is
often lacking within the workplace in the post-industrial context. It was also shown that gendered dynamics affected the leadership style and organizational culture within J4DW. With its self-governing and flat structure and sharing and open culture, J4DW created a model of authentic representation for MDWs. The female-dominated leadership opened up a new possibility for the creation of alternative labour organizing, rejecting the traditions of authoritarianism and hierarchies associated with classical trade unions.

Furthermore, the community priest proved to an important leader in the labour organizing of MDWs. He was one of the key founders of J4DW and actively introduced MDWs to trade unions. His commitment to labour organizing can be partly explained by his strong belief that employment problems are the most crucial issue faced by MDWs and thus MDWs can be successfully mobilized only when their employment issues are addressed.

Case two indicates that Polish immigrant workers had multiple economic and social needs including employment, education, housing, crime and health care issues. However, these issues were not seen as inter-related and affected by each other during the community organizing process. GMB framed the issues of the Polish community more along class lines while MECA mainly addressed the issues of ethnic discrimination and community safety. South Somerset Mind aimed to help Polish workers who were mentally ill to cope with psychological stress. There was no intention for these organizations to work together so as to generate a complete picture of the difficulties faced by Polish workers and seek solutions to these problems collectively. Instead, there was competition among these organizations as they tried to gain Polish membership for their own organizational developments.

In case two, MECA, the ethnic-based Polish association, also offered a point of contact for trade unionists to reach immigrant workers who were often unreachable in
non-union food processing factories. Nevertheless, MECA failed to offer a bonded ethnic group setting in which community awareness and labour solidarity could develop. This shows that ethnic cohesion does not exist within MECA or in the wider Polish community. Due to MECA’s focus on organizational developments instead of grassroots empowerment, Polish members did not develop a sense of belonging and mutual trust through their interactions with co-ethnics in MECA. The fragmentation and inter-group competition further led to the breakdown of labour solidarity in the workplace. Although trade unions reached Polish workers through MECA, they were not able to promote critical learning agendas there because the two organizations framed the concerns of Polish workers in different ways, along class and ethnic lines respectively.

Furthermore, case two shows that the Polish church was another important socializing place for Poles. Therefore it offers a starting point for activists to reach a sector of the Polish population and understand their collective needs. The Polish association ‘Sami Sobie’ in Taunton Deane, was a good example of how an ethnic organization emerged from informal meetings in the church. However, the research also shows that the percentage of ‘new’ Polish immigrant workers who regularly went to church was very small. They often had to work at weekends or stopped practising religious activities after they moved to the UK. This imposes constraints on the scope of the Polish community which labour activists can reach through their connections with churches.

To sum up, class intersects with gender, ethnicity, religion and migrant status in a number of ways during immigrant mobilizations. This intersection addresses multiple issues faced by immigrant workers and offers leadership and a group setting in which labour solidarity may grow. The research indicates that the nature of the articulation between labour solidarity and other forms of solidarity is an open issue in which mediating institutions play a critical role.
9.3.2 Mediating institutions/networks

9.3.2.1 Different levels of mediating institutions/networks

As Chapter Four points out, the existing literature on community unionism often focuses on the role of formal institutions in organizing immigrant workers, with a particular emphasis on how trade unions and community organizations can effectively represent immigrant workers. However, the research found that informal social networks are also important sources of help and support for immigrant workers. Four different levels of support networks/institutions have been identified: personal networks; informal and voluntary support networks; community-based immigrant organizations; and other civil society organizations.

Table 9.3: Different levels of networks in community organizing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case one</th>
<th>Case two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal networks</td>
<td>A very limited number of personal friends</td>
<td>A small circle of co-ethnic friends based on kinship,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>work or neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal and voluntary</td>
<td>J4DW</td>
<td>Voluntary support network initiated by a Polish activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support networks</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Sami Sobie’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based</td>
<td>Unite the Union</td>
<td>MECA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant organizations</td>
<td>Kalayaan</td>
<td>‘Sami Sobie’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other civil society</td>
<td></td>
<td>GMB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was found that immigrant workers often have a small circle of trusted and reliable friends whom they turn to for help and support in times of hardship. Due to the specific nature of domestic work, MDWs had little opportunity to enter public spaces and make friends. It was reported that they were more likely to become acquainted with people in their neighbourhood or through church activities. Some MDWs claimed that they got to know about J4DW and trade unions through their neighbours.
or community priests who showed sympathy for their harsh working conditions. In case two, unlike Polish professionals who were more likely to utilize formal organizational resources to resolve employment and general, everyday problems, low-skilled Polish factory workers largely relied on personal networks, such as co-workers and neighbours, as the sources of informational support when they had employment-related problems. Personal networks were an essential source of information about the receiving society, particularly in regard to employment opportunities, residence permits, housing, education and health care. This not only benefited individual immigrant workers, but also groups and communities. Interpersonal aid helped MDWs and Polish immigrant workers to develop self-confidence within the host society and familiarize themselves with local support networks. However, these alone are not sufficient to solve the structural disadvantages faced by immigrant workers.

The next level of support network is the informal and voluntary support network which does not have formal organizational status. In case one, it is difficult to precisely define the nature of J4DW. Although J4DW has formal organizational status, the mutual support networks among MDWs have expanded beyond the space created by J4DW. The vast majority of J4DW members claimed that they started socializing with friends from J4DW in their houses and in restaurants and parks after work and, through this process, they established their own social circle for emergent needs and emotional comfort. In case two, a voluntary support network arose as a result of the fact that some social needs of Polish workers could not be met by MECA, and MECA’s services were not available to less well-off Poles who could not afford its membership fees. As MECA became increasingly bureaucratic and started to turn its attention away from community support and empowerment towards organizational developments, several volunteers left the organization. One Polish volunteer initiated an informal and voluntary support network which emphasized the
exchange of information, voluntary social support and the development of community awareness. The network was loosely structured without a stable membership base. Once a small group of Polish workers had problems and issues in common, they arranged informal meetings at their houses or in local cafes to exchange information and collectively seek solutions. Polish workers who spoke good English also helped their fellow workers to fill in forms or represented them in negotiations with their employers or other social bodies when they had disputes. This kind of informal and voluntary network increased the scope of the network and frequency of contact among Polish workers, by creating new links with peers who had similar needs and problems. They were an important source of social ties that compensated for the deficiencies of both Polish personal networks and formal institutions in the provision of diverse kinds of resources.

Although informal and voluntary support networks within immigrant communities can begin to address their collective needs and problems, it is difficult for them to bring those issues into the public arena due to their lack of organizational status and social resources. Community-based immigrant organizations are the third level of social support. In both cases, J4DW and MECA emerged from informal and voluntary networks within immigrant communities. J4DW was created out of an informal self-help group among MDWs which offered emotional support and mutual emergency aid for those who were escaping from employers. MECA emerged from a Polish voluntary self-help group with the aim of helping Polish workers to improve their language skills and resolve work-related problems. Their formal organizational status granted J4DW and MECA more opportunities to attract public funding and improve their public profile. The creation of formal immigrant organizations can give a voice to the collective needs of immigrant workers in the public sphere. However, unlike MECA, J4DW rejected public funding and continued to emphasize voluntary social support and the development of community awareness. The final level of
support networks is other civil society organizations which do not emerge from immigrant communities but show an interest in supporting and organizing immigrant workers, such as Unite and Kalayaan in case one, and GMB and Polish churches in case two. Compared with informal support networks, both community-based immigrant organizations and civil society organizations have more financial and social resources and thus might play a significant role in organizing immigrant workers.

By differentiating four levels of support networks within immigrant communities, the research tries to redress the balance in community unionism research, which tends to overemphasize the role of formal institutions and take the unity of the immigrant community for granted. Case two suggests that fragmented and dispersed personal networks were still the primary source of support for many Polish workers and this imposed limits on the extent of the immigrant community that labour activists could reach through connections with immigrant community organizations. Informal support networks and community-based community organizations can potentially enhance community empowerment and create conditions for collective action. Trade unions and NGOs can also offer organizational and social resources for collective mobilization. To what extent they can effectively mobilize immigrant workers and what factors might have an impact on their capacity to do so will be discussed in the following section.

9.3.2.2 Trade unions

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is an urgent need for trade unions to represent immigrant workers in the context of the decline of the traditional manufacturing membership base and the increasingly diverse workforce in the UK, but it is also difficult for them. Hyman (2001) argues that the role and identity of unions is important to the construction of solidarity that responds to the changing nature of the
workforce. By comparing case one and case two, the following section discusses how the role and identity of unions vary in different community organizing initiatives and their impact on coalition building.

Table 9.4: Community organizing strategies of trade unions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unite the Union (case one)</th>
<th>GMB (case two)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues focus</td>
<td>Employment relations, visa status and social needs of MDWs</td>
<td>Employment relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing approach</td>
<td>Wider community organizing; campaigning for public policy</td>
<td>Workplace-based organizing; union recognition and collective bargaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning initiative</td>
<td>Mobilization-driven (learning as key step prior to mobilization)</td>
<td>Service-driven (learning as a key union service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections with</td>
<td>J4DW affiliated to Unite but retaining independence and autonomy</td>
<td>Polish branch within GMB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In case one, Unite the Union took an organic and broad view of MDWs’ economic and social needs. Its main organizers were fully aware that, in order to organize MDWs, they not only had to focus on workplace issues, but also needed to address the issues of visa status and the emotional needs of MDWs. Other types of exploitation reinforced MDWs’ disadvantaged positions in the labour market. Therefore Unite actively worked with Kalayaan and J4DW to campaign for legal status for MDWs. It also became involved in parliamentary lobbying for family reunion rights of MDWs. Some union officers made personal commitments to supporting MDWs who escaped from their employers by offering them food, clothes and other emergency aid.
Recognizing the multiple issues that MDWs face, Unite adopted a wider community organizing approach by aligning with community groups and NGOs to organize MDWs based on broad social justice instead of narrow work-related issues. It utilised the media to improve the public profile of MDWs and drew on community resources to reach MDWs who were often invisible in the public sphere and thus further organized them. The main organizers realised that the traditional organizing approach that focuses on union recognition and collective bargaining is not effective for MDWs; instead, a community organizing approach to campaign for a change of public policy is more feasible. Unite managed to build an issue-based coalition with Kalayaan in spite of the fact that they emphasized two different ways of framing MDWs, as workers and victims of human trafficking respectively.

The learning initiative was one of the most important initiatives adopted by Unite to organize MDWs. The culture underpinning learning initiatives was mobilization-driven. Learning has been used to reinforce the potential role of unions in political education, not only encouraging active citizenship, but also union activism. The political learning was organized in a separate and safe community space beyond the reach of employers where MDWs could freely exchange their views on employment problems and other common social issues. J4DW educators were either full-time MDWs who had adequate language skills or volunteer educators and activists with a trade union background. Therefore employment issues and the development of a work identity among MDWs were privileged in the learning. Educators moved beyond their roles as instructors and trainers and acted more as facilitators who encouraged members to share and reflect on their own experiences of work and engage with open-ended and thought-provoking discussions. The content of the learning was framed from the worker perspective rather than the employability perspective to help MDWs understand their worker status and employment rights. This kind of interactive learning provided MDWs with not only practical knowledge
on visa policy and employment rights in the UK, but also the conceptual tools they needed to act in their own interests. Therefore learning was seen as an essential step in labour organizing, through which collective worker identity has been developed and reinforced.

Finally, in terms of connections with immigrant groups, Unite allowed J4DW to maintain independence and autonomy in spite of its affiliation to a branch of Unite. Unite provided a venue and some tutors for J4DW classes and occasionally one-off funding for their campaigns, but did not dominate their decision-making. J4DW also has its own management committee and organizational structure. Unite only acted as a supporter rather than a leader in their collective mobilizations. This independence gave MDWs more space in which to address their specific issues which might be different from those of workers in general. However, J4DW was also one of the most active worker groups within Unite, which continually showed great support and solidarity for general worker campaigns and demonstrations. Unite placed much emphasis on developing worker identity and labour activism among MDWs instead of merely union development based on membership.

On the contrary, case two shows that GMB in Somerset continued to frame the concerns of the Polish community around employment relations in the workplace. Seldom were they engaged with the wider issues of the Polish community such as community safety, ethnic discrimination, education and housing. This can be partly explained by the fact the union role was largely neglected by South West regional migrant forums. Trade unions were not invited to give views on Polish immigrant workers during the county-wide discussions about migrants. More importantly, GMB local officers took an instrumental view of union development by arguing that community engagement required substantial investment in terms of financial and human resources and would take considerable time to bear fruit.
By focusing on employment relations in the workplace, GMB’s main organizing approach was to identify the potential employers which they could target for union recognition. They then utilized those community networks as meeting venues from which to organize informal discussions on employment issues until they could get enough Polish members to win union recognition in specific workplaces. In this sense, community connections were treated as an effective means of facilitating workplace organizing. GMB’s focus on workplace organizing reduced their chances of getting involved in a local migrant partnership to address the wider social issues affecting the Polish community.

In case two, GMB’s partnership approach to learning emphasized a partnership with employers and personal employability. Learning activities were organized in specific workplaces so as to help immigrant workers improve their language skills and employability and establish good relationships with non-union employers which might subsequently lead to union recognition. Although GMB also unitized community space to offer classes and advice to Polish workers, they failed to promote a critical labour agenda through community learning. This was partly linked to the resistance from some community organizations, which will be discussed in the next section. More importantly, local union officers saw community learning mainly as a potential way to recruit union members instead of a social process designed to develop labour solidarity in wider social movements. This explains why GMB planned to stop offering learning and advisory services in some community groups due to the lack of interest in union membership among Polish workers.

GMB also managed to create a Polish branch in Southampton based on the belief that ethnic cohesion might facilitate the union organizing of Polish workers. This strategy helped GMB to recruit a number of ‘new’ Polish immigrant workers, but failed to develop collective worker identity among Polish members because they worked in different workplaces and industries and came from different social backgrounds.
By focusing on workplace issues and workplace-based organizing, GMB successfully recruited and organized Polish workers in union-friendly workplaces through workplace learning initiatives. They also managed to utilize community space to organize discussions among Polish workers, develop potential members and win union recognition in the workplace. However, these cases were still rare in immigrant organizing because most Polish workers were employed in anti-union workplaces. Without taking a broad view of the social needs of Polish workers and actively engaging with immigrant community groups, GMB failed to extend its representation to the wider Polish community. On the contrary, Unite’s focus on the development of organic solidarity among MDWs and campaigns for a change of public policy not only potentially improved their working conditions at an industry-wide and national level, but also developed labour activism and union identity when their validity was compromised in the context of globalization and post-industrialisation. It is important to point out that the above discussion does not intend to generalize the differences in Unite’s and GMB’s immigrant organizing strategies at a national level, but to compare their organizing strategies for MDWs in London and Polish Workers in South Somerset.

9.3.2.3 Different types of community organizations

Chapter Four points out that the existing community unionism literature often glamorizes community organizations by taking their grassroots connections and relational culture for granted. The research found that community organizations are not homogeneous, but differ in terms of organizational structure, mobilization mechanisms and funding sources. The nature of community organizations needs further discussion as this has an impact on the mobilization process and its outcomes.

Table 9.5: The nature of immigrant community organizations
In case one, the leader of J4DW, rather than being an outsider, came from the MDW community, and was a full-time domestic worker herself. Rather than giving orders and directing events, she believed that all MDWs have the potential to be leaders and organizers. Therefore there were attempts to develop a group-centred leadership that ‘embraces the participation of the many as opposed to creating competition over the evaluation of a few’ (ECCO 1989: 16). Members were encouraged to attend organizing courses arranged by unions and give public speeches. Various J4DW members have represented MDWs in public forums and parliamentary meetings to report on their employment situation. The major decisions affecting MDWs were collectively discussed at their monthly self-regulated meetings which all J4DW members were encouraged to attend. J4DW had a conception of leadership as supporting and educating. The Chair was more like a ‘bridge leader’ who developed social networks and activities that created a sense of community consciousness, connecting people with similar issues and highlighting awareness of shared concerns (Robnett 1996; Sacks 1988). One might argue that if this Chair steps down, the nature of this organization could change. However, there have been conscious efforts to develop collective leadership within J4DW. Several MDWs have been transformed from powerless immigrant women to worker activists and potential organizers.
In terms of mobilization mechanisms, J4DW intentionally cultivated social commitment, community consciousness and a relational culture within the MDW community via one-to-one discussions and social activities. The culture of mutual support can be clearly seen within J4DW. Food, clothing and short-term accommodation were frequently offered to MDWs who escaped from their abusive employers by their fellow workers. They collectively donated money to MDWs in times of hardship. Many MDWs claimed that they had never received such care, support and compassion from any other group in the UK. Their mobilizing process began by creating a safe and nurturing space or community of coping where MDWs could identify and discuss the issues affecting their work and life in the receiving society. They used small but interactive groups to develop trust and create informality and respect. This kind of group setting affirmed each member’s participation, provided the time and space for individuals to reflect and share their concerns, and made it possible for members to listen to each other and identify with common problems. Members were always encouraged to share their personal experiences by talking, painting or acting in English classes, art workshops and monthly meetings. Personal sharing then further elicited collective discussions on common issues. They believed that the power of community organizing rested upon the development of solidarity among members which can be used as the basis of collective mobilization at a later stage. Therefore, there was less focus on immediate public actions in the initial organizing phase. Instead, much effort was made to develop a more positive self-image and self-confidence among MDWs, which led to collective activism. Although J4DW offered free employment and visa advice to individual domestic workers, they treated these services as an effective means of improving MDWs consciousness of their rights which could then motivate them to join collective mobilization. Thus, the mobilization agenda has clearly taken precedence over providing services.
Finally, J4DW leaders and members were fully aware of the danger that accepting public funding might produce professionally-run organizations that do not engage members to participate actively in group activities and have few low-status members. Unlike other charity organizations and NGOs, they rejected regular public funding because they did not want to act and organize within the existing institutional framework. They wanted to have the space to challenge the government or any other institutions to defend their rights as domestic workers. Although they received one-off funding from Unite the Union, Kalayaan and other social bodies to attend public forums and organize campaigns, the role of these organizations was marginal in J4DW’s organizing. They were not involved in the decision-making process of J4DW agendas, which was collectively discussed by MDWs. Despite the fact that Unite the Union offered venues for their meetings and classes, it was not compulsory for MDWs to join Unite. There were no paid positions in J4DW. The Chair and secretaries were all full-time domestic workers. The running of other activities relied on a membership fee, which was £1 per person per month, and member donations. They insisted that rejecting outside funding would be the best way to maintain the self-governing and voluntary nature of their organization. Only by doing this, could a self-centred style of leadership be avoided and close connections with MDWs at grassroots level be maintained.

In case two, politically MECA represents the interests and voice of Polish immigrant workers at ground level, but organizationally it operates for the most part as a modern bureaucracy. The Chair believed that organizing was a very complex task which required professional training and experience. Therefore leaders and professionals were recruited on the basis of their ‘management expertise’ instead of their personal commitment to community empowerment and political activism. The Chief Officer of MECA was hired due to the fact that he had gained valuable experience in dealing with issues of ethnic discrimination and established wide connections with local
governments and other social bodies. Although he is Polish, his social background differs significantly from that of the Polish workers whom the organization targets. While the vast majority of their members were working in low-skilled jobs in food processing factories and agriculture, he had no experience of working in factories and started his career as a professional at South Somerset Racial Equality Council after attaining a university degree in both Poland and the UK.

As a community organization, MECA faced financial difficulties in maintaining organizational sustainability. The membership fee was often not enough to support the costs of the whole organization. The Chief Officer of MECA contended that attaining public funding was a realistic option taking into account the cost of paid staff, running an office and providing services, and maintaining the public image of a community organization. By accepting money from the Home Office’s Migrant Impact Fund, MECA shifted its attention from the goal of substantial support to that of organizational performance: how many immigrant worker cases do they deal with per year? How diverse are their clients? How wide an area does the organization cover geographically? The overwhelming emphasis on membership development raises questions over whether MECA is an authentic representation of Polish workers’ interests. Certainly, their strategy was directed less towards those who would participate and more towards those who would pay, resulting in a membership dominated by the more affluent Polish workers, though not necessarily the most active. It was reported by many Polish workers that MECA’s current membership fee was already expensive in relation to their income. If MECA further increases its membership fee or commercializes its classes, many low-income Polish workers who are in considerable need of support might be excluded from community support. Management had lost sight of broad community empowerment objectives and instead were becoming increasingly preoccupied with organizational goals and the expansion of membership.
The pressure for MECA to professionalize and maintain the resulting bureaucratic management systems limited the scope for a culture of active participation. The decision-making of community agendas was dominated by elite professionals, particularly MECA’s Chief Officer. It was reported by several volunteers that their views were not seriously taken into account in the committee meetings. There were no meetings or forums in which MECA members could collectively discuss the issues that concerned them. The acceptance of public funding also constrained their framing strategies. The purpose of the Migrant Impact Fund was to promote social cohesion between the local community and the migrant community and thus MECA often framed the concerns of the Polish community along the lines of ethnic discrimination or community safety. One of the most important dimensions of migrant workers’ life, employment issues, became largely diluted.

The focus on organizational performance has led to the development of a ‘service-driven’ culture within MECA. Individual casework on employment, schools, housing and social benefits took up the bulk of professionals’ time, substituting individualization for collectivism in community organizing. Membership was often based on instrumental commitment: many members perceived their membership rights – free English classes and access to advice - as direct compensation for their membership fee. Many members claimed that they did not receive timely and adequate advice, despite having paid their membership fees. There was no attempt to promote a culture of sharing and develop community consciousness in the classes. It was commonly reported that there were no close connections between members after classes.

The shift in priorities towards organizational developments has also extended to the relationship between MECA and other community organizations: rather than seeing them as fellow activists, they are treated as competitors. MECA’s competitive and
bureaucratic management system has caused problems and tensions in the coalition building process. Portuguese community workers and leaders of other Polish associations in South Somerset all commented on the difficulty they experienced in working with MECA due to its ambition to expand its organizational influence to other immigrant communities and geographical areas where relevant community organizations already existed. The GMB Yeovil organizer also pointed out that MECA was too controlling of the immigrant community and discouraged its members from joining trade unions. There has been a tendency for MECA to monopolize its position within the field of immigrant worker organizing in South Somerset.

Clearly, organizational structures and mobilization cultures vary between different community organizations. While J4DW is characterized by a flat and democratic management structure and a relational mobilization culture, MECA operates mainly as a modern bureaucracy with the focus on organizational development and membership expansion. There is a danger that community organizations could move away from their original purpose of supporting the poor and disadvantaged within the community towards organizational development by accepting outside funding. This is evident in case two. MECA was initially established as a Polish self-help group offering voluntary support to the disadvantaged in the Polish community. However, it became a professionally-run and bureaucratic community organization with an emphasis on organizational goals after attaining outside funding. Instead of aligning with other community organizations to provide better support to immigrant workers, tensions between similar types of community organizations arose, due to the shift in priorities towards organizational goals. This imposes limits on how community organizations can effectively mobilize community members in the field of community organizing.

9.3.2.4 Trade unions and community organizations
Echoing the existing literature on potential tensions in the coalition building discussed in Chapter Four, the research demonstrates that trade unions and community organizations might conflict in terms of framing strategies, organizational structures and organizing objectives.

Table 9.6: Sources of mismatch between trade unions and community organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing division</th>
<th>Trade unions (ideal type of trade unions)</th>
<th>Community organizations/NGOS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worker identities</td>
<td>Human rights (Kalayaan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Worker identity (J4DW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnic discrimination (MECA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural division</td>
<td>Exclusive membership and mandatory dues; Hierarchical and top-down structure; Industry—specific</td>
<td>Membership earned through activities, not dues payment (J4DW); Flat and democratic structure (J4DW); Geography and ethnicity-based (MECA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing objectives</td>
<td>Institutional interests; Political outcomes</td>
<td>Grassroots empowerment; social and cultural outcomes(J4DW); Institutional interest; political outcomes (MECA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In case one, two differing forms of framing became apparent. The first, put forward by J4DW leaders and Unite emphasized the framing of MDWs as workers and active social agents, while the second, advanced by the NGO, Kalayaan, positioned MDWs in terms of human trafficking. The human trafficking framework, and its implicit imagery of the MDW as victim suggests an approach to improving the plight of MDWs by emphasizing the worst cases of torture and abuse, and then bringing them to the attention of the media, court or lobbying meetings to ask for changes to be made on humanitarian grounds. J4DW and Unite, by contrast, dissociated themselves
from the concept of human trafficking, seeking to overcome the feelings of powerlessness among MDWs and organize them around issues of exploitation at work.

Moreover, in terms of organizational structures, exclusive membership and mandatory dues are key features of trade unions. Trade unions tend to judge the strength of an organization based on formal membership. However, J4DW began without a developed idea of membership requirements. In case one, although J4DW wanted to build a stable organization, it was reluctant to make the payment of a membership fee a prerequisite for receiving services and attending classes. Staff believed that some members were simply too poor to be asked to pay a fee. They thought that membership should be earned through active participation instead of due payment. J4DW charged members £1 per person per month, but the membership fee was not compulsory. This initially caused problems for Unite which expected to recruit MDW members through community learning initiatives. In contrast to the ideal type of trade unions, Unite took an organic view of MDWs’ needs and adjusted their organizing approach, making union membership optional for those MDWs who wanted to attend English classes.

Trade unions also have long-established patterns for organizing and set hierarchical structures at every level of their organizations. This was evident in the case of Unite. However, J4DW has a flatter, more democratic structure. As opposed to the traditional top-down and bureaucratic organizational structure, J4DW is characterized by collective leadership and relational culture. Staff believed that this democratic structure and culture of sharing were essential to developing self-esteem and self-confidence and nurturing a collective worker identity among MDWs. This raises a question over the integration of immigrant community groups into union structures. Unite faced the loss of MDWs as J4DW registered itself as a separate and
independent entity. J4DW staff believed that J4DW should not operate as a modern bureaucracy, but should maintain its self-governing and voluntary nature.

Furthermore, trade unions often define the success of organizing activities as institutional gains and political outcomes. While Unite aimed to recruit MDWs and campaign for favourable public policies to improve the general conditions of MDWs, J4DW emphasized the importance of grassroots empowerment and the development of social capital among its members. Staff believed that the development of self-esteem and self-confidence among MDWs was essential to nurturing worker activism. J4DW offered a safe and autonomous space in which MDWs could give and receive mutual support if their high-profile political actions and demonstrations fail.

In case two, a trade union and MECA also framed the issues of the Polish community in different ways. GMB focused on the employment relationship, while MECA was organized along ethnic lines and accepted all Poles regardless of their different backgrounds. The main framing strategy adopted by MECA emphasized ethnic discrimination. For MECA, ethnic and cultural concerns took precedence over class issues. This explains why MECA did not actively promote trade unionism among their Polish members.

A structural division existed between the trade union and MECA because they are constituted upon different bases; industry versus geography; ethnicity versus occupation. Although GMB established a Polish branch, its main purpose was to identify potential employers for union recognition and further organize Polish workers in the workplace through branch meetings. Therefore the structure of GMB is still industry-based. On the contrary, MECA is geographically and ethnically rooted. As a result, it regularly encounters workers from a range of industries and workplaces. Instead of focusing specifically on their employment issues, MECA’s ideological framework is based on ensuring the broad survival of individuals, family and
community. This means focusing on a wide range of issues that affect the everyday lives of Polish immigrant workers, from employment rights to housing, health care and education.

Finally, as both the trade union and MECA focused on institutional goals, tensions arose because they were competing for membership. It was frequently reported by GMB officers and community activists that MECA appeared to control the Polish community and made little effort to encourage their members to join trade unions and other progressive organizations. GMB Yeovil organizers claimed that trade unions were sometimes treated by MECA as social resources for its own organizational developments. This element of competition imposed limits on the sustainability and depth of coalition building.

As we have seen, despite a common interest in organizing immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors, trade unions and community organizations might struggle to cooperate along the dimensions of framing strategies, organizational structures and organizing objectives. There is a structural and cultural mismatch between the ideal type of trade unions and community organizations.

9.4 Assessing community organizing outcomes

A wide range of organizing outcomes have been identified in these two cases, which can be seen in the following table. It is suggested that a wider social movement perspective should be adopted to incorporate both concrete gains and capacity building to assess community organizing outcomes, as a community organizing strategy might not bring about material gains in the short-term. A distinction is made between capacity building from the perspective of workers, and organizations involved in the community organizing of immigrant workers.
Table 9.7: Assessing community organizing outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community organizing outcomes</th>
<th>Case one</th>
<th>Case two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence development and improvement of self-esteem</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development of labour solidarity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of social capital</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational capacity (trade union)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union trust and identity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union membership</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union recognition</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union commitment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete gains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The improvement of individual working conditions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The improvement of working conditions at industrial or regional level though the change of public policy</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of capacity building at grassroots level, the first organizing outcome which can be categorized as successful includes the development of confidence and self-esteem, and the rediscovery of dignity. It is clear that in case one, the majority of J4DW members felt more confident and empowered in dealing with their own problems and participating in public events related to MDWs after joining J4DW. Some started giving public speeches about their life stories in the media and at migrant forums, and actively engaging with parliamentary debates. Characterised by a nurturing and sharing culture, J4DW offered a safe and autonomous space in which MDWs could give and receive mutual support if their high-profile political actions and demonstrations fail.

As well as the development of self-confidence, the labour solidarity has been fostered among MDWs. They have been successfully transformed from ‘mothers’ and ‘servants’ to workers through conscious political learning. Labour consciousness,
Chapter 9: Discussion

namely the awareness of the existence of different classes and the desire to improve working conditions, has been developed among many MDWs. The majority of MDWs became aware that they were workers instead of servants who were entitled to enjoy the same employment rights as other types of workers. Nearly all the MDWs in the study expressed their passion for, and interest in, joining campaigns related to MDWs or general workers, although some workers were unable to join campaigns because of time limitations and resistance from employers. Several MDWs who were very quiet and indifferent initially became organizing activists. The change that has been brought about through their involvement in J4DW is palpable. Even though their campaigns are on-going and it remains to be seen whether they can bring about substantive changes to MDWs’ working conditions, the development of labour consciousness can be seen as a major step for MDWs in resolving their employment disputes and will serve as the basis for future collective mobilizations.

Thirdly, the social trust and associational life developed through their participation in J4DW activities has been successfully transferred to other progressive organizations. Some MDWs joined other progressive women’s organizations, religious organizations and trade unions after attending activities coordinated by J4DW and Unite. J4DW activities, including mutual support, political learning and campaigns, helped MDWs to develop an awareness of community and solidarity which further contributed to the establishment and development of other tight-knit communities. Many MDWs started socializing in other social settings with friends they had made in J4DW and established their own social circle for emergency aid and support. This implies that participation in voluntary organizations can generate social trust among members, which can potentially spill over into trust in other forms of political participation.

From the perspective of trade unions, J4DW and Kalayaan have supported and expanded the domestic worker unionizing activities of Unite the Union. Through
English classes and political learning, MDWs have developed a strong sense of worker solidarity and union identity. Many MDWs claimed that they had never heard of trade unions before, but became very interested in joining trade unions after attending language and organizing classes coordinated by J4DW and Unite. It was frequently reported that trade unions were more helpful than churches or other ethnic organizations in helping MDWs deal with employment issues and difficulties in their everyday lives. The majority of J4DW members joined Unite even though it was not compulsory for them to join a trade union in order to receive language training. Some even joined other trade unions. J4DW has also become one of the most active working groups within Unite and has shown strong support for general work-related campaigns and demonstrations. The directors of J4DW believe that all workers, regardless of their occupations and nationalities, share the same interests and thus should support each other in their aim of improving general working conditions. In supporting MDWs’ grassroots activism while allowing them to remain autonomous, Unite has enhanced worker-directed organizing capacity in a highly exploitative industry.

In terms of concrete gains, several domestic workers successfully brought their unfair dismissal cases to an employment tribunal and won compensation, with support from J4DW. Therefore, working conditions have been improved in individual labour processes. In addition, Unite, Kalyaan and the MDWs’ self-help group have also been able to alter the climate of debate on labour market policy, labour legislation and migrant policies. After ten years of a coalition of campaigns organized by Kalayaan and Unite, the labour government launched a favourable visa policy for MDWs in 1998. The Chair of J4DW represented domestic workers in the UK by attending the ILO conference to lobby for the adoption of the ILO convention on domestic workers in 2011. However, there have still been no successful policy changes and labour market interventions to bring about a substantial change in MDWs’ working
conditions at industry level or national level at the time of writing. J4DW, Kalayaan and Unite have been actively lobbying and organizing campaigns and demonstrations to urge the coalition government to ratify the ILO convention on domestic workers and adopt a more favourable visa policy towards MDWs. It is still hard to predict the outcome of their public demonstrations and lobbying. Nevertheless, it can be argued that lobbying for favourable public policy can better represent MDWs’ interests as MDWs are particularly vulnerable within the context of the individualized employment relationship which makes workplace-based organizing almost impossible.

In terms of grassroots empowerment, many Polish workers in case two, who were members of MECA, still had low self-esteem and self-confidence, which can be partially explained by MECA’s organizing approach with its focus on organizational development instead of community empowerment. It was reported by some Poles that their voices have not been listened to and their demands have not been recognized and respected by the key organizers in MECA.

In addition, labour solidarity has not been developed among Polish immigrant workers. The ethnic organizations in South Somerset, such as MECA and ‘Sami Sobie’, were created and organized along ethnic lines. Consequently, ethnic concerns took precedence over work issues. They did not target working class Polish workers, but aimed to include all Polish immigrants regardless of their social backgrounds. Although they both maintained close connections with trade unions, they mainly utilized union resources to resolve the individual employment issues of their members. There was a lack of effort to encourage members to discuss their common work-related issues and further seek collective solutions. The one-to-one service has prohibited the development of labour solidarity among Polish workers. Many MECA members claimed that they did not maintain close connections with fellow members.
because they did not feel that they had much in common. Intergroup competition and exploitation within the Polish community was frequently reported in the workplace. Internal tensions were even more salient than those between Polish workers and British supervisors. MECA and GMB failed to develop community awareness and social trust among Polish immigrant workers. Neither labour solidarity nor ethnic cohesion has been found among the Polish community in South Somerset.

From the union perspective, GMB recruited a small number of Polish workers and identified labour activists through community learning and advisory initiatives. More importantly, GMB utilized community space which was separated from employers’ surveillance, such as community centres, labour clubs and town halls, to organize informal meetings among workers from the same workplace and further nurtured their union activism to win union recognition in specific workplaces. In this sense, community organizing is complementary to workplace organizing. However, the number of successful workplace-based organizing cases of this type was rather limited. This can be partially explained by the fact that immigrant community organizations, such as MECA, were often not interested in supporting the union’s workplace organizing agenda. Without strong support from community organizations, unions faced the barrier of lacking a regular and clearly defined community space in which to organize immigrant workers prior to union recognition. In addition, immigrant workers who attended community classes and activities were from different workplaces and industries. It was difficult for the union to identify a common issue as the basis for workplace-based organizing. Even after GMB recruited a significant number of Polish workers through their learning initiatives and established a Polish branch in Southampton, it was challenging for them to maintain Polish members’ commitment to union activities. It was widely reported by Polish workers that there were no common issues they could share with fellow Polish workers in union meetings as they were distributed across different industries and
geographical areas. Furthermore, some low-skilled food processing factories were hostile to trade unions. It was reported by some Polish workers that if they were union members, they would not be able to get a job in some food processing factories. Therefore a workplace-based organizing approach might not be effective because Polish workers were afraid of potential victimization from employers.

In terms of concrete gains, some Polish workers resolved their employment disputes with help from GMB officers who organized regular drop-in advice sessions at MECA. GMB officers succeeded in getting several Polish workers who had been made redundant because of health problems reinstated in food processing factories. Nevertheless, this kind of individualised service delivery needs a sustainable investment of financial and human resources from community organizations and trade unions. It was reported that unions reduced the number of community-based advice surgeries during the economic crisis when they were already too busy dealing with requests from existing members. Due to their limited resources, it was often difficult for immigrant community organizations, such as MECA, to offer a consistent service for individual immigrant workers.

Criticism can be raised on the grounds that community organizing in these two cases has not brought about substantial changes in immigrant workers’ working conditions or fundamentally challenged exploitative labour processes. Nevertheless, these two cases show that community organizing can be progressive in three important ways. Firstly, we have witnessed that MDWs have developed a collective working class community based on the highly exploitative labour process in which they are bound from an individualised and dispersed community. A notion of ‘worker identity’ has been successfully instilled in the psychological framework of MDWs who used to be ‘mothers’ and ‘servants’ in the private sphere, which serves as a solid foundation for future collective mobilizations. It is important to recognize that union power not only
comes from union membership, but more importantly, from worker solidarity, particularly at a time when workers’ bargaining power has been dramatically fragmented and weakened in the post-industrial and globalized context. Secondly, J4DW offered a safe and autonomous space in which MDWs’ everyday forms of resistance and mutual support can still operate if their high-profile political actions and demonstrations fail. A critical and mutually supportive space will continue to exist to help MDWs cope with the exploitation they experience in their daily lives and improve conditions in the individualized labour process before any substantial changes to their working conditions are achieved. Finally, case two shows that community organizing does not necessarily contradict workplace-based organizing, but can be complementary to the traditional union organizing approach. By connecting with community organizations, GMB successfully identified the employers they could target, created a unified community space in which to develop potential union members and further gained union recognition in the workplace.

9.5 Conclusion

The research suggests that it is difficult to develop collective worker identity among immigrant workers within the workplace because of the nature of immigrant work. However, this does not imply that class has lost its relevance in immigrant collective mobilizations. The case studies signal an organizing approach at the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity, religion and migrant status. Labour solidarity might grow from other forms of solidarity, such as gender, ethnicity, religion and migrant status, in the wider community setting. Nevertheless, this is not a linear and automatic process and mediating institutions/networks play an important role in the social process of solidarity formation. These institutions/networks differ in terms of leadership, mobilization mechanisms and organizing approaches and thus can either facilitate or impede the formation of labour solidarity. Instead of taking a union-centred view with
which to assess the outcome of community organizing, it is suggested that a broad social movement perspective should be adopted, to take concrete gains and capacity building into consideration, in order to assess community organizing outcomes. A distinction is made between capacity building from the perspectives of workers and organizations.
10.1 Introduction

By analyzing community organizing of immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors, the research contributes to the debate on the image of immigrant workers as victims and their role as active agents in the global economic restructuring and community unionism literature. This chapter aims to explain the study’s theoretical contributions and practical implications for trade unionism. The methodological limitations and possibilities for future research are also discussed.

I have divided the theoretical contributions into three sections. Each section centres on a research question. Section one discusses the issue of interest formation among immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors. Section two explores the mobilization structure of community organizing. Section three examines community organizing outcomes. Each section has a similar structure. Firstly, the existing literature is discussed, and then an explanation of how the research findings can fill some of the gaps in the literature is provided.

10.2 Theoretical contributions

10.2.1 Factors that affect interest formation

The first set of research questions in the study is related to the interest formation among immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors. These questions aim to explore what kind of socio-economic conditions either within or outside of workplaces can stimulate or impede the interest formation among immigrant workers. This is important because the majority of immigrant workers are employed in flexible and precarious economic sectors where non-unionised workplaces often lack a group
setting in which they can share work grievances and discuss common employment problems (see Chapter 2).

On one side of the debate about collective mobilization among immigrant workers is the view that immigrant workers are predominantly the victims of global economic restructuring and have little opportunity for agency in organizing against exploitative conditions (Wallerstein 2004). This position is accompanied by the argument that increasing fragmentation and individualization of immigrant jobs leads to the dissolving of labour consciousness and collective action (Castells 1996). On the other side of the debate is a more optimistic position which can be expressed as follows: ‘one response is surely that their position in the employment relationship as workers is, at very least, a basic point of potential solidarity’ (Simms 2012:113). The latter view is developed from the fact that the class basis for collective mobilization is particularly salient among immigrant workers who occupy the bottom end of the labour market. The study identified some factors that facilitate or impede the development of labour consciousness among immigrant workers.

Echoing the pessimistic position, the research identified a series of negative factors which are related to both workplace dynamics and immigrant workers’ social characteristics: lack of long-term relationship with employers due to the nature of temporary and agency work (see Chapter 8); individualized and dispersed workplaces (see Chapter 6); the weakness of trade unions in immigrant industries (see Chapter 8); potential victimization from anti-union employers (see Chapter 8); ethnic divisions within the workplace (see Chapter 8); over-dependence on employers for legal status (see Chapter 6); social isolation and lack of access to local support organizations (see Chapter 6); language deficiencies (see Chapter 6 and 8); lack of union experience (see Chapter 6); lack of trust in unions (see Chapter 8); dual frame of reference (see Chapter 6 and 8); concerns about ‘employability’ (see Chapter 6 and 8); and lack of
‘exit’ opportunities (see Chapter 6). These factors posed particular challenges to the workplace-based class organizing of immigrant workers.

In Chapter Three, it is argued that Thompson’s (1963) approach to class analysis is particularly useful for this study because well-defined labour consciousness among immigrant workers cannot be easily fostered. The nature of the work in which they are embedded and the specific cultural context, such as their migrant trajectory and ethnic and gendered experiences, could mediate between exploitative labour processes and the formation of labour consciousness. By treating class as a relational, processual and cultural concept, communities, instead of narrow production sites, are central to the development of labour consciousness and class identification among immigrant workers. If the scope is extended to the wider community setting rather than the narrow context of the workplace, the research found that there are some positive factors that facilitate the formation of labour solidarity among immigrant workers.

Echoing the community studies from the 1940s and 1970s which emphasize the interaction between work and place in generating a distinctive way of life among working class people (Dennis et al 1969; Jackson 1968; Supple 1987; Williamson 1982), the research shows that place is still important in the collective mobilization of immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors. It was found that new East European immigrant workers gravitate towards neighbourhoods containing clusters of people from similar ethnic and employment backgrounds due to social isolation and poverty. This contrasts with the destruction of traditional local working class communities and their replacement by loose social networks caused by deindustrialization and the development of the service sector (Calhoun 1982). The segregated community of immigrant workers can offer them a sense of identity and security based on living with co-ethnics or colleagues, particularly when there is hostility from the local community in rural England (see Chapter 7). This suggests that trade unions and
labour activists should adopt a geographically-based instead of an industry-based approach to reaching and further organizing immigrant workers.

Moreover, resonating with those studies that emphasize the importance of non-traditional actors in encouraging the political engagement of immigrant workers (Anderson 2010, Pero 2008; Wills et al 2008), the research shows that community networks based on other dynamics which are embedded in immigrant workers’ social life, beyond those of production sites, such as faith and gender, can also play a part in the articulation of labour solidarity by offering a safe and separate group setting in which immigrant workers can freely share work-related grievances and seek collective solutions, and providing leadership in the collective mobilization process. This indicates that the further development of collective mobilization in the informal and flexible economy may require creative leaps of sociological imagination in nurturing labour consciousness, wherever they may occur - in ethnic social clubs, women’s groups, churches, or at the school gates in the wider community setting.

10.2.2 Mobilization opportunity and structure

The second set of research questions are related to the mobilization opportunity and structure in community organizing. The following questions are addressed. 1) What is the role of non-traditional actors, such as ethnic organizations, churches and self-help groups, in organizing immigrant workers around employment issues? 2) How do immigrant workers utilize different levels of community networks to combat exploitation? 3) What tensions and power relations exist between different civil organizations, and how does this impact upon the ability to create effective collective actions?
10.2.2.1 The intersection of class, gender, ethnicity and religion

The existing literature (see Table 10.1) has widely explored the role of non-traditional actors, such as churches, ethnic organizations and self-help groups, in supporting immigrant workers and labour activism. Table 10.1 shows the positive and negative role of non-labour organizations in labour organizing discussed in the existing literature and how the finding of my research echoes or contradicts to those arguments. Most of these studies are optimistic about the role of non-traditional actors in supporting labour organizing (see the second row of Table 10.1). It is reported that religious organizations have offered important social and institutional resources for London Living Wage Campaigns (Wills et al 2008). Some argue that ethnic organizations play significant roles in offering employment advice and supporting union organizing activities (Hologte et al 2012; Pero 2008). It is also argued that immigrant self-help groups can potentially nurture community consciousness among immigrant workers and stimulate the involvement of immigrant workers in politics (Katz and Bender 1976; Anderson’s 2010; Hernandez-Plaza et al 2006; Sakine et al 2009).

In accordance with these studies, this study also found that non-labour organizations can support the labour organizing of immigrant workers in three important ways (see the fifth Columns of table 10.1). Firstly, ‘communities of coping’ based on other social dynamics beyond production sites may offer a group setting in which immigrant workers can share work-related grievances and seek collective solutions. The dispersed and informal workplaces in which the majority of immigrant workers are concentrated tend to lack these types of group settings. Domestic work is an extreme example of an individualized employment sector. The nature of their work makes it impossible for MDWs to organize themselves in workplaces. J4DW, the informal MDW self-help group based on sisterhood, was one of the very few places
beyond the reach of their employers where MDWs could seek comfort from each other and collectively discuss issues that they have in common. In case two, as many Polish workers are employed on temporary and flexible contracts, it is difficult for them to develop labour solidarity in the workplace. MECA, the ethnic-based Polish association, and the Polish church offered a socializing space where Polish workers could exchange views on their work and life in the receiving society. Secondly, the social capital generated by community-based organizations might facilitate the formation of labour solidarity. The gender-based social capital among MDWs, which grew out of J4DW’s caring and sharing culture, supported the formation of labour solidarity. However, this transformation was not a linear and automatic process. Political and radical learning served as a key step in transforming a community of coping based on sisterhood into a community of and for workers. Finally, other social dynamics can affect the leadership style and organizing culture found in community organizing. The female-dominated leadership of J4DW opened up new possibilities for the creation of alternative labour organizing, rejecting the traditions of authoritarianism and hierarchical structures that have characterized classical trade unions.

Table 10.1: The role of non-traditional organizations in organizing immigrant workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Self-help group</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>My research findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Positive role

| Empowering community settings (Maton and Salem 1995); Mediating structure for social justice (Todd and Allen 2011); Offering social and institutional resources in labour organizing (Jamoul and Wills 2008; Wills at al 2009a). |
| Enhancing a communal sense of empowerment (Katz and Bender 1976); Stimulating migrants workers’ political involvement (Anderson’s 2010; Hernandez-Plaza et al 2006; Sakine et al 2009). |
| Providing employment service; Offering social and institutional resources in labour organizing (Holgate et al 2012; Pero 2008) |
| Offering a bonded group setting to share work-related grievances; Developing social capital that facilitates the formation of labour solidarity; Affecting leadership and organizing culture. |

### Potential risks

| Explicitly apolitical or even anti-political (Wong 2006); Resistance from trade unions as a product of secular antipathy to faith (Holgate 2009). |
| ‘Symbolic ethnicity’ (Gans 1979); Tension between the extent to which ethnic organizations frame issues along class or ethnic lines (Josephides 1991) |
| Divisions between trade unions and community organizations in terms of framing strategies, organizational structures and organizing objectives; Community organizations might not be harmonious and organic (bureaucratization |
and professionalization of community organizations; ethnic divisions within immigrant communities

Nevertheless, the nature of the articulation between labour solidarity and other forms of solidarity is an open issue in which mediating institutions play a critical role. The existing literature recognizes that forging solidarity across different institutions with different organizational and ideological traditions is not easy (see the third rows of Table 10.1). It is argued that a fundamental mismatch exists between American trade unions and worker centres because unions have established internal structures and modes of operation while worker centres are non-bureaucratic and grassroots-based social movement organizations (Fine 2007). Holgate (2009) argues that resistance from trade unions as a product of secular antipathy to faith poses challenges to coalition building. Scholars of industrial relations have repeatedly criticized the bureaucracy and conservatism of trade unions (Gaido 2008) and the unwillingness and inability of unions to prioritize the community organizing agenda (Sherman 2000; Wills 2001). The research also demonstrates that there are divisions between trade unions and community organizations in terms of framing strategies, organizational structures and organizing objectives. Trade unions (Unite) frame the issues faced by immigrant workers in terms of their employment relationship while some NGOs, such as Kalayaan, organize immigrant workers based on humanitarian grounds. The structural division between trade unions (GMB) and community-based organizations (MECA) exists because they are constituted upon different bases: industry versus geography; ethnicity versus occupation. Furthermore, trade unions often define the success of organizing activities in terms of institutional gains and political outcomes
while some community-based organizations (J4DW) emphasize the importance of grassroots empowerment and the development of social capital among members.

Despite the recognition of potential divisions between trade unions and community organizations, Industrial Relations scholars have largely overlooked the nature and relevance of immigrant community organizations in the community organizing of immigrant workers. It is often assumed that immigrant community organizations have close connections with immigrant workers at ground level and thus are direct representations of immigrant workers’ interests. Although some sociologists (Gans 1979; Josephides 1991; Nayar et al 2004) have criticised the supposedly ‘harmonious’ and grassroots-based nature of community organizations, the features of community organizations and the impact that they have on organizing outcomes have rarely been discussed in the community unionism literature. The tendency to glamorize the role of community organizations in community organizing has been subject to two types of criticism. First, immigrant associations are not necessarily ideal collectivities characterized by commonality, unity and feelings of group-wide obligations that will endure, but function more as a formal expression of the community (Kelly 2003). The research showed that Polish immigrant workers had a dichotomous perception of their own community, ranging from a close and trustful relationship with a small circle of co-ethnic friends to suspicion and intolerance toward the wider Polish community. Polish migrants’ daily life was bounded by specific and close networks of family members and friends, but social structures such as class, age and proficiency in English created internal divisions and tensions. The division and intolerance within the Polish community imposes limits on how far ethnic community cohesion – rooted in common values, a shared sense of place and nationality, and ethnic networks of trust – can become the basis of community organizing.
Moreover, the existing literature often assumes that community organization engages in a relational culture and exemplifies a form of social commitment between the members and the group (Tapia 2012). However, the non-bureaucratic and grassroots-based nature of community organizations cannot be presumed. Organization structures and mobilization cultures vary in different community organizations. The research detected that community-based immigrant organizations (J4DW) can offer a potential bonded group setting in which the grassroots empowerment of immigrant workers can be enhanced and labour solidarity may grow, when it is coupled with a relational and mobilization-driven culture and close connections with immigrant workers at ground level. There is also a risk that the institutional goals of some immigrant community organizations (MECA), in terms of securing funding and expanding their organizational influence, may take precedence over their substantive goals of providing support, which further leads to tensions between immigrant organizations and trade unions in competing for membership and social influence. These findings resemble those of MacKenzie et al’s (2012) study that identifies the bureaucratization effect of community organizations.

10.2.2.2 Informal and formal networks/institutions

As Chapter Four points out, the term ‘community’ has recently flourished in the field of industrial relations amongst union renewal writers and, most commonly, the concept of ‘community’ is used as a substitute for the phrase ‘community organizations’, the formal dimension of community. This form of usage is built into the term ‘labour-community coalition’ to describe joint actions between unions and community organizations (Craft 1990; Brecher and Costello 1990). Attention has been drawn to the negotiation of representations between trade unions, NGOs and immigrant community organizations, and to how industrial relations can be managed within these spaces (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009). Although the concepts of
network and organization are important variables for understanding the capacity of community, organizations/networks vary in size, type and membership. Interpreting the meaning of community as ‘community organizations’ carries with it the danger of over-emphasizing the ‘formal’ dimension of community while losing sight of complex and informal ‘personal communities’ which are inhabited by and enacted in the practices of everyday life and provide other forms of support. To counter-balance the prevailing focus on the formal dimension of community, this study differentiates between four different levels of community networks/organizations: personal networks; informal and voluntary support networks; community-based immigrant organizations; and other civil society organizations (see Chapter 9).

By distinguishing between these four levels of support networks/organizations within immigrant communities, the research tries to rebalance the trend in community unionism research to overemphasize the final two levels of community networks/institutions. This has two important implications. First, it was found that Polish factory workers tended to rely more on personal networks which often consisted of a small number of co-ethnic workplace colleagues, neighbours and friends as a source of information and advice during times of hardship. This implies that the immigrant community may be fragmented and individualized, which raises the question of to what extent community organizations can unify and represent immigrant workers. Additionally, it highlights the importance of ‘communities of coping’ - informal and self-help networks within immigrant communities - in supporting and organizing immigrant workers at ground level. Communities of coping have been well-documented among workers in a range of service jobs with high emotional labour costs (Benner and Wrubel, 1989, Korcsynski 2003), but have received scant attention in community unionism studies. The study shows that communities of coping among MDWs not only helped them to develop self-esteem and self-confidence, but also offered a safe and autonomous group setting in which
labour consciousness was developed and resistive actions were carried out. This kind of group setting, characterized by a sharing culture and a flat structure is often lacking in many modern bureaucratic community organizations (MECA). Therefore it is important for community unionism scholars to pay more attention to the organic and informal dimensions of immigrant communities that can potentially serve as the basis for resistive collective mobilizations.

10.2.2.3 Community organizing: forms and diversity

The existing studies (Martinez Lucio and Perrett 2009) suggest that community organizing initiatives are developed in a diverse manner, and there is no community unionism per se. The research also demonstrates that it is difficult to generalize findings to construct a template for the community organizing of immigrant workers. Table 10.2 shows that community organizing initiatives in the study vary in terms of issue focus, organizational relationship, links with community, coalition building strategy and organizing approach.

Table 10.2: Forms and diversity of community organizing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case one</th>
<th>Case two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue focus</td>
<td>Employment relationship; Visa status</td>
<td>Broad survival of Polish workers in the UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational relationship</td>
<td>MDW self-help group-led; Trade unions and NGOs involved; Transformative link</td>
<td>Geographically-based with different civil society organizations involved; Instrumental link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links with community</td>
<td>Organizing in community</td>
<td>Organizing for community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition building strategies</td>
<td>Mobilizing</td>
<td>Servicing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing approach</td>
<td>Beyond production sites;</td>
<td>Complementary to workplace-based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 10: Conclusion

Regarding the issues around which the labour-community coalition is built, the employment relationship is still the central context for community organizing in case one. Visa status is another important issue based on the fact that discriminatory visa policies might reinforce MDWs’ disadvantaged positions in the labour market. Case two, by comparison, shows that the main issue around which community organizing initiatives were developed was the broad survival of Polish immigrant workers in the receiving society, including employment problems, and concerns about ethnic discrimination, housing, education and community safety. The issue of the employment relationship became diluted in regional strategic migrant forums. This indicates that the generation of class politics or progressive trade unionism are not necessary corollaries of community organizing initiatives.

Which forms of community organizing initiatives are adopted also varies according to the organizational relationship. Case one demonstrates a ‘bottom-up’ organic model of community organizing that is more democratic in nature. The community organizing activity was led by a MDW self-help group. Unite was not involved in the decision-making of their agendas, but played a marginal role by offering MDWs venues for English classes and showing support for their campaigns. The coalition between J4DW and Unite not only developed labour consciousness and union identity among MDWs, but also improved workers’ direct organizing capacity in a highly-exploitative and dispersed industry when globalization compromised its validity. This form of union-community relationship can be linked to a ‘transformative link’ which identifies common ground between communities and labour that then creates a more permanent identity, described by Lipsig-Mumme (2003). This represents a break with the traditional service and hierarchically-based
Chapter 10: Conclusion

approach. In case two, a top-down, geographically-based form of community unionism was adopted. There were no organic connections between GMB and MECA, but both utilized each other for instrumental reasons. The coalition can be seen as an ‘instrumental link’, the term coined by Lipsig-Mumme (2003). The instrumental link is often short-term and it collapses when the organizational needs of individual organizations cannot be met. It was reported that GMB planned to withdraw their employment advice sessions from MECA because MECA members showed little interest in joining GMB.

Echoing the historical link drawn between labour and community in Chapter Four, it is important to consider whether trade unions organize in or for communities. In case one, community organizing initiatives were deeply rooted in the MDW community. The class-based and gendered culture within the MDWs’ community of coping that was characterized by social isolation, occupational homogeneity and tight bonds facilitated the formation of solidarity among MDWs against exploitation at work. The nature and culture of the MDW community has been highly significant in ensuring that Unite could play an important role in organizing most economically and socially disadvantaged domestic workers based on their employment relationship. However, case two shows that a local strategic migrant partnership was a response to the renewed emphasis on localism and community empowerment promoted by the Labour Government and the Coalition Government. Community organizing activities were structured in a top-down way and led by professionals to represent the interests of the Polish immigrant community which itself was fragmented and divided by class, gender, age and immigrant experiences.

In terms of coalition building strategies, the links that trade unions establish with the community can vary through the use of distinct approaches: servicing; organizing; and mobilizing. In case one, community learning was used to reinforce the potential
role of unions in political education, developing not only labour consciousness, but also union activism among MDWs. Learning was seen as an essential step towards collective mobilization through which labour solidarity could be developed and reinforced. In case two, community-based learning was seen as a union service designed to make GMB more appealing to immigrant workers. Therefore, community organizing does not necessarily run counter to a more business-oriented version of union renewal, but can be service-oriented and ad hoc.

Regarding organizing approaches, case two shows that the community facilitated venues, such as ethnic organizations, town halls, labour clubs and local cafes, for union meetings. By offering a safe group setting outside of anti-union workplaces in which workers could share work-related grievances, community organizations helped GMB to reach immigrant workers and further developed enough members to win union recognition. In this sense, community organizing can be complementary to the workplace-based organizing model. On the other hand, case one indicates that the workplace-based organizing approach is not effective for immigrant workers who work in dispersed and individualized sectors, such as domestic work. A more feasible organizing approach is to lobby or campaign for the adoption of favourable public policies which will ensure immigrant workers’ legal visa status and improve their wages and other working conditions at both the industry-wide and national level.

In summary, there is no template for the community organizing of immigrant workers. Some prevailing assumptions about community organizing need further scrutiny. Firstly, community organizing does not necessarily indicate an ideological shift from ‘worker’ organizing to a new type of community organizing based on other social categories such as ethnicity, gender and religion. It is often assumed that the development of class consciousness is linked to traditional union activities. Case one shows that the one factor with the potential to unite the increasingly diverse set of
interests of MDWs is their position as workers. Far from being obsolete, class is still an important variable in collective mobilizations among immigrant workers who work in highly-exploitative and dispersed industries. In addition, current practices show that community organizing does not necessarily represent a clear break with the service-oriented and hierarchically-based approach. This is particularly evident in case two. Finally, community organizing does not indicate a need to move away from the workplace-based model of organizing. Community could potentially offer a safe and separate group setting in which labour consciousness can be developed and union members recruited.

10.2.3 For what? Arenas of community organizing outcomes

The final set of research questions are concerned with collective actions. What forms of collective actions are carried out, and how do we assess the outcomes of these actions in community organizing?

To define what constitutes community organizing outcomes can often be a difficult task. This is due in part to the fact that community organizing can influence many arenas - political, cultural and social - simultaneously. As Cress and Snow (2000:1064) stated, outcomes can vary greatly, ‘extending from state-level policy decisions to expansion of a movement’s social capital to changes in participants’ biographies’. Outcomes can be more easily measured in cases involving changes in public policy and union recognition (case two), or more difficult to gauge empirically in cases involving the formation of collective identity and the development of social capital (case one).

The majority of research on community unionism assesses outcomes of community organizing from an organizational perspective, focusing on the benefits that connections with the community can bring to trade unions, such as union recruitment
and recognition (Heyes 2009, Wills 2001). Without addressing the meaning of empowerment as it is perceived by immigrant worker themselves, the community organizing strategy might risk becoming simply a ‘problem solving’ strategy for the union membership crisis instead of a promising approach to helping migrant workers to mobilise. The research shows that there might be a contradiction between organizational developments within civil society organizations and the empowerment of immigrant workers at ground level. MDWs were disempowered by Kalayaan’s discourse which presents the issue of domestic workers from the perspective of victimization. Case two also demonstrates that, while MECA expanded its membership base and gained significant recognition in the public sphere, levels of self-esteem among Polish immigrant workers remained low.

Moreover, the majority of research into community organizing outcomes focuses on political outcomes, which usually refer to changing or implementing public policies and setting or influencing political agendas (Fine 2005). However, there are a further two arenas - the social and cultural dimensions of community organizing outcomes - which have been largely ignored by the existing research (Earl 2000 2004). The major problem with focusing exclusively on political outcomes is that psychological empowerment, the development of social capital, collective identity formation and other dimensions of social life that are influenced by community organizing activities have been excluded from theorizing about organizing outcomes (Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Earl 2000 2004). Cultural and social outcomes are important for two reasons. First, relatively new and small community organizations seldom begin by taking political action. Their locally embedded and culturally nurtured organizing activities cannot be assessed in terms of political outcomes. Although MDWs still have not achieved substantial gains in terms of public policy changes and union recognition, the majority of J4DW members have improved self-esteem and self-confidence which in turn helps them to solve their own problems in relation to employment and
everyday life. Collective worker identity has been successfully instilled in MDWs’ mental frameworks through politicized learning and radical art. The social trust and associational life developed through their participation in J4DW activities has been successfully transferred to other progressive organizations. Both cases show that community organizations can effectively develop social bonds with other local social bodies and political groups in the community organizing process, which can then open up opportunities for success within the political arena. Additionally, gains in the cultural and social arenas can play a significant role in facilitating successful political outcomes. In case one, it was shown that cultural gains, such as the development of collective identity, can play a significant role in leading to changes in the political arena, such as campaigning and lobbying for changes in public policies or paving the way for future collective mobilizations.

Table 10.3: Arenas of community organizing outcomes

Therefore the research suggests that a distinction should be made between capacity building from the perspective of workers and organizations involved in the community organizing of immigrant workers. There might be a contradiction between organizational developments and grassroots empowerment in relation to the outcomes of community organizing. Instead of merely focusing on political outcomes as the
existing research suggests, greater attention needs to be paid to social and cultural outcomes and how gains in one arena can facilitate or hinder gains in another.

### 10.3 Practical implications for trade union

The challenge to unionism posed by a declining membership base and hostile employment relationships has led to unions taking an increasing interest in recruiting non-traditional workers, such as immigrant workers and women workers, and the creation of community organizing strategies. Community organizing strategies do not only represent a powerful response to the union crisis, but also challenge our understanding of the role of unions and union power.

Community organizing practices raise the question of what the role of unions should be. Is the role of a union confined to employment relationships, or does it have a broader political and social role? In a period of declining social legitimacy among unions and the development of the flexible and precarious economy, it has become less effective for trade unions to simply focus on collective bargaining and addressing members’ grievances. This is particularly true for immigrant workers as the majority are concentrated in dispersed and low-skilled sectors where union densities are low. The study indicates that unions should broaden their function and campaign on a wider set of social demands in order to recruit and organize immigrant workers. This echoes Hyman’s (2009) assertion that unions need to adopt principles associated with a multi-faceted, flexible and organic solidarity instead of mechanical solidarity to organize workers outside the traditional ranks of trade unionism, because the labour market circumstances of different groups of workers vary hugely and identities have become increasingly differentiated. In this study, it was shown that Unite successfully undertook political activities not simply to shape the individualized employment relationships of domestic work but, most importantly, to change public policies and the political environment affecting domestic workers. In case two, it was widely
reported by Polish workers that their concerns went beyond employment relationships, extending to their lives in the UK in a broader sense, including concerns about education, housing, health care and ethnic discrimination. This requires trade unions to take an organic view of immigrant workers’ economic and social needs. It also involves an assertion of unions’ identity as a ‘sword of justice’ (Flanders 1970): contesting oppression, inequality and discrimination.

Community organizing practices also challenge the way in which actors are traditionally understood within industrial relations. Dunlop’s (1993) system theory argues that there are three well-defined categories of actors in an industrial relations system: ‘a hierarchy of managers and their representatives in supervision ... a hierarchy of workers (non-managerial) and any agents, and ... specialized governmental agencies concerned with workers, enterprises, and their relationships’ (Dunlop 1993: 47). This ‘tri-actor’ model tends to ignore the emerging trend of a wide range of civil organizations in the industrial relations system. The research findings show that new actors can potentially support the more traditional actors in organizing workers. Building coalitions with non-traditional actors in the sphere of industrial relations represents a concrete strategy through which unions can embrace a more political and social role and engage a new constituency of active members. Instead of constraining legitimate union actions to employment relationships, coalitions provide a mechanism for unions to engage with the issues of job creation, education, equality and social integration. By working with J4DW and Kalayaan on a wide range of concerns such as employment rights and visa status, Unite successfully built up a presence within the domestic worker community, reached ‘unorganisable’ workers and improved the profile and political influence of MDWs. It was also found that collaboration with community organizations can function as a source of power in workplace relations. With the support of community allies, GMB managed to gain union recognition and improve bargaining power in some food-processing factories where the majority of
workers were immigrants. Unite also regulated the working conditions of domestic workers by campaigning for changes in public policies. Consequently, this suggests that civil organizations are highly relevant to modern industrial relations.

Finally, the study has implications for the understanding of union power in the era of globalization. Traditional trade union organizing activities often focus on institutional goals such as membership expansion and collective bargaining strength (Fine 2007). Yet these objectives which are set by unions cannot necessarily be achieved through community organizing practices. Tensions exist between different actors in terms of how they define the success of community organizing activities. First, grassroots-based community organizations (J4DW) emphasize the goal of grassroots empowerment, such as the development of social capital and collective identity and the self-organizing capacity of workers, instead of institutional goals. As J4DW registers itself as an independent entity, Unite is confronted with the problem of how to balance its relationship with community organizations when they gain status and strength in the public sphere. Second, some professional community organizations such as MECA prioritize organizational developments and thus there is a danger that they might be competing with unions for membership. All these challenges require unions to adopt a broad understanding of the power of community organizing. Particularly in the case of immigrant workers who are concentrated in flexible and dispersed industrial sectors where no collective bargaining framework is available, it is important for unions to recognize that union power is not only built upon membership and collective bargaining, but more importantly, linked to the development of labour consciousness and the enhancement of workers’ capacity for self-organization when globalization compromises the validity of unions. As Simms and Holagte (2010: 165-166) point out:
We need to go beyond an evaluation of organising which assesses outcomes against the objectives set by the unions, and move towards an evaluation which rests on a more political understanding of organising...We argue that central to the purpose of organising activity should be notions of worker self-organisation and power, a debate that is certainly not widely heard within the UK academic or practitioner communities at present...The changing political and economic context (including a possible change of government) makes the need to have a vision of renewal for the labour movement that puts workers’ power at the centre of action and debates even more acute than it has been.

10.4 The limitations of the research

There are a few theoretical and methodological limitations to this study. First, there is a lack of analysis in relation to how the time factor affects community organizing processes and outcomes. Time is important for the interpretation of community, both bringing people and organizations together and pushing communities apart. The community organizing experiences of the low-skilled immigrant workers and civil organizations involved and mobilization outcomes are mediated by notions and experiences of time. Temporality is also important for understanding the ways in which community organizing leads to changes for immigrant workers. Therefore, a useful way to approach community unionism is to consider the development of various elements of community over time and their implications for the outcome of mobilization efforts, and to recognize that, at different intervals, certain aspects of communities, such as organizational relationships and geographical scales, can promote community unity or divide the community. Thus, Crow and Allen (1995:149) called for:

… an approach which emphasizes community’s several dimensions and their interconnectedness as well as exploring the ways in which these interconnections are grounded in time-specific as well as place-specific contexts … such an approach will need to pay attention to the ways in which community time mediates connections between communities as places, social structures and meanings if it is to avoid the problems of previous typologies.
The study implies that the time factor might have a significant impact on the nature of community organization and the sustainability of successful organizing outcomes. Over six years, MECA has changed in character from a Polish self-help group focusing on providing substantial support at ground level to a bureaucratic and professional organization that prioritizes organizational performance and development. The notion of social time also affects the sustainability of successful organizing outcomes. GMB managed to recruit Polish members and set up a Polish branch through learning initiatives in 2006. However, by the time the research was carried out, the branch had already begun to dissolve. Due to the limitations imposed by financial resources and time, the researcher observed the two cases over separate periods of one year and five months respectively. As J4DW is still a relatively new organization, it is difficult to predict whether it can maintain its class-based and democratic nature over time or if it will become a bureaucratic community organization like MECA. Migrant policies are continuously changing in the UK and consequently the political opportunities available to MDWs are also changing. Without the benefit of long-term observation, it is hard to infer whether the labour solidarity and collective activism developed within J4DW can facilitate further collective mobilizations. In case two, the economic and social needs of post-2004 Polish immigrant workers have also begun to change since they started to settle in the UK. Because the research was subject to a time limit, it does not seek to generate a template for immigrant workers’ needs and trade unions’ community organizing strategies over time. Instead, it makes contingent comments in the time-specific context.

Secondly, the fieldwork was carried out in a wider community setting which included an immigrant neighbourhood, community organizations, churches and social clubs. However, the researcher did not gain access to workplaces because MDWs work in private households and Polish workers are employed in highly-exploitative
food-processing factories where researchers are often not welcome. The fieldwork revealed that some employers were particularly sensitive when the researcher sought to examine the collective mobilization of immigrant workers, frequently refusing to grant access to migrant workers. The early literature on rank and file activism (Kimeldorf, 1999; Scott 1985) suggests that the grievances upon which collective assistance are forged occur at the point of production and therefore the workplace and its dynamics are the natural starting point for understanding why and how workers contest power at work. Workplace dynamics are still highly relevant to collective mobilizations among immigrant workers as the majority of them suffer from highly exploitative labour processes (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7). In order to address the limitation of not having access to workplaces, the research participants were invited to give detailed descriptions of their work during the interviews that were often conducted in private houses and cafes. Away from the supervision and surveillance of their employers, immigrant workers were usually free to talk openly about their experiences of work.

Finally, there are only two cases studies in the research. Therefore the researcher makes contingent comments on the forms and diversity of the community organizing efforts of immigrant workers in low-skilled sectors. It would be useful and worthwhile to add more case studies in order to further analyze the complexity of community unionism and its consequences for organizing outcomes. By analyzing more cases that are diverse in terms of the different dimensions of community that they represent, such as identity, geography, organization and time, it may be possible to generate a template for community organizing among immigrant workers.
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Appendix one: Interview guide

Guide for interviews with immigrant workers

Work-related questions:

1) How did you come here doing this job?
2) Can you describe your daily life?
3) What do you get paid now? Do you have any benefits?
4) How many jobs have you done since you came to the UK? Why did you change your job?
5) What are good and bad things about your current job? How does it compare with other jobs you’ve done before?
6) How do other people react when you tell them your job?
7) What kind of relationship do you have with your employers? How do you think of them? How do you think your employer thinks about you?
8) What kind of relationships do you have with your colleagues? How many of them you can reply on them when you need help?
9) Are you thinking of staying in the current job for long time? Why or why not?
10) If you have any problem with your work, who or which organization do you turn to for help?

Social life questions:

1) What do you do in your spare time? What kind of people do you socialize after work?
2) Do you belong to any institutions, societies or clubs in the UK?
3) If so, how does it compare with your experiences at work? What kind of activities are you involved in?
4) If you think of your life in the UK, where do you feel happiest? Where do you feel
Appendix

most respected?

Organizing-related questions:

1) Have you joined unions or not? Why or why not?
2) Can you tell me how that decision reflects anything about your social values?
3) Have you been involved in any campaign organized by Justice for domestic workers (or MECA)? If so, what did you do?
4) How did the experiences alert you? Does it change the way you think of your work, trade unions or your life in the UK?

Home country life

1) Were you born in the UK?
2) If not, can you tell me something about your life before you came to the UK? Why did you come to the UK?
3) How do you compare your work and life in the UK with that at home?
4) Do you plan to go back to your country in the near future? If not, what is your plan in the UK?

Is there anything particular you want to talk about your work and life in the UK?
Appendix

Guide for interviews with union officials and community activists

1) Can you tell me how you first got involved in organizing immigrant domestic workers (or Polish immigrant workers)?
2) What was it that appealed to you in particular?
3) What has been your role in the organization?
4) What has been your main experience since getting involved?
5) How do you manage to work with others who have different backgrounds and values?
6) How is this model of politics different from your usual way of doing things?
7) Is there any opposition voice from your organization against the involvement in the coalition building? Why do you think were those people not motivated to get involved in the same way?
8) What has it done for your organization? (Concrete outcome? members and power?)
9) What has it done for your identity as a community activist?
10) Do you feel that this model of organization allows people to forge mutual relationship of respect or just simply co-presence?
11) What are the wider implications of this organization?
Appendix

Appendix two: questionnaire for J4DW members

General Information:

Age: ____________                         Nationality ________________

Gender: Male ☐     Female ☐     Are you British Citizen?  Yes ☐  No ☐

How long have you been in the UK? _______Years     _________Months

Are you on Domestic Work Visa?  Yes ☐ No ☐ If no, please specify______________

Email address: (optional) _________________________________

Telephone number: (optional) _____________________________

Work Information:

Monthly Salary (before tax): ___________pounds

Working hours per day:_______ hours  Days off per week :____

Do you have paid holidays? Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes, how many weeks__

Have your employer deducted some money from your monthly salary for the following reasons?

Tax ☐ Accommodation ☐ Keys ☐ Food ☐ Others (Please specify)_____________

If yes, how much is it? ________pounds

Is your accommodation offered by your employer?  Yes ☐ No ☐ If no, where? __________

Why and how did you join Justice for Domestic Workers?

How did you know Justice for Domestic Workers for the first time?

Through friends from your country or ethnical background ☐ (if yes, how did you know him or her?)
Appendix

Through friends whose nationality and ethnical backgrounds are different from yours [ ] (if yes, how did you know him or her? ________________________________________________________________ )

Through Churches [ ] Through lawyer associations [ ]
Through trade unions [ ] Through Kalayaan [ ]
Other ways (Please specify) ________________________________

Have you approached any of these organizations or people to get help to solve your problems before you joined Justice for Domestic Worker? (Please select all groups that you have used and mark the one that you have used most with *)

Citizen Advice Bureau [ ] Trade unions [ ] Ethnic groups and organizations [ ]
Police [ ] Church [ ] Friends [ ]
Your employers [ ] Others (please specify) ____________________

Why did you join Justice for Domestic Workers? (Please select three reasons and mark the most important one with *)

English and IT Classes [ ] Make friends [ ] Look for new jobs in the UK [ ]
Combat Discrimination [ ] Tackle low pay [ ] Seek legal advice [ ]
Combat physical abuse or psychological abuse from your employer [ ]
Participate in campaigns and other public events related to domestic workers [ ]
Other reasons (please specify) ________________________________

Activities

Have you joined Unite the Union? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Why? ____________________________________________________________

What activities organized by Justice for Domestic Workers have you participated in so far? (Please select all activities that you have attended and mark the most useful two activities to you with *)
Appendix

English and IT classes on Sundays □   Monthly self-regulated meetings □
Social activities  □   Campaigns and demonstrations □
Immigration policy session □   Unite the union meetings □
Legal advice session □   Migration forums and conferences □
Media activities (such as interviews from TV and newspaper) □
Direct discussion with policy makers □
Others (Please specify) ____________________________

**How often** did you participate in activities organized by Justice for Domestic Workers, Kalayaan and Unite the Union?

- More than twice per week □
- Once per week □
- Once two weeks □
- Once per month □
- Others (please specify) ____________________________

**Feedback on activities**

How do you think of J4DW, Kalayaan and Unite the Union? Do you feel able to make things better at work and in your life by joining these groups?

How would you rate the activities organized by Justice for Domestic Workers so far?

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<th>Average</th>
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</table>
Can you please explain why you like or do not like these activities?

What have you got after joining Justice for Domestic Worker? (Please select all benefits that you have gained and mark the most important two benefits with *)

- Get to know employment rights that you have
- Get free education and then look for better jobs
- Make more friends and feel less lonely
- Feel more confident to bargain with your employers
- Feel more powerful and more willing to be engaged in public events related to domestic workers

Are you a member of any organizations/groups?

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<th>After you Joined J4DW</th>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
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</table>
Are you willing to participate in broad campaigns related to domestic works and immigrants in the UK?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Why? ________________________________________________

__________________________________________________

**Empowerment questions:**

How do you think you can make things better for yourself at work or improve life quality?

Do you feel able to create changes by joining Justice for Domestic Workers? What else do you expect Justice for Domestic Work to do for you?