When the 'Unorganisable' Organise:

The Collective Mobilisation of Migrant Domestic Workers in London

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Abstract

The collective mobilisation of migrant workers is an important issue for analysis. Three key barriers to the of mobilisation of migrant workers have been identified – employment conditions that tend to prevent migrant workers coming together, the framings held by migrant workers that marginalise an understanding of their position as that of exploited workers and the issue of the sustainability of any mobilisation. The paper examines migrant domestic workers as a case in which collective mobilisation appears highly unlikely. The paper uses the social movement approach as a meta-theoretical framing to explore the collective mobilisation of migrant domestic workers in London. As such, it analyses how the 'unorganisable' organise. We show that mobilisation changed the framing of migrant domestic workers from 'labourers of love' to workers with rights. It was able to do this because it addressed the three barriers to mobilisation: by creating a space for the development of communities of coping among migrant workers; by using politicised learning; and by using participative democracy and collective leadership development, tied to links with formal organisations. The paper argues for the importance of social scientists examining

the creative processes by which migrant workers move towards collective mobilisation, and for the utility of a social movement approach in this process.

Keywords

migrant workers, collective mobilisation, communities of coping, domestic work, social movement, unorganisable

Introduction

International migration has become one of the most prominent and controversial issues in the twenty-first century. Much of its prominence is attributed to the wave of economic migrants in the past few decades. Immigration has stirred age-old fear about outsiders who have been blamed for taking jobs, scrounging social benefits and criminal activities (Philips, 2003). Outside of the discourse of vilification of migrants, a key topic of concern relates to the forms of exploitation and disadvantage suffered by migrant workers (Mehrotra, 2010; Piper, 2013). Sassan (1991) noted that there was a rapid growth of migrant jobs at the both top and bottom end of the labour market in global cities. It is reported that about 25% of health professionals, natural and social science professionals, managers in hospitality and leisure services and chief executives are migrant workers in the UK (Rienzo, 2014). Alongside the increase in professional workers in leading sectors of the economy, however, the majority of migrant workers still concentrate in low-skilled processing and elementary occupations in the UK. In 2013, the top five occupations of migrant workers by workforce share included elementary process plant occupations, cleaning and housekeeping supervisors, food preparation and hospitality trades, elementary cleaning occupations and process operatives (Rienzo, 2014).

Domestic work, agriculture and construction have been identified by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Piper, 2003) as particularly important because: they are the sectors where migrant workers are concentrated and where labour relations are largely unregulated; they involve largely individualised forms of employment relations; and the temporary nature of their residential/employment status makes political activism by migrant workers a risky undertaking. How to combat migrant workers' conditions of injustice has appeared on the agendas of the ILO, trade unions and other progressive Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). This paper focuses upon one of the most marginalised group of migrant workers, namely those undertaking domestic work. The collective mobilisation of migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in the UK is an important issue for analysis because 31.2% of the workforce in domestic personnel are migrant workers (Rienzo, 2014) and domestic work is a sector where traditional workplace-based union organising is almost impossible.

The paper uses the social movement approach as a meta-theoretical framing to explore the creative mobilisation among migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in London. The case shows that there were good reasons for regarding MDWs as almost beyond the reach of traditional collective organisation in that there were three key barriers in terms of employment conditions that individualised workers, in terms of framings held by the workers that marginalised an understanding of their position as exploited workers, and in terms of barriers to the sustainability of any mobilisation. Despite these barriers, non-traditional collective mobilisation of MDWs has been possible. By analysing the processes by which this

mobilisation took place, the paper makes the following contributions. It makes an empirical contribution. Through its use of ethnographic research, it addresses an important gap in our knowledge regarding a highly marginalised group of workers within the contemporary economy. In addition, the paper puts forward a number of analytical points that can be gleaned from a case when the 'unorganisable' organise. First, we point to communities of coping (Korczynski, 2003), oral-based informal networks in or beyond the workplace, as a potentially important form of micro-mobilisation context, in which migrant workers in dispersed sectors may come together to share the lived experiences of their working lives. Second, while communities of coping may be crucial, they may not be enough for a nascent collectivism to develop into a resistive solidarity. The case highlights the key role that careful, non-didactic politicised learning can play in the cognitive liberation of migrant workers that the social movement literature identifies as crucial. Third, we argue that the case represents a creative associational model of organising that is based on participative democracy, collective leadership development, combined with autonomous links to more stable formal organisations. The paper suggests that this associational model of organising can be at least sustainable in to the medium term. Finally and more broadly, we argue for the utility of a social movement perspective in extending our theorising of patterns of collective mobilisation among migrant workers.

Analysing the Organisation of the 'Unorganisable'

The rest of the literature review has three sub-sections. First, we show that the literature

points to three key barriers to the emergence and sustainability of mobilisation among migrant workers. We then discuss the literature relating to the specific context of MDWs, and argue that MDWs constitute an extreme 'unorganisable' case. We end by considering analytical frames to examine the case, and argue for the merits of a social movement approach.

Barriers to the emergence and sustainability of migrant mobilisation

Migrant workers are an important part of the labour force in many contemporary economies. In the UK, Rienzo (2014) estimated that 15.2 per cent of the labour force were foreign-born migrants in 2013. Migrant workers in the UK are largely concentrated in low-skilled sectors which involve high levels of exploitation and low rates of unionisation (Coleman, 2010). Given these points, the potential for collective mobilisation among migrant workers in the UK is an issue of considerable importance.

The existing literatures have highlighted two key forms of barriers to the potential emergence of collective mobilisation among migrant workers. One barrier relates to the structure of the employment conditions of many migrant workers at the bottom of the labour market. Schierup et al (2006) outlined key phases in post-war political economy with direct implications for the nature of work undertaken by migrants and the potential for collective mobilisation in the UK. In the period of 1945-73, within a political economy of the Keynesian settlement, migrants' work tended to be embedded in large factories with strong union representation. By contrast, the current phase of migration, dated by the authors from

around 1990, has occurred in a context of a move to neo-liberal policies in which a laissez-faire state offers little protection to workers, and in which there are weak unions, and fragmented labour markets which open the door for exploitative employment practices.

There is a tendency for migrant workers to undertake sub-contracted, temporary, and casualised work in the UK (Schierup et al, 2006). According to the 2004 British Workplace Employment Relations Survey, building service maintenance was subcontracted out in 52% of workplaces, while this figure was 52% for cleaning, 34% for training, 29% for transportation, and 29 % for security (Kersley et al, 2006:106). All these sectors have a high share of migrant workers in their workforce (Rienzo, 2014). This indicates that flexible and precarious forms of employment are spreading among workplaces where migrant workers are concentrated.

Contemporary labour migration in the UK is increasingly located in private service industries. Among the top five sectors of foreign-born worker by workforce share, there were three low-skilled service sectors: domestic personnel (31.2%), accommodation (27.8%) and food and beverage service activities (27.1%) in the UK (Rienzo, 2014). 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 organisation might not be sufficient to mobilise migrant workers in dispersed service sectors. Furthermore**,** the growth in irregular migration has also been intertwined with a burgeoning of the informal economy. Economic deregulation and employer practices have created informal sector jobs, forming a pull factor for irregular migrants. Overall, this first type of

barrier can be seen as acting against the potential for migrant workers to come together collectively. As Castells (1996:45) commented:

> 'Labour is disaggregated in its performance, fragmented in its organisation, diversified in its existence, divided in its collective action …Labour loses its collective identity, becomes increasingly individualised in its capacities, in its working conditions and in its interests and projects.'

The second type of barrier relates to the subjectivities that migrant workers may hold. The 'dual frame of reference' thesis is the most important argument here. Some scholars (Piore, 1979; Waldinger and Lichter; 2003) argue that migrant workers may tend to be more quiescent in accepting low-end of the labour market employment conditions because they compare themselves less with the participants in the UK labour market, and more with their counterparts in their country of origin. Even if their employment conditions are poor by UK standards, because of this additional frame of reference, migrant workers may have little sense of injustice, and therefore will be less likely to collectively mobilise. Overall, this second type of barrier can be seen as acting against the potential for migrant workers to see themselves as exploited workers.

Further, even if mobilisation may emerge, there remains a significant barrier to the longer-term sustainability of such mobilisation (Ally, 2005; Hyde, 2003). If the mobilisation occurs outside of stable formal organisations, such as trade unions, there is an immediate issue of how to sustain the mobilisation beyond the short-term. Important problems exist even if the mobilisation occurs through stable formal organisations. The industrial relations

literature on trade unions clearly points to the importance of at least tacit support from employers for the longer-term stability of trade unions (Clegg, 1976), but such a tacit support is less likely to emerge from employers in the largely casualised, sub-contracted world in which many migrants work. Further, even if there can be some form of tacit institutional support from employers, the lack of long-term employment relationships in the casualised, sub-contracted sectors also poses an important problem with regard to the longer-term sustainability of organising.

Migrant domestic workers as an extreme case

The focus of our analysis in this paper is upon MDWs in London. The existing literature on migrant domestic work suggests that MDWs constitute an 'extreme' case in the terms of Flyvbjerg's (2011) typology of cases. It is an extreme case in the sense that, assessed against the three types of barriers discussed above, collective mobilisation among MDWs appears highly unlikely to emerge and be sustained. First, the individualised, dispersed employment conditions facing MDWs tend to create a barrier against the workers coming together. MDWs work (and usually live) in private households and thus there is no workplace setting in which MDWs can share work grievances with fellow workers. As Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos (1997: 56) argue: 'the peculiar exceptionalism of paid domestic work centers on the spatial isolation and atomisation of individual employers, employees, and workplaces'. To gain autonomy from employers, MDWs have to turn to the public sphere, but access may be limited by factors such as prohibitions on going out unsupervised or extremely long working

hours.

The literature also suggests that the subjectivities held by MDWs may constitute a second significant barrier to mobilisation. Not only is there the issue of the dual frame of reference, but there are also further significant issues here linked to the specific occupation of domestic work. 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. Others have also argued that domestic work is often stigmatised as 'servant' 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). Indeed, Grant (1997) has titled an article on this subject: 'Domestic workers: employees or servants?' The strength of these alternative subjectivities for MDWs has led Meagher (2000: 27) to argue that the creation of a worker identity *per se* is a key issue in MDWs' collective organisation:

> 'The creation of worker identity is an objective of strategic action in the domestic services industry, whereas in "mainstream" industries, mutual recognition as workers is closer to the starting point of collective identification.'

'Isolation, dependence, [and] invisibility' (Gaitskell *et al.*, 1983: 87) are therefore the patterns of paid domestic work that tend to hinder collective organisation. Although these significant barriers to collective mobilisation may lead to a view of MDWs as almost unorganisable in terms of traditional forms of collective organisation, some cases of non-traditional mobilisation among MDWs have been outlined. Ally (2005) makes the case

that while traditional union-based forms of organising domestic work have not been sustained, recently, alternative modes of 'associational' organising have emerged. This associational model is loosely defined as a non-union-based model of representation in which migrant, ethnic, women's, human rights, legal advocacy, and non-governmental organisations mobilise, on a wider range of issues, beyond just employment. Anderson (2001) recounted the case of MDWs in London forming the United Workers' Association in which MDWs came together partly as a campaigning group around visa status issues, partly as a social forum, and partly to share legal and social services. Meagher (2000) outlined cases of alternative forms of organisation undertaken by domestic workers, in Sweden and in the USA.

Although these studies point to cases of migrant domestic workers being involved in alternative modes of organising, they, collectively, raise the issue of the sustainability of such organising efforts. For instance, the mobilisation centred on the United Workers' Association studied by Anderson (2001) has not been sustained because this association was no longer active in mobilising MDWs since it won the campaign about domestic worker visas in 1998[i]. Further, Hyde's (2003) study of mobilisation in New York highlights a tendency for such associational models to burn brightly but briefly around specific law-centred campaigns. This suggests that in the case of MDWs also matches onto the third significant barrier relating to long-term sustainability of organising.

Analysing mobilisation among migrant workers: the utility of a social movement approach

We turn now to consider an appropriate frame to inform analysis. We first outline contributions within migration studies and industrial relation fields. We note limitations here and argue for the utility of a social movement approach.

The field of ethnic and migration studies (Chimienti, 2011) tends to have a bottom-up focus on migrants as active social actors. This literature has given rise to some rich case study analyses, focusing not just on the presence of collective organisation (Anderson, 2001; Cantor, 2010; Hearn and Bergos, 2011; Briones, 2013), but also on its absence (Paragas, 2006). A danger recently highlighted by Pero (2014) in relation to some of this migration studies literature is that a focus on issues of culture and (often faith-based and ethnicity-based) identity can lead to a marginalisation of the potential for employment-centred, class-based mobilisation among migrants.

The issue of organising migrant workers has also recently become a central interest of academics and practitioners in the field of industrial relations. The erosion of union influence and membership has stimulated a 'renegotiation of union identity' (Heery and Adler, 2004: 64), in that unions have increasingly recognised that the future of trade unionism depends on a more inclusive strategy that accommodates the interests of previously marginalised categories of workers in the UK. The focus is on whether institutions of regulation and representation, such as trade unions, could adjust to the needs and demands of migrants (Holgate, 2005; Martinez Lucio and Perrett, 2009). In other words, trade unions were themselves a focus of concern, rather than migrant workers. This approach was also reflected in the measurement of effectiveness and success of organising which was often defined in

relation to the gains of established Industrial Relations institutions such as union membership, collective bargaining and formal systems of representation (Heyes, 2009). As Martinez Lucio and Connolly (2010:20) comment:

> 'It suggests that this positive turn [the interest in the study of migration, race and ethnicity] 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.'

Of course, not all studies within industrial relations are marked by these limitations. A number of writers and practitioners have argued that, in order to organise a previously marginalised section of the workforce, unions have to recreate themselves as social movements in which unions foster activism, leadership and organisation among workers (Greer, 2008; Turner and Hurd, 2001; Waterman and Wills, 2001). Of particular note here are studies which focus on emerging coalitions of trade unions and community organisations. Some writers (Holgate, 2009; McBride and Greenwood, 2009) have begun to explore such a community organising approach linked to norms of broad social justice. Connolly et al. (2012) pointed out that trade unions in the UK are wary of working outside their own structures and have been ambivalent to the setting up of 'alternative' worker organisations for migrants such as the workers' centres that exist in the US. The strengths of this community organising approach can be taken further through the adoption of a social movement approach

We, therefore, apply and extend an analytical lens informed by the social movement literature (Tilly, 1978), particularly the strand of that literature focused on the culture, agency

and lived experience of the powerless who come together (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999). The social movement approach adopted here draws from both political process perspective (Gamson, 1990; McAdam, 1988; Tilly, 1978) and new socio-psychological perspective (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999; Klandermans, 1997) in social movement studies, which regards mobilisation as a cognitive as well as political process through which individuals are transformed into collective actors. This approach helps by directing our attention to the agency of migrant workers, and by offering important concepts to explore micro and internal organising dynamics within migrant communities Notably, the social movement approach is well-suited to examine social action around the three forms of barrier to migrant workers' mobilisation and organisation. Our analytical focus is upon both mobilising and organising. We recognise that authors such as Bate et al (2004) and Ganz (2010), point to differences between mobilising and organising: mobilising is seen as bringing together the people who are supporting the cause, moving individuals from bystander to participant, whereas organising is seen as centring on translating the energy developed through framing and mobilising, into purposeful and effective action, often linked to a key role for leadership and the formal organisation. In practice, social processes can involve both mobilising and organising (and this is particularly true in the case examined in this paper), and so our focus encompasses both areas.

Barrier 1: micro-mobilisation context. In the context of this study, the first useful concept of the social movement approach is McAdam's 'micro-mobilisation context' defined as 'the small group setting in which the process of collective attribution are combined with

rudimentary forms of organisations to produce mobilisation for collective action' (1988:134-135). This matches on to the barrier relating to the lack of space for migrant workers to come together. In union revival studies with a focus on migration, the group setting in organising often refers to established industrial relations institutions which are not available at individualised workplace in domestic work sector. For dispersed migrant workers, another form of informal community is also pertinent, however – communities of coping. Here, we contextualize and thereby develop McAdam's abstract concept by analysing how far 'communities of coping' may constitute a micro-mobilisation context. Communities of coping are intimate, dense oral-based networks in which service workers turn to each other for emotional support (Korczynski, 2003), particularly in order to socialise the costs of emotional labour. They have been well documented in a range of service jobs with high emotional labour costs (Lewis, 2005; Seymour and Sandiford, 2005). The scholarship on domestic work has highlighted patterns of behaviour among domestic workers – such as gossiping and making fun of employers (Cohen 1991; Ozyegin 2001) – which are very similar to communities of coping. A key unresolved issue in the emerging literature on communities of coping is whether these communities tend to simply accommodate workers to their situation, or whether they may serve as a basis for resistive collective organisation (Simms, 2005).

Barrier 2: Focus on cognitive liberation. Central to the social movement approach is a focus on how subjectivities of agents come to change, for there is an understanding that the emergence of a social movement requires a revision in the manner in which people look at

the problematic conditions of their life (Turner, 1969; Kelly, 1998). In McAdam's words (1988), the process of 'cognitive liberation' is crucial to individuals' participation in collective actions. He identified three key cognitive processes in 'cognitive liberation'. First, people who normally accept the authority of 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 realise 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). Klandermans (1997) also shows that people are more likely to participate in movements if they believe that movements help to redress their grievances at affordable costs. Cognitive liberation is particularly important in mobilising MDWs because of their multiple subjective barriers to considering structural causes of work exploitation - the second barrier to mobilisation.

Barrier 3. Focus on the sustainability of collective action. In addition, social movement scholars address the issue of the sustainability of collective mobilisation through the focus on the dynamics and form of collective action (Tilly, 1978). Brill (1971) argues that successful outcomes of collective actions cannot be sustainable if movement leaders are unable to build an effective organisation. Gamson (1990) also suggests that successful groups tend to be more bureaucratic and centralised, while Piven and Cloward (1979) critique the conservative tendencies of formal organisations and ague that the movement of the powerless can be best accomplished by a national network of cadre organisations capable of coordinating mass mobilisations. Some studies on migrant organising suggest that sustainable organising relies

on formal leadership who are frequently drawn from the well-educated middle class and outside grants (Moody 2009). However, some movement scholars (Robnett, 1996; Sacks, 1988) argue that within the context of civil right movements in the US, 'bridge leaders', those who initiated the ties between the community and the social movement, were central to the empowerment of participants and the sustainability of activism. Bridge leaders cross the boundaries between the public life of a movement organisation and the private life of its constituents and see activism as the empowerment of their communities. This type of leadership may be important to the sustainable organising of low-skilled migrant workers who often have low self-confidence and a sense of powerlessness.

These three important aspects of the social movement approach – the focus on how people come together in the micro-mobilisation context, the focus on how participants may come to reframe their understanding of their working life and the focus on sustainability of forms of collective action – make it an appropriate lens for this study for they exactly match on to the key barriers to collective mobilisation among MDWs, outlined above. These three aspects of social movement literature provide the meta-theoretical frame for this study.

Research methodology

The MDW self-help ground studied was Justice for Domestic Workers (J4DW) in London. The aim of the research project was to study forms of self-mobilisation among migrant workers. J4DW was chosen because it was a self-help group led by MDWs themselves. J4DW was established by eight MDWs in March 2009. It offers a supportive group setting where members

can share working experiences and build a sense of community. J4DW is affiliated to the hotel and restaurant branch of Unite the Union and to Kalayaan ('freedom' in Tagalog) which is a charity organisation providing advice and advocacy service for MDWs in the UK. In November 2010, J4DW registered itself as a company[ii]. Among people on the management broard are domestic workers from the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Morocco and Nigeria who are directly elected by J4DW members, founders of Kalayaan, an official from Unite the Union and one community priest. The MDW directors discussed in the following sections refer to MDWs on the management board. The chair of J4DW was a fill-time Philippine domestic worker. So far, J4DW has not received any funding from government or other social bodies. Its functioning has largely relied on a membership fee of one pound monthly per person.

J4DW has approximately 500 members[iii] and has organised the following activities for their members: free English as Second Language, IT and art classes every Sunday; organising courses offered by Unite; legal surgeries by qualified solicitors; employment rights advice; emergency support for those escaping employers; cooperation with research institutes to produce reports on working conditions; parliamentary lobbying; media connections (such as BBC Four: Dispatches and Guardian) to raise public awareness on the plight of MDWs, and social trips.

An ethnographic approach was adopted with an explicit purpose of unearthing how MDWs respond to the structures facing them. Ethnographic research has been traditionally married to the agenda which aims to lend voice to the research subjects (Thomas, 1993). A

concern regarding positionality is vital as it impels us to acknowledge our own power and bias in the research process. The fact that the researcher was an Asian female migrant, herself, assisted in building relationships of trust with MDWs. However, the researcher's status as a middle-class researcher and unmarried woman might have created noticeable social distance to MDWs. To overcome this problem, the researcher showed a committed presence by working as a volunteer for MDWs' language and art training. As the research was emotionally-laden, the researcher always tried to show commitment alongside them. Without such a shared emotional space that offers the possibility of trust, it would have been difficult to establish a narrative space. The researcher felt that taking so much time away from MDWs without changing their material conditions created a reciprocal obligation from the researcher. We sought to 'give something back' to the community by helping the group in raising their voice to the public. The research finding has been utilised by MDWs in their parliamentary debates and public speeches. Given the vulnerable position of many MDWs, the research material has been anonymised.

Four strands of data collecting are utilized in this paper. First, the researcher worked as assistant English tutor for two months and helped with employment advice sessions. Second, the researcher was involved in J4DW monthly self-regulated meetings, social activities, union meetings and parliamentary meetings over 12-months. Field notes and diaries were generated from observations. Third, 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting from 25 minutes to one and half hours were conducted with MDWs, union officials, community activists and NGO staff. MDW interviewees were diverse in terms of their nationalities, with The Philippines, India and Indonesia being the main countries of origin, and their age ranged from 24 to 54.

Because J4DW did not have formal records, it was not possible to say if the characteristics of this group differed in any important way from characteristics of the whole membership. Further, informal talks were carried out in the occasions of social gatherings and language training. A group discussion with 12 MDWs on employment rights also informed the study. Finally, MDWs' coursework in English classes and art workshops were recorded. The analysis of the ethnographic data, particularly unstructured field notes and diaries, was undertaken in an inductive thematic manner: data were coded to categories and themes that emerged from the field work. In addition, it used methodological triangulation – a technique designed to compare these four stands of data to help provide a more comprehensive insights into MDWs' working and living conditions and their mobilisation efforts.

The Case of J4DW

Our research findings are structured as follows. First, we outline that MDWs, prior to involvement in J4DW, tended to be dispersed and isolated, and that they tended to frame their position as labourers of love. These link directly to the first two barriers of migrants - not being able to come together as workers, and having frames which act against them seeing their position as that of exploited workers. We then outline the processes by which these barriers were overcome – the creation of a safe space for the development of communities of coping, and politicised learning. We also consider the development of participative democracy and leadership and the links to formal organisations as a way of addressing the barrier to sustainability. Finally, we outline key outcomes from these processes.

From MDWs as isolated labourers of love

As we will substantiate below, prior to involvement in J4DW, the MDWs were largely isolated, and outside of social networks. To qualify for a domestic worker visa, MDWs have to work for one employer for at least one year, with the employer agreeing to move to the UK and bring them with them. Working and living in employers' houses, MDWs lacked autonomous space. It was commonly reported that MDWs were not allowed to go out without company and supervision from their employers. The long working hours also prohibited them from going to public spheres. Although many MDWs did make some contact with a small number of MDWs in their day-to-day activities of looking after their employees' children, overall, the dispersed and isolated nature of domestic work meant that this was not translated into a sense of collective power with fellow workers.

Prior to involvement with J4DW, three framings tended to dominate how MDWs saw their position. These framings were a maternalism/familial framing, a servant framing, and a dual frame of reference. All worked to marginalise the ability for MDWs to conceive of their position as exploited workers. The importance of maternalism meant that many MDWs initially tended to frame their position as labourers of love. The first form of maternalism was the framing of 'being part of the family'. To understand the strength of the framing of maternalism, it is necessary to understand the MDWs' roles in their own families. Many workers described a position in which they gave generous love to their own family and their employer's family, whilst suffering from huge personal emotional loss in return. A number of

MDWs in the study reported that their husbands had left them after they went to work abroad. It was also not uncommon for interviewees to report that they were no longer recognised by their children when they returned home. In J4DW's monthly meetings, MDWs frequently used the adjective- 'loveless', to describe their situation. This informs why they defined whether an employer was good, less in terms of the wages and benefits they received, and more in terms of the quasi-family relationship they experienced in the employer's homes:

> '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)... I like the feeling of being part of the family. A lot of domestic workers, their employers treat them badly. They are like slaves. That's why I don't care about the salary. I was lucky (laughing).' (Filipino, 36 years old, single, 5 years in the UK)

The other very emotional aspect of maternalism was that of the 'motherhood' roles. Most MDWs who had children at home transferred a significant degree of their 'motherhood' to their employers' children. Such strong emotional bonds with their employers' children also blurred the line between 'working' and 'mothering'. Some domestic workers were even willing to compromise the employment rights for the comfort received from being a good 'mother' for their employer's children:

> '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?... 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).' (Sri Lankan, 40 years old, single mother with one child, 5 years in the UK)

On the other hand, many MDWs took the definition of motherhood to include 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 mobilisation for the fear of losing their jobs:

'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.' (Indian, 38 years old, married with two children, 2 years in the UK)

J4DW monthly meetings always contained a section of new members' self-introduction, in which most J4DW new members described themselves with low self-esteem as 'domestic servants' rather than 'domestic workers'. This suggests the importance of a 'servant' framing. Such a framing was partly generated from their working experiences as domestic workers in the previous destination countries or home countries. An Indonesian domestic worker shared her working experience in Qatar where she was locked in the room every day after she finished work at midnight and unlocked every morning at 4:30 am to let her start working again. She said that she had become used to the way in which she was treated as a 'servant' subject to dispositions of their masters. Such a 'servant' framing can also be reinforced by public

perceptions of domestic work in their homes 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 had been uncomfortable about this, but had not known how to articulate a different framing around employment rights.

After they moved to the UK, many MDWs carried the 'servant' framing with them as they had little chance to access employment right information and advice. The 'live-in' conditions and long working hours reduced their chance to go out, meet friends and join social groups.

MDWs also often made reference to a 'dual frame of reference' in interviews and discussions. Although the non-compliance of National Minimum Wage was prevalent in this industry, many MDWs considered their salary as acceptable compared with their wage 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.' (Indian, Married, 36 years old, 3 years in the UK)

Some domestic workers suffered from even worse working conditions back home while they still could not support their family adequately. As one Moroccan domestic worker commented:

> '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 Moroccan Dirham/week [about £3/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.' (Moroccan, 43 years old, single, 4 years in the UK)

To MDWs as labourers with collective rights

As the above framings veiled the exploitative employment relationship in which they were situated, the labour solidarity among MDWs was something that had to be worked for. J4DW utilised three processes to help reshape MDWs' understanding of their working lives and transform them from isolated 'labourers of love' to workers with collective rights.

Addressing barrier 1:Safe space for the development of communities of coping

First, J4DW created a safe space for the formation of communities of coping among MDWs. One of the main purposes of the group was to provide a space, apart from employers, for care and sharing. J4DW is characterised by non-hierarchical, democratic structures built upon trusting connections among participants. The recruitment method involved a migrant domestic worker asking another domestic worker, usually a friend of theirs, to join them in coping with working circumstances. Establishing a relaxing and trusting atmosphere was essential to encouraging this particularly vulnerable group of workers to talk frankly about their experience. Notably, there was one J4DW member who appeared scared and silent at the first time the researcher met her. However, in meetings in the following months she was actively sharing her horrible working experiences within the company of her friends.

J4DW monthly meetings were characterised by informality and a sharing culture. Members were allowed to bring their children, partners, friends or their employers' children to the meeting. It was common to see babies crawling on the floor during the meeting. Some were called 'J4DW babies' because their mothers carried them to classes and meetings since they were born. Members could sit anywhere, even on the table; they could also interrupt the speech at any time if they had any questions or other issues to raise. The meetings started with self-introduction of all people who were present, alongside jokes and casual interactions. There was a specific section which allowed all members to share what was going on with their work, what seminars or training they had attended, how they felt about recent classes and social trips and all other experiences in life. People who were shy and silent were always encouraged to talk by the chair of J4DW. Different emotions, such as sorrow, happiness, sympathy and empathy, flowed during the meetings. When the emotions were overwhelming, people might clap in support on hearing some strong words such as 'bastard'.

J4DW also offered emergency aid to those MDWs who escape from their employers' houses with no place to stay. Short-term accommodation and clothing were often provided by their fellow workers. 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 a significant amount of money given their income, they still attended the activities every week. As one of them explained, 'This is like my family. This is the only place I feel released and I know who I

am. They will celebrate birthday for me. This can never happen before'. Such loose trusting connections allowed them to receive love, care and attention from their fellow workers. This helped to reduce their emotional reliance on their employer's family. The majority of interviewees emphasised mutual support and sisterhood in J4DW.

Facilitated by the flat, trusting and gendered space of J4DW, MDWs tended to form communities of coping in their day-today living. They started socialising with those friends made in J4DW in their houses, restaurants, churches and parks after work and thus they established their own immediate social circle.

Addressing barrier 2: Politicised learning and radical art

There were two social processes through which sisterhood and mutuality, developed within communities of coping, were transformed into a resistive form of labour solidarity. Politicised learning provided an interactive context in which labour solidarity was developed. English and IT classes were taught by the J4DW chair and other volunteers every Sunday in a place offered by Unite the Union. The primary purpose of education was to equip MDWs with necessary language knowledge and skills so as to improve their working conditions. Importantly, the chair of J4DW emphasised the importance of educating MDWs to help them create their own view of the world and develop their political consciousness. Her consciousness of politically educating MDWs was shaped by her personal experiences with critical learning: 'I was very depressed when I was writing "Cry of a Migrant". Then they (Unite the Union) found me. I got a series of training and became much more politically active. I know the importance of education.' Here, 'Cry of a Migrant' was a personal story written by the chair of J4DW and awarded the first prize at a union festival organised by Unite the Union.

J4DW chair and directors were very aware of the danger that professional educators might be seen as part of the structures that workers would resist. Therefore, all tutors were either domestic workers or Unite the union members and their learning activities had an obvious radical orientation. The educator had an explicit 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 'servant' during the conversation sessions, the educator would develop the process of reframing by asking MDWs to use the term 'worker' to describe themselves.

A story-telling method was utilised in English learning sessions to encourage members to talk about their work-related experiences. The advantage was that personal stories involved a lot of daily life experiences which were highly emotional and resonant. Educators organised group discussions on employment right in which members were encouraged to talk about issues such as wages, holidays and health. In this way, MDWs drew on their personal experiences to understand oppression and its social causation.

In addition, in their monthly art workshops, J4DW also sought to create a politicised art context. Typically, members were assigned tasks such as picture drawing and poem writing about their work and life in home countries and receiving societies. One example was the 'life river' painting task in which members were asked to display the joy and obstacles in their migrant trajectory. One domestic worker drew a crocodile in the river which symbolised the inhuman treatment she had received from her employer who enforced her to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and detained her in his house. This elicited reflections and discussion

among other domestic workers upon their working situations which helped to develop an understanding of the structural exploitation they collectively faced.

INSERT IMAGE ONE ABOUT HERE

J4DW's anniversary celebration, open to the public, and social gatherings featured a range of art performance such as solidarity songs, dancing and dramas in which MDWs' experience of exploitations and abuse in at the hands of recruitment agencies and employers were theatrically represented. In their second year anniversary party, they performed a drama piece which vividly demonstrated their migratory trajectory and how sad they felt about being separated from their children with a combination of acting and singing. Such performances allowed the socially isolated a stage for their voice to be heard in public. They successfully organised an exhibition with these art materials in London Museum to improve the public profile of their organizing activities. More importantly, the use of radical art helped transformed a community of coping into a space of creativity in which MDWs reflected on the existing unequal power relations through sharing grievances via art.

Unite education officers had previously proposed that radical art should be utilised 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 J4DW:

> 'They are source of inspiration. They have more organising spirit. They are more committed to what they are doing. 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. They are inspirational for us as trade unionists because they are teaching us how to organise people. We are not teaching them at all.'

Addressing barrier 3: Participative democracy, collective leadership development and links to formal organisations

The overall mode of participative democracy and collective leadership development constituted another part of the process in the transition of MDWs to labourers with collective rights. 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 organisers. Therefore there were attempts to develop a group-centered leadership to develop members' participation. Members were encouraged to attend organising 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. Several MDWs have been transformed from powerless migrant women to worker activists and potential organisers. J4DW also had a conception of leadership as supporting and educating. All director positions within J4DW

were non-paid and voluntary. 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. Instead of focusing on high-profile political actions, the bulk of the directors’ work aimed at individual empowerment and ‘cognitive liberation’ (McAdam, 1988) of MDWs.

Despite the emergence of worker activists through the group-centred and nurturing leadership development, it was also noted that the social and political activities of J4DW were still initiated and led by one or two charismatic MDWs at the time of writing. This is partly because organising often requires considerable skills and self-confidence. As the chair of J4DW commented, it would take a long time to equip MDWs with the necessary organising skills.

J4DW has cooperated with Unite the Union and Kalayaan to organise campaigns and classes without sacrificing its autonomy in decision-making since its establishment. Several activists from Unite and Kalayaan were also on the management board of J4DW. However, they were all aware of the importance of enhancing the self-organising capacity of MDWs. The link with trade union was innovative in this case. On one hand, Unite offered venues for their classes and monthly meetings, and organised campaigns with J4DW together in relation to the issue of migration policy and employment rights. On the other hand, J4DW was an independent entity which had autonomous decision making. In their monthly meetings, no union officials were present unless they were invited to observe the meeting. The leader of J4DW had no position in Unite. The legal advisors in J4DW were not from Unite. They were

progressive solicitors who showed personal sympathy to MDWs. There were English and art tutors from Unite, however, it was not compulsory for J4DW members to join Unite in order to receive free English education.

The founders and directors insisted that J4DW should maintain its non-bureaucratic and grassroots nature by recruiting voluntary activists within the community and rejecting public funding. The leaders of J4DW summarised two important factors which were equally important to their mobilisation: strong links with other progressive organisations and the maintenance of independence and autonomy. As one founder put it:

> '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 organised 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.'

So far, the running of J4DW's activities has 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 organisation.

Outcomes: 'I feel I am braver now'

Here, we consider outcomes of the collective mobilisation of MDWs through J4DW. We move from considerations at the level of individuals' sense of empowerment to considerations at the

level of formal institutional actions and strength.

It was apparent that the majority of J4DW members felt more confident and powerful in dealing with their own problems and engaging in public events related to MDWs. Two J4DW members put it thus:

> ‘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.’ (Indian, 38 years old, married with two children, 2 years in the UK)

> ‘I feel now I can make a difference, not just controlled by anyone. There are some people standing besides me’. (Filipino, 53 years old, married with three children, 6 years in the UK)

In some cases, concrete material gains were achieved within the sphere of employment relations. On occasion, merely access to information on rights was enough to lead to material gains. Without J4DW, the majority of MDWs interviewed stated that they had no idea of what employment rights were available to them after arriving in the UK. With the support from J4DW, however, two Filipino domestic workers successfully brought 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 fellow workers with the procedures in making a claim to employment tribunals.

The enhancement of self-confidence and the feeling of personal efficacy further increased

MDWs' propensity to join collective actions. It is clear that collective activism was engendered in J4DW. Nearly all J4DW members expressed their interests in joining campaigns related to MDWs or general workers. As one Filipino domestic worker noted:

> 'I like campaigns. I've already joined the demonstration last year. I feel we were strong, bright, and active… had some social influences…If we are sitting alone, what will happen? Nothing. We might cry, complain, but nothing will change. I like joining people. We can make other people [employers, politicians, media and other public audience that MDWs face in various forums, parliamentary debates, conferences and campaigns] listen to us. We should let those people know they need to pay us salary; they need to comply with those terms and conditions.'(Filipino, 35 years old, divorced with one child, 4 years in the UK).

It is notable that this domestic worker, when she first joined J4DW, mentioned that she was not interested in joining campaigns but wanted to focus on earning more money for her son's education. The change through involvement in J4DW was palpable, and was emblematic of the collective journey of the MDWs from labourers of love to labourers with rights.

At the institutional level, the social capital has been extended to other progressive organisations in the UK. Some MDWs joined trade unions, women organisations or ethnic organisations after joining J4DW. Unite the Union has successfully recruited a significant number of MDWs by offering support for J4DW activities.

> 'They 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 500[iv]people.' (Unite the union London organiser)

In terms of political outcomes, campaigns are on-going to urge the British government to ratify ILO convention on International Domestic Workers and to abolish the government's change of domestic visa policy announced in 2012. In June 2011, the ILO adopted convention No. 189 and supplementing Recommendation No.201 regulating terms and conditions of work for domestic workers. However, the British government refused to ratify the convention. In 2012, the government proposed changes to the domestic worker visa regulations by either removing the domestic worker visa or restricting leave to 6 or 12 months with no option to change employers. J4DW and Unite organised campaigns to urge the British government to ratify the ILO convention and to abandon the proposed visa changes. It is hard to predict the outcome of these campaigns, but we can still point out that J4DW has largely improved their public profile by strategically utilising media to frame their situation. Noticeably invitations from media, conferences and forums have asked J4DW to give their views.

Discussion

Our discussion of the wider literature on migrant workers, and of the specific literature on MDWs pointed to three key barriers to collective mobilisation – a barrier in the nature of

employment conditions that serves to isolate workers, a barrier in the framing of their situation held by MDWs which tends to marginalise MDWs' understanding of their position as exploited workers, and a barrier in terms of longer-term sustainability of any mobilisation that occurs. Table one plots these three barriers, and links them to key concepts within the social movement literature (which provides the meta-theoretical frame for this study). The table also summarises how J4DW worked to overcome these barriers, and the outcomes of these efforts. We discuss each row of the table in turn, and then consider the overall outcomes.

INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

We outlined that prior to involvement with J4DW, MDWs tended to be isolated, with their life experience concentrated in the domestic space of their employers. By creating a safe space for the development of communities of coping among MDWs, J4DW made the crucial step of engendering the coming together of MDWs. In the social movement literature, the key concept here is the creation of a micro-mobilisation context (McAdam, 1988). In this specific case, communities of coping (Korczynski, 2003) were central to the texture of this micro-mobilisation context. The starting point for J4DW was helping these isolated and often vulnerable people to come together to share their life experiences. Indeed, the mode of recruitment was centred on this idea. Even though they were isolated, MDWs often found ways to form micro-communities of coping with one or two MDWs they came across in their daily lives, and J4DW used this by asking members to bring along other MDWs that they knew within these embryonic daily lived communities of coping. The monthly meetings, and

the classes were spaces in which these communities of coping could strengthen and deepen. There are two forms of communities of coping being referenced here. One is the daily micro communities of coping that MDWs form themselves. The second is the development of a wider community of coping through the safe space of J4DW meetings. Our argument is that J4DW made use of the micro daily communities of coping for recruitment and that the safe space of J4DW then allowed the widening and thickening of these micro communities. We also argue that the development of communities of coping can overcome the first barrier to mobilisation, which relates to the atomisation of labour (Castelle, 1996; Schierup et al, 2006;Wial, 1993). Communities of coping do this by offering a group setting for migrant workers to come together collectively..

We noted that a debate within the nascent literature on communities of coping concerns whether they function merely as a mode of accommodation to a social order or whether they can form the basis for resistive solidarity among the participants (Simms, 2005). The actions of J4DW in terms of developing politicised learning suggest the belief that, at least for this group of workers, there needed to be more than communities of coping upon which to develop the cognitive liberation (MaAdam, 1988), of which the social movement literature speaks. Arguably, this was a distinct set of workers who held a number of powerful framings that marginalised the understanding of their position as exploited workers. Not only did many of these workers hold the dual frame of reference (Piore, 1979; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003) that may have relevance to the position of many temporary migrant workers, but they also understood their position in terms of a maternal/familial framing (Anderson, 2000) and in

terms of a servant framing (Mehrotra, 2010; Grant, 1997). Faced with this important barrier, J4DW offered a mode of politicised learning. Many of these MDWs wanted to improve language and other skills, and J4DW addressed this need and dovetailed this with a mode of learning that asked these MDWs to consider an alternative framing of their position as exploited workers. Crucially, this framing was not imposed in a top-down manner. Rather, the educators facilitated MDWs' questioning of their original framings by posing critical questions.

The final barrier to the collective mobilisation of MDWs concerns the longer-term sustainability of their self-organisation (Ally, 2005; Hyde, 2003). The danger is that mobilisations not tied to longer-term stable institutions such as trade unions may briefly wax but will then tend to wane (Brill, 1971). Within the social movement literature, this is addressed by considering the forms of collective action undertaken (Tilly, 1978). Given that the research occurred in the early years after the founding of J4DW, it is clearly not possible to assess whether J4DW has been able to successfully address this problem. It is possible, however, to offer an analysis of the likely sustainability of this mobilisation. One of the factors highlighted as working against sustainable mobilisation is the development of a service-client relationship (Ally, 2005) which positions members in a passive position. J4DW have sought to actively avoid this danger by emphasising a participative democratic mode of self-organisation among MDWs. Further, the organisation has sought to avoid the danger of a professional cadre of leadership developing by explicitly seeking to develop the leadership roles taken on by a range of MDW members. This points to the importance of a 'bridge

leader' (Sack, 1988) in empowering marginalised communities and developing internal democracy within communities. At the same time, J4DW also has links to formal, stable institutions, such as unions and NGOs, but in a way that maintains the independence of J4DW. It is a curious case of a self-help group that also comprises members of other organisations upon its management board. This creative combination of participative democracy, collective leadership development and relatively autonomous links to stable formal institutions suggests a model of 'associational' organising (Ally, 2005) that may be able to be sustained at least into the medium term. However, the rejection of outsider funding has posed financial constraints to the sustainability of their organising activities. Of course, only time will tell if this analysis proves accurate.

In terms of overall outcomes, J4DW has not succeeded in their lobbying regarding changes in domestic MDWs' visa status. However, we have clearly witnessed social and cultural gains in the sense of individual and collective agency and an improvement of working conditions in individualised labour processes. They are important for two reasons. First, relatively new and small communities of coping seldom begin by taking high-profile political actions. Their culturally nurtured activities cannot merely be assessed in terms of political outcomes. Despite the lack of substantial changes in terms of the change of public polices, the development of self-confidence and self-esteem in turn helped them to solve their own problems in relation to employment and everyday life. Moreover, cultural gains, such as the development of labour consciousness, can pave the way for further campaigning and collective mobilisation. Many MDWs stated that they were interested in joining further

collective actions to fight for their rights at work. Here we argue that to assess the success of organising, we should not only focus on institutional and political gains as can be seen in mainstream industrial relations studies (Heyes, 2009). Social and cultural gains (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999; Klandermans, 1997), in terms of psychological empowerment and the development of labour consciousness, are important outcomes of organising as well.

Although there were significant achievements particularly in terms of the development of individual and collective agency in this case, we do not intend to glamourise J4DWs' organising efforts. Three points are salient here. We must be aware that mobilisations can go through cycles, and that the snapshot, in terms of internal processes, provided here may be a product of the timing of the research in a period of positive dynamics. In addition, it takes time to transform powerless domestic workers into confident and capable organisers. At the time of writing, J4DW mobilising efforts are mainly initiated by one or two charismatic leaders who are from the domestic worker community, while more activists have been developed to help with the organising process. Moreover, we should note that necessarily the research has focused only on those participating within J4DW. It has been unable to access the MDWs who do not participate in the group. Because of this, we cannot say if there are subtle processes of marginalisation or exclusion which leads to some MDWs not participating. In any research process, there are inevitably voices missing. It may be that the missing voices could alter the tone of the story told here.

Conclusion

This paper began by arguing that analysis of the potential for collective mobilisation among

migrant workers within the current political economy is a key issue for social scientists. Important barriers in terms of employment conditions that act against migrant workers coming together, barriers in terms of the framings held by migrant workers that serve to marginalise an understanding of their position as exploited workers, and barriers to longer-term sustainability were identified. In terms of the strength of these barriers, the case of MDWs was seen as an 'extreme case'. Despite the tendency to see MDWs as 'unorganisable' in terms of formal forms of union organising, MDWs have collectively mobilised in London through J4DW, in a non-traditional associational manner. In developing this argument, we have used the social movement approach as a meta-theoretical framing. It should be noted that by positioning the case of MDWs as an extreme case we are necessarily acknowledging that it is not a representative or typical case. Nevertheless, as Flyvbjerg (2011) argues, it is still possible to learn wider lessons from extreme cases.

Our ethnographic research into an important but marginalised group in the current economy makes an important empirical contribution. In this conclusion, we want to go beyond merely making an empirical contribution to suggest a number of analytical points that can be gleaned from a case when the 'unorganisable' organise. First, we point to communities of coping as a potentially important form of micro-mobilisation context, in which migrant workers may come together to share the lived experiences of their working lives. Communities of coping are oral-based informal networks in which workers share the burdens of the working lives, particularly in terms of socialising the costs of emotional labour. Given that many migrant workers are located in low-end jobs in the care and service sectors, these

micro-communities may be an important form of nascent collectivism upon which to build in developing the collective mobilisation of migrant workers. Second, while communities of coping may be crucial, they may not be enough for a nascent collectivism to develop into a resistive solidarity. The case of J4DW suggests the key role that careful, non-didactic politicised learning can play in the cognitive liberation that social movement literature identifies as crucial. How important this is will surely depend on how strong are the framings of migrant workers that marginalise an understanding of their position as exploited workers. In the case of MDWs, these framing were very strong, and perhaps it is this that meant that politicised learning was so important. This is clearly a point to be investigated further in other research into forms of mobilisation among migrant workers.

Furthermore, we have argued that J4DW represents a creative associational model of organising that is based on participative democracy, collective leadership development, combined with autonomous links to more stable formal organisations. Our analysis suggests that this mode of organising may be sustainable at least in to the medium term. We do not, however, want to necessarily suggest this as a new ideal type of associational organising that can or should be reproduced in other settings. Rather, we see it as more likely that there are a range of types of associational organising that are being tried out and developed in different settings by migrant workers in the current political economy. The most important thing to learn from this case of J4DW, therefore, is that social scientists should go out in search of new creative modes of associational organising being enacted. This will have the double benefit of extending our social theorising of patterns of collective mobilisation among

migrant workers, and of helping practitioners learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses in the search for better ways for migrant workers to collectively mobilise. Finally, and more abstractly, if our analysis is seen as helpful it suggests the utility in drawing on (and extending) a social movement perspective in the examination of mobilising and organising among migrant workers.

i Unite the Union, Kalayaan and the UWA (Waling Waling) launched a long campaign together to urge the Labour Government to introduce migrant domestic worker visa in the UK. This was successful in 1998. Migrant domestic workers entered the UK with a visitor visa

before 1998. Note that J4DW has little connection with the UWA. None of the main leaders and activists in J4DW were members of the UWA.

ii The reason is that if an organization's income does not exceed £5,000, it is not able to register as a charity. J4DW has not run any commercial activities since its establishment.

iii This is the accumulated number of J4DW members since its establishment. In their classes and meetings every Sunday, there are usually 30-50 active members.

iv 500 members are not all from J4DW. Unite recruited 500 MDWs through connections with different community organisations.

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Image one:

Life ‘river’ drawn by one migrant domestic worker, taken by Author 1, on March 20 2011

Table one: Barriers to mobilisation and J4DW

Barrier to mobilisation	Social movement literature focus	Social processes in J4DW	Outcome
Inability to come together	Micro-mobilisation context	Safe space for development of communities of coping	The development of mutual trust and social networks The enhancement of self-confidence and self-esteem;
Framings that marginalise an understanding of MDWs as exploited workers	Cognitive liberation	Politicised learning	The development of critical understanding of their position as exploited workers who hold rights
Sustainability of organising	Form of collective action	Participative democracy and leadership development, links to union and NGOs	Primacy of self-organisation to avoid danger of service-client relationship; potential for medium term sustainability