This is a repository copy of *The worker branch in Yorkshire as a way of organising Polish migrants: exploring the process of carving out diasporic spaces within the trade union structure*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/138954/

Version: Accepted Version

The worker branch in Yorkshire as a way of organising Polish migrants: exploring the process of carving out diasporic spaces within the trade union structure

Abstract

While post-2004 Polish labour migration to the UK was underpinned by diasporic spaces instrumental in facilitating social and labour market adjustments, the institutions of the host society such as trade unions also sought to establish links with migrants. The analysis of interactions between UK unions and EU migrants focused on organising strategies and specific provisions such as English language learning. However, the discussion tended to ignore the impacts of diasporic influences, from ethnicity and native languages of migrants to the outcomes of migrant worker organising. Drawing on ethnographic and qualitative data, this paper discusses how Polishness, in its ethnic, historic and linguistic manifestations, has affected the internal dynamics of a migrant worker organisation created by a major UK trade union. The explicit acknowledgement of diasporic particularities of post-2004 Polish migrants not only enabled labour organising activities but also shaped the migrant worker organisation from within. The strength of diasporic influences on one hand and the chosen form of union organising on the other created conditions for the development of diasporic spaces within the institution of the host society.

Key words: diasporic influences; Polish migrants; UK trade unions; language

Introduction

EU enlargement in 2004 extended the right of freedom of movement and created market incentives for Poles and other new EU citizens from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) to move to the UK labour market for higher levels of pay and greater employment opportunities. On a structural level, post-2004 CEE migration was also a response to market demand for migrant labour among UK employers (MacKenzie et al., 2012). Market mechanisms ranging from labour intermediaries to diasporic businesses developed by migrants themselves facilitated the incorporation of mobile Polish workers into the UK labour market (Garapich, 2008). The reliance on fellow Poles was not only used to find paid employment but to establish ethnic businesses by those migrants who could identify specific market niches capable of offering

services to the post-2004 Diaspora (Vershinina et al., 2011). While the emergence of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora in the UK relied on multiple openings created by market forces, scholars also acknowledged that migrants with low individual bargaining power were susceptible to discriminative treatment by UK employers (Alberti et al., 2013). The imperative of protecting migrant workers' rights led to the countermovement to market forces in the form of various UK trade unions' initiatives aimed at organising migrant newcomers (Tapia et al., 2014). Such initiatives included outreach to diasporic organisations; a shift from workplace to community organising; offering specific services to migrants; and joining political campaigns in support of migrant rights.

While literature on the inclusion of Polish workers into UK trade unions has accumulated rich data on issues such as English language learning and the establishment of special branches (e.g. Aziz, 2015), it largely omits discussion of how diasporic influences associated with ethnicity, language and the legacies of contemporary Polish history has shaped migrants' experiences within UK unions. As Perrett and Martinez Lucio (2009) have noted, the interaction between trade unions and ethnicity was traditionally an under-explored topic in the study of labour organising in the UK. While the significance of diasporic influences on labour organising has been recognised by UK authors in a historical perspective (Holgate, 2013), such insights were not applied to the study of interactions between post-2004 Polish migrants and UK trade unions. In contrast to the UK, US-based studies have explicitly linked diasporic influences with the practice of countermovement (Fine, 2005). The development of worker centres in the US (both affiliated and unaffiliated with the unions), which explicitly embrace ethnic (Hispanic) and linguistic (Spanish language) particularities of Latino migrants in the US, represent a clear example of how collective representation of migrants could be intersected and influenced by various diasporic bodies, ranging from religious institutions to informal groups of mutual assistance (Fine, 2005).

Building on such reflections, this paper brings diasporic influences such as ethnicity, language and historic legacies affecting a particular ethnic group – post-2004 Polish migrants – to the centre of the analysis. The paper begins by contextualising the role of ethnicity and language within post-2004 Polish migration to the UK and discusses UK trade unions' outreach initiatives to this group of workers. While migration studies has identified multiple ways in which diasporic influences have intersected with market forces and affected the experiences of Polish migrants in the UK, studies of trade unions' countermovement and the inclusion of Polish migrants have paid little attention to the subject of diasporic influences.

This paper fills this lacuna by analysing the case of the migrant worker branch created by a major UK trade union in Yorkshire. The analytic interpretations in the paper contend that an explicit embrace of ethnic, linguistic and historic particularities of post-2004 Polish migrants by this branch enabled it to create a countermovement that responded to the needs of a specific migrant community. The ethnographic and qualitative data gathered in the paper reveal how ethnic composition of the branch and its tactics in engaging with post-2004 Polish migrants turned it into a significant diasporic actor in the region. While previous studies of Polish migrant worker inclusion within UK unions have favoured the focus on unions' organising strategies and union officials' accounts, the interpretive lenses used in this paper reveal how Polish diasporic influences have played a central role within the branch, helped in recruiting new members, and generated social activities outside of the trade union organisation.

Setting the Context

The role of diasporic influences on the processes related to migration from Poland to the UK has received considerable coverage in migration studies literature. While Poland had been a country of emigration throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Mayblin et al., 2014), post-2004 migrants' mobility strategies could be traced back to the country's post-WWII history: White and Ryan (2008) noted that Poles would prefer to use personal contacts among family members and co-ethnics over formal labour market intermediaries. This pattern was attributed to the distrust felt towards official institutions – this attitude formed in the communist period (White and Ryan, 2008). While in economic terms post-2004 migration could be seen as a response to the demand for Polish migrant labour in the UK, there was an explicit diasporic component related to the realisation of labour market opportunities: labour market access was facilitated by Polish language newspapers, advisers, shops and travel agents (Garapich, 2008). The sharing of housing with other Polish migrants upon arrival allowed newcomers to develop friendships and use those ethnic ties to access information about employment opportunities (Gill and Bilaski, 2011). Diasporic influences manifested themselves in virtual spaces: Polish migrants would use Polish-speaking social networking sites to search for work and flag up abusive employers to be avoided (Janta and Ladkin, 2013). The demand of migrants for Polish consumer items led to the opening of ethnically-themed shops – a visible representation of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora (Vershinina et al., 2011). While Polish migrants sought to participate in the institutions of the host society,

diasporic influences set the dynamics of these interactions: Trzebiatowska's (2010) study of the integration of Polish migrants within the structure of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland demonstrated that Polish migrants insisted that religious services were delivered in the Polish language and by Polish priests. A particular form of market mechanism aided migrants in advancing these demands: the operation of flights by low-cost commercial airlines between Poland and the UK created opportunities for Catholic priests from Poland to undertake short-term trips and offer religious services in the UK (Trzebiatowska, 2010).

In contrast to migration studies that reveal the multiple roles played by diasporic influences, studies of trade unions have tended to treat the issues around ethnicity and language from a more instrumental angle. Offering an optimistic analysis, Fitzgerald and Hardy (2010) argued that the recruitment of Polish workers would allow UK trade unions to increase ethnic diversity and potentially penetrate sectors with low trade union density. Following the tradition in the UK labour movement of allowing autonomous groups for ethnic minority and migrant workers within unions to develop, such studies observed a trend for the creation of special branches designed to organise and service post-2004 EU migrants to the UK: this approach emphasised the need for safe spaces for Polish migrants and advocated a gradual inclusion of migrants into the unions (Aziz, 2015). Another trend included the launching of joint events with Polish community groups designed to spread information about both workers' rights among newly arrived migrants and the trade unions' role in the UK labour market (Meardi, 2012). English language classes were offered by a number of trade unions, such as UCATT, GMB and UNISON, and these learning spaces were used to promote union activities and to attract Polish migrant members (Perrett et al., 2011; Heyes, 2009).

Despite generating rich data, the analysis of interactions between unions and post-2004 Polish migrants contains a number of omissions: it has tended to over-emphasise general activities – notably the process of new member recruitment and the inclusion of migrants. Rather than considering diasporic influences associated with the use of the Polish language within the unions, the focus has been squarely on how the acquisition of English language skills facilitates gradual inclusion of migrants to ultimately put them on an equal footing with British members. While the overlapping relation between UK trade unions and diasporic spaces constituted by post-2004 Polish migrants has been noted by some scholars (Meardi, 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2012), trade unions were still treated as separate and free-standing entities decoupled from broader migratory processes taking place within the post-2004 Polish Diaspora. Finally, the extent to which Polish migrants' involvement with UK unions was

influenced by the contexts of their home country – firstly, by communist-era legacies (Stark, 1989), and secondly, by the relative ethnic homogeneity of Polish society (Mayblin et al., 2016) – tended to be left out of the analysis.

The omissions in the industrial relations literature on one hand, and the recognition of the significance of ethnicity and language in migration studies scholarship of post-2004 Polish migration on the other, creates a possibility for exploring Polish migrants' participation in UK unions in a way that specifically seeks to discover the role of diasporic influences. Drawing on the case of the branch established by a major UK trade union in Yorkshire, this paper poses a number of questions about the significance of diasporic influences. It specifically examines the following: how diasporic influences contributed to the union's ability to organise and service Polish migrants; how diasporic predispositions of post-2004 Polish migrants affected interactions within the branch; and how the branch came to be and acted as the representative of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora in the region.

The Fieldwork

This paper draws on qualitative and ethnographic research data related to the migrant worker branch established in Yorkshire by a major UK trade union (referred to as the 'GU'). The branch was set up in 2010 to attract EU workers and was funded through the union's learning fund. Given its funding source, the branch engaged in specific learning activities by providing English language classes to migrants, and the branch was based in a Yorkshire city. Members would come together for meetings every last Saturday or Sunday of the month.

The data originates from different contacts with the branch, its migrant members and GU officials. The invitation extended by the head of the branch to the principal investigator to attend the branch's meetings led to the accumulation of ethnographic material. The material originated from observations conducted during branch meetings (in November 2010, January 2011, December 2011, and November 2012). The principal investigator also attended the meetings of Polish community groups in two West Yorkshire cities in 2010 (some Polish migrants participated in both groupings). In addition, relevant materials were generated by attending two talks given by the GU trade union officials that focused on the union's strategy in engaging with CEE migrant workers. In total, six semi-structured interviews were conducted from June 2009 to February 2010 in the Yorkshire region with the branch members; all interviews were conducted in Polish. Multiple informal conversations also took

place before, during and after branch meetings with other migrant members. Two semi-structured interviews, as well as multiple informal conversations, were conducted with the head of the branch. Moreover, four migrant branch members (all Polish males) were interviewed in their homes (three in West Yorkshire cities and one in a South Yorkshire town). Interviewed participants worked in bulb packaging, vehicle repair, cosmetics packaging and kitchen furniture manufacturing. All interviewees were married and their ages ranged from 26 – 50 years.

While the interviews aimed to explore migratory biographies, they also covered aspects related to the participants' membership and relationship with the GU. Furthermore, since the interviews were home-based, the principal investigator interacted with family members (such as a spouse of union member who was a full-time child-carer at the time of the interview). In addition to six interviews with branch members, one additional interview was conducted with a female friend of the branch member who was involved in organising Polish migrant community events (such as New Year's Eve celebrations in a South Yorkshire town) – she was not a union member, but she interacted with Polish migrant members of the GU, who contributed to her events. The participation of migrants who were not members, but whose social lives overlapped with the union, shed more light on how the branch contributed to post-2004 Polish diasporic space in the region. Finally, a separate visit to the migrant branch was undertaken by the principal investigator with the co-authors (two British citizens and native English speakers) in January 2011 – the conversation with the branch head was conducted in English this time only.

The principal researcher's background – a citizen of Lithuania who can speak Polish (albeit with a Russian accent) – effectively turned him into a 'halfie' – a term introduced by Abu Lughod (1991) to describe ethnographic and qualitative researchers of non-Western/non-English native speaking backgrounds involved in researching diasporic communities in the West. The 'halfie' labelling indicates the existence of commonality and distance between the researchers and the researched: while they are united by their migratory background, they also belong to different ethnic and social groups. The principal researcher was positioned as someone coming from Lithuania (thus, a CEE migrant), speaking Polish (a source of commonality that led to being described as 'a member of our Polish community' by one participant). As a result of this position, the principal investigator exposed a particular form of reflexivity: the status of a 'halfie' allowed seeing more acutely the significance played by Polishness on ethnic, historic and linguistic levels to the development of the migrant worker

branch, and at the same time helped to avoid equating and conflating Polishness with the experience of CEE migrants more generally. However the gendered identity (male) of the principal interviewer imposed limitations: when the investigator contacted the branch members via the branch head (also male) and asked them to be interviewed, it was male members who felt more comfortable and extended invitations for home-based interviews. Nonetheless such gendered imbalance was compensated for by attendance at the branch meetings, which allowed the investigator to listen to opinions expressed by female members. Finally, the location of the union branch was also significant methodologically: earlier studies of migrant-union engagement tended to be located in global cities (Tapia et al., 2014). In contrast, this study is located not in a capital or global city but in a region, allowing for the exploration of geographically-distinctive empirical data.

The data analysis is organised thematically around three main issues. The first part considers the range of factors that attracted the interviewed migrants to become members of the GU branch. It particularly explores the role of diasporic influences in encouraging them to join the union. The second part of the data analysis draws primarily on the ethnographic material to discuss how the legacies of state socialism and the particularities associated with the national history of their country of origin (Poland) shaped migrants' expectations and had a formative role in creating an ethnically-bounded space within the branch. The third part explores how the GU's engagement with Polish migrants helped in nurturing and expanding diasporic spaces both within and outside of the branch. All names of participants were anonymised for reasons of confidentiality. The union's name has also been anonymised due to the particularity of the issues covered: the relation between migrants' ethnicity and UK trade unionism is not only under-researched, but is also a highly politically sensitive topic, thus cautious steps are necessary in order to avoid any potential misinterpretation of the data.

Grounding the Countermovement: Diasporic Influences in Organising Polish Migrants

The migrant worker branch's ability to expand and attract fee-paying members (there were 290 in 2012) could be at least partially attributed to the appreciation of the role played by diasporic influences. The GU officials were aware that any serious engagement with Polish migrants would require adaptation to a communication style that would be comprehensible to members of this community. Such awareness manifested itself during a joint presentation of the union strategy by British and Polish GU officials, when a Polish GU representative half-

seriously said that when Polish migrants would hear British officials of the GU speaking about the 'working class' and 'socialism', they would be pushed away rather than attracted to join. For potential migrant members originating from post-communist Poland such rhetoric could be associated with the repressive and externally imposed regime that ended in 1989 (Mayblin et al., 2016). The potential challenges of matching the migrants' diasporic background with the communication style of a UK union was voiced by another GU official, who said that there were concerns over the potential reluctance of Polish migrants becoming union members because of negative attitudes to the unions going back to their experiences of the communist system. Such historical perceptions suggested that the unions' officials recognised that the success of Polish migrants' organising would depend on the ability to take into account diasporic influences associated with this particular ethnic group.

Apart from the diverging historical legacies of Polish post-communism and the rhetoric of some UK union officials, the GU also faced a fundamental challenge of communicating with Polish migrants due to a language barrier – not all migrants could speak English. The GU sought to deal with such a challenge by recruiting a Polish migrant, Marek, to act as the head of the migrant worker branch: the presence of a union official – who could speak Polish and English, came from the same ethnic background and was a post-2004 migrant himself – was advantageous because it allowed Polish migrants to be in touch with a person who shared their migratory experiences and language. Fine and Holgate (2014) argue that any successful countermovement by organised labour to market forces in the context of international migration is conditioned by trade unions' ability to identify potential union organisers among migrants themselves. In the case of the GU, it was not only represented by the hiring of a Polish migrant to head the migrant worker branch, but also in Marek's ability to identify active members who could shadow him or act in particular roles, such as the representative for young people.

While the GU branch sought to engage migrants by hiring a Polish-speaking official, Polish migrants saw branch membership as something valuable because it offered the type of assistance they struggled to find elsewhere. When one of the migrants – Karol, who worked for an agency contracted to package cosmetics products – was directly asked why he decided to join the union, he answered that his limited English language skills was the main reason that influenced his decision. Becoming a member of a Polish speaking branch allowed him to get information in his native tongue. He further expanded on his motives:

I became a member just in case… I feel that it would give me a greater stability if there were *some sort of conflict with the employer… You can never know what can happen in the future* – I want to feel psychologically comfortable. At the moment, I do not have any problems and in any case I am a capable person although I do not speak English as well as I would like. But even I am a legal worker, I want to be even more legal.

Karol's experience highlights the significance of having access to the trade union organisation in which migrants could get advice in their mother tongue: while trade union-based studies have tended to highlight the role of English language classes as a valuable advantage used by British officials to attract Polish migrants (Heyes, 2009), the possibility of obtaining information in Polish, particularly about employment law, was a key issue mentioned by Polish migrants themselves. Moreover, as a Polish-speaking head of the branch, Marek could explain the benefits of membership in a way that British officials could not due to the language barrier. He could point out that the branch was part of a major UK trade union and as such it could offer not only legal support or English language classes but wider sets of services, including training around health and safety. Such services offered tangible benefits for potential members. One GU branch member, Mirosław, said that he decided to become a member after two years of consideration and explained that the GU branch was attractive for work-related reasons:

Obviously there were advantages, for instance, I am taking a course which I could not take *otherwise. I became a member for several reasons… Especially, in the case of conflict with* the employer. I joined to cover my back so if anything happens I have someone to turn to. Even though I have to pay contributions in order to be a member

Mirosław said that he was approached by Marek, who managed to convince him to become a member after explaining the type of benefits union membership involved. Although his workplace – a vehicle repair company – did not recognise the union and he did not inform his employer about his membership, the GU branch offered a sense of protection and the possibility of legal support, as well as training opportunities. Subsequently, he convinced a number of other Polish workers in his company to join as well. The commonality of language and ethnic background in promoting union membership is notable: migrants were persuaded to join by fellow co-ethnics whom they trusted on a personal level. As in the case of job searching strategies stemming from the trust forged within ethnic networks and the use of Polish language (Gill and Bilaski, 2011), migrants learned about the branch and decided to become members by relying on the example of ethnic networks and fellow Polish-speakers.

While there were similarities between the role of diasporic influences in forging friendships and in joining the migrant branch, the consequences of union membership had an impact of a different scope: since the branch by its design aimed to shield migrants from unrestrained market forces by providing services, it introduced a dimension of collective voice that had the potential to not only offer legal support and distribute information, but to change dynamics of employment relations in specific workplaces as a whole. One of the interviewees, Michał, acted as a Polish workers' union representative in his workplace (a kitchen furniture manufacturer). Michał described the experience with the union by pointing to the impact it had on employment relations:

It is as if someone tied their hands and they cannot do whatever they want. They got used to behaving with Polish workers, especially those who do not speak English, in a way beneficial to them, even to break the law. Before they could tell workers to do something which was not legal because workers simply did not know their rights. Now there is a protective union hand *extended to him. But before he had only his own finger… he was trapped and had to agree to* anything. Now he is being protected and defended.

When articulated in this way, union membership contributed to advancing the cause of social justice by giving migrant Polish workers a clearer understanding of their employment rights and establishing a collective support mechanism for them: such dynamics are represented by the metaphors of 'own finger' versus 'union hand'. The countermovement represented by the GU branch could shape working lives of Polish migrants for good because it was able to address migrants' vulnerabilities related to language, the knowledge of employment rights and so on. Such vulnerabilities were not specific to a particular workplace: Marek argued that the existence of the pool of Polish workers who came from lower wage country (compared to the UK), lacked good English language skills and a precise understanding of UK employment laws, created opportunities for British businesses to treat them less favourably than British workers. A similar sentiment was confirmed by other participants. A branch member told the principal investigator, during a chat after a branch meeting, that coming to the UK and working in a factory persuaded him about the need for union membership: it was seen as a way to protect the rights of Polish migrants like him vis-à-vis British employers. More specifically, the existence of the branch created grounds for the recruitment of a Polish trade union representative at the workplace level, who in his union official's capacity could act as an effective spokesperson for Polish migrants and liaise with the head of the GU migrant worker branch. For members such as Michał the union branch was also attractive because it

allowed him to play an active role in his workplace and help fellow Polish migrants. It made the countermovement initiated by the GU work in practice because it was based on the active participation of members prepared to represent and support fellow migrant workers from Poland. It shows how the union's willingness to acknowledge diasporic influences turned it into an organisation that had something meaningful to offer to post-2004 Polish migrants. However, as the subsequent analysis will show, diasporic influences would not only shape the GU branches' countermovement strategy but would also impact on social relations within the branch.

Diasporic Intersections of the Countermovement: State Socialism and Ethnic Homogeneity

Diasporic influences that shaped the internal dynamics of the branch can be traced to two legacies of contemporary Polish history: one associated with the inheritance of the communist era; the other derived from the relative ethnic homogeneity of post-1945 Polish society. As mentioned earlier, Polish migrants were seen as a challenging group in terms of their inclusion within the trade union by UK officials for historic reasons. Such opinions were shared by Polish migrants themselves from a different and less straightforward angle. Reflecting on this difficulty during a branch meeting, one of the members observed:

It is my first experience of seeing Poles organised in a collecti*ve way… I say it without* sweetening my words.

This statement points to the success in organising Polish migrants by the branch but also recognises challenges. There were a number of reasons why Polish migrants were difficult to organise. In the words of Marek, Polish migrants would typically search for short-term fixes regarding work-related issues: 'załatwiac' – a Polish verb that can be translated as 'to handle' or 'to sort out' – was a commonly deployed request from potential union members. As such, it could be associated with finding short-term solutions based on interpersonal contacts. Instead of prioritising the collective dimension of employment relations and locating it within socio-legal regulatory frames, some Polish migrants would expect informal interventions from the branch head. The origins of such expectations could be interpretively linked to the legacies of state socialism: unlike in the market economies underpinned by liberal democracy, under state socialism independent trade unions did not exist or were repressed – as with the case of Solidarity in Poland; moreover, state-controlled official trade unions

replicated HR-related functions of capitalist firms instead of representing workers vis-à-vis employers (Stark, 1989). To find a counterpoint to state-controlled management, workers would rely on informal dealings with individual managers to achieve higher earnings and greater autonomy – this could involve engaging in semi-private and officially illegal economic activities in the workplace, with such practices being legitimised by informal agreements with the management of state-owned companies (Stark, 1989). Stark (1989) claims that under state socialism such informalisation played an equivalent role in the functions of trade unions in post-1945 free market democracies in the West because it allowed workers to engage in wage bargaining and gave them a balancing power vis-à-vis those in the position of power – plant managers and party bosses. In this sense, the preference for informal solutions among migrant Polish workers was influenced by the legacies of state socialism – this expectation posed challenges for the GU officials operating within the legal framework of the free market economy.

One of the common themes of the meeting was related to explaining what Marek could legally do as the trade union representative – when he could intervene and how. The members had to be reminded that the union had to follow a legal framework in representing workers, and the reliance on informal practices, stretching back to state socialism (Stark, 1989), would not provide meaningful help in the UK labour market. The head of the branch's role could be described as that of cultural broker: using the language of fellow migrants, but trying to convey a message that accurately reflected UK realities. Migrant members were implicitly treated as a diasporic group; to re-phrase the framework conceived by Alberti et al. (2013), which advocated servicing migrants both as workers and migrants, the processes within the branch involved treating members specifically as Polish migrant workers – workers who migrated from a country with a distinctive history. The reference to employment law as a guiding principle of representation could put the branch representative in a difficult position: although the branch offered English language classes to its members – a flagship training programme designed to offer support to migrant newcomers – not all could take advantage of them due to scheduling clashes. When one of the members mentioned that her employer prevented her from going to the classes because it overlapped with her shifts, Marek had to explain that it was legally permissible for employers to deny workers' attendance at training if their learning was not essential for the tasks they performed in the workplace. As a trade union representative, he could do little about the situation due to legal constraints. However, in the same meeting, the dissatisfaction with legal constraints did not prevent migrants from

joking and taking the opportunity to express their feelings in Polish in a culturally sensitive way. Moreover, their jokes had an explicitly diasporic element – in this instance clearly traceable to the communist era of Polish history: when the members were guided through the complex system of union governance, they ironically compared it to communist era Poland by laughingly re-using charged words such as the 'general secretary'. Simultaneously, a female migrant member used bawdy humour (speaking about one's 'dupa', or 'ass') to mock legal constraints of union bureaucracy, which provoked a wave of unrestrained laughter.

While legacies of state socialism influenced migrants' expectations and required attention from the branch's head, such factors in themselves were not exclusive to Poland – other CEE countries went through a similar post-WWII history. In contrast, the pattern of ethnic homogeneity in the country of origin was more specific to Poles and it contributed to the ways in which diasporic influences structured social interactions within the branch. It was noted that following the Holocaust and the ethnic cleansing that took place during and after WWII, Poland became a largely ethnically homogenous society (Mayblin et al., 2016). In the words of Marek, this particularity of the home country made relating to the people of different ethnicities more difficult for Polish migrants because they were not accustomed to ethnic diversity. Within the branch, this form of ethno-centricity manifested in relation to language: while Polish was the only language used in the meetings, exceptions were made when British officials or invited guests were present and bilingual Polish-English speaking took place. On these occasions there was one participant who spoke in Polish with a distinct accent – it later appeared that he was a Czech national. He was praised by a fellow female Polish attendee for his good Polish skills. However the compliment had a particular twist: the Polish member said that she wished to speak English as well as he could spoke Polish – Czech was not seen as a language to learn. On another occasion – during a meeting with the Lord Mayor of the major West Yorkshire city on the union premises – the Polish community organiser said that 'most Eastern Europeans speak Polish…' Such conflation between being Polish and CEE would be highly contestable, especially by other CEE groups such as Lithuanians and Ukrainians, who in the late 19th and early/mid 20th centuries saw the use of the Polish language as an imperial project undermining their own ethno-linguistic identity (Mayblin et al., 2016). There were other manifestations of ethno-centricity: while the branch promoted participation in the celebration of Polish National Independence Day, which involved a trip to London, the participation in the Catholic Mass linked to the event and the

march with other Polish community organisation, it did not involve itself in celebrating the national holidays of other CEE countries.

Another example of strong ethno-centric orientation was connected to relations with non-Poles. It manifested in a number of verbal expressions: while speaking about allegedly preferential treatment given to 'white' British workers by one employer, one participant spoke about the need for equal treatment between Polish migrants like himself and British workers. This participant jokingly called UK workers 'Angole'; this expression provoked embarrassed looks from the head of the branch and a subsequent warning from another member against using divisive language. Generally, scholars of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora in the UK perceive such invented colloquialisms as 'Angole' as labels suggesting ethnic distancing (Gawlewicz, 2016). On another occasion, while speaking about job insecurity and his employer's potential responses to workers' demands, a Polish male migrant used an ethnically-centric example by saying that this British employer 'could hire a girl from Lithuania straight away…' Such phrasing would suggest that Polish members of the GU branch felt threatened by potential competition from other CEE migrants, whose ethnic difference was highlighted rather than downplayed. On the other hand, other CEE workers also demonstrated a strong sense of ethno-linguistic attachment. The branch's head was approached by a couple of Russian-speaking migrants from Latvia, and he was explicitly asked whether he could speak Russian. Since he could not speak Russian, those workers drifted away from the branch. This unsuccessful recruitment attempt illustrated that CEE workers of other nationalities could have a strong diasporic attachment of their own – in this instance the preference for speaking in Russian not only in Latvia, where Russian-speakers form an ethno-linguistic minority, but as a part of a Russian-speaking Diaspora in the UK – a pattern that was also observed in non-trade union settings (Lulle and Jurkane-Hobein, 2017). The offer to communicate in English by the branch head did not help as, similarly to Poles, Russian-speakers from Latvia had a preference for the use of their mother tongue.

The use of Polish language and the dominance of Polish membership created a particular diasporic closure: while the branch was established to attract all post-2004 CEE migrants, explicit reliance on Polish language and ethnicity in organising turned it into a de facto Polish migrant worker branch. The generic name – 'migrant worker branch' – obscured the extent to which diasporic influences converted the branch into a body that had an explicitly Polish membership structure and ethos. The branch's ethnic dimension also manifested in its ability

to respond to the demand to provide services for post-2004 Polish migrants – services that migrants could not obtain from post-WWII Polish Diaspora organisations.

From Labour Organising to Creating New Diasporic Spaces for Post-2004 Polish Migrants

When asked whether he had any contacts with the community organisations established by post-WWII Polish migrants and their descendants, Karol gave a categorically negative answer:

With the old Polish Diaspora – Polonia, my wife and I do not have any contacts. They looked at us in a completely different way because we are economic migrants, while they were the political ones. Their children were born here already.

A similar experience was corroborated by another interviewee who said that when post-2004 migrants approached a Polish Social Club in a South Yorkshire town (she worked in a bottle repackaging plant in the town), they felt unwelcome and had to look for alternative premises for their New Year's Eve celebration (known as 'Sylwester' in Polish) – eventually they found a location in a property belonging to the local Catholic Church. Such distancing between post-2004 arrivals and the support infrastructure left by the post-WWII Polish community has also been observed by other studies (Vershinina et al., 2011). In contrast to what Karol refers to as the old Polish Diaspora, the GU branch was established specifically in response to the migratory processes that followed EU enlargement. Moreover, it explicitly sought to develop diasporic spaces through its internal activities and its external engagements with other Polish community groups in the region. The development of diasporic spaces manifested in several ways: firstly, in using diasporic influences to shape interactions within the branch; secondly, in its capacity to embed itself within the wider Polish community; and finally, in its pursuit to provide a voice for post-2004 Polish migrants both within and outside the branch.

While the use of the Polish language attracted migrants to join the union in the first place, the decision to allow the use of Polish was of principal significance in developing a diasporic space within the branch. One of the members said that even though he spoke very good English, any interaction in English with British workers would involve some kind of translation effort on his part – the need to explain more – while the possibility of speaking with fellow Poles in Polish would eliminate communication barriers. The branch would not

restrict itself to servicing employment-related issues but offered wider services in the Polish language: it included translation services, help in completing English-language forms, advice in accessing welfare and health services, assistance in dealing with utility companies and more. The GU branch also recognised the general needs of its new migrant membership by distributing Polish language brochures containing information not only on working rights but on living in the UK. The use of the Polish language also helped to create a relaxed and friendly environment within the union: while the head of the branch initially referred to the present members as 'państwo' ('ladies and gentlemen'), he moved on to call them 'koledzy' and 'koleżanki' ('friends'), suggesting a greater sense of closeness. However, while promoting friendliness in the meetings, the head of the branch was firm in drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours: migrants would be required to respect their fellow members – for example, if someone responded by texting 'spadaj' ('get lost') to the union SMS messages or got drunk within the union premises, they would be expelled. As in the case of non-union settings, diasporic influences such as Polish language and ethnicity helped to forge relationships based on friendship (Gill and Bilaski, 2011). However, the culture of trade union membership dictated particular rules for social interactions: Polish migrants would be expected to behave as union members, which would differentiate social interactions within the branch from more informal diasporic settings.

The use of the Polish language within the branch could be compared to US worker centres, which would use the Spanish language to make Latino migrants feel welcome (Fine, 2005). The other similarity with US worker centres was the branch's integrative approach: post-2004 Polish migrants were explicitly seen as a diasporic community, which the branch sought to assist. Marek said that the main satisfaction he derived from his job of union official lay in his ability to help fellow Poles. In other words, the reference group was not exclusively limited to union members or migrant workers but members of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora. Helping members of this Diaspora involved building contacts with various post-2004 Polish groupings in the region: on its website the GU branch advertised its close links with the post-2004 Polish organisations in a major Yorkshire city, launched events jointly rather than separately with Polish community groups, and some individuals were generally active in the post-2004 Polish community across Yorkshire. The branch cooperated with individual post-2004 Polish migrants who occupied various roles, from police officers to social workers to a Polish editor-publisher of a Yorkshire-based magazine for Polish migrants. Simultaneously, the union did not seek to control the activities of these groups – a strategy found among some

statutory funded migrant community umbrella groups (MacKenzie et al., 2012); instead it provided support and acted as an incubator for community activities. The branch's embeddedness within the wider diasporic community deviated from a standard trade union approach: Perrett and Martinez Lucio (2009) observed that traditionally UK trade unions would not seek close cooperation with diasporic groups. The branch's structure – covering all migrants in the region rather than workers from a particular locality or workplace – allowed for outreach to members of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora scattered across Yorkshire. Such a geographic spread of the GU migrant branch also created the possibility of successful spin-offs in the shape of informal groups. The head of the branch mentioned that the spouses of some of his friends (and migrant worker branch members) started an online group supporting Polish mothers in the region. Later in the interview, the initiator of this group (nursing her first born child at the time of interview) described it in this way:

We set up a g*roup for the mothers, it's active on one of* the Polish networking sites on the Internet. Now we have eight Polish women. We meet and talk about nurseries and schools, *we exchange children's clothes, we try to borrow things between ourselves so we can save* money and do not spend too much on shopping...

Such parallel developments suggest that the branch played a role in the development of a wider support infrastructure involving networks of different post-2004 Polish groups: Polish migrants participated and drew assistance from a variety of groups, drawing on the interconnections and overlaps partly created by the GU branch. In effect, the branch contributed to nurturing diasporic space rather than acting as a self-contained trade union body. The angle between social networking sites and the union is also worth noting: earlier studies of Polish migrant inclusion within UK unions (Fitzgerald et al., 2012) considered diasporic websites from a purely instrumental perspective – as sources for recruiting new members. In contrast, the relation observed in this case is multi-directional: the existence of Polish diasporic space within the union indirectly gave rise to non-union diasporic activities both on- and offline.

Significantly, branch membership allowed Polish migrants to share their diasporic experiences with members of the host society – both within and outside the union. This manifested itself in one of the union gatherings that included Polish members and British trade union officials. For this event Poles prepared traditional Polish dishes, which were well received by their British colleagues. The Polish branch member noted with satisfaction: 'look how the English enjoyed the Polish Borscht'. It suggests that Polish migrants did not simply

enclose themselves within their diasporic circle but enjoyed showing aspects of their ethnic culture to those British people with whom they shared a common GU membership. The branch also sought to represent the post-2004 Polish Diaspora outside of the confines of the community by using the GU's affiliation with the British Labour Party. This involved meeting one of Yorkshire's MPs, during which migrants raised concerns over negative stereotyping of Poles in some sections of UK media. Such contacts were highlighted by the head of the branch who said that although there were UK Parliament members who had Polish roots, they were associated with the descendants of the post-WWII Diaspora and were not representative of post-2004 migrants. In such vision and practice, the branch was seen as a channel through which Polish newcomers could communicate their migratory experiences to members of the host society. The range of such distinctive activities would indicate that the branch was transformed into a platform allowing migrants to raise concerns over their vulnerabilities as Polish migrants and workers, filling the representation gap created by the distance between post-2004 and post-WWII Polish migrant communities, as well as carving out diasporic space in a symbiotic manner by aligning GU's servicing structure with the interests and expectations of post-2004 Polish migrants.

Conclusions

While the interpretations developed by the paper point to the capacity of the worker branch to offer collective representation to migrant newcomers, it also reveals that the presence of diasporic influences has created a situation in which the branch primarily acts as a Polish worker centre as opposed to organising post-2004 EU migrants more generally. The observations of migration studies literature about a fundamental link existing between diasporic influences and market mechanisms regulating Polish migration to the UK are applicable to the discussed form of union engagement with a particular twist: diasporic processes flourished within a UK institution rather than stemming exclusively from ethnic networks or independent diasporic groupings. Moreover, instead of facilitating market mechanisms, diasporic influences were used to counter such forces through collective organising and servicing of Polish migrant newcomers. Diasporic influences shaped the countermovement created by the trade union in multiple ways: the explicit reliance on Polish ethnicity and language helped to attract migrants in the first place and affected the interactions within the branch. Diasporic influences also manifested themselves within the branch; the interpretations uncovered how the legacies of communist-era Polish history

shaped migrants' expectations vis-à-vis the union and how the union sought adequate means of communication to address them. The intersection between the union branch and ethnically-bounded diasporic space also inadvertently reproduced the ethnic homogeneity of Polish society within the branch. The mutually supportive cooperation with Polish community groupings and individuals reveals that the branch was also embedded within a wider structure of post-2004 Diaspora in the region. The branch and its Polish organiser did not limit its activities to labour market servicing but sought to establish itself as a viable voice for members of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora in a wider social arena. Furthermore, this union-sponsored group had a knock-on effect by generating Polish diasporic activities in the region – it created informal linkages and helped with building support networks. This would suggest that new diasporic spaces could be developed via cooperation and insertion within a UK institution (in this instance, the union), which did not have specific connections, prior to 2004, to Poles and Polish migrants. It shows that diasporic activities can flourish in interaction between rather than in separation from the institutions of the host society.

The interpretations further suggest that there was a two-way relationship between the union structure and diasporic influences. The diasporic dimension set up the parameters of migrant inclusion: the reliance on Polish language and ethnic commonality as the main tools to attract migrants contributed to a relaxed and collegial atmosphere within the branch but also created an ethno-linguistic closure formed around one particular diasporic group – post-2004 Polish migrants. Such a configuration has implications for future trade union inclusion campaigns: while migrants may have a preference to be serviced in their mother tongue, using the language of one particular group makes it difficult to reach out to migrants from different backgrounds, who in turn may expect to receive services in their own languages. It raises questions over how unions can deploy their resources in an effective and ethnically inclusive way.

It was also significant that the branch functioned within the context of EU freedom of movement: it meant that Polish migrants had certain rights and protections extended to EU citizens in the UK (Ciupijus, 2011). The curtailment of EU freedom of movement and Britain's withdrawal from the EU could jeopardise these rights. It may mean that when it comes to future relations with Polish and other EU migrants, UK trade union-sponsored bodies may need to show greater engagement in socio-legal and civil rights advocacy, something that has been a long-standing priority for US-based worker centres (Fine, 2005). At the same time, in contrast to the worker centre phenomenon in the US, which is associated

with a predominantly Spanish-speaking Diaspora from Mexico and other Latin American countries, the reality of ethno-linguistic diversity of EU migration creates greater nuances for similar forms of engagement between migrants and UK unions. It is probable to assume that diasporic influences will continue to play a significant role within the restructured migratory landscape between the UK and the rest of the EU. Thus the challenge of aligning diasporic influences with a trade union-sponsored countermovement to market forces will continue to constitute dilemmas for all actors involved in this process.

References

Abu-Lughod, L. (1991) 'Writing against culture' in Fox, R. (1991) Recapturing Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press

Alberti, G., Holgate, J. and Tapia, M. (2013) 'Organizing migrants as workers or as migrant workers? Intersectionality, trade unions and precarious work', The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24(22): 4132-4148

Aziz, K. (2015) 'Trade unions and Polish migrants in the UK: the benefits and limitations of different inclusions strategies', Warsaw Forum of Economic Sociology, 6(11): 27-48

Ciupijus, Z. (2011) 'Mobile Central Eastern Europeans in Britain: successful EU citizens and disadvantaged labour migrants', Work, Employment and Society, 25(3): 540-550

Fine, J. (2005) Worker Centres: Organizing on the Edge of the Dream, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Fine, J. and Holgate, J. (2014) 'The countermovement needs a movement (and a counterstrategy)' in Adler, L., Tapia, M. and Turner, L. (2014) Mobilizing Against Inequality: Unions, Immigrant Workers, and the Crisis of Capitalism, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Fitzgerald, I. and Hardy, J. (2010) 'Thinking outside the box': trade union organizing strategies and Polish migrant workers in the UK', British Journal of Industrial Relations, 48(1): 131-150

Fitzgerald, I., Hardy, J. and Martinez Lucio, M. (2012) 'The Internet, employment and Polish migrant workers: communication, activism and competition in the new organisational spaces', New Technology, Work and Employment, 27(2): 93-105

Garapich, M. (2008) 'The migration industry and civil society: Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom before and after EU enlargement', Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 34(5): 735-752

Gawlewicz, A. (2016) 'Language and translation strategies in researching migrant experience of difference from the position of migrant researcher', Qualitative Research, 16(1): 27-42

Gill, N. and Bialski, P. (2011) 'New friends in new places: network formation during the migration process among Poles in the UK', Geoforum, 42: 241-249

Heyes, J. (2009) 'Recruiting and organising migrant workers through education and training: a comparison of Community and the GMB', Industrial Relations Journal, 40(3): 182-197

Holgate, J. (2013) 'Faith in unions: from safe spaces to organised labour?', Captial & Class, 37(2): 239-262

Janta, H. and Ladkin, A. (2013) 'In search of employment: on-line technologies and Polish migrants', New Technology, Work and Employment, 28(3): 241-253

Lulle, A. and Jurkane-Hobein, I. (2017) 'Strangers within? Russian-speakers' migration from Latvia to London: a study in power geometry and intersectionality', Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43(4): 596-612

MacKenzie, R. Forde, C. and Ciupijus, Z. (2012) **'Networks of support for new migrant communities: institutional goals versus substantive goals?'**, Urban Studies, 49 (3): 631-647

Mayblin, L., Piekut, A. and Valentine, G. (2016) 'Other' posts in 'other' Places: Poland through a postcolonial lens? , Sociology, 50(1): 60-76

Meardi, G. (2012) 'Union immobility? Trade unions and the freedom of movement in the enlarged EU', British Journal of Industrial Relations, 50(1): 99-120

Perrett, R. and Martinez Lucio, M. (2009) 'Trade unions and relations with Black and minority-ethnic community groups in the United Kingdom: the development of new alliances?', Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 35(8): 1295-1314

Perrett, R., Martinez Lucio, M., McBride, J. and Craig, S. (2012) 'Trade union learning strategies and migrant workers: policies and practice in a new-liberal environment', Urban Studies, 49(3): 649-667

Stark, D. (1989) 'Bending the bars of the iron cage: bureaucratization and informalization in capitalism and socialism', Sociological Forum, 4(4): 637-664

Tapia, M., Turner, L. and Roca-Servat, D. (2014) 'Union campaigns as countermovements: "best practice" cases from the United Kingdom, France and the United States' in Adler, L., Tapia, M. and Turner, L. (2014) Mobilizing Against Inequality: Unions, Immigrant Workers, and the Crisis of Capitalism, Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Trzebiatowska, M. (2010) 'The advent of the 'Easyjet Priest': dilemmas of Polish Catholic integration in the UK', Sociology, 44(6): 1055-1072

Vershinina, N., Barrett, R. and Meyer, M. (2011) 'Forms of capital, intra-ethnic variation and Polish entrepreneurs in Leicester', Work, Employment and Society, 25(1): 101-117

White, A. and Ryan, L. (2008) 'Polish 'temporary' migration: the formation and significance of social networks', Europe-Asia Studies, 60(9): 1467-1502