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Abstract

Temporary contract migration schemes have experienced a revival in Europe. Such schemes mean that a significant number of migrant workers have limited access to rights and entitlements, let alone full citizenship. The temporary nature of their migration poses obstacles to traditional ways of organising workers. This changing landscape of migration dynamics, thus, requires a changing landscape of migrant rights activism also.

The focus in this paper is on collective activism by social justice organisations and their engagement with, and handling of, the subject matter of migrant workers' rights. Based on insights from scholars working on social movements and transnational advocacy networks, I argue that a trans-national and trans-institutional perspective is required in addressing temporary migrants' socio-economic and legal insecurities, and it is the concept of the 'network' which captures best these interactions between multiple actors at multiple sites.

Key words: temporary migration, rights activism, organisations, networking, transnational, trans-institutional

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Introduction

Temporary contract migration poses a particular challenge for political activism on behalf of and by migrant workers. Policies of temporary or seasonal admission schemes which involve rising numbers of migrants have experienced a recent revival in Europe and North America, new birth in Australia and persistent continuity in Asia[1]. Although temporary migrants are comprised of highly skilled and lower skilled

workers, the latter constitute the numerical majority. This means that there are a substantial number of foreign workers with increasingly limited access to traditional rights and entitlements, let alone full citizenship (Wickramasekara 2008). This is likely to have implications for rights activism by civil society organisations involved in campaigning for greater social and economic justice in general and of migrants in specific (Grugel and Piper 2007; Piper 2008a). In fact, based on the insecure and temporary nature of migration, the type of rights prioritised by migrants and the organisations representing them tend to revolve around specific human rights, that is labour rights, rather than conventional citizenship rights.

As indicated in the phrase 'rights activism', instead of providing a legalistic or normative discussion of 'rights', I shift the focus to the role of collective organisations in promoting a rights agenda and their way of operating in the attempt to influence policy making. In the realm of work, the labour movement through trade unions and relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs) constitutes an important vehicle for the representation of workers' interests. The main problem for *foreign* workers, however, has been their status as non-citizens. Given trade unions' historical anti-immigration stance based on their focus on the national or indigenous workforce (see e.g. Briggs 2001), migrants have often been excluded from membership and collective political struggle until they firmly settle into the 'new' society and/or dominate certain sectors of the labour market. The feminisation of migration and women's position in mainly informal sector jobs is another area that trade unions have historically neglected or struggled with (Piper 2008b). Moreover, in the light of changing migration reality, with the revival or expansion of temporary contract schemes, conventional trade union practices do not work for many economic migrants. As a

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result, NGOs and other civil society organisations have been filling the gap as service providers and advocates (Ford 2006; Piper and Ford 2006). More recently, trade unions have also begun to turn around and now actively support the inclusion and rights of *all* migrants.

The focus in this paper is on collective activism via organisations and their engagement with, and handling of, the subject matter of migrant workers' rights in the context of temporary migration schemes. The changing landscape of migration patterns, characterised by greater fluidity and complexity, requires a changing landscape of migrant rights activism also. I therefore argue that a trans-national and trans-institutional perspective is required in addressing migrants' socio-economic and legal insecurities – theoretically as well as on the operational, that is to mean here: organisational, level.

My discussion will be based on an analytical framework which bridges sociological literature on social movements and networks with works from within migration studies on political mobilisation of migrants and transnationalism at the meso level of organisations that defend migrant rights. I argue that a focus on networks captures best the transnational as well as trans-institutional activities that are beginning to emerge and are necessary to defend the rights of temporary migrants. The examples given draw mainly on the European context with some reference made to the situation in Asia also.

Temporary Migration and Challenges to Political Activism

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Temporary contract migration has become a significant phenomenon in many parts of this world, having experienced a revival in Europe after the official 'zero migration' policies following the early 1970s, a new birth in traditional settler countries such as North America and Australia, and continuation in Asia (including the Gulf countries). In this regard, the (re-)emergence of temporary and seasonal migration can arguably be described as a converging policy of almost global outreach.

Both the volume and patterns of economic migration have undergone important changes during the last decade. In Europe and elsewhere, demographic, economic and labour-market related trends have resulted in the increased demand for skilled foreigners (e.g. in the health and care sector) and the revival or intensification of temporary ('guest worker') migration schemes (Ruhs 2006; Castles 2006; Piper 2008c). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Europe constitutes the region with the largest volume of migrant workers (27.5 million or 34%), followed by Asia with 22.1 million or 27% foreign labour (ILO 2004:7). Asia contrasts with Europe and traditional immigration countries in that governments of destination countries in Asia practice temporary migration schemes only (with few exceptions) and, thus, at least officially prevent migrants (especially those classified as lower skilled) from settling and reuniting with their families in the host country[2].

Since the 1990s Europe, and the UK in particular, has begun to re-open channels for economic migration in 'new' sectors that attract, or are in need of, migrant workers. This is now taking place as part of the policy discourse of 'managed migration' which puts the emphasis on control issues rather than rights protection (Grugel and Piper

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2007). The more or less systematic recruitment along skilled-lower skilled categories entails an increasing bifurcation between these two categories in the ease of migration between countries and accessing labour markets as well as other resources. A recent report by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in the UK has found that migrant workers tend to be at either end of the spectrum: in professional work or what they refer to as 'routine jobs' and, thus, to a lesser extent in intermediate jobs (TUC 2007)[3]. The increasing bifurcation between skilled and less skilled migration is part of the promotion of 'knowledge economies', a concept that has been transposed into migration policies by differentiating between bearers of distinct forms of human capital (Kofman 2007).

The trend towards greater diversification of migration categories and flows has also become part of the traditional 'settler' countries' experience where migration has become less permanent. There are more temporary migrants today than before, and in addition, there is also more out-migration of 'native' citizens from these 'settler' countries, as work on the Australian expatriates, for instance, has shown (Hugo et al. 2003). Diversification also plays out geographically: recent studies on newly arrived migrants in the UK have shown that the preponderance to concentrate in the South/Southeast of England is less noticeable today than in the 1990s (TUC 2007) and more migrants now reside and work in smaller towns and rural counties all over the UK, including Wales (e.g. Drinkwater and Blackaby 2004). The landscape of migration has become more diverse in Europe as the result of EU enlargement also. In the latter case, it is to date unclear whether newly arrived migrants from Eastern Europe constitute part of a trend or a short-term phenomenon (TUC 2007).

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At the lower skilled end, many of these migrants end up working in a narrow range of sectors, especially in agriculture, construction and food packaging/processing as well documented in the case of the UK (Markova and Black 2007; TLWG 2007; TUC 2007). Domestic work has proven to be an increasingly important 'sector' in Europe, Asia, and North America and, thus, constitutes a vital employment opportunity for newly arrived women. Migrant workers' location within specific sectors of the (formal or informal) labour market and the temporary nature of their migration status usually entail certain legal and economic constraints. This is likely to have implications for migrant rights' advocacy work by civil society organisations and political mobilisation of migrants.

Temporary Migrants and concomitant rights issues

Lower skilled temporary migrant workers, who form the numerical majority of economic migrants in Europe and Asia, are more vulnerable to rights violations as opposed to the skilled, largely based on the specific position they occupy within labour markets. They are highly represented in the informal sectors which are not unionised, or in sectors where labour standards are often not applied (or do not even exist, as in much of Asia). This affects local workers also and is often the reason why they shun these jobs.

The key issues and concerns for temporary foreign workers which centre upon workplace grievances can be broadly classified under two headings: 1) employment related, and 2) welfare, occupational health and safety issues. Employment-related issues are mainly about non-payment or under-payment of wages and unauthorised

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deductions. Issues to do with welfare, occupational health and safety are concerns pertaining to accommodation, long working hours and workplace hazards (ICFTU-APRO 2003; TLWG 2007; TUC 2007). The latter includes work-related injuries and accidents as well as physical/sexual abuse (as encountered by foreign domestic workers, or FDWs). Official statistics on numbers and types of the various workplace grievances are rare and mostly non-existent, and so are systematic studies or recording activities by NGOs. The higher skilled migrants are often subject to de-skilling or downgrading faced with barriers to promotion (e.g. Bauder 2005).

According to a multi-country study on Asia (Verité 2005) which covers Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines Thailand, Taiwan, Jordan and Malaysia, the list of common abuses against foreign contract labourers were excessive overtime, improper wage payments and withholding of wages. Despite the widespread existence of legislation limiting fees for service, placement or recruitment, fees charged were nevertheless excessive in practice in two regards: they exceed legal limits and often accounted for a large portion of a worker's earnings. This discrepancy between law and actual practice has to do with the absence of formal legal mechanisms for governing the payment of placement fees (with the exception of Vietnam). The report, therefore, concludes that the level of indebtedness of foreign contract workers pertains to 'debt-bondage' consistent with the United Nations (UN) definition of human trafficking.

A recent study in the UK has pointed to fairly similar problems categorised into two groups: 1. critical non-compliances and 2. major non-compliances. Under the first, failure to pay the minimum wage appears as fairly widespread and so is the overcharging of weekly payments for accommodation as well as the lack of

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appropriate, safe and not overcrowded housing. The second category includes, amongst other, deductions from salary without written consent and the non-issuing (or incomplete issuing) of contracts (TLWG 2007).

With domestic work being a highly significant source of legal employment for foreign women and the continuing demand for such services, it deserves special mention. Legal status (work permit) does not automatically mean coverage by labour standards laws. In fact, domestic work is widely excluded from national labour legislation around the globe[4]. Foreign domestic workers or carers (typically women) do commonly not fall under national employment acts whereas foreign workers in industries such as construction and manufacturing are usually covered by industrial relations legislation (Piper 2005b).

With regard to employment or labour rights of temporary workers, of grave concerns for rights activists are breach of contract and the non- or under-payment of wages. The notion of 'portable justice' captures the problem when contracted or undocumented migrants are sent back 'home' or deported without being paid their wages, and the difficulties involved in claiming grievance in labour courts or labour standards offices when physically absent (Caron 2005)[5]. Often, when temporary contract migrants lose their job (even in cases of unfair dismissal) they are made to return home and, as a result, have no channels available for recourse.

To sum up, the almost universal problems related to work faced by migrant workers, especially those with temporary or seasonal status, are non- or underpayment of wages (not migrant specific), work contracts tied to (often inadequate and overprized)

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accommodation, and work permits tied to a specific employer or sector (including live-in arrangements for domestic workers). All of this renders migrants vulnerable and insecure, hence reluctant to voice complaints. An additional problem is the violation of freedom of association which is widespread in Asia for local as well as foreign workers (Piper 2006). In Europe, the problem tends to be of informal, rather than formal, barriers that hamper greater unionisation of migrant workers.

Political mobilisation of temporary migrants

The situation of temporary contract workers today poses a marked difference to what the existing literature on political mobilisation of migrants has highlighted, including trade unions' responses[6]. One of the elements which distinguish contemporary flows from earlier waves of (post-war) migration to the North is the institutional and structural context of weaker unions and deregulated labour markets in which current temporary migration occurs. Few studies have explored the specifics surrounding the organisational support structure for this particular group of migrants, and those which do are mostly on intra-Asian migration (Ford 2004, Piper 2006, Wee and Sim 2005) or the US context (Chun 2008).

With regard to these contemporary developments, unions increasingly have to own up to the reality that temporary migrant workers play an increasingly important role in regional and national labour markets beyond the mere filling of jobs – migrants also work to discipline domestic labour in a number of ways (Sharma 2006). In this context, trans-institutional and transnational networking is a vital form of organising, as I argue here.

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Parallel to the downscaling of trade unions' relevance, a rise in the numbers of migrant associations and NGOs can be witnessed globally advocating more specifically for migrants' labour rights regardless of their legal status and the jobs they perform. Thus, NGOs have addressed the precarious position of many migrant workers in informal (and often feminised) 'sector' jobs typically not tackled by trade unions (Ford and Piper 2007; Piper 2008d).

In order to incorporate migrant workers into the overall political struggle to uphold workers' rights in general and to address temporary or undocumented migrants' specific grievances, recent studies have argued for a need to enhance collaboration between trade unions and migrant organisations to build upon, or complement, their respective strengths and weaknesses (Piper and Ford 2006). Cross-organisational collaboration has also been identified as important in the context of 'portable justice'[7] (Grugel and Piper 2007). Migrant worker organisations can benefit from trade union structures as unions tend to have the financial leverage and political clout to force "governments to govern" and to institute their own legislation to support migrants' rights. In turn, it has been suggested that organising foreign workers can lead to a reinvigoration of the overall labour movement (Piper 2005a; Campbell 2006). In this sense, trade unions and NGOs are indispensable allies of not only *migrant* workers but all workers. How can this work in practice and what kind of emerging trends are we witnessing? These are questions I return to below.

Bridging perspectives on migrant activism: social movements and transnational activism

Migrants, especially temporary contract workers, are without doubt among the most marginalised and invisible, especially in policy terms (Grugel and Piper 2007). There

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are considerable obstacles to their organisation into effective social movements, whether at the local, national, regional or global levels. When they participate in the labour market, they can be found at the very bottom of the hierarchy, performing work nobody else wants to do in sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, in factories which are at the bottom of global production chains, and sex tourism. They are often 'undocumented'. Their issues and concerns are often hidden from mainstream society and the attention of the wider public. There is still little public awareness of their day-to-day roles in society and the economy. As a result, they suffer high levels of social exclusion and are targets of low, if any, social spending. "(T)heir transnationality (being simultaneous 'constituents' of both origin and destination countries) means that state responsibilities are difficult to attribute and easy to evade" (Grugel and Piper, 2007:152). The result is that migrants are among those groups of marginalised people who face immense difficulties in winning, for themselves, a discursive recognition of their rights.

The concept of social movement - with its emphasis firmly placed upon bottom-up citizen protest - is useful to highlight the importance of advocacy as an act to galvanise support for marginalised groups in society. But the concept itself has its limitations, as argued by Sikkink who sees its main failure in not portraying accurately the full range of actors involved in social justice and human rights issues beyond specific types of civil society organisations (1993). She refers to this broader set of organisations as an "international issue network", an idea further developed by her and Keck in their seminal work on "transnational advocacy networks" (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Similarly, I have elsewhere established the argument for a focus on

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transnational *activism* as it allows the inclusion of many different types of actors and thus, leads to an open or expansive perspective on advocacy networks (Piper and Uhlin 2004).

What these approaches have in common is reference to NGOs and other civil society organisations, including trade unions, as important actors in advocacy and political activism. Where they convert is in treating them mainly as *domestic* actors (such as Avci and McDonald, 2000, on trade unions) or explicitly as *transnational* actors (see Herod, 2007, on unions as transnational players). In the case of temporary migration in particular, taking a transnational perspective is paramount.

Transnationalism in migration scholarship

Transnational perspectives have also been developed by migration scholars in a variety of ways, a full summary of which goes beyond the scope of this paper. The transnationalisation of labour markets together with the rise in temporary migration schemes requires us to adopt a transnational approach also to the issue of political representation and activism of migrants as *workers*.

By highlighting the increasingly transnational workforce and transnational overlapping of societies, Johnston (2001) makes direct reference to immigrant labour, documented and undocumented, in his work on labour as part of a broader citizenship movement in the US. This, according to him, requires a re-conceptualisation of conventional perspectives on citizenship. New approaches and strategies are needed

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to address critical problems faced by migrant workers in their role as foreigners as well as labourers in certain sectors that are associated with the "three Ds" (dangerous, difficult, dirty), epitomised by the construction sector, agriculture, sweatshop and domestic work. There is growing realisation that 'coalitions of organisations' can exert far more influence than single organisations by themselves.

Recent transnational perspectives that introduce an understanding of migration as involving social processes that bridge countries of origin and destination also include the realm of politics (Sørensen et al., 2002). Østergaard-Nielsen (2002), for instance, discusses how politics in the country of origin filter into political activism in the country of destination but this tends to be mostly about so-called 'homeland' politics. She argues that transnational political networks engage in democratic processes in Turkey and Germany by using 'democracy' as a variable that allows for the differential effectiveness of political networks in each country. Thus, transnationalism emerges in her analysis also as an obstacle in policy making and implementation.

What remains, however, largely is missing in studies on political transnationalism is a consideration for the role of the labour movement and the role of traditional worker organisations, i.e. trade unions, in responding transnationally to the situation of increasing numbers of temporary migrant workers. This 'missing link' to trade unions has partly to do with the little engagement that trade unions have so far made with this specific group of migrants. The short-term nature of such migratory flows has implications for traditional approaches to 'membership' in trade unions in the destination countries. Another reason is that migrants tend to work in sectors that are regarded as impossible to organise or in jobs that are not recognised as 'proper' work,

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as in the case of domestic work which is often explicitly excluded from national labour laws. To operate transnationally, however, is vital in two regards: (1) to assist migrants in claiming their labour rights and address widespread malpractices on the part of employers; (1) to direct political activism not only toward destination governments' policies, but also origin governments' policies. Yet, to date, trade unions have by and large tended to be more nationally oriented. The political void left by trade unions has to some extent been filled by NGOs. But more recently, unions have begun to embark upon reform processes as evident from slogans such as "unions without borders" (Bacon 2001; Kloosterboer, 2007; Piper and Ford 2006). I return to this below.

Networks

Within migration studies, network theory has mostly been approached from socio-cultural and/or spatial perspectives, whereby the political sphere at the meso level of organisations has not yet received sufficient attention (Piper, 2008b; Pries 2007). Social movement scholars and political scientists working on advocacy networks, on the other hand, have investigated the transnational sphere of such network activities and the transnational nature of the issues advocated for, as well as the transnational form of such activism[8], but hardly beyond the context of NGOs, neglecting trade unionism and, thus, an important element of collective political action. Migrant worker organising has, therefore, not sufficiently been looked at from a transnational nor trans-institutional perspective. In migration studies, network theory has mainly been applied at the individual level to analyse migrants' decision making, flows of

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information and the geographic direction of migratory movements. There is very little work that maps out the 'politics of migration' in terms of the involvement of multiple organisations (NGOs, migrant associations, and trade unions) from a national as well as transnational network perspective.

As mentioned above, there is a great deal of academic writing on the subject of trade union reforms but a detailed summary goes beyond the scope of this article[9]. Conceptually the most interesting and relevant contributions as far as this paper is concerned is the work by Waterman (2003) on social movement unionism and Johnston (2001) on 'labour as citizenship movement'. These concepts, amongst other, allude to the issue that having a 'voice' at the workplace does not necessarily translate into having voice over other relevant public policy areas which relates to the point made above about the need to cooperate with other advocacy organisations.

Waterman (2003, 2005)'s notion of 'social movement unionism' is based on the broad argument that the crisis of trade unionism is rooted in the fact that the labour movement is still understood in organisational/institutional terms when it needs to be understood in networking/communicational ones (as new social movements have done). Both he and Johnston argue that, although labour is not the only source for social change, it constitutes an important ally and would achieve its full potential if aligned with other democratic social movements. With traditional workers and unions no longer being the norm of political struggle for social justice, labour movements have to rethink their way of operating.

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Although the notion of social movement unionism has in fact been developed in the case of a number of non-western countries, most notably South Korea and South Africa, it has also been employed by western scholars to argue for the much needed revitalisation and reform of conventional trade unionism in the west (Moody 1998). A few scholars based in the US and Canada have made reference to similar notions in the specific context of *im*migrants under the heading of 'community unionism' (e.g. Cranford and Ladd 2003), or by discussing specific campaigns such as 'Janitors for Justice' or fair wage campaigns where coalitions between trade unions, grass root or community organisations and university staff/students were formed (Aguiar 2006; Savage 2006). Trade unions themselves have also published documents acknowledging the need for a social movement unionism approach and "comprehensive campaigning" that is to focus not only on workers' direct material interests but to include broader issues such as human rights and social justice by forming coalitions with an array of community organisations. For example, the Dutch FNV has identified the organising the low wage service economy with it is high share of ethnic minority or migrant workers as an important element of their political activities (Kloosterboer, 2007, p. 22).

Recent studies on migrant worker NGOs in the Southeast Asian context have argued on a similar line: that regular collaboration with trade unions would enhance NGOs' advocacy efforts and vice versa (Piper and Ford 2006). The specific situation of many migrant workers highlights the importance of organisational representation and the formation of alliances as well as networks across space, institutions and issue-specificism (human rights, women's rights, workers' rights) to address the complexity of migrants' rights. In the Philippines, the notion of social movement unionism is well

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understood by some trade unionists, even if in practical terms it has not been realized based on a number of obstacles (Alcid 2006).

To recap, I have argued for an analytical framework which builds upon and expands social movement scholarship by emphasizing the importance of trans-institutional networking in order for migrant rights activism to gain more strength and, thus, greater influence on policy making and implementation. This is analytically well captured by the notion of 'social movement unionism'. The two crucial sets of organisations which constitute the major elements of social movement unionism are trade unions and social justice NGOs. By extending this to the transnational sphere, this type of political activism reflects the nature of migration, especially temporary migration. The manner of operationalising is in form of networks and alliances, built within and across borders.

A number of scholars have, in fact, emphasised the importance of NGO-trade union alliance in order to revive, or enhance, the effectiveness of collective organising and demonstrated by way of concrete examples or case studies an emerging trend in this direction (see Gallin on 'necessary partnership', 2000; Development in Practice, special issue 2004 on 'trade union and NGO relations'; Piper and Ford, 2006, on 'partnership in progress' in the context of migrant workers). What emerges in these works as a common thread, as well as those concepts discussed above on civil society's influence on public policy, in a more or less explicit manner is the significance of networks – transnationally as well as across organisations.

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When linking the notion of social movement unionism to the concept of networks, civil society organisations involved in migrant rights advocacy are situated within an integrated, yet open web of organisational networks, with the potential to address an array of issues that pertain to migrants as workers, as members of families and communities (Piper 2008a). The networking form, premised on the existence of relevant organisations or the capacity to establish new ones, is, thus, also a future-oriented concept – and in this sense normative and prescriptive.

Examples of such complex networks

Networks to support and advocate for migrant workers are being instigated by unions or other civil society organisations, depending on the specific type of migrant or the type of work these migrants are involved in. As far as trade unions are concerned, national union centres in the western world seem at the forefront of new initiatives on incorporating migrant workers into the labour movement, based to a large extent on the decrease in membership of traditional constituents. This has also to do with the fact that they are still blessed with larger pools of resources that many unions in the non-western world cannot draw on. Also, in Europe, the regional trade union structure clearly is also a reflection of, or a response to, the institutional set-up of the European Union[10].

In Europe, trade unions have also begun to engage in concrete forms of transnational networking to support and protect migrant workers. One such example is the

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establishment of a migrant worker branch by the TGUW in Southampton which caters for newly arrived Polish workers. In addition to organising Polish migrants who have come to the UK as part of the latest wave of A8 nationals – facilitated by the hiring of a Polish speaking trade unionist – this union is said to attempt to link up with unions in Poland also (Campbell 2006). Another such example is the newly established European Migrant Workers Union that was founded by the IG Bau (Germany's Trade Union for Building, Forestry, Agriculture and the Environment) in 2004 as the first such organisation to be formed within the European trade union movement. This new union addresses posted and seasonal workers in all industries, with specific focus on migrant workers in agriculture and construction in its initial phase. The aim is to provide those workers with legal assistance and advice, support them in the event of sickness or accident and help them to receive correct payment for work done and promote the provision of better accommodation. This new organisations concentrates its activities also on migrant workers from Poland and the aim is to set up offices in all the countries of origin of migrant workers, with the first being in Poland. These initiatives, thus, clearly involve a transnational dimension in their organisational networking.

With regard to trans-institutional alliances and networks, the domestic worker NGO Kalayaan in London successfully campaigned for regularisation and independent migration status for foreign domestic workers who had become overstayers in the UK, and one contributing factor to this success was the close and consistent working relationship with the Transport and General Workers Union (RESPECT 1998). Domestic worker supporting networks have also been formed across regions of which CARAM Asia and RESPECT are two examples. The former which stands for

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Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility is not only exclusively concerned with domestic worker related concerns, but also health and other migration issues. As a follow up to a regional summit on domestic workers in 2002, CARAM Asia adopted the 'Colombo Declaration' listing rights of domestic workers. This summit was attended not only by NGOs from within Asia but also trade unions. The Europe-wide network RESPECT (which stands for Rights, Equality, Solidarity, Power, Europe, Co-operation, Today) was set up in 1998 to campaign on very similar issues – to boost the respect and recognition of domestic workers' rights. This network also involves trade unions.

The coalition building activities across various nationality groups and different types of organisations to campaign on behalf of foreign domestic workers have been particularly well documented in the context of Hong Kong (Law 2002; Wee and Sim 2005). Asia is also interesting with regard to an ever expanding regional network of migrant worker associations which form the Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), headquartered in Manila. Trade unions have begun to be part of this network too which is also part of an international network, Migrant Rights International (MRI) based in Geneva.

The probably oldest and most extensive European network of social and economic justice NGOs that has included migrant worker organisations is SOLIDAR which was founded in 1948 (then under a different name) and comprises of 42 members in 20 countries in Europe and beyond. This networks works in alliance with trade unions, the labour movement and various civil society organisations including think tanks and foundations such as the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (which is also active on migrant

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worker issues in Asia, see Barriga and Herberg 2006). SOLIDAR's activities are concentrated in the field of social policy, employment and development with specific campaigns revolving around "Decent Work for a Decent Life" and "Take Part!", a migration specific project undertaken between June 2006 and December 2007 with the broad aim of starting a dialogue between NGOs involved in providing services to migrants and migrant organisations. Among its findings are that the involvement of migrant organisations in the selected EU countries is still insufficient and unstructured, with the result of duplication of efforts and even competition for funding.

What remains unclear from these examples are the specific dynamics involved in networking transnationally and trans-institutionally, leaving questions such as the extent to which these alliances and coalitions are built in view of long-term relationships that go beyond individual campaigns unanswered.

Conclusion

International migration poses a new challenge in the subject area of migrants' rights activism and the way forward seems to lie in transnational and trans-institutional networking and coalition building among migrant associations and trade unions which have key leadership roles to play in generating strategies, common approaches and in mobilising societies to ensure the fair and equal treatment of migrant workers. Given the increasingly restrictive migration policies by destination countries globally, the

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insecure and vulnerable position of temporary contract workers and the undocumented have the potential to reinvigorate labour activism if organisations were to overcome institutional and other barriers. The way forward for the various organisations involved in labour activism seems "to go transnational" and engage in networking across institutions. This links up to the argument made for a broader social movement unionism based on inter-organisational networking between trade unions and other social justice organisations as well as intra-organisational networking across national borders ('unions without borders') in order to revive the labour movement more generally.

Yet, despite emerging studies in the area of transnational migrant politics and organisational networks by or on behalf of migrants, many questions are still unaddressed and deserve further exploration. For example, how exactly the transnational nature of migration is reflected in the transnational and transinstitutional operating of social justice organisations - and the obstacles involved – is an issue that deserves more attention. Sector-specific studies in particular would enhance our understanding of the opportunities and obstacles to specific partnership models. The significance of other civil society groups (e.g. lawyer associations, faith-based organisations, professional associations) as actors in promoting migrants' rights and their positioning within existing nodes and networks remain an unexplored issue also. Last but not least, the precise nature, feasibility, and sustainability of social movement unionism in the transnational context of temporary contract migration requires further research (as also argued by Vandenberg 2006).

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Overall, there are still significant conceptual and empirical gaps in our knowledge that revolve around the feasibility and practicality of transnational policy making and the role of organisations in migrant rights advocacy and service provisioning.

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[1] For a fairly detailed account of the various policy schemes in those regions, see Ruhs (2006).

[2] However, some European countries also prohibit migrant domestic workers from reuniting with their families at their destinations. Notable exceptions are Italy and Spain. And Asian governments tacitly allow the presence of migrant workers over longer periods of term (often whole families in an undocumented manner) without officially recognition of settlement and official integration policies (Piper 2008b).

[3] According to a more recent report by the Migration Advisory Committee (2008), however, it appears as if migrants (at least as far as those from the A8 countries are concerned) are more evenly distributed throughout the UK economy than suggested by the TUC report.

[4] This is often the case for local domestic workers as much as for foreign domestic workers, hence not a migration problem but a 'sector' specific problem. The inadequate legislative coverage of domestic

workers will be addressed by the ILC (ILO's annual congress) in 2010 when beginning the drafting work for a new Homeworker Convention.

[5] A statement published by PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) on the EU plans to impose employer sanctions (dated 15 April 2008) point to this particular problem also (see www.picum.org; accessed 19 May 2008).

[6] For a detailed literature review, see Piper 2007.

[7] The notion of 'portable justice' captures the problem when undocumented migrants or temporary labour migrants are deported or sent back to their countries of origin upon completion of their contracts, but were not paid their wages, and the difficulties involved in claiming grievances in labour courts or labour standards offices when physically absent (Caron 2005). This problem, thus, has a transnational element (Piper 2008a).

[8] For a detailed review of the literature, see Piper and Uhlin (2004).

[9] Useful references can be found on http://www.crimt.org/2eSite_renouveau/Samedi_PDF/Cradden_Hall_Jones.pdf.

[10] Such regional or sub-regional configurations are conducive for triggering transnational collaboration among unions. There is evidence from NAFTA countries US, Canada and Mexican unions also but without reference to migrant workers (Bacon 2001).

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