LOW-WAGE WORKER ORGANIZING AND ADVOCACY IN THE USA: COMPARING DOMESTIC WORKERS AND DAY LABORERS

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ABSTRACT

This chapter compares and contrasts organizing and advocacy among US domestic workers and day laborers. These two occupations share many features: both are ill-suited to conventional unionism; immigrants, many of them unauthorized, have long dominated the workforce in both; both are entry-level jobs at the bottom of the labor market (although both are also internally stratified); and both have been the focus of advocacy and organizing at both the local and national level in recent decades. Yet, there are also significant contrasts between the two. First and foremost, women are the vast majority of domestic workers while men predominate among day laborers. Another striking difference is that while domestic labor is hidden from public view inside private households, day laborers are regularly on display on street corners and other public spaces. This chapter explores the effects of such similarities and differences on the collective action repertoires of day laborers and domestic workers. In both cases, many workers have individualistic, entrepreneurial ambitions, a formidable organizing challenge; yet, orientation does not necessarily impede and sometimes even facilitates collective action. Day laborers' demands are largely economic, and these (predominantly male) workers often hope to return to their countries of origin; domestic workers (overwhelmingly female) are more interested in improved opportunities within the US. Although women are overrepresented in the leadership of both domestic workers' and day laborers' organizations, male day laborers and

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female domestic workers have distinct experiences and aspirations, and put forward different types of demands, generating gendered collective action repertoires.

Keywords: Day laborers; domestic workers; immigrant organizing; alt-labor; labor movement; worker centers

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, to the surprise of many observers, immigrant workers relegated to the bottom of the US labor market have regularly engaged in successful collective action to improve their pay and working conditions, and to gain dignity and respect. Some low-wage immigrant workers have organized in traditional labor unions (Milkman, 2006), but others have turned instead to community-based organizations known as "worker centers." Day laborers and domestic workers – occupations that unions have often considered difficult or impossible to organize – have been particularly central to worker centers' efforts.

The literature on worker centers rarely examines gender, but as I argue here, the centers' organizing efforts are deeply shaped by the gender-specific experiences of the low-wage immigrant workers who are the focus of their organizing and advocacy. As the extensive literature on gender and migration has documented, male and female immigrants have distinctly different experiences in the United States, which lead to gender-specific aspirations. Immigrant men often dream of return to their countries of origin, while immigrant women tend to be more committed to establishing roots in the United States and building a future for themselves and their children (see for example Jones-Correa, 1998; Pessar, 1999). One effect of this gender difference is that immigrant women are disproportionately represented in leadership roles in worker centers.

Like the larger labor market, the sectors in which low-wage immigrant workers are concentrated are highly segregated by gender. The two occupations on which I focus here, both of which are populated almost exclusively by immigrants from the Global South, exemplify this starkly: day laborers are predominately male, and domestic workers are overwhelmingly female. The combined effect of this occupational segregation by gender and workers' gender-differentiated experiences of migration has propelled these two occupational groups toward distinctly different collective action agendas. Day laborers' organizing demands are largely economic, focused on maximizing earnings – a goal that makes sense for a group of workers who aspire to return to their countries of origin. In contrast, domestic workers' organizations concentrate their efforts on winning dignity and respect and on seeking opportunities for advancement within the labor market – goals that make sense for a group that plans to remain in the United States permanently. In short, the contrasting gender composition of these two occupations, along with the contrast between male and female immigrants' future aspirations, have generated gender-specific collective action repertoires for domestic workers and day laborers.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Day labor and domestic work have become iconic examples of the "precarity" central to discussions of twenty-first-century labor markets (Standing, 2011). Although those discussions are not always historically grounded, in fact, precarity is hardly a new phenomenon. In the US context, its current prominence reflects the restoration of labor conditions that were common in the first four decades of the twentieth century in the aftermath of the neoliberal turn of the 1970s. Day labor and domestic work share this historical trajectory: both flourished in the years prior to the US New Deal era, when a series of social reforms under President Franklin D. Roosevelt narrowed economic inequalities and regulated labor markets on a previously unprecedented scale; this led both occupations to decline after the 1930s, and then both expanded once again starting in the late twentieth century.

In 1935, civil rights activist Ella Baker and journalist Marvel Cooke published an explosive article in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)'s magazine *The Crisis.* Entitled "The Bronx Slave Market," it vividly described the informal street corners in New York City where African American women gathered in hopes of being hired for day work in private homes. This exposé, still widely cited today, drew unprecedented public attention to the low pay and degraded working conditions of domestic workers and sparked widespread public condemnation of the street corner markets themselves, with their eerie evocations of slave auctions. New York's then-Mayor Fiorello La Guardia soon banned the hiring of day workers in the City's streets and established indoor employment centers designed to monitor and regulate the pay and conditions of private household workers (Nadasen, 2015, p. 14).

The same year Baker and Cooke's article appeared, domestic workers (along with agricultural workers) were explicitly excluded from two key legislative pillars of the New Deal, the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act (the latter granted US workers collective bargaining rights for the first time). Three years later, domestic workers were again excluded from coverage under another landmark New Deal law, the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established federal minimum wage and overtime pay requirements for the first time. Thus, domestic workers, the vast majority of whom were African American women in this period, were effectively written out of the groundbreaking labor and employment legislation passed in the late 1930s. Nevertheless, the New Deal *indirectly* transformed their occupation, as it generated what economic historians term the "Great Compression," a dramatic reduction in income inequality that began in the late 1930s. Declining inequality, in turn, contributed to a steep decline in the size of the domestic service workforce. Once the largest single female occupation, employment in domestic labor shrank significantly as a share of all-female employment over the next few decades. By the 1970s, sociologists were even penning obituaries for it (e.g., Coser, 1973).

But such expectations that the occupation would completely disappear proved premature. Instead, as the New Deal order began to unravel in the late

1970s, and income inequality reversed course and widened once again, employment in domestic labor also expanded – although it never again approached the size it had assumed in the early twentieth century. Along with growing inequality, increased maternal labor force participation and the aging of the population also have contributed to the growth of demand for paid domestic labor. In its new incarnation, the occupation heavily relies on recent immigrants from Latin America and other parts of the Global South rather than African Americans, who by then had won better job opportunities (Milkman, Reese, & Roth, 1998).

Whereas the early twentieth-century labor market for domestic workers was dominated by African American women, in this period, day laborers in other industries included not only African American men but also significant numbers of male immigrants. Some female domestic workers, like those in the "Bronx slave market," were recruited by employers to work for the day, so they were also day laborers; but most domestics had more enduring relationships with their employers. And in the United States (unlike some other countries), this was an overwhelmingly female field; by contrast, in other sectors, the day labor workforce was overwhelmingly male in the early decades of the twentieth century. Single European immigrant men often worked as day laborers outside major cities in industries like mining and lumber; in agriculture as well as in urban construction, both African American men and male immigrants were employed as day laborers. As in the case of domestic workers, employer abuses of day laborers garnered public attention during the Great Depression. For example, in 1930, a government investigator reported that construction contractors treated day laborers very poorly, "imposing […] long hours of labor, low wages, unreasonable charges for board, poor housing conditions, and compelling them to pay fees to employment agencies for jobs" (Higbie, 2003, p. 41).

Paralleling the trend in domestic work, day labor gradually declined in the construction industry starting in the late 1930s. In this case, the underlying mechanism was not declining inequality, but instead the robust growth of unionization in residential construction. By the early 1970s, day labor corners had nearly disappeared from cities where the building industry was highly organized. As Liebow's (1967) ethnography *Tally's Corner* memorably documented, African American men continued to be recruited as construction day laborers as late as the early 1960s in cities like Washington DC. But by then, the day laborer phenomenon was much reduced relative to the early twentieth century. Starting in the late 1970s, however, paralleling the resurgence of paid domestic work, the steady erosion of unionism in residential construction and the influx of immigrants into the low-wage labor market led to a rebirth of construction day labor. By the twentieth century's end, day laborers had once again become a common spectacle on urban street corners across the nation. In this period, just like in the newly revived domestic service field, recent immigrants predominated in day labor; African Americans had gained access to better jobs in the post-Civil Rights era (the Civil Rights Act was enacted only one year before the 1965 law lifting immigration restrictions), although more recently, ex-offenders, most of them African Americans, have also turned to day labor in some cities (Purser, 2012).

By the end of the twentieth century, domestic work and day labor were well established as the twin entry-level occupations for female and male immigrants, respectively – especially immigrants with limited formal education and/or those who had entered the United States without authorization. Not only did employers in both fields seem indifferent to the legal status (or lack thereof) of the workers they hired, but also the fact that these occupations flourished largely outside the formal, regulated economy made them especially attractive to unauthorized immigrants. Yet at the same time, informality rendered workers in both fields highly vulnerable to employer abuses such as wage theft, sexual harassment (for domestic workers) and, in extreme cases, labor trafficking.

Despite their similar historical trajectories, these two sectors are marked by important differences in the twenty-first century. Women have long dominated the domestic labor field in the United States (whereas in some parts of the Global South, male domestic workers are commonplace), while men virtually monopolize day labor in US urban construction (again, in some parts of the world women are routinely employed in the construction sector). Iconographies of gender surround both occupations, as well as the organizing and advocacy efforts directed at them. For example, while domestic workers are often portrayed as victims in need of special protection from abuse that is hidden in private homes, day laborers are more typically seen as aggressive or "macho" – and indeed as a potential threat to the building trades unions and their members, insofar as their growing ubiquity undercuts the labor standards those unions managed to secure in earlier years. In the absence of established unions in domestic work, no such threat exists.

Another striking difference between the two occupations is that while domestic labor is largely hidden from public view, due to its location within private households, day laborers are conspicuously visible on street corners and in other public spaces, where they are often vulnerable to harassment by the police as well as hostile community members. This contrast dovetails with the gender norms of many immigrant communities, which often discourage women from participation in the public sphere, where men predominate. Although domestic workers routinely violate those norms by leaving their own households for employment in the homes of others, paid domestic work is more acceptable for women than most available alternatives and is also a familiar female occupation in many immigrants' countries of origin. Day labor, in contrast, embodies many of the cultural conventions of masculinity, in part through its flagrant visibility in public spaces like street corners (Purser, 2009).

NEW FORMS OF ORGANIZING

Domestic workers and day laborers alike have long been considered unlikely candidates for unionization or other forms of collective organization due to the instability and geographical dispersion of employment in both fields. In the United States, traditional labor unions have seldom attempted to recruit workers in either occupation. In some periods, workers have launched successful unionization efforts on their own, but these efforts never achieved significant scale.

This bleak historical record makes it all the more remarkable that a wave of high-profile organizing and advocacy among both domestic workers and day laborers emerged in the 1990s and 2000s as part of the "alt-labor" movement – a term that marks these efforts as distinct from the traditional labor union movement – led by community-based organizations called worker centers (Fine, 2006).

Worker centers began to proliferate on the local level in the 1990s, especially in immigrant gateway cities like Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, and soon they spread across the nation. Early organizing took place among Pilipino and South Asian workers in New York City, who then reached out to Latino and Caribbean workers who made up the majority of the city's domestic workers. This led to the establishment of Domestic Workers United in 2000. Similarly, day laborers organizing emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s on the local level, especially in Los Angeles, which was home to more day laborers than any other part of the United States.

By the twenty-first century, the centers were scaling up their efforts, increasingly coalescing into national networks. The National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON) was founded in 2001, and six years later the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) followed. Both networks actively coordinate organizing and advocacy in their respective occupational jurisdictions in cities across the nation. Although in the 1990s relationships between worker centers and traditional unions were fraught with tensions and marked by mutual distrust (Fine, 2007b), in the twenty-first century, NDLON and NDWA and their affiliates (as well as worker centers focusing on other occupations and industries) have received growing moral and material support from key sectors of organized labor. From the outset, the worker centers had strong ties to the immigrant rights movement – a movement that unions also increasingly embraced after 2000 when the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) famously abandoned its support for immigration restriction.

The worker centers and the alt-labor movement have done much to enhance public awareness of the plight of domestic workers and day laborers alike, exposing employer abuses, and in key instances, also winning back pay and other remedies for the workers affected. The centers' media campaigns have riveted public attention to stories of exploitation in both occupations, with further stimulus from book-length exposés written by worker center leaders, like Jennifer Gordon's (2005) *Suburban Sweatshops* and Kim Bobo's (2009) *Wage Theft in America*. The twenty-first-century narrative about the conditions facing domestics, day laborers, and other vulnerable low-wage workers in many ways recapitulates the 1935 piece by Baker and Cooke – although now the standard historical reference point is not slavery but instead the pre-New Deal sweatshops that exploited earlier generations of immigrants.

The worker center movement has also been compared to the Progressive era labor reform movement and to the early twentieth-century settlement houses that assisted and advocated for working-class European immigrants in cities like Chicago and New York. Like their Progressive era predecessors, worker centers

and their allies have struggled, with some success, to improve enforcement of existing legal protections for low-wage workers, and in a few jurisdictions have also won new legislation expanding those protections. In another echo of the 1935 exposé of the New York City "slave market," some local governments – in cooperation with the worker centers – have responded to the proliferation of day labor on street corners by establishing formal day labor centers that function as hiring halls, setting minimum wage rates and attempting to regulate working conditions.[1]

GENDER, IMMIGRATION, AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE "ALT-LABOR" MOVEMENT

As I have argued elsewhere (Milkman, 2006), low-wage immigrants have shown great receptivity to labor-organizing efforts in recent decades on the (relatively rare) occasions when they encounter such opportunities. This receptivity partly reflects the fact that most originally moved to the United States with economic advancement as their primary goal. But the gender dimension of the immigration process complicates this story: male immigrants often experience a decline in their gender status and power relative to the situation in their countries of origin, while for women the migration process typically improves their status vis-à-vis men in their communities (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Pessar, 1999) This leads to a gender asymmetry in activism as well. Indeed, gender is a highly salient feature of the alt-labor movement, both in regard to the content of worker centers' advocacy and organizing campaigns and in regard to the leadership of the organizations themselves. Yet this aspect of the movement has received surprisingly little attention in the previous literature on alt-labor. In this chapter, in a preliminary effort to fill that gap, I sketch out a comparison of the dynamics of organizing among domestic workers and day laborers, drawing on my own fieldwork as well as ethnographic data from the secondary literature.

Although the membership of traditional US unions has become increasingly feminized in recent decades (mostly due to the growth of public-sector unionism, which is disproportionately concentrated in female-dominated occupations), the top leadership of most trade unions remains highly male-dominated. The alt-labor movement is strikingly different in this respect, to the point that even in some male-dominated occupations (e.g. taxi drivers' organizations), worker centers are disproportionately female-led. One explanation for this gender contrast is the simple fact that leaders of traditional unions often earn very high salaries, while worker centers typically are at the opposite extreme, operating on shoestring budgets and paying their staffers and directors very little. But there are other dynamics involved as well.

One factor is the age of traditional union organizations, most of which date back a century or more, whereas the worker centers only began to emerge in the late twentieth century, well after the second-wave women's movement had led a wide variety of progressive organizations to embrace the goal of gender equality and (at least nominally) to incorporate it into their internal cultures and structures. More recently, these groups have also incorporated an intersectional

approach into their view of social change, recognizing the complexity of multiple inequalities involving race, gender, class, nativity, sexuality, and more. Moreover, there are more leadership opportunities in the burgeoning alt-labor movement than in traditional unions, most of which are suffering membership decline (and in which turnover is notoriously low among incumbent leaders).

Some worker centers focus exclusively or primarily on organizing immigrant women in female-dominated sectors of the economy (such as domestic work), and some use "explicit language about gender and gender oppression in their work," as Janice Fine (2007a: 216) has pointed out. But women also are prominent in leadership roles in many worker centers with male-dominated and gender-mixed constituencies. One such leader who had developed a popular education program focused on "gender relations" for her worker center told us in an interview, "We are getting more and more women participating, we have really strong women leaders who make themselves heard. Organizers have become more conscious, they talk constantly with the workers about respect and equal participation of men and women" (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012, p. 741).

Indeed, women's leadership is conspicuous by its presence at all levels – from the rank and file to the very top – in the worker center movement (and also in the immigrant rights movement). Worker center leaders are often professionally trained (many are attorneys), and there is typically a substantial gap between their socioeconomic status and that of the low-wage workers on whose behalf they organize and advocate. Some of these leaders resemble the settlement house workers of a century earlier, most of whom were US-born women from privileged families, although other alt-labor leaders are immigrants themselves, often from families of relatively modest means. The latter are often 1.5-generation immigrants who arrived in the United States as children and went on to obtain a college education (or beyond). As Veronica Terriquez and I have documented elsewhere (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012), immigrant women are more involved than their male counterparts in worker centers and other immigrant-oriented community-based organizations. "Women are more organized. We are the ones who are out in front, leading these organizations," one leader declared. "Women are more willing to take the risk and step up" (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012, p. 741).

The roots of activism among immigrant women reflect the ways in which the migration process itself operates to improve women's economic and social status relative to that of their male counterparts, or what Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994: 196) characterized as "a general trend toward gender egalitarianism," driven primarily by the dynamics of female labor force participation among the foreign-born. The employment opportunities that immigrants (of both genders) find in the United States are generally superior to those in the sending countries – indeed this is the single most common reason for migration. After arriving in the United States, female immigrants seek paid work out of economic necessity, generating a female labor force participation rate much higher than that in their countries of origin.[2] Although initially paid work may be constructed as an extension of domesticity rather than a challenge to it, over time it provides women with greater economic independence and freedom of movement than

most of them enjoyed prior to migration: this in turn increases their power and autonomy within immigrant households.[3]

Although male immigrants typically earn more per hour than their female counterparts, males often have less stable employment, especially if they are day laborers. By contrast, female immigrants – including many domestic workers – often work longer and have more regular hours and therefore may accumulate earnings equal to or exceeding those of their husbands and fathers. Even those with lower earnings typically have far more economic independence than they did prior to migration (Pessar, 1999). They enjoy greater freedom of physical movement as well – traveling to work, taking their children to school, shopping, and so forth – all of which place them "outside of traditional normative expectations and squarely 'in the street'" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, p. 194). As Zentgraf (2002, p. 637) observes, this greater spatial mobility is itself empowering, providing "a sense of freedom […] a breaking down of gender-related cultural and social roles that [had] kept them tightly regulated and watched."

Like paid employment itself, immigrant women's alt-labor activism often begins as an extension into the public sphere of traditional female obligations toward children and families, drawing them into community-based organizing efforts rooted in what Temma Kaplan (1982) memorably called "female consciousness." This has an especially complex meaning for "transnational mothers" – immigrant women who leave their children behind in their countries of origin. For others, especially those with high levels of formal education, activism may have more explicitly political or ideological roots. Moreover, the fact that female immigrants disproportionately find employment in interactive service jobs (including but not limited to domestic work), where they are frequently exposed to "American" ideals of gender equality, can also be a significant influence. Many female immigrants come to embrace those ideals, albeit in complex and ambivalent ways (Grasmuck, & Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Menjivar, 1999; Zentgraf, 2002).

Women who migrate as adults experience these shifting gender dynamics directly; those who were still children when they arrived in the United States (the 1.5 generation) often have a different experience. The latter are less constrained by patriarchal traditions to begin with, and typically have much greater access to educational opportunities than their mothers. Indeed, whereas in their countries of origin immigrant men typically have more access to education than women, after settlement in the United States, the pattern is reversed: young immigrant women are more likely than their male counterparts to gain access to higher education. As other commentators have noted, a sexual double standard contributes to this dynamic: immigrant parents often strictly regulate girls' leisure activities in efforts to protect their sexuality, while their brothers enjoy far more freedom (Espiritu, 2000; López, 2003; Smith, 2002). Here, patriarchal tradition, ironically, advantages young female immigrants, while the personal liberty afforded to young males may distract them from schoolwork and led to more negative outcomes.

For the 1.5 generation, higher education in the United States often serves as a catalyst for political awareness; many women alt-labor and immigrant rights

leaders began their political careers as student activists. Moreover, many women leaders report that their mothers were highly supportive of their educational aspirations as well as their activism. The bilingual and bicultural 1.5 generation is especially well-situated to navigate US institutions, while at the same time remaining strongly identified with the immigrant community in which they grew up. As Abrego (2011) has shown in a study of undocumented immigrant activists, the 1.5 generation tends to be less fearful of political engagement in the United States than are those who migrated as adults. Bloemraad (2006) also found the 1.5 generation to be overrepresented among civic and political immigrant leaders in Boston and Toronto.

These processes combine to generate a substantial supply of female immigrants who move freely and comfortably in the public sphere, who have experienced some social and economic empowerment, and who are motivated to consolidate those advances. The orientation of immigrant men is quite different. As Pessar (1999) comments in her review of the gender and migration literature, migration-based "gains in gender equity are central to women's desires to settle, more or less permanently, to protect their advances." She adds, "In contrast, many men seek to return home rapidly to regain the status and privileges that migration itself has challenged."[4] These contrasting "here" versus "there" orientations give immigrant political engagement a strikingly gendered character, as Jones-Correa (1998) argued in his classic study of Latino immigrants in New York City. First-generation immigrant men, Jones-Correa showed, were drawn to political projects focused on their countries of origin, while immigrant women's political activity was more often directed at improving the situation of their families and communities in the United States.

One result is that immigrant women face limited male competition for leadership roles in political projects focused on the situation of immigrants "here" in the United States, including worker centers. Not only do women lead domestic workers' organizations, but more surprisingly they also are often leaders of day laborers' groups whose membership is overwhelmingly male. There are male day laborer leaders too, but many have plans to return to their home countries, even as they engage in organizing efforts aiming to improve their situation as sojourners in the United States. Excerpts from Central American and Mexican day laborers' comments in a focus group I convened in an LA day labor center in 2006 illustrate this "there"-focused orientation, as well as hinting at the gendered status loss they experienced north of the border:

> *The way things are going here, the way we're treated, you're repeatedly humiliated. And it's not like that back in my country. So the goal for most of us is to save up some money and go back to our countries, to return home, and start up a business there.*

> *I want to make a little money and start something over there. We emigrate on account of there not being any work. But there the money is worth ten times as much, so if you use it wisely you can start up a little shop. We can't do that here without papers, plus it would cost much more.*

> *As long as there's work, we do it - we sure can't go to school or anything like that. And we have to pay the bills for our families back home* […].

Nicholas De Genova cites similar expressions of nostalgia, like those of "Felipe," who is proud that his wife back in Mexico is a full-time mother and not employed outside the home, thanks to the remittances he sends her. Filipe too hoped to return with enough funds to buy a plot of land (De Genova, 2005, pp. 133–134). Although these aspirations may never be fulfilled, they nonetheless reveal the gendered aspect of immigrants' worldviews.

Job segregation further reinforces the "there" – focused orientation among first-generation immigrant men. Those employed in male-dominated sectors like construction find a reservoir of support among their coworkers for patriarchal gender norms, or what Robert Smith (2006: ch. 5) calls "ranchero masculinity," further reinforced in all-male leisure activities like soccer or drinking in bars. Gretchen Purser's ethnographic study of day laborers reveals the importance of repeated affirmations of masculinity, which she argues were key to these workers' struggles to attain a sense of dignity. In their view, "real workers" and "real men" look for work in the street as day laborers (Purser, 2009, p. 126). She goes on to suggest that the highly individualistic character of this quest for dignity as men can undermine efforts to form a collective identity.

GENDERED PATTERNS OF ORGANIZING AMONG DAY LABORERS AND DOMESTIC WORKERS

Many day laborers self-identify as self-employed "entrepreneurs" rather than as "workers." Purser reports that the day laborers she observed on street corners (but less so for those who utilized the day labor center she studied, who had a different yet also hyper-masculine identity) saw themselves "as free and autonomous individuals engaged in an entrepreneurial activity" (2009, p. 126). Abel Valenzuela argues, similarly, that day labor "is a strategy employed by workers with labor market values consistent with the traditional self-employed. It provides them with the quality or state of being self-governing or autonomous, without outside control by one employer." Moreover, Valenzuela claims, most day laborers "partake in this market by choice" (Valenzuela, 2001, pp. 346–347).

In the US construction industry, the boundaries between employers and workers have always been fluid; many workers (past and present) aspire to become subcontractors and quite a few actually achieve this goal – although some who do may later revert to being ordinary wage workers. Day laborers are also now part of the industry's *de facto* internal labor market, and some move up to positions as recruiters of coethnic immigrant workers for contractors. Marc Droussard describes several examples of subcontractors who were formerly day laborers, observing that "ascent to a higher skill level converts recently immigrated workers into contractors exercising a position of power over their peers" (Droussard, 2013, pp. 159, 176–185).

In this context, it is not surprising that day labor organizing in recent years has focused explicitly on economic issues – setting minimum pay rates with the goal of taking wages out of competition, creating an orderly queue of workers in hiring halls for the same purpose (although in a nod to the entrepreneurial

identity of workers, exceptions are made for workers who have preexisting relationships with individual employers), and assisting workers in pursuing cases of non-payment of wages (Theodore, Valenzuela, & Melendez, 2006). In some parts of the country, day laborer organizing has also drawn on cultural and organizational repertoires imported from Central America, like *teatro campesino* and Freieran-inspired popular education and literacy training; soccer leagues are another common vehicle of recruitment and building cohesion. The appeal of these approaches to recruitment – which are seldom found in domestic worker organizing – is congruent with the nostalgia for "there" among so many immigrant day laborers.

The establishment of day labor centers and hiring halls also was sparked by efforts to respond to public concern (much of it unfriendly and some explicitly xenophobic) about workers congregating on street corners in an unruly quest for work. Indeed, many day labor centers are subsidized by municipal or county governments. This is not the only reason that some day laborers openly disdain the centers, preferring to take their chances on the more anarchic street corner markets rather than submitting to the regulation the day labor center and their hiring halls impose; they also find the corners more in keeping with their entrepreneurial self-image. Some move back and forth between corner and center, depending on their shifting perceptions of the quality and quantity of job opportunities in each location.

Michelle Camou (2009) argues persuasively that the individualistic orientation of day laborers "may present unique organizing challenges when compared with other immigrants." At the Denver day labor center where she conducted participant observation, she reports, those workers who became actively involved did not share the organizers' "collectivist" worldview; instead they "associated the center with business opportunities […]. Day laborers brought to the center short-term and self-interested views." Camou concludes, "For organizers, centers are collectivist and transformative. For day laborers they are vehicles to generate job leads and earn income […]" (Camou, 2009, pp. 59–61). This highly instrumental side of day laborers' activism reflects their eagerness to maximize earnings, both to send remittances home and save funds for later investment there.

But entrepreneurialism is not inherently antithetical to organizing! As Eli Chinoy(1955) found among US automobile workers in the 1950s, many of whom aspired to own their own businesses in reaction to the soul-destroying experience of factory life which they suffered daily, a leadership role in a labor union can be an appealing alternative for those with entrepreneurial ambitions. That the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions have taken a growing interest in organizing day laborers in the past decade (in 2006 NDLON and the AFL-CIO entered into an official partnership) is relevant here as well. At least in theory, this provides day laborer activists a path to leadership positions (albeit at the lowest levels) in the building trades, not coincidentally the most male-dominated sector of the US labor movement. (Although many day laborer organizers and worker center staffers are female, for the reasons suggested earlier, this is rarely the case in the building trades unions.)

In short, although day laborers are indeed entrepreneurially oriented in ways that may at first seem incompatible with collective action, their individualistic ambitions propel some of them into leadership roles, and this in turn can help to energize organizing and advocacy efforts. Paradoxically, then, day labor entrepreneurialism has helped generate a cadre of rank-and-file leaders for the day laborer movement.

Elements of entrepreneurialism can also be found among immigrant domestic workers, some of whom recruit other immigrant women (typically recent arrivals who cannot find work on their own) as helpers or launch small housecleaning businesses in which they employ co-ethnics. Moreover, there is considerable scope for upward mobility within the highly stratified field of domestic labor, as Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) has shown. Women in this occupation often begin their careers, especially upon initially arriving in the United States, in the worst jobs as live-in domestic servants with long hours and very low pay (which employers justify because of the "in kind" food and shelter workers receive). Over time, many live-ins move into better jobs as live-out housekeepers, nannies, and eldercare providers, and eventually into the most lucrative work, as housecleaners who are paid a flat rate for each job. As Mary Romero (1992, p. 155, 161) has documented, over the years domestic workers have strategized to professionalize their occupation, and with considerable success in the housecleaning sector.

The direct access many domestic workers obtain to a class-privileged habitus also contributes to their aspirations for upward mobility. Like day laborers, indeed, many domestic workers do not share the progressive, collectivist worldviews of the (often highly educated and relatively privileged, and often of a different racial or ethnic background than the bulk of the workforce) advocates and organizers who created the organizations now affiliated with NDWA. In a nod to this reality, some of these groups offer training programs for domestic workers interested in moving into more skilled positions. And like the day laborers' alt-labor groups, most domestic workers' organizations offer legal services to victims of wage theft.

In contrast to the day laborers, however, the domestic workers' organizations are less narrowly economic in their orientation.[5] One underlying reason for this is exposed in the extensive ethnographic literature on US domestic workers, which emphasizes the importance many workers assign to being treated with dignity and respect by their employers (most of whom are female, not incidentally) in the context of what some commentators have dubbed "intimate labor" (Boris & Parrenas, 2010). For those who work as caregivers (whether for children or elders), a complex emotional experience further intensifies such aspirations. And this is a deeply gendered experience: not only is domestic work nearly exclusively female but the emotional valence inherent in caregiving stands in sharp contrast to the experience of male day laborers. (But paid-by-the-job housecleaners, many of whom work in empty homes, also experience this far less than other domestic workers.)

The domestic workers' groups that emerged in the 1990s from the outset prided themselves on developing "worker-leaders" a process facilitated by the

gendered dynamics of immigrant political leadership discussed earlier. These worker-leaders were trained in "story-telling" and launched campaigns to win public recognition for domestic workers' rights and eventually for new legislation to expand those rights (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, Chapter 8). Another legislative focus was the effort to eliminate the surviving exclusions of domestic workers from the New Deal labor and employment laws (some of those exclusions were eliminated in earlier decades). The groups now affiliated with NDWA also campaigned to improve enforcement of the laws that do, in principle, cover domestic workers (Boris & Klein, 2012; Goldberg, 2014; Nadasen, 2015). Enforcement is a problem across the low-wage labor market, but the challenges are unusually daunting in regard to private household workers. [6]

In addition to its efforts to improve enforcement of existing laws, the domestic workers' movement has campaigned to expand the scope of legal protections for the occupation. New York State's 2010 Domestic Workers Bill of Rights was the first major breakthrough here, and it has been replicated in several other jurisdictions since. But these organizations have been far less successful in reaching the masses of domestic workers or in improving the field's pay and working conditions. Although from the outset they have been engaged in grassroots base-building, for example through visits to public parks, playgrounds, and public transit lines where domestic workers congregate (one example is the New York DWU's "Ambassadors Program"); this has yet to yield much in the way of results (Goldberg, 2014, p. 284). Absent effective state enforcement of the laws they have won, and given the relatively small number of activists in their organizations, many of the domestic workers' movement's victories have been more symbolic than real — a problem of which NDWA and its affiliates are all too aware. They have a high profile in the progressive community and have won an impressive level of media attention with their strategic story-telling and access to foundation resources and professional communications expertise. But most domestic workers remain unaware that these groups exist, and the impact on their actual pay and working conditions has been modest at best.

The achievements of day laborers' and domestic workers' alt-labor organizations to date are impressive, especially given the limited resources at their disposal and the spatial atomization of both occupations. Both have been able to extract concessions from local and state governments, although enforcement of the rights they have theoretically won is often lacking. Yet both organizations also face the daunting challenge of bringing their organizing to scale to include the vast numbers of workers on the ground who remain untouched by their efforts. The domestic workers may have greater potential for growth, insofar as the workforce they are targeting, made up largely of immigrant women, is more oriented to improving their situation "here" in the United States, relative to the day laborers with their dreams of returning to their countries of origin and their more individualistic worldviews. Both groups have recently explored alliances with traditional unions, something that was anathema in the early days of alt-labor organizing; here the day laborers may have the edge given the near-impossibility of union organizing (at least under current U.S. labor law) among private household workers.

CONCLUSION

Recent efforts to organize U.S. domestic workers and day laborers and to advocate on their behalf reflect the gendered experiences and aspirations of the workers involved. Both occupations are ill-suited to conventional forms of unionism; recent immigrants, many of them unauthorized, have dominated the workforce of both since the late twentieth century; both are entry-level jobs at the bottom of the labor market (although both are also internally stratified with jobs that vary in desirability and pay); and both have been the focus of extensive advocacy and organizing at both the local and national level in recent decades. Yet they differ in one critical respect, namely that women are the vast majority of domestic workers while men predominate among day laborers. Another important difference is that while domestic labor is largely hidden from public view, inside private households, day laborers are regularly on display on street corners and in other highly visible public spaces.

Both domestic workers and day laborers have highly individualistic, entrepreneurial ambitions, which in some respects is a formidable organizing challenge. But in practice, that orientation does not necessarily impede and at times even facilitates collective action. Day laborers' demands are largely economic, reflecting the aspiration of the overwhelmingly male workers in this occupation to return to their countries of origin. By contrast, domestic workers (overwhelmingly female) have focused their collective action efforts on a quest for dignity and respect, and opportunities for advancement within the U.S. labor market. Thus both the contrasting gender composition of the two occupations and the contrast between male and female immigrants' experiences and aspirations in the United States, generate fundamentally gendered collective action repertoires.

NOTES

1. One point of potential confusion is that these government-sponsored centers are sometimes called "worker centers": later in the text I refer to them instead as "day labor centers" or hiring halls.
2. However, largely due to higher marriage and fertility rates, immigrant women have lower labor force participation rates than both US-born women and immigrant men, and this pattern is even stronger among unauthorized immigrants (Fry, 2006).
3. The next several paragraphs draw on Milkman, & Terriquez, 2012.
4. Zentgraf (2002) also found this pattern among immigrants with working-class backgrounds, but in her sample, the women who had been middle class prior to migration resembled male immigrants in that the status loss they suffered upon arrival in the United States made them nostalgic for their countries of origin.
5. I refer here to the domestic workers' groups affiliated with NDWA and not the traditional unions (SEIU and AFSCME) that have organized home healthcare workers and in-home child care providers in recent years.
6. The 2008 Unregulated Work Survey I co-led found disproportionately high levels of wage theft and other violations in this sector (Bernhardt et al, 2009, p. 31, 34).

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