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Economic Restructuring, Immigration and the New Labor Movement: Latina/o Janitors in Los Angeles

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Working Paper 9
May 2000

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Introduction

The move toward a service-based economy has forced the American labor movement to change. The growing low-wage service sector is characterized by “flexible” production resulting in contract, temporary, part-time or other casualized work. Labor law drafted in the pre-war era is ineffective protection for these new, casualized service-sector jobs; and labor protections were eroded in the Reagan decade. Restructuring has been achieved through processes of racialization as recently arrived immigrant women and men were recruited to the downgraded jobs. At the same time their work is made invisible through a gendered, anti-immigrant discourse that constructs them as economic burdens. In response to these structural changes, many unions have returned away from the bureaucratized, business unionism of the post-war era and have begun to organize the Latino and Asian immigrant women and men concentrated in these sectors. These unions have returned to a ‘community unionism,’ using direct-action organizing tactics successful in earlier periods of unionization. Like in previous historical moments when restructuring and immigration collided, immigrant *women* are active participants in this ‘new’ labor movement. In this paper I examine whether these processes affect relations of gender and race, with a case study of the *Justice for Janitors* (J4J) organizing campaign of the Service Employees International Union’s (SEIU) in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles janitors are members of a new cohort of Latino workers, most of whom are recent arrivals. They are Salvadorans and Guatemalans who left home in the 1980s due to civil war and economic depression. The Mexicans are heavily made up of the ‘*migrantes de la crises*,’ described by Corneilus (1991), - new streams of migrants who left urban areas during the economic crises of the 1980s and early 1990s. Women are well represented in this new wave of Latino migrants. Many of these Latina migrants are single, most came to work and are significantly contributing to their household economies (Bretell and Simon 1986; Sassen and Fernandez-Kelly 1995). Women make up roughly 50% of *Justice for Janitors* members in Los Angeles. The prominent role played by women in *Justice for Janitors*, has recently been recognized during a three-week strike in L.A. Some politicians and journalists are calling the *Justice for Janitors* campaign a ‘new women’s movement’ (Treviño 2000). However, *Justice for Janitors* is more than a movement for women. *Justice for Janitors* is mobilizing women alongside men within a frame of immigrant rights.

An understanding of the implications of this movement requires a theory and methodology that can link individual lives to structural constraints in a given historical moment. After a brief review of the literature on women and unions, I discuss how a theory of practice and a cohort analysis allows us to

better understand social change. I then examine the structural constraints facing *Justice for Janitors*, focusing on the linkages between restructuring and immigration. Finally I examine the ‘frames’ and practices of organizing within this movement. I examine the extent to which women’s engagement in new practices alongside men disrupt gendered and racialized relations of power that shape the lives of both women and men.

Literature, Theory, Methods

Literature

Studies of community and labor organizing describe a pattern of men in leadership positions and women at the grass roots level (Baron 1991; Massalo 1992; Naples ed. 1998; Neddleman and Tanner 1987; Pardo 1998; Sacks 1988). This gendered division is largely due to a lack of equitable recruitment into leadership. However, women’s under-representation in leadership positions is also a result of their internalization of sexism, which inhibits them from nominating themselves for elected positions, speaking up in public and confronting management (Cook 1968; Kanter 1977). For example, Gray (1993) finds that women are less likely to be on negotiating committees because negotiations require direct confrontation with the supervisor. The under-representation of women on negotiating committees is important because these committees are highly respected, the participants are visible among the membership and the position often leads to higher level of union leadership. Family responsibilities also affect women’s union activism. The small number of women on negotiating committees is also related to the fact that contract negotiations take up many full days of work and make it difficult for women with household responsibilities to participate. Similarly, studies of shop stewards find that women are more likely to participate in union activism if they can do so during work time, rather than their personal and family time (Roby and Uttal 1993; Roby 1995). In general, scholars find that women, compared to men, are more likely to be in leadership positions if they are appointed rather than elected (Gray 1993; Neddleman and Tanner 1987).

The gendered division between grassroots and leadership work is not universal but varies by union, industry and historical moment. Through historical analysis, scholars have excavated both the structural changes that have led to women’s incorporation into unions, and the limits of their incorporation (Baron 1991; Cobble 1993; Milkman 1993; Ruiz 1987). The most thorough analysis is that done by Milkman (1993). Milkman examines 4 waves of organizing and the participation of women in each.¹ The first wave of union organizing was craft unionism, which Milkman characterizes as ‘male-centered unionism in its most extreme form’ and the ‘source of deeply patriarchal labor movement traditions that linger today’ (229). Specifically, craft unions viewed women’s labor as unskilled and thus a threat to men’s wage levels that were tied to skills. The second wave, the ‘new unionism’ was in the 1910s and was heavily focused on organizing immigrant women garment workers. However, the leadership in the garment unions continued to be male-dominated, a legacy that remains today. In response to the de-unionization of the 1920s and early 1930s, a third wave of unionism arose in the late 1930s – the industrial organizing within the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The CIO organized entire workplaces regardless of race and gender. Milkman links this philosophy of organizing not only to the structural need for a new form of organizing, but also to the suffrage victory and the growth of women’s employment in the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, this organizing focused on the male-dominated mass production sectors like auto, steel and rubber (1993:5).

A fourth wave of unionization began in the 1960s and was housed in the feminized public sector (teachers, clerical), and in some private sector industries like health care. This wave finally saw women moving into leadership positions, albeit still at a rate below their membership and grassroots participation.

¹¹ See Baron ed. (1991) for excellent case studies of the first three waves Milkman discusses here.

While in the first three waves women's issues were subsumed under class issues, in the fourth wave Milkman (1993:245) describes a 'new gender politics' that 'accepts difference as a strategic basis for making demands that will ultimately move toward equality.' For example, scholars have shown that the concentration of women in the service sector has pushed unions to engage with issues of importance to women such as comparable worth, parental leave, universal health and child care², and including children and spouses in union activity (Cobble 1993; Cowell 1993; Miller 1993; York 1993; Milkman 1993).

I would argue that we are now embarking on what we might call a fifth wave of organizing in the low wage private sector service industries, such as janitorial and hotel workers. This sector is largely made up of migrant women and men, and in order to understand it, we must theorize a racialized as well as a gendered labor market and union structure.³ Labor's historical appeals to a masculinity based on breadwinning will no longer suffice to mobilize low-wage workers in the casualized sector. Yet neither will appeals to unitary 'women's issues.' Studies have found that unions whose membership is made up of both women and men rarely speak explicitly of 'women's issues,' for fear that it will mitigate solidarity between women and men (Cobble ed. 1993). For example, Cowell, Vice-President of the ILGWU, argues that unionists often frame issues like child care and pregnancy leave as "family issues" in order to avoid their stigmatization as special, women's interests.

Justice for Janitors organizes through use of a modified familialism that considers the immigrant experience within a broad frame of immigrant rights. This strategic move is not incompatible with the feminist project. For example, Kessler-Harris (1985:157) argues for a unionism that brings the "values of the home" to the workplace where they can transform work itself (Kessler-Harris 1985:157). Similarly, Cook (1993) calls for an assertion of the feminist principle of putting family life ahead of work life allowing men to take advantage of family policies as well. Indeed a generous reading of this strategy would be that it clears the pathway for men to become more involved in family life. The 'frame' of immigrant rights resonates with the 'american dreams' of both women and men members. Furthermore, because anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1990s has targeted women and children, this immigrant rights frame is a powerful rhetorical tool for women to contest their racialization.

Sociologies of Practice

In order to understand the new labor movement and its implications for inequalities of gender, we need to contextualize women's experiences within race and class relations. My theoretical perspective is housed within the post-structural challenge to categorical notions and stable identities, such as man/woman or black/white. I approach this debate, however, from a sociological perspective. Following Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and others who have used his work, I turn my focus towards an examination of specific practices that constitute social relations within particular institutions.

Sociologies of practice urge us to examine the ways in which racialization occurs alongside gendering in a given historical moment. Omi and Winant's (1986) examination of 'racial formations' through 'racial projects' is a useful framework to understand the racialization of Latina/o migrants. Omi

² Unions are most likely to support and organize for federally funded child care. Yet in the Reagan Era, they felt this was not realistic and they turned to bargaining child care (York 1993). However, as Cook (1993) notes, the positions of most unions is such that it is very hard for them to compete with non-union companies who do not have child care, as well as medical and higher wages.

³ While, Milkman Cobble and others primarily concerned with the category 'woman,' both recognize that men are increasingly becoming casualized and contingent workers as well and that solidarity with men is crucial, they say little about the fact that non-white migrant men are most likely to be in the 'feminized' service sector.

and Winant argue that in the post-civil rights era, race is no longer referred to as biological difference, but is 'rearticulated' through the use of 'code words.' These 'code words' point to deficient culture *vis-a-vis* a dominant U.S. culture based on individual merit in a free market economy. In this way, culture, class and race are conflated.⁴ Beginning in the 1980s, sociologists began to theorize the ways in which race, class and gender relations intersect to produce new situated experiences.⁵ Patricia Hill Collins (1990) challenges us to examine a "matrix of domination" rather than race or gender alone. Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (1996) argue for a focus on race, class and gender as relational. Much of this theorizing has come from analyses of the family economies of non-white and immigrant women. These women are in the labor force out of necessity, because the men in their lives are rarely able to earn a 'family wage.' As a result, racial-ethnic families are sites of class and racial solidarity and survival, as well as sites of gender inequalities (Baca Zinn 1982; Nakano Glenn 1985).

This framework is useful for understanding how *Justice for Janitors* uses a frame of immigrant rights to foment (racialized) class-based solidarity between women and men. This frame resonates with both women and men within a context of a racialized politics of immigration. The 1990s brought a new kind of anti-immigrant sentiment, one that fits within the new racial project of rolling back the welfare state. Politicians and community groups began to construct immigrants as those who come to benefit from the U.S. social welfare system. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1995) has convincingly argued that this new discourse expresses gendered as well as racialized anxiety about their settlement. The family reunification measures in IRCA brought a sense of security and led to more permanent migration. Settlement was solidified by women and children and thus they are the targets of a new xenophobia, argues Sotelo. For example, in his campaign for Governor, Pete Wilson drew heavily on T.V. images of Mexican migrant women carrying children illegally across the U.S.-Mexico border. This new focus on immigrants as burdens to the state reached its peak in 1994 with California's proposition 187 that would have denied education, health care and other social services to the U.S. born children of undocumented immigrants. There was also increasing anxiety about the settlement of Central Americans. A few months after proposition 187, as the expiration of the temporary protection of Salvadorans and Guatemalans loomed, the director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform Dan Stein stated "[T]he time has come for the El Salvadorans to go home." Proposition 187 has been blocked in the courts due to questions of Constitutionality, yet it prompted national proposals to deny public benefits to legal permanent residents. In 1996 Congress passed the "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which cut welfare benefits to legal immigrants."⁶ In 1998, California voters passed proposition 227, which ended bilingual education in California schools and heightened Spanish language as a racial marker.⁷

A sociology of practice urges to examine how processes of racialization and gendering draw upon one another. It also allows us to theorize social change through political practice. Drawing on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, and Sartre's theory of practice, both of which have been adopted by Bourdieu, I hold that structural relations are wrought with contradictions. Social movements make these

⁴ Alan Simmons (1998) makes a similar argument in the Canadian context. Simmons holds that Canadian immigration policy is 'neo-racist' by focusing on economic development because it denies racist outcomes of immigration policies.

⁵ I draw here on the work of sociologists but this theorizing is interdisciplinary. See Haraway (1985).

⁶ Within this political context, politicians sought to appease voters by steeping up border control, for example through the new wall along the San Diego/Tijuana border. While this project is called "Operation Gatekeeper," a border patrol agent admitted to me that it only pushed migrants into the desert where they cross under more dangerous conditions with more expensive smugglers. Yet this agent argued that the removal of migrants crossing the border from the sight of San Diego residents (e.g. voters) as an indicator of success of the Operation.

⁷ This focus on migrants as burdens to the state exists, uneasily, beside a return of immigration policy to the workplace through audits of social security numbers.

contradictions visible by politicizing practices. Within this framework, practices do not always reproduce social relations; they can also challenge them.

Methodology and Data

In order to understand social changes as an outcome of practices situated in relations of race, class and gender, we need a methodology able to link everyday lives with the structural context in a given historical moment. A methodology that uses ethnography to interpret the behavior of cohorts can show us how situated actors bring about social change.

We can detect social change by conceptualizing individuals as members of groups that share the same experience due to their similar location in time and/or place. I examine not merely life histories within statistical portraits, as some of the best studies of social change do (Blauner 1999s; Connell 1995; Lamphere, Stepick and Greiner eds. 1994; Rocco 1996). I also add an intermediate level and that is the level of the cohort. Cohorts can be defined by a host of indicators. By defining ‘migration cohorts’ we can link individual migrants with historical events occurring in that decade. For example, the women who were touched by the four ‘waves’ of organizing described by Milkman, were members of four distinct cohorts. Today a new cohort of immigrant women and men are fueling a 5th wave of organizing. In the analysis of restructuring, I situate individual immigrants within industrial changes with a ‘double cohort method’ that houses birth cohorts within migration cohorts. This method has recently been used to examine the occupational trajectories of immigrant women (Myers and Cranford 1998).⁸ It will here be used to trace Latina/o migrants’ entrance into (or exit from) the janitorial industry.

A cohort analysis allows us to see the growing participation of migrant women and men in union activism as a meeting of structural constraints facing the labor movement, and new experiences presented to migrant workers. The previous experiences and beliefs of migrant workers, mix with their present experiences of racialization in the U.S., and the present reality that women are now economic providers alongside men. This is not to say that individual women and migrants do not bring with them experiences from their daily lives that help with organizing, such as militant student activism in 1980s Guatemala City, or close community relationships that stem from involvement in the school activities of one’s child. It is to recognize that these experiences become organizing tools through social movements, which are historical moments that come about for a range of structural reasons. In this paper, I will argue that the revitalization of labor in this historical moment is both due to the necessity for labor to employ new tactics and organize new workers and the current experiences of immigrant workers in the low-wage service sectors.

A cohort analysis is bolstered by ethnography. Ethnographic methods allow one to interpret the behavior of cohorts by drawing on the experiences of individuals within the cohort. This research is based on 2 years of fieldwork with the cohort of Latina/o migrants who moved into janitorial work with it’s restructuring. It is this cohort that is today re-unionizing the industry. Data include semi-structured interviews with 35 women janitors and 4 union organizers. Data were also gathered from participant observation at the union, in the city streets, in the home and at the workplace, where I worked as a janitor for 2 months.⁹

⁸ Unlike the Myers and Cranford (1998) study, I am able to better interpret the behavior of cohorts by using work/life histories and by focusing in closely on one industry. This means that my sample sizes are too small, however, to do logistic regression that would measure the odds of engagement with this work, as were Myers and Cranford.

⁹ The first four weeks I worked alongside others. I then worked my own floors for five weeks.

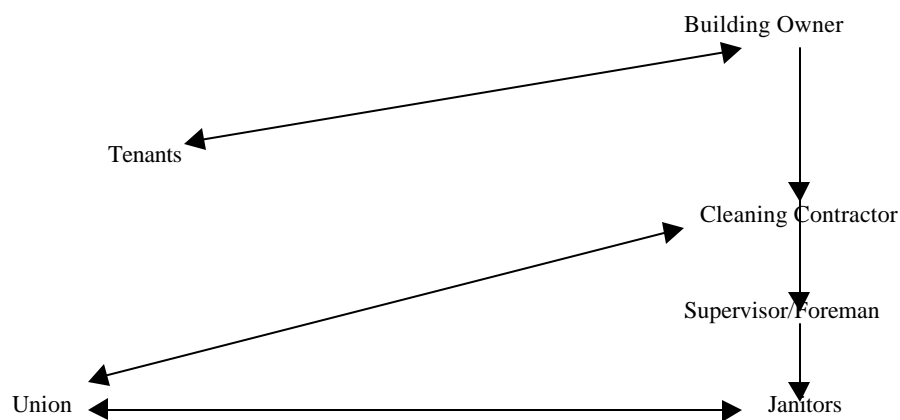
Employing an ethnographic understanding of cohorts, I examine whether a 5th wave of organizing leads women to engage in new practices alongside men thus upsetting power relations of gender. The unions who are organizing in these sectors, recruit and train women and men for leadership positions. At the same time they are concerned with keeping men involved in the behind the scenes, face to face, grassroots work of organizing. This commitment to gender equality stems from the structural necessity of the union to organize. Organizing after a decade of restructuring requires the mobilization of union members to themselves ‘become the union.’ After an explanation of this restructuring, I examine this 5th wave of unionism in detail.

Restructuring and Immigration: The Janitorial Case

Accelerated “Flexibility” for Building Owners

In the 1980s the janitorial industry experienced a drastic decline in union buildings and plummeting wages. Restructuring was concentrated in the commercial real estate sector and I focus my study on this sector.¹⁰ Janitors were once direct employees of building owners who controlled hiring, firing and the management of labor relations. Today flexible sub-contracting relationships characterize the industry. Figure 1 diagrams these relationships. Most janitors are employees of contractors that specialize in cleaning and maintenance of office buildings. Tenants also have power in the industry, as rent-paying customers. While this move from “in-house” to contract workers grew in the 1970s, competition among many small cleaning companies intensified during the 1980s real estate boom (Howley 1990; SEIU 1995; Waldinger et. al 1996). The one-way arrow between the building owner and the cleaning contractor in Figure 1 represents the fact that it is largely an owner’s market. During the 1980s real estate boom, developers made a united effort to reduce cleaning costs. One union researcher describes this as a “bidding war” between cleaning contractors and claims that this ‘war’ resulted in a 42% reduction in cleaning costs between 1979 and 1993 (SEIU:10).

Figure 1: Organization of the Commercial Real Estate Janitorial Industry



The new cleaning contractors were non-union and their proliferation led to a decline in the number of janitors with union representation. By the 1970s, SEIU local 399 (now local 1877) had organized the largest cleaning companies in Los Angeles. As a result, wages and work conditions were good, especially downtown which was nearly all union (Mines and Avina 1992). This began to change in 1983. The non-union companies first gained contracts in the new suburban developments. But by the mid-

¹⁰ The commercial real estate sector is defined as janitors in services to buildings in the census.

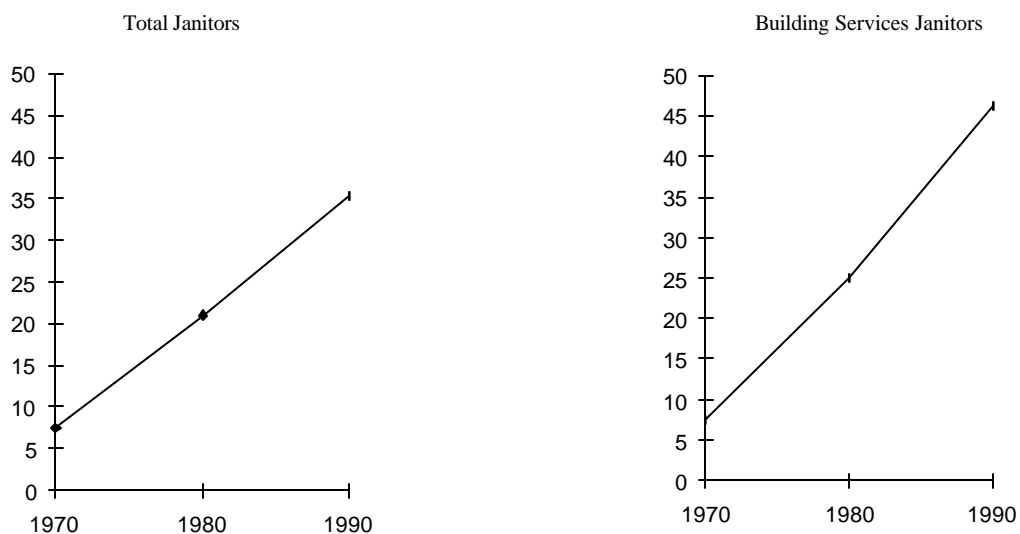
1980s, building owners downtown and in other areas of concentrated real estate went non-union as well. In 1983, non-union janitors' wages averaged below \$4.00 and hour while union janitors earned slightly over \$7.00 and hour. By 1987, non-union contractors controlled 83 percent of the market. (SEIU 1998).

Recruitment of Latina/o Migrants

The non-union cleaning contractors cut costs by lowering wages and increasing the workload. These contractors hired recently arrived, primarily undocumented, Latina/o migrants to do the downgraded cleaning work, rather than the African Americans previously doing this work.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between recent arrivals (defined as 10 years prior to the census) and restructuring (measured by decades). The relationship is nearly linear. While the share of recently arrived janitors in commercial real estate increased substantially in the 1970s, it rose more rapidly the next decade when competition between contractors intensified. By 1990, 46% of janitors had arrived in the 1980s.

Figure 2: Change in Percent of Janitors who are Recently Arrived Migrants Los Angeles County, 1970-1980

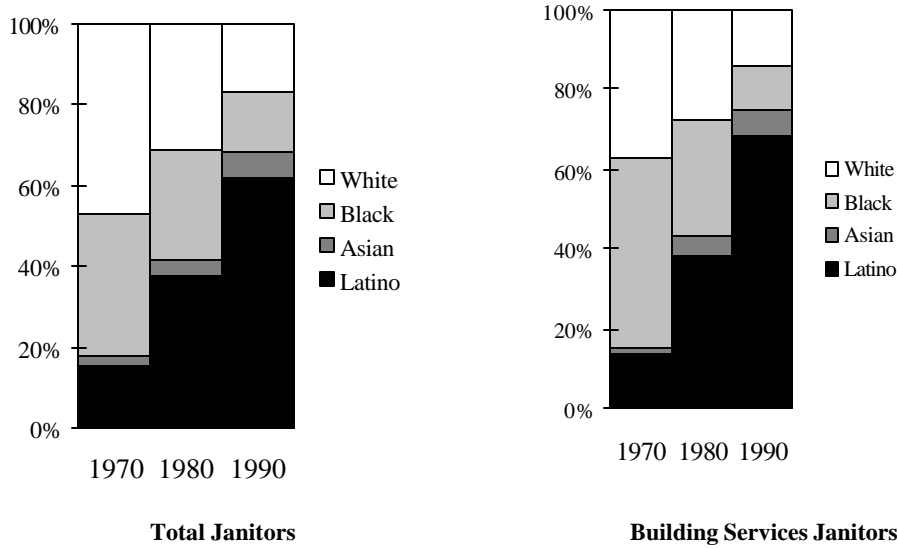


Source: 1970, 1980, 1990 Census PUMS. The code for janitor is 903 in 1970 and 453 in 1980 and 1990. The code for building services is 728 for 1970 and 722 for 1980 and 1990.

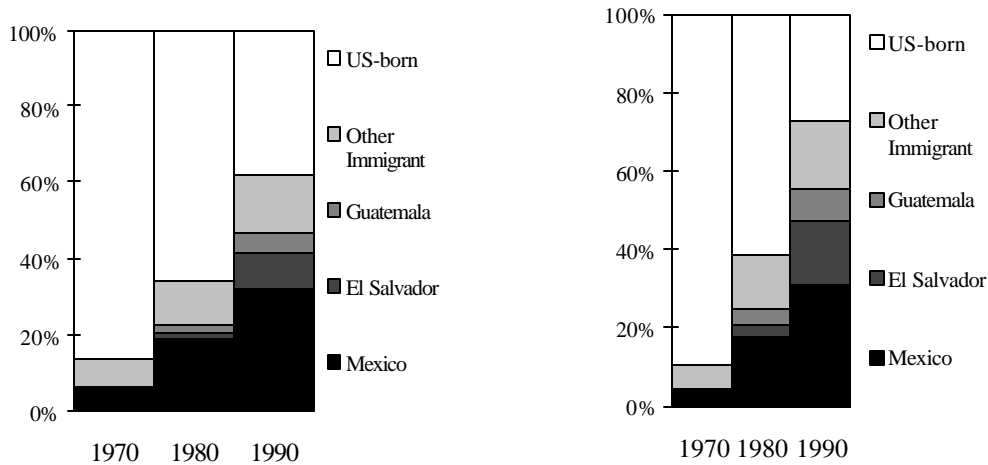
Because immigration is so closely correlated with race, the growing share of recently arrived janitors meant a changing racial makeup in the commercial real estate industry as well. The share of Latino janitors grew from 13 percent in 1970 to 68 percent by 1990 with the largest growth occurring in the 1980s (Figure 3). The share of Latinos is primarily made up of migrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala. The share of Mexican immigrants rose significantly between 1970 and 1980, and at a lesser rate between 1980 and 1990. In 1970 the census recorded no Salvadorans and Guatemalans in this job but by 1980 there 3% and 4%, respectively. The greater share of Guatemalans in 1980, compared to Salvadorans, is related to the fact that the civil war in Guatemala was earlier and more migrated to the U.S. during the 1970s. The share of both groups burgeoned between 1980 and 1990, a decade of increasing migration and restructuring. The rising share of immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala coincided with a falling share of US born blacks and whites. In 1970 48 percent of janitors

were African Americans. Their share fell significantly during the 1970s and 1980s to reach a low of 14 percent by 1990.

Figure 3: Change in Percent of Janitors by Race and Nationality



Source: 1970, 1980, 1990 Census PUMS. The code for janitor is 903 in 1970 and 453 in 1980 and 1990. The code for building services is 728 for 1970 and 722 for 1980 and 1990. Nativity is defined by the place of birth variable. The

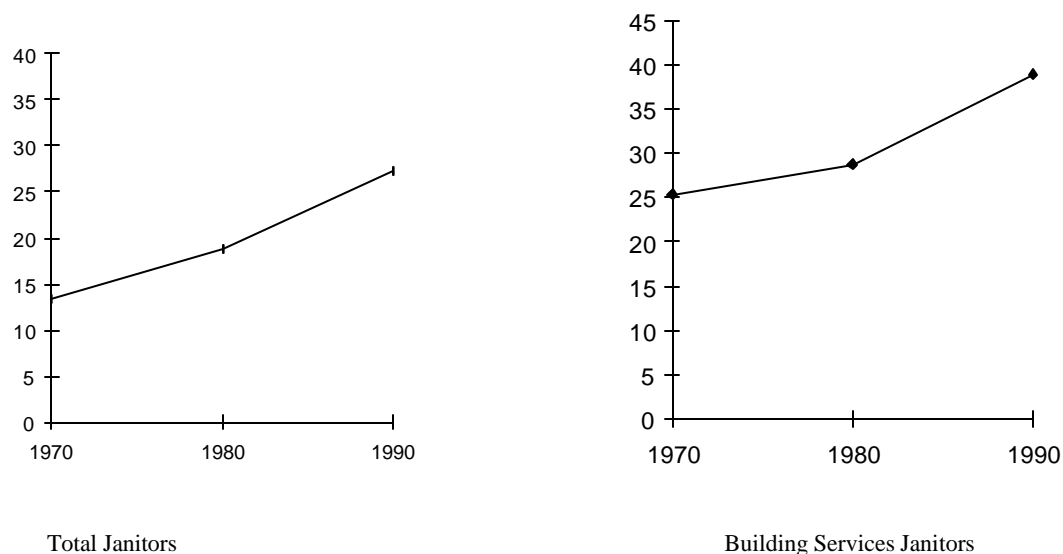


code for Guatemala is 62 in 1970, 434 in 1980 and 313 in 1990; for El Salvador is 66 in 1970, 433 in 1980 and 312 in 1990; for Mexico is 61 in 1970, 436 in 1980 and 315 in 1990. Latina and Latino refer to all "hispanic" women and men, respectively; The other racial/ethnic categories are non-hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander, Black and White.

The common position of Latina and Latino immigrants, along the lines of class, nationality and citizenship, led employers to recruit Latinas as well as Latino men. Because the industry was previously male-dominated (particularly in the unionized downtown sector), the share of women increased with their

recruitment, particularly in the 1980s. Figure 4 shows that the share of women in this industry increased from 28 percent in 1980 to nearly 40 percent in 1990.

Figure 4: Change in Percent of Janitors who are Women, Los Angeles County 1970-1980

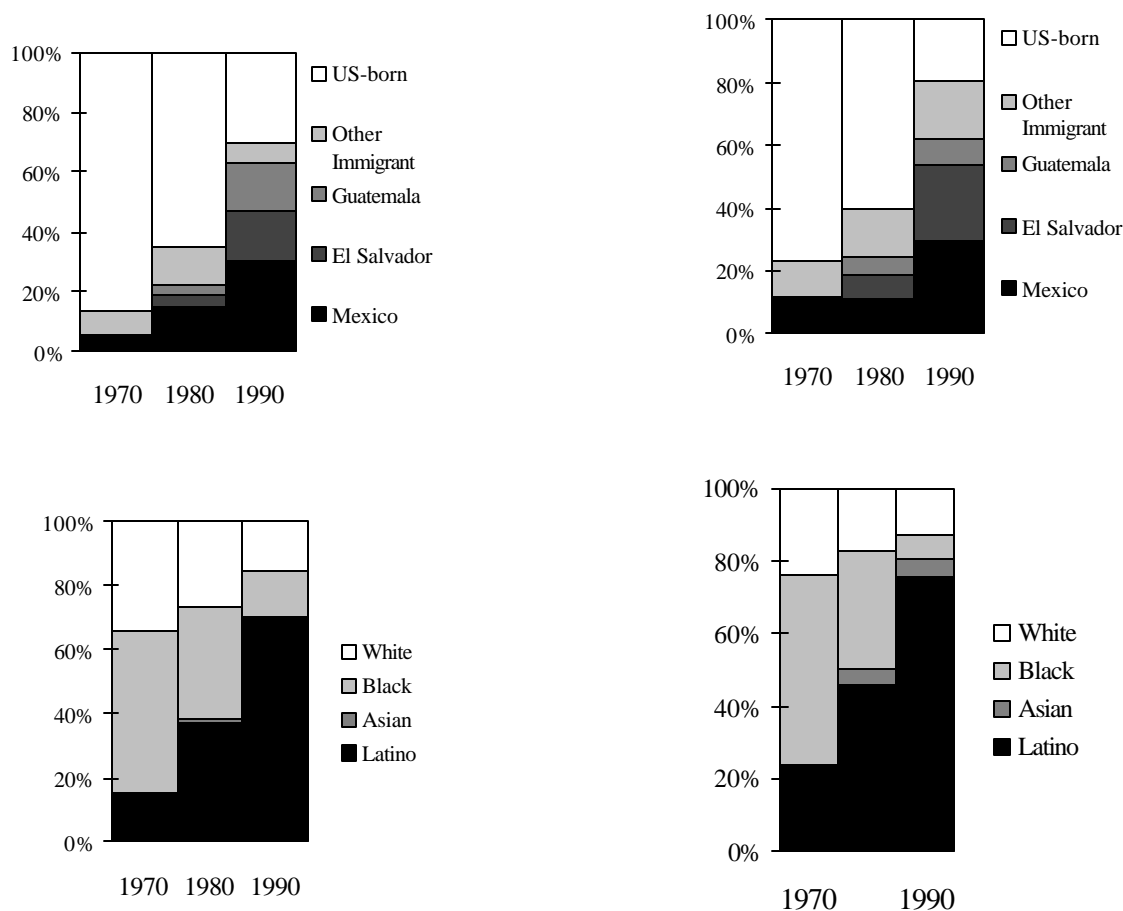


Source: 1970, 1980, 1990 Census PUMS. The code for janitor is 903 in 1970 and 453 in 1980 and 1990. The code for building services is 728 for 1970 and 722 for 1980 and 1990.

Among women janitors we see a sharp rise in the share of Salvadoreñas and a less pronounced increase in the share of Mexicanas and Guatemaltecas. By 1990, the percent of women who were from El Salvador was 24 percent, compared to 9 percent from Guatemala and 29 percent from Mexico.¹¹ The most dramatic difference between women janitors and all janitors is that the share of *Latina* immigrants did not rise until the 1980s, while the share of total Latino immigrants began to rise in the 1970s. In short, Latino immigrant men moved into this occupation before Latina immigrants.

¹¹ The share of Guatemaltecas and Salvadoreñas is significant given the size of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations in Los Angeles. According to the 1990 census, the Los Angeles County foreign-born Guatemalan and Salvadoran populations were 107,966 and 212,788, respectively, compared to 1,174,185 for the Mexican population.

Figure 5: Change in Percent of Women Janitors by Race and Nationality, Los Angeles County 1970-1990
Total Janitors **Building Services Janitors**



The rising share of Latino immigrant women and men in the 1980s suggests a clear relationship between immigration and restructuring. Yet Figure 4 shows that Asian immigrants did not move into janitorial work in significant numbers, even while the 1970s and 1980s were a period of increasing Asian immigration. The small share of Asians, and the large share of Latinos is largely explained by legal status and networks.¹² While the census does not ask about legal status, field work, as well as studies predicting the number of undocumented show that most of the workers in this industry are undocumented (Marcelli and Heer 1997; Heer et. al. 1992). Latino migrants are more likely to be undocumented compared to Asian immigrants (Warren and Passel 1987), making them more likely recruits in employers' restructuring strategies. The initial recruitment of undocumented Latinos allowed employers to gain access to networks of migration and employment that were burgeoning in the 1980s.

¹² Informal conversations also reveal that Asians are more likely to be found cleaning small buildings in small family crews. This work is undercounted in the census.

One observer, the senior public policy analyst of SEIU, summarizes the restructuring of the industry in the following way. “It was a triple whammy: over-built office markets, nonunion contractors invading from the suburbs, and a sudden surplus of unskilled labor” (Howley 1990:64). This explanation, however, does not examine why there was a sudden surplus of unskilled labor nor how the building owners took advantage of it. Such an explanation can be found in a cohort analysis.

Cohorts of Janitors

There are three main points that I wish to draw out from the following cohort analysis. First, the restructuring of the Los Angeles janitorial industry was achieved through a process of racialization. Cleaning contractors hired recently arrived Latino immigrants because they thought they could control the former more effectively. The job of janitor *became* a low-paid, immigrant job through a conscious decision to restructure the industry. Employers drew on relations of citizenship in an effort to keep workers from complaining about pay and labor conditions. Janitors told me that employers would, not so subtly, remind them of their undocumented status. For example, Enrique, a young man from Mexico City, told me that one night the supervisor called a meeting with all the workers where she placed copies of the social security cards of each worker in two piles - one for fake and one for legitimate papers. The supervisor then told those with fake papers to go get new ones.

The second point I will illustrate with a cohort analysis is that recently arrived Latina/o workers were actively sought. Many told me that they were recruited at English class by a low level supervisor, or an employee with close ties to a supervisor. Once some recently arrived Latinas/os were recruited to do this work, networks facilitated the incorporation of others, as Waldinger (1996a; 1996b) found in several New York and Los Angeles industries. Employers actively drew on their own and their employees’ networks. A ‘recommendation’ was, and still is, essential to getting a full-time job in this industry. But many times co-ethnics were willing to recommend someone they hardly knew. Indeed several told me about getting their first janitorial job through co-ethnic strangers. In this way, networks have snowballed and now serve to shut out the entrance of Anglo Asian or African Americans. Networks have become social structures built up through interactions in the Latino spaces of the city, such as apartment buildings in Pico-Union and buses that run through it. A cohort analysis can imbue theories of network recruitment with an analysis of power.

A third point I will illustrate with the cohort analysis is that the recently arrived migrants were recruited to downgrade janitorial work. The non-union contractors offered the building owners lower cleaning costs by lowering wages and increasing the workload. One indicator of downgrading was the increase in workload. Total office space doubled in the 1980s, yet the number of building service workers only increased by 25%, according to a 1994 survey by *Cleaning and Management Magazine*. Employer strategies of speed-up were achieved through violating of labor laws, particularly working overtime without pay. Workers were pressured to prepare their supplies before they clocked in, they often worked split shifts clocking in under different names at each shift, and they were encouraged to bring family members, often children, to ‘help’ with the work without being paid. Many janitors worked for weeks without pay, to ‘practice’ in order to get a ‘recommendation.’ Janitors worked by the piece, rather than by the hour. They would be given 3 floors to clean and they would have to stay until they were finished. Often this meant working 10 or 11 hours but only being paid for 8. Exploitative employer-worker relations were another mechanism of restructuring. Many told me of not so subtle reminders that there were many others willing to do this work and threats concerning legal status.

Exactly *how* the recruitment of undocumented Latina/o immigrants facilitated restructuring is best understood through an analysis of individuals within structural constraints. A cohort analysis can

give the entering migrants agency, but situate their replacement, or displacement, of the previously unionized, well-paid workers within the structural context. A cohort analysis helps us to bring an analysis of power to our study of restructuring. In doing so, it points us to a dualistic racialization of Latina/o immigrants and African Americans.

I examine the entrance of Latina/o migrants into janitorial work with a graphic representation of the ‘double cohort’ method (Myers and Lee 1996). The graphs trace the movement of workers, broken down by ethnicity and gender, into or out of janitorial work from 1980 to 1990. A data point of 1970 is added for African Americans. The movement into janitorial work of the 1970s migration cohort, is represented by the lines from the white dots (1980) to the black dots (1990). The 1980s migration cohort is represented by an x. By comparing 1970s and 1980s migration cohorts, the graphs also illustrate change through the succession of migration cohort.¹³

The Guatemalan Pioneers

A close look at the entrance of Guatemalans into the janitorial industry provides much insight into the links between immigration and restructuring. Census data, secondary data and key interviews suggest that a cohort of Guatemalans who came to the U.S. in the 1970s and even the late 1960s were key players in the restructuring of the industry. The aggregate census data presented above showed that a significant share of Guatemalans in L.A.. County arrived in the 1970s. A cohort analysis shows that a significant number moved into this job during that decade. By recruiting family or friends who arrived with most Guatemalans in the 1980s, they facilitated the industry’s restructuring.

Figure 6 shows that significant¹⁴ percentages of middle-aged men and women (birth cohort 25-34 in 1980) who arrived in the U.S. in the 1970s (white dot), were already found in janitorial work by 1980. This suggests that they entered these jobs in the 1970s upon arrival. The cohorts of women and men show similar patterns at different rates. By 1980, men in each age cohort were more likely, compared to women, to be janitors. The oldest cohort of men (35-44 in 1980) had 14% in janitorial work in 1980.¹⁵ In the decade of the 1980s, this 1970s arrival cohort was moving out of this work, with the exception of young Guatemaltecas (15-24 in 1980) who were moving in at a great rate.

¹³ For a fuller explanation of the double cohort method see Myers and Lee (1996) or Myers and Cranford (1998).

¹⁴ Seven and 6 percent of Guatemalans in the 25-34 and 35-44 cohorts, respectively, are significant given that all janitorial workers are only 1.2% of the total labor force.

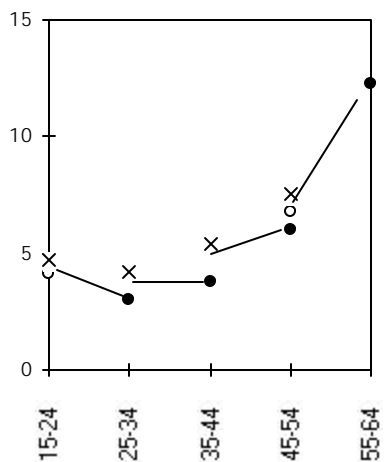
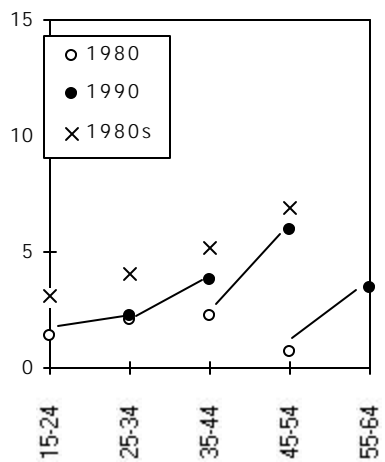
¹⁵ This suggests one of two things. Either Guatemalan men were never as concentrated in janitorial work as women, or they had already moved out in large numbers before 1980. This can only be answered with analysis of the 1970 census.

Figure 6: Cohorts of Recently Arrived Latina/o Immigrants and African Americans

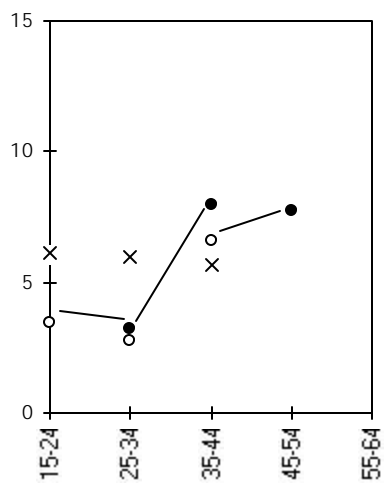
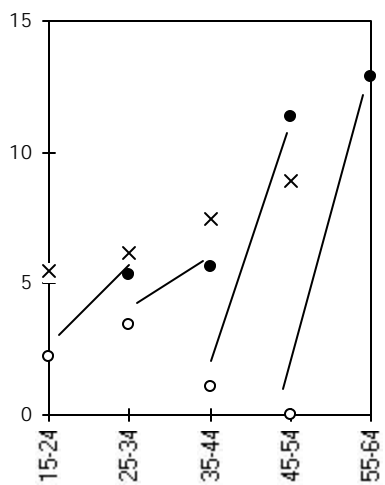
Mexican

Women

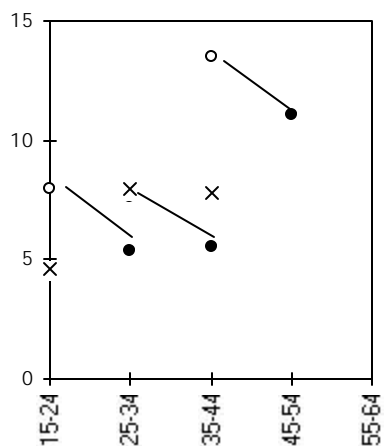
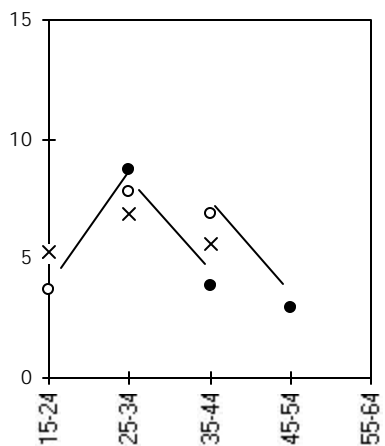
Men



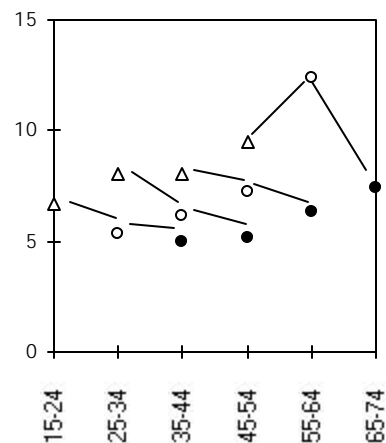
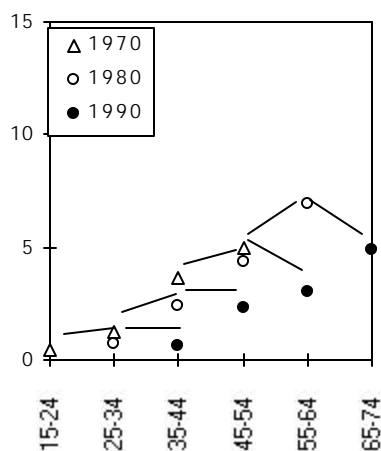
Salvadoran



Guatemalan



**African American
US born**



*Recent arrivals are defined as those who arrived 1-10 years before the census in which they were measured.

1970s arrivals, who were recent in 1980 are traced from 1980 to 1990. They are compared to 1980s arrivals (represented by the x) who were recent arrivals in 1990.

Interviews suggest that the cohorts of middle-aged 1970s arrivals included middle class men who moved quickly into supervisor positions. This continued in the 1980s. Esperanza, a Mexican woman, had a male Guatemalan supervisor in 1979. This supervisor would often bring her other men from Guatemala, “acquaintances, friends, family” to train as supervisors.

To be a supervisor one has to learn how to clean a table, how to vacuum the inside corner from side to side and how to paint even strides, like pine trees, with the vacuum cleaner.¹⁶ And then the bathrooms... But people of money! They would say “Me? In my country, I was a doctor.” “You had the pleasantry of doctors back home but here we are all equal.” I told them. So I would teach them well how they had to clean, how they had to vacuum, what they had to check because they were going to be supervisors. They gave me these people [to train] for only a week.

Guatemalan supervisors and foremen in turn recruited their own and their employees’ family, fictive kin and friends. We can see this recruitment in the census cohort analysis. While the older 1970s arrival cohorts moved out of janitorial work in the 1980s, younger cohorts of women moved in (15-24 in 1980). Furthermore, migrants who arrived in the 1980s (represented by an x) entered this work in the decade of their arrival. Middle-aged men and young women from the 1980s arrival cohort entered at even higher rates than the 1970s arrival cohort. Among these 1980s arrivals were nephews, nieces, sisters, brothers and fictive kin that the Guatemalan supervisors recruited.

Jose is a member of the early 1970s migration cohort Guatemalan men. Jose came to the U.S. in 1972 with his sister. They left their home in the department of Jutiapa, joining other family already here, and entered the industry in 1980 ‘by way of family.’ Jose said they did not come because of the war. But he did say that in Guatemala there are “always *contras*, and this will never subside.” Jose’s explanation

¹⁶ Janitors have to ‘*pintar pinos*’ with the vacuum cleaner in even strides so that the supervisor knows that they have vacuumed the carpet.

for why he and his family came reflects the longstanding U.S. economic hegemony in Guatemala (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991). Jose stated simply that his family “came to work.”¹⁷

Jose got his job in 1980, before the union had completely lost the industry. He entered a downtown, unionized building cleaned by one of the largest cleaning contractors. Here is how Jose explained his work before the massive de-unionization. “I entered a union job. And it was better than it is now. I worked less. And at that time we earned \$7.32/hour. We had all the benefits, 100%.” The building where Jose worked was one of the 5 in the downtown area that stayed union throughout the 1980s. But in order to do so they had to accept wage reductions. This was how Jose described restructuring.

First they took away our vacation days, they took away like 3 vacation days a year. [...] I walked out of a discussion with Susan Baker who was the *mera mera* (top dog) in the union. They still had 4 months before the contract expired. And she came to the building and asked us to sign a petition agreeing to a wage of \$5.60/hour, because in order to renew the contract they had to do this. And everyone signed except me.

As a result of his intransigence, the supervisor fired Jose. But he easily got a job at one of the non-union competitors.

By the late 1980s the job of janitor had become a Latina/o migrant job and the number of non-union contractors looking to employ them had proliferated. Networks of kin combined with new networks created from daily interactions in the Latino spaces of the city. When Amanda, a single mother, could not earn enough as a maid in a Guatemala City hotel, she left her two children with their grandmother and came to Los Angeles, clandestinely, where her brother already resided. The year was 1988. Her brother did not have networks in the janitorial industry so Amanda became a live-in nanny housekeeper. Amanda was unsatisfied with the pay and work conditions in this job and quit after a year. This quote describing how she entered the janitorial industry illustrates the ease with which undocumented Latinas/os entered by the late 1980s.

One day I was on the bus and a girl asks me ‘what time do you have?’ ‘It’s 5:00pm.’ ‘Ay I’m going to work, at night’ she tells me. ‘*Pues*, its great that you have a job’ I told her ‘I have been without work for a week.’ ‘Oh yeah? Where I work they are looking for new people’ she tells me. And then she started to ask me ‘where are you from?’ ‘I’m from Guatemala’ I tell her. ‘I am too! Where do you live?’ And she tells me ‘if you’d like, I’ll recommend you. I’ll tell my boss that we are old friends.’ What’s your name?’

Amanda represents the cohort of Guatemaltecas who entered the industry as recent arrivals in the late 1980s (the xs in cohort graphs) through *ethnic* networks. She described the work relations during this time in the following way. “They could fire me anytime they wanted. If they didn’t like something they would tell me ‘[T]he door is open, you can leave in you want.’”

¹⁷ Jose’s perception of the war reflects his age as well as the length and nature of the war. He was not yet born to see the U.S. backed coup of 1954, and he had already left when the government launched its ‘counter offensive’ killing thousands of indigenous peasant civilians in areas controlled by the guerrillas.

Enter the Salvadorans

The census cohort analysis shows that Salvadorans who had been in the U.S. several years (1970s arrivals), moved into this job during the apex of restructuring, between 1980 and 1990. Women moved into this job at a much greater rate than men. For example, while in 1980 there were nearly 0 Salvadoran women of the two oldest cohorts of 1970s arrivals, by 1990 12 and 13% of women in these cohorts were janitors. Middle-aged men (25-34 in 1980) also moved into this occupation at high rates between 1980 and 1990. Furthermore, the migrants who arrived in the U.S. as the industry was restructuring (the 1980s, represented by the x) entered this job at higher rates than the 1970s arrivals did a decade earlier. Nearly 10 percent of the oldest Salvadoreñas (45-54 in 1980) in this 1980s arrival cohort were janitors in 1980.¹⁸

Lupe represents a small cohort of Salvadorans who came to the U.S. before the war. Like many Salvadorans who arrived in this decade, Lupe did not have any networks in janitorial work. Lupe came to the U.S., clandestinely, in 1978. Although she grew up in Puerto de Libertad Salvador, she moved to Petin, Guatemala with her family where she lived 15 years. She eventually fled Guatemala because her work as an informant for the guerrillas, disguised as a waitress, got her into some trouble. Lupe arrived in Los Angeles with only one close acquaintance. After housing her for a week, the acquaintance took Lupe to a friend of a friend's house where she met and moved in with the man who is now her *marido*. Lupe described a situation of desperation during this period. Her, then new, *marido* supported her until she received her first paycheck as a garment sewer. Over the next 10 years Lupe did garment work, sold Salvadoran food from one of the many lunch trucks in Central L.A., and worked as a nurse's assistant. In 1989, she got a part-time job as a janitor with a non-union cleaning company Bradford. Lupe started as a temporary worker on call, like many women who do not have a 'recommendation.'

Those who arrived later, however, did have networks among fellow janitors as well as supervisors. Gloria came to the U.S. from El Salvador in 1992 but she benefited from networks that preceded her.¹⁹ She entered this work by way of the husband of her aunt. She got her first job as a janitor in early 1993, in a building in the South Bay cleaned by a non-union company Skyline.

When I started they paid me \$4.50/hour. And, for me at that time, it was a good wage, but not anymore. I have to conform no? Now, thanks to God and to the union, *pues*, I have more benefits, 3 weeks of vacation after 5 years. And now I earn \$6.60/hour and in the next check, due to the raise that is coming, I will earn \$7.10/hour. I think that's enough to support a family!

Gloria represents a cohort of Salvadorans who migrated primarily due to economic depression. Although this depression was accelerated by the 12 year civil war, these migrants are rarely granted political asylum by the U.S. government. Gloria entered the U.S. illegally and applied for asylum. The INS gave her temporary 'permission,' to stay and work but also took her fingerprints and told her she must appear at a hearing to argue her case. At that time, immigrant legal service providers, such as CARECEN and El RESCATE were advising Central Americans that political asylum was difficult to get and that they should be sure of success before they present themselves at the INS. They were correct. Gloria recently received a deportation letter.²⁰ Despite the order to leave, Gloria now calls Los Angeles

¹⁸ Field-work suggests that many 1990s arrivals are also found in this occupation, a trend that can only be measured when the year 2000 census becomes available.

¹⁹ Susana, a Guatemalteca, also benefited from networks that preceded her. While Susana arrived in L.A. in 1987, two years after the union had completely lost the industry, her brother had entered a non-union building in the early 1980s in a suburban part of the city characterized by new development (edge of West L.A. and Santa Monica). When Susana sought to re-enter the labor force in 199x, her brother a *bañero* "recommended" her.

home and has no plans to leave. She doubts that she can survive the poverty of El Salvador now that she has become 'accustomed to' life in the U.S., and she believes her 4 year old, U.S.-born daughter will not be able to do so either.

Enter the Mexicans

The cohort analysis shows that, like Salvadorans, most Mexicans moved into the industry in the decade of the 1980s. Some of these were from the 1970s migration cohort, while many more had recently arrived in the 1980s. Figure 6 shows that few Mexican women of the 1970s arrival cohort were janitors in 1980, with the exception of the middle-aged cohort (35-44 in 1980). The majority of Mexican women moved into this job in the decade of the 1980s, as indicated by the upward slope between the white and black dots. The 1980s migration cohort (represented by the x) also entered janitorial work in the 1980s. Furthermore, this migration cohort entered at a higher rate than the 1970s migration cohort. This inward movement was most pronounced among the three youngest birth cohorts.

Thelma represents the cohort of migrant women that arrived in the 1970s and entered janitorial work in the 1980s. Thelma came to Los Angeles with her husband in 1978 from Texta, Guerrero, a small town outside of Acapulco. In 1988 she and her husband divorced and Thelma asked her Puerto Rican neighbor to recommend her for a janitorial job.²¹ This is how Thelma described the work upon entry.

They would yell at you. [...] There was no union. And they paid little and gave much work. [...] That company was bad. Like a jack ass one worked there. I had 13 bathrooms; I had a large area to vacuum and do the bathrooms. And in addition to that, I had an entire floor to vacuum, empty trash, dust and everything. Ay, they tired me out.

The men's entry into the industry had a different pattern. In 1980 there were already a significant number of Mexican men janitors of the 1970s arrival cohort. However, only the oldest cohort increased its presence in this job in the decade of the 1980s. Furthermore, the more recent 1980s arrival cohort did not enter at a much higher rates their 1970s counterparts, as shown by the closeness of the x to the black dot in Figure x. These gender differences confirm that most women moved in during the intense period of restructuring (1980s), while many men moved into this occupation earlier.

While the participation of Mexican 1970s arrivals was not as high as that of Guatemalans, Mexican early arrivals also facilitated restructuring by recruiting and recommending their family and fictive kin who arrived in the 1980s – a decade of economic crisis in Mexico.

²⁰ I went with Gloria to an immigration appointment to translate. They did not provide translators and asked her to sign forms in English. The forms read that they had referred her case to court for two reasons: 1) she did not demonstrate that she had suffered from a particular incident in the past where she was persecuted due to race, nationality, religion or political beliefs. 2) she did not demonstrate the likelihood of persecution in the future. They took her fingerprints (as they did on previous meetings) and told me to tell her that if she did not show up at the hearing, she could lose any possibility of residency. When we arrived home Gloria called CARECEN for the first time. They told her to come in the next day. Gloria was not satisfied with the pessimism of the El Rescate legal aids. She contacted a paid lawyer whom she reasoned would bring results. Immigrant rights advocates warn of such attorneys that charge high fees and promise results. As they predict, Gloria is headed for deportation.

²¹ Thelma worked off and on as a nanny for 10 years but considers her more permanent employment to have begun in 1986.

Los Migrantes de la Crisis

Interviews suggests that many of the Mexican migrants who entered janitorial work as it restructured were urban migrants who came because of the debt crisis. The work history of Esperanza, and her family and friends, illustrates how networks were a mechanism of restructuring. Like Thelma, Esperanza is a member of the 1970s migration cohort. Yet Esperanza got a job as a janitor in the year of her arrival, at a building I will call Santa Monica. Esperanza then recruited family and friends who arrived after the peso devaluations in the early 1980s.

Esperanza came to L.A. from D.F. in 1979 with her sister for a short visit. Esperanza decided to stay and convinced her husband, her children and several more distant relatives to come as well. Arturo, a middle-aged man from D.F., explained to me that his aunt Esperanza was the first one in the family to come to this country. Arturo, his wife, their children, nephews and several relatives by marriage all told me they were taken to Esperanza's house by the coyotes who helped them cross the San Diego border. According to Arturo's son, it is because of Esperanza that the entire family "runs in this kind of work." The immediate family of both Esperanza (husband, 2 daughters and son-in-law) and Arturo (wife, 3 daughters, 2 sons, 3 son-in-laws) as well as many more distant kin were 'trained' by Esperanza. When positions opened, either in her building or other buildings cleaned by the same contractor, Esperanza referred these family members.

The experience of Concepción, who is married to Arturo, illustrates the informality with which family members entered and exited this work. For many years Concepción lived in between Mexico City and Los Angeles. The tourist visa that she was able to secure with proof of property in D.F. allowed her to "come and go." Concepción explained that she first started janitorial work in the Santa Monica building when she came to visit her husband.

I came to stay in 1988. But when I came to visit my husband, I would work to earn the money to pay for my return trip. So that's when I started. So, I told you that my aunt was already in this building. She was the one that got me the job. She knew the supervisors very well. So when someone didn't show up for work, I would work there.

Yet this transnational life ended abruptly when the INS authorities concluded that Concepción was living and working in the U.S., confiscated her tourist visa and sent her back to Mexico. Concepción tired to re-enter the U.S. through the San Diego border. Her fake passport was not convincing and she was sent to a detention center in Las Vegas for a month. After her second expulsion to Mexico, Concepción successfully crossed the San Diego border by foot. She now works in the same building where Esperanza first recruited her in the late 1980s.

Esperanza's network is so expansive because both she and Arturo became supervisors. This gave them the power to directly hire from their networks. Arturo became supervisor in at Torrance, the building where I worked. One day on the way to work Arturo said it was good I was coming to 'learn' the job first because it is difficult to get a job in this industry without a 'recommendation.' He then explained to me one of the functions of this 'recommendation,' namely the construction of a workforce that is thought to do the work efficiently with few complaints. He explained that he took two workers (Yvonne and Miguel) with him to Torrance and hired his daughter Sonia and nephew by marriage Ricardo.²² Distant relatives back home become "political" allies in the U.S. For example, Ricardo referred to Arturo

²² During the period I worked there, the building was union. Arturo admitted that he doesn't go through the union's hiring hall, as required in the contract. He reasoned that those workers were on that list because they had had 'problems' with their supervisors.

as his '*tio politico*' (political uncle).²³ When I asked Ricardo to explain this term he said, "like when I need something..." "Like a job?" I asked. "*Ándale*,"²⁴ he responded. "Those that were here before," Arturo said, 'we fired them.' When I asked why he responded simply "we didn't like how they worked."

In 1988 the company promoted Esperanza to supervisor in a building I will call Marina. Esperanza continued to hire family members but she also drew on more general ethnic network that had proliferated by the late 1980s. Leda entered Esperanza's building through ethnic networks created in the Latino neighborhoods of Los Angeles. Leda, a wife and mother of three from rural Michoacán, arrived in 1989. She had been taking care of children in her home, while caring for her own, but she quit because "they didn't pay her well" and she didn't like the responsibility of caring for another's children. Shortly thereafter, Leda was offered a janitorial job through a stranger who just knocked on her door. That man was an acquaintance of Leda's neighbor. The neighbor could not come up with a social security card when offered the job. Leda did have a card, albeit a fake one, and was hired immediately in her living room.²⁵ Leda's husband worked cleaning a hotel but he only earned \$800.00 a month. Here Leda explains why she took the job.

I really wanted to work, because, as I told you, really I needed the work because of my son in Mexico and my daughters and everything. My husband worked but they did not pay him enough for the family. I needed the work. I had 3 children to support.

Leda's experience, as well as that of Thelma discussed above, illustrate that for women, entry into this job is shaped by an interaction between gender and race relations, in particular, the presence of a partner who is earning a sufficient wage.

Leda described her relationship with 'Dona Esperanza' as characterized by what the janitors called *presión* - direct pressure akin to Edward's (1979) simple control.²⁶

That Senora was very tough (*dura*). She would send me to dust the legs of the desks and the bottom of the toilets. She would said to me 'you have to wet a towel and get all that dust under there.' [...] Five minutes before I would enter work I would get a headache. Ay no. I would die from it. That Senora didn't have compassion for people. Its as if she isn't Latina, like she isn't from one's own race.

It is important to note that supervisors are themselves in precarious positions. They are paid between \$8 and \$10 an hour, rarely have health insurance or vacation time and are often fired if their company loses the contract with the building owner. During our interview, Esperanza recounted a difficult job of safeguarding the contract and keeping the tenants satisfied. She told me that the owner of her building was one of the largest but also most 'delicate' building owners. She showed me her log-book and described to be the most demanding tenants in the two 12 -floor towers. Interacting with tenants was often difficult for Esperanza because her English is not fluent. She often asked Latina receptionists or

²³ Maggie, Arturo's niece by marriage also referred to Arturo as her '*tio politico*' because he hired her *marido*.

²⁴ Mexican saying akin, in this context, to 'there you go' or 'you got it.'

²⁵ The year was 1992, thus Leda's does not show up on the cohort graph, yet her experience is similar to those of the 1980s arrivals represented by the x. A more precise analysis of this cohort will have to await the year 2000 census.

²⁶ Many workers described Esperanza as one of the most demanding supervisors and the company Forward as one of the worst companies to work for. For example, Enrique told that Forward has much power but they 'kill the workers' (*son lo más fregonas, pero matan a la gente*). "This is where the aunt of Arturo works," Enrique continued, 'and she commands (*manda*) the workers. She even makes them dust the leaves of the plants" (field notes:110498).

called her son to translate or explain things. Esperanza has received some complaints about the cleaning from the tenants but ‘up until now,’ she explained “I haven’t had a big complaint. I have conserved the contract.”

Nevertheless, janitors explained how supervisors ‘conserved the contract’ through violations of labor laws and direct *presión*. For example, Leda went on to explain how the demands of Esperanza meant that she often worked overtime without pay. She was initially hired to work only 4 hours, yet she could not finish the assigned work in this time.

They give you an area to clean. They gave me an area for 4 hours. But I saw that this area was for like 6 hours. And I had to finish the work as quick as I could, but I had to leave it finished. And they never paid me one minute more [than 4 hours]. But there was someone, that man that got me this job, that helped me a lot. He would tell me ‘No. Go home already. I’ll finish this work. No one is going to pay you more.’ And yes I would go sometimes, and the supervisor would get so mad. She would send me back and tell me ‘you haven’t finished.’

Leda’s experience illustrates the difficulties of resisting exploitation when the necessity for work is great.

The cumulative effect of networks has led to a racialization of this job. One worker, Enrique, told me on my first day of work “so you want to know how we live? Well you can say that this is an immigrant job, well we say, a job for *indocumentados*.” Over the next few months Enrique often talked about legal status and its relationship to restructuring and race. One day he told me he had previously worked with African and Asian Americans who were earning \$9.00/hour. ‘But they don’t pay *indocumentados* that!’ he exclaimed. Enrique’s experience illustrates how Latino migrants are racialized by their citizenship status and their employment in low wage jobs.

The Exit of African Americans: Downgraded Work and Civil Rights

As recently arrived, undocumented Latinas/os were entering this job, African Americans were leaving it. The census analysis shows that African American men were more likely to be janitors than women, throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Both women and men moved out of this job in the 1980s, although not anywhere near the rates that Latina/os moved in. This suggests that Latinas/os took many of the new jobs that were added during the real estate boom. Nevertheless the number of African American janitors declined as well. Thus, because the cohort analysis is based on a sample of workers, the lack of a drastic decline in Black cohorts indicates that those who were displaced by restructuring, left the labor force altogether. I did not interview African Americans and thus cannot speak for certain of the reasons of their exit or their current economic position. I can, however, speak of how the entering Latinas/os perceived this change.

Latina/o migrants were aware of the discourse that African Americans were displaced by the entry of Latinas/os. Yet they interpreted this within their own experience with racialization as burdens on the state. The following commentary between Maria and I was typical.²⁷ Maria, a Mexican single mother, had just told me that upon arrival she was recruited from English class and that, for two years, she worked nine hours but was only paid for seven.

²⁷ It is important to mention that because I am committed to anti-racism, I was not always ‘objective’ in these conversations about African Americans. Instead I asked questions to try to get the interviewees to put themselves in the place of African Americans.

Maria: And I understand that before there were all people of color in this job right?

Cynthia. Yes yes, African Americans, *Morenos*.

Maria: And the *Hispanos* came and now they feel displaced, because they say that before they had this work and that we came to take it from them, they say. I know that they say this.

Cynthia: What do you think about that?

Maria: I think that we have demonstrated with our work that we know how to work, and that we, I think, have won the work. And these people, they want the easy way, they don't want to work hard, or they want to earn good money without working hard. So, I imagine that it why they feel displaced.

Cynthia: I don't know why, or what happened. But its possible that if, for example, an African American, if they didn't pay him for two hours, like they didn't pay you, he would leave or say "don't exploit me."

Maria: Yes I think that more than anything that is what happened, because when one comes, one doesn't know, at least I didn't. And I worked however they wanted me to, how they said I should work, like for example working nine hours and only getting paid for seven. And I worked like that for 2 years. [...] But they didn't know we could organize, right?

This conversation reveals several important trends. First, it illustrates how Latina/o migrants are racialized (exploitable, expendable labor force) through their juxtaposition with African Americans, who are thought to be both lazy and demanding of their rights. Employers' historical strategy of pitting different racial/ethnic groups against one another was thus re-enacted in Los Angeles in the 1980s. This conversation also touches on the unfortunate irony that African Americans, who refused to accept the downgraded work conditions, would not be the beneficiaries of re-unionization. This is both due to the employers' use of Latina/o migrants to restructure as well as the fact that the union was not organizing the Latina/o migrants as they arrived, nor mobilizing the African American members. Finally it illustrates the dialectic of power/resistance. Building owners pursued flexible specialization in order to rid themselves of workers that might protest their labor rights but, as Maria stated, they were not counting on the immigrants organizing. A cohort analysis can also help us understand the re-unionization of the janitorial industry.

Community Unionism as a Fifth Wave of Union Organizing

Following two decades of restructuring, and the recruitment of migrants and women to the downgraded, contract, part-time and temporary jobs, service sector unions have moved toward an 'organizing model' of unionism. Labor leaders openly espouse the organizing model as the only way unions can survive globalization (Mantsios, ed. 1998; Mort ed. 1998). An organizing model requires unions to adopt a series of strategies, which scholars have conceptualized as "community unionism," or "social unionism" (Banks 1991; Lerner 1991). At the crux of the J4J philosophy of organizing is a set of practices to contend with the fact that U.S. labor law is insufficient protection for undocumented immigrant, contract service workers. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) prohibits 'secondary picketing,' and thus prohibits picketing the building owner who has the power in the industry. J4J seeks to pressure building owners to accept union firms by taking their organizing to the public. They appeal to the court of public opinion through media campaigns, for example linking non-union firms with sweat-shops and the health care crisis in the city. In addition, they invade the public and corporatized spaces of the

city, and engage in civil disobedience and other direct organizing. As one veteran J4J organizer told a reporter “Unless you’re willing to break the law in this country as a labor leader, you’re not going to win” (Gardetta; *LA Weekly* July30-August 5 1993). At the same time, J4J uses provisions under the NLRA, as well as worker protection laws like overtime pay and health and safety regulations, in what some have called “guerrilla legal tactics.” The goal is to cost the employer as much money as possible so they will agree to a card check or community-based union election, rather than one run by the National Labor Relations Board (Lerner 1991). Organizing is sustained through the active participation of the rank and file and through coalitions with groups concerned with social and economic justice. While this community unionism is not new, it is a radical break from the bureaucratized, business unionism that arose in the post war era and was dominant until the mid-1980s. It is also distinct from the 1970s organizing in the feminized public sector, what Milkman describes as the 4th wave of organizing.

We can conceptualize this approach as a fifth wave of organizing. Milkman hypothesized that it would be in unions least touched by ‘patriarchal traditions’ and the “forces of de-unionization,” where women’s advancement in the labor movement would be manifest (1993:227). J4J is one the ‘young’ unions that have organized women from the beginning, adding credence to Milkman’s first prediction. Yet it was precisely de-unionization, and it’s coupling with immigration and restructuring, that forced J4J and other unions to actively engage women in the work of the union. In an industry where labor law does not protect contract workers and where employers’ anti-union campaigns often threaten undocumented workers, organizing is very labor intensive. Organizing drives depend on the active participation of the current members, at both the grassroots and leadership levels, and their willingness to devote part of their dues to this project.²⁸

The union seeks to mobilize their current members, and potential new members, with three organizing frames. The broadest frame is that the workers themselves are the union and that they should take ‘ownership.’ A second frame is that labor rights are immigrant rights. A third frame is an immigrant familism that views union organizing as the way to “move ahead for the family.” With these frames, J4J seeks to mobilize the membership to engage in several practices of organizing. In this paper I examine three of these practices--participatory education, political organizing and street actions—and their implications for gender relations. Before we examine these practices, however, we must understand the initial, grassroots organizing of the cohort recruited to restructure the industry, and the movement of these immigrant women and men into leadership.

Initial Re-organization of the Industry

A philosophy and practice of community unionism has been successful. *Justice for Janitors* inaugurated its Los Angeles organizing drive in 1988. In 1987 there were only 1,800 union janitors in the city of Los Angeles. By 1995 there were 8,255 unionized janitors representing 81% of janitors in the city. With unionization came health care, sick days and a slow but steady increase in wages. In addition to these bread and butter gains, the grievance procedure secured by the contract protects against increases in workload, unjust firing, and abusive supervisor relationships.

Maria was one of the janitors who helped re-organize the industry in the early 1990s. Maria, is from Leon Guanajuato and represents the new Mexican migration of urban women. Maria came from

²⁸ The new commitment to organizing has led the international to put several locals in trusteeship, including this local. While many have been critical of this top-down approach, others have noted the benefits of combined top-down national leadership and strong rank and file local participation (Waldinger et. al. 1998). One such benefit is that it secures resources for organizing from the international.

working class origins as the daughter of a single mother. Maria's husband 'drank too much' and 'didn't want to work,' she said, so she left him and supported her 4 children on her wages from working in a shoe factory. In 1988, she migrated to Los Angeles with her brother in order to earn some money to pay off her house. Like many, Maria, decided to stay and brought her children "one by one." While Maria worked two years under the exploitative labor conditions described above, when she was approach on the street by J4J organizers she was receptive.

They invited me to their office, the union local. And I began to listen. And I became interested. I liked what I heard and I said that's enough (*ya basta*). I don't have to continue giving away my work. I said "how great that we can exercise our rights." Because one thinks that because she is an immigrant, she doesn't have rights in this country. But I realized that I was wrong. And that I had to fight for my rights.

Maria's quote illustrates that the frame of immigrant rights resonates with both women and men. Nevertheless, most women have less leisure time than most men due to women's greater responsibilities for the childcare and household chores. The union seeks to address this difference with a familialism immigrant style. The union's familialism is better suited to the reality of Latino immigrant families, than the ideal family image of a male breadwinner-female homemaker secured by a 'family wage.' J4J's discourse is one of a better future 'for the children.' A focus on mobility for the children incorporates both men's and women's "american dreams." Yet it also resonates with single women's breadwinning motherhood. In our interview, Maria emphasized motherhood as well as immigrant rights, as a motivation for her activism. She generally spoke of the two fluidly, as if they were one. She summed up her participation in the initial organizing simply. "I am a mother. I have children. So I had to respond."

Nevertheless, like any social movement, *Justice for Janitors* has its problem with 'free riders.' Both women and men are among those who would reap the benefits of unionization but not participate in the marching, leafleting and house calls necessary to secure them. Yet women were often chastised for using children and *maridos* as 'pretexts,' or un-acceptable excuses for not participating. One worker activist expressed her frustration with women's pretexts by mimicking one of these women in a whining voice.

'I don't have tiiiime. I have chiiiiildren.' 'I do too.' 'No. I have to...' they come up with anything 'I have to make dinner.' They give a million pretexts. But they want the benefits and to earn good salaries. We do the work and they don't want to. But everyone has time. A march isn't everyday. It's once a week or every 15 days. If you give a little you aren't going to die. Sometimes that is my theory.

While, in times of frustration, women were chastised for using children as pretexts, staff and worker organizers also sought to facilitate women's participation in the union by making organizing a 'family affair.'

Organizers and activists facilitated women's participation by accepting children as central parts of the union, by 'organizing' resistance husbands, and by helping with childcare. One lead organizer explained organizing as a 'family affair' like this.

Because we were active in having [the entire network] participate, there weren't so many questions about women participating. Again it was a family affair, people participated. You do get, on occasion, a woman who can't commit because she also has to take care of her stuff at home right? But the way that is dealt with is to make sure that when you go to visit somebody at their house, you include the husband and the kids in the discussion.

Several women janitors told me of the effectiveness of this strategy. Lupe, the Salvadoreña we met earlier, was one of the first janitors to organize her co-workers. The lead organizer at the time would meet Lupe on her way to work each night on the bus until he finally convinced her to quit her day job and help them organize. Lupe was soon spending most of her time organizing, which initially did not suit her husband. Lupe feels that the union must explain to the partners of members the reasons why they are organizing and the importance of this work. One day a staff member came to ‘organize’ Lupe’s husband.

That was when he felt that one needs the help of the man, the husband, and the husband of the wife, to be able to be a leader. And they *have to* involve the husband, because the strongest politics are in the home. (Really?) Yes of course! I am a worker, I am a homemaker, and I am an activist. And as an activist, I have much obligation.

Lupe’s story illustrates the dialectic between organizing and women’s decisions to become activists.

In addition to constructing organizing as a ‘family affair,’ staff and worker activists draw on the very gender relations that result in women’s lack of leisure time to mobilize them to participate. For example, Elena, a Mexicana from Guadalajara and a member of the union’s Executive Board, uses a discourse of familialism to organize another woman to be more active in the union.

We all have the right to give our opinion. It’s important that you know your rights and about the contract that is coming and how to move forward, for the children.

Elena appeals directly to a bread-winning motherhood, by suggesting to the woman that she will achieve motherhood through labor activism. Men also use the family to motivate the membership. In an effort to motivate his fellow shop stewards, both women and men, to focus on the year 2000 contract fight Memo said:

[T]he family depends on us. And we depend on our work. But if we don’t mobilize for the campaign, we won’t be successful. The union is nothing more than ourselves. And we have to work hard and be united.

Both Elena and Meno point to a more powerful way to mobilize women workers, namely to offer them the opportunity to get involved in the decision making processes of organizing.

Leadership Positions

The union’s philosophy, or frame, that the workers should take “ownership” of their union has meant that the union has recruited women, alongside men, into leadership positions. Because women make-up 50% of the membership and because they are active at the grassroots level, their entrance into leadership is central to the success of organizing.

The commitment to having women in leadership positions is evident in the gender breakdown of the Executive Board, committee members and shop stewards (1999 figures). In the 1999 Executive Board elections, of 11 positions open 5 were filled by women. Women were 42% of the negotiating committee for the year 2000 contract. This is significant given that negotiating is in many unions viewed as a skill that men are more likely to have (Gray 1993). The near equal representation of women was a conscious effort by the union staff to change this sentiment in the union. The previous negotiating committee was 80% men. Nearly half of the members on the most important committee, the committee that is directing the year 2000 contract campaign, are women (48%). This committee directs the work of several smaller committees: the organizing committee (45% women), the political organizing committee (30%) and the leadership committee, which trains shop stewards and other rank and file leaders. Women are less well

represented on the political organizing and leadership committees, compared to the organizing committee. Finally, 42% of the shop stewards are women.

There is a conscious effort to recruit more women into the political organizing and leadership committees. Nevertheless, union staff must be aware of the gendered relations that structure women's engagement with activism. Bernice's trajectory into activism over the 2 years I have known her, illustrates how and why a new cohort of women is moving into union leadership. Bernice is a member of the large cohort of migrants that left El Salvador after years of civil war and economic depression in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁹ When her village was subsumed by battles between the leftist guerrillas and the right-wing army, like many poor Salvadorans, Bernice moved to the capital city. However, life in the city was too expensive particularly when factories closed down and food prices rose. Bernice made the journey to L.A. in 1991, leaving her 4 children with her mother and separating from their father. Like many of these 'transnational mothers,' Bernice sends money back home to her children each payday.

I met Bernice at one of the first picket lines she attended. She was one of several women I interviewed who was close to Lupe, and whom Lupe organized to participate in union pickets and marches. When I asked Bernice why she went to these actions she pointed to the union's backing and job security that made her feel sure she could support her children.

Imagine if we didn't have the union. They would do with us what they wish, I tell you, what they wish! If I lost my job, how would I send money to my children?

Bernice's activism is motivated by much more than bread and butter concerns for job security. Indeed, 'free-riders' in the movement also have job security. But Bernice is very active in the union. Not only does she attend marches regularly, she is on two of the most important committees for the year 2000 contract campaign. Two things have changed in the period I have known Bernice that have shaped her engagement with the union. First, Bernice was organized by other workers and recruited by staff members to sit on these committees. Second, Bernice was open to this organizing because of gender relations where they intersect with class.

Gender relations shaped Bernice's trajectory into activism. When I asked her if she was involved in any union, community or religious group back home she said:

I couldn't with the children. I had to cook, take them to school, and by myself. And I was the one that paid for everything. He didn't help me at all. He drank.

Upon arrival to the U.S. Bernice had an equally unfulfilling relationship with a man. In fact, her attendance at union meetings and marches vacillated with separations and reunions with this man. Bernice explained that he did not want her to go anywhere, except work, not even English classes but especially not to the union. When her *marido* went back home for a visit, Bernice moved and changed her phone number in an effort to sever her relationship with this man. It was at this time that her union representative encouraged her become a leader. Bernice was open to this recruitment due to her personal life, which did not fulfill her but instead made her feel suffocated and locked in (*encerrada*) to a routine of domestic chores.

As more single mothers make up the new waves of labor migrants, women like Bernice will fuel a new labor movement. That is, if unions are willing to understand gender relations. There is some evidence that many J4J organizers do. Consider this quote from an organizer.

²⁹ The civil war in El Salvador was from 1978 to 1992.

Just generally speaking what I see is women asking themselves, or having their internal struggles with their family, about participating, so that they're sort of going through 2 struggles. Instead of just kind of questioning whether or not, you know, this is something that I should get involved in. They're also sort of, second to that, is you know "is this worth my while" right. [...] And then when they do decide to participate its a whole different level of their commitment.

Bernice went through these struggles and, like many women I met, challenged gender relations in the home in order to participate in union leadership. This led to a range of new practices that further upset power relations of gender.

The Practices of Organizing

The recruitment of women in the grassroots organizing as well as in leadership positions means that women are engaging in new practices alongside men. These new practices include interactive education in the site of the union, grassroots political organizing and protest in the city streets. Next I examine whether these practices contest, not only restructuring, but also the racialized and gendered relations that facilitated restructuring.

Popular Education and Feminist Pedagogy

In *Justice for Janitors*, unlike many social movement, there is a conscious effort to have women and men learning, strategizing and organizing side by side. A commitment to equitable recruitment, coupled with a philosophy and practice of participatory learning, politicizes women alongside men and has implications for growing solidarity across gender. The committees are organized by a philosophy of learning influenced both by popular education, such as that practiced by Paulo Friere, and feminist principles. One union organizer characterized the approach as "creating training modules that allow members to take ownership and assume power." She contrasted it with one that views workers as a "vessel" into which organizers "pour knowledge." One of the main goals of this popular education is to point out the relationships of power in the industry, locate the janitors' experiences within them, and strategize how janitors can change their position in the local political economy. It is important to note that this discourse of 'ownership and power' came about through the structural necessities to mobilize the membership. After one meeting of the year 2000 committee, I told an organizer that it was great that workers were gaining such an in-depth understanding of the political economy of the industry and the city. This organizer responded 'Yeah it is. We used to just tell them what to do. And we realized that didn't work.' Nevertheless, whether out of altruism or necessity the mobilization and training of the rank and file is indeed empowering them, particularly the women.

Bernice, as well as several other women, told me that she was no longer fearful of speaking in front of a group of people, a character trait viewed in the literature as stemming from women's socialization to be submissive (Cook 1968; Kanter 1977). For example, Bernice told me that at one meeting everyone at the table looked at her for her opinion '*fijate*' she says 'like I was someone important!' (Field notes:1-29-99). Most of the other members on this committee are men. The potential for change comes not merely from a change in women's political consciousness, but also as men work alongside women and begin to view them as economic and political actors.

Political Organizing

Justice for Janitors is active in the political process as part of a concerted effort to, in the words of the local's President, "turn around this anti-immigrant climate." In striking contrast to earlier positions on immigration, organized labor is now calling for a new amnesty for undocumented workers. In addition, they seek support in their campaigns from politicians. The most recent example is the participation of former Speaker of the California House and current L.A. mayoral candidate Antonio Villaraigosa, State Assemblywoman Gloria Romero, city council representative Jackie Goldberg and other politicians participation in the marches during the April 2000 janitors' strike. Within this political organizing, women and men are engaging in new practices.

This political action resonates with the janitors, even though many of them cannot vote, because of an anti-immigrant politics that targets them directly. Members of *Justice for Janitors* campaigned against the most recent bout of anti-immigrant and anti-labor propositions. These included proposition 227, which ended bilingual education in California. Members of this union also helped to elect Governor Gray Davis, who recently announced that he would re-instate pre-natal care for undocumented mothers. Ironically, non-citizens many who are undocumented, are precinct walking! This quote by Magdalena, a Salvadoran woman, illustrates the discourse of immigrant rights within *Justice for Janitors* and other immigrant-dominated unions.

I understand that there is a proposal that we who are not citizens would not have any rights. All of us are in this country and working to produce it. We also have the right to give our opinion. Not only as a member of the union but as a person that is in this country, because we are part of the community. It shouldn't matter if one is a citizen or not in terms of the rights one has in this country. Or if one is undocumented one still should have one's rights.

For Magdalena, the fact that she is living and working in L.A. should grant her rights.

While both women and men are racialized within California politics of immigration, women's political practices are also challenging gender relations. This was expressed to me most clearly by Delia, who migrated from Mexico City in the late 1980s.

I say the union grabs the woman out of the closet because it is like being closed in. You don't know anything. So you aren't interested in politics. And organizing? Forget it! But suddenly, I have done a million things.

Delia is a shop steward, a member of the negotiating committee and the Executive Board. Delia went on to explain, that these political practices are not only in opposition to an anti-immigrant climate that women and men both experience. These practices are also in opposition to unequal gender relations between Latinas and Latinos.

When I say the union takes women out of the closet, what I mean to say is that men cannot say that women are good for nothing in terms of politics. So men can't put you in the closet, understand?

Here Delia gives men agency, arguing that they participate in keeping women out of politics. Yet, through their union activism, women are becoming political subjects. And, just as important, men are seeing women become political actors. To the extent that J4J encourages women's participation in political organizing, they will also make space for women to challenge gender relations. Nevertheless, women are still under-represented among those who would lead this political organizing. This inequality mitigates the impact of J4J organizing on gender.

Another way that women's political action challenges gender relations is by helping women gain economic security for themselves and their children. The following quote from Dora, a single mother from Nicaragua, is representative of many women's feelings.

There is much racism, maybe because one isn't a citizen. But even though I don't have my residency, I will fight to have the same rights as citizens, to see if I can achieve something better, and to achieve it for my children. [...] I have children and that is why I have joined the union.

By making women's economic independence viable, these political practices are challenging gendered inequalities within a racialized political and economic context. This is significant in a political context where immigrant women are objectified as mothers who come to the U.S. to be dependent on social services. One way women can secure job security, better wages and health benefits is by taking their organizing into the streets of the city.

Taking the Fight to the Streets

One of the most vivid ways that women and men janitors are challenging their racialized incorporation into the U.S. economy is through protests in the public and corporate spaces of the city. Practices of protest in the city streets, brings possibilities to contest gender as well.

The main reason for such public protest is so that the janitors will be seen and heard by the tenants who work in the buildings, by the owners of the buildings and by politicians. Janitors expressed their presence in the streets as the place they can gain respect. Respect is gained through displays of militancy. During big marches members and supporters often engage in civil disobedience, generally combined with creative drama to draw media attention. For example, on Thanksgiving they had a sit down dinner in the middle of an intersection. In disrupting the taken-for-granted organization of practices in public spaces, janitors become visible political subjects.

Another way janitors assert political subjectivity is the occupation of corporate space, the spaces of the city that have become more and more privatized. For example, one day we were picketing in a mixed-use residential and commercial neighborhood of primarily white residents on the west side of Los Angeles. During the picket, the Anglo-American building owner came out several times to talk to the lead organizer and to the police who were stationed across the street. During the rally that concluded the picket, the organizer told the group of janitors that the building owner is running around because he is upset to see so many Latino immigrants out in front of his building during the lunch hour. The organizer ended by stating that they are here to give the building owner a strong message that *'aquí estamos y no nos vamos!'* It is significant that she used this popular slogan of immigrant rights groups "we are here and we are not leaving!" This slogan is used to lay claim to a space that one has been denied the right to inhabit. Furthermore, the organizer constructs a "Latino immigrant" identity in a politics of opposition. Appropriating these spaces, speaking Spanish and claiming the right to live and work in Los Angeles, as "Latino immigrant subjects," is oppositional in this context. These practices transgress what normally occurs in such corporate spaces, and who generally inhabits those spaces during business hours. In short, these practices challenge the anti-immigrant racial formation, as it is manifest in urban space and time.

The participation of women in these practices of protest also challenges gender relations of meaning. In a political context where immigrant women are viewed as dependent and economic burdens, their visible protesting for labor rights is oppositional. Through picketing, blocking traffic and occupation of corporate space, these women are creating images of Latina immigrants as economic subjects.

The participation of children has further implications for gender by challenging biological notions of motherhood. Women, as well as men, are encouraged to bring their children to public actions. This is part of the J4J motto that organizing is a ‘family affair.’ Indeed, the image of a child on the picket line is a good organizing tool when one is fighting for family health insurance. Bringing children to a picket line also opens up the possibility that mothers will have help with childcare, rather than doing it alone in the home. Maggie, a Mexican woman from D.F., expressed a common sentiment when she said:

It’s a union thing over there. So there are people that I can also give my baby to. They tell me ‘I’ll help you carry her.’

Bringing children to the picket line questions gendered ideas about biological motherhood by making the work of mothering more communal. While it is more common for women do this ‘othermothering,’ as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and others have called it, if male partners are organized to participate in the union actions they might also engage in more of the childcare work. Maggie went on to tell me that her *marido*, who recently got a job as a janitor, came to the last march and he helped carry the baby. It was not uncommon to see men carrying or holding the hands of children on the picket line, particularly if their partners were janitors. However, there were far more women, biological mothers, othermothers and organizers, who were caring for children. Nevertheless, strategies of direct public action and making organizing a ‘family affair’ make space for men to engage in family life as well.

Conclusion

By mobilizing women and men members in both the grassroots and leadership work of the union, *Justice for Janitors* has been successful in improving the lives of the members as well as challenging income inequality in Los Angeles. After a 3-week strike, sustained by considerable community and political support, the janitors and cleaning companies signed a contract that secures significant wage increases and health benefits for janitors.³⁰ These bread and butter gains in turn bring economic independence for women and children. By mobilizing the immigrants that were recruited to downgrade the industry, J4J not only challenges ‘flexibility,’ but also challenges relations of race and gender that are embedded in the restructuring of work.

With a methodology that brings together a theory of practice with an understanding of cohorts through ethnography, I have argued that the structural imperative for unions to mobilize their membership to engage in new practices of protest can in turn upset the current racialized and gendered economic formation. I focused on immigrant women and men’s engagement in three practices. I argued that practices of participatory learning have the possibility to mitigate ideas of gender inequality through the work of organizing. In the practice of public protest as a ‘family affair,’ street actions become spaces where men can engage in family life. Challenges to a gendered, anti-immigrant political context can be found in the practices of public protest and grassroots political action. Through these practices women become political and economic subjects, and bring possibilities both for a new politics of gender and a more just politics of immigration. A sociology of practice, combined with an ethnographic understanding of cohorts, reminds us of the dialectic of power and resistance and alerts us to possibilities for social change.

³⁰ Janitors in the downtown area will receive raises of .70/hr, in the first year and .60/hr the next two years. Janitors in the outlying areas received wage increases of .30/hr in the first year and .60/hr in the next two years.

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