

RÉSUMÉ

**Prendre soins des travailleuses à domicile:
Mobiliser sous l'ombre féminine de la
mondialisation**

Shireen Ally

En dépit du fait qu'elles aient été rendues invisibles par la pensée dominante qui a cours dans la mondialisation, et par la pensée dominante au sein du mouvement syndical, les travailleuses qui vivent dans l'ombre féminine de la mondialisation revendiquent de plus en plus et exigent une plus grande visibilité.

Dans une analyse sur les efforts des immigrantes, travailleuses à domicile, mon article montre que la récente prolifération des organisations des travailleuses est caractérisée par une structure bifurquée de représentation. Nous y trouvons le modèle d'association qui se distingue du modèle d'organisation syndicale et qui tente de combler la carence historique de la mobilisation syndicale dans ce secteur. L'article suggère que le mouvement syndical peut bénéficier d'une plus grande reconnaissance des activités organisationnelles dans ce secteur.

Caring about Care Workers: Organizing in the Female Shadow of Globalization

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Abstract

Despite being rendered invisible by contemporary mainstream accounts of globalization, and historically, by the mainstream labour movement, reproductive care workers in the female shadow of globalization are claiming visibility through a groundswell of global organizing. In an analysis of the contemporary organizing efforts of migrant domestic workers, the article argues that the recent proliferation of care worker organizing is characterized by a bifurcated structure of representation in which an association model that involves primarily non-union-based labour organizing competes with a union model that seeks to overcome organized labour's historical failure to represent the sector. In this bipolar landscape of migrant domestic worker organizing, the article suggests that effective worker-controlled representation is not always achieved by the mere fact of organization, and that the union-based labour movement would benefit from recognition of the significance of gendered care work under globalization.

Introduction

Over the past decade, studies of globalization have exposed the global re-organization of production, but much less has been said about the global re-organization of reproduction (Truong, 1996: 47). In this “female underside of globalization” (Ehrenreich, 2002: 3), women of colour from the global South increasingly labour as reproductive care workers for fami-

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lies in the North². An estimated one third of Filipina women, for instance, now work as migrant domestic workers in more than 180 countries around the world (Parreñas 2001). With this gendered and racialized international division of caring labour, globalization has crafted a “new world domestic order” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Yet, in the mainstream scholarship on globalization, the female sphere of reproduction is marginalized and reproductive care workers are taken to be “truants from globalized economic webs” (Pratt and Yeoh, 2003: 160).

Far from marginal to globalization, however, care work is essential for the reproduction of global capitalism. Among the most important of these caring jobs is paid domestic work³, which remains iconic of the growing number of low-wage service jobs (Chang, 2000). Subject to notoriously exploitative pay, abusive working conditions, and debilitating racism and sexism, these “servants of globalization” (Parreñas, 2001) are beginning to challenge the widely-held belief that the sector is unorganized. In a recent proliferation of global organizing around the plight of domestic workers, one of globalization’s most hidden dimensions is gaining visibility, and some of its most vulnerable workers are asserting themselves.

While labour’s international organizing in response to globalization’s restructuring of production has been documented (Moody 1997, Munck 2002, O’Brien 2000, Waterman 1998, Waterman and Wills 2001), this article profiles an emerging form of labour organizing internationally as a consequence of globalization’s restructuring of reproduction. Analyzing the resurgence of domestic worker⁴ organizing globally to understand the emerging structure of resistance in globalization’s female shadow, I argue that domestic worker organizing is marked by a bipolar structure of representation. On the one hand, an association model

²‘Care work’ is the work of social reproduction that is required to maintain human life throughout the life-cycle (Truong 1996), or what neo-Marxists in the 1970s called ‘reproductive labour.’

³The term ‘domestic worker’ is used interchangeably in this article with ‘care workers’, ‘reproductive workers’ and ‘household workers’, consistent with the literature’s use of these multiple descriptives for the occupational category under discussion.

⁴This article refers to domestic workers who migrate from their home countries to work abroad within private households, doing mainly cleaning, cooking, and childcare. This labour diaspora does not include gardeners, for instance, and therefore remains a distinctively feminized workforce.

recognizes and utilises transnationalism's reformulation of the calculus of race and gender, and has pursued a new politics around migrancy. On the other hand, a union model has attempted to recover the traditional mobilizing category of class, reconfigured to recognize the significance to the labour movement of gendered care work under globalization. In this bifurcated landscape, new efforts at organizing the unorganized have challenged the union-based labour movement, and forced a reconsideration of the relationship between organizing and unionizing.

Organizing the Unorganizable?

With cross-national unionization rates in the domestic service sector at barely 1% (ILO, 2004), domestic workers are not only unorganized, but widely regarded as unorganizable (see Ford, 2004). This is usually attributed to the structural barriers against organization inherent in the nature of domestic service. Domestic workers labour in isolation, behind closed doors, making general organizing, and specifically unionization, difficult. As Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos (1997) argue: "The peculiar exceptionalism of paid domestic work centers on the spatial isolation and atomization of individual employers, employees, and workplaces" (56). For Bujra (2000), this isolation means that "in structural terms privatized workers are not assembled for exploitation in a context where their consciousness of grievance leads to solidarity with fellow workers" (179). Furthermore, employer ideologies that construct domestics as one of the family, and social ideologies that refuse to recognize domestic labour as real work, mitigate against domestics' understanding of themselves as workers, and therefore unionization. Even when domestics can overcome these ideological mystifications, possibilities for collective mobilization based on a worker identity are limited given the "personal nature of the employer-employee relationship", and "the worker's extreme dependence on the employer" (ILO, 2004: 43). These features of the paid domestic work arrangement, together with the social and economic vulnerability of domestic workers as a group, make it difficult for domestic workers to exercise their right to freedom of association where it exists, and to advocate for such rights where it does not⁵. "Isolation, depend-

⁵In many gulf states, such as Jordan, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as in Brazil, and the Canadian province of Ontario, domestic workers are not allowed to form trade unions (ICFTU, 2002)

ence, [and] invisibility” (Gaitskell *et al.*, 1983/4: 87) are therefore the patterns of paid domestic work that hinder organization generally, and unionization specifically.

As much as the structure of domestic service places limits to unionization, however, exclusive focus on the conditions that make domestic workers unorganizable cast domestics as passive and powerless victims of the structural features of their work. But this construction is untenable in light of the long history of not just organization, but unionization, in this sector.

As early as 1881, washerwomen in the US organized the “Washing Society” to mobilize for higher wages and called a strike to enforce their demand (Van Raaphorst, 1988). Eventually attracting nearly three thousand washerwomen, cooks, and child nurses, and lasting almost three weeks, this act not only defies the construction of domestics as passive victims, it also “revealed an astute political consciousness by making women’s work carried out in private households a public issue” (Hunter, 1993: 205-206). In fact, Smith (1999) argues that far from being relegated to the private, domestic workers made the issue of household labour “nothing less than ‘the Great American’ question of the nineteenth century” (855). Van Raaphorst (1988) profiles the formation of domestic worker unions in that period, like the American Servant Girls’ Association and the Domestic Worker Industrial Union of the International Workers of the World.

More recent history from other parts of the world reveals a similar flurry of organizing activity amongst domestic workers. The histories of domestic service in Latin America and the Caribbean demonstrate a tradition of active attempts at unionization in the sector from the mid-twentieth century (Chaney and Castro, 1989; Gill, 1994). And in East and Southern Africa, domestic workers have, intermittently, organized throughout the twentieth century into domestic worker’s unions seeking to deal with political repression as much as work-related issues (Gaitskell *et al.*, 1983/4; Van Onselen, 1982; Bujra, 2000). Actually, the deep and active history of mobilization amongst paid household workers in Africa is so at odds with the prevailing construction of the sector as recalcitrant to unionization that Bujra (2000) is forced to comment, regarding her experiences studying domestic service in East Africa just this past decade, that

[p]erhaps least anticipated in this study was the discovery that domestic servants can, within lim-

its, organize themselves as unionized labour, making class-conscious alliances with other workers...Against all the odds, domestic servants here and in other parts of Africa combined to protest their lot, becoming a significant element in the creation of a trans-ethnic and politically conscious urban working class (179-180).

While the documented history of unionism amongst domestic workers is limited, especially in terms of geographical and historical scope, it does reveal that, far from being resistant to organization, and especially unionization, domestic workers have organized on the basis of their worker status to form unions. This history challenges the presumption that paid domestic work is “an occupational oddity that defies organization” (Smith, 2000: 47).

But, the most important feature of these unionization efforts remains, unfortunately, that they are not sustained. Given that domestic work, in many countries, currently represents or historically represented the largest single sector of the female workforce, and given its historical significance as a point of entry into the labour market for women of colour (Glenn 1992), it is indeed interesting that domestic workers have failed to sustain their unionization efforts to the same extent as other sectors. Perhaps the failure to sustain unionization is not as reflective of this sector’s resistance to organizing as labour, as it is of organized labour’s resistance to unionizing this sector.

In each of the documented histories, the mainstream labour movement’s failure of domestic workers is noted. Van Raaphorst (1988), for instance, shows that in their efforts to unionize, domestic workers could not sustain their activity due, in part, to the indifference of much of organized labour. Although organizations as diverse as the Knights of Labour, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the Women’s Trade Union League, attempted to organize domestic workers, organized labour, in the main, opposed the unionization of domestic workers and provided little to no support for workers’ nascent efforts. Palmer (1989), also writing about the early history of unionism, observes that “domestic workers were not a high priority for unions” (127), and Christiansen (1999), too, documents the exclusion of household workers from the agenda of various labour organizations. Smith (2000), surveying a broader history, concludes that

[a]lthough a few domestic service unions had the support of trade unionists, the labour movement largely ignored the many women who performed household work for pay, despite the fact that they accounted for more wage-earning women than any other occupation (67).

While the relationship between organized labour and domestic workers' unions is under-explored in other parts of the world, where it has been studied, the conclusions remain the same. In Great Britain, it is argued that paid domestic work "has received very little attention...from trade unionists" (Anderson, 2001: 25). In Bolivia, Gill (1994) argues that the "Bolivian labour movement and traditional political parties have ignored domestic workers" (124). And, in South Africa, where the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has actually been highlighted as an exemplary union federation regarding the support for domestic workers (ILO, 2004), domestics had to make the following impassioned plea just not to be abandoned by the federation:

COSATU...now we are in the dumps and you just leave us like that. You talk about how you are the umbrella and you give us all a shelter. But how come you don't give the domestic worker a shelter?...You don't know what a struggle we have got in the backyards...We cannot [survive] without a union that knows our struggle (South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union Pamphlet, 1996).

The response to the plea was so half-hearted that Grossman (1997) concludes, in general, that "there is insufficient support from the large unions and federations, which appear to give domestic workers 'third-class status' within the union movement" (63).

Today, organized labour recognizes the need for effective representation of the sector, but defers to the rhetoric that the sector is unorganizable to justify the failure of sustained unionization for domestics. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, in a representative statement for instance, argued that while it is necessary to organize domestic workers, "[t]oday, however,

the sector remains largely impermeable to unionization” (ICFTU, 2002: 2). Cobble (1996) argues that before women employees were unionized successfully, it was claimed that women were unorganizable. Today, “a new myth...has replaced the old...[T]he old idea that women were unorganizable has now been superseded by the unsubstantiated notion that certain kinds of jobs (almost all of which are female-dominated) are unorganizable” (Cobble, 1996: 336-337). Deconstruction of this myth has never been more possible nor necessary than in the era of globalization.

Given globalization’s disruption of standard definitions of employment, work, and organization, the peculiarity of paid domestic work “no longer seems so anomalous” (Smith, 2000: 48). Despite their marginalization historically by the mainstream labour movement and by contemporary mainstream accounts of globalization, domestic workers in the new global economy refuse to submit to notions that domestic work is unorganizable. The systematic abuses of, especially migrant, domestic workers in the global economy has generated an equally systematic response – a “groundswell of domestic worker organizing” that, according to one report, represents an “upsurge in activity by domestic worker organizing groups, the likes of which has not been seen since the [Great] depression” (Press Release, Domestic Workers Rights Partnership, August 6, 2001).

An analysis of this contemporary groundswell of domestic worker organizing and the challenges it poses for the construction of the sector as unorganizable, reveals that the proliferation of organizing efforts for domestic workers globally is characterized by a bifurcated structure of representation in which an association model that involves primarily non-union-based migrant, women, and labour organizing, competes with a union model that seeks to overcome organized labour’s historical failure to represent domestic workers.

Organizing Domestics: The Association Model

In 1995, Flor Contemplacion, a Filipina domestic worker in Singapore, was executed after being convicted, most argue falsely, for murder. The execution generated a massive response, as various organizations representing migrant women participated in protests and denunciations of what they saw as a wrongful conviction and unjust execution. The level of protest in the Philip-

piners was even compared “to the ferment preceding the fall of the Marcos dictatorship” (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1997: 4). In the same year, Sarah Balabagan, a fifteen year old Filipina working in the United Arab Emirates, was sentenced to death for killing her employer in self-defence as he raped her at knifepoint. Again, global organizations were activated, with transnational associations like the Gabriele Network playing specific advocacy roles (Chang, 2000), and various other migrant domestic worker groups lending their voice to the protests. The response following both these incidents confirms the resurgence of domestic worker activism globally, and is symptomatic of the systematic features of this contemporary mobilization: nontraditional organizations mobilized around the injustices of migrancy, rather than traditional national unions organized around class exploitation.

Domestic workers have always been amongst the most exploited workers. They are channelled into paid domestic work on the basis of several axes of differentiation – race, class, and gender – which are reflective and generative of social stratification more broadly (Glenn 1992). Globalization has transferred these historical realities of paid domestic work to a global circuit, compounding domestics’ existing dimensions of vulnerability with compromised citizenship status (Parreñas, 2001). The codification of citizenship as a marker of inequality under globalization, and the reinscription of gender in transnationalism has been so powerful, that gendered migrancy has framed a politics of mobilization that now dominates domestic worker organizing globally.

As a result, domestic worker labour organizing today is primarily through an association model - a non-union-based model of representation in which migrant, ethnic, women’s, human rights, legal advocacy, and non-governmental organizations mobilize, and on a wider range of issues than just employment. In North America, Asia, and Europe (the three main regional geographic constellations across which care resources are transnationally relocated), this model of representation dominates domestic worker organizing, where female and immigrant statuses have become the basis for mobilization.

In the United States, the Domestic Workers Association of CHIRLA (Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles) remains one of the most successful domestic worker organizations on the west coast, basing its mobilization on the

strength of workers' connections around gender, on "[w]omen's relational identities and group orientations" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos, 1997: 71). The association is primarily focused on the upgrading of domestic work, but achieves this, in part, through reliance on cultural events, and by mobilizing around workers' other identities. *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (MUA), also in California, and defined as a "support group for Latina immigrant domestic workers" (Chang, 2000: 57), is focused quite specifically on organizing immigrant women. According to Chang (2000), both represent models of "nontraditional labour and community organizing among immigrant women and women of color" (Chang, 2000: 202). Based less on traditional forms of labour organizing, the association model focuses on providing advocacy and representation through more broad-based organizations that are critically oriented to migrant women workers.

On the east coast of the United States, as well, there has been a proliferation of similar organizing of domestic workers. The Domestic Workers Rights Partnership is a coalition that combines at least eight of the most organized advocacy groups for domestic workers in New York City, ranging from ethnic to worker advocacy groups. The partnership is primarily focused on worker's rights and is not union-based. It includes community and non-governmental organizations, as well as human rights and non-union labour advocacy groups⁶. As a result, the partnership is defined by a constituency activated by migrant worker issues, and the activities of the partnership go well beyond the scope of employment, advocating sometimes on non-work-related immigration matters. Such non-union-based associational labour organizing is, of course, not surprising in the United States, where a weak labour movement has been displaced by stronger ethnic organizations and associations of immigrant workers and workers of colour over many sectors for some time (see Cranford and Ladd, 2003). But, domestic worker organizing is dominated by this model of representation globally as well.

In Canada, where the labour movement has been historically stronger, the association model is a dominant strategy for

⁶Of the eight affiliated organizations, the Asian American Legal Defence and Education fund (AALDEF) and CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities, are the only two that do not explicitly aim to represent workers. The remaining six all represent workers (eg. Workers Awaaz, Workplace Project, DAMAYAN, Domestic Workers Association, etc.), but their organizations are all non-union-based.

organizing domestic workers, working as much on immigration and citizenship issues as on traditional workplace-related matters. The Association for the Defence of the Rights of Domestic Workers is one of the most active, an organization seeking legislative change to improve the conditions of domestic service. Its model of organizing is seen as the only one available for the sector: “at this moment, the only thing we can do is to reinforce organizations of the household workers, like this association” (Elvir, 1997: 155). Another major organization in Canada remains INTERCEDE, the Toronto-based organization that has campaigned in coalition with other advocacy groups for broader based bargaining, as well as for changes in immigration policies that affect workers’ citizenship and labour rights (Fudge, 1997). Focused primarily on immigrants, INTERCEDE reflects the importance of migrancy as a basis of mobilization and action, and of the salience of citizenship not only as an axis of inequality but as a mobilizing construct around which workplace-based claims are made (see Fudge, 1997).

Domestic worker organizing outside of North America, too, is primarily migrant-based non-union labour organizing through an association model. In Asia and the Middle East, especially where there is limited local capacity, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in association with other groups have become the main organizers of domestics, not unions. In Lebanon, for example, domestic worker organizing is dominated by NGOs that have organized primarily migrant constituencies and advocated on workplace-related issues in tandem with more broad-based issues relating to immigrant rights (Jureidini, 2002). Similarly, in India, Battacherjee (2002) reports the displacement of unions in labour organizing by NGOs who have taken on the burden of organizing foreign domestic workers. And in Indonesia, the same is evident as well (Ford, 2004), where the largest and most vocal organization mobilizing domestic workers, Solidaritas Perempuan, is an NGO rather than a traditional union (Silvey, 2004). Ford (2004), therefore, concludes that “advocacy for overseas migrant worker rights in Asia and the organization of foreign domestic workers have largely been the province of non-union bodies” (101).

A large amount of domestic worker organizing in Asian receiving countries is concentrated in Hong Kong, where the large numbers of mainly Filipina migrant domestic workers are

representative of an explosion of migrant workers. The Asian Migrant Centre is an NGO that remains among the most important centres of domestic worker organizing anywhere. And, it is representative of the association model of organizing domestics in Hong Kong. Of the more than 2,500 organizations and associations organizing overseas migrant workers in Hong Kong, only three – the Filipino Migrant Workers Union, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union, and the Asian Domestic Workers Union – are formally registered as unions (Ford, 2004). The thousands of other groups organize on a wider range of issues than traditional union organizing would, focusing on immigration-related matters, and even providing social and cultural supports.

In Europe, organizing foreign domestic workers is also based on the association model. The UK-based Kalayaan, a coalition of migrant support organizations, has been among the most active agencies campaigning intensively for the protection of migrant domestic workers. Mobilizing workers primarily on the basis of their compromised citizenship status, Kalayaan has, like its Canadian counterparts, actively sought change through legislation that targets both worker and immigrant rights, while at the same time offering a range of services for migrant domestic workers, including legal services, English classes, and services for finding emergency housing. The organization also functions as part of the Respect Network that has adopted a 10-point charter of women domestic workers' rights, many of which have political implications extending beyond the workplace. In many ways, the export of previously national patterns of domestic work to a global plane has translocated workers to more resource-rich environments and has thereby facilitated this proliferation of organizing efforts.

The result has been a resurgence of domestic worker organizing, but not necessarily always domestic worker unionizing. Organized labour has therefore had a mixed relationship with the association model. While some unions have joined forces with other organizations to create associations representing domestic workers, others have remained distant, viewing such broader associations as a substitute for, rather than a complement to, traditional labour organizing.

Organizing vs. Unionizing?

In the debate on the legitimacy of non-union forms of organizing in the sector, some argue that non-union models of

labour organizing are to be encouraged. Abu-Habib (1998), for example, argues that NGOs, in particular, are more aptly suited to fill the representation gap for domestics: “local and international NGOs and women’s groups and networks need to take a stronger position on this issue...the abuses faced by women domestic workers are serious and we should address them in the NGO community” (56). Others argue that non-traditional forms of labour organizing may be more suited to the specificities of paid domestic work than traditional unionism. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos (1997), for example, argue that “neither traditional union organizing, nor service-provider models can accomplish the upgrading of the occupation” (75). Others do not privilege either form of labour organizing, arguing that both union and non-union based forms expand the availability of representation for these vulnerable workers. For Ford (2004: 105), the debate is important given “[t]he empirical evidence about the extent and depth of non-union labour organizing that is occurring around issues concerning foreign domestic labour”. Does this proliferation of non-union forms of organizing then enhance or constrain the possibilities for union-based organizing in the sector? That is, do alternative forms of labour organizing complement unionization efforts, or threaten them?

The complementary nature of associations and unions is to be potentially defended by the argument that each offer different services to workers. Associations address citizenship rights more explicitly, making them more receptive to the needs of migrant domestic workers. They are also more capable of providing workers alternative spaces of political engagement given their compromised positioning vis-à-vis the polities of their host countries. The association model has become the dominant model of organizing foreign domestic workers, supplanting the role of unions in this sector. This is perhaps indicative of the extent to which their foci on service provision, immigration-related advocacy, and social and cultural support service the particular needs of this group of workers in ways that unions’ focus on workplace-related issues do not. If this is the explanation for the association model becoming the prevailing mode of representation for migrant domestic workers, does it hinder the cause of unionizing or promote it?

In some cases, the association model has actually been pivotal to enhancing the role of unions in this previously marginal

sector. The role of the Asian Migrant Centre, an NGO, in the establishment and expansion of more than a few unions, including the relatively successful Indonesian Migrant Workers' Union (IMWU) in Hong Kong, is notable. Two UK-based associations, Waling Waling and Kalayaan, have similarly played a role in supporting and expanding the domestic worker unionizing activities of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU).

But, a representative case study of the association model in action suggests that unionists' misgivings about this emerging model of representation deserve consideration. The case of Domestic Workers United's successful advocacy for New York City Local Law 33 of 2002 suggests that domestic worker organizing can sometimes be at the expense of their unionization. Domestic Workers United is arguably one of the most active groups organizing domestic workers in New York City. While the campaign for Local Law 33 was successful, and represented a victory for workers, it was not, as Hyde (2004) demonstrates, a victory for traditional union representation. Unions competed with an association of legal advocacy groups, law school clinics, ethnic or immigrant advocacy groups, and even public entities such as the New York State Attorney General. In this "tetralogy of representation," as Hyde calls it, unionization was threatened, not enhanced. This type of organizing potentially defeats the purposes of the collective organization of workers, since it does not empower a group of workers to take ownership of their own sustained representation. "The advocacy groups are self-designated", argues Hyde, generating a system of representation that is often not self-sustaining beyond particular advocacy campaigns. As a result, the association model, while not always seeking to substitute for union-based organizing, can at times undermine the cause of unionism. This produces a rather deleterious equation, in which the organizing of domestic workers may actually undermine their unionization.

The association model, where it functions as a *substitute* for unionizing, remains therefore problematic. By organizing primarily on the basis of gendered migrancy, some contemporary domestic worker organizing can unwittingly reproduce the logic that domestic work is women's work and the work of women of colour, and undercuts a consciousness of the structural class dynamics that are important in shaping the institution. In legal reform advocacy, especially the individual case-centred forms of

legal aid, the root of the exploitation of this type of work remains unchallenged (see Silvey, 2004). As Constable (1997) summarises: “[t]he problem is that despite the important improvements that domestic workers’ organizations have helped bring about, the overall structural position of domestic workers remains relatively unchanged” (209).

This failure of structural change is complicated by the failure of the association model to distinguish between domestic worker advocacy motivated by workers themselves, and the provision of domestic worker *services* usually by non-worker-established organizations. For example, many of the associations for domestic workers exist in partnership with legal aid and other service-based advocacy groups that mobilize workers, but are not originated by workers. This serves to construct domestic workers as client recipients, instead of building workers’ capacity to be the innovators and engines of their own organizing (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997). Some NGOs, established and staffed from outside the community of domestic workers, in their efforts to aide domestic workers, paradoxically construct them as victims and recipients of good will, disrupting possibilities for their own agency (Gibson, Law and McKay, 2001).

Even when workers are drawn into the daily operations of such organizations, unionists remain legitimately suspicious of the representivity of such non-union labour advocacy organizations. As limited-member organizations whose leaders are not elected nor accountable, the extent to which associational organizing truly represents a model of authentic representation for domestic workers is unclear. And, more often than not, the founders and directors of various organizations that attempt to organize domestic workers, however well-intentioned and committed to the sector they may be, are often not workers themselves, nor indeed, from the communities they seek to represent.

In the end, while the association model may be useful for expanding the range of representation available for domestic workers, when it functions to undermine rather than enhance the work of unions, this emerging model of representation potentially weakens the collective cause of workers. A competing model of organization has therefore emerged, one that organizes domestic workers as *workers*, while at the same time creatively adapting existing strategies of union organizing to the specificities of care work in a globalizing era.

Unionizing Domestics: The Union Model

Globalization's erosion of the formal and production-based sectors of national economies has had dramatic consequences for the unionized labour movement. Ironically, however, in globalization's shadow lies a workforce that offers the possibility for a contemporary revitalisation of the labour movement. After more than a century of indifference from organized labour, reproductive workers are beginning to turn the attention of unionists. In an emerging union model of organizing care workers in globalized economies, unions have recognized the opportunities in care work for increasing union density (Gapasin and Yates, 1997; Chang, 2000; Cranford and Ladd, 2003). The result has been a concerted effort to deconstruct the prevailing myth that the sector is unorganizable through active efforts to incorporate this predominantly female and immigrant workforce into the ranks of the organized labour movement.

Such heightened sensitivity to the concerns of the low-wage service sector, in particular those of care workers, has sparked nothing less than a "labour renaissance of sorts" (Smith, 2000: 50). Across the global North, unions have sought to establish effective representation for domestics, and where they have, these workers have responded in ways that reflect their eagerness to be unionized. In this union model, domestic workers are being organized on the basis of their status as workers. But unions have had to creatively adapt their traditional labour organizing strategies to more effectively represent a predominantly female, migrant, and reproductive workforce.

In European countries, where many migrant domestic workers live and work, campaigns for the unionization of domestics have adopted these creative strategies and have been gaining ground. In Switzerland, the SIT (Interprofessional Workers' Union) has actively organized migrant women domestic workers, abandoning workplace organizing for community-based mobilization, and focusing on both service-oriented advocacy, and worker empowerment (ICFTU, 2002). In Belgium, Filipina domestics have been organized by the FGTB trade union federation, which provides them with legal and administrative assistance. Similarly, in Portugal, the trade union confederation, UGT, has organized various congresses on the issue of immigrant care workers, and its cleaning sector affiliate, the SLEDA, is organizing domestic workers on the ground (ICFTU, 2002) by focusing

on the specific needs of care workers, rather than imposing models of organizing from other sectors on to this one. And, in Great Britain, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) has achieved a degree of success in representing and mobilizing migrant domestic workers for change by establishing links with community-based organizations, but at the same time privileging worker-controlled models of collective representation.

Ironically, the United States labour movement, given its lower rate of unionization, has been at the forefront of the union model. There, the challenge of care workers has been taken up by unions in creative ways with phenomenal results. In 1995, the AFL-CIO recognized the impact of declining union membership in the new economy and launched a program to prioritize organizing the unorganized (Delp and Quan, 2002). During the 1990s, there were some significant union organizing successes in the previously unorganized low-wage service sector, especially the 'Justice for Janitors' campaign. But, it was the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 434B's campaign to organize home-based care workers that was to produce the single biggest organizing victory for the US labour movement since the United Auto Workers victory at Ford's River Rouge plant in 1941 (Stone, 2000). Despite their fragmentation in private homes, with no single employer, and more than one hundred languages spoken by the workforce, nearly 74,000 homecare workers, mainly low-wage and female ethnic minorities, were successfully unionized by the SEIU (Delp and Quan, 2002).

Importantly, the success was based on a dual strategy of innovative organizing, and a political focus. Traditional strategies of labour organizing, which presume a singular workplace, singular employer, and a male production worker, were abandoned in favour of strategies more specifically suited to the structural features of private care work. Local 434B focused on women's community lives, and developed dedicated strategies of grass-roots and bus-stop activism for mobilizing workers in public spaces. SEIU Local 434B's success, therefore, "relied upon novel approaches to the unique structural attributes" of care work (Smith, 2000: 75).

The campaign also pursued political objectives. Rather than establishing services for workers that provide case-by-case advocacy, or pursuing short-term legislative gains – features of much of the contemporary organizing for domestic workers – the

union poured resources into a political campaign that targeted the structural sources of exploitation for this group of workers. David Rolf, SEIU Local 434B leader, argued that this was integral to the strategy: “key to the activism was a political focus” (Interview, cited by Delp and Quan, 2002). This focus on political and structural change remains critical since it has established the union model as a model of representation that recognizes the political economy of care work in ways that NGO, community organizing, and service-based advocacy, sometimes does not. Kirk Adams, former AFL-CIO director of organizing, confirms that care work “is much broader than an organizing issue. It is a policy issue” (Interview, cited in Delp and Quan, 2002).

It was this critical insight that defined Local 434B’s victory. For while this campaign’s success is often defined in terms of the numbers mobilized, its real success was the significant advancement of the rights of this group of workers through innovative legislative gains that targeted the basic structure of the work and the industrial relations system. In the same moment, Local 434B’s success was transformed from the success of care workers alone to that of the labour movement as a whole.

Indeed, the union model of organizing domestic workers is an important parallel model of representation emerging amongst transnational care workers that the mainstream labour movement can no longer afford to ignore. While immigrant workers have been recognized as a significant new element of globalization’s transformation of the workforce (Milkman, 2000), it remains important for the union movement to organize based on categories of workers. The unionization of care workers is encouragingly being recognized as important not only for the representation of domestics, but for the vitality of the labour movement.

The extent to which organized labour has extended itself to support existing efforts by domestic workers to unionize is far more limited, and signals an important area for further consideration. Smith (2000) highlights various initiatives (for example, hiring halls) that may represent opportunities for the expansion of existing domestic worker unions. Support from more established unions for embryonic efforts by care workers to establish their own unions must remain the goal of this revitalized energy within organized labour for the plight of domestics.

Where this has not yet happened, and existing unions

have attempted to mobilize domestics, it has creatively adapted traditional unionism to the specificities of a predominantly immigrant, female, and reproductive workforce. Cobble (1996) argues that the “labour movement as we know it today was created to meet the needs of a male, factory workforce. If it is to appeal to women and in particular to the majority of women who work in service occupations, it must rethink its fundamental assumptions about organizing and representation” (336). The case of domestic worker organizing through a union model suggests that traditional labour organizing trained on unorganized care workers without due consideration for the sector’s specificity cannot succeed. At the same time, the constant referencing of the specificity of the sector in denying more sustained efforts at unionization is illegitimate in light of the demonstrated organizing potential of these workers globally. Where the union-based labour movement has succeeded in demystifying the presumed status of this group of workers as unorganizable, they have opened up the possibilities for effective worker-controlled representation of one of the most important, yet neglected, labour forces of globalization. In doing so, they have not only enhanced the capacity for worker-directed organizing in the highly exploitative care work sector, but they have enhanced the labour movement at a time when globalization has compromised its vitality.

Conclusion

Domestic workers are rendered invisible by more than just their physical labouring in private spaces behind closed doors. Narratives of globalization silence their role in the contemporary political economy of global capitalism, and mainstream labour has historically failed to acknowledge their presence as workers capable of unionization. This invisibility is enforced most potently by the discursive construction of domestics as unorganizable.

In a powerful challenge to this invisibility, domestic workers have come out of the shadow of globalization to establish their presence precisely by demonstrating that they are indeed organizable. Globally, a proliferation of domestic worker organizing has generated widespread enthusiasm about the possibilities for organizing in this sector. But, the structure of representation in this contemporary expansion of domestic worker organizing is bifurcated.

An association model of organizing increasingly mobilizes workers based on globalization's inscription of migrancy as one of the lived experience of exploitation. In organizations, coalitions, and campaigns, this model of representation has therefore redefined the nature and scope of worker representation. In both sending and receiving countries, non-governmental and other non-union labour advocacy organizations continue to proliferate, suggesting a domestic revolution. However, the extent to which much of this organizing represents a strategy for sustained, organic, worker-controlled collective representation is not clear. In fact, in some cases, the association model has arguably undermined the possibilities for unionization.

A union model, alternatively, mobilizes domestics based on their status as workers, thereby recovering the salience of class in the new economy. Historically shunned by the mainstream labour movement as unorganizable, organized labour in the context of globalization now, ironically, depends on the once-questioned capacity of domestic workers to unionize. But, rather than simply being incorporated into the labour movement, care work is uniquely positioned to transform unionism to creatively develop more broad-based strategies of organizing reproductive workers who are predominantly women of colour. In relation, these unionization efforts need to move beyond incorporation, to actively support domestic workers in their efforts to establish their own unions.

While it is important to disaggregate the different kinds of organizing that currently characterises the landscape of domestic worker mobilization, and to trace the respective consequences of different models of organizing for the effective representation of workers, it is actually the simple fact of organization in the sector that is most critical to this analysis. In the context of globalization's unequal re-distribution of reproductive labour, domestic workers have successfully disrupted the construction of their sector as unorganizable. Now, the struggle is to ensure that their efforts at organization successfully disrupt the politics of reproduction engendered by globalization.

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