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On the corner: Gender, race, and the making of informal day labor markets in New York City and San Francisco

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**On the corner: Gender, race, and the making of informal day labor
markets in New York City and San Francisco**

by

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**On the corner: Gender, race, and the making of informal day labor
markets in New York City and San Francisco**

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This dissertation is an ethnographic exploration of Latin American migrant women who engage in day-wage labor in two distinct organizational settings: an informal street-corner market located in Brooklyn, New York and a worker center in San Francisco's Mission District. Based on sixteen months of fieldwork consisting of interviews and participant observation, my research follows these women's daily search for casual employment and their ongoing negotiations and contestations with state and non-state actors who seek to visibilize their social, structural, and sexual vulnerabilities. More specifically, this dissertation seeks to provide insight into how and why Latin American migrant women turn to this form of self employment over other types of low-wage work, and how day-wage labor can be perceived as favorable, even desirable, by women with limited labor market opportunities.

Drawing on the Sociology of Gender, Labor, and Immigration, I incorporate three levels of analysis. At the micro level, I examine Latina day laborers' livelihood strategies and solicitation practices across two day labor organizational settings: an open-air street-corner market in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and a worker center located in San Francisco's Mission District. My findings show that while the Brooklyn corner is one of the few informal open-air day labor markets in the country where women gather to solicit

temporary employment, the San Francisco worker center attracts a considerable number of migrant women looking to secure employment through its domestic worker collective in exchange for their activism and labor organizing. On a meso level, I examine how day labor markets have become an especially fertile ground for the enactment of innovative labor organizing strategies, particularly through the emergence of worker centers. My findings highlight how state and non-state actors, in various entanglements, employ different tactics to fashion a particular type of day labor behavior and idealized forms of employment solicitation. At a macro or structural level, I examine the expansion of state apparatuses for immigration regulation, particularly the development of internal governing schemes aimed at policing migrant populations. I situate the creation of worker centers on a continuum of local forms of social control that the state mobilizes to manage “illegal” migrants.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Soliciting temporary manual labor in public venues has a long history in the U.S. (Valenzuela 2003). So called “shape-up” sites were common in cities like New York and other Northeast ports in the 1800s, where Irish immigrant dockworkers were hired on an as-needed basis. Irish and African American women, who were concentrated in the domestic labor market sector, also gathered at these sites (Martinez 1973). In the twentieth century, as reported in *The Crisis* in 1935, and again in the 1950s in *The New York Compass*, African American domestic workers gathered on street-corners in the Bronx to solicit employment by the hour or for a day. This market came to be known as the Bronx Slave Market. In California at the turn of the twentieth-century, Mexican day laborers or “hobos” were concentrated in the agricultural sector, but also in urban day labor markets in cities like Los Angeles (Valenzuela 1999). Structural forces such as the Great Depression, and later, World War II, fueled the day labor industry. Historically then, day labor has not been exclusive to men or industries such as construction.

Contemporary day labor markets continue to be shaped by regional economic and racial formations (Valenzuela 2003), as well as macro-processes such as globalization, neoliberal restructuring, and immigration. A segmented U.S. labor market, the growth of flexible employment and the service industry, combined with massive immigration created the structural conditions for day labor to proliferate on a much larger scale. Day labor sites are now visible across the U.S. (Valenzuela et al. 2006), including new rural, suburban and urban gateways throughout the South, Midwest and Northeast (Varsanyi 2011; Massey 2008). A national survey of day labor conducted in 2004 found that Latino migrant men make up the majority of this labor force, many of them undocumented and largely

dependent on casual wage labor for their livelihood (Valenzuela et al. 2006). Often viewed as a first or last resort for securing paid work among groups of migrated people, day labor markets also serve as a barometer for cities' ability to absorb “unskilled” workers into its paid workforce (Shah 2014).

Although women have a long trajectory in day wage labor markets, they have been largely overlooked in the literature on day labor, much of which deals with demographic considerations of the workforce. This omission can be attributed, in part, to inconsistent definitions of day labor. One of most commonly used definitions is that proposed by Valenzuela, as “the practice of searching for work in open-air, informal markets such as street corners or in formal temp agencies” (2003:307). This definition includes both formal and informal day labor, and is described as a type of temporary employment arrangement that is characterized by hazardous work conditions, lack of fringe benefits, and insecurity given that it entails a daily search and procurement of employment. The type of day labor that this dissertation is concerned with is the informal variety, which generally confers a daily search of employment in open-air markets. However, within the informal category, there is another organizational configuration, that of “regulated” sites or worker centers, which more closely resemble formal temp agencies (Valenzuela and Melendez 2003).

Given that day labor studies have largely focused on informal open-air markets where Latino migrant men are most visible and likely to be employed in male-dominated industries like construction and landscaping (Valenzuela 1999), women are largely ignored. Women, however, working in domestic industries such as housecleaning and care work are also “day laborers” in that they typically contract for a few hours and experience the contingency and insecurity that is characteristic of the day labor employment arrangement (Kennedy 2010). Moreover, women have and do solicit temporary employment in public settings such as street-corners and worker centers, and thus can

hardly be referred to as the “new” face of day labor (Gorman 2007). Still, much of the literature on day labor, in framing day wage labor markets as male-dominated “islands of despotism” (Peck and Theodore 2012), inadvertently suggests that these spaces are somehow unsafe or inhospitable to women.

Based on sixteen months of ethnographic fieldwork consisting of interviews and participant observation, my dissertation, *On the corner: Gender, race, and the making of informal day labor markets in New York City and San Francisco*, hitches together the literature on migration, intimate labor, and labor organizing to examine the proliferation of nonstandard work arrangements in postindustrial economies, and the organizing strategies that have emerged to advance the rights of low-wage migrant workers. I incorporate three levels of analysis. At the micro level, I examine Latina day laborers' livelihood strategies and solicitation practices across two distinct day labor organizational settings: an open-air street-corner market in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and a worker center located in San Francisco's Mission District. While the Brooklyn corner is one of the few informal open-air day labor markets in the country where women gather to solicit temporary employment, the San Francisco worker center attracts a considerable number of migrant women looking to secure employment through its domestic worker collective. The comparison of these two sites and organizational settings allows for a systematic examination of the conditions that make day labor possible for migrant women. On a meso level, I examine how day labor markets have become an especially fertile arena for the enactment of ground-breaking labor organizing strategies, particularly for migrant women through the worker center movement (Milkman and Terriquez 2012). Here I am concerned with Latina migrant workers' daily negotiations with state and non-state actors who not only seek to address their social, structural, and sexual vulnerabilities, but ultimately fashion a particular type of day labor behavior and idealized forms of employment solicitation. At a macro or structural level, I

examine the expansion of state apparatuses for immigration regulation (De Genova 2013; Gonzalez 2013), particularly the development of internal governing schemes aimed at policing migrant populations (Heyman 2014; Inda 2006; Varsanyi 2011, 2008b). I situate the creation of worker centers on a continuum of local forms of social control that the state mobilizes to manage “illegal” migrants.

The questions that inform this project are the following:

1. What are the structural conditions that enable Latina migrant women's participation in this regime of precarious employment? How does the option of day wage labor fit in the limited opportunities available to Latina migrant women?
2. What are the practices that regulate the use of day labor spaces, and how does gender, race, and citizenship shape how these spaces are inhabited and experienced? How do women go about promoting their labor against a backdrop of anonymity, hyper-flexibility, and disposability?
3. What is the role of the state in the creation and management of day labor markets? How do state and non-state actors, in various configurations and entanglements, seek to fashion a particular type of day labor behavior?

This introductory chapter is organized as follows: First, I provide an overview of the day labor literature to contextualize the need to examine women’s participation in this precarious industry. More specifically, I highlight the a) three macro-structural frameworks that are used to explain the emergence and expansion of day labor markets in the U.S.; b) analyses that examine the cultural meanings day laborers attribute to their work; and c) literature on domestic labor, and the parallels between “day work” and “day labor.” Second, I present the conceptual framework that undergirds this research project. This study draws on the three theoretical discussions within the sociology of gender, labor

organizing, and critical migration studies, mainly a) intimate economies, b) immigrant organizing and the regulation of informal day labor, and c) practices of border and migration management. Third, I present my methodological approach, which includes a brief discussion about ethnography, terminology, and research site selection. I conclude with an overview of the structure of the dissertation.

BACKGROUND

An Overview of Informal Day Labor Markets

Informal day labor is considered the epitome of casualized and contingent employment (Peck and Theodore 2012). Although there is no generally agreed-upon definition, the term usually refers to the daily practice of searching for work in public or open-air settings such as street corners, storefronts, parking lots, and in recent years, worker centers (Valenzuela 2003). It is considered a form of precarious employment arrangement because of the unpredictability and variability of the work, the unsafe and often exploitative working conditions in which it takes place, the absence of workplace benefits, as well as the (alleged) undesirability of the work. Since day laborers are generally hired on an as-needed basis and by the hour, employers can evade responsibilities such as providing unemployment and workers' compensation insurance. Also, given the lack of governmental oversight and enforcement of workplace laws and regulations, day laborers are often hired to perform labor-intensive work in particularly hazardous industries such as construction. The pay for day labor is generally low, irregular, and insecure.

In terms of the workers themselves, a national day labor survey (NDLS) conducted by Valenzuela and his team in 2004 revealed that the workforce is predominantly male, Latino (mostly Mexican), and migrant (mostly unauthorized). Their employers generally include construction contractors, landscaping companies, small business owners, and

private households that hire workers for short-term, often hourly, manual tasks. These day labor exchanges are considered informal in that they are cash based, off-the-books transactions that are untaxed and unregulated by the state. The national day labor survey also found that day laborers typically search for work on a full-time basis, often five or more days a week. At most, however, day laborers are employed two to three days per week. The survey also revealed that the majority of workers rely on this type of work as their sole source of income. Despite (or because of) the precariousness, instability, and high risk associated with day labor, contingent labor arrangements such as these have become an increasingly important means of securing employment for many migrant and displaced workers (Valenzuela 2003). While day labor was once confined to the larger gateway cities, such as Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago, and areas with historically high levels of international migration, day labor sites are now visible in smaller towns and suburbs. This is particularly the case in the South, Midwest and Northeast of the U.S. given more recent changes in migratory routes and patterns of migrant settlement (Peck and Theodore 2012).

Scholars generally use three theoretical frameworks to explain the emergence and expansion of day labor markets in the U.S. The first points to macro-structural forces such as globalization, immigration, and economic restructuring. Sassen (2001), for instance, argues that globalization, the restructuring of regional economies (and the growth of informality), and massive migration to “global cities” has created the conditions for these markets to emerge, where the demand for low-wage, flexible, and part-time work such as day labor proliferates. The second approach locates day labor in a broader context of expanding contingent and nonstandard employment relations. Peck and Theodore (2012), for example, argue that like other forms of contingent work, the growth of day labor markets has occurred in the wake of the erosion of core employment protections since the

early 1980s, due in part to “modernizing” forces of workforce systems in advanced economies. Accordingly, the flexibilization of labor relations over the last few decades have compelled employers to restructure employment arrangements, roll-back social protections, and externalize the costs associated with maintaining a stable workforce (Theodore et al. 2008). Firms have managed to do this by cutting labor costs and introducing new forms of labor flexibility through the adoption of various contingent work arrangements. These include turning to temporary staffing agencies and employing casual laborers off the books to meet their labor needs. Firms embrace these casual hiring practices in order to increase their competitiveness and restore profit margins. The third frame is the neoclassical economic approach that explains the proliferation of day labor on the basis of labor demand and supply schedules. This view predicts an efficient, voluntary exchange between employers and workers where the economic rules of efficiency, perfect competition, and supply and demand converge. Overlooked in this approach is the role various labor market intermediaries play in shaping local opportunity structures and creating recognizable day labor markets, such as worker centers, which are increasingly sorting workers into regional urban labor markets.

This vast, and growing, literature on day labor has alerted us to the precarious and often highly exploitative nature of this industry, as well as the daily struggles workers are confronted with in trying to ensure their livelihood. We now know, for instance, that it is not uncommon for migrant day laborers to experience wage theft, mistreatment, and harassment at the hands of their employers, the police, and communities in which they live and solicit employment. The basis of my critique of this literature is that while it has given us a general sense of the industry by “documenting its day-to-day activities and providing a picture of how the market is organized” (Valenzuela 2003:327), we lose sight of several important considerations. First, with these studies we often do not get a sense of the

communities in which these hiring sites are embedded, particularly the local political and economic interests as well as assemblage of state and non-state actors that shape these informal labor markets. Non-state actors including religious institutions and community-based organizations (CBOs) are particularly important here since they often support these sites, with or without the endorsement of subnational governments, and assist day laborers in their search for employment.

Second, this literature not only overlooks the role of the state in shaping these labor markets, but also how social institutions and gender norms influence who can procure employment in the public domain. The exclusive focus on hiring sites without accounting for the political, economic, and social conditions that create the opportunity structures for these markets to emerge leaves us with an apolitical and decontextualized account of how day labor markets operate. The state, for instance, is particularly important in shaping local day labor markets through the control and regulation of urban space through local ordinances such as those prohibiting loitering, soliciting, and disorderly conduct such as blocking sidewalks and obstructing vehicular traffic. Moreover, informal day labor markets need to be situated in a broader context of increased immigration regulation, criminalization and surveillance, particularly the development of internal governing schemes aimed at policing migrant populations. My analysis of day labor markets is grounded on a particular constellation of social, political and economic circumstances operating at multiple scales.

Masculinity, Gendered Worth and Dignified Work

Scholars using ethnographic methods such as Malpica (1996) and Turnovsky (2004) have focused their analyses on the practice of day labor or “doing the corner” (Turnovsky 2006a, 2006b). Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz (2004) examined the experience

of injury, illness and disability among undocumented Latino day laborers in San Francisco. Through a gender lens, they show how constructions of masculine identity organize the experience of embodied social suffering among workers who are rendered vulnerable by the structural conditions of their undocumented status and limited work prospects. Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz note that this gendered dynamic becomes all the more apparent when migrant workers become injured, disabled and thus unable to fulfill their masculine (breadwinner) obligations of maintaining their families back home. González-López (2006) found that day laborers work under conditions that expose them not only to economic exploitation but sexual harassment by their employers.

Building on Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz (2004), Purser (2009) examined the arrangements by which migrant day laborers make their work more tolerable and enjoyable. In her ethnographic study of two day labor sites in California—a worker center and a street-corner market—Purser found that day laborers engage in a process of “boundary work,” drawing on gendered imagery to distance themselves from each other and reaffirm their masculinity. She was particularly interested in documenting the specific practices and discourses through which migrant day laborers constituted a masculine, hardworking “self.” Purser found that how migrant men searched for work—e.g., soliciting from a street corner as opposed to a worker center—was seen to be “a measure of their character, a mark of their masculinity, and an indicator of their moral worth” (2009: 125). Street corner day laborers, for instance, emphasized their perceived autonomy, assertiveness, and shrewdness to differentiate themselves from those who sought work through the worker center. In their eyes, day laborers who awaited work indoors were lazy, deferential, and incompetent “welfare queens” who were dependent on government “hand-outs” (2009:128) for their survival. For those on the corner, ambition, skill, and hard work differentiated them from their more “effeminate” counterparts housed in the worker center.

The men thus drew on gendered imagery to make moral judgments of those who rely on the center as their job-searching strategy. Purser argues that this perceived autonomy allowed the men to challenge “widespread depictions of themselves as unskilled laborers, scavenging for crumbs at the bottom of the labor market” (2009:127). Accordingly, “‘real workers’ and ‘real men’ look for work in the street” (2009:130).

Unlike the men on the street corner who turned the uncertainty characteristic of this casual labor market into a masculine endeavor and virtue of risk-taking, those in the center viewed themselves as members of a community, as bearers of rights, and thus worthy of respect. The men at the center engaged in the same kind of boundary work as their street counterparts by labeling the latter as desperate and compromising their safety by seeking work in the streets. For them, the center is not only more dignified, but more appropriately masculine. Some workers, moreover, used gendered imagery of prostitution (e.g., men getting picked up by other men) in framing the differences and symbolic order between the men at the worker center and the men on the street corners. Purser notes that “if standing on the corner is constituted as feminine submission to, and homoerotic tension under, the objectifying gaze of other men, then waiting at the center is constituted as appropriately masculine, a place for ‘serious and hardworking’ men” (Purser 2009:133). She argues that through boundary work participants in each site construct a set of moral boundaries via identification and repudiation of what they interpret to be the feminine submission exemplified by the day laborers in the other site. So that while soliciting work from the curbside is constructed as “masculine” by one set of actors, another views it as “feminine.” Her findings suggest that these cultural meanings are the vehicle through which the men constitute their daily quest for work as dignified. This quest for dignity, she concludes, “can lead workers to be complicit with their own exploitation and thwart the emergence of

the sense of commonality and feelings of solidarity that are needed to collectively organize day laborers” (Purser 2009:135).

These ethnographic studies alert us to the importance of identity and cultural considerations that shape the meanings day laborers attribute to their work and solicitation practices. They also highlight the extent to which masculinity is constituted and sustained through bodily performance, and how gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained (Connell 1995), as Bourgois and his colleagues suggest is the case when day laborers experience an illness or injury. A limitation of this work, however, is that it tends to focus on the interactional level, which often precludes a deeper discussion about power and “relations of ruling” (Smith 1987: 3). According to Smith, these relations encompass “that total complex of activities, differentiated into many spheres” through which we are ruled and through which we participate in ruling (Smith 1990). In the case of Purser, while she documents the specific practices and discourses through which migrant day laborers constituted a masculine, hardworking “self,” she loses valuable context, specifically in terms of the actual communities in which these men live and work. One is left wondering how this context mediates between the individual worldview she presents, and the cultural and structural context in which it is forged. While the cultural meanings day laborers attach to their work as part of their creative pursuit of dignity is important, we do not know enough about the actual benefits (and limitations) street corners confer relative to worker centers, and what it is about these different organizational structures that make one type a more attractive option than the other.

Women, Domestic Labor, and a Day’s Work

While migrant women are rendered invisible in day labor studies, they are no strangers to contingent work in the United States. During the Great Depression, for

instance, in the notorious Bronx Slave Market, African American women gathered on street corners and waited for white, mostly Jewish, women to pick them up for a day's work as domestic workers. Those women "with the most calloused knees would be hired first," since "worn knees indicated that the women were accustomed to scrubbing floors" (Sullivan 2001). Today, however, the most common domestic labor arrangement is day work, not full-time live-in or live-out domestic work. Moreover, Mary Romero (1992) and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) contend that informal social networks are the most important resource women rely on to secure domestic work. Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that "network contacts, or the lack thereof, can make you or break you" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001:74) since employers will not hire someone to clean their home without referrals, and workers do not feel comfortable going to the homes of complete strangers. Those women who seek work through informal social networks rely on referrals and recommendations from friends, family, and colleagues. Personal referrals, in other words, are reassuring for all parties involved. Hondagneu-Sotelo, however, does not consider other ways through which women come into domestic "day work," mainly through worker centers or street-corner markets.

To this effect, Kennedy (2010) contends that in the vast underground economy of domestic service, migrant women seek work through a combination of informal social networks, worker centers, employment agencies, or by gathering on a street corner. She argues that what Romero and others call domestic "day work," is in fact "day labor" given the variability and unpredictability of the work, the low wages, and lack of fringe benefits it confers. Feminist scholars have consistently argued that women are often left out of conversations about work, economic restructuring, and global migrations. Men, according to Pratt, "often feature as entrepreneurs, career-builders, adventurers and breadwinners who navigate transnational circuits with fluidity and ease, while women are alternatively

taken to be truants from globalised economic webs, stereotyped as exotic, subservient or victimised, or relegated to playing supporting roles, usually in the domestic sphere” (2003:159). An important component of any feminist project then is to reveal how this literature has systematically excluded women, and that in studying these contingent labor markets as gender-neutral phenomena we are actually contributing to the reification of their exclusion. As Rosenberg and Howard (2009) note, “integrating these theorizations of gender into all aspects of sociology (thereby freeing gender from the ghetto of the family), eschewing a fictive neutrality in favor of a liberatory politics, and transforming power relations within the academy” (2009:675) is central to a feminist project.

My study contributes to the day labor literature by examining the conditions that enable women's participation in this “regime of precarious employment” (Theodore 2003). In the section that follows I present my conceptual framework, which draws on on the Sociology of Gender, Labor, and Immigration, to examine: a) the structural conditions that shape women's participation in the day labor industry; b) their livelihood strategies and solicitation practices; and c) how state and non-state actors, in various entanglements, employ different tactics to fashion a particular type of day labor behavior and idealized forms of employment solicitation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is informed by three important theoretical discussions within the sociology of gender, labor organizing, and critical migration studies. The first concerns the literature on informal day labor markets, its gendered assumptions, and inability to account for women. My dissertation hitches together “intimate labor” (Boris and Parreñas 2010) and informal day labor (Valenzuela 2003) to account for women's experiences in this precarious employment regime, including the stigma attached to street-based solicitation

and the emergence of regular and intermittent sexual commerce—both sex work and sex for (future or continued) work—in spaces sanctioned strictly for domestic and care work. The second deals with the emergence of labor organizing strategies among low-wage migrant workers such as domestic workers and day laborers through the worker center movement. Viewed as the “best-solution” for regulating informal day labor exchanges and protecting migrant workers, my dissertation shows how worker centers emerge as state-sponsored institutions that purport to provide care to day laborers in exchange for increased surveillance and seclusion. Drawing on Foucault's (2000) analytic of governmentality, I contend that while day labor centers are hardly oppressive instruments of state authority, they ultimately seek to transform day laborers into proper neoliberal subjects. The third is the expansion of state apparatuses of immigration regulation, criminalization, and surveillance through the development of internal governing schemes aimed at policing migrant populations. Here I situate the creation of worker centers along a continuum of local forms of social control that the state mobilizes to manage “illegal” migrants, making these institutions part and parcel of the national project.

Informal Day Labor and Intimate Economies

In “gateway” cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York, migrant workers have long gathered on street-corners, storefronts, and busy intersections to solicit temporary employment in construction, landscaping and related industries. In recent years, informal day labor hiring sites have expanded into almost every metropolitan area and all regions in the U.S. (Valenzuela et al. 2006). Although undocumented Latino men from Mexico and Central America are overrepresented in this precarious industry, women also turn to street-corner labor markets and worker centers to procure temporary employment. Much of the literature on informal day labor, however, overlooks women

largely because their involvement in the industry is not as visible as men's. Moreover, day labor scholars (Valenzuela, Theodore, Meléndez and González 2006) contend that the demand for flexible labor is most acute in industries such as construction, where workplace violations are also rampant. As such, informal day labor markets are framed as male-dominated “islands of despotism” (Peck and Theodore 2012) that are somehow unsafe or inhospitable to women.

This study draws on the literature on “intimate labor” (Boris and Parreñas 2010) to situate women’s participation in informal day labor, and contextualize the intimate labors they are hired to perform. In their edited volume, Boris and Parreñas put forth a continuum of “intimate labor” that encompasses the previously differentiated and discreet categories of care, sex, and domestic work. This continuum seeks to challenge “the separation of home from work, work from labor, productive and nonproductive labor that has characterized capitalist globalization” (Boris and Parreñas 2010:2), bridging different types of work that have historically been assumed to be the unpaid responsibility of women, lower classes, or racial outsiders (Nakano Glenn 2010). They contend that the presence of dirt, bodies, and intimacy—in providing household tasks, bodily and psychic intimacy, and emotional labor—contributes to the stigmatization of such work and those who perform it. They note, however, that while the process of intimate labor is not uniform, it remains the primary source of livelihood for women around the world. Its devaluation is ultimately attributed to the notion that it is work that has been historically performed by women without remuneration, in their roles as slaves, mothers, wives, and caregivers, as well as the socially precarious status of the doers.

The concept of intimate labor is useful when contextualizing women’s work in informal day labor markets. While the literature on day labor focuses on men’s experiences in male-dominated industries such as construction, the literature on intimate labor focuses

on how neoliberalism impacts family life, particularly how households resolve what is perceived to be a gendered labor crisis at home resulting from women's increasing participation in paid employment, mainly by hiring outside help. In New York, for instance, the emergence of the Brooklyn street-corner market in Williamsburg can be attributed to growing demand by ultra-Orthodox households for inexpensive, flexible household labor. Moreover, the fact that this market caters largely to a Hasidic Jewish clientele creates an aura of safety that allows migrant women to solicit employment on the street free from community and police harassment. Driven by the significant growth of the Orthodox population in Brooklyn in recent decades, as well as the depletion of factory and ancillary jobs in the area, this "human marketplace" (Martínez 1976) now attracts hundreds of migrant women from the different boroughs in hopes of securing a day's work or "fractions of jobs" (Peck and Theodore 2001). My research shows that while women use the corner primarily to solicit contracts for household work in ultra-Orthodox Jewish households, they also solicit clients for sex work or exchange sexual services for continued or future employment. As result, this street-corner market becomes a site of regular or intermittent solicitation for sexual commerce, often alongside other income-generating activities.

Immigrant Organizing and the Regulation of Informal Day Labor

The second area of research my dissertation draws on deals with labor organizing strategies among Latina migrant workers who straddle both informal and intimate economies. My research brings the literature on intimate labor into conversation with the sociology of social movements to examine the mobilization efforts pursued by the worker center movement (Fine 2006). Drawing on participant observation and fieldwork in a day labor worker center, the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective (SFDLP-WC), my dissertation shows that as informal hiring sites like the Brooklyn

corner are framed as spaces that expose an already vulnerable group of Latina/o undocumented migrant workers to exploitation, harassment, and abuse, day labor worker centers emerge to “protect” workers by providing a “safe space” for them to gather and await employment (Theodore, Valenzuela, and Meléndez 2008, 2009). This protection, however, comes in exchange for increased state surveillance and seclusion.

Drawing on Foucault's (2000) analytic of governmentality, I contend that day labor centers like the SF day labor program occupy a complex and often contradictory position as trustees, providing care and protection to “illegal” migrant populations. On the one hand, worker centers claim to know not only what workers need but what is best for them, and on the other, actively work to “empower” migrant workers to claim their rights and take on duties of democratic citizenship. In my dissertation I focus on the women's wing of the day labor center as it is women members who are seen as the ideal subjects for targeted intervention. I contend that the “responsibilization” (Foucault 1988) of migrant women that these centers promote has gone hand-in-hand with a rise in the criminalization of poverty — and of male poverty in particular — through the police and courts. As a result, men are made redundant by the restructuring of capitalism and disproportionately the targets of coercive strategies of containment.

Speaking of the current targeting of Latino men for deportation, Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013) note that this gendered pattern of forced removal represents a shift from restrictionist immigration policies that had historically focused on keeping women out to a situation where exclusionary and enforcement-oriented programs and practices target working-class Latino men. Global economic restructuring, male joblessness, the criminalization of men of color, they argue, create the context for this gendered transformation. They contend that a labor market that increasingly relies on service jobs deems these men, and not their wives, sisters, and daughters, disposable and

redundant. Latino migrant men's labor in the past had concentrated in industries such as construction, a sector that experienced extreme contraction due to the real estate bust during the recession. Predictions for job growth, moreover, focus on women dominated low-wage occupational sectors including hotel and food services, healthcare, caregiving, as well as cleaning jobs. Also, according to Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2013), the perception of migrant women as threats to the nation—particularly as the service jobs that traditionally employ women have increased—has become muted in the current post-industrial economic context. They argue that the gendered and racialized construction of immigrant danger has shifted, fueled by anti-immigrant sentiment, nativism, and Islamophobia, and thus currently embodied by “Muslim terrorist” men (Afshar 2012) and Latino “criminal aliens” (see also Chavez 2013).

Feminist scholars writing about diverse institutions draw on Joan Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations to highlight how assumptions about masculinity, femininity, and gender difference are encoded into the practices, ideologies, and distributions of power. According to Acker, organizations are not gender-neutral organisms that become contaminated by gendered bodies but rather sites in which these attributes are presumed and reproduced. As such, gender is a foundational element of organizational structure and work life. McCorkel (2012) extends these insights into a different institutional environment, that of women's prisons. Here she notes that the ideology of rehabilitation has occupied a more central role within the feminine side of the penal system. McCorkel shows that at the moment when men's prison became preoccupied with containing the body, the women's prison she studied became more invested in the self as the primary object of institutional control, signaling the arrival of a new system of punishment, one that is deeply gendered and racialized and reflects the growing influence of privatization and market-based sensibilities in the governing logic of punishment. The shift she documents

is the process of responsabilization (Rose 2000), which refers to the “a general strategy of governance that shifts responsibility for social problems from the state to the individual and, then in turn, encourages the individual to become self-regulating” (McCorkel 2012:10).

I refer to this research here in an effort to theorize the SFDLP-WC implementation of “woman-centered” and “gender responsive” policies aimed at empowering women, in this case, members of the WC. These responsabilization efforts psychologize the inequalities that women confront, attributing things like poverty and domestic violence to poor self-esteem rather than structural vulnerabilities, and their tendency to position women as victims. Women are expected to take ownership of their problems and resolve them by learning how to make the “right” choices. Lynne A. Haney (2010), in *Offending Women*, a study of two community-based alternatives to prisons for women in California, shows how programming was cast as gender-specific and empowering alternatives to traditional prison approaches. I draw on these feminist insights to examine how responsabilization schemes and gendered governance unfold outside of total institutions, in a distinct institutional environment, that of day labor centers (community-based organizations), and why rehabilitating the self is so central to making women proper neoliberal subjects. Also, how Latina migrant workers carry this burden by being the best hope for a revitalized labor movement.

Practices of Border and Migration Management

The third area of research my dissertation engages with is the expansion of state apparatuses for border control and immigration regulation, mainly the development of internal governing schemes aimed at policing migrant populations. Since 9/11, immigration controls have moved inward, well beyond the cartography of the border,

deepening the architecture and practices of the “border regime” (De Genova 2005, 2013). The intensified surveillance and regulation of migrant life “on the inside” of the U.S. state implicates a multiplicity of authorities, actors, and institutions, and operates at different scales (Heyman 2014). My dissertation contributes to critical migration studies by adding migrant day labor centers to what Sabine Hess (2010) has called the new “soft” modes of migrant/migration governance since they are part of the development of new state governing capacities, institutions, and practices designed to monitor immigrant populations. While often framed as the “best-solution” for regulating informal day labor, my research situates day labor centers on a spectrum of state-sponsored projects that seek to shape the conduct of “illegal” immigrants. Given the changing nature of state power, these hybrid organizations emerge and take on state functions while often downplaying their governmental identity by mobilizing a discourse of social justice.

Open-air informal day labor markets such as the Brooklyn corner represent one of the most visible manifestations of “illegal immigration” at the local scale. Collective anxieties surrounding unauthorized migration often target these migrant spaces and the presumed illegality of their inhabitants, which contributes to them being approached as “a problem” by cities, policy makers, and community organizers throughout the United States. City governments, residents, and businesses, for instance, often accuse day laborers of loitering, causing traffic congestion, deterring customers from entering (formal) businesses, and harassing women. For many, day laborers are the visible embodiment of migrant illegality as well as a docile, exploitable, and reserve labor force that is responsible for increasing economic insecurities among the working poor. Immigrant advocacy groups, on the other hand, view day laborers as one of the most vulnerable subpopulations of the precariat (Standing 2011, 2014) who, in order to secure some semblance of regular employment and livelihood in this country, are forced to solicit work on the street. Chronic

income and employment insecurity, substandard work conditions, and social marginalization make this group of workers highly vulnerable to exploitative drive-by employers. Their illegality, they add, renders these precarious workers invisible to the state, the ultimate denizens who are forced to live in “the shadows” in a permanent condition of covertness and marginality (Chavez 2013). Both groups converge, however, in approaching informal day labor sites as spaces in need of some form of state intervention, whether eradication or regulation, the latter in the form of the creation of day labor worker centers that are operated by local community organizations.

Contemporary day labor hiring sites, however, are hardly outside the reach of the state. Subnational governments, for instance, have explicit power to regulate space and territory within their jurisdiction and determine what constitutes appropriate uses through a series of policy instruments including local ordinances. An indirect effect of controlling and criminalizing certain behaviors and uses of public space is control over the persons within these spaces, including, in recent years, migrant day laborers and their livelihood strategy of public solicitation. These ordinances can be understood as part of a recent wave of local initiatives that attempt to deal with the presence of unauthorized migrants at the subnational level across the U.S., a form of migrant policing by proxy or “through the backdoor” (Varsanyi 2011, 2008b). In the past scholars argued that enforcement-oriented immigration policies had been largely concentrated along the U.S.-Mexico border zone, while workplace enforcement lagged behind, thus cautioning against overstating the role of the state in structuring the (working) lives of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. (Heyman 1998). In a post-9/11 world, however, particularly with the emergence the homeland security state (Gonzalez 2013) and as enforcement-oriented immigration programs and practices have extended well beyond the physical confines of the border,

scholars are forced to reexamine the degree of influence the state holds over the lives of noncitizens, particularly unauthorized migrants.

As De Genova argues, the “border is effectively everywhere” to the extent that “the entirety of the interior of the space of the state becomes a regulatory zone of immigration enforcement, and as borders appear to be increasingly ungrounded” (2013:4). The enactment of exclusion—through what he refers to as the “spectacle of the border”—in the form of border policing and punitive enforcement-oriented immigration programs, he adds, produces illegalized migration as a category and renders it (hyper)visible by imprinting it on particular migration streams and racialized bodies. So while grand-scale state performances of exclusion such as workplace immigration raids remain relatively rare (although increasing)—and illegality becomes an individualized and penalized transgression—the social condition and threat of deportability remains, serving as a disciplinary technology of the state. Immigration policy is also a mechanism of state-sponsored labor reproduction (Gomberg-Muñoz and Nussbaum-Barberena 2011). For some, however, mass unauthorized migration signals the inevitability of weakening nation-state hegemony (Kearney 1998); for others it was indicative of unrelenting state power in its ability not only to channel and regulate global flows of capital, but also ascribe illegal status to entire segments of the labor force (De Genova 2005; Gomberg-Munoz 2011). In redirecting our attention to the state, the latter contend that immigration categories and nation-building projects represent mechanisms for reproducing vulnerability among a global low-wage labor force.

In sum, my research cuts across scholarship on gender, labor organizing, and critical migration studies to examine the proliferation of nonstandard work arrangements in postindustrial economies and the organizing strategies that have emerged in recent years to advance the rights of low-wage immigrant workers, particularly women. I incorporate

three levels of analysis. At the micro level, I examine Latina day laborers' employment prospects and solicitation practices across two day labor organizational settings. On a meso, or mid-range approach to institutional dynamics, I examine these women's ongoing negotiations with state and non-state actors who seek to address their social, structural, and sexual vulnerabilities. At a macro or structural level, I examine how day labor markets have become an especially fertile ground for the enactment of labor organizing strategies, as well as the development of new state governing capacities and institutions. That is, together with the expansion of state apparatuses for border control, immigration regulation and migrant policing, we also see the development of internal governing schemes including migrant-oriented training programs and worker centers.

METHODOLOGY

On the corner, examines the gendered assumptions undergirding day labor markets by offering an ethnographically situated account of the day-to-day experiences of Latina day laborers who solicit temporary employment in two different organizational settings: a street-corner hiring site located in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, and a “regulated” day labor worker center in San Francisco's Mission District. While the Brooklyn corner is one of the few informal day labor sites in the country where women gather to solicit temporary employment, mostly housecleaning, the SF worker center attracts a considerable number of migrant women looking to secure employment through its domestic worker program, the Women's Collective. The comparison of these two sites and organizational settings allows for a systematic examination of the conditions that make day labor possible for Latina migrant women. I conducted a total of eighteen months of fieldwork and 50 interviews at these two sites beginning in June 2013, including two months of preliminary fieldwork in New York during the summer of 2012.

The Brooklyn Corner

In New York, I conducted interviews and participant observation at the Brooklyn corner, in the women's homes, or at a neighborhood park between June 2012 and December 2013, for a total of eight months. A flexible schedule of questions and key topics guided the interviews (n=25), which lasted from two to three hours, documenting life histories and employment trajectories in the U.S. as well as their country of origin. My visits to the corner occurred five days a week, and I usually spent six to seven hours there between 8:00 a.m. and 3 p.m. This was the time of day when the majority of day laborers looked for work on this corner. The majority of our exchanges were carried out in Spanish, since this was the native language of the majority of the women I interviewed. Some days I stayed on the corner well into the evening, after most women had left, to socialize with those who remained and/or accompany them to the public library where they could access computers and reading material.

I also shadowed some of the women in their neighborhoods and homes in order to get a better sense of their daily practices, living situations, and family life. During these visits, I also met and spoke with family members, spouses, and friends. At times I was introduced as simply “a friend” [una amiga] without an explanation as to how, where, or under what circumstances we had become acquainted. Some women explicitly asked me to keep any talk of the corner to a minimum as they did not want their spouses, children, or friends to know about the nature of their job search. They also asked for discretion over social media sites such as Facebook. The women were well aware of the gendered (but also racialized and classed) construction of day labor—and the stigma associated with those who take part in the industry—and although the work they were hired to perform was not a source of shame, how they went about getting employment often was, in large part because of its association with sex work. Women's ambivalence about corner work, and

their efforts to make their work respectable and dignified, illustrates the need to approach day labor street-corner markets as gendered. It also shows that the livelihood options that Latina migrant women navigate daily—legitimized or stigmatized, legal or illegal—overlap or exist in close proximity to one another.

During the first few weeks of fieldwork I mostly stood side-by-side with the women and observed their interactions and negotiations with potential employers. In order to avoid arousing suspicion at this stage of fieldwork, I also took on the role of day laborer which allowed me to establish rapport with the women and get insight into the basic features of this street corner market. This not only allowed me access to the corner, but also to gain familiarity with the work the women are hired to perform and the basic features of this street corner market. Taking on the role of worker also granted me access to Hasidic Jewish employers, through which I learned about their views on the corner and their hiring preferences, but also insights on how belabored Hasidic women were at home.

Combining these methods allowed me tap into not only the social organization of the corner but also how the women go about trying to shape their work environment and mediate their precarious circumstances. I realized that although negotiation is a capacity that is reflective of human capital, shaping the women's ability to transact in a successful manner, it also speaks to how these workers size up the world and their place in it. This means that although power may be on the side of the employer, the women learn to “play the game” to improve their situation despite being highly constrained in their choices and behaviors. Moreover, by working alongside the women I was able to gain insight into the embodied subjectivity of the workers, the emotional states uncertainty and waiting produces, and the specific (and gendered) ways of relating to and using the body, both on the street corner and at work.

Not long after starting fieldwork I began to explain my research project to the women on the corner. Access and consent, however, were ongoing processes as they had to be (re)established and (re)negotiated as new women came to the corner in search of work on a daily basis, and others continually and consistently pressed me about the nature of my research, its political objectives, and how they would benefit from it, if at all. When the word spread that I was a researcher conducting a study of the Brooklyn corner, and not a worker, some women decided they wanted no part in my research project, and they kept their distance from me. Three weeks into fieldwork, as rumors and suspicion mounted, I was confronted by a group of veteran street corner workers, some of whom considered themselves to be the founders of the corner. Once I was able to prove that I was not a journalist or a community organizer (two figures that are deeply distrusted and disliked on the corner), a negotiation ensued—mostly among the women—about the best way for me to conduct my research without being a nuisance or liability to them. Access was initially granted on the condition that I would not intervene in the women's negotiations with potential employers. These negotiations, as I would later learn, proved key not only to the day laboring process (as it is part of being a successful solicitor) but to the women's sense of self-worth and dignity.

Although it is not uncommon to see different people come and go on a daily basis, relations with workers are not always fleeting or one-time encounters. Many of the women on the Brooklyn corner have been gathering there intermittently for more than three years—some for up to fourteen years—coming and going as their employment status, household obligations, and care-giving responsibilities change over the years. The fact that these women spend much of their day waiting on the corner allowed me to engage in open-ended and on-going conversations with the women throughout the duration of my fieldwork. Over time I was able to identify the different types of street corner workers—

e.g., full-time, part-time, and seasonal solicitors—as well as those who are considered successful solicitors as they too often spent a considerable amount of time on the corner socializing with the women who are waiting for work and keeping track of the ebb and flow of the street-corner market. This allowed me to capture some of what Valenzuela (2003) refers to as the “impossible to identify universe populations” of day labor by including the range of experiences on the corner.

The San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women’s Collective

For this study I also conducted interviews and participant observation at the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective during a period of eight months. Data collection involved participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of the Women's Collective, as well as with men in the day labor program, paid staff, volunteers, and coordinators of the Day Labor Program. Although the twenty current and former members that I interviewed were chosen using the point list provided by the WC, I also interviewed five members that had recently left the organization who I found through snowball sampling. A flexible schedule of questions and four key topics guided the in-depth interviews, which lasted from an hour and a half to three hours. The major topics included: the circumstances of the migration experience; employment and living situation; participation in the Women's Collective; and expectations and concerns about their future. The interviews were conducted in Spanish at a coffee shop located in the Mission District. They were translated, transcribed, and analyzed using NVivo coding software.

Throughout my time at the day labor center, I took on several roles including volunteer, job dispatcher, and outreach coordinator. As a volunteer, I attended all WC organized events include a (mandatory) general member meeting, a self-esteem group (Grupo Sol), a theater group, two weekly flyering events, as well as a bi-weekly *llamada*

or national call with the National Domestic Workers' Alliance. During these events, which usually lasted approximately two hours, I was expected to help with translation (mostly for two non-Latina members) and note-taking. For the first few weeks of fieldwork, however, I mostly attended and observed the women's activities as well as their interactions with the staff and each other at all of their weekly organized events. These also included outside events such as marches, protests, and other civic and political events organized by WC and their political allies in and around the Bay Area, particularly those dealing with issues of housing, immigration, and jobs. In addition to participating in these events, I worked in the main office twice a week (during business hours, from 7am-1pm) doing mostly job dispatching work for the Women's Collective but also for the men's program. As a dispatcher I responded to calls and emails from employers looking to hire a housecleaner from the WC, and answered questions and concerns from prospective employers regarding the hiring process, the organization, and the legality of hiring from the SFDLP-WC. For job requests I used the point list (explained below) generated each week to distribute jobs, depending on women's points and availability, but also taking into consideration employer requests (for things like English speakers or work permit holders).

As a dispatcher I also prepared the women's "job packets" which included an information sheet with basic employer information and job characteristics, a receipt, a small booklet with information of the WC, and a map. Women were responsible for picking these up from the main office prior to going out on a job. These "pick ups" were the few times the women and men from the SFDLP-WC interacted and shared that space, in large part because most WC activities take place off-site or are scheduled in the evenings, while the men are expected to be at the center during the day if they are waiting for work. Toward the end of my stay in San Francisco, I also participated in a six-week outreach campaign organized by the California Domestic Worker Coalition (with the financial support of the

National Domestic Worker Alliance). This was a paid position that entailed coordinating a team of five WC members to do community outreach in San Francisco as part of a Bay Area wide pilot organizing drive. This was part of the California Domestic Worker Coalition's campaign to expand its membership and reach (target was to organize 10% of domestic workers in the state by 2016), as well as to re-approve the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights (AB 241) in 2016.

I do not change the name of the center because anyone familiar with day labor programs in San Francisco (or the Bay Area) will recognize that the center I discuss here is the SFDLP-WC, as it is the only one of its kind in the city. I use pseudonyms for worker members, staff, and volunteers with the exception of the Women's Collective's organizer, Guillermina Castellanos since she is the only founding members of the organization that remains there to this day. All of the women members I include in this study are of Latin American origin, and have been residing in the U.S. between eight months and twenty-five years. Three of them self-identify as TransLatinas.

A Note on the Ethnographic Project

Feminist ethnographer Kimberly K. Hoang, in her study on Ho Chi Minh City's sex industry (2015), took on hostessing and bartending work as part of what she refers to as deeply embodied ethnography. Immersing herself in Vietnam's global sex industry came with an "embodied cost" in that she had to let go of "all markers of respectability" (2015:22) that she had acquired in the U.S. as a highly educated woman from a prestigious university. Not only did she have to manage an array of relationships with the local police, mafia members, bar owners, madams, female sex workers, and male clients, but also subject herself to submissive performances of femininity and technologies of embodiment to navigate multiple niche sex markets and negotiate male desire in the field. Such

laborious embodied transformations, she notes, while at times painful and deeply humbling, significantly altered the narrative of her research. She adds, however, that she always knew that unlike the women who participated in her study, she could eject herself from “the field” at any moment, making it all the more clear that while she was “a temporary insider” she would remain “forever an outsider” (2015:22) as her livelihood did not depend on her ability to be a successful hostess worker.

I find Hoang’s methodological discussion and candidness about the many challenges she faced in doing a deeply embodied ethnography and studying sex work as a young woman of color refreshing and powerful. It informs my way of thinking about my own approach to ethnographic research, particularly in light of some of the most recent controversies that have emerged in response to the work of scholars like Alice Goffman (2014). Hoang notes that in an effort to move away from voyeuristic ethnography, she chose to center the experiences of her research participants instead of her own. So while the reflexive turn in ethnography has advanced the notion that the researchers’ positionality affects the ethnographic project—i.e., from the selection of research topic, site selection, data analysis, to the interpretation of findings—such “embodied commitments” (Cobb and Hoang 2015:348) to clarity and transparency regarding one’s position in the field have often given way to a narcissistic, scholar-centered ethnography. Such approach, they add, rests on scholars’ ability to establish their legitimacy by highlighting their embodied difference and social distance from the communities they study. How the adventurous, risk-taking and brave ethnographer navigates (and survives!) this murky terrain, makes “extraordinary discoveries,” and comes to “understand aspects of it we don’t ever get to see” (Duneier 2014) becomes the central piece of the narrative, not the lived experiences of the research participants. This turn toward an embodied, reflexive, and transparent ethnography, Hoang and Cobb argue, has inadvertently shifted the ethnographic objective

away from theorizing social phenomena, relationships and ideas and toward describing the researcher's subjectivity and relationship to the field.

Hoang, in *Dealing in Desire* (2014), contends that she experienced what Contreras refers to as a “standpoint crisis” in grappling with the contradictions of a feminist standpoint approach to ethnography, which urges researchers to be reflexive of their own subject position in relation to their research participants. As Contreras asks (2013), who really stands to benefit from this reflexive turn, particularly if we take into account the differential rewards and consequences associated with such self-disclosure? Reflexivity, she argues, ultimately ends up benefiting “objective outsiders” (2014:21) who are seen as courageous and heroic—“cowboy” ethnographers—for “daring” to put themselves in harms way by studying poor “urban” (read black or Latino) communities, while simultaneously delegitimizing scholars of color who study their own racialized communities. This approach to ethnography, what Rios (2011) refers to as the “jungle book trope,” and the narratives they produce about discovery of a social world that is construed as “impenetrable, exoticized and Other” (Cobb and Hoang 2015:349), actually end up reproducing the very problem that self-reflexivity was intended to address. Cobb and Hoang conclude that a more protagonist-driven research approach offers a new possibility that positions reflexivity as a method instead of an objective. The goal of the researcher then is not to become like the research participants (and “go native”) nor to maintain an unsurpassable distance from them (so as to render such endeavors daring and heroic) but rather, to develop what Hoang and Cobb refer to a “locally grounded stance” (2016:350) which produces situated insights provided by the people who actually live them, the research subjects.

Equally as insightful is Mario Small's (2016) discussion of the “sympathetic observer,” where he presents the case of Bartolomé de las Casas, a colonizing missionary

and pseudo-ethnographer, who rigorously documented the mistreatment of indigenous populations and made the case against their enslavement before the Spanish Crown (making the case for enslavement of Africans instead). His case, as Small points out, rested on the depiction of indigenous peoples as “simple” and “tender,” incapable of hard labor, and lacking the intellectual capacity to defend themselves. The point Small makes is that the more simple and innocent de las Casas portrayed indigenous populations, the crueller and more shocking the horrors committed against them became. As Small notes, de las Casas’s documentation of these genocidal acts as well as his problematic and racist portrayals of indigenous populations not only helped make the case against forced labor of indigenous populations, but also served to make him a sort of “conscience of a continent,” a conveniently benign and flattering representation of himself that came at the expense of the of indigenous populations he so wanted to protect and save.

I draw on Small’s cautionary discussion of the sympathetic observer and the drive to elicit sympathy for marginalized populations. This commitment to sympathy, he contends, inevitably yields simplistic representations of those we set out to study, thus flattening out the heterogeneity, dynamism and messiness of their social world and personal circumstances. As Small notes, many recent ethnographies bear this character. I contend, however, that ethnographers are not the only social actors trafficking in these discourses of sympathy. Activists and community organizers too set out to document and highlight the abusive and exploitative practices inflicted upon marginalized populations, often reproducing the very things they set out to challenge. In seeking politically expedient solutions to social problems—e.g., police harassment, deportation, exploitation, sexual assault, etc.—they magnify elements that are likely to evoke pity, sorrow, and outrage, while leaving out those that complicate these views. Fischer (2014) notes that “pornography of pain” is certainly effective in eliciting middle-class sympathy (and guilt),

but pitying the victim and blaming the victim are two sides of the same coin in that they both share a problematic understanding of poor racialized communities that end up reinforcing stereotypes.

I invoke these insights from Hoang, Cobb, and Small here in an effort to illustrate the contradictions that emerge out of engaging in ethnography projects that have redemptive objectives or that are driven by a commitment to elicit sympathy, particularly with respect to impoverished and racialized communities in the U.S. In thinking and writing about the women who participated in this study I am cognizant of the tensions associated with embarking on an ethnographic project as a feminist scholar of color, particularly as an “ethnic insider” (Zavella 1993:3). My approach in the field, and beyond, was to not overstate the similarities between researcher and participant, and instead consider how different levels of insiderness and outsidersness presented themselves at different moments.

A Note on Terminology

As do other scholars (De Genova 2002), I use the terms undocumented and unauthorized interchangeably, and use quotes for terms like “illegal” in reference to migration or migrants in order to denaturalize these categories and avoid reification of the legal/illegal distinction. Illegality, as De Genova argues, is a juridical category (and a structural location, see Das Gupta 2003) that entails a social relation to the state. As such we cannot speak of communities of undocumented migrants as undifferentiated, hermetically sealed entities, or as portrayed in popular culture and discourse, as living “in the shadows” or margins of the state. As Karma Chavez (2013), the word “shadow” carries both a pejorative and racialized meaning, and has been increasingly used to describe “illegal” migrants who occupy jobs (like day labor) that native-born Americans are

unwilling to perform. Undocumented people then have been routinely described, by the media, politicians, and scholars, as a “shadow population” largely in connect to conversations about immigration reform, particularly the need to bring them, as Reagan noted, “into the sunlight” (Chavez 2013:58). Scholars, as Chavez contends, rarely question the political and symbolic function the shadow serves as metaphor, instead applying it liberally to describe the invisibility and criminalization of undocumented migrants, especially in reference to their alleged lack of political presence and agency. Depicting undocumented migrants as living “in the shadows” or margins of the state, however, would only serve to perpetrate a kind of “epistemic violence” on the social reality of everyday life of those migrants (De Genova 2002:422).

Similarly, I use the term migrant instead of immigrant for several reasons. First, while much of the literature on day labor problematically portrays these workers as sojourners or newly migrated populations despite the fact that many have been in the U.S. for decades, I opt for referring to them as migrants to avoid the implicitly linear teleology of these categories (De Genova 2005) and the centering of the receiving nation-state’s standpoint. As De Genova contends, terms such as immigrant (and immigration) “imply a one-directional and predetermined movement of outsiders coming in and thus are conceptual categories that necessarily can be posited only from the standpoint of the (migrant-receiving) U.S. nation-state” (2005:2). The term migrant, on the other hand, allows scholars to retain a greater sense of movement, across various legal statuses and heterogeneous migration histories, as well as the intrinsic incompleteness and irresolution of the social process of migration.

Another term that is often deployed rather carelessly, in both scholarly production and activist practice, is Latina. Although I use the term “Latina” throughout this dissertation, as a conventional ethno-racial marker, the women in this study rarely use the

term to self-identity, this is particularly true in New York, where my informants opted for national designations such as *mexicana* instead. As a composite, pan-ethnic construction, *Latinidad* glosses over the specificities of the various national groups and their historical experiences, and homogenizes the diverse power locations among U.S. Latinas/os. I use it here strategically in the context of labor organizing and immigrant rights advocacy as in the case of San Francisco, where women were compelled to use such a designation for political purposes. However, the women in the WC rarely used the term outside of public events or meetings. I state this here in an effort to communicate my ambivalence around using the term, awareness of its contested nature, and to recognize that we are dealing with a wide range of differences in historical, social, and cultural experiences. It also means being mindful of the multiple cleavages between workers based on race/ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, language, religion, etc.

Also, the term *jornalero* carries its own racialized, classed, and gendered baggage. Although community organizers both in New York and in San Francisco at times deploy the term in an effort to highlight the similarities between migrant men in day labor and women in domestic work confront, most women adamantly reject the label of “jornalera” or female day labor. This is particularly true in New York, where the label is often imposed on women on the Brooklyn corner, both by the media and an immigrant organization that has been trying, unsuccessfully, to organize the women for years.

Site Selection

I conducted sixteen-months of comparative ethnographic fieldwork in two day labor sites that represent the two most common organizational configurations outlined in Valenzuela’s typology (2003). According to Valenzuela’s typology of day labor, informal day labor sites fall under three general categories, connected, unconnected and regulated

(Valenzuela & Melendez 2003; Valenzuela 1999). Connected sites are those that are linked to a specific industry such as construction, and are therefore physically located near home improvement stores. These pick up sites are also common near nurseries where workers are hired to provide landscaping and gardening services to homeowners and local businesses, as well as movers for moving equipment suppliers. Sites that are unconnected are those not linked to any particular industry and are instead conveniently located along major avenues, intersections, or in other highly visible public spaces. This category includes sites that serve multiple industries and clientele. While connected and unconnected sites are “the bread and butter of informal day labor hiring halls,” regulated day labor sites are “the new kids on the block” (2003:322). The latter, also known as worker centers, are “loosely regulated hiring sites where workers may seek work under relatively structured conditions” (Valenzuela 2003:4). These centers are therefore more heavily regulated—typically by community-based organizations with the support of subnational governments—and have emerged in recent years to improve the working conditions of migrant day laborers.

According to Valenzuela’s typology of day labor sites, the New York site constitutes a connected site while the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women’s Collective is an example of the regulated site stipulated in his model. The connected site in Williamsburg, Brooklyn is a street-corner market where Latina and Eastern European migrant women gather in a largely ultra-Orthodox neighborhood to provide inexpensive and flexible intimate labor. This Brooklyn street-corner market gathers anywhere between twenty-five and sixty Latina and Eastern European migrant women on a daily basis in hopes of securing mostly household work. Although the site has historically provided the local Hasidic community with household workers and caregivers, in recent years the corner’s clientele has expanded to include contractors, small business owners, and hotels

in surrounding areas. The second site is a regulated, city-sponsored worker center in San Francisco's Mission District. The San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective (SFDLP-WC) serves an area that covers a ten-block radius where over a hundred (mostly) men and women gather daily in search of construction, landscaping, and household work. Unlike the New York site, the San Francisco day labor program falls under the administrative sponsorship of a well-known local nonprofit and immigrant advocacy organization and is funded largely by the city of San Francisco. As such, it provides comprehensive services such as job dispatching, professional and leadership trainings, as well as legal and health services to hundreds of migrant and contingent workers in the city.

As mentioned earlier, worker centers are fast becoming key labor market intermediaries, playing an important role in job allocation and training in urban labor markets. The emergence of worker centers, therefore, is altering traditional migrant job search behavior and employment options. This is particularly true for women, who are becoming a regular presence in day labor worker centers across the country. These community-based organizations are poised to help migrant women break into the housecleaning industry by providing basic employment training but also helping them organize and take part in immigrant rights movements. They also seek to shape hiring behaviors and labor market outcomes in informal hiring sites, for instance, by setting a minimum wage (which is optional) and providing women basic training on cleaning techniques and substances. Some predict that day labor will become a salient option for women with the growth and expansion of worker centers around the nation (Gorman 2007), since they are believed to represent "a safe place for women to search for work," unlike street corner markets.

Since I am interested in the social organization of day labor markets across two organizational contexts in New York and San Francisco, a discussion about what I mean by both social organization and construction is in order. Social organization in this context refers to the practices, rules, and norms that shape the interaction and behavior at day labor pick up sites, and thus constitute “doing the corner.” Focusing on the social organization of day labor thus tells us how workers participate in this labor market. This includes thinking about how sites are ordered and organized with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship, etc., and how this shapes social relations on the corner as well as hiring processes and employment prospects. Also, I am interested in how Latina day laborers go about promoting their labor in order to maximize their employment prospects and attain some measure of autonomy and financial security in spite of their vulnerable, subordinate status. I do so in an effort to emphasize the agency—understood here as “the human capacity to exert some control over the condition’s of one’s existence” (Gomez-Muñoz 2010:297)—of undocumented immigrants as they navigate the terrain of work in the U.S. I argue that our understanding of agency in day labor spaces, and ultimately contestation, need not be limited to the more extreme moments such as those involving wage theft and abuse but rather, day laborers’ daily interactions with employers (and other workers) on the street corner (see Ordoñez 2014).

By the social creation and construction of day labor markets I am referring to the local contingencies and interests that shape how local governments, businesses, and communities manage day labor markets. These encompass subnational policies and programs including things like sanctuary ordinances that provide some legal protection to undocumented populations by prohibiting city employees from assisting Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with immigration investigations or arrests unless mandated by federal or state law or a warrant. These have long been in place in both San Francisco

and New York City. This can also include the implementation of a host of ordinances that restrict or outright ban day labor activity, such as soliciting, loitering, obstructing traffic, etc. In Williamsburg, for instance, day labor activity is not uniformly monitored or curtailed since some day labor sites are targeted regularly while others, like the Brooklyn corner, are left unbothered for the most part. A few blocks outside of the Williamsburg Hasidic neighborhood where the women gather is an all-male pick up site that is constantly being targeted by the police, and the workers forced to disperse. Some of these men are homeless, and thus seek shelter from the same Catholic Church that also provides women day laborers regular meals and access to the restroom facilities. The point is that while there may be ordinances that (indirectly) restrict day labor activity, these do not appear to be implemented in a uniform manner, prompting the question of what interests shape which sites will be targeted and dismantled, and which corners will be protected, and why.

Non-state actors such as religious institutions and community-based organizations also serve regulatory functions. A prime example is the creation of worker centers, which are typically funded by local governments, although operated by community-based organizations and non-profit organizations. These centers serve as market intermediaries, for instance, by establishing basic labor standards, a minimum wage, and organizational rules. While there are still relatively few centers scattered across the country (compared to informal day labor sites), community-based organizations shape day labor markets even when local governments do not support them directly. In Williamsburg, for instance, a local immigrant advocacy group provides English classes to day laborers, training programs, and supports their collective organizing efforts. They also encourage day laborers to set a minimum wage and basic work regulations.

While the Williamsburg pick up site was “selected” because it represents one of the few (known) all-women day labor hiring sites in the U.S., the SFDLP-WC was included as

a case study to examine what happens when women's organizing efforts are supported by worker centers, the other organizational model included in Valenzuela's day labor typology. The San Francisco site also represents one of the larger, most heterogeneous, and long-standing worker centers in the nation. Moreover, its gender-specific program and women's wing, *La Colectiva*, is a model that other worker centers are implementing in order to better accommodate women. Also, both San Francisco and New York City are de jure "sanctuary cities" for undocumented migrants. In 1989, San Francisco passed the "City and County of Refuge" Ordinance (known as the Sanctuary Ordinance) which forbids City employees from helping Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with immigration investigations or arrests unless mandated by federal or state law or a warrant. The Ordinance dates back to the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980's, when churches across the country provided refuge to Central Americans fleeing civil wars in their countries. In 2007, Mayor Gavin Newsom reaffirmed San Francisco's commitment to immigrant communities by issuing an Executive Order that called on City departments to develop protocol and training on the Sanctuary Ordinance (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.). New York City has a similar sanctuary policy in place, a "don't ask, don't tell" mandate, in which city employees, including the police, are not required to report undocumented migrants to federal authorities. That executive order dates back to 1989 when it was issued by Mayor Ed Koch, and reissued by Mayors Dinkins and Giuliani.

In designing a comparative study of day labor, it was thus important to include the two most common types of hiring sites—connected and regulated day labor sites. The objective of the comparison is to examine Latina migrant women's experiences in the informal day labor industry in order to better understand the social construction and regulation of day labor markets. As such, I am interested in how these sites are representative of a larger phenomenon—as opposed to a larger population (Luker 2008:

103). The two sites allow me to examine the way day labor operates across different institutional contexts as well as different structures of power—gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, nativity, and legal status—and provide unparalleled insights into the inner-workings of day labor markets.

Research Sites

The Southside of Williamsburg

The Brooklyn street-corner market is located on a busy intersection overlooking the Brooklyn-Queens expressway (BQE) in South Williamsburg, a largely Hasidic-Hispanic enclave. A quick walk through Williamsburg's Southside, referred to as “Los Sures” by its Latino residents, reveals the remnants of a not so distant violent past, as murals and graffiti can still be seen covering many building walls and bridges, in commemoration of the young men killed on the streets when the neighborhood was still one of the poorest, most violent and drug-ridden parts of the city (Rubin 1997). Puerto Rican and Dominican flags can be seen hanging from windows and balconies, schools, churches and communal areas bearing the names of Latino community leaders and notables, displaying of a strong sense of cultural pride. The Southside's Latino population dates back to at least the 1960s, when thousands of Puerto Ricans flocked to Williamsburg by the appeal of factory jobs in a booming regional manufacturing sector. In the last few decades, however, the Latino population has decreased from seventy to forty-five percent of the neighborhood, from roughly 20,000 to 15,000 residents. During the 1970s, Williamsburg's Southside, once a vibrant neighborhood, fell into decline due in part to a loss in manufacturing activity as well as city policies of urban renewal. At its peak in the early 1960s, for instance, Williamsburg provided roughly 90,000 manufacturing jobs; by the 1990s, less than 12,000 manufacturing jobs remained. This decline in the manufacturing sector severely affected

Latino residents' economic prospects, leaving thousands unemployed. Moreover, with the construction of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, some of the area's affordable housing was destroyed. By the end of the 1970s, the effects of deindustrialization and depopulation were badly felt.

Another important demographic group to arrive to Los Sures were Jews, particularly following the construction of the Williamsburg Bridge in the early 1900s. Hailing from Manhattan's Lower East Side, thousands of Jews made their way to Brooklyn in search of a better life in Williamsburg. In the 1930s, large numbers of European Jews, particularly ultra-Orthodox Jews, arrived in the area escaping Nazism, establishing a vibrant Hasidic enclave in the process. Among the ultra-Orthodox Jews that arrived to South Williamsburg during that time were the Satmar, considered one of the most religiously stringent and isolationist of Hasidic courts (Fader 2009). In recent decades the Satmar have clashed with their Latino neighbors over affordable housing, city services, and police protection (Rubin 1997). Today, more than half of the Hasidic families in South Williamsburg live below the poverty level (Fader 2009). As anthropologist Ayala Fade (2009) notes, although the Satmar have some of the strictest standards of piety and modesty among ultra-Orthodox Jews, the differences between the various contemporary Hasidic courts in the city should not be overstated since they are largely united by a renewed effort to "hyperbolize" (Jewish) distinctiveness by heightening the ways that religious observance is carried out in daily life, particularly by emphasizing Hasidic gender differences. Fade argues, for instance, that Hasidic boys' and girls' separate socialization prepares them for the "gender segregation that increasingly characterizes adult Hasidic Jewish life" (Fader 2009:21) in the city. This segregation, she adds, is based on the different responsibilities that Hasidic women and men have to the Jewish community as a whole. Boys and men, for instance, focus their efforts on studying sacred texts, eventually taking

on a more prominent role in the Jewish public sphere including the synagogue, the religious leadership structure of the community, and the social life of the yeshiva. Girls and women, on the other hand, play a greater role in mediating the secular (gentile) public sphere—particularly as it relates to the home and children—interacting with public institutions and social service agencies as needed.

The Brooklyn Corner: La Parada de las Mujeres

The need for Hasidic women to manage and maintain a strictly kosher home shapes the increasing demand for low-cost household services, particularly cleaning. Hasidic kosher household management includes the separation of dairy and meat products in meal preparation, the prohibition of certain foods, inspecting cleanliness of vegetables to ensure they do not harbor non-kosher elements such as flies or worms, but also extends to the observance of complex laws of family purity (Fader 2009). In addition, every week leading up to the Shabbat, Hasidic wives must also ensure not only that their home be thoroughly cleaned but that the customary ritual foods be cooked before sundown. Women's household responsibilities also include preparing for the different Jewish holidays throughout the year, including the spring holiday of Passover, when women are expected to give their homes the most exhaustive cleaning to fulfill the religious requirement that all leavening be removed from the home.

Hasidic women that take on paid employment, often as breadwinners, do so mostly in the teaching fields, particularly special education, but also in small businesses or providing household services to other Hasidic women such as child care. Hasidic women's breadwinning role is considered appropriate if such work frees a husband for study or pays for children's yeshiva tuition. This means that in addition to raising larger families than in the past (with an average of nine children) and maintaining a strictly kosher household,

Hasidic women often also have to navigate the secular world of paid employment. Thus, not unlike other families across the U.S. (Glenn-Nakano 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Romero 1992), Hasidic women too turn to hired help, particularly female migrant labor, to cover the so-called second shift (Hochschild 1989). In their struggle to infuse everyday life and the material world with divine meaning, the Hasidim have inadvertently created a thriving market for household day labor. Day labor practices, therefore, are not exclusive to male-dominated industries such as construction or landscaping but also found in care work (Kennedy 2010).

Recent migratory flows to New York City have also contributed to the growth of the Brooklyn corner. On any given day, with the exception of Saturdays, the Brooklyn corner gathers between twenty and sixty migrant women who seek temporary work. These workers are mostly Latina and Eastern European migrants. Mexican women are overrepresented on the Brooklyn corner, the majority from the southern state of Puebla. Ecuadorians make up the second largest group of Latinas on the corner, some of them are Quechua-speakers from the Azuay and Cañar provinces. Central American women, fleeing social and economic instability in their countries of origin can also be found on the Brooklyn corner. While some of them are asylum seekers or TPS recipients, most have endured month-long migrations and multiple border-crossings before reaching New York City. Many travel alone and ride across Mexico on top of freight trains, including the “The Beast,” a train commonly known as “the train of death” as migrants have to stave off Mexican police officers, gangs, and drug cartels along the way. For many unauthorized travelers, however, the journey does not end upon arrival to the U.S. An increasingly difficult border crossing has translated into a significant increase in smugglers' fees. On the corner, more recent arrivals report paying anywhere between five and seven-thousand dollars to come to the U.S., making their job search all the more urgent.

The Brooklyn corner is one of the few places in the city (and U.S.) where women gather in a public venue to solicit temporary household work. During the day—with the exception of Saturdays—this intersection morphs into a human marketplace, a place where migrant women gather to offer their labor at a low cost to mostly Hasidic employers who hire the women to perform a range of intimate labors including cleaning, care work, and at times also sex. The boundaries of “the corner” are fluid as the women often spillover well beyond its physical confines, reaching the public library located across the street, a nearby park, and private properties to await work. A police car patrols the area in the mornings as well as in the afternoons, when the kids are present at school, giving out warnings and even citations when the women from the corner obstruct traffic. Those who have been on the corner long enough are accustomed to the presence of the police, and approve of the occasional citations they distribute to women who venture too far from the corner. These citations are a reminder that the women must stay in their place, the area designated, at least informally, for public solicitation. It is also a reminder that the state, as embodied by the police patrol, is cognizant of and tacitly consenting to the existence of the street-corner market. Still, from seven in the morning until at least six in the evening, this corner—which the women refer to as “la parada de las mujeres” or the women's corner—is theirs.

The workers

As the New York Day Labor Survey (NYDLS) revealed, informal day laborers in the New York metropolitan area are overwhelmingly Latino. Roughly a third are from Mexico, another third from Central America, and the rest from South America, Eastern Europe and elsewhere (Valenzuela and Melendez 2003). Valenzuela and Melendez estimate the majority of day laborers in the New York metropolitan area are relatively young (mean age of 32), unmarried, and recently migrated with more than half living in the U.S. less than two years. Day labor is generally considered a stepping stone to better

employment opportunities, particularly among new arrivals, or a stop-gap measure for those who experienced a sudden job loss, layoff, or other work interruption. The NYDLS found that almost eighty-five percent of day laborers surveyed had been doing this type of work for less than three years. They also found that while most solicit on a full-time basis, a considerable portion of day laborers reported having another job or additional sources of income. That some workers combine day labor with other income-generating activities was a surprising finding for Valenzuela and Melendez, largely because day laborers elsewhere typically spend much of their time on the corner waiting for work.

La parada de mujeres, as some refer to it, differs in several important ways. First, the workers are women who gather to solicit (mostly) housecleaning work, although sexual commerce and other forms of intimate labor were also exchanged on the corner. Second, almost a third of the day labor population at this site are Eastern European women, mostly Polish. A few African American women, Chinese, and Korean migrants occasionally visit the corner as well. Third, the Brooklyn corner tends to attract relatively older workers, women in their mid to late forties, higher than the average reported by Valenzuela and Melendez, many of whom have extensive labor histories and experience in factory work and/or as live-in domestics in the U.S.; the average age in my study was 45. Fourth, the majority of the women in this study have been in the U.S. for at least five years. Some were seasonal labor migrants who travel between their home country, Europe, and the U.S. several times a year. Another key difference is with respect to tenure on the corner. Most of the women I discuss here have been soliciting day-wage labor on the Brooklyn corner, whether sporadically, seasonally, or consistently, well over three years, often in combination with other off-the-books employment or formal work. Although many new women pass through the Brooklyn corner on a daily basis in search of work, not all stay;

this is particularly true of younger women who often secure live-in domestic employment through temp agencies or referrals.

The women who remained on the corner found that while they risked not getting work day to day on the street, they could earn well over the state and federal minimum wage (\$7.25) if they did, and could eventually amass a portfolio of regular employers and repeat jobs. In her study of a Brooklyn street-corner market not far from my site, Turnovsky (2010) found that men earned between eight and twelve dollars an hour, often working more than eight hours at a time. So that when day laborers at her site did go out to work, they earned between eighty and one hundred twenty-five dollars a day, mostly in construction. Women on the Brooklyn corner, however, rarely made that kind of money, at least not from ad hoc jobs they picked up from the street. In fact, most of the jobs the women were offered on the street were ad hoc jobs from first time or “unclaimed employers” (Ordoñez 2010), largely for housecleaning, which could entail between three to six hours of work. Three-hour job offers were common, and the least desirable from the workers' perspective, not only because it provided insufficient hours but also because these jobs mostly consisted of more strenuous housecleaning work such as scrubbing floors and cleaning kitchens and bathrooms, areas that are considered the dirtiest parts of a home. These were also perceived to be one-time hires that would not necessarily lead to repeat or regular employment. However, many employers try to persuade workers by guaranteeing a full day's work by, for instance, finding her another house to clean that same day—usually a neighbor or relative—or promising long-term employment. More experienced solicitors, including those who I am calling “full-time” solicitors (see chapter 1) usually turned down these job offers because they did not believe the employer would make good on their offer, or because cleaning two houses, particularly in such a rushed manner would be too arduous, as one woman put it, “sales matada.” Moreover, while such work offers would be the

closest to a full day's work some women would get on the corner, particularly the recently arrived, it often requires taking a bus or the subway to get to the next location, and the transportation costs and travel time are often not taken into account in their wages.

The San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective (SFDLP-WC)

The San Francisco Day Labor program (SFDLP) was established in 1991 in the Mission District to provide support, structure, and resources to day laborers and employers in San Francisco, as well as to address community and neighborhood concerns. In 2000, the day labor program was adopted by La Raza Centro Legal, a community-based legal organization, creating a worker-run center that combined job training and social services with organizing and leadership development. In 2001, the center founded the Women's Collective (WC), the women's branch of the S.F. Day Labor Program in an effort to provide an independent organizing space for the social, economic and political empowerment of low-income immigrant women. The WC sought to address the specific issues of abuse and exploitation immigrant women as low-wage workers face, particularly as domestic workers. In doing so they established a feminist forum for immigrant women's leadership and perspectives in the larger U.S. labor movement. In September of 2004, the SFDLP-WC moved to its current location on Cesar Chavez Street, where day laborers have long gathered to procure work along a ten block corridor. The San Francisco Day Labor Program & Women's Collective (SFDLP-WC) joined Dolores Street Community Services in July 2012 as membership-based programs serving both day laborers and domestic workers in San Francisco. The women's collective, however, has its own structure and regulations and serves a considerably smaller number of worker members (between 35-50 active members) than the men's day labor program (110-130 members).

The ten block corridor along Cesar Chavez Street is the main day labor hiring site in the city. On any day of the week day laborers will gather there and self-sort around occupational niche, ethnicity, regional identification, and age (Quesada 2011). Historically, the San Francisco Police Department responded to neighborhood complaints by moving day laborers off certain corners temporarily, and/or handing out citations and fines to day laborers and employers for traffic violations. In 2002, immigrant day laborers, supported by La Raza Centro Legal, marched and protested in an effort to curb police harassment. Through a series of meetings, the police, immigrant rights' activists, and community members reached an agreement whereby the police agreed to respond to community complaints of day laborers on a case-by-case manner. For the most part, they now first contact the SFDLP-WC staff before intervening. Moreover, San Francisco has de jure sanctuary city status since it passed legislation in the early 1990s prohibiting city and county employees from cooperating with immigration authorities except when required by federal law. This sanctuary city status, however, is questionable in a post-9/11 political climate with the intensification of enforcement at the border and the shift toward greater cooperation between local and federal agencies on immigration matters.

Day labor programs operate in a charged political environment in which local communities try a variety of approaches to control the proliferation of day labor street-corner markets and respond to the public opposition to the presence of migrant workers in public settings. In the Bay Area, some local governments have attempted to keep day laborers off the streets by passing anti-solicitation ordinances, including Concord, Oakland, San Jose, Redwood City, and San Mateo, but this appears to be the exception rather than the rule in the region. Informal day labor sites in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, compared to other metropolitan areas in the U.S., are considered “as good as it gets” in terms of being socially tolerated and relatively safe from police and community

persecution (Quesada et al. 2014). As the authors note, living conditions in San Francisco and Berkeley, California, are more favorable for the undocumented relative to cities in Arizona and Alabama, where even renting an apartment to the undocumented is forbidden or severely restricted (Sumber 2009).

Day labor centers in the Bay Area are increasingly attracting women, who are considered the “new faces of day labor” (Gorman 2007). To better accommodate them, some centers have created stand-alone and gender-specific programs for women workers, including domestic worker collectives. San Francisco, for instance, attracts a greater number of women relative to other centers in the area, with women comprising 38% of total worker-members. Still, workers' centers remain male-dominated spaces, and women often report experiencing discomfort when awaiting work in these spaces. In this regard, the SFDLP-WC is lauded for having a distinct and gender-specific program for women workers (which channels them largely to household work), with its own mission, structure, political agenda, activities, and decision-making process.

The SFDLP-WC, as other day labor workers' centers, emphasizes the importance of leadership development and internal democratic structures within their organization. As Theodore notes (2010), worker centers share a commitment to Freirian and leftist forms of organizing by focusing on tools of popular education to build democratic organizations with strong worker leadership. The popular education approach is designed to raise the political consciousness of participants and enable them to become cognizant of how individual circumstances and experiences are linked to broader socio-political forces. This pedagogical approach is said to resonate with Latina/o migrants since many (mainly men) participated in mass radical social movements in their home countries during the 1980s and 1990s. The idea is that these workers bring familiar organizing frames and repertoires to day labor organizing. Leadership development is represented as a collective enterprise, a

shared understanding and commitment to changing the social conditions that impact the lives of immigrants in the U.S.

As mentioned above, the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective are part of Dolores Street Community Services. The funding for the program comes from multiple sources including donations from private foundations such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Benton Foundation and the Zellerbach Family Foundation, and public grants provided by the City and County of San Francisco, Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA) and the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE). The program receives \$250,000 per fiscal year through public grants. While the city grants focus on providing support, job training, and structure to migrant and informal job seekers and their employers, they also stress the need to address community tension and safety concerns that arises from the presence of open-air hiring sites located near residential areas and businesses. The OCEIA, for instance, in its requests for proposals specifically states that those non-profit organizations interested in assisting the city in managing the day labor program must be able to provide structure, job training and support for the informal day labor industry in the City and County of San Francisco, as well as to address any community concerns that may arise in the various communities where these workers they tend to gather. The city thus has three explicit goals: first, to provide day laborers a structured work environment to ensure their economic self-sufficiency; second, to ensure a stable supply of low cost, seasonal, temporary and other labor services for residents, small businesses and industries such as construction, hospitality, food/restaurant, domestic services, janitorial and landscaping, and; third, to promote public safety by abating community tensions and concerns about safety, traffic congestion, and crime. In gauging the success of the day labor program, the city of San Francisco focuses on the extent to which the organization can: 1) increase employment and

training opportunities for day laborers to meet emerging and changing labor needs/demands of businesses and employers; 2) address workers' rights and other needs and concerns of day laborers, including information about city-level social services such as shelter, medical, mental health, legal and nutrition services; and 3) develop a new model of excellence in program operations and high quality service while also building leadership and decision-making capacity in the day laborer population and promote civic engagement.

Private foundations, on the other hand, support the “social justice” side of the day labor program and women's collective. The Zellerbach Family Foundation, for instance, through its Immigrants and Refugee Program, focuses on “facilitating the successful integration of newcomers and encouraging their informed and widespread participation in community life.” Through their grants, the Zellerbach Family Foundation seeks to strengthen the capacity of community-based organizations in their efforts of community outreach, leadership development and civic engagement. In doing so they support community-based organizations that strive to help migrants develop the skills they need to work on their own behalf and to join with other residents to improve their lives and their neighborhoods. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, through its New Routes to Community Health Program, helped the WC launch a media campaign unveiling striking posters, billboards, bus ads and postcards depicting domestic workers as strong, independent and "green" savvy.

These multiple funding sources reflect their hybrid nature as part social movement organization and part labor market institution. These goals, however, often collide. Through a complex—and not always successful—combination of services, advocacy, and organizing, workers' centers are said to be uniquely positioned to help low-wage immigrants navigate the world of work in the United States (Fine 2006). In cities like San Francisco that have long been destinations for low-wage immigrant workers, workers'

centers tend to fill a specific role in already extant networks of migrant advocacy and service organizations (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010). In many cities, sizeable numbers of day laborers use centers and corners simultaneously or resist centers altogether. In San Francisco, for instance, two-thirds of day laborers remain on the street, with only one-third utilizing the workers' center (Zoellner 2000).

The Workers

At the time I began fieldwork, membership in the Women's Collective fluctuated in the low thirties, with members coming and going every week. Latina migrant women were the dominant group of member-workers looking for employment at this site. Most were of Mexican national origin, but there were also women from Central America, particularly Guatemala and El Salvador. During my time at the SFDLP-WC, there were a few non-Latinas from Poland and Taiwan. Although the center did not inquire about the legal status of its membership, most of the women that participated in this study were unauthorized migrants, but some had U.S. citizenship or permanent legal residency. TransLatinas are also a strong presence at the SFDLP-WC. Most were referred to the WC by public agencies as well as other organizations such as El/La Para TransLatinas, a San Francisco community-based organization that serves Latina/o members of the LGBTQI community, many of whom are undocumented and seeking asylum. Since El/La operates largely as a drop-in space, they refer TransLatinas to other organizations in the city that serve Latina migrants' employment needs.

The women that participated in this study were either current or past members, but the distinction between the two was tenuous at times as some stayed involved in the organization despite not having active membership, were recurring members, or were in the process of severing ties with the WC. Some of the former members that I interviewed had quit in protest of what they perceived to be the unfair and severe punishment of another

member who was outspoken about the lack of financial accountability and transparency of the organization. A quarter of the women I interviewed were relatively new, having been in the WC for less than three months. All of them were mothers, between the ages of twenty-six and sixty-seven; some had children in the U.S. and/or their countries of origin. Most of them were married or living with a partner, and had been residing in the U.S. for at least five years. All of the women I interviewed reported joining the WC in order to secure household employment, hearing about the organization from friends, neighbors, social workers, or other community-based organizations. A fraction of them had known about the WC for a few years, attended a meeting or two in the past, but decided not to join because of time constraints, the need to secure employment, or the political nature of the organization.

The SFDLP-WC is a membership-based organization that provides not only access to job services but also center resources such as computers, weekly food distribution, health services, and leadership development trainings. Because the day labor program and women's collective operate separately, they also abide by different membership requirements. Day laborers, for instance, have to attend an hour long orientation session, fill out an application, and pay dues in order to become members of the day labor program. Women, on the other hand, have to attend an orientation session, a mandatory general meeting, pay dues, and participate in different WC events in order to be eligible for membership. The main benefit to membership, according to the women I interviewed, was the job dispatching service the WC offers. In order to secure work, however, women have to adhere to an intricate point system as employment allocation is tied to participation. That is, women have to do “community work” (Naples 1992) in order to secure paid work through the organization in the form of housecleaning jobs. The organization has a set rate for domestic work, charging clients \$80 for three hours, which is the minimum, and \$20

for each additional hour. As the WC secures employment for women that pays well above the minimum wage, Latina migrant women are compelled to participate in the various events the organization organizes and attends, including distributing flyers, city hall meetings, as well as attending political rallies, marches and protests. For each event the women attend they receive a point, and at the end of each week points are tallied up and used to create a job dispatching list staff uses to allocate jobs as they come in. Members who do not attend any of the events are not included in the job dispatching list. The point system was implemented in an effort to encourage regular, active participation, but also to make job dispatching a more transparent and meritocratic process as in the past the WC's organizer was accused of nepotism and preferential treatment by various members.

Structure of the Dissertation

The bulk of the dissertation—chapters 2 through 4—is devoted to exploring the organization and experiences of women in the Brooklyn corner. **Chapter 2** presents a typology of solicitors that illustrate the different types of workers that can be found in this street-corner market, as well as their distinct pathways into day wage labor. This typology of solicitors, full-time, part-time, and seasonal job seekers, sets out to capture the range of experiences not typically afforded to contingent workers (Peck and Theodore 2012). However, despite the heuristic value of these categories in helping us think about the multiple ways by which Latina migrant women come into day labor and their disparate experiences in the industry, I do not wish to overstate the differences between them. That is, all of the women I encountered on the corner were struggling to create some semblance of full and/or stable employment, and even for the most “successful” of solicitors the boundaries between employment and unemployment were porous and constantly changing.

Chapter 3 examines the work the women on the Brooklyn corner were hired to perform, mainly domestic, care, and sex work. Here I draw on the concept of intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010) to illustrate not only the range of tasks women were expected to perform in the context of finite economic opportunities on the corner, but also the fluid and porous nature of these occupational boundaries. I show that while only a fraction of women (openly) engaged in sexual commerce on a regular basis, others turned to sex work intermittently, when other type of work was unavailable, undesirable, or in exchange for continued or future employment. Weaved into this section are the subjective meanings women ascribed to their work. I show that the domestic labor Latina migrant women performed for the Hasidim were not only imbued with religious meaning and purpose, but ultimately perceived as central to the reproduction of Jewish ethnicity. Day labor also provided women with a greater sense of autonomy in their work experience, which was manifested in their ability to negotiate better pay and a flexible schedule of hours, provisions they rarely enjoyed when working in traditional low-wage jobs in the general economy.

Chapter 4 is largely concerned with Latina migrant workers' understandings of their own participation in precarious industries. Here I focus on how Latina day laborers go about promoting their labor in order to maximize their employment prospects and attain some measure of autonomy and financial security in spite of their vulnerable, subordinate status. I do so in an effort to emphasize the agency—understood here as “the human capacity to exert some control over the condition's of one's existence” (Gomez-Muñoz 2010:297)—of undocumented migrants as they navigate the terrain of work in the U.S. I argue that our understanding of agency in day labor spaces, and ultimately contestation, need not be limited to the more extreme moments such as those involving wage theft or abuse but rather, day laborers' daily interactions with employers (and other workers) on

the street corner. To do this I examine three strategies women on the corner deploy—mainly, performing social identities, doing extra work, and turning down job offers—to promote their labor, shape their employment prospects and environment, and cultivate some modicum of job security and predictability against a backdrop of anonymity, hyperflexibility, and disposability. Street-corner markets, I argue, are not just spaces of subjugation and marginalization, they are also political sites of struggle and resistance.

Chapter 5 presents a comparative case study of the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women’s Collective (SFDLP-WC) in an effort to examine women’s day labor organizing prospects and possibilities. Here I examine the recent emergence of workers centers in an effort to contextualize the work of the SFDLP-WC and what I refer to as the “organizing imperative,” that is, the impetus to organize migrant day laborers in a particular political, economic, and social climate rife not only with nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment but also the progressive criminalization of migrants (Inda 2011). Drawing on Foucault's (2000) analytic of governmentality, I contend that while day labor centers are far from being oppressive instruments of state authority, they actively seek to transform day laborers into respectable neoliberal subjects, which inadvertently calls for their increased surveillance and seclusion. I thus situate the emergence (and proliferation) of worker centers on a continuum of local forms of social control that the state mobilizes, with the support of non-profit organizations, religious institutions, and other actors, to manage “illegal” migrants. I also examine the different ways by which women are incorporated into the organization and compelled to become active members of broader immigrant and labor organizing movements. Through the day to day operations of the center, I show that women are positioned as ideal (moral and economic) subjects for targeted intervention and come to represent the best hope for a revitalized labor movement. Finally, I examine two important contradictions in the center's organizational goals: First,

the positioning of women's organizing and activist work as an extension of their traditional gender roles as mothers and caregivers while at the same time seeking to contest these gender ideologies in their households, particularly with their spouses (see also Rudrappa 2004). Second, women's empowerment, conceived in part through the therapeutic model, emphasized personal transformation as the mechanism through which to affect structural change. I conclude with a discussion of how these hybrid organizations, which are purported to be "safe spaces" for disenfranchised immigrant workers, actually reproduce existing structures of gender and class inequality.

CONCLUSION

This study is an ethnographic engagement with the everyday lives and struggles of Latin American migrant women who solicit temporary employment through informal day labor markets in New York and San Francisco. *On the corner: Gender, race, and the making of informal day labor markets in New York City and San Francisco*, brings together the sociologies of migration, intimate labor, and labor organizing to examine the proliferation of nonstandard work arrangements in postindustrial economies, and the organizing strategies that have emerged to advance the rights of low-wage immigrant workers, mainly Latina day laborers. I incorporate three levels of analysis. At the micro level, I examine Latina day laborers' livelihood strategies and solicitation practices across two day labor organizational settings: a street-corner market in Brooklyn, and a worker center located in San Francisco's Mission District. On a meso level, I examine these women's ongoing negotiations with state and non-state actors who seek to address their social, structural, and sexual vulnerabilities. At a macro or structural level, I examine how day labor markets have become an especially fertile ground for the enactment of labor organizing strategies, as well as the development of new state governing capacities and

institutions. That is, together with the expansion of state apparatuses for border control, immigration regulation and migrant policing, we also see the development of internal governing schemes including migrant-oriented training programs and worker centers.

Chapter 2: The Women at Brooklyn's *La Parada*

INTRODUCTION

The Brooklyn corner, located in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of South Williamsburg, represents one of the few places in the U.S. where women gather in a public venue to solicit temporary household work. This human marketplace (Martinez 1973) is strategically located and highly visible, spread out over a cemented shoulder overlooking the Queens-Brooklyn expressway. The Brooklyn corner is also near a subway station that connects Brooklyn to Manhattan in one short stop. Since the early 2000s, “the corner” has been a place where the local Hasidim—mostly from the Hungarian Satmar sect—transact with migrant women who are looking for a few hours of household work. South Williamsburg, as opposed to the gentrified and moneyed North Williamsburg, is still home to a large Hasidic and Hispanic population. And, the Satmar, considered the most religiously stringent and isolationist of Hasidic sects (also staunchly anti-Zionist), have historically had complicated relations with their mostly Latino neighbors, clashing over affordable housing, city services, and police protection (Rubin 1997).

The recent expansion of the Brooklyn corner is due in part to a steady demand for low-cost household services, particularly cleaning, in the Hasidic community. Here ultra-orthodox households often hire a *goyte* or non-Jewish “cleaning lady” to provide an exhaustive weekly cleaning in order to fulfill the religious requirement that all leavening be removed from their home. This means that every week leading up to the Shabbat, Hasidic wives must ensure not only that their home be thoroughly cleaned but also that their children be bathed and dressed, and that the customary ritual foods be cooked before sundown. It is not uncommon for Hasidic women to take on the role of family breadwinner

(Fader 2009). In fact, her breadwinning role is considered appropriate if such work frees a scholarly husband for study or pays for children's yeshiva tuition. The rise in religious orthodoxy among the Hasidim has often translated into women raising large families while also often having to navigate the secular world of paid employment in order to protect Torah-studying men and boys from such worldly distractions. As one of the most poverty-stricken of New York's Jewish communities, however, hiring household help on a weekly basis is luxury many cannot afford.

Increased migration flows to New York City have also contributed to the growth of the Brooklyn corner. On any given day, with the exception of Saturdays, the Brooklyn corner gathers between twenty and sixty migrant women who seek temporary household work. These workers are mostly Latin American and Eastern European migrants. Mexican women are overrepresented on the Brooklyn corner, the majority from the southern state of Puebla, but also from Mexico City and surrounding states. Ecuadorians make up the second largest group of Latin American women on the corner, including indigenous Quechua-speakers from the Azuay and Cañar provinces, whose appearance, dress, and comportment is subject to much criticism and ridicule by their *compatriotas* (conationals). There are also women from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Argentina, and Peru, some of whom arrived to the U.S. on temporary tourist visas after having lived and worked in Spain and other parts of Europe for extended periods of time. Central American women, at times fleeing social and economic instability in their home countries, can also be found on the Brooklyn corner after having endured month-long migrations and multiple border-crossings (and multiple arrests). Those who traveled to the U.S. *sin papales* [without documents] often did so alone, without family or the assistance of a *coyote* or migrant smuggler. As Heyman notes (2014), intensified U.S.-Mexico border enforcement has spread back into Mexico, which renders Central Americans' and others' passage through

the interior of Mexico even more dangerous. Intensified border enforcement not only increases the risks associated with passage but also the costs, both for those traveling with or without a *coyote*. Women who could afford a smuggler, however, report having to pay anywhere between \$5,000 to \$12,000 in crossing and related fees, making their job search all the more urgent. For the unauthorized migrant women in this study, however, their journey did not end upon crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

In some ways the Brooklyn corner can be considered “as good as it gets” (Quesada et al. 2014) as far as informal day labor markets are concerned. With rare exception, the Brooklyn corner tends to be socially tolerated and relatively safe from police and community harassment. Like San Francisco, New York passed sanctuary ordinances in the 1980s to provide some legal recourse to Central American immigrants fleeing civil war and political persecution. These ordinances prohibited the police from aiding Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with immigration investigations. While these ordinances have long been in place in New York City, the legal and social climate has considerably changed for migrants, particularly following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 with the U.S. government adopting increasingly stringent policies to regulate migrants. As Gomberg-Muñoz notes (2012), these punitive and enforcement-oriented U.S. immigration policies and practices have been legitimized by a rhetoric of criminality that stigmatizes Latina/o migrant workers and intensifies their exploitation.

In this chapter I propose a typology of street-corner solicitation in an effort to illustrate not only the different types of workers that can be found on the Brooklyn corner and their distinct pathways into day wage labor, but also how these differences shape solicitation practices and outcomes. I use three categories, full-time, part-time, and seasonal solicitation, to capture the heterogeneity of experiences not typically afforded to day laborers, whose experiences in the industry are predetermined by their legal status or

precarious social locations. These categories serve as heuristic devices that reveal important differences among the women with respect to their “attachment” to the corner, that is, the extent to which they rely on the corner for their livelihood. They also point to distinct employment and migratory trajectories, and the diverse solicitation practices that emerge as a result. This chapter is organized as follows: First, I describe the experiences of full-time solicitors, who turn to this type of work in order to break into the housecleaning industry or as a stopgap strategy resulting from sudden unemployment. Second, I examine the trajectories of part-time solicitors who do not rely exclusively on day-wage labor to make ends meet. This includes workers who turn to day labor as part of a complex strategy for survival that entails juggling multiple jobs or mobilizing different income-generating strategies. Third, I illustrate the experiences of seasonal workers, women who were visa holders thus enjoyed greater mobility than other women on the corner, often traveling between Europe, the U.S., and their countries of origin as they navigated “global care chains” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). In all, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the heterogeneity of experiences, trajectories, and challenges day laborers, in this case women, confront when soliciting employment in these public markets to complicate overly deterministic accounts of the industry and its workforce.

THE BROOKLYN CORNER

On any given day, between thirty and sixty women gather at the corner of Marcy and Division Avenue in Williamsburg’s Hasidic Satmar enclave. Hailing from Latin America and increasingly less, Eastern Europe, these women stand for hours on end, scattered along a curved asphalt shoulder overlooking the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, waiting, without pay, for the possibility of obtaining a day’s work, or what Peck and Theodore aptly refer to as “fractions of jobs” (2001:493). From approximately seven in the

morning until six or seven in the evening, this Brooklyn corner—known among its Latin American occupants as *la parada*—morphs into a “human marketplace” (Martínez 1976) where migrant women gather to solicit day wage labor contracts from ultra-Orthodox Jewish families residing in and around Williamsburg, Brooklyn. This highly localized demand for inexpensive and flexible day labor is largely driven by the significant growth of the Hasidim in recent decades, as well as the depletion of factory and ancillary jobs in the area. The Hasidim, a highly ritualistic sect of ultra-Orthodox Judaism from Central and Eastern Europe who claim to be the bearers of authentic Jewish religion (Fader 2009), arrived in New York City during and following the Holocaust with the mission of reconstruction, focusing on rebuilding and repopulating their communities (Belcove-Shalin 1995). Women are key to these communities’ growth, for it is they who are tasked with bearing (an average of 8.33 children) and rearing the next generation of believers. However, as more than half of Hasidic households in Williamsburg live below the poverty level (Fader 2009), hiring a domestic worker on a regular basis is beyond the financial possibilities of many ultra-Orthodox families.

On a daily basis, migrant women are hired from this street-corner market to perform a range of “intimate labors” (Boris and Parreñas 2010) for the Hasidim, including domestic, care, and sex work. Solicitation on the Brooklyn corner, however—at least publicly—is largely confined to housecleaning work to the exclusion of other, less respectable (and illicit) forms of income generation. In this street-corner market, Latin American and Eastern European migrant women sell their labor in discrete units by day, from a few hours to a full day’s work. This means that these workers’ employment status is in constant flux, often from one day to the next. As a form of “liminal labor” (Purser 2012), they are caught “betwixt and between” (Turner 1964) employment and unemployment, relentlessly straddling the worlds of productive work and job searching. Waiting on the corner without

pay and for indeterminate amounts of time for the opportunity to work entails a considerable investment in terms of time, energy, and resources—in the form of bus fare, food costs, and forgone income. Thus the inability to secure employment on a daily basis, a regular occurrence on the corner where all workers are vying for a finite number of economic options, represents a significant loss.

This street corner serves a number of functions. Although primarily a site for income-generation, it also serves as a space where Latina migrant women can cultivate a social life and a sense of community for themselves (Turnovsky 2006a). Moreover, the corner represents a crucial space for exchanging important information about employment, housing, public resources, immigration, among other things. This street-corner market is bound by time-space (Shah 2014), which means that during the day women are allowed to gather in this designated area to await work, and expected to vacate it as soon as it no longer serves this productive function. Women start to slowly expunge themselves from the corner as the day advances and it becomes increasingly unlikely that they will secure work for the day. This typically starts to happen around noon, when the women break for lunch at a nearby catholic church that provides free meals to day laborers and homeless populations several times a week. It is not uncommon, however, for some to return to the corner after lunch to try to secure work for later in the day or week.

Not only does the corner serve multiple functions but is also inhabited by distinct groups of workers. Although various ethnic, racial, and national categories are mapped onto the physical confines of the corner, with Latinas gathering on one extreme and Eastern European women on the other, at times further segmenting along national lines, I found important differences among the women with respect to their “attachment” to the corner. The term “attachment” is generally used by economists to differentiate discouraged workers from the unemployed, claiming that these categories (and populations) are

analytically distinct because the latter searches actively while the former does not. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), discouraged workers, unlike the unemployed, are considered outside the labor force and lacking a distinctive labor force commitment. Discouraged workers are included in a broader group of jobless individuals who want and are available for work, but are not actively seeking it—referred to by the BLS as “marginally attached to the labor force” (see Van Haitsma 1991). Thus while economists generally use the term labor market attachment to examine the behavior of jobless individuals, here I use the term “attachment” in a more literal (and less normative) way. Attachment, in the context of street-corner solicitation, is a two-fold process: first, it refers to the amount of time an individual spends on the corner (on a full-time, part-time, and seasonal basis), and second, the extent to which she relies on day-wage labor for her livelihood (as the main source of income, supplemental, or temporary).

Those soliciting employment on a full-time basis consisted of workers who were suddenly laid off, recently unemployed or migrated. Not only did these workers solicit employment on a daily basis, five or six times a week, but relied largely (although not always exclusively) on this form of income-generation for their survival. The largest group that I encountered on the corner, however, were the part-time solicitors, those who mobilized multiple income generation strategies to make ends meet, and solicited at most three or four times a week. This group included those who held employment elsewhere (e.g., part-time and seasonal jobs), relied on some form of public assistance, or had considerable household and caregiving responsibilities and could not “commit” to full-time soliciting. The smallest group consisted of seasonal workers who traveled to the U.S. every year for up to six months at a time for employment. These women were visa holders who enjoyed greater mobility than most, often traveling between Europe, the U.S., and their

countries of origin as they navigated “global care chains” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

With the exception of those who were recently migrated, the women who gathered on the corner had extensive labor trajectories in the U.S. in sectors such as manufacturing and services, particularly as live-in domestics, caregivers, waitresses, and hostesses. So while day labor studies have consistently shown that men rely on this income-generating strategy as their sole source of income (Venezuela et al 2006; Valenzuela 2003), soliciting on a full-time basis, my findings reveal a more fragmented story when it comes to women's ability to make ends meet strictly through street-corner solicitation. That is, women's day labor experiences and ability to rely exclusively on these “jobs without a tomorrow” (Snow and Anderson 1993), varied significantly depending on their employment status, household and marital situation, networks, age, English skills, and to a lesser extent, legal status. The differences among the three categories of workers also shaped the solicitation practices women mobilized when trying to secure employment on the corner, something I discuss in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4. This chapter then examines three different types of street-corner solicitors that can be found on the Brooklyn street-corner market and their distinct pathways into day wage labor. I use the three categories of full-time, part-time and seasonal workers to capture the range of experiences not typically afforded to these precarious workers in the day labor literature.

The Workers of the Brooklyn Corner

Full-Time Solicitors

Street-corner markets are often understood as the first and last resort for securing paid work among groups of migrated people in New York City, acting as a barometer for the city's ability to absorb “unskilled” workers into its paid workforce (Shah 2014). For

full-time solicitors, however, day labor not only represented an entry point into the world of work in the U.S., or a stop-gap economic measure resulting from sudden unemployment, but also a way to transition into the housecleaning industry. The full-time solicitors were mostly undocumented migrants who relied on this work to support themselves. Those who were recent migrants were relatively younger than most on the corner, in their 20s and 30s, often unmarried or divorced. Those who turned to day labor as a result of a sudden job loss tended to be older workers with extensive living and employment trajectories in the U.S. Many were married or living with a partner and had U.S. born children and/or children in their countries of origin.

Full-time workers solicited employment on the corner on a daily basis, with the exception of Saturdays, the Jewish day of rest, and the income garnered through day labor represented their main source of income. By word of mouth, the women learned about the corner through friends or family members who often accompanied them to explain the intricacies of street-corner solicitation. At times a male relative or partner would chaperone them to ensure the safety of the site, although they would be quickly informed that men are not allowed to gather on the “women’s corner” (*la parada de mujeres*). An aura of safety surrounded the site as the women that solicited there arrived reassured that they would be working exclusively for the Hasidim, a deeply religious and tight-knit community that not only sanctioned the corner but also protected it from police intrusion and harassment. The constant (and increasing) demand for low-cost housecleaning services among the Hasidim created the conditions for this street-corner market to effectively draw hundreds of workers from as far as the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island to seek work at this site.

Transitioning into “Day-Work” in the Housecleaning Industry

I met Rosa, a twenty-two-year-old *mexicana* from the state of Mexico, on her first day on the corner. She was standing across the street with her father Francisco by her side.

After a year-long stint as a live-in domestic worker/nanny in New Jersey, a job her father had secured for her through an employment agency, Rosa was ready to join him in Brooklyn where he lived with her brother. During that first year as a live-in, Rosa was able to pay back most of the \$5,000 *coyote* debt her dad had accrued for her passage to the U.S. Although she was making \$450 a week as a live-in domestic, more than she could hope to make in Mexico in a month, she felt isolated and overworked. Despite working twelve-hour shifts, six days a week, cleaning, cooking, and caring for two small children, Rosa felt compelled to stick it out until she could pay back most of her father's debt. The youngest of five children, Rosa was determined to take over as her household breadwinner:

I don't want to be another burden for my father. He works hard and still manages to send my mother money every month despite the fact that they have been separated for over a decade. I feel like now it's my turn to help out, to take over caring for *mama*. She's not his responsibility anymore.

Her only brother migrated to the U.S. as soon as he finished high-school in Mexico, and her three older sisters are now married with children.

I don't expect my sisters to help out [financially] anymore because they have families of their own, but they still do a lot, checking in on *mama* and making sure she is taken care of. My brother, on the other hand, is not very reliable. The money that he makes he keeps for himself. We have yet to see a penny from him. He's saving up for when he gets married. I guess that's to be expected.

Rosa explains that unlike her brother, who was expected to migrate to the U.S. upon completing his studies, she had to “beg” her father to bring her to New York when she graduated:

My father insisted that I try to get some vocational training after high school so I started taking English classes at night to appease him but I really hate school. I just wanted to work and start making money to help out because I saw my mother struggling. A few years into it I became really impatient because I felt that my

father would never agree to bring me to New York so I had to come up with a plan. I convinced *mama* to call my father and tell him that I was seeing some *cholo* from the barrio, and that she was afraid I was going to run off with him. A month later I was boarding a plane headed to the border.

As a live-in domestic/nanny, Rosa managed to save up money and pay off the bulk of her *coyote* debt within a year. She eventually talked to her father about wanting to quit her job.

I told him I couldn't stand the isolation any longer. Being in a new country, away from my family and friends. It was a good first experience because I learned how to clean like a professional, how to take orders, and practice my English, but it was becoming clear that it was a dead-end for me.

For Rosa, live-in domestic/nanny work, not day labor, was her entry point into the world of work in the U.S. As soon as she settled her *coyote* debt, however, she turned to her father once again for help securing another job. Her father Francisco, who worked at a nearby deli owned by a Hasidic family from Argentina, introduced her to *la parada* and assured her that she could find employment there cleaning houses for Hasidic families. Unlike her job as a live-in domestic/nanny, which was ongoing and stable, day wage labor would be a temporary strategy until more stable forms of generating an income would become available. Francisco's Argentinean employer assured him that the corner was safe as the Hasidic community there was very tight-knit and everyone knew each other should something happen. Before leaving Rosa on the corner, Francisco insisted that she would be safe since the Hasidic community was made up of "hardworking and honest people." Should any problems arise, he would take it up with his employer. He repeated that "[I] wouldn't leave you here if I didn't think it was safe." He kissed her on the cheek, and pulled her hair away from her face. "Don't be so shy. Just remember that you have an advantage over these women. You are young, strong, willing to work hard, and most importantly, you speak English."

Her father was right. Within a few weeks of soliciting employment on the corner, Rosa secured a job as a nanny for a Jewish family who lived in the neighborhood. Although her employers had originally hired her to clean their home once a week, they eventually offered her work as a nanny, caring for their four-year-old son in addition to (light) cleaning. During the first few weeks of waiting for work on the corner, however, Rosa was unsure she would ever find employment through public solicitation. “I’m too shy for this,” she would say, adding that “you have to be aggressive to get noticed.” During the first week, however, Rosa turned down multiple employment offers, mostly from men or those that entailed more than a fifteen-minute walk from the corner, as a “safety precaution.” These precautionary measures were prompted by her conversations with other women on the corner who advised her against getting into cars with men, accepting offers from non-Hasidic employers, or taking on non-cleaning work, at least until she was better able to discern “honest” employers from unscrupulous ones. The message was clear: younger solicitors had to take extra precautions by restricting their mobility, thoroughly vetting employers, and limiting employment to cleaning to enhance their safety. This is a topic I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3.

This level of discernment, while done with the intent of minimizing risk and enhancing her physical safety in a context that was construed as potentially unsafe for young women, also meant that Rosa would be turning down a considerable number of job offers. During her first week on the corner, for instance, she managed to secure a measly four hours of work. Despite receiving two or three job offers on a daily basis—more than most women—she turned them down because she did not feel comfortable venturing too far from the corner, the only part of Brooklyn she was familiar with, or accepting job offers from men. “Me da miedo [I’m scared],” she would say when I asked her why she did not feel comfortable accepting these offers:

One hears all these stories about what happens to women on this corner. A few days ago an *ecuatoriana* told me about a young *polaca* [Polish woman], a college student who was visiting for the summer and would come to the corner to make some extra cash. They said she was picked up by a group of men in a truck, raped, and then thrown into a nearby dumpster. Apparently this happened a few years ago. Who knows, maybe they are just rumors, gossip really, but it makes me think that it is not as safe as the *judios* say.

In a context of limited information, stories like these, although often trivialized as “just” rumors or gossip, serve as cautionary tales that are passed down to newcomers in an effort to illustrate what constitutes acceptable soliciting behavior, particularly for younger women who are perceived as requiring an additional layer of protection. As a form of social control (Gluckman 1963), it is also an effective way for older, more established solicitors not only to ensure that newcomers comply with their rules around proper forms of solicitation, but that the advantage youth confers these workers on the corner is leveled by imposing a higher degree of discernment on them. Despite her father’s repeated reassurances that the street corner was safe, the only job Rosa accepted on her first week came from a young Hasidic girl who lived just a few blocks away. Before leaving we exchanged phone numbers, which was another safety measure some of the women advised her to take before going off to work, at least until she felt safe.

Rosa's story illustrates how for many Latina migrant women, particularly those who are young, unmarried, and undocumented, live-in domestic work is a rite of passage as they transition into the world of work in the U.S. Her story also shows that arriving to the U.S. often requires immediate employment, particularly for those with outstanding debt from *coyote* fees and/or families to support in their countries of origin. Once she was able to repay her debt, however, Rosa quit her job and resorted to day labor as a temporary measure until something more stable and long-term came along. Thus day labor was not a first or last resort, but rather a way for her to break into “day work” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) in

the cleaning industry that did not entail the grueling, invasive, and more exploitative aspects of live-in work, which was perceived by Rosa as a more precarious and demanding type of employment. Once on the corner, however, Rosa believed that she did not have an “aggressive” enough disposition for street-corner solicitation. Given that she was new (and younger than most women on the corner) and received multiple work offers on a daily basis, more seasoned workers often stepped in when she was approached by an employer to ensure that she would abide by the rules of the corner and that she would not accept work that was perceived to be unsafe. Rosa often felt silenced in her interactions with potential employers because others would speak for her despite the fact that she spoke English fluently. She also felt observed as women would keep track of how many employers approached her on any given day, and how many times she turned down a job offer. After securing work as a nanny, however, Rosa stopped going to the corner on a daily basis, limiting her stints of day labor to once or twice a week or on her days off.

A Stopgap Strategy for Sudden Unemployment

Maria is a forty-six-year-old *mexicana* from the state of Puebla who was recently laid-off from her factory job in Brooklyn where she had been working full-time for the last ten years. Maria lives with her husband in East Brooklyn where they share a three-bedroom apartment with two other families. Her three adult daughters remain in Puebla and are now married and have families of their own. However, Maria still feels a financial obligation to her three daughters and her grandchildren, and “helps out” by sending them remittances every month or so, “at least fifty or a hundred dollars so that they can have some grocery money and not depend solely on their husbands” she said. Although Maria has been unemployed for the last six months, she continued to generate some income by providing childcare services to her friends and neighbors. After hearing about the corner from a friend at church in Queens, however, she decided to give it a try:

Taking care of other people's children is too stressful. I felt that it was more trouble than it was worth since I was only getting paid \$20 a day for each kid. I also had to feed them so at the end of the day I often ended up losing money. One day when I stayed and talked to a friend after mass, telling her all about my employment situation, she told me about *la parada*. My first reaction was, “*no te da miedo?* [aren't you scared?]" I don't know, there was something about standing on a corner, like the men do or like a prostitute, waiting to get picked up like that. It just didn't sit well with me. It didn't sit well with my husband either. He insisted that I take a break instead and stay home for a while. “*Relajate,*” he would tell me, like he wanted me to take being unemployed as a vacation or something. But I would say to him, “What am I supposed to do at home all day? I am not a high-class lady!” I've worked my entire life, since I could remember, since I could hold a broom. As a young girl my mom would send me to the neighbor's house to clean and help out. So, no, *not* working was never an option for me. Plus, I thought, “Who is going to look after my daughters and grandchildren in Mexico?” And that's when I decided to check it out, see what it was like, at least until I could return to work at the factory.

Despite her reservations about soliciting employment on the corner “like men” or “prostitutes,” Maria decided to give street solicitation a try. Her friend Tere dropped her off at the corner on her way to work, explaining the intricacies of solicitation:

Mira aquí, try to stand somewhere in the middle that way you can see employers and they can see you. Make eye contact and smile, look friendly, and try not to get so sucked into conversation with these women because employers don't like to approach large groups of women, especially when they're socializing or eating. They prefer the loners. And try not to sit. Also, next time, try not to come looking like a *pordiojera* [bum] and wear some loose, comfortable pants and a long-sleeved shirt because they won't hire you if you are showing too much skin. It's a religious thing. Always ask them “How many hours?” and make sure they agree upfront to \$10. And since you are new at this, I wouldn't try to negotiate further than that because you are just trying to get as many employers as possible at this point. Later, when you have more options, you can *botarlas* [discard them]. Now is not the time to get picky, later, sure, when you have more experience and options. For now, take what you can get and be thankful. And remember, on the corner, *cada quien se rasca con sus propias uñas* [it's every woman for herself].

Maria was overwhelmed by the amount of information she received from her friend Tere that day but also by the sheer number of women that were gathered on the corner looking

for work, well over fifty. As we waited, she mentioned that she was desperate to get back to work at the factory, where she worked as a seamstress forty hours a week (at minimum wage). Her husband, a construction worker, was a day laborer who solicited employment in other parts of Brooklyn. Although he often earned more than she did (when he managed to get work), his employment was unreliable and constantly changing. Out of the two, it was her factory wages that had kept the household afloat and provided just enough for her to send their daughters and grandchildren remittances on a monthly or bimonthly basis. Her sudden unemployment came after the owner of the factory suffered a stroke, and it was unclear if and when production would resume.

Like some of the other women I talked to, María initially tried to secure temporary employment through an (pseudo)employment agency in Brooklyn. Although she could provide proof of legal residency in the U.S. with counterfeit “papers” she purchased when she first arrived to the U.S., she was unsuccessful in getting work through the employment agency, which she attributed to her English skills:

Here [on the corner] I can get away with the little English that I know because I can memorize a few questions and follow basic instructions when it comes to cleaning. You have to be conversant in English in order to get work through the employment agency. Why? I don't know, it's not like they would be hiring me to work in an office. It's still housecleaning work, just not with *judios*. They also don't guarantee that they will find you employment and so you have to wait and wait, much like we do here. The only difference is that here we don't have to pay [fees] or accept minimum wage when we do go out to work. I figured it was worth giving the corner a shot, perhaps I would have more options here. To be honest, it didn't seem like I had much of a choice at that point. I was wasting time and money trying to get work through the agency and nothing was happening. The corner was my only option, I was desperate.

Given her unsuccessful attempt to secure employment through a temp agency and her reservations about street-corner solicitation and its association with sex work, Maria defined the corner as a last resort. She turned to day labor as a stopgap strategy because

other, more stable forms of generating income were not available. Her first stop, however, was the employment agency where she paid a \$25 application fee for the opportunity to secure housecleaning work in non-Jewish households in other parts of the borough. In addition to offering to pay her minimum wage, she would have to give them a portion of her wages during the first three weeks of employment. Unable to secure work for weeks, she turned to the corner to see if she would have more control over her employment prospects there. When I met Maria she was still new to the corner, and like Rosa, was feeling overwhelmed and intimidated by the sheer number of women who gathered there on a daily basis. Shortly after we meet, Maria got a haircut and modified her wardrobe by wearing long-sleeved shirts and loose-fitting jeans in hopes that this would increase her chances of getting work. Still, in the weeks that followed Maria was getting, at most, two or three jobs per week. Determined to “fill her week,” she began arriving to the corner earlier than most, and leaving well into the evening. Seeing that I was approached by several employers on a daily basis, Maria would stand next to me and a few other “veteran” workers so that we could pass on jobs we did not want, or help translate during her interactions with potential employers. A few weeks after we met, Maria managed to secure an ongoing office cleaning job that the other women had turned down because of the short hours it offered. Although the job only provided four hours of work twice a week, Maria was hopeful because it put her on the path toward “filling her week.”

In sum, full-time solicitors represented some of the most precarious workers on the corner. Day labor was often an entry point into the world of work in the U.S., a stop-gap economic measure resulting from sudden unemployment, or a way to transition into housecleaning “day-work.” They learned of the corner through family members or friends, reassured that they would be working exclusively for the Hasidim, who were portrayed as “hardworking and honest people.” Despite their ambivalence of soliciting employment

from the street, the income garnered through day labor represented their main source of income, which they used to send remittances to their families back home or provide for their households in the U.S.

Part-Time Solicitors

Unlike workers who solicit on a full-time basis, part-time solicitors did not rely exclusively or largely on day-wage labor to make ends meet. These workers instead pooled income from multiple economic activities, both on and off the corner. This often included combining day labor with formal part-time employment elsewhere, or (il)licit productive activities on the corner. Among them were also those who relied on some form of public assistance and working mothers who could not (or would not) take on full-time employment because of their care giving and household responsibilities. For the latter full-time employment rarely accommodated their caregiving needs due to the non-standard hours and unreliable scheduling practices that were pervasive in the low-wage service sector where many had previously worked. Similarly, women who received public assistance such as cash assistance, subsidized housing, unemployment, or disability benefits were compelled to turn to day labor to secure a few days of off-the-books employment to supplement their incomes. For those who held employment elsewhere, the corner was part of a complex strategy for survival that often included straddling formal and informal employment. Among these workers were those with relatively long trajectories of street-corner solicitation, often engaging in heated negotiations with employers over adequate pay and more favorable work conditions. Given their ability to mobilize multiple sources of income, these workers were more inclined to turn down less than desirable employment offers, particularly if they did not entail a “full-day's work” (at least 6 hours) and the standard hourly rate of \$10.

Unlike with full-time solicitors, migration status does not map on easily to these workers. Among part-time solicitors were those with legal permanent residence and U.S. citizenship. There were also a significant number of Central American asylum seekers and TPS (temporary protected status) recipients from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras who were temporarily protected from deportation and had employment authorization. Unauthorized migrants included long-term residents of the U.S. who had arrived to the country on tourist visas from Mexico, Ecuador, Peru and the Dominican Republic. Besides relying on multiple forms of income generation to make ends meet and spending less time on the corner than full-time solicitors, these women differed from the rest in that many were single mothers (widowed, separated, or divorced) and/or household heads. They also significantly differed in their approach to street-corner solicitation. These workers were more aggressive and proactive in their interactions with employers, negotiating for longer hours and at times also meals and a ride back to the corner. Turning down work then was a common occurrence among these workers. Unlike full-time solicitors, moreover, part-time workers had extensive experience as street-corner solicitors and as a result closely monitored other workers and their interactions with prospective employers.

Day-Wage Labor as Part of a Complex Strategy for Survival

Janet is a single mother of three who has been residing in the U.S. for over twenty-five years. Originally from Lima, Perú, Janet decided to migrate to the U.S. where her father resided with his second wife and their U.S. born children. After several failed attempts at securing a tourist visa to come to the U.S. for work, her husband “allowed” Janet to apply for a tourist visa on the grounds that it would be easier for her to be granted a visa given that she was financially dependent on him and had a six-month old baby. Moreover, once in the U.S., Janet would be under the supervision of her father, who could secure employment for her in the company where he worked. On her first attempt, Janet

was granted a tourist visa that would allow her to remain in the U.S. for up to six months at a time, long enough for her to secure employment and send her family monthly remittances, which would significantly boost to their household income. Sensing trouble in her marriage, Janet was happy to leave Peru and envisioned a new life for herself in New York with her father and his family. She planned to send for her daughter once she was settled in and could come to some financial agreement with her husband over the custody of their six-month old daughter. However, in order to appease her husband and his family, Janet framed her decision to migrate to the U.S. as a “family strategy,” a (temporary) separation that would ultimately strengthen their marriage and household economy. It was a sacrifice she was willing to make for her family, particularly as a new mother. Her husband was reassured that she would return as she would not “abandon” their six-month old daughter. Once in the U.S., however, Janet filed for divorce and demanded custody of their daughter.

Janet describes leaving Peru as an escape, not only from an abusive husband but his overbearing family. She felt “trapped” in a failed relationship and viewed her decision to leave her husband and daughter as her only option since she feared for her life. “What kind of mother is a dead mother?” she asked as she explained the circumstances of her departure from Peru. Leaving her family behind, however, had consequences as it would take well over two years for Janet to terminate her marriage and reunite with her daughter in the U.S. Janet's father eventually returned to Perú a few years later, leaving Janet and her daughter to fend for themselves in Queens. She eventually remarried, had two more children, and became a U.S. citizen. Janet, however, describes her marriages as a series of “opportunities,” the first allowing her to leave her parent's dysfunctional household and the second as a way to provide her daughter from her previous marriage with a fatherly-figure

and a more financially secure environment in the U.S. “I’ve never married for love,” she noted.

After her second divorce, Janet found herself single again, this time with three small children. She supported herself and her family by selling Herbalife products to friends and neighbors, a “hobby” she had acquired during her second marriage as her husband did not approve of her working outside the home. She also began making t-shirts and selling them at a Queens flea-market, in addition to offering snow removal services to neighbors during the winter months. Through her local mosque Janet was eventually able to secure additional off-the-books employment assisting a Pakistani property manager in Queens part-time. On her free time, Janet also operated an informal taxi service in her neighborhood. Moreover, a few years ago Janet married a third time, this time to a Tunisian migrant she met online in order to help him secure a green card, for which she was paid \$15,000. She now shares her three-bedroom apartment with her Tunisian husband, a second tenant, and her fifteen-year-old daughter. Janet’s current boyfriend, however, is being held at an immigrant detention center in upstate New York, and her daily phone calls, weekly visits, and monthly commissary deposits have severely affected her household economy. In order to supplement her income, Janet began going to the Brooklyn corner to secure day wage labor. Janet describes herself as a “businesswomen.” However, as for other women who are heads of households, day-wage labor is rarely enough to make ends meet:

Look, I was a businesswoman in Peru, helping my father out with his business and properties in Lima, and that is what I am here. Even when I wasn’t working I was making money, little bits here and there from my many hobbies. If I relied exclusively on the corner for my survival, I would die of hunger.

Despite it not being enough to make ends meet, Janet finds that day-wage labor allows her to make extra cash on a regular basis without interrupting her other hustles and “hobbies.” She is, therefore, “jobless but not workless” (Andrews 1996:D10). On the corner, Janet also finds that she can negotiate better pay with employers on the corner:

Unlike the other women here, I usually go for \$11 [an hour]. But if an *americano* or *judío moderno* [non-Orthodox Jew] comes looking for a worker, I'll ask for \$12 or even \$15 an hour, depending on how many hours they're willing to give me. Sometimes I'll even charge by the job, depending on the size of the flat, like they do in Manhattan. So you see, here in *la parada*, unlike for example, in McDonald's, every job is an opportunity, you never know what you're going to get and that's what keeps me coming back.

Despite her inability to rely exclusively on the corner to make ends meet, for if she did she would “die of hunger,” Janet finds some benefits to street-corner solicitation, particularly in relation to minimum wage paying jobs in the service economy. On the corner, for instance, she could negotiate directly with prospective employers, and set a higher hourly rate. When I asked Janet why she charged more than the going rate of \$10, she pointed out that unlike most other women on the corner, she was an American citizen. “It’s only fair since I actually pay taxes, unlike most of these other women here who are undocumented.” When employers inquired into why she charged significantly more than the standard rate, she typically explained that not only does she pay taxes, but also speaks English fluently, and has vast work experience and even references. On one such occasion, when a non-Hasidic man approached her on the corner to clean his house, she explained the following: I am an American citizen sir, and every year, just like you, I file my federal taxes. I pay taxes, you see? Other women here don’t so it’s fine to pay them just \$10. But not me. I also have a car payment and three children in private school so I can’t give my work away for free.

The man who approached her offered her \$12 and four hours of work. Janet accepted the offer, but only after she explained to him that she usually asks for \$15 when the work contract is for less than four hours. However, she said she was willing to make an exception because things were unusually slow on the corner.

Despite noting that day-wage labor would not be sufficient to ensure her and her family's livelihood, Janet, as others on the corner, also embraced the idea that on the street, “every job is an opportunity.” Much like the men in Purser's study of informal day labor in the Bay Area, for whom the street was perceived to be “paved with economic opportunity” (2009:126), women on the Brooklyn corner also viewed the street-corner market as a promising prospect for generating income. Unlike other low-wage jobs that were characterized by routine and repetitive tasks, soliciting and negotiating work on the street-corner were perceived as more dynamic and self-directed that could potentially yield higher wages and a more flexible work schedule. In this context, day labor emerged as an employment strategy that allowed street-corner workers to cultivate not only a sense of autonomy, but also a social identity as assertive and shrewd “businesswomen” who could actively shape the terms of their employment. So while studies of day labor typically portray these contingent workers as docile bodies that are easily expendable and coercible, women on the corner found ways to promote their labor in ways that were beneficial to them. The strategies these women relied on included not only cultivating an identity as “businesswomen” but also mobilizing their own racial stereotypes to promote their labor (over others’), something I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 4. Still, on the corner where “every job is an opportunity,” the burden is placed on the self-reliant, “entrepreneurial” woman to improve her personal circumstances, successfully mediate risk, and ensure her livelihood.

Balancing Employment with Family and Household Responsibilities

Lili, a thirty-one-year-old *guatemalteca* from a small rural community just outside of Guatemala City, has been soliciting work on the Brooklyn corner for over a year. Previous to this, Lili worked as a waitress in different Latino establishments in Queens, where she lives with her husband, their two children, and his brother and family. Unlike the waitressing jobs she had since she first arrived to the U.S. seven years ago, Lili finds that day-wage labor allows her to spend more time with her children and husband:

Every morning, after I fix breakfast and take my kids to school, I jump on the train and make my way to the corner by 8am. My husband leaves at 6am so he doesn't get to see me leave after I drop off the kids, or even know that I come to the corner everyday. As long as I make it back in time to pick up the kids from school, I'm ok. And really, he doesn't have a way of knowing that I am working. The thing is, when we got together and started to live in *union libre* [cohabitate], he told me that he wanted a wife who would be fully dedicated to her family. I didn't take him very seriously but I really liked him, so I promised to quit my job after starting a family. I also needed a place to live because my old roommate was moving her boyfriend in and wanted me out of the room we shared so I went along with it. Honestly, I wasn't sure I wanted more children, or even a husband [laughs]. I already had two kids in Guate, and could barely call myself a mother because I have been away from them since they were small. My oldest was just seven, old enough to remember me, and of course, he resents me for leaving him. So I thought, "Why would I bring more children into this world if I can't even take care of the ones I already have?" It just seemed selfish and cruel.

After meeting her partner Lili continued to waitress during the weekdays and weekends, which caused a lot of problems in their relationship. Her partner resented the fact that she was not around to make dinner during the week, or that they could not spend more time together on the weekends:

The problem, I think, is that he didn't like his younger brother to see that I was away from home a lot, or that I wasn't there to make them dinner or clean up. At one point he didn't even let me go to the gym because he said that I was already spending too much time *en la calle* [on the street]. He felt that I was sending the wrong message, that his brother would think that he was incapable of supporting me, that I was *ingobernable* [out of control], and that made him very upset. But I told him that I

couldn't just quit my waitressing job because my children and mother in Guate depended on me. So I said, "Fine, I'll quit, but you'll have to support my children. I send them \$200 every month." He agreed and so I quit and got pregnant six months later.

Like some of the other women I talked to, Lili did not reveal to her husband that she solicits employment on the street-corner. Unlike her waitressing job, which caused a lot of tension in her relationship and household, day-wage labor allowed her to be the "selfless" and "dedicated" wife and mother her partner expected her to be since she can still tend to her family obligations while making "pocket money" by cleaning houses. "I'm giving him what he wants," she added, noting, however, that "he hasn't kept his part of the deal because he sometimes doesn't have enough money to send my children in Guate. So I have to do the right thing and go out and make my own money so that *my* children there are taken care of too."

For Lili, withholding this information from her husband is justified in that he has not "kept his part of the deal." However, she does not want to "completely undermine his authority" by taking on full-time employment. Day labor represents a compromise that allows Lili to attend to her household responsibilities while still meeting her financial obligations to her family in Guatemala. To do this she keeps the money she makes from housecleaning from him and sends it directly to her children and mother in Guatemala. Since her husband works as a construction worker during the day, Lili is able to spend time on the corner without him knowing. Lili notes that another reason she does not disclose this information to him is because he would not approve of her soliciting employment on the street-corner given its association with sex work. Like women who rely on multiple income generating activities, Lili only takes on jobs that offer at least six hours, or less if it pays at least \$11 an hour. Although this is Lili's way of filtering out "bad jobs," it also means that she spends a lot of time on the corner, often engaging in long and heated

discussions with employers over pay or with other women who accept job offers that she perceives as unfavorable to all of the women on the corner.

Part-time solicitors then differed from full-time solicitors in that they pooled income from multiple economic activities, both on and off the corner, including combining day labor with formal part-time employment elsewhere. Among these workers were also women who relied on public assistance and working mothers who could not take on full-time employment because of their caregiving and household responsibilities. For them full-time employment was not an option as it rarely accommodated their caregiving needs due to unreliable scheduling practices or long hours that were common in the low-wage service sector where many had previously worked. These workers' legal statuses were more diverse and complex than full-time solicitors, and many were single mothers and/or household heads. As such, they tended to be more proactive and assertive in their interactions with employers, asking for longer hours, meals, and at times bus or train fares. These workers also monitored others' negotiations with employers to ensure that the standard rate of \$10 would be upheld. They were also more inclined to turn down employment offers that were not perceived to lead to recurring employment, which meant that they did not work as often as full-time solicitors.

Seasonal Workers

Seasonal workers included women from Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic who travelled to the U.S. with tourist visas on a yearly basis, often for a period of three to six months. Staying with family or friends in New York, these women turned to the corner to secure as much work as possible before returning to their countries of origin. Although they could hardly be described as the most precarious of workers on the corner—as visa holders who enjoyed greater mobility and relied on

extensive social networks in the U.S.—their solicitation practices consisted of procuring as much work as possible in a short period of time, which often entailed accepting job offers without negotiating pay, more favorable work conditions, or attempting to cultivate a lasting relationship with employers.

Julie is a forty-four-year-old *colombiana* from Bogotá who has been traveling to the U.S. for over twenty years for seasonal employment. Her tourist visa allows her to travel to the U.S. every year for up to six months at a time. In the past Julie secured full-time work through an employment agency, mostly as a live-in nanny/caregiver, but in recent years she has found that type of work extremely taxing, lonely, and stress-producing. A Mexican friend mentioned the corner one day at a church event:

She told me, “stop working so much, come to the corner, you will find housecleaning day work there,” and so I decided to check it out. It was strange seeing all those women standing around waiting for work, I thought, “wow, how I am I ever going to get work here?” There were so many women that day, and the need was so great...*tanta muerta de hambre* I thought. [laughs]. But I decided to stay and give it a try because I was ready to do something different, something that wouldn't be so stressful and emotionally draining. I was exhausted and stressed out all of the time but had to think really hard about what to do because live-in jobs pay well, at least when you first see the check you say, “wow, that's a lot of money!” But if you do the math, you realize that you do a lot of work and at the end the pay is not so great, when you break it down by hour. And caring for someone is a lot work, it's a human being, you know? It's a lot of pressure, and that has caused me much stress over the years. As I get older I realize that I don't have the energy or desire to care for another human being. My daughters are grown and although they still need me to help them with college tuition and all that, I can't take care of them forever.

Julie, like some of the other women on the corner who have long employment trajectories as caregivers, expressed feeling exhausted, overworked, and emotionally drained. However, her decision to transition to day-wage labor had significant financial consequences. While as a caregiver she would make an average of \$500 a week (working

twelve hour days, six or seven days a week), on the corner she was struggling to make half of that—on a good week. With the support of her partner, who provided her a place to stay during her stints in the U.S. free of charge, Julie decided to give street-corner solicitation a try, at least for a few months. Over time she found that she not only had greater control over her labor on the corner, but that she could (or rather, would have to) combine cleaning work with other types of work to make ends meet. After gathering there a few weeks, for instance, she found that standing on the “Polish side” increased her job prospects:

Employers often approached me to ask if I was Polish, and of course, I would tell them that I was Colombian but then I realized that other Latinas just went along with them, nodded, and then the employer would say, “OK let's go.” And so I started to stand on the Polish side, and since I am light-skinned I fit right in. I think it also helped that I was younger than most *polacas* who are much older, in their fifties or sixties.

Julie found that there were often “too many Latinas” on the corner and that standing on the “Polish side” increased her job prospects as some employers explicitly asked for Polish workers. However, even though she was getting housecleaning work 3-4 times a week, she was not making as much money as she had anticipated. A few weeks after arriving on the corner, Julie began to accept offers for “massages” for which she would charge between \$30 and \$40 an hour, “depending on the body part” she added, half jokingly, in addition to housecleaning work. Julie, however, avoided getting into the details of what the massages entailed, at least not in front of other women. Taking on such work was frowned upon because of its association with sex work. Most women believed that “massage” was a euphemism for sex work, and thus rarely entertained such offers, at least not openly. Although Julie rarely talked about this type of work, she did not conceal the fact that she had recently also started working as a hostess at a working-class Latino “dance hall” in Queens, where she is tasked with socializing and dancing with male patrons:

You have a drink with the poor guy, or pretend to because the bartender dilutes our drinks. You dance a bit, or a lot, depending on how much he wants to spend that night. These poor men come to the bar with their entire paychecks and spend it all in one night. Some of them are so young, you know, my daughters' ages! It can be sad at times but the way I see it is, well, we provide these men some comfort [*alivio*], and for a few hours it's like they're back home, in a familiar and friendly environment, you know? It's a nice feeling, really nice. And of course, sometimes I do worry that someone I know may see me because, you know, there are many *colombianos* in Queens. But I'm not ashamed of what I am doing to make *plata* because it puts food on the table, it pays for college tuition, okay? So it's *trabajo digno* [dignified work]. My daughters attend some of the most prestigious private schools in Bogotá. They don't know what hard work is and never will, thank God. Leave the hard work to their mother who is illiterate and never received a proper education. And what am I doing, really? I'm dancing, and I do that anyway because I love to dance [starts dancing]. You see, *colombianas* are known to be amazing dancers, and despite my age, I still have a firm and beautiful body.

Julie, as other women on the corner, found it difficult to make ends meet relying exclusively on housecleaning day-wage labor. In this case, Julie supplemented her day labor wages by taking on non-cleaning work on the corner as well as working weekends as a hostess at a dance hall in Queens where she makes an average of one hundred dollars a night, depending on tips and the number of drinks patrons purchase for her. Julie thus managed to piece together a series of informal jobs in order to support herself and her family in Colombia. The massages Julie performs, however, is not work that a lot of women take on in the corner, or at least admit to, in part because such work offers are perceived to be sexual in nature, and ultimately, discouraged by more veteran workers who do not view that type of work as legitimate waged work.

Part-time solicitors included women that had long employment trajectories as live-in domestic and/or caregivers. In their efforts to transition into other types of work, they had to piece together a series of informal jobs in order to support themselves and their families. As the case of Julie shows, some of them took on sex work both on and off the corner, immersing themselves in different intimate economies and providing a range of

services from “massages” to dances at Latino nightclubs in Queens. Many of these women were single mothers and heads of households, who like Janet, had to generate income from multiple jobs and illicit economic transactions including “tactical sexual relationships” (see Stout 2014). This is a topic I will return to in the following chapter where I describe, in greater detail, the different types of intimate labors women on the corner are hired to perform.

CONCLUSION: ON FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, AND SEASONAL WORKERS

The most comprehensive and widely cited survey on day labor in the U.S., the National Day Labor Survey (NDLS) undertaken by Valenzuela and his team in 2004 (Valenzuela et al. 2006), sampled 2,660 day laborers at 264 sites nationwide. The NDLS estimates that on any given day there are more than 117,000 day laborers awaiting work across the U.S. A largely Latino, undocumented, and recently migrated workforce, the study found that most day laborers have been in the country for less than six years and solicit employment on a full-time basis (Valenzuela et al. 2006:18). Day labor then is their sole source of income. These figures have been routinely cited in subsequent studies of day labor (González 2015), including public health and social work research (Organista 2007; Worby and Organista 2007) and urban ethnographies (Ordoñez 2010; Purser 2009; Turnovsky 2006). These studies, however, tend to overlook important differences between the workers who solicit employment in these public street-corner markets, their particular pathways, circumstances, and needs, and instead focus on the experiences of “full-time *jornaleros*,” those who solicit employment on a permanent basis and are said to be representative of this laboring population. However, even Valenzuela warns us of the limitations of the sampling frameworks and methods commonly employed to examine an industry that is characterized by daily and seasonal fluctuations, as well as the impossibility

of gauging the “true” universe population. He notes, in reference to quantitative studies, that even the most robust random selection procedures “allow for only limited generalizations” (Valenzuela 2003:329).

I mention these studies and methodological considerations here because much in the same way that women are consistently overlooked in studies of day labor because they represent a small minority of its labor force (given the way day labor is defined by most), so too are workers whose experiences and trajectories deviate from the statistical norm concocted by quantitative researchers. Even when ethnographers allude to the nuances of this precarious industry, particularly the different types of workers who solicit employment through these public markets, their concern is largely with those who can be found on the corner on a permanent basis to the exclusion of those that are consistently hired and working. This form of “selectivity bias” is noted by Valenzuela largely in reference to survey research and interviews—but the same can be said of ethnography—which results from the oversampling of day laborers who are not getting work or less experienced solicitors. Researchers then have long engaged in methodological discussions about what constitutes a day laborer, how to capture the size of the workforce given the volatility of the industry, and the extent to which studies have missed more “effective” day laborers who may not be present at the time surveys and interviews are conducted.

From an ethnographic perspective, however, Ordoñez (2010) argues that the very idea of being an “effective day laborer” is oxymoronic and misleading because it obscures the very reality of what it means to rely on street-corner solicitation to make ends meet. That is, in order to “vivir del jornal” or live by the day wage, one must be physically present on the street on a permanent basis in order to be economically viable. He argues that one ceases to be a day laborer when one can avoid the street altogether, presumably by being permanently employed elsewhere. Those who are not permanently on the corner then get

omitted from his ethnographic study of day labor in Berkeley, California, not because he did not encounter them (he did) but rather because their inclusion would complicate his assumptions about the inevitable marginalization and powerlessness of the day labor workforce. The premise of his study is that as “docile bodies” and ultimately, surplus labor, day laborers are easily expendable and coercible, and his ethnographic project is merely tasked with documenting the paths through which this powerlessness is reproduced and further naturalized by the workers themselves.

This study does not seek to undermine the important contributions made by scholars of day labor, particularly with respect to the abuse, exploitation, and daily violence undocumented migrant workers often face when attempting to secure employment in this public manner. I am, however, interested in highlighting the heterogeneity of experiences, trajectories, and challenges day laborers, in this case women, confront when soliciting employment in this public manner in order to complicate overly deterministic accounts of the industry and its workforce. My identification of workers as full-time, part-time, and seasonal seeks to complicate these one-dimensional portrayals and accounts of the day labor industry by showing the range of workers who rely on day labor, the different pathways to day labor, and the varying degrees of “success” and ability make ends meet through day wage labor.

My research indicates that there are important differences with respect to the amount of time workers spend on the corner and the extent to which they rely on day labor to make ends meet. These are considerations that are rarely addressed or discussed in much depth in studies of day labor in part because of the focus has been largely on “full-time *jornaleros*,” those who rely exclusively on day labor for their livelihood (and are present when surveys and interviews are conducted). The group of women that I categorize as full-time solicitors more closely fits the profile of day laborers reproduced in much of the

literature I point to above. These workers are mostly recent migrants or those who recently experienced a sudden job loss as they tend spend the most amount of time on the corner and rely on day wage labor as their main source of income. Part-time and seasonal solicitors can also be found on the corner, and their trajectories deeply shape their attachment to the corner, or the extent to which they rely on day labor to make ends meet. As Shah (2014) notes, day labor markets act as a barometer for the city's ability to absorb "unskilled" workers into its paid workforce. These markets then provide women who are underemployed or unable to support themselves with the wages garnered through the formal economy an opportunity to supplement their incomes. They are, in other words, the "emergency rooms of today's sick economy" (Kennedy 2010).

In the chapter that follows I examine the work the women on the Brooklyn corner were hired to perform, mainly domestic work, care work, and sex work. I draw on the concept of intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010) to illustrate not only the range of tasks women were expected to perform in the context of finite economic opportunities on the corner, but also the fluid and porous nature of these occupational boundaries. Moreover, I found that while only a fraction of women (openly) engaged in sexual commerce on a regular basis, others turned to sex work intermittently, when other type of work was unavailable, undesirable, or in exchange for continued or future employment. Weaved into this section are the subjective meanings women ascribed to their work. I show that the domestic labor Latina immigrant women performed for the Hasidim were not only imbued with religious meaning and purpose, but ultimately perceived as central to the reproduction of Jewish ethnicity. Day labor also provided women with a greater sense of autonomy in their work experience, which was manifested in their ability to negotiate better pay and a flexible schedule of hours, provisions they rarely enjoyed when working in traditional low-wage jobs in the general economy.

Chapter 3: Intimate Labors on the Brooklyn Corner

INTRODUCTION

Women are considered a small minority of day laborers, a category of precarious and contingent workers that is typically reserved for those who gather in public settings seeking to secure temporary manual work in industries such as construction, gardening, landscaping and farming. Valenzuela (2007), in a report titled, “Immigrant Day Laborers: Myth and Realities” notes that there is a small but growing female day labor market for housecleaning, care work and other intimate labors. He is referring mainly to the Brooklyn corner, one of the few known sites in the U.S. where women gather to secure temporary work in a public setting, as well as worker centers which are increasingly opening their doors to women job seekers. Kennedy (2010), a legal scholar who writes about the importance of expanding workplace rights to women working in domestic industries, notes that women day laborers generally attract little attention from passersby, policy makers and scholars. Unlike Latino migrant men, she adds, who consistently provoke outrage (and concern) from policy makers, local communities, and merchants, women day laborers go for the most part unnoticed. While invisibility can confer these workers some protection against the “poli-migra” (Menjívar 2014), “sanctuary” policies (Leitner 2012) and anti-solicitation ordinances that target undocumented migrants in public settings (Varsanyi 2008b), Kennedy contends that such invisibility comes at a price. That is, despite being part of a national workforce of over 117,000, women’s daily search for work goes unnoticed, not only by “possible foes” such as right-wing vigilante groups and nativist politicians who increasingly target these spaces and the individuals that inhabit them, but also potential allies such as immigrant rights advocates, labor organizers, and scholars.

This chapter examines the work migrant women on the Brooklyn corner are hired to perform, mainly domestic, care, and sex work. I draw on the concept of intimate labor, as put forth by Boris and Parreñas (2010) to illustrate not only the range of tasks women were expected to perform in the context of finite economic opportunities on the corner, but also the fluid and porous nature of these occupational boundaries. I show that while only a fraction of women (openly) engaged in sexual commerce on a regular basis, others turned to sex work intermittently, when other type of work was unavailable, undesirable, or in exchange for continued or future employment.

Weaved into this section are the subjective meanings women ascribed to their work. I show, for instance, that the domestic labor Latina migrant women performed for the Hasidim is not only imbued with religious meaning and purpose, perceived as central to the reproduction of Jewish ethnicity, but also at times presented these workers with a more appealing income-generating option than the alternative employment options that are available to them. I describe how, for some, day labor can represent a more meaningful and advantageous option compared to other forms of low-wage, low-status work, partly because it often affords them greater control—whether perceived or real—over the conditions of their work. Day labor can provide women with a greater sense of autonomy in their work experience, which was manifested in their ability to negotiate better pay and a flexible schedule of hours, provisions they rarely enjoyed when working in traditional low-wage jobs in the general economy.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE STREET-CORNER MARKET

As an informal hiring site, the Brooklyn street-corner market is open to all—at least in theory. Its unregulated nature allows migrant women access to employment without requiring much in the way of experience, references, English skills, or proof of legal

residence in the U.S. Those who solicit employment on the corner—whether full-time, part-time, or seasonally—find that while they are not guaranteed work on a daily basis, the prospect of earning well over the minimum wage and “filling” their week with regular employers makes the street-corner appealing. As noted earlier, most of the women on the corner are hired to perform household labor, particularly cleaning. Here the greatest demand for inexpensive and flexible housecleaning workers comes from the Hasidim, which are now the fastest-growing segment of the Jewish population in New York City (Fader 2009). Hailing from Central and Eastern Europe following the Holocaust, particularly Hungary, the Hasidim arrived to North America with the expressed mission of rebuilding and repopulating their communities. Hasidic courts thus had to establish themselves anew in New York, creating a series of community institutions including yeshivas and enclave communities in various Brooklyn neighborhoods. Although there are more than thirty Hasidic courts in the city, the three largest and most prominent in New York City are the Satmar (Williamsburg), Lubavitch (Crown Heights) and Bobov (Borough Park). In Williamsburg, where the street-corner market is located, the Satmar court, which is considered the most religiously stringent and isolationist (and staunchly anti-Zionist), are the most dominant.

At least half of the Hasidic households in Williamsburg live below the poverty level (Fader 2009). Hasidic families residing in and around Williamsburg, but also as far as Borough Park, a destination point for Orthodox Jews from all over the world, hire workers from the Brooklyn corner on an hourly basis to perform intensive housecleaning tasks leading up Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Employers that rely on the corner for household workers typically hire women once a week, or as often as their finances allow, for a duration of three to six hours at a time. The closer in the week to Sabbath, the higher the demand for house cleaning, and the more women gather on the street-corner to solicit

employment. While it is mostly Hasidic women who hire workers from the street-corner, Hasidic men and young girls also approach workers who are gathered there. It is not uncommon for Hasidic men to hand out slips of papers to workers with an address and phone number, or picking up and transporting a worker to his or a relative's home. Similarly, young girls, often with cell phones in hand, hire workers on their way to or from school. Young Hasidic girls also accompany their mothers to the corner to hire workers, observing not only how they go about selecting them, but also their negotiation practices and strategies.

As anthropologist Ayala Fader (2009) notes, Hasidic wives are expected to manage and maintain a strictly kosher home. Not only do Hasidic women primarily care for their children and do most of the housework, they also navigate the secular world and outside services related to their children and the home. Maintaining a kosher home, which entails ensuring that dairy products and meat products do not mix, keeping their kitchens free of prohibited foods, and inspecting and cleaning vegetables to ensure that they do not harbor flies or worms, becomes part of the daily observance of complex laws of family and household purity. Women are also responsible for all preparations for the Jewish holidays that structure the year. During the spring holiday of Passover, for instance, the corner becomes busier than ever as workers are hired to work longer shifts and provide an even more intensive house cleaning to fulfill the religious requirement that all leavening be removed from the home.

Fader, writing specifically about Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, notes that unlike previous generations of Jews that arrived in New York and gradually assimilated, Hasidic Jews have become increasingly stringent and isolationist. For Hasidic women and girls, this heightened religious stringency requires new forms of Hasidic femininity, which includes their participation in the secular city around them. In order to facilitate Hasidic

men's and boys' religious studies, for instance, Hasidic women become active participants in the life of New York City, as evidenced in their use of English (rather than Yiddish, the traditional vernacular of Eastern European Jews) and taking on paid employment outside the home, often as teachers in local yeshivas. Moreover, Fader notes that one of the unexpectedly progressive outcomes of these women's increasing religious stringency is the acquisition of newfound authority in their families and households.

In the early 2000s, when women started to gather on different street corners in South Williamsburg (Kennedy 2010), a handful of migrant women, some who remain on the corner today, participated in negotiations with a prominent rabbi, Yitzchok Glick, as well as religious officials from the Transfiguration Roman Catholic Church, community organizers, and politicians over the growing tension their presence in this Hasidic neighborhood was producing. Immigrant rights activists such as Oscar Paredes, then director of the Latin American Workers Project (LAWP), were key in these negotiations, advocating for an indoor facility or “safe place” in the community for migrant women to gather and await work. Similarly, Rabbi Glick was concerned about the implications of having a group of migrant women gather in the heart of the Williamsburg Hasidic neighborhood because they “were not dressed modestly” (Howell 2002). Tensions between the different factions escalated in the summer of 2002, when numerous Hasidic residents and rabbis used loudspeakers and threats to force the women from their usual gathering spots and into a desolate street under the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. The police were also involved in getting the women removed from the premises on the grounds that they were obstructing traffic.

After a series of negotiations between members of the Latin American Workers Project (LAWP), the Transfiguration Roman Catholic Church of Williamsburg (TRCC), and Hasidic religious and political leaders, a compromise was reached. Instead of soliciting

employment on the street, women day laborers would have to report to a newly created social service center that would be housed in the Southside Mission, an extension of the TRCC. Both the LAWP and TRCC agreed to oversee the management of this worker center and assume all its financial costs as long as they had the support of Hasidic communities in Williamsburg and surrounding areas (Howell 2002). The assumption was that Hasidic religious leaders would have the clout and authority to persuade local ultra-Orthodox families to hire worker exclusively from the newly established center. Employers would have register with LAWP and TRCC staff every time they hired a worker from the center. So while a compromise was reached to the Hasidic leaders and community organizers' satisfaction—i.e., getting the women off the street and creating an indoor-space that would function like a hiring hall—Hasidic employers continued to hire women off the street. Women who had initially resorted to the center in hopes of securing employment eventually returned to the section near the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. Today, there appears to be little impetus for creating a formal hiring site for migrant women searching for household labor, so they continue to gather in the same open-air street-corner market.

The workers who were part of these earlier negotiations recognize that although their presence on the Brooklyn corner is now tolerated, largely because Hasidic families depend on their inexpensive household labor, this laissez-faire approach is no guarantee that the corner will be allowed to operate indefinitely. In neighboring Long Island, for instance, the growing presence of male day laborers has sparked hostility and a heated community debates resulting in several violent assaults of day laborers by white supremacists and the firebombing of a day laborer's home (Healy 2004). Several government-sponsored day labor centers have been created in recent years as a result. Solicitors in Brooklyn then occupy a liminal space since they could be removed at a moment's notice if women draw too much attention to the corner. Moreover, the handful

of veteran workers that remain on the corner till this day have considerable influence over what happens at the site, particularly with regards to solicitation practices, employment relations, and the type of work that is viewed as legitimate. They keep tabs on the ebb and flow of workers, incidents on the street, and any kind of attention that the corner garners, not only from local reporters and researchers, but also community organizers with whom most of them have a contentious relationship.

Working for “God’s Chosen People”: Domestic Work on the Corner

Migrant women generally do not solicit household employment in street-corner markets (Valenzuela 2003). Instead, many Latin American migrant women secure jobs as domestic workers through personal social networks and informal apprenticeships with fellow co-ethnics, bypassing employment agencies, newspaper ads, or other job announcement forums. Employers too generally rely on informal referrals or recommendations from friends, kin, co-workers, or neighbors for household “help” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Not so on the corner. Employer referrals, previous household work experience, a work permit, or English skills are not prerequisites for employment. While at times employers will request workers with specific skills such as cooking, sewing or other garment related alteration services, the assumption is that any woman on the corner is capable of performing basic household tasks since this type of work is generally considered unskilled (Roberts 1997) and ultimately “women's work.” The social characterization of household work as unskilled labor, a “labor of love,” and “something other than employment” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001:9), has to do in part with the affective setting in which it takes place (Romero 1992). That is, because housework takes place in the private sphere of the home, performed (and supervised) by women as part of their caring labor as mothers and wives (England and Folbre 1999), it is stripped of its economic

function and thus naturalized as “women's work” propelled largely by affective considerations.

Although the Latinas who solicit employment on the corner perform a range of intimate labors (Boris and Parreñas 2010) including care work and sex work, the bulk of their employment consists of housecleaning. Feminist scholars who have examined the spectrum of paid reproductive labor often conceptualize non-nurturant work such as cleaning as “dirty work,” and ultimately the “underbelly” of care work (Duffy 2007). Moreover, as Nakano Glenn (1992) and others (Parreñas 2001; Romero 1992; Rollins 1985) point out, such “dirty work” has been historically relegated to racial-ethnic women. Historian Phyllis Palmer (1989), for instance, found that household work created stark boundaries between women of different class and racial backgrounds, with some being defined as clean and pure, and others as dirty and tainted. Roberts (1997), in describing the racialized hierarchy structuring reproductive labor in the home, points to a division between “spiritual” work—associated with white women and their domestic roles as moral and spiritual guides—and “menial” work—associated with racialized minority and immigrant women who perform the “nasty, tedious, physical tasks” (Roberts 1997:55) that are rendered the least desirable by more privileged women in the household. Roberts then points to an ideological split operating within the home, one that distinguishes the more menial aspects of domestic labor such as cleaning from highly valued and spiritual tasks like the moral upbringing of children. The fragmentation of domestic labor into spiritual and menial, she adds, serves to reinforce a racialized hierarchy operating among women workers (see also Shellee Colen 1995). However, Roberts notes that despite this racialized separation of spiritual and menial housework, Black slave women and domestic servants found ways to transform the meaning of their household work, thereby disrupting the spiritual/menial dichotomy.

The menial/spiritual split is further complicated when applied to the Hasidim, and their racial-ethnic household workers. As Fader (2009) notes, Hasidic women challenge easy stereotypes about women in what she refers to as nonliberal (or patriarchal) religions given their heavy involvement in the public sphere to support Hasidic men's and boy's religious studies, which often precludes the latter from taking on paid employment. This means that it is not uncommon for Hasidic women to take on the role of breadwinner, thus cultivating a version of Hasidic femininity that Fader calls an "alternative religious modernity" (2009:3) that entails transgressing distinctions between the religious and the secular. The struggle for Hasidic women then is "to infuse everyday life and the material world with divine meaning" (2009:37), to infuse their material realities with religious meaning and purpose. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Hasidic men and women are expected to take on different responsibilities in their communities, with men becoming more involved in the Jewish public sphere of the synagogue and religious leadership structure, while women engage with the secular public sphere as well as the domestic domain. Fader notes, however, that while gender segregation is more muted in the household, with both men and women partaking in childcare, as children grow fathers become more heavily involved with their sons and mothers with their daughters.

These are important considerations when thinking about the menial/spiritual ideological split Roberts (1997) theorizes, and the racial ordering of women that results. The ideological dichotomy between home and work, as proposed by Roberts, hinges on the marital exchange of the husband's economic sustenance for the wife's spiritual and moral guidance (who was unsuited for public life). Hasidic men, however, are deeply involved in the religious and moral upbringing of their children. Moreover, women, and girls, Fader reminds us, do not study the Torah (or as is the case in some Satmar schools, the Bible), but do receive religious instruction in school and attend religious lectures

throughout their lives. Also, for the Hasidim, the material world, through daily rituals and practices, is diffused with divine meaning. Something as seemingly menial as cooking or cleaning then is elevated, made into a sacred act, when it serves a higher purpose as well as yield divine rewards. Thus the “opposition between maternal nurturing in the home and masculine work in the cutthroat marketplace” does not hold (Roberts 1997:55), nor does the clear-cut splitting of tasks between menial/physical and moral/ideological.

However, regardless of whether or not Hasidic women take on paid employment outside the home, they are expected to perform the bulk of household work necessary for the well-being of their families, what feminist scholars refer to as reproductive labor (Nakano Glenn 1992). Those who can afford it, manage their household responsibilities then by hiring a worker from the Brooklyn corner. While housework has historically been constituted as women’s work (MacKinnon 1989) and carries with it little social value (Roberts 1997), this does not mean that women that perform this labor internalize such “disparaging views” (Colen 1989; Cohen 1991). Despite the occupation’s low public standing, most workers on the corner did not have a negative view of household work. Nor did they see it as an inherently degrading occupation but rather, took pride in the work they did. Others, as I describe below, transformed the personal meaning of their work by infusing it with religious meaning and purpose. For most it was not the nature of the work that rendered it undesirable or dirty but rather the conditions in which the work often took place. As Betty, one of my informants, noted in a conversation with another woman who was lamenting having to do such “degrading” work:

Gracia: I used to have a live-in domestic worker in Ecuador. And now look at me, cleaning other peoples' toilets! I am not like most women here [on the corner], I am an educated professional, not an *analfabeta* [illiterate]. But in this country we are all the same, are we not? We all do the same shitty jobs.

Betty: Yeah, well, some of us have been cleaning our entire lives. I am not above housecleaning. It is all I know, and as long as I am getting paid, I don't see it as degrading, it's all the same to me. Sure, it's hard work but it's not unlike what we do at home, and for free. All work, whether it's cleaning a toilet, someone's ass, or working in an office, is dignified if it pays.

Gracia: Is working on your knees all day dignified? Bent over like that? Cleaning floors by hand? I have a degree in engineering, I worked in an office back in Ecuador *mamita*. I wasn't made for this type of work.

Betty: Nobody is holding a gun to your head and forcing you to come here.

Gracia: All I'm saying is that these *judias* don't have to treat us so poorly. Why not just give us a mop and try to make things a little easier on us, on our knees and bodies. It's degrading, a humiliation, an insult.

Betty: *Doña*, stop suffering and buy yourself some kneepads.

Gracia: This has nothing to do with kneepads. No, It's what's behind it. They make us work that way, on our knees, on all fours, because they see us as less than human, like animals that they can order around. They are backwards people that have no regard for those who aren't like them, for those of us who are of a different faith. Who, in the twenty-first century, doesn't use a mop? It's like they live in another era and don't care to progress like the rest [of us]. And it's not just their customs that are antiquated, look at how they treat their women. Pushing out nine or ten kids and walking around in the middle of the summer completely covered. These women are so repressed that they take it out on us because we have no other option but to put up with their disrespect.

Betty: What are you talking about? They have mops, they just don't like to use them for more intensive cleaning. It has nothing to do with their religion and everything to do with the fact that mops retain a lot of dirt and filth. They don't want to bring that into their homes. And by the way, they clean their own floors the same way, by hand.

Gracia's views are not uncommon among some of the women on the corner, particularly those who first entered the housecleaning industry upon migrating to the U.S. The conditions in which the work takes place, particularly Hasidic women's unwillingness to provide their household workers mops and other adequate housecleaning equipment, are at

the source of many heated debates and arguments on the corner not only with employers, but also other women. “Working on one’s knees,” as the women refer to it, is a contentious issue that splits the workers on the corner, particularly those who “willingly” comply and make the necessary accommodations such as buying kneepads and those, mainly part-time workers, who often turn down job offers that do not include a mop. As Gracia, a forty-year old *dominincana* and part-time solicitor, asked when a negotiation with an employer was unsuccessful because the latter refused to provide a mop: “Who do they think we are, the Cinderellas of the 21st century?!”

For solicitors like Gracia, the very act of working on one’s knees denotes submissiveness and servitude. Gracia’s comments about the Hasidim’s customs and cultural practices illustrate the curiosity, confusion and ambivalence they produce among the women on the corner. This has to do, in part, with the fact that some of these “antiquated customs” directly affect the women who work for them. For instance, if a woman is not deemed to be dressed properly, she will be given a gown to cover her entire body. Workers, moreover, are discouraged from bringing outside food into Hasidic households as these items may not be kosher, and if they do, they will be asked to eat outside or in the bathroom. In order to avoid workers bringing non-kosher food into their homes, employers will at times provide workers with meals, mostly yogurt, hard-boiled eggs, and fruit, but this is not always the case. Most importantly, women are often prohibited from using a mop to clean hard-wood floors. Instead, they are expected to clean the floors by hand using a series of liquid products to ensure they are properly cared for. While women develop different strategies to avoid having to do this, such as wearing kneepads or using a broom with a towel over it, some are adamantly opposed to the idea on principle because it is associated with servitude. While some women will not accept employment from employers who are not willing to buy them a mop, others prefer to negotiate these things privately, or after

they have “proven” themselves to an employer. Others still prefer to avoid such a contentious issue and make their own mops out of a broom and *schmate* [rag], or clean the floors when their employer is not watching them.

The problem for most, however, has to do with the insufficient hours these employment offers often confer, as well as the instability of the employment arrangement.

As Betty noted,

The problem, as we all know, is that employers expect you to do eight hours’ worth of work in three or four hours. It’s the abuse and the constant pushing, nagging and looking over your shoulder that is humiliating, not the work itself, or how it gets done. There’s no shame in cleaning houses, it’s hard work, and when done well, can be very satisfying. I just wish they would give us more hours or pay us a bit more if they are only willing to give us three or four hours.

Workers like Betty make the case the work itself is not degrading or humiliating but rather, the conditions in which it takes place. When workers are given the autonomy, time, and adequate tools to carry out the work it is viewed as potentially satisfying. I bring up this distinction here in order to make the case that some of the street-corner workers come to view their work as rewarding, despite the challenges associated with working for the Hasidim. As noted above, some even view the household work that they perform for their Hasidic employers as affirming and important because it is imbued with religious purpose and meaning. As Josefina explained:

Over the course of fourteen years that I have been coming to the corner, I have managed to fill my entire week. Although these *judias* [Jewish women] don’t always want to give you a mop or even a glass of water, they can be reasoned with once they get to know and trust you. That’s when your work ethic and hard work will pay off. Also, when I travel to Mexico once or twice a year to see my kids and grandkids, they hold my jobs because they are loyal. I believe that working for God’s chosen people is a true blessing, they protect us, and I know God watches over the women on the corner and will reward us one day for doing this type of work.

Josefina explains that although the conditions in which the work takes place are not always optimal, she has managed to cultivate a fond and lasting relationship with her employers who will often “hold” her jobs when she is away. Josefina also noted that instead of hiring another worker from the corner, even if temporarily when she is away, her employers will allow her husband to take over the housecleaning during the months that she is in Mexico. She adds, however, that the loyalty and rapport that she has established with her employers is the result of her work ethic and propensity for hard work. Moreover, Josefina also does not view the work that she performs for Hasidic families as “menial” or “dirty.” Not only has the corner provided her with a means of subsistence during the months she is in the U.S. but also the work itself is perceived as meaningful in that she sees it as central to Hasidic ethnicity. A fervent Catholic herself, she views the cleaning services that she provides to her employers on a weekly basis as part of a series of rituals that the Hasidim must perform in keeping with their religious practices. The menial/religious split that Roberts (1997) describes is troubled by some of these women's own views of the household work they are hired to perform. Josefina explains that,

It's frustrating to hear women [on the corner] complain about the work as if there was something shameful about cleaning houses. The constant complaints about working on one's knees, cleaning floors by hand, and how humiliating that is, is idiotic because these *judias* clean their homes in the same way. They don't expect us to do things that they don't do themselves. Yes, they are picky and have a particular way of doing things, some could say it's antiquated but it is all part of their religion. Their religion requires that they do things meticulously, with care and precision. And we are hired to help them keep their homes kosher. These *judias* work hard! Some of my employers often get down on their knees to help me finish my work. They are also busy cooking, baking, and managing the household. It's hard work.

In Josefina's view, seemingly menial tasks such as cleaning are an integral part of the Hasidim's religious observance and practices. Women on the corner are hired to help them comply with the religious practices and mandates that are expected of Hasidic women. The tasks that they expect their household workers to perform, and in the manner that they want them to perform them, are generally things that themselves do on a daily basis in their homes. They hire household workers once or twice a week, often leading up to the Sabbath, not to perform tasks that they deem too tedious or “dirty,” but to help out with last minute cleaning and prepping work while they prepare dinner and bathe their children. According to Josefina, Hasidic women are not above such tasks as her employers often “get down on their knees” and help her clean. She finds that Hasidic women “work hard” and are ultimately so belabored that they cannot accomplish everything on their own.

Similarly, Rosa Maria, a *dominicana* in her late fifties and a veteran of the Brooklyn corner, notes,

These *judios* work hard. They work as a team, everyone has a particular role in the household, in the community. The men dedicate their time to studying and working, and while don't make that much money they still manage to take care of their families. They are formidable providers [*hombres del hogar*]. Women then have to keep the home spotless, or as they say, kosher, and take care of the children. It's part of their religious obligations as mothers and wives to ensure that their house is tidy and the food they prepare kosher. Everything is about religion to them. We *hispanos* could learn a lot from them.

Rosa Maria has lived in South Williamsburg for almost two decades and worked in the homes of the Hasidim for almost as long, depending on her employment situation and circumstances at home. As a veteran of the corner, and someone who participated in earlier negotiations with Hasidic leaders and politicians about potentially creating a center for women on the Brooklyn corner, she is vigilant of newcomers or anyone else that steps foot on the corner, including reporters, researchers, and especially community organizers. Rosa

Maria is a vocal and fierce defender of the Hasidim, not only because she has been working for them for decades, but also because the very existence and viability of the Brooklyn street-corner market (and hers) hinges on maintaining the status quo, and not raising any type of concerns or controversies surrounding the work they are hired to perform or the Hasidim.

As stated earlier, the bulk of the work women get hired to perform is housecleaning. While for some this work is inherently degrading and humiliating, for others the work itself is not the problem but rather, the conditions in which it takes places. The hyper-surveillance they are subject to when first hired, the short hours they are given to complete it, and the low pay shape the extent to which they come to view the work as desirable or satisfying. Others still view the work that they perform for the Hasidim as deeply rewarding as it is imbued with religious meaning and purpose. As ardent Catholics, these women take pride in working for this religious community, and come to view compensation in broader terms, beyond monetary remuneration.

Sexual Commerce on the Corner

Besides housecleaning, women on the corner also engaged in sexual commerce for both Hasidic and non-Hasidic clients. The services the women provided encompassed massages, company, friendship, and a range of sexual acts. Most of the women that shared their experiences of sex work on the corner did so in coded or ambiguous language, without providing details about the nature of these sexual exchanges. Others talked about the emergence of sexual commerce as the doing of a few “bad apples,” women who used the safety and anonymity of the corner to offer a range of sexual services. These types of services were generally frowned upon as they were viewed as potentially jeopardizing the viability of the corner and women’s livelihoods. They were also seen as contributing to the

sexual violence some of the women experienced on the corner, as some male clients expected the women that gathered there to be open to providing sexual services.

Part-time workers who engaged in sexual commerce, moreover, often did so off the corner as well, particularly as hostesses in Latino nightclubs in Queens and other areas. As mentioned in chapter 2, some relied on sex work to supplement their incomes from housecleaning, particularly when they were transitioning away from care work and found it difficult to make ends meet. Women like Elsa, however, preferred engaging in sex work over domestic work given that the latter was perceived as poorly compensated and entailing more arduous work. Others, like Julie, turned to sex work on the corner when housecleaning work was hard to come by, particularly at the end of the month when they had to send remittances to their families or pay household bills. Janet, Julie, Lili and others also cultivated what Stout (2014) refers to as “tactical sexual relationships” with U.S. based partners, lovers, and husbands, in which sexual services, intimacy, and companionship were exchanged for different types of support and maintenance.

The women who shared their engagement in sex work with me often described domestic, care work or factory work as far more damaging to their bodies and well-being and less autonomous when compared with sex work. As domestics, not only did they have to work long hours and perform physically demanding labor but also experienced sexual assault from their bosses in their places of work. Some of the women noted that others on the corner look down on how they make their money because it is not perceived as being “hard work,” as in it does not require the sustained and grueling physical labor that is often required of domestic workers. Women who performed sex work on the corner were subject to much criticism for allegedly taking the “easy route” for not wanting to do “hard work” but also the wages that result from sexual labor was viewed as “easy money.”

Like those women who thought about the household work they performed for the Hasidim as work that most already perform at home, often for others and for free, women who engaged in sexual commerce used the same logic. That is, whether domestic or sexual in nature, both are gendered labors that have historically been extracted from women without proper compensation. It is labor that they were expected to provide because of their gendered roles as mothers, wives, and daughters. Another reason women gave for performing sexual services over domestic work is the preservation of bodily integrity. Women like Julie had long histories of providing care and domestic work, both in the U.S. and in their countries of origin. Sex work for them provided a change of pace, intensity, and responsibilities, a way to scale back on the arduous bodily and emotional labor that is associated with cleaning and providing care for children, elderly or disabled populations.

Still, most women on the corner wanted to limit street-corner solicitation to household work in an effort to control the narrative of what constitutes legitimate waged work, which requires the invisibility of anything other than that mode of legal solicitation. Regardless of their attempts, employers, Hasidic and non-Hasidic alike, resorted to the corner to procure of sexual services, often expressed in the form of massages, companionship, and friendship. While most women that engaged in sexual commerce negotiated these contracts off the corner or accommodated these requests after providing cleaning services, during fieldwork I met several women who solicited sex work openly on the corner, usually from Latino construction and maintenance workers in South Williamsburg. Only one of them, Juana, a thirty-six-year-old *mexicana* from the state of Puebla, openly approached potential employers for sex. The first time I met Juana she was groping a maintenance worker as he swept the street where the women gathered. It was a Thursday evening and I had just spent a few hours at the Brooklyn Public Library setting up Facebook accounts for some of the women. As we crossed the street on our way back

to the corner, Eufemia, a long-time street corner solicitor, pointed to a woman in a tank-top, fitted jeans, and heels, calling her “la puta.” Juana chatted with the maintenance worker for a bit before straddling him from behind and groping him as he attempted to sweep. The man tried to free himself but she persisted, placing her arms around his waist and trailing behind him as he attempted to walk away. Seeing that the man was uncomfortable with the interaction, Eufemia whistled to catch their attention, to ensure that they could see that we were watching them. Juana released him and shouted out to us: “We’re just playing, relax, he’s fine. He’s a big guy, he can handle it.” As we pulled out a few plastic crates to sit on, Eufemia explained:

She’s crazy, *no tiene verguenza* [she has no shame]. She doesn’t even try to be subtle about her business. I could care less about how she makes her money but if she comes here to do it then it becomes my business. She makes it everyone’s business. You see, it makes the rest of us look bad, makes the corner look bad. Men now come here asking for all kinds of things, like massages. Just because a few women are into easy money doesn’t mean that the rest of us are. Just last week a young woman came back to the corner in tears, distraught, because her employer exposed himself to her, insinuating that he wanted to have sex with her. Who on this corner hasn’t experienced that? And then they’ll say things like, ‘Hey, if you do this, then I will give you a little more, or, hey, if you help me out then I’ll hire you permanently or refer you to friends and family.’ Men will always try to get what they want through any means necessary but women should know better. There are no shortcuts when it comes to work.

Eufemia is referring to the emergence of sexual commerce on the corner—both sex work and sex for (future or continued) work—in a space originally sanctioned strictly for domestic work for the Hasidim. So while the street-corner market largely provides low-cost housecleaning services to Hasidic families in South Williamsburg and surrounding areas, other types of services are exchanged there as well. As Julie noted in the previous chapter, for instance, she provides “massages” to clients in addition to housecleaning services. Women on the corner, myself included, realized that “massage” functions as a

euphemism for sex work, simultaneously an indirect recognition and denial of the pervasiveness of sex work on the corner. Referring to sex work in such coded language also speaks to the stigma associated with openly soliciting clients for sexual services or accepting such offers. Because sex work solicitation is frowned upon, rarely acknowledged by community organizers or religious leaders, and for the most part solicited discreetly, it is easy to miss. Community organizers and leaders of the Catholic Church, for instance, often focus on the prevalence of sexual violence on the corner in an effort to shed light on the unique vulnerabilities women experience as they solicit employment on the street, particularly the association between street-solicitation and prostitution.

Through a triangulation of data, from first-hand accounts, personal experience, observation, rumors and gossip, I learned to notice the subtleties of sexual commerce on the corner. One of the first encounters with sexual commerce that I had was when I was approached by a Hasidic employer on the corner. I provide the fieldnote of this encounter below:

He had a long, stringy white beard and matching *peyes*. He approached a group of us saying that he was looking to hire someone to organize his kitchen pantry. It was a quick job that would require two or three hours. It seemed like an easy enough job, one that did not entail the grueling scrubbing and cleaning of floors, toilets, and kitchens the women on the Brooklyn corner are typically hired to perform. But none of them seemed particularly interested. One by one, they all turned him down, looking away or turning their backs to him so that he would leave them alone. Scenes like these, where women turned down job offers, were not uncommon but it still surprised me a bit as the work seemed fairly straightforward and work was particularly slow that day. I came to the conclusion that most women turned down these job offers because they offered very few hours, that it was not worth leaving the corner in case something better came along if they were patient and kept waiting. But there comes a point in the day, especially after lunch, when this logic of turning down job offers in hopes that something better would come along no longer makes sense. Where the women simply too tired to go out to work? Had they resigned to the idea of going home empty-handed? Why would anyone who came to the corner with the explicit purpose of securing work turn down a few hours of work at a point in the day when work prospects were so bleak?

I was mulling over these questions when the old man approached me. Still finding it difficult to turn down offers and turning my back to employers as I watched some of the other women do, I entertained his offer, asking him to provide more details of what the work entailed. He tried to convince me to go with him by offering me a meal and a ride back to the corner. It worked, and a few minutes later I trailed behind him, wondering if I had made the right decision. Up until that point, I had only accepted job offers from Hasidic women or young girls. My palms were sweating, but as I took another long look at the old man, I found his aging body to be harmless and somehow trustworthy. I waved the women goodbye, and stuck my phone in my back pocket. As we were walking the old man waited for me to catch up, and then asked where I was from. When I told him I was from Mexico, he smiled and responded, placing his hand on my shoulder, "Mexican women are very nice, very, very nice." He then leaned forward, as if to whisper something in my ear, and asked if I would play with him. "Excuse me?" I asked. "You can play with me?" he asked again, this time cupping his crotch with his hand, in case it had not been clear the first time. The next day when I returned to the corner and told the other women what had happened, they laughed, made a few jokes about me having sex with the old man in the kitchen pantry, and then quickly moved on to the next topic.

There are three main ways by which women come to engage in sexual commerce: First, directly through offers on the corner for specific sexual acts; second, indirectly, often in combination with the housecleaning, and third, as part of a complex negotiation for future employment. Although rumors and gossip about women's engagement with sexual commerce were widely circulated on the corner, women rarely spoke of sexual labor in relation to themselves. Instead, euphemisms, rumors, and silences around sexual commerce abounded, combined with a few instances of solicitation I witnessed as women used the corner to solicit clients for sexual commerce. I realized that women were engaging in regular, intermittent, or sporadic stints of sexual commerce as another income-generating strategy they could mobilize in order to support themselves and their families.

While in some cases the iterations of sexual commerce were engendered by the intense competition for work at the Brooklyn corner, it would be misleading to talk about women's engagement in sexual commerce as survival sex as other types of work was

available to them. I often wondered, for instance, how women managed to make ends meet when work was in short supply or hard to secure on a regular and consistent basis on the street-corner market. Over time, I came to see how the women that gathered there pursue multiple activities within the space designated, at least informally, for housecleaning solicitation. Anthropologist Keith Hart used the phrase “the economy of the streets” to illustrate the blurriness of economic and legal categories such as in/formal in people's daily negotiations for survival.

Below I present the case of Elsa, a woman who I befriended on the corner and who I accompanied to several meetings with different non-profits in the area that provide legal services to migrants. I include Elsa's story here because it reveals some of the silences and stigma associated with procuring sex work on the corner, as well as the various motivations for engaging in sexual commerce more broadly. Her story also illustrates the range of sexual services that are on offer on the corner, their appeal, especially if combined with recurring or future employment, and how women are expected to navigate such sexual encounters with employers. It also shows how women's precarious locations and pressing employment needs do not automatically result in them accepting any employment offer that is extended on the corner. Elsa's story demonstrates that there are still choices to be made on the Brooklyn corner.

Elsa

Elsa is a thirty-three-year-old woman from El Salvador who has been in the U.S. just over a year. After divorcing her husband, the father of her two children, she decided to make the trek across Central America and Mexico to join her mother who had been living in New Jersey for over a decade. Left with less than two-hundred dollars after her divorce, Elsa could not afford to pay a *coyote* or migrant smuggler to facilitate her trip to the U.S.

Like many other Central American migrants, she had to go embark on this trajectory on her own, an experience she does not like to talk about. After being detained at the border for trying to cross illegally into the U.S., she was sent to a women's detention center in Hutto, Texas, where she remained for several months until her petition for political asylum was accepted and she was released after providing sufficient evidence that she was not at risk of fleeing.

I learned all about Elsa's immigration woes after accompanying her to an interview at a non-profit organization that specializes in Central American asylum cases. In the interview I discovered that there was a deportation order against Elsa as she had missed her one-year asylum hearing, and ultimately the legal staff at the organization decided against accepting her case because it was not deemed life-threatening. Moreover, they suspected that Elsa had been counseled, while in the detention, to (falsely) petition for political asylum in order to be eligible for immediate release from the detention center.

After meeting with the lawyer we headed back to the corner so that Elsa could try to get a few hours of work. Earlier that day she had mentioned that she did not have any cash on her, at least not enough for a meal or even a train ticket back to New Jersey, where she was living with her mother. When we arrived to the corner we stood in silence for a few minutes until a young Hasidic girl, no older than nine or ten, approached us. She looked over at Elsa and asked her if she was available. "I'm standing here, aren't I? Clearly I'm available, *niña boba* (stupid girl)." The young girl asked her if she was interested in a cleaning job, which at most would take three hours. "I charge \$12 [an hour] for three hours," Elsa responded, looking away, seemingly uninterested in the offer being extended to her. Unsure what to do, the young girl called her mother on her cell phone, and came back a few minutes later to offer Elsa \$10, lunch and a ride back to the corner. Elsa quickly

shooed her away with her hand, and the young girl hired another Latina, who accepted the offer without much in the way of negotiation.

Elsa's unwillingness to entertain the job offer was confusing, mainly because she had just mentioned to me that she did not have enough money for a train ticket or meal. It was already noon, which meant that job offers would be in short supply and more than twenty women remained on the corner. When I asked Elsa why she had turned down the job offer, she explained, visibly annoyed by my question, that she needed more than a mere two or three hours of work. "At this time of the day it may be difficult to get more than a few hours, don't you think?" I asked, still confused. "Difficult but not impossible," she responded, adding that "with a little luck, something better will come up."

An hour or so later, a blue van pulled up with two Latinos. Elsa and a few others ran up to the driver's side to see what the men wanted. Elsa eventually made her way to the front as some of the other women slowly returned to the corner, seemingly uninterested in what the men were offering. After chatting with them a few minutes, Elsa waved me goodbye and jumped into the back of the van. When I saw her the next day, she told me that the driver had hired her to give him a foot massage for \$20. When I asked Elsa why she had turned down the cleaning job but accepted the massage instead, a type of service that most women on the corner understood as a form of sex work, she looked at me as if the question was so ridiculous as to not merit a response. "Exactly," she said, rolling her eyes, "it would have been the same amount of money, for double, no, triple the work."

The next time I ran into Elsa, a week or so later, I asked her if she was managing to get work on the corner. This question was so common among the women that it acts more like a greeting. She pulled me to the side and told me that earlier that week a man had picked her up from the corner but that when they arrived at his house she realized that he was not interested in having her clean. "As soon as we got inside I noticed we were

alone and that his wife and kids weren't home. He offered me a drink and told me to get comfortable." Before proceeding Elsa asked him how much he would pay her, if she "got comfortable." After offering her \$50 to have a drink with him, she pulled up a chair in his kitchen, still unsure of what he was expecting her to do. "What did he give you to drink?" I asked awkwardly. "I'm not sure, I downed it as soon as he poured it." Fifteen minutes or so into their conversation he asked her to stay a bit longer, offering her another \$50. "Weren't you scared?" I asked, nervously, anticipating one of those unhappy endings the women on the corner often spoke about. "You can't have those thoughts, not in this type of work," she replied. Elsa agreed to stay and after a few drinks he proceeded to rub her legs and thighs, eventually pulling her closer to him. Elsa did not go into the details of what happened next, just that she had made a hundred dollars in an hour, the equivalent of ten hours of "matado" or back-breaking housecleaning work.

Elsa also mentioned that earlier that week, a thirty-something year old Hasidic man had picked her up from the corner to clean his house while his wife was at work:

He was very handsome and when he saw me on the corner, he made his way directly to me. He didn't even bother talking to the other women. It's like he knew exactly what he wanted. When I was changing into my work clothes in the bathroom, he knocked on the door, and asked me to come out. He asked if he could watch me, as I cleaned. Honestly, I was a little confused at first because I wasn't sure what he meant, like, watching me clean. But then he reassured me, saying 'no touch,' and that I should clean as I normally would, that he wouldn't get in the way, but that he wanted to watch me do it. He said that if I did a good job he would keep me on several times a week.

At that point, Eufemia, a part-time worker who has been soliciting on the corner intermittently for over seven years, was listening in to our conversation, and decided to interject, as is commonplace on the corner, where the boundaries between public and private are blurry at best:

Why is it that you always get these types of jobs? I never do! Maybe I'm doing something wrong! Ha! No, no, I think it's probably because of the way you look, your slutty face [*será por la cara de puta que te cargas*]. But why would you even entertain those offers? I mean, I couldn't show my face there again if something like that happened to me, I'd be too scared, unless, of course, I liked what he was offering me. Maybe today he is paying to watch, but then what? He's not going stop there. And why would he? You're basically offering yourself to him by sticking around. If you keep accepting those types of offers, others will think that this is a prostitution corner [*parada de putas*], and then they'll expect the same from the rest of us.

Up until that point I had only heard rumors about women providing sexual services on the corner. A few women were signaled out as being “putas” by the rest, mostly because of the way they were dressed, their assertive disposition, and “unfeminine” comportment on the corner. Only one woman openly offered sexual services to men who passed through the corner, mainly maintenance workers, at times by groping them as they swept or picked up garbage in surrounding areas. Many of my informants, however, revealed that they were often propositioned for sex, mainly oral sex, or asked to provide services such as massages. Others noted that they were paid “a little extra” for allowing Hasidic men to watch them as they cleaned, explaining that while these jobs did not necessarily entail touching or fondling of any kind, a few reported that men masturbated as they watched. Most of the women that I talked to, however, claimed that they largely rejected offers for massages, friendship, conversation, or play because they understood them to be sexual in nature, even if they did not necessarily entail the provision of sexual services. Elsa, however, was one of the few women that openly discussed performing a range of services on the corner, from housecleaning to massages. She made it clear that she was less interested in cleaning jobs as she perceived these to be too arduous and poorly paid.

Sexual commerce is thus not uncommon on the Brooklyn corner. Elsa's case highlights some of the respectability politics around solicitation, and the boundary work that emerges in an effort to render only some types of solicitation as legitimate and

acceptable. Her case also reveals that sex work was not necessarily propagated by the intense competition for work on the corner but rather, that other types of work on offer there, mainly housecleaning, which were viewed as too arduous (*matado*) or unprofitable. Women like Julie, who had spent a lot of time in the U.S. as caregiver or housecleaners, felt that the arduous nature of housecleaning work had long-term implications for their health and well-being, preferring to provide other types of services to men as these were perceived to be better paid and less onerous on the body.

At times, however, sexual commerce was also part of a complex negotiation for future employment, as Elsa's case shows. Still, most women did not report engaging in sexual commerce themselves, but often provided ample examples of other women's involvement in sex work, particularly their "willingness" to accept sex work in lieu of, or in addition, to housecleaning. As Julie also noted, however, "when it's the end of the month and rent is due, and you've only worked a handful of days, extreme measures are necessary." As a result, few of these women also engaged in sex work "off the corner" in the evenings and weekends, mostly in hostess dance clubs in Queens that cater mostly to working-class Latino men.

Talk of sex or sex work on the corner, however, was often nestled in conversations about sexual violence, as women had to constantly navigate the risks and stigma around street-corner solicitation and its association with prostitution. Accepting, or even entertaining, such work offers, was frowned upon by most women on the corner who felt that in doing so women were not only putting themselves at risk of sexual assault but also the rest of the women who solicited on the corner. Stories abound of women being propositioned for sex while performing domestic work, and these experiences are often perceived as a natural consequence of some women participating in sexual commerce on the corner. As Eufemia noted above, "it sends the wrong message" that some women make

themselves available for sexual commerce as it jeopardizes the livelihood of all women on the corner. Moreover, if such work is publicly acknowledged or sought out, the corner could be shut down, thus compromising everyone's livelihood. The tacit agreement between local Hasidic leaders, community activists, local politicians and law-enforcement makes it so that this space is perceived as safe for women, in large part because of the religious clientele that they serve and the household labor that they typically perform. This means that unless the women are obstructing traffic, they will be left alone to go about their business. Veteran workers thus feared that if sexual commerce became something that was pervasive (or at least rendered visible), that it would have a negative impact on their ability to gather there. In their view, the very existence of sexual commerce on the corner meant that women would not only be susceptible to being propositioned but ultimately sexually assaulted.

Care Work

The third type of labor that street-corner workers are hired to perform is care work. It is also the least common of the three. In the earlier section dealing with domestic work, I mentioned Robert's (1997) racialized distinction between menial and spiritual labor to illustrate how delegating what is perceived as menial household work to immigrant and/or non-white women enables more privileged (white, middle-class) women to perform "spiritual housework," particularly nurturing and caring for their children. As I noted earlier, this dichotomy of menial/spiritual housework breaks down on the Brooklyn corner as workers often see their household labor as imbued with religious meaning and thus central to the reproduction of Hasidic ethnicity. That is, seemingly menial tasks such as cleaning are tinted with religious purpose and meaning.

Although care work is the least sought after service on the corner, I realized that it had to do more with the Hasidic women's employment situation rather than a racially-based

objection to having Latina migrant women care for their children. The instances of care work that I observed on the corner consisted of Hasidic women who held full-time employment outside the home and in rare instances, non-Orthodox Jewish women who lived in the neighborhood. Moreover, the former often struggled to find workers who could take on full-time employment given that many of the women on the corner had a few regular employers already lined up and were not available to work all week. In addition, accepting a full-time job offer from a single Hasidic employer was considered risky in that it would require losing all other jobs one already had secured without really knowing if this caregiving position would work out.

When a Hasidic woman showed up to the corner one late morning in July looking for a full-time nanny, she was surprised that none of the women there seemed particularly interested:

Employer: Who here is available all week? I need someone full-time, Monday through Friday, eight am to five pm.

The women who had approached her car as she was pulling over, looked around and talked amongst themselves for a few minutes before the women repeated her initial question.

Employer: Come on, I'm in a hurry. Who's available? I need someone who can work all week.

Betty and her friend exchanged glances and quietly asked each other who, in their circle of acquaintances on the corner, didn't have any ongoing work. Sensing that this could be a good opportunity for someone who did not have any regular employers, and that nobody was showing interest, Betty took control of the negotiation.

Betty: What do you need?

Employer: I need to get back to work so I need someone who can watch my four kids everyday and clean-up a bit. The cleaning would be light, mostly just picking up after the kids and making sure things aren't piling up.

Betty: How much?

Employer: \$300 for the week.

Betty: We charge by the hour here.

Employer: Yeah, well, I can't do hourly. It's \$300 a week. That's my offer. We are not rich around here, you know? I'm offering a good job, a stable, long-term job. I need someone who can commit to sticking around for a few years. It's a great opportunity.

“Qué dice?” [What is she saying?], asked a few women who could not follow their conversation in English. Betty took a break from the negotiation to translate for the group of women now surrounding them. She told them that it really was not worth it because she was not willing to pay \$10 an hour and also expected them to perform two different services, cleaning and care-giving. “Any of you want the job? I can try to negotiate a higher wage if anyone is interested.” One of the women from the back made her way forward and mentioned that one of her neighbors needs work. She could provide her contact information if the employer was interested. Betty turned around and told the employer that this woman's sister needed work but that she was not on the corner that day.

Employer: No, no. I need to be able to meet this woman, take her home with me today and see how she works. If I like how she works, I'll keep her on. I need someone who is here today, who can come with me now. Who is ready to work? Who is ready to make some money?

Betty: It's going to be hard to find a worker full-time, most of the women here are already working. Maybe you can make them a better offer.

Employer: If most of you are already working then what are you doing on the corner? Socializing and having coffee? Why come to the corner if you are not looking for work?

Betty: We are here because we are available to work *today*.

Employer: So you are telling me that nobody here wants to work full-time? I'm making a good offer. Come on, it's good pay too. It's a great opportunity. It would also be long-term, I can't have someone staying with me a few months and then

running off. I need someone who is willing to commit to staying with me for at least a few years, not just months. Come on ladies, it's getting late!

Betty, growing increasingly frustrated with the Hasidic woman, turned around and asked again if anyone was interested. The women chatted amongst themselves, asking each other if they were missing out on a good opportunity. "Ok, say I drop everything else to work for her. What if I don't like her? Look at how she talks to us here, can you imagine what she's like at home? What if she doesn't like the way that I clean or care for her children? What then?" Another woman, who had said that she was available to work three times a week asked, "Who is going to pick up my kids from school everyday if I am working past 5pm?" And another, "What if I need to take my kids to the doctor? Or have a meeting at their school?"

Betty: Most women here already work a few days a week so they won't be available full-time, unless you make a better offer.

Employer: Look, I had a woman who worked for me for years and she was perfectly happy with the pay. She didn't complain or ask for more. She understood it was a good opportunity. It got her from the corner.

Betty: Great, so where is she? Why don't you call her?

As Betty continued to have this conversation with the employer, a few women who had just arrived to the corner joined the group to see what was happening. "What does she want?" asked Laura. When the other women filled her in, she turned over to her friend, who was new to the corner, and told her that this would be a good opportunity for her since she didn't have many regular employers. "*Manita* [sister], you have what, one or two employers now? Why don't you take this job, try it out, and see how things go. If you don't like her you can always come back here." "But what will I tell my other employers?" asked her friend. "Tell them that you are sick and that you won't be available that week. Then if things don't work out with this woman you can call them back." "I don't know, it seems like a lot. Cleaning, watching the kids, and God knows what else. She's probably gonna expect me to cook for them too, no? Ay, it's a lot, and all for minimum wage? It sounds like a trap." Her friend kept insisting, telling her that accepting the work did not mean she had to stick to it. "You are not obligated to stay, if things don't work out. You can come back to the corner anytime. I think this could be a great opportunity for you." To which her friend responded, "If it's such a good opportunity, why don't you take it?"

At this point the employer was growing impatient with the women. Betty had walked back to the plastic milk crate she had been sitting on before the Hasidic woman pulled up to the corner and resumed her conversation with a friend. I stayed

behind with other women to see what would happen, and who would end up taking the job offer. However, one by one, the women turned her down, asked her for more money, fewer days, or a combination. The Hasidic woman paced back and forth, from one extreme to another, waiting for more women to show up to the corner. She eventually left, empty-handed.

Incidents like these throw into question the notion that work is hard to come by in street-corner markets, and that the scarcity of work and the oversupply of workers will automatically benefit employers. It also shows, as Betty notes, that women turn to the corner for work on any given day but that it does not necessarily mean that they are “not working.” As the above case illustrates, most women on the corner have several employers they work for on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. In addition to these regular employers, they turn to the corner to pick up additional jobs from ad hoc employers, offers that do not necessarily turn into long-term employment. However, full-time employment offers do occur on the corner, but these rarely uphold the \$10 an hour wage minimum and are often perceived as risky for workers with established employers. Full-time offers also presume that women are available, interested, or able to take on full-time work, which is not always the case, particularly for women with caregiving and household responsibilities. For them it makes more sense to piece together some semblance of full-time work with multiple employers so that they can have greater flexibility and control over their work week. Moreover, offers for care work are rare on the corner, and typically come from Hasidic women who hold paid employment or non-Hasidic women who live in the area.

While the fieldnote above illustrates that care work is occasionally procured on the corner, it often requires a full-time and long-term commitment. This type of work, moreover, is highly personalistic and involves a greater degree of physical and emotional labor (Ibarra 2010). As some of the women in the fieldnote observed, these types of employment arrangements can be highly exploitative as they often entail a combination of care, cleaning, and cooking, and for the same hourly rate, or in this case, \$300 a week.

None of the women were compelled to take on that job, in part because it offered minimum wage pay, but also because it would mean losing other jobs that they had already secured. The women, however, believed this employment offer would serve someone without any employment prospects, mainly someone who was available all week. Even if they could open up their schedules, they were ambivalent about working for a single employer, as well as the strict hours and lack of flexibility it would entail, something that did not sit well with women with family and household responsibilities.

Moreover, the women on the corner generally did not consider offers for care work to be appealing for several reasons. As mentioned above, they are perceived as highly personalistic, and some prefer a more “professional” or detached relationship with their employers. This was particularly true for women with extensive histories in care work as live-in nannies, aides in nursing homes or for private firms. As I describe in the next chapter, domestic “day work” allows women to generate regular income without having to cultivate a strong personal relationship with their employers. Unlike the Mexican migrant women in Ibarra’s (2010) study, who framed paid care relationships with sickly and dying elderly populations as rewarding on moral grounds, as leading to spiritual salvation, women on the corner found this type of work to be too physically and emotionally taxing.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the different types of work women on the Brooklyn corner were hired to perform, mainly domestic work, sex work, and care work. The concept of intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010) is useful here in illustrating not only the range of tasks women were expected to provide in the context of finite economic opportunities on the corner, but also the fluid and porous nature of these occupational boundaries. Moreover, I show that while only a fraction of women engaged in sexual commerce on a

regular basis, others turned to sex work intermittently, when other type of work was unavailable, undesirable, or in exchange for continued or future employment. Weaved into this section are the subjective meanings women ascribed to their work. I showed that the domestic labor Latina migrant women performed for the Hasidim were not only imbued with religious meaning and purpose, but ultimately perceived as central to the reproduction of Jewish ethnicity. Day labor also provided women with a greater sense of autonomy in their work experience, which was manifested in their ability to negotiate better pay and a flexible schedule of hours, provisions they rarely enjoyed when working in traditional low-wage jobs in the general economy.

Kennedy notes that day labor sites can be described as the “emergency rooms of today’s sick economy” (2010:130). Others have noted that street-corner markets are the first and last resort for securing paid work among groups of migrated people in urban centers, acting as a barometer of sorts for city’s ability to absorb “unskilled” workers into its paid workforce (Shah 2014). Contemporary day labor markets then are shaped by regional economic (and racial) formations (Valenzuela 2003). The women that solicited employment on the Brooklyn corner had long employment trajectories in the U.S., particularly as live-in domestics, caregivers, and in the broader service economy. While day labor did not constitute their ideal form of employment given its erratic and unpredictable nature, it was often perceived as a more promising and fulfilling option relative to other jobs that were available to them in the low-wage economy, particularly for undocumented workers or those with little English skills.

Chapter 4: Life and Work on the Brooklyn Corner

INTRODUCTION

As unregulated day labor markets have become a permanent and growing feature of the American landscape, scholars have been drawn to these sites to document the challenges day laborers face in a post-9/11 political and social climate that is marked by increasing surveillance and control over the criminalized status of “illegal” immigrants (Inda 2011, 2006; De Genova 2002;). By way of surveys and interviews, the bulk of the scholarly literature on day labor has dealt with demographic considerations such as the size of the industry, the characteristics of its workforce, and workplace conditions (Theodore et al 2006; Valenzuela et al 2006; Valenzuela 2003). Epidemiological analyses emerging from public health and social work research have followed, examining a host of health risk factors including alcohol use and “problem drinking” among male Latino migrant day laborers (Wolby and Organista 2014; Wolby and Organista 2007), and the health and social consequences including accident and injury, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and domestic violence. These studies, which have consistently targeted a handful of Northern California informal hiring sites in cities like Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco, have also contributed to the production of day laborers as a target population among public health workers, social services providers, and non-profit organizations, rendering them legible to state intervention. Ethnographic studies (Ordoñez 2014; Quesada 2011; Purser 2009; Walter, Bourgois, & Loinaz 2004)—at times in collaboration with, or resulting from, these same epidemiological studies in the greater San Francisco Bay Area—have focused on the social context in which day laborers live and work, particularly the racism, hostilities, and “daily violences” Latino migrant day laborers contend with as they attempt to procure work in public venues. The location of these sites is important as the Bay Area, which, compared to many other metropolitan areas in the U.S., is deemed “as good as it

gets” for day labor in terms of being socially tolerated and relatively safe from police and community harassment (Quesada et al 2014).

While this chapter builds on this growing literature it also seeks to complicate some of the ways by which day laborers get construed as a “unique population” (Organista and Wolby 2013:59) whose particular experiences of privation and adversity that result from migrating, living, and working in the U.S. are exceptionalized. That is, while migrant day laborers, many of whom are undocumented, are intensely marginalized and increasingly “illegalized” by the state (De Genova 2005; Ngai 2005), many of the conditions that they experience—lack of economic opportunities, financial instability, discrimination, poverty, hardship—are shared by other workers in the post-industrial, “gloves-off” (Bernhardt et al 2008) economy. We know, for instance, that in recent years federal and state policy makers have exacerbated the trend toward neoliberal deregulation by adopting policies—e.g., immigration policy and enforcement, safety net and welfare reform, and policies affecting ex-offenders—that have expanded the stock of “extra-vulnerable” workers (Bernhardt et al 2008:2). Moreover, following the critiques of Bernhardt (2015), Vosko (2006) and others, much scholarship on neoliberalism tends to valorize a “Golden Era” of full-employment (built around the norm of a White male–breadwinner model) without paying sufficient attention to its history of racial exclusions and that for marginalized members of the American workforce, precarious employment is not a new phenomenon. However, as Peck and Theodore note, the contingent economy—encompassing a wide spectrum of flexible, short-term, and temporary “shitty jobs” (2001:471) procured through temp agencies, hiring halls, and street-corner markets—is much more than “a free market sphere or Hobbesian space” (2012:743).

Drawing on the work of Turnovsky (2006) and Gomberg-Muñoz (2010), who are largely concerned with migrant workers’ understandings of their own participation in

precarious industries, this chapter focuses on how Latin American migrant women in day labor go about promoting their labor in order to maximize their employment prospects and attain some measure of autonomy and financial security in spite of their vulnerable, subordinate status. I do so in an effort to emphasize the agency—understood here as “the human capacity to exert some control over the conditions of one’s existence” (Gomez-Muñoz 2010:297)—of undocumented migrants as they navigate the terrain of work in the U.S. I argue that our understanding of agency in day labor spaces, and ultimately contestation, need not be limited to the more extreme moments such as those involving wage theft and abuse but also day laborers’ daily interactions with employers (and other workers) on the street corner. In this chapter I examine three strategies women on the corner deploy to promote their labor, shape their employment prospects and environment, and cultivate some modicum of job security and predictability against a backdrop of anonymity, hyper-flexibility, and disposability. That is, by demonstrating how migrant women perform social identities, do extra work, and turn down work, street-corner markets can be understood not just spaces of subjugation and marginalization, but also as sites of struggle and resistance.

LIFE AND WORK ON THE CORNER

In many respects, day labor epitomizes the type of flexible labor that employers favor in the context of the neoliberalization of labor relations following the three-decade-long shift in the modes and practices of labor regulation and the rise of contingent work in the U.S. This is particularly acute, scholars note, in sectors such as construction, where deunionization, deregulation, cost-cutting, and “just-in-time” employment practices have become entrenched (Peck and Theodore 2012). The adoption of contingent work strategies—such as the hiring of day laborers—allows employers to reduce labor costs,

evade legal liabilities that result from employing “regular” workers, and undermine the potential for collective action in the workplace. In their search for pliable and elastic labor, employers are particularly drawn to undocumented migrant workers, whose legal status is used as justification for deficient workplace rights, social entitlements, and bargaining power. Day labor, characterized as one of the most flexible of flexible labor markets—an “island of despotism” (Peck and Theodore 2012:743)—is said to be increasingly archipelagic and interconnected in its form as other industries have since followed suit. That is, these localized enclaves of economic exploitation are not the anomalies they once were but rather, as Peck and Theodore note, “reflect and shape the terms of a reworked, if unstable, labor market settlement, which is systematically skewed against the interest of labor—a downscaling and atomization of employment relations achieved in the context of transnationalizing employment relations” (Peck and Theodore 2012:743).

Street-level hiring sites are unregulated in that they facilitate untaxed economic transactions that lack governmental oversight of workplace laws and regulations. In unregulated day labor markets workers are employed on an as-needed basis to perform a range of manual, short-term tasks from construction and moving to cleaning. In the Brooklyn corner, unlike other street-corner markets, the services that are offered are mostly house cleaning for the Hasidim. Although these economic transactions are not monitored by a governmental agency, community organizers from the Workers Justice Project (WJP) have been actively trying to organize the women on the corner, and have even created an “eco-friendly” cleaning cooperative as an alternative to street solicitation. While they have been largely unsuccessful in garnering support for the creation of a formal hiring site in Williamsburg, community organizers visit the corner once or twice a month to do outreach work and provide workers basic English instruction on site while they are awaiting work. They also assist workers in their interactions with potential employers. Most of the women,

particularly those with long trajectories of street corner solicitation, had contentious relationships with the organizers from the WJP, and for the most part abstained from participating in the services they provided on the corner. They also rejected any translation or mediation assistance in their negotiations with potential employers. Although some women, particularly those who were new to the corner, appreciated their support and guidance, others resented the efforts of the WJP because they perceived them as unsolicited or even counterproductive. In their view, being able to negotiate with employers, without mediators, was a skill the women on the corner needed to cultivate in order to be successful solicitors.

Day Labor Sites as “Male Spaces”: Exclusions, Absences, and Organizing Logic

Since street-corner markets are often portrayed as deeply chaotic and disorganized spaces, scholars have taken to examine their internal organizational logics and practices (Quesada 1999; Malpica 1996). Malpica, in his work on migrant day labor in L.A. in the 1990s, contends that one of the appealing characteristics of day labor markets, particularly for the newly migrated and undocumented, is their accessibility given the lack of formal mechanisms restricting entry. Despite the relative ease with which workers can enter this labor market, not everyone is welcome. Malpica notes that day labor is not only constituted as “men’s work” (given the physical nature of the work that they are expected to perform) but that day labor sites are “male spaces” (Malpica 1996:133) that are inhospitable to women given the pervasive “ritualistic sexism” that is deeply entrenched in these spaces. Newcomers, moreover, are subject to intense surveillance, at least initially, to ensure that “inappropriate” behaviors such as public drunkenness and conspicuous drug use are deterred to avoid attracting the attention of the police. Although the Brooklyn corner also allows the recently migrated, under/unemployed, or those looking to break into the cleaning

industry the means to secure employment on a daily basis without having to show proof of legal employment, English skills, references, or experience, not everyone is welcomed. Men, for instance, are not allowed to linger or solicit on the premises. This exclusionary measure is attributed to the Hasidim and the gender segregation practices they impose in other public spaces. The instances in which this informal rule is relaxed is when new women, particularly relatively younger women in their 20s or so, arrive to the corner with a male relative, partner, or friend, who act as a chaperone in order to gauge the safety of the site. These moments were telling not only because the presence of men (non-employers) on the corner is a disruptive force in that it violates an informal rule that the women were quick to enforce but also because they highlight another important feature of the street-corner market: the relative absence of younger women.

I became attuned to the dearth of younger women during my first few months on the corner when I came across a young woman in her early 20s who had recently migrated from Honduras. As she slowly made her way to the center where I was standing with a few other women, I could hear them whispering and talking about her appearance in a disparaging manner. Unlike most women who wore old jeans, loose-fitting t-shirts and/or long-sleeved shirts, she wore leopard print leggings and a black sequined tube-top that exposed her belly button. A few of the women laughed and wondered, out loud, if she was lost and had ended up on the wrong corner, insinuating that she was a prostitute. Her name was Elvira, and had been in the U.S. for just three weeks. Unlike most of the women who commuted from Queens, the Bronx, and other parts of Brooklyn, she lived a few blocks from the corner. She learned about *la parada* the previous week when she went to pick up a few groceries from a nearby bodega. There she sparked conversation with one of the workers, a young Mexican man who was stocking shelves in the back. Elvira approached him and shared with him that she had recently migrated from Honduras and that she was

desperately looking for work. He told her about *la parada*, where women go to find housecleaning work. "It's safe," he assured her, "they are *judios*."

After a brief conversation with Elvira a black suburban pulled up across the street. Angel, a fifty-six-year-old part-time worker who had been soliciting employment on the corner intermittently for seven years made her way to the driver's side to see what the men wanted. A few minutes into their conversation the driver, a young Latino who appeared to be in his early twenties, pointed to Elvira, signaling that he was interested in hiring her. Angel walked back to the corner to tell us that there were three men in the vehicle and that they had specifically asked for the young woman standing next to me. The men were looking to hire someone to work at a clothing store in downtown Brooklyn, mostly unloading and arranging new merchandise. A group of women gathered around us, nudging Elvira to go talk to the men. Looking both confused and nervous, Elvira asked Angel to accompany her to talk to the men. They offered her a full day's work and a ride back to the corner at the end of her shift. The pay was \$15 an hour. Five or six women were now gathered around them, waiting for her to decide whether or not she would accept the job offer. Sensing her ambivalence, a few of them made their way to the front and offered to go, if she was not interested. "I'll go. I'm available all day," they said repeatedly. Angel immediately told the women to back off: "This doesn't concern you, they are already negotiating with this young woman." They stepped back and quietly observed the negotiation unfold.

Elvira turned her back to the men and whispered to us that she did not feel comfortable getting into a car with strangers. Given that she had only been in the U.S. for several weeks and was still unfamiliar with the city, she did not know where downtown Brooklyn was relative to the corner. She also did not feel confident enough with her English skills to be able to communicate or ask for directions if she were to get lost. Moreover, the

young man at the bodega had assured her that she would be hired exclusively by Hasidic Jews in the neighborhood to clean houses. Angel advised her against going if she felt unsafe. “Always go with your gut,” she noted. “Why don't you take one of us instead?” Angel asked to the men in the Suburban, pointing to herself and some of the other women who were in their forties and fifties. “Or do you have something against older women?” The men explained that they needed someone younger as the work entailed heavy lifting. “Sweetheart, everyone here can do hard work, what do you think we do all day?” she assured him. Angel then turned to Elvira and told her that the offer seemed too good to be true and that it could be a scam. Why were the men insisting on taking her? Why would they offer to pay her \$15 an hour when the going rate was \$10? Angel asked the men if they would consider hiring two women at \$10 an hour each instead. “If you hire two workers they could finish the work faster, so at the end it would cost you about the same.” The men insisted that they wanted only Elvira. This interaction divided the women, with some, mainly full-time and seasonal workers encouraging Elvira to accept the job offer and others, particularly Angel, warning her against it. Ana, a thirty-seven-year-old *mexicana* insisted Elvira go:

Ana: They picked *you*, so they clearly want *you*. Take the job, it's a good one. These opportunities are rare.

Angel: Would you put your own daughter in that situation? Would you let her get into a car with strange men? And not one, but three? Would you expose her in such a manner? Have a heart! You are a mother, *qué no?*

Ana: Ay, *tranquila doña*. It's no big deal. *No pasa de que le den una manoseadita y ya*. [What's the worst thing that could happen to her?]

With the exception of Angel, the women burst into laughter. Ana was not convinced this was a particularly high-risk situation that warranted such protectionist measures. “We get

into cars with strangers all the time,” she noted, asking “why is it suddenly such a big deal? She’s not defenseless, she can leave if she feels uncomfortable.” Angel explained that Elvira was not only new to the corner, but also very young. “She has no experience in dealing with these situations. She has no idea how things work on this corner.” Elvira agreed and added that she would feel more comfortable staying on the corner and waiting for a cleaning job instead. Sensing an opportunity, Elsa, a thirty-three-year-old full-time worker from El Salvador, made her way to the front of the crowd, opened the back door of the Suburban and slammed the door behind her. After a brief negotiation, they drove off.

As Elvira’s case suggests, there is an aura of safety around the Hasidim, their homes, and the Brooklyn corner that renders soliciting employment on the street relatively safe for (some) women. As I mentioned in previous chapters, when Latinas first learn of the Brooklyn corner as a place where they can solicit employment, they are often assured that it is safe precisely because they would be working exclusively in the homes of ultra-Orthodox Jews, a highly ritualistic sect of Judaism. Younger women, however, are instructed to take extra precautions to successfully maneuver men’s aggressive behavior (see Hlavka 2014) as they are deemed particularly vulnerable and susceptible to abuse and sexual assault. Despite the fact that many women, regardless of age, reported experiencing different forms of sexual violence when soliciting employment on the corner, or more commonly, in the Hasidic homes where they worked, it is younger women’s experiences of sexual assault and harassment that are rendered particularly disconcerting. It is not just that young women are perceived as expected, even natural, targets of male sexual aggression but that they are viewed as less capable of protecting themselves when these incidents occur. The protective measures that are devised to deal with such situations—e.g., constrained mobility, vetting of employers, working strictly with the Hasidim—are associated with their presumed inability to protect themselves in potentially dangerous

situations. What is at stake for street-corner workers is not necessarily the potential of sexual violence, that is a given, but women's ability to successfully navigate and ultimately deter sexualized encounters. It is therefore not uncommon for more seasoned solicitors like Angel to mentor newcomers, not because they are particularly concerned with their safety or well-being but because they seek to ensure that they adhere to the rules around solicitation, negotiation, and employment conditions. In their view, failure to do so would have a detrimental impact on all of the women's livelihoods.

Not surprisingly then, younger women, particularly those in their twenties, generally do not solicit employment in this manner. In fact, they represent a small minority of solicitors on the corner. Those that do are often accompanied, at least initially, by a male relative or friend. Again, although scholars generally point to accessibility and "openness" of street-corner markets as one of the most prominent features of this labor market, not everyone is welcome, and in Brooklyn "women's corner," men are a case in point. Josefina, one of the (self-proclaimed) founders of the corner, on multiple occasions had me ask men to leave. On one such occasion, Josefina asked me talk to an older Latino man who had been standing across the street from where we were for over fifteen minutes:

Josefina: Why don't you go and see what that man's deal is over there. He's been standing there for a while now, and he doesn't seem to be interested in hiring a worker.

Erika: And tell him what exactly?

Josefina: That this is *la parada de mujeres*, and that the *judios* don't like men hanging out here unless they are interested in hiring someone. Just go see what he wants, maybe he's lost or something.

Grudgingly, I agree to go and talk to this man, despite feeling embarrassed and unsure of what I would say to him.

Erika: Good afternoon, sir. How are you? Are you looking to hire someone?

Man: *Hola hija*, no, not really. I'm just trying to see what this corner is all about. My niece is looking for work and I had heard that women come here to find work, so I just thought I would check it out before sending her over.

Erika: Oh, I see.

Man: So from what I hear, it's mostly house cleaning, right?

Erika: Yeah, for the most part.

Man: And it's with *judios*?

Erika: Yeah, for the most part.

Man: And it's safe?

Erika: Well, I think you should ask the other women here about that. The thing is, they don't really like men hanging out on the corner. They say that the *judios* get mad, and so they asked me to talk to you and see if you needed help with something, otherwise they prefer that you not stick around.

Man: Oh ok, I was just leaving. I just wanted to take a look for myself. Thanks for your help though, I appreciate it. I'm not sure my niece would feel comfortable here, and to be honest, I don't know if I would feel comfortable sending her here because she's under my care. It just doesn't seem very safe, you know?

When I returned to the corner and relayed this information to Josefina, she agreed:

Look, it's understandable that he doesn't want to send his niece here because if something were to happen to her he would have to take full responsibility. He doesn't want to expose her in that way, and I completely understand. Some of us have daughters and we would probably feel the same way about bringing them [here]. This isn't the safest environment for them. Too many things happen on this corner.

As Josefina notes, the corner is not a particularly "safe environment" for young women as it can expose them to dangerous situations that they may not be able to navigate. Thus the absence of certain bodies in these street-corner markets is as telling as the presence of those that are deemed to be not only particularly fit for the most grueling forms of domestic labor,

but also unaffected (or undeterred) by violent incidents on the street. Moreover, most conversations on the corner around sexual violence were limited to ensuring the sexual safety of young women who were perceived to be predisposed to sexual advancements and propositions by male employers. As most noted, how women navigate these encounters have implications for all who solicit employment on the corner, presumably because if a woman entertains sexual advances, it will not only create a market for sexual commerce but also predispose all women to sexual violence.

Getting Work on the Brooklyn Corner

In a rare effort to examine the different types of workers who solicit employment through day labor markets, Malpica found that there are important differences among the workers with respect to who hires them. More successful solicitors, according to Malpica, were those who relied on “regular” employers who hired them for extended periods and on a recurring basis. Those who relied mostly on “unclaimed” or ad hoc employers they acquired from the street corner, who hired them a one-job only basis, were the most precarious. The ability of some workers to amass a cadre of regular employers and ultimately work with more regularity and consistency, created a status hierarchy among the workers, which in turn served as an informal organizing logic on the corner. As noted in chapter 2, I identified three types of workers on the corner, mainly full-time, part-time, and seasonal workers. This typology reflected differences among the workers with regards to their attachment to the corner, or the extent to which they relied on day labor for their livelihood. Unlike Malpica, who categorized workers based on their reliance on “regular” versus “unclaimed” employers, I found that workers on the Brooklyn corner relied on both. However, given the more pressing nature of full-time and seasonal workers’ situation and daily job search, they tended to rely more heavily on “unclaimed” employers they secured

on the street corner. Malpica found that those with regular employers tended to command deference and respect on the street, given their ability to secure work in a more stable and consistent manner. They also received preferential treatment in the hiring process.

On the Brooklyn corner, however, deference, respect, or preferential treatment in job hiring is more complex. Part-time solicitors, for instance, relied on a mix of regular and unclaimed employers as well as other income-generating strategies, often engaged in heated negotiations with employers, and were more compelled to turn down work offers than full-time or seasonal solicitors. This means that they spent a considerable amount of time on the corner, which could be read as indicative of being an unsuccessful solicitor or having a questionable work ethic. These workers, however, were often avid negotiators who secured the more highly coveted jobs on the corner, including those with higher hourly rates (or by the job) with *judios modernos* or non-Hasidic employers. Among part-time solicitors were also those with long trajectories of street-corner solicitation, including a handful of self-proclaimed founders of the Brooklyn corner, who despite having a broader network of Hasidic employers, including regular employers, solicited from the street-corner several times a week and kept tabs on others' solicitation practices. Given that full-time and seasonal solicitors attempted to secure as much work as possible on a daily basis, their approach to solicitation was viewed at best as desperate.

How employers go about selecting who to hire from the street-corner is a topic of much speculation among the workers. There is a general consensus that Hasidic employers make hiring decisions on the basis of race/ethnicity, at times signaling a racialized preference for "Polish" or "Mexican" women. In the case of the former, some workers attributed this alleged hiring preference to racial discrimination and bias, while others drew on cultural explanations such as a common language, shared cultural practices, and a certain affinity toward people of (Eastern) European descent. This alleged racial preference

for Polish women baffled some of the Hasidic employers that I worked for. As Anna, one of my “regular” employer’s daughter, noted:

It’s shocking to hear that, actually. Given the experience of Jews in Poland, particularly Hasidic Jews, it makes no sense that we would want to hire them now, to bring them into our homes. It’s insulting. There is too much history there.

Still, other women interpret some employers’ preference for Polish workers as having to do with precedent and familiarity. They note that in the early 2000s, when women began to solicit employment on street corners in different parts of Williamsburg, Eastern European, particularly Polish women, outnumbered Latin American migrants. The handful of Latinas, mostly Dominican and Puerto Rican women, that solicited employment in this manner were lived in the area and looked to street solicitation to supplement their incomes. Over the years, however, Latin American migrant women from as far as Queens and the Bronx began soliciting employment in South Williamsburg, and currently greatly outnumber Eastern European women. Latinas and Eastern European women now self-segregate and position themselves on opposite ends of the cemented asphalt that constitutes the corner, making it easier for employers to choose between them as they see fit.

While it is certainly not uncommon for employers to be explicit about the nationality of the worker they intend to hire, asking, for instance, for a “Polish” or “Mexican” worker, many resort to using seemingly neutral language such as “flexible,” “nice,” and “willing” when voicing their hiring preferences. As an employer explained to me after engaging in a heated discussion with a few Latinas over their “unwillingness” to accept job offers that did not provide mops:

Look, we are flexible in hiring them, you know what I mean? Because well, they are illegal in this country and most don’t even speak English. Not a word! And what do we do? We *still* hire them, offer them a good wage, provide them with a nice meal, so why not show some appreciation and gratitude and reciprocate? They have

to be willing to return the favor which means that if we like something done a particular way, like cleaning floors by hand with a *schmate* instead of a mop, they should be more than happy to do it. It's a compromise, is it not? We hire them, no questions asked, so they have to be flexible too.

The flexibility that is desired and sought after by employers on the corner also takes the form of being available and willing to work at a moment's notice. However, neither willingness nor flexibility are racially devoid terms. Employers, for instance, at times voiced an explicit preference for "Mexican" women—a term that was often used in reference to all women of Latin American origin—because they were perceived to be particularly meticulous, dedicated, and hard working. As Hannah, a Hasidic woman in her late forties noted,

I hired Rosa from the corner ten years ago and she has been with me ever since. I only come to the corner on the days she is sick, her kids are sick, or when she travels back home to see her family. I am never disappointed when I hire Mexican women. Polish women are hard workers too, don't get me wrong, but look, they are really old and very demanding. So I go with those who are still strong and willing to do a little extra, to go over and beyond what I ask them to do. And my Rosa is detail-oriented, dedicated, a real hard worker. I think she works hard because she has suffered so much. There's a real urgency there that I don't see with Polish women, the need to work hard to survive, I think. A survival mentality.

When *her* Rosa is not available for work, Hannah, as other Hasidic employers, purposefully select workers on the corner who they perceive to be Mexican because they have a reputation for being diligent workers with a good work ethic (De Genova 2005; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Although Hannah rarely inquires about women's nationality upon hiring them, she systematically picks women from the "Mexican side," the part of the corner where most Latin American women gather. Unable to differentiate Latinas on the corner, employers like Hannah rely on their physical location and phenotype when making hiring decisions. Mexican migrants' assumed hard work ethic allows employers to make hiring decisions "on-the-fly" in the day labor context where insufficient information is

normalized. And while some employers certainly attribute these women's hard work ethic to their "culture" (Gomberg-Muñoz 2010), an essentialist notion that naturalizes inequality and racial difference among seemingly bounded social groups, others attributed it to an alleged "survival instinct" that Latinas supposedly developed as a result of withstanding adversity and poverty in their countries of origin. Whether assumed to be an intrinsic cultural characteristic or something Latina migrant workers developed given the hardships they are all presumed to have endured in their home countries, their "hard work" ethic makes them ideal for low-paid, grueling work. Women like Rosa are perceived to be hard working and highly dexterous because of difficulties they have had to endure in order to survive, which create a sense of urgency, a "survival mentality" that then compels them to endure arduous and less than desirable employment conditions in the U.S. While this hard work ethic certainly helps women promote their labor on the corner, they still have to prove their "willingness" on a daily basis. That is, employers will reward workers who are deemed to be loyal, dependable, and willing to work hard, or willingly willing and "reliably contingent" (Peck and Theodore 2011).

WORKING THE CORNER

Race/ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship are categories that not only inform employers' hiring preferences and practices, but are also mobilized by street corner solicitors in order to promote their labor, maximize their employment prospects, and attain some measure of financial security. In spite of their vulnerable and subordinate status as an increasingly "illegalized" workforce, and a labor reserve as structural approaches emphasize, migrant day laborers, including those who are undocumented, devise different mechanisms to respond to and contend with the challenges posed to them by class, racial, and legal circumscription. In this section I focus on how Latina solicitors negotiate these

racial and ethnic impositions, at times mobilizing them in order to exert some control over their employment prospects and conditions. I argue that our understanding of agency in day labor spaces, and ultimately contestation, need not be limited to the more extreme moments such as those involving wage theft and abuse but rather, day laborers' daily interactions with employers (and other workers) on the street corner. In the section that follows I examine three strategies women on the corner deploy to promote their labor and cultivate some modicum of job security and predictability against a backdrop of anonymity, hyper-flexibility, and disposability. That is, through performing social identities, doing extra work, and turning down work, solicitors seek to enhance their emotional well-being and employment conditions despite structural constraints that work to further intensify their precarity and guarantee their continued "willingness" to perform low-wage jobs. Street-corner markets, in sum, are not just spaces of subjugation and marginalization, they are also sites of struggle and contestation.

Performing Social Identities

In order to improve their working conditions, women often construct fictitious stories about their family life in the U.S. and in their countries of origin to elicit sympathy and flexibility from their employers, something akin to what sociologist Kimberly Hoang refers to as "performing poverty" (Hoang 2015:99). These fictitious renditions serve two main purposes: First, they allow women to establish boundaries between their working and personal lives, protecting their privacy and interiority. Second, women often rely on these stories in order to renegotiate wages, ask for time off or accommodations at work. In the first instance, privacy refers to "what is most singular, secret, ineffable, internal, that is, private, about [individuals]" (Morris 2000:323). Here Debra Morris, as black feminists like bell hooks (1990) and Patricia Williams (1991), is calling for a "positive political theory

of privacy” that conceptualizes it as a transitional, psychic space that serves as a reprieve from scrutiny, public judgment, and social control. While many theorists, particularly radical feminists, have focused on the negative effects of privacy, rendering it a masculinist prerogative (MacKinnon 1987) and self-serving right (Young 1990) that functions to keep us from examining oppressive relations and ultimately enhances the vulnerability and powerlessness of women, Morris argues that the exaltation of the public self has come at the expense of our care and concern for the private. In this section I show that the fictions women on the corner devise allow them to not only establish much needed boundaries with their employers in order to protect their private and intimate lives, but also their working lives, from intrusion. These stories, moreover, serve to elicit sympathy and flexibility from employers.

In the previous chapter I introduced Julie, a *colombiana* and part-time solicitor who often stands on the “Polish side” in order to increase her chances of getting hired. As Latinas generally outnumber Eastern European women, some will “cross-over” to the other side to take advantage of some employers’ racialized preferences for Polish workers and their relatively low numbers on the corner. Similarly, Marta, a forty-five-year-old seasonal worker from Argentina who solicits employment on a daily basis, viewed her blonde hair and light complexion as assets she could depend on to secure work from the Polish side. As she noted,

It’s not that I want to lie about being Polish, and I generally don’t have to, but the way I see it is that in standing with other Latinas my chances of getting hired are very, very low. There are so many of us on the corner on a daily basis, you know, so many options to choose from. I also find that employers who want Latinas will pick the poorest of the bunch, so that the more dingy and destitute [*paupérrima*] you look, the more likely you are to get hired for the day. If you are an *india* [indigenous woman], uff, all the better because they think you are docile and subservient. They like the ones they can easily train to their liking. Employers look

for very specific things when they come to this corner, and I generally do better on the Polish side.

Marta contends that employers have a clear idea of what they want and expect from the workers they hire from the street-corner market. Race/ethnicity allows employers to make speedy decisions and judgments about the work ethic of a worker, and often look for specific phenotypical and physical markers when hiring them as a result. As Marta noted, her attempts to “pass” as a Polish worker by gathering with them opposite her Latina counterparts is less about pretending to be Polish and more about her inability to be read as a Latina, or at least the type of Latina Hasidic employers find to be most desirable and appropriate for this type of work. She found it difficult to stand out and secure work among her Latina counterparts because she was not only outnumbered, but also not perceived to be destitute enough.

Since “passing” is a strategy that is not available to all Latinas, some will instead rely on racialized scripts in order to promote their labor and renegotiate their terms of employment. Angelica, a forty-eight-year-old *nica* who currently lives in the Bronx with her long-term partner from Mexico, pointed this out to me one day as we were having lunch at a nearby bodega. Angelica was a quiet and reserved woman who did not have many friends on the corner. She was a part-time solicitor who had been working for the Hasidim for the last twelve years. Previous to this she had worked at a jewelry store in Queens as well as a street vendor in Manhattan. Although she arrived to the U.S. on a tourist visa, she had been living in New York for almost twenty years without *papeles*. She described working for one employer for almost ten years. Her name was Esther, and she lived in Borough Park with her husband and two of twelve children. Angelica met Esther on the corner when the latter was looking for someone to cover for her regular domestic worker a few times a week. After a few months of working for Esther, Angelica felt comfortable

enough to ask her for more days of work. In order to make her case, Angelica told her employer that she had four children in Nicaragua that she had to support, and that working one day a week was not sufficient for her to take care of her family's needs back home. In addition to caring for her four children, she mentioned having to provide for her mother's basic necessities as well. The story Angelica told her employer in order to get more days of work were not entirely untrue, but rather, embellished to elicit empathy and support in the form of more work. Angelica, for instance, has three adult children, all of whom are married with families of their own, and although she occasionally sends them gifts, she no longer feels a financial obligation toward them. Esther explained that she could not afford to hire her for any additional days but that she would refer her to some of her daughters who had recently married and were looking for a domestic worker. Angelica has been working for them every since.

Recently, however, Esther told Angelica that, in addition to cleaning for her and her two daughters, she wanted Angelica to care for her eighty-six-year-old mother who had recently undergone hip surgery and was on bed rest. Despite not wanting to take on any more work, Angelica felt that she could not reject the offer as it would jeopardize her employment with the entire family. Now that Angelica works for several family members, she felt pressured to take on the additional labor of caring for Esther's mother despite knowing that it would entail double the work (a combination of care work and domestic work) at the standard rate of \$10 an hour. In order to get out of this predicament, Angelica told Esther that her partner Lazaro would not allow her to take on any more work. With the help of google translator, Angelica communicated to her employer via text that her husband forbade her from taking this job as it would pull her away from the home, where she was needed. The text, which she displayed on the corner one morning, read:

Mrs. Esther, I'm sorry but my husband prohibits me from more work. Mexican men are very macho. Thank you for the opportunity. Maybe in the future he will let me work for your mother. God bless you and your family.

Not completely satisfied with this response, Esther insisted that Angelica plead with her husband so that he could understand the urgent nature of the situation. Angelica, via text (and google translator), explained that her husband had a very bad temper, and that she did not want to upset him by insisting. I was at their house having dinner the evening Esther called Angelica's husband's cell phone. When he did not pick up, she sent him a text message asking him to call her as soon as possible as it was urgent. Lazaro quietly scolded Angelica for getting him involved in the situation when he had nothing to do with whether or not she would take on any additional work. He also did not want to lie to Esther, and instead responded, via text, that he could not call her as he did not speak English, which was not true.

Angelica was compelled to make up these stories in order to get out of additional labor. Hasidic women often expect women on the corner to willingly take on, particularly with extended family members. Although Angelica had initially asked her employer to provide more days of work so that she could send remittances to her four children in Nicaragua, she did not want Esther to feel entitled to dictate what her work schedule should look like, or think that she had the right to impose additional family members on her as she pleased without consulting with her first. Angelica, however, felt that outright opposition to her employer's demands could potentially jeopardize her employment situation with her entire family, and cause her to return to the corner on a more regular basis to acquire new employers. She thus used her husband, his alleged "machismo," and her need to be a good and obedient wife as a way to get her employer to understand her hesitation to take on more work. When I asked Angelica why she thought this particular story would get her out of this predicament, she responded that:

These women dedicate themselves entirely to their homes and families. Family is everything to them, to their religion. So I felt that she would understand where I was coming from. That I am also a wife and mother, you know? I figured she would understand that I also have to do what is best for my family. I couldn't just say to her, "I don't want to do it because it's too much work and not enough pay" because she would interpret that as me not wanting to work, being lazy, greedy or unreasonable. Sometimes we have to tell white lies so that they don't take advantage of the situation.

Angelica felt the need to rely on a believable and recognizable script that would also resonate with her Hasidic employer. She mobilized the trope of machismo (Gutmann 1996), a culturally defined attribute (and deficiency) associated with Mexican and other Latino men, which emphasizes the absolute supremacy of the husband and the self-sacrifice of the wife in the traditional heterosexual Mexican family. While a deeply elitist and racist archetype (González-López and Guttman 2005), here it is used strategically by Angelica to highlight a sense of duty and obligation to her husband, key markers of what it means to be a "good wife," which is a laudable aspiration for both Angelica and her ultra-Orthodox employer. Moreover, in attributing her inability to take on more work to her husband's machismo, Angelica's work ethic could not be questioned or rendered suspect. However, Esther's final attempt included bypassing Angelica altogether and negotiating directly to her husband, who would presumably have the final say in whether or not she would take on more work. Lazaro, however, refused to participate in this fiction and could not understand why his wife was incapable of simply being forthcoming about not wanting to care for Esther's sickly mother. Lazaro reminded Angelica that she only worked because she wanted to ("trabajas porque quieres, no porque tienes [que trabajar]"), not because she had to as he was a good provider.

This was not the first time Angelica concocted a fictitious story to her employer. A few months after we met, for instance, Angelica underwent gastric bypass surgery as she was considered morbidly obese. When I visited her during her recovery at a hospital in

Manhattan, she asked me to contact Esther to let her know she would not be returning to work for several weeks. However, she did not want me to reveal the details of her surgical procedure, and instead asked me to tell her that she was leaving for Nicaragua to visit her children. “Wouldn't it be better if she knew about your health condition so that she can lighten up on the work load when you return?” I asked. Angelica insisted that I not mention the surgery as she wanted to maintain a strictly professional relationship with her employer:

I think I'm entitled to some privacy here. These women have no business knowing all the details of our lives. I like to maintain a professional and cordial relationship with all of my *judío* employers, and sometimes that means keeping them at a distance.

Fabricating or embellishing stories about family, spouses, and countries of origin allowed women to create some much needed boundaries between their working and personal lives, as well as some semblance of intimacy and closeness. Unlike the women in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's *Doméstica* (2001), who used “white lies” in order to sever ties with employers and end abusive working relationships, women on the corner embellished or fabricated stories in order to negotiate better working conditions and/or to protect their personal lives from external scrutiny and imposition in the context of recurring employment. As Angelica, many women on the corner were not particularly interested in cultivating a close and intimate relationship with their employers, or what Hondagneu-Sotelo refers to as “personalism” (2001:172). Angelica, for instance, was more concerned with maintaining “a professional and cordial relationship” with her Hasidic employers, one that hinged on establishing clear boundaries and a certain amount of emotional distance. This orientation differs from the closeness that Latinas in Hondagneu-Sotelo's study aspired to in their relationships with employers. However, this does not mean that women like Angelica were interested in establishing an anonymous and strictly contractual relation

with their employers—although some clearly were, particularly seasonal workers—but rather, preferred to deploy a “strategic personalism” as a way to keep their employers at a healthy distance while protecting their right to privacy.

Speaking about the ways by which undocumented migrant workers are stripped of the capacity for meaningful agency given their highly constrained environment, Gomberg-Muñoz notes that if we are to understand agency more broadly as the “capacity for action” (2010:297), then we can deduce that they are capable of effectively shaping their work environment. One of the ways women on the corner are able to do this collectively is precisely through “impression management” (Goffman 1959), not only through the mobilization of essentialist notions of a “Mexican work ethic,” but also by “performing poverty” (Hoang 2015:99) in a way that is legible to potential employers. Janet, one of the women that solicits work on the corner, mentioned that,

Look at what I am wearing. I have to wear the ugliest pair of jeans I own, and the most run-down t-shirt in order to get work here. Employers won't hire you otherwise. It's like the poorer you look, the more they want you [laughs]. I can't tell my employers that I own a car, or that I use it to drive to work. Or that I own my apartment. No, they don't want to hear all that. They think I have kids back in Peru, that I have to support and send money to on a regular basis. They don't know that my kids are all American citizens, born right here in New York, and that they are in private school, just like their kids.

Although Janet is an anomaly on the corner in some respects, as an American citizen who owns a car and a three-bedroom apartment in Queens, she as others on the corner understand that in “performing poverty” they can increase their chances of getting employment on any given day. Such performances and strategic silences around their lives in the U.S. also helps the Hasidic women and men that hire them to frame their employment as a form of charitable giving. Similarly, Eufemia, a veteran worker on the street corner, notes that she rarely tells her employers she speaks fluent English,

With *americanos* I negotiate in English, but with these [Hasidic] women I just nod my head and smile, I don't even bother. Why? What good is it to speak English here [on the corner], when they see us as one and the same? No, they're not trying to hire a secretary! It makes no difference whether or not I speak English. They just want to be able to hire someone they can command, and give orders [to]. So the more quiet you are, the better. As they say in my country, *calladita me veo más bonita*.

Eufemia, an avid negotiator with non-Hasidic employers, withholds the fact that she speaks English in an effort to better accommodate employers' desire for a particular type of worker, one that is docile, quiet, and easy to command. Eufemia is also well aware of what happens when women try “too hard” to impress Hasidic employers with their English and negotiation skills,

Americanos expect you to negotiate, to be aggressive. It's the American way. Theirs is a culture that respects people who fight hard for what they want. The *judios* [jews] don't even see us as human, you know? We are not [their] equals...we really are more like animals to them, *borregas* [sheep]...and so if I get too demanding, too difficult, they can just turn to the *compañera* and offer her the job instead.

Doing Extra Work

As the previous section illustrates, women on the Brooklyn corner creatively develop strategies in response to the structural constraints they face in their daily lives, including asymmetrical power relations with Hasidic employers. In this section I focus on migrant day laborers' interactions with other workers on the corner and ultimately the cultivation of a social and racialized identity as “hard workers” who go over and beyond what employers ask them to do in order to secure on-going or future employment. Cultivating a reputation as hard workers also allows Latinas to carve out employment opportunities for themselves in the street-corner market, what Tilly (1998) refers to as opportunity hoarding. The practices that women mobilize to promote an ethic of hard work, however, also give rise to inequalities and hostilities among workers on the corner.

While many women on the corner get hired on an individual basis, occasionally employers and contractors will hire them in pairs or small groups to clean multiple houses, hotel rooms, or construction sites. On one such occasion Betty, Eufemia and two other new women were hired by a contractor to clean a series of new apartment units in north Williamsburg. Betty and Eufemia, both part-time workers, knew each other well as they had both been soliciting employment from the corner intermittently for over five years. However, neither knew the other two women who they would be working with that day. As Betty explained,

I've known Eufemia for years now and although I don't particularly like her because she talks shit about Mexicans left and right, I can work with her because I know and respect her work ethic. She is good at negotiations and getting a better deal. The other two we barely knew so the first thing we did when we arrived to the site was explain to them how the work would be divided up. We figured out a way to divide the work evenly so that there wouldn't be any problems, but as always, there are people who want to make a good impression with the *jefe*, while making the rest of us look bad. Without even bothering to ask for a mop these women dropped to their knees and started scrubbing the floors like crazy. They were cleaning so fast, trying to impress the boss, that we ended up working only 4 hours as opposed to 6, which is what they had offered us on the corner when they picked us up. We managed to get them to agree to give us six hours at \$12 a piece. We all lost money that day. I later heard that one of them was called back the following week, so that is the part about working with others that is really frustrating. There's no sense of solidarity on this corner.

When women are expected to work in teams or even pairs, there is usually an attempt to divide up the work in a way that is fair to everyone involved. Problems can arise with respect to how the work gets done, usually when workers approach the task in a seemingly individualistic and uncooperative manner. In the case above, Eufemia and Betty tried to impose some organization and order into their group assignment by dividing up the work in such a way that it could be prolonged for the length that they had agreed upon on the corner, which was six hours. As seasoned day laborers, they are particularly adroit at

organizing the labor so as to work at roughly the same level and pace. Having negotiated with the contractors on the corner, Betty and Eufemia felt they had the authority to coordinate the other two workers, but quickly realized that they were more concerned with making a good impression with the contractors in order to secure future employment with them. Their willingness to work harder paid off as one of them was called back the following week by the same contractor. In other words, there are strong material incentives to work hard, in this case, for the opportunity of continued employment.

In this context, those who work harder and assume additional responsibilities by doing “extra” work are subject to much criticism on the corner because it gives them an unfair advantage over others. Often this is manifested by working fast and taking on additional tasks and risks. They demonstrate their “willingness to work” by performing extra work without complaint and with eagerness. Eufemia and Betty viewed such alacrity as indication that these women were particularly destitute and desperate, thus attributing their “willingness” to work extra hard to their precarious status as newly migrated, undocumented workers. For them, it had little to do with an intrinsic immigrant work ethic that privileges hard work and more to do with their need to be hyper-flexible, which can make the difference between keeping or losing a job. Having a good work ethic then is seen as a way to reduce or even overcome the vulnerability associated with soliciting day-wage labor. Performing a willingness to work hard promotes these workers’ financial stability and employment prospects, a particularly important quality for those whose employment is insecure and low paid.

Employers will often reward “hard workers” by giving them food, clothing, kitchen supplies and other household items they are looking to dispose of. These “gifts” are viewed as important supplements to the workers’ cleaning wages. In addition to these material benefits, workers also receive considerable social esteem from their employers, extending

the benefits of working hard beyond economy and into the realm of autonomy, respect, and dependability. Winning an employer over through a willingness for hard work is important for workers who are subject to constant supervision (see Romero 2002). That is, workers can capitalize on stereotypes about Mexican migrants as hard workers to promote employment for themselves. A “willingness to work hard” is a special feature of their labor power that they can strategically draw on to make their labor more attractive to employers.

Day laborers, like other low-wage migrant workers, take an active role in promoting their labor and cultivating their well-being by negotiating norms of willingness and hard work on the corner. As undocumented migrants, Gomberg-Muñoz reminds us, these workers are neither mere victims or criminals (as “illegal aliens”), nor are they inherently “hard workers” or unconstrained actors as they navigate their employment prospects and work lives in the U.S. Instead, as other workers in the low-wage economy, they actively and creatively attempt to shape their workplaces and working lives in a deeply disadvantageous environment.

Turning Down Work

As Ordóñez (2014) in his study of day laborers in the Bay Area noted, a common misconception of day laborers is that they are able to secure work on a daily basis. Another common misconception that scholars of day laborers make, including Ordóñez, is that workers in this precarious industry will accept any job offer that is extended to them given that demand for work often surpasses the supply of jobs in street-corner markets. I found that in the Brooklyn corner turning down job offers is a regular occurrence, particularly among part-time workers who rely on multiple income generating strategies to make ends meet. As I mentioned in chapter 2, these workers often negotiate more favorable employment contracts that guarantee a longer work day, higher hourly rates, as well as

more favorable work conditions that include the provision of cleaning supplies that they deem essential such as a mop. Adopting a more proactive strategy to solicitation, however, often means that they will not go out to work as often as others, or as one of my informants put it, “working less but better.” Still, these workers expect all street-corner solicitation to be prefaced by some baseline negotiation in which, at minimum, the standard \$10 an hour wage standard will be upheld. As they see it, individual negotiations set a precedent on which all future employment contracts and prospects hinge, so that if some women accept lower wages or substandard working conditions, it jeopardizes their collective livelihood.

Full-time and seasonal solicitors, however, given the more pressing nature of their job search, were often more “willing” to take on jobs that paid the standard rate of \$10 and rarely engaged in more complex negotiations with potential employers on the corner. For these workers, the strategy that made most sense, given their personal circumstances, was to accept as many work offers as possible in an effort to fill their week and establish some semblance of full-time employment. For them, engaging in further negotiations with employers was detrimental because the numbers were stacked against them; that is, if a worker is not willing to accept the job offer as is, someone else inevitably will. As some would say, *una no puede ser pobre y delicada*, or “one can't be poor and demanding.” However, even among full-time and seasonal solicitors, women were expected to ask a few basic questions before deciding whether or not to accept an employment offer. These questions had to do with the hourly rate, task to be performed, location, and the number of hours they would be expected to work. The duration of these interactions, often lasting two or three minutes, signaled to other workers the extent to which a woman is properly vetting an employer. If a woman accepts a job too quickly, she is viewed as putting herself at risk of wage theft or assault for not having adequately or sufficiently vetted an employer.

The question of why day laborers would turn down work, given their precarious economic situation, was particularly prominent in conversations with community organizers on the corner. Yesenia, a community organizer with the WJP, raised this issue with me one day in the summer of 2013. Given that, Lidia, the main organizer for the WJP had been kicked off the corner earlier that summer, Yesenia often visited the corner alone in an effort to talk to newcomers and assist them in their negotiations with the Hasidim. When an employer approached a worker that was standing nearby, and was immediately turned down, Yesenia engaged the employer and talked to her for a few minutes, eventually pulling out a notebook to write this woman's name and telephone number down. She did this several more times with different employers, taking down their contact information and address, ensuring them that she would find a worker for them. "She's poaching our jobs," Eufemia noted as she observed Yesenia talk to a few other employers. Sensing that we were talking about her, Yesenia walked over and greeted us. Eufemia, not one to engage in small-talk, asked her what she was doing on the corner: "Is Lidia sending you to the corner now? From what I hear she can't show her face here anymore." "No, no, it's not like that *compañera*" responded Yesenia, "I just wanted to come and see what was happening on the corner, help out in any way that I can, you know?"

Eufemia: That's nice of you, helping the women out. So why do you have this notebook out? Why are you taking employers' numbers? Are you running an employment agency now? Coming to the corner to take the few jobs that we get here?

Yesenia: No, no, it's not like that at all. I just took down the numbers of employers who were not able to hire someone. I don't want these jobs to go to waste.

Eufemia: They'll come back, they usually do, so don't you worry about these jobs going to waste.

Yesenia: I guess I am just surprised that so many women are turning down perfectly good job offers. That's why these *judias* came to me and asked for my help. They really want to hire someone but people keep turning them down, for no good reason, you know? I just hate for these jobs to go to waste when there are so many *compañeras* in desperate need of employment.

Eufemia: Everyone on this corner needs work, that's why we come here. If they are turning them down it's for a reason, you don't know the circumstances. And just because we need the work doesn't mean that we are going to give our labor away for free. This is our livelihood.

Yesenia: I guess I just figured that it wouldn't hurt to take down their information in case someone calls me looking for work. So many women call me asking if I know of something and I want to be able to help out in any way that I can.

Eufemia: If they need work they can come to the corner themselves, they don't need a mediator. They can come here just like the rest of us.

Yesenia: Ay, but it's so confusing! Women come here looking for work and then when a job offer is made, they reject it. I don't understand why, if they say they need work, they wouldn't go. Is it because *judios* don't want to provide them with mops? Is that it? It must be, right? Why else would women subject themselves to looking for work on this corner everyday? And put up with the indignities of the corner, if they didn't desperately need the work?

Eufemia: They must have their reasons for turning them down. I wouldn't worry too much if I were you, it's not that complicated. Just because it's a job doesn't mean it's a *good* job. Some women here don't want to accept *migajas* [crumbs] and prefer to wait it out until something better comes along.

Yesenia here is vocalizing what other community organizers and scholars also assume about street-corner solicitation, mainly that it is a deeply undignified and degrading way of securing employment. Moreover, only workers that are “desperate” take to the corner to look for work. Given the extent to which workers are assumed to be deeply destitute and desperate, turning down work is baffling. But as Yesenia explained, just because a woman is extended a job offer does not mean she will be inclined to accept it, or that the job that is being offered is particularly good. Being on the corner then is automatically seen as an indicator of desperation, of destitution, which will result in them taking on as much work

as possible. In such instances women are stripped of choice, and discernment then is interpreted as a sign of a poor work ethic. As Yesenia explained to me when Eufemia left,

Man, these women are *bravas* [feisty]! It's like they don't want to better themselves, they are stubborn, set in their ways, and don't want to be helped. It's so frustrating to see them turn down so much work, and confusing as hell. Why come here if you don't want to work? That's why the corner doesn't make progress. Year after year, and here they are, doing the same things.

Progress, as Yesenia saw it, is for the women to organize and get off the corner “to better themselves.” As a result, the WJP supports a housecleaning cooperative that was formed by some of the women from the corner back in 2011. Membership oscillates between four and six members, and mostly includes a former street-corner solicitor and her relatives. Like Eufemia, the women on the corner generally resist the WJP's efforts to bring them under some overarching structure and social control. Women do, however, turn to the WJP when they experience some form of wage theft as the organization is usually successful in recovering their wages. But when it comes to daily life on the corner, solicitation practices and employment relationships, the women generally eschew their help, unless they are new and do not know other women on the corner. Community organizers from the WJP, whether at general meetings or *platicas* on the corner, scold women for not being proactive and aspirational in their working lives, manifested by their inability to see themselves “off the streets” and in a more secure and reputable work environment through collective action and organizing. The complex ways by which individual women go about promoting their labor through their daily interactions with employers, or other workers on the corner, gets invisibilized.

Although turning down work is a regular occurrence, a strategy women use to filter out less than desirable job offers, a less common strategy is what the women on the corner refer to as a *huelga*, or general strike during Jewish holidays. Street-corner solicitors look

with anticipation to Jewish holidays as the demand for household labor significantly increases, which means that hourly wages can be renegotiated—at least temporarily. The week prior to Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, I was intercepted on my way to the corner by a young Hasidic girl who looked no older than twelve or thirteen. She was wearing a school uniform and had a cell phone in hand. “You available to work today?” she asked, or rather, demanded to know. I was about twenty feet from the corner and could see several Hasidic women pacing back and forth, as if waiting for more women to show up for work. When I arrived to the corner there were about twelve or fifteen women waiting, which is always an indication that the demand for workers is particularly high and that women are getting picked up for work. Some of the women that were gathered there were embroiled in a heated discussion with a group of Hasidic women who were upset about the sudden increase in the hourly rate. “It’s *our* holiday, not *yours*. There’s no reason for you to charge us more during Jewish holidays. Nobody is going to hire you at twelve dollars an hour. I don’t even make that much!” “My husband doesn’t make that much either,” said another Hasidic woman while frantically pushing a baby stroller, adding that “We can barely afford it now at ten dollars an hour.” Carmen, a fifty-four-year-old Puerto Rican woman who solicits employment on a part-time basis, was at the forefront of these negotiations, explaining to the Hasidic women that the hourly rate increases during Jewish holidays because housecleaners are expected to provide a more exhaustive cleaning:

It’s not just more work than usual but also more back-breaking work. We are expected to clean all the windows, inside and out, which is very dangerous, also ovens, refrigerators, walls, on top of everything else we normally do. It’s only fair we charge a little more during Jewish holidays.

As more workers trickled in, Carmen would yell out, “Huelga! Strike! Don't go for less than twelve dollars. Ask for a mapo [mop] too.” While some women eagerly followed Carmen's lead, turning down job offers at the standard rate of \$10 an hour, others were upset at her efforts to organize the workers and dictate the terms of their employment. Rosa Maria, a light-skinned Afro-Dominican woman in her late fifties was particularly upset: “Nobody gives orders here, there are no *patrones* [bosses] on the corner. Each woman is free to decide when and how she wants to work.”

As I was watching this unfold, the young Hasidic girl that had approached me before I even reached the corner kept insisting that I go with her. “I'll give you six hours and a nice meal. Come on, let's go, it's getting late,” she said as she gently tapped me on the shoulder, nudging me to start walking. I explained to her that I could only go for twelve dollars an hour, as the rest of the women on the corner. “That's too much,” she said, “but I'll call my mom to see what she says.” As I stood there waiting, I watched the other women negotiate with potential employers, some asking for up to fifteen dollars, a full-day of work, and a mop. Shortly after an African American woman approached me from behind. “What does she want?” she asked. I explained that she was offering six hours at ten dollars an hour, but that I was trying to convince her to take me for twelve because it's a holiday. When the young girl got off the phone, she told me that her mother could not pay me twelve dollars an hour, but that she could do eleven plus lunch and a ride back to the corner or the nearest train station. “I'll go for ten,” offered the African American woman as she made her way forward, gently pushing me to the side. I was surprised by her assertiveness and willingness to interrupt another woman's negotiations with a prospective employer, something I rarely witnessed on the corner. Typically, when an employer approaches a worker, others will gather around and quietly watch the negotiation unfold. If the negotiation goes awry, others are then free to intervene and offer their services but only

after the job has been turned down by the woman who was originally approached. While this is acceptable, women who offer their services at a lower rate than the standard \$10 an hour are publicly reprimanded.

Despite the tempting offer the African American woman had made to the young Hasidic girl, she continued to ignore her by avoiding eye contact and fixing her gaze directly upon me. She reassured me that it was a good opportunity. “If we like how you work, we’ll keep you on. We can also recommend you to our neighbors and relatives.” I kept shaking my head, looking away and turning my back to her, as I’ve observed other women do when they are not interested in a job offer, repeating that I would only go for twelve. “I’m available, I’ll go for ten,” repeated the African American woman as she got closer to the girl, only louder this time so that it would be impossible to ignore her. The girl, still avoiding eye contact with her and looking down at her phone, murmured that she wanted me. “What’s the matter, you don’t like black people? I’m telling you I’ll go for ten, she’s asking for twelve. Do they not teach you basic math in Jewish school?” I started to walk away in hopes that they would come to some agreement but the young girl followed me to where Carmen was standing arguing with Rosa Maria. The African American woman left shortly after, empty-handed.

I greeted Carmen, and told her, in Spanish, that the young girl was offering eleven dollars an hour. “I’ll go,” said Rosa Maria, slowly peeling herself off the plastic crate she was sitting on. “You’re too old,” said the young girl, “I want her,” pointing at me. “Why don’t you take someone else, there are plenty of women here today,” I responded, looking at the other women that were now gathering around us and listening intently to our conversation. Rosa Maria, notably annoyed, said, “When they pick you, you gotta go. That’s how it works here, they have their preferences, and when it’s you they want, be thankful and take it. Go, *coño*, she wants you!” “*Mami*, she can’t go for eleven dollars,”

Carmen interjected, “leave her alone, stop pressuring her.” “She just stands here all day doing nothing, let her go work,” shouted Rosa Maria, adding that “standing here and turning down work is bad for the corner, it gives employers the impression that we aren't really here to work.” “Sure,” said Carmen, “but not at eleven dollars an hour, not today, we are on strike. It's a Jewish holiday so she needs to ask for at least twelve.” As Carmen and Rosa Maria went back and forth a few more times about what I should or shouldn't do, the young girl got on her cell phone again. With Carmen and Rosa Maria arguing in the background, I deliberated about what the best way to proceed would be: taking the job would upset some of the women, no matter how much I was asking for given the fact that I was a researcher and not a worker; not taking the job would upset other women who would view my antics as sending the wrong message to employers, mainly that women were not interested in working. When the young girl got off the phone she returned to me and said that her mother had agreed to pay me twelve dollars, but that we needed to hurry up because it was getting late and there was a lot to do. I looked over at Rosa Maria and Carmen for guidance on how to proceed, and they both, in unison, yelled out: “Go!”

These forms of collective action are common during Jewish holidays when the demand for household work is at its peak and workers can renegotiate the terms of employment. So while the Brooklyn corner market is “unregulated” in that it lacks governmental oversight or the daily management of a formal organization that systematically mediates transactions between employers and workers, women are expected to uphold the standard hourly rate of \$10 an hour, or in days like these, act in accordance to “what is good for the corner.” It also shows that while the corner is in theory accessible to anyone who is looking to secure work, there are rules and norms that shape solicitation practices. Moreover, there are multiple and at times conflicting views of what is in the best interest of the corner and the workers, and ultimately, its function. These views illustrate

the competing interests of part-time workers who actively seek to impose a certain structure on the hiring process and policing the solicitation practices of others, particularly newcomers.

My presence on the corner, and the question of whether or not I should be accepting employment offers, brought these distinct visions and interests to the surface. Cognizant of my unique circumstances for being on the corner, for instance, often allowed women like Carmen to use me as a bargaining chip against prospective employers. My role, as she and others saw it, was to offer my cleaning services at the “exorbitant” rates of \$12 or \$15 an hour in order to set the tone for progressively increasing the standard rate on the corner. Setting my hourly rate well above the standard rate of \$10 an hour meant that I would spend a lot of time on the corner as employers were less inclined to hire me. It also meant that I would have to constantly be subject to verbal abuse by employers, who accused me of loitering and being on the corner for the “wrong” reasons—mainly to socialize. Rosa Maria and a few others, however, viewed this as a form of price gouging, an act of sabotage that would ultimately drive employers away. In their view, I was making the corner “look bad” by asking for such high hourly rates and turning down perfectly valid work offers that did not meet my unreasonable demands. Moreover, these women were not comfortable with my presence on the corner, my role as an observer, and my (presumed) association with a non-profit organization that had for years been “meddling” in their business by attempting to organize the workers and compel them to join a cleaning cooperative instead of soliciting employment on the street.

Moreover, although both Carmen and Rosa Maria viewed the corner as an open market, a space where any woman could, in theory, solicit employment, it was not accessible to all who were willing and able to fill the jobs being offered. For instance, the few African American women that sporadically sought employment there, rarely got hired.

As previously mentioned, young women in their 20s were a minority of street-corner solicitors. They were often accompanied by a relative, typically male, who would chaperone them to the corner to ensure its safety. These women were also subject to heavier surveillance and policing by more senior workers, who would mediate, at least initially, negotiations with prospective employers to ensure that they would follow the rules of street-corner solicitation. More seasoned workers justified their role as intermediaries on the need to offer protection and oversight, and weed out unscrupulous employers who could potentially take advantage of these women's youth and inexperience.

Turning down work is a regular occurrence on the corner, particularly among part-time workers who rely on multiple income-generating strategies and engage in lengthy negotiations (and arguments) with prospective employers over hourly rates, number of hours, and the provision of basic housecleaning materials. Among these worker, the mantra of “working less but better” was often deployed in order to come to terms with not working as often as others, who contended that *una no puede ser pobre y delicada*, or “one can't be poor and demanding.” Turning down work then allowed workers to filter out “bad” jobs, mostly those that consisted of just a few hours of work at the standard hourly rate. Accepting these would compromise their ability to make more money if a better offer would come around. For Yesenia, a community organizer with the WJP Progress, their very presence on the corner signaled their unwillingness “to better themselves.” Yesenia could not understand why Latina migrant women who were in dire need of employment would be compelled to turn down a job offer, one that in her mind, was perfectly “good.”

For Yesenia and other community organizers from the WJP, not only was turning down work a sign of women's unwillingness to better themselves but also their refusal to organize and join the housecleaning cooperative that they helped a few women from the corner form back in 2011. Membership oscillates between four and six members, and

currently includes a former street-corner solicitor and her relatives. Like Eufemia, the women on the corner generally resist the WJP's efforts to bring them under some overarching structure and social control. Women do, however, turn to the WJP when they experience some form of wage theft as the organization is usually successful in recovering their wages. But when it comes to daily life on the corner, solicitation practices and employment relationships, the women generally eschew their help, unless they are new and do not know other women on the corner. Moreover, community organizers from the WJP, whether at general meetings or *platicas* on the corner, scold women for not being proactive and aspirational in their working lives, which in their eyes means getting “off the streets” and into a more secure and reputable work environment through collective action and organizing. As a result, the complex ways by which individual women go about promoting their labor through their daily interactions with employers or other workers on the corner, gets invisibilized.

CONCLUSION

While the processes highlighted above show how workers attempt to make themselves more attractive (and less replaceable) to Hasidic employers—by performing social identities, doing extra work, and turning down work—these strategies can also lead to the reproduction of some of the most exploitative aspects of their work, such as the intensification of their labor and increased workloads for the same pay, and in the process, undermining other workers’ livelihoods and employment prospects. Women on the Brooklyn corner, like other undocumented migrant workers in the U.S., have to contend with deep-seated racialized stereotypes and negotiate their identity, sense of self, and work ethic within these subjective constraints and hegemonic frameworks. In the process they

develop various strategies for protecting themselves, their bodies, privacy, and well-being while preserving a sense of dignity and autonomy.

As we know, day labor markets are part of the booming contingent economy that is characterized by flexible, temporary, and precarious employment (Peck and Theodore 2001). This means that episodic and transient work is normalized in this “regime of precarious employment” where low pay and heightened job insecurity are common features of this labor market (Theodore 2003:1811). Moreover, the unregulated nature of these sites means that they are not operated or supervised by any government entity or non-profit organization. As Malpica notes, there is little attachment between employer and employee in the day labor market. The employment contract is negotiated directly through the employer and employee, without a third party to mediate, and often does not entail any form of obligation on either end. As this chapter illustrates, however, migrant day laborers mobilize a series of strategies and solicitation practices in order to promote their labor, shape their employment prospects, and cultivate some sense of job security and predictability against a backdrop of hyper-flexibility and disposability.

This chapter also shows that despite the women's (many and shifting) constraints, there are still choices to be made. I contend that while in unregulated street-corner markets employment can be sporadic, transient, and unpredictable, women find ways to secure regular employers, stable income streams, and safer work conditions. Recent accounts of day labor (González 2015; Ordóñez 2010), however, portray informal hiring sites such as street-corner markets as “messy places” (Ordóñez 2010:vi) where chaos, cut-throat competition, and anomie are pervasive and normalized features of these labor markets. As Malpica (2002) notes in his study of Latino migrants who solicit employment in a street-corner market located in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the characterization of day labor sites as competitive or unstructured misses the rich structural forms that provide the

organizational basis for bringing together prospective employers and seekers of work. Like all other markets, the day labor market has rules and norms that apply as participants seek efficiency, consistency, and predictability in dealing with each other and their clients. These rules, as Malpica observes, are unwritten and based largely on practice or precedent, governing the different aspects of the work relationships. In examining the rules and norms that underpin day labor market exchanges he is troubling the notion that this industry responds strictly to competition and supply-demand schedules rather than informal work rules, norms and customary relationships.

Moreover, González, whose research examines the benefits and challenges associated with formalizing day labor through worker centers, suggests that day labor is rarely, if ever, a type of work that people would choose. Day labor accounts (González 2015; Ordóñez 2010) have consistently portrayed migrant day laborers as the most precarious and vulnerable of contingent workers who, in their daily struggles to secure employment on the street, are stripped of agency and choice in their interactions with potential employers. As such, these workers are compelled to accept any and all work that is offered to them given that the demand for employment often surpasses what's on offer at unregulated sites. I contend that while exploitation and abuse are not uncommon features of employment on the Brooklyn corner, conceptualizing this “regime of precarious employment” and the experience of day laborers as exceptional only serve to perpetrate a kind of “epistemic violence” (De Genova 2002:422) on the social reality of everyday life of those migrants.

Chapter 5: Women, Day Labor, and the Organizing Imperative

INTRODUCTION

In the last three chapters, I described the informal day labor site, *La Parada* in Brooklyn. Now I turn to a different approach to the “problem of day labor,” one that has garnered widespread support from immigrant rights advocates and scholars: the establishment of day labor centers. This approach is seen as not only a more creative and progressive strategy, but also a “kinder” form of policing of day labor activity (Herrera 2010), one that seeks to “protect” workers from unscrupulous employers (González 2015). Couched within a language of care and protection, day labor centers are thus professed to be “safe spaces” for precarious workers, including a growing number of women who are soliciting employment through day labor sites (Valenzuela 2003). Given the changing nature of state power, these hybrid institutions emerge and take on state functions while often downplaying their governmental identity by mobilizing a discourse of care, protection and social justice.

This chapter draws on ethnographic research conducted at a worker center located in San Francisco’s Mission District, the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women’s Collective (SFDLP-WC). As a comparative case study, I am interested in examining how women’s organizing efforts in day labor unfold, and why formal organizing emerges as a palliative to the challenges women confront when trying to make a living through day labor markets. In this chapter I focus on the worker mobilization strategies the SFDLP-WC utilizes in an effort to include women in this male-dominated industry, particularly through the Women’s Collective, the feminist wing of the day labor center. The SFDLP-WC is one of the longest-standing day labor centers in the Bay Area (and arguably in the country) that attracts a constant stream of day laborers, including a significant number of women through

its domestic workers' collective, an active feminist forum established to boost immigrant women's participation and leadership in the larger U.S. labor movement.

The chapter is divided as follows: First, I examine the recent emergence of workers centers in an effort to contextualize the work of the SFDLP-WC and what I refer to as the “organizing imperative,” that is, the impetus to organize migrant day laborers in a particular political, economic, and social climate rife not only with nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment but also the progressive criminalization of migrants (Inda 2011). Drawing on Foucault's (2000) analytic of governmentality, I contend that while day labor centers are far from being oppressive instruments of state authority, they actively seek to transform day laborers into respectable neoliberal subjects, which inadvertently calls for their increased surveillance and seclusion. I thus situate the emergence (and proliferation) of worker centers on a continuum of local forms of social control that the state mobilizes, with the support of non-profit organizations, religious institutions, and other actors, to manage “illegal” migrants, making these institutions part and parcel of the national project. The way worker centers are made to manage day labor populations can be understood as what Sabine Hess (2010) has called the new “soft modes” of migrant/migration governance since they are part of the development of new state governing capacities, institutions, and practices designed to monitor immigrant populations.

Second, I examine the different ways by which women are incorporated into the organization and compelled to become active members of broader immigrant and labor organizing movements. Through the day to day operations of the center, I show that women are positioned as ideal (moral and economic) subjects for targeted intervention and come to represent the best hope for a revitalized labor movement. Women, unlike their male counterparts, are called upon to “work on themselves”—on their self-esteem, professional development, and leadership skills— shifting the responsibility for managing social risks

such as unemployment, poverty, and “illegality” on individual migrant women. I contend that the “responsibilization” (Foucault 1991 [1978]) of migrant women that these centers promote can be understood in the broader context of the restructuring of capitalism and the criminalization of poverty, which makes men disproportionately the targets of more coercive strategies of containment through the police and courts.

Third, I examine two important contradictions in the center's organizational goals: First, the positioning of women's organizing work as an extension of their traditional gender roles as mothers and caregivers while simultaneously seeking to challenge these gender ideologies in their households, particularly with their spouses. That is, while the reproductive labor they provide for their partners, children, and families is viewed as unhealthy and at times even pathological—a barrier to their political participation—in the context of the worker center it is praised and rewarded (through jobs). I argue that women members became the *domésticas* of the organization, and the “movimiento” more broadly. Second, women's empowerment, conceived in part through the therapeutic model, emphasized personal transformation as the mechanism through which to affect structural change. That is, women are compelled to reveal the most painful and private experiences of their lives in the context of labor organizing which promotes a particular politics of visibility. Moreover, I show that women contest this compulsion to self-disclose by cultivating a culture of silence in order to protect their interiority. I conclude with a discussion of how these hybrid organizations, which are purported to be “safe spaces” for disenfranchised immigrant workers, actually reproduce existing structures of gender and class inequality.

IMMIGRANT DAY LABOR AND THE ORGANIZING IMPERATIVE

The Worker Center Model

In her comprehensive national study of worker centers, Fine (2006) defines day labor centers as a subtype that seeks to facilitate and oversee the exchange of informal day labor. Day labor centers pursue this mission through a combination of service provision (e.g., job dispatching, legal assistance, English classes, etc.), advocacy work including grassroots mobilization campaigns, and organizing through popular education and leadership development. As hybrid “multi-purpose” organizations that combine activities characteristic of social service agencies, ethnic organizations, and social movements with employment allocation and professional training, they are believed to be uniquely positioned to assist low-wage migrants navigate the world of work in the U.S. Fine notes that in addition to providing much needed services, day labor centers also give migrants workers, many of whom are unauthorized, the opportunity to express a voice through collective action (Fine 2011). This relatively new organizational form emerged at the nexus of two currents in community organizing: the decline of organized labor and their inability to establish a presence in industries such as domestic work, and the rise of organizing practices around issues of low-wage labor and immigration. These multipurpose organizations thus serve, organize, represent, and advocate for low-wage migrant workers who have been deemed “unorganizable” given their doubly precarious status as informal *and* undocumented workers (Theodore 2014).

Although worker centers provide a broad range of services and engage in many strategies of community mobilization including advocacy work and industry-specific organizing, recent studies suggest that its “users” are largely drawn to these organizations for the purpose of securing employment (Johnson 2013; Camou 2009). Unlike for-profit employment agencies, however, day labor centers operate as non-profit organizations that

serve as third-party mediators by offering what they refer to as a referral service for employers and casual workers looking for daily, temporary, or seasonal employment. In using the language of “third-party mediators” who provide a “referral service” for employers and seekers of work, centers can eschew potential legal entanglements that may arise from questions regarding the workers’ legal status, which they are not legally allowed (nor required) to inquire about. From a business standpoint, moreover, presenting themselves as non-profit organizations that merely “help workers and employers connect” provides worker centers some relief from the usual trappings of the service industry such as ensuring customer satisfaction. Also, by highlighting their status as nonprofit organizations, worker centers can position themselves in direct opposition to the private corporate sector while still engaging in market-oriented undertakings such as job dispatching and professionalization. Much like unions, however, worker centers operate as labor market institutions that advocate for improved wages and working conditions of workers in marginal industries such as day labor and domestic work, even if they cannot engage in direct collective bargaining with employers (Fine 2007). Thus they differ from formal labor organizations in that they are not bound by legislation such as the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and the Labor Management Relations Act (LMRDA), which have procedural guidelines regarding accountability and financial transparency.

Today, while most day laborers still procure employment through informal hiring sites such as street-corner markets (Zoellner 2000), many are also turning to worker centers as an additional resource to find employment (Valenzuela 2006). As Camou (2009) notes, in many cities day labor centers coexist alongside informal hiring sites. Recent studies, however, show that worker centers provide workers a modest wage premium, challenging the popular belief that street-corner markets provide workers a significant hourly wage advantage relative to worker centers (Meléndez et al. 2014). In addition to improving

hourly wages by enforcing wage floors, worker centers also seek to improve the working conditions in the day labor market by increasing the transparency of the hiring process, monitoring employment conditions, and providing job and safety training. While they are considered the most effective response to the “substandard” conditions found in the informal day labor economy, worker centers are still in the process of figuring out “how best to secure justice for and with laborers” (Camou 2009:43).

The Business of Protecting and Caring for Day Laborers

Valenzuela (2004) suggests that day labor centers have emerged in recent years largely in response to community conflict. In order to address complaints from local residents, law enforcement agencies, and merchants about the congregation of “scruffy, unkept men” on the street, subnational governments, often with the support of non-state actors such as church groups and community-based organizations, enter the “day labor business” by creating and managing official hiring sites (Johnson 2013). While some argue that the imperative to create these centers comes from outside day labor communities themselves, as a politically motivated strategy aimed at containing “community” conflict and hostilities, others stress their potential to transform local day labor markets. This potential, however, can only be realized through the complete eradication of rival street-corner markets. According to this view, the transformation of local day labor markets is possible only to the extent that worker centers are able to monopolize the day labor supply and eliminate street-corner competitors (Camou 2009). Only then will centers be able to yield the type of power that is needed to successfully challenge the exploitative practices that are normalized in the informal day labor industry.

Convincing day laborers to procure employment strictly through worker centers, however, is a complicated endeavor, one that entails striking a delicate balance between

the use of more coercive tactics such as anti-solicitation ordinances and police intimidation, to more subtle measures like drawing workers indoors through the promise of “orderly” and “dignified” employment as well as the provision of much needed social services. Day labor centers, however, are careful about using material benefits to attract migrant workers, opting instead for appeals to collectivist social justice principles, a political ideology that supposedly resonates with Latino migrants (Camou 2009). Recent ethnographic studies, however, illustrate some of the tensions that arise with the worker center organizing model. Johnson (2013), in a study of a worker center in Los Angeles, finds that despite the good intentions of the center (and its altruistically-inclined organizers), a disconnect exists between the immediate material and employment needs of the workers and the greater goal of these organizations, which is long-term social justice. According to Johnson, day labor centers rarely address the more immediate needs of the workers themselves, and although they purport to offer a “safe space” for migrant and disenfranchised workers to gather and await employment, they often lack the resources they need to reach their full potential. Moreover, she found that although the center had originated as a grassroots community-led initiative, it eventually morphed into a deeply hierarchical organization that ignored the realities of those they claimed to serve. Camou (2009), in a study of day labor organizing in Denver, Colorado, also found that while community organizers viewed the creation of worker centers in ideological terms, as vehicles of collective action and social justice, day laborers were more concerned with securing employment.

Given the dearth of research on day labor organizing and worker centers, particularly on their internal organizational structure and day-to-day operations, these studies make an important contribution to our understanding of this labor market institution. Most importantly, they raise a series of questions regarding the multiple meanings and functions of day labor centers, as well as the different political and economic

interests involved in establishing, managing, and maintaining these organizations. As Herrera (2010) argues, day labor centers, through their collaboration with subnational governments and community-based organizations, are well within the state's radar of governing technologies. These centers also produce unintended consequences. For instance, the creation of day labor centers as "official" designated spaces for solicitation, for instance, renders the procurement of employment elsewhere as "illegal" and thus subject to further state intervention and police harassment. Moreover, while centers purport to offer protection and care they often do so in exchange for increased surveillance and control of day labor populations. They also promote a discursive differentiation between "good workers—i.e., those who are organized, professionalized, and indoors—and "bad workers," mainly those who continue to secure employment in public spaces.

Thus, if informal day labor corners facilitate the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers by drive-by employers and contractors, then it is no surprise that day labor centers have emerged in recent years as the best policy intervention to protect workers (Malpica 2013). At their best, day labor centers are poised to produce a system for monitoring the exchange of labor between employers and casual workers, particularly unauthorized migrants. Viewed from this perspective, centers not only incorporate migrant workers into urban economies and local systems of labor protections, but also have the potential to restructure informal day labor markets and strip them of their most exploitative elements. A more critical view, however, would also address the tensions and unintended consequences that arise not only when organizing and directing migrant day laborers to worker centers, but also what happens when community-based organizations enter "the business" of regulating day labor, and the paternalistic and assimilationist assumptions that undergird their efforts to provide care and protection for low-wage migrant workers.

This chapter seeks to add to these critical perspectives by focusing on the internal organizational structure underpinning this informal labor niche through an ethnographic case study of the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective. The analysis that follows is in not meant to detract from the important and in many ways groundbreaking work undertaken by the SFDLP-WC (and other day labor centers across the country), but rather recognize that even in struggles for social and economic justice, there is ambivalence, contestation, and contradictions.

The San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective

Day labor centers in the Bay Area are increasingly attracting women, who are considered the “new faces of day labor” (Gorman 2007). To better accommodate them, some centers have created industry-specific programs for women such as domestic worker collectives. Others, armed with the intent of ensuring women's safety and comfort, also provide gender-segregated waiting areas and implement democratic governance schemes to encourage women's participation in decision making processes (Toma and Esbenshade 2001). Relative to other day labor centers in the area, the SFDLP-WC attracts a significantly higher number of women workers, with women comprising 38% of total members. In this regard, the SFDLP-WC is lauded for having a stand-alone program for women in the domestic work industry, with its own mission, structure, political agenda, activities, and decision-making processes. The SFDLP-WC, as other day labor centers, emphasizes the importance of leadership development and internal democratic structures within their organization. As Theodore notes (2014), worker centers share a commitment to Freirian forms of organizing by focusing on tools of popular education to build democratic organizations with strong worker leadership. The popular education approach is designed to enable participants to recognize and address the overlapping layers of

marginality and discrimination in their lives. This pedagogical approach is said to resonate with Latina/o migrants, some of whom participated in radical social movements in their home countries during the 1980s and 1990s. Given some of these workers' political engagement in their countries of origin, they are said to bring familiar organizing frames and political repertoires to day labor organizing in the U.S. Leadership development is represented as a collective enterprise, a shared understanding and commitment to changing the social conditions that impact their lives in the U.S.

Day labor programs such as the SFDLP-WC are funded through multiple sources including donations from private foundations such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Benton Foundation and the Zellerbach Family Foundation, as well as public grants provided by subnational governments, in this case the City and County of San Francisco, Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA) and the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE). While city grants target the range of employment, social, and educational needs of day labor populations (as well as community tension and safety considerations), their primary concern is to increase these workers' employment prospects and economic self-sufficiency. The success of the SFDLP-WC in meeting these objectives is gauged through a series of metrics and assessment tools such as tracking day laborer demographic information and job placements, which are then reported back to the city in monthly reports and annual summaries.

Private foundations, on the other hand, focus more on the “social justice” side of the day labor program and women's collective. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, for instance, through its New Routes to Community Health initiative, which focused on migrant health integration through the use of media including posters, billboards, bus ads and postcards, funded the WC's media campaign depicting Latina domestic workers as strong, independent, professional, and “green” savvy. In partnership with the Labor

Occupational Health Program at UC-Berkeley (LOHP) and Underground Advertising firm, the campaign themed "Communicating Strength and Hope" sought to transform the working conditions of Latina domestic workers as well as the perception of the industry from "undervalued women's work" to "a respectable contribution to the economy" (Arrieta 2009). The campaign was a call to action for employers in the Bay Area to support safe and dignified jobs.

Through a participatory process, domestic workers from the WC helped develop the messages of "conscientious cleaning" through a series of glamorous visual representations of the women as "angels," "fairy godmothers," and ultimately, the "keepers of your sanity." By embarking on this advertising campaign, "this once shy group of women became fierce advocates of rights and dignity for domestic workers." Besides mobilizing racialized tropes to depict Latina migrant women as noble (Padilla 2009), magical, and spiritually gifted (see also Glenn and Cunningham 2009), these campaign ads relied on the logic of "socially conscious" or "compassionate" capitalism through which potential consumers of such a service are assured that profit and achieving social good are not opposing goals. Through this campaign, the WC, with the support of its private funders, sought to construct poverty and the poor in ways that were compelling to potential clients, which would potentially translate into more jobs for the women of the collective. This means that even as a non-profit organization that rewards organizing and political activism through the *promise* of employment, the WC has to navigate the conflicting demands to be economically efficient and savvy, as well as socially and politically empowering. The organization achieves this in part by making migrant women's stories (of migration, destitution, and victimhood) central to the service they are providing, simultaneously tapping into the white guilt and "responsible" consumerism of its "progressive" Bay Area clientele.

The SFDLP-WC's funding sources reflect (and shape) the hybrid multi-purpose nature of these organizations as part social movement and part labor market institution. These goals, however, often collide. Still, through a complex—and not always successful—combination of services, advocacy, and organizing, worker centers are said to be uniquely positioned to help low-wage migrants navigate the world of work in the United States (Fine 2006). In cities like San Francisco, which have long been destinations for migrant workers, worker centers tend to fill a specific role in already extant networks of migrant advocacy and service organizations (Milkman, Bloom and Narro 2010). In many cities, sizeable numbers of day laborers use centers and corners simultaneously or to resist centers altogether. In San Francisco, for instance, two-thirds of day laborers remain on the street, with only one-third utilizing the worker center (Zoellner 2000).

LABOR ORGANIZING AS WOMEN'S WORK

Becoming a Member of the SFDLP-WC

The SFDLP-WC is a membership-based organization that provides job placement for its worker-members as well as a range of services such as legal assistance, health services, and leadership development trainings. Because the day labor program and women's collective operate separately, they also abide by different membership requirements. In order for men in the day labor program to be eligible for job placement, for instance, they have to apply for membership, attend an hour-long orientation (detailing the history of the organization, its mission, and the rules of the program) and pay dues. Once their membership is cleared, they are required to be physically present at the center—from at least from 8 am to 10am—in order to be eligible for a job placement; if a worker does not show up for two consecutive days, he will be removed from the job dispatching list. Day laborers are also required to pay monthly member dues (\$2) and volunteer to clean

and/or distribute flyers after every job placement. While highly encouraged, members of the day labor program are not required to attend a weekly member meeting. On average, members of the day labor program can expect to secure two job placements per month through the SFDLP.

Membership for women is more elaborate. In order to be eligible for work and the other benefits associated with membership, women have to adhere to an intricate point system, attend mandatory weekly meetings, and pay monthly membership dues (\$2). Jobs are tied to “active participation,” which means that women have to accumulate as many points as possible on a weekly basis by participating in WC events in order to be eligible for employment. The point system then is used to quantify and reward a member's participation in the organization. The activities women can participate in (and get points for) are predetermined by SFDLP-WC staff and organizers. These typically include: distributing flyers door-to-door three times a week (usually two hours each time) to advertise their cleaning services; attending weekly events such as a self-esteem group (Grupo Sol), theater group meetings and performances, bi-weekly conference calls with the National Domestic Workers Coalition (NDWC) and allies across the country; and participating in political and civic events throughout the Bay Area. Each activity—unless it requires travel outside the city or to another state—counts as one point, and the points are then added up on a weekly basis and used to create a job list that allows dispatchers to distribute jobs as they come in. The women with the highest number of points are placed at the top of the list while those who do not make points on any given week are removed. Job dispatchers are instructed to work their way through the list as requests for cleaning services came in by phone or over email. The point system, according to Guillermina, the main organizer of the WC, is viewed as a “necessary incentive” to keep the women active since without it turnout and participation would plummet: “We are a *movimiento*, not an

employment agency. If all women want is a job, they can go somewhere else. Women come to us because they want to be part of a larger political movement for immigrant rights.”

Promoting Social Justice and Political Empowerment

As a worker center, job dispatching is key to the organization’s ability to attract migrant workers. It is also an important service that the city of San Francisco, its main funding source, expects the organization to provide for precarious workers in order to boost their economic “self-sufficiency.” The Day Labor Program and Women’s Collective are then uniquely positioned to assist day laborers and domestic workers find work and negotiate the terms of employment. However, as a member of the International Domestic Workers Network, National Domestic Workers Alliance, and the National Day Labor Organizing Network, the WC’s “mission and vision” is to empower migrant women economically, socially and politically, and enhance their ability to participate in larger social movements in the U.S. So while the organization, through its job dispatching service and job training programs, offers individual members access to jobs that provide enhanced wages and working conditions, their larger objective is to promote migrant workers’ collective power. They set out to achieve this largely by focusing on the social justice side of their goals by having the women attend events, workshops, political rallies as well as participate in acts of civil disobedience that would allow them to develop a critical analysis of the power imbalances affecting their families and communities in the U.S. Empowerment, from the organization’s perspective, had to do with providing migrant women the training, tools, and platform to participate and advocate for their workplace and civil rights.

Cecilia, a forty-five-year-old *afro-ecuatoriana* who moved to the U.S. with her son after having lived in Spain for over ten years, was asked to participate in an act of civil

disobedience on behalf of the WC. In an effort to draw attention to the deportation of migrants fleeing violence, particularly from Central America, she joined a handful of protesters from other organizations who were chained to each other and seated in a circle at the intersection situated in front of the San Francisco branch of the federal office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). They were arrested and later released.

Despite being in the WC for less than seven months, Cecilia was “chosen” to participate in this act of civil disobedience because of her active involvement in the organization, as well as her advanced English language skills and ability to communicate well with reporters and journalists. Cecilia, however, noted that prior to this, she was not particularly interested in politics and viewed the invitation to participate in the civil disobedience as an opportunity to show her deep gratitude toward the WC. Still, she was clear that her decision to join the WC being shaped by her need to secure work after leaving her job as a home care aid, which was stressful and physically taxing. She heard about the WC on the bus one day and decided to give it a try:

One of the first things that Aida, the orientation coordinator explained to me when I showed up to a general meeting was that in order to get work I would have to participate, and that I shouldn't expect to get work right away. I told her that I would approach participating in the organization as a job, a full-time job. I was committed to participating in all of their events, even if I wasn't getting paid for these things because I knew that I would eventually start working, that it would pay off in the long run.

Cecilia, like other women, saw her participation in the WC as a necessary step toward securing work. She was able to dedicate herself to the organization as a “full-time” job because she had saved up enough money for cover her basic necessities for several months. Her “active participation” and presence at all of the WC events were noted and praised by the staff and organizers, which encouraged her to become more involved, only this time in civil disobedience. Cecilia, however, was ambivalent about participating in this defiant

political act because as an undocumented migrant, she could face deportation, if arrested. Despite the organizer's assurance that their legal team and allies would not allow this to happen, she was worried about what would happen to her son Camilo if she were to get arrested, or worse yet, deported. Still, she decided to participate in this act of civil disobedience in order to demonstrate her gratitude to the organization, and most importantly, to *mama* Guille, as she refers to the organizer of the WC who constantly urged her to develop her leadership skills and become an advocate for immigrant rights, something she never envisioned herself doing.

When I interviewed Cecilia she had stopped showing up to the WC's general meetings, and was slowly trying to detach herself from the organization now that she had secured four regular housecleaning jobs and several more through employer referrals. Moreover, she recently had a falling out with Aida, one of the orientation coordinators of the WC, after the latter began to charge women a dollar for every phone call they would take during their general meetings. This incident quickly escalated to a heated verbal exchange between the two women, resulting in Cecilia flipping Aida off in front of the group; when I interviewed her, she was awaiting disciplinary action from the organization that could result in a temporary suspension.

While civil disobedience is an uncommon form of political participation expected from migrant women in the WC, they are a regular presence at city hall meetings, marches, protests, and political rallies across the city. At these events women are often asked to speak to reporters and journalists about their involvement in the WC, for which they are prepped by the organizers. The women are also often invited to college campuses and classes to share their stories of political struggle and organizing as domestic workers and undocumented migrants in the U.S. Guillermina, a former domestic worker herself and co-founder of the Women's Collective, noted that while the WC is a multi-purpose

organization that provides women with “dignified” employment, they do not see themselves as an employment agency, but rather, a social movement. Women are told, upon approaching the organization, that although they provide women with jobs, what is at the core of their “mission and vision” is to provide migrant women with the confidence, knowledge, tools, and platform to be part of a larger political movement for immigrant rights. Given their emphasis on getting women to be more heavily involved in the public arena, they prioritized activities that would enhance their political and critical consciousness as migrants and workers. Thus, as a result of the organization’s greater emphasis on its political and social justice objectives, job allocation was seen as supplementary. Not only was job placement seen as marginal relative to the organizations’ other goals, it was construed as a privilege that women had to earn through “active participation.” As Guillermina, noted, in reference to participation, that while absolutely necessary, it was not sufficient:

The *compañeras* who are truly committed don't just show up to our events to earn points. No, they participate because they are truly concerned with what is going on in their communities, in the legislature, in Washington. They aren't just a warm body on a chair. It is not greed or selfishness that motivates them but the belief that as immigrant women, we have to fight for what we want. President Obama is not just going to hand us amnesty or immigration reform. We have to work for it. So you see, it is not fair that some of us put in the time and effort to attend all of these events, participate, march, protest, share our stories, talk to politicians and journalists, etc. and others simply enjoy the fruits of our labor. Some women will only show up when they need a job, and leave when they have collected enough employers to fill their week. You see, this is both the strength and the weakness of the organization, our ability to provide employment for so many immigrant women. We are still trying to figure out how to keep women involved in *la colectiva*, even after they are stably employed.

In other words, employment, much like citizenship, is seen as something gained through work and involvement in the community. Active participation in the WC, as active

citizenship in the nation-state, is viewed as membership through contributions to one's community. According to Guillermina, "active participation" entails more than "just showing up" and being "a warm body" on a chair. Participating in events by merely showing up or doing so with the intent of earning a point is not only perceived as insufficient but also self-serving.

On a weekly basis, four or five new women will show up to the WC's general meetings looking for work. At these meetings, which are held on Wednesday evenings from five to seven, job seekers learn about the organization's "mission and vision" and receive a brief orientation about the point system the organization uses to allocate jobs among women members. The majority of the women who turn to the WC in hopes of securing employment are Latin American migrant women who recently migrated, lost a job, or seek to break into the cleaning industry. It is not uncommon, however, for those who attend a general meeting for the first time to decide against joining. Marta, a sixty-year-old accountant from Perú who originally arrived to the U.S. on a tourist visa with her son, explained that after attending a general meeting she quickly came to the conclusion that the organization was not a good fit, at least not initially:

I was an accountant in my country, had a high salary, worked for a multinational corporation, Proctor & Gamble, and was treated like a queen. As soon as I turned forty, they decided to give me an early retirement, which came with a measly monthly pension. I spent months looking for work but apparently I was 'unhireable' because of my age, work experience, and previous salary. My family in the U.S. convinced me to visit and try my luck in San Francisco, so that's what I did. Unfortunately, shortly after arriving I realized that with my poor English skills and lack of *papeles*, that it would be difficult to secure office work in the U.S. Still, I managed to get a few jobs here and there, first at a travel agency then at a shipping company but I was always looking for something that would give me not only more money and time with my son, but also personal satisfaction. As an *indocumentada*, that is almost an impossible combination. So one day as I was reading a local Spanish-language newspaper I saw something about La Colectiva, an organization

that helps women find employment, and so I decided to check it out. I attended their general meeting but decided not to stay for their new member orientation because it was too political. I was not interested in politics, not in Perú and certainly not here in the U.S. In my country politics is reserved for corrupt people who want to enrich themselves but have no talent to do anything else. I wanted nothing to do with it. What I desperately needed was a job, especially because I had to start saving for my son's college while also caring for my mother back in Perú.

Marta, despite wanting to find work that would pay well and allow her to spend more time with her son, found that the WC was an organization that was too heavily focused on politics, which she found to be unappealing. This sentiment of the organization being “too political” came through when I spoke to other women that felt that a certain (leftist) political orientation was being imposed on them. For some the WC’s take on political *concientización* was eerily familiar, as they recalled having to participate in political rallies and events in their countries of origin in exchange for much needed social services or public resources. This was the experience of Flor, a Cuban TransLatina who came to the WC after years of working in the retail and tourism industry:

I had been attending the general meetings for less than three weeks when they [la colectiva] brought in three members of the socialist party [the Party for Socialism and Liberation] to talk to us about the Cuban Five. They were selling booklets with these men's *testimonios* and drawings from prison, and the whole time I'm thinking to myself, *qué mierda es esto* [what the hell is this]? They went on and on about how unfair these five men’s imprisonment was, how horrible the US government’s policy in the region was, but all I could think about the whole time was the thousands of Cubans that are unjustly imprisoned, tortured, and disappeared in Cuba every year, not to mention the way gays and transsexuals are treated. What about those who dare to criticize the socialist policies that have ruined the country and have to pay the consequences with their lives or imprisonment? If I didn't need work so badly I would have walked out and never returned. *Mira*, I was *indignada* but also really, really confused. Like, what does this have to do with us, immigrant women looking to make a better life for ourselves in this country? Why couldn’t they just bring someone to talk to us about how to do professional cleaning instead? I have never cleaned a house before, besides my own of course, so I could not understand why they would waste our time on politics. I started to feel like they were disconnected from our reality, our economic necessities, and more focused on other things. They really have to get their priorities straight because this stuff has

nothing to do with job development or getting work. If I wanted to sit through a sermon about how marvelous socialism is I would have stayed in Cuba.

Having attended the meeting with the “Cuban Five” that Flor is referring to in this interview transcript, I also was unsure how this talk would be relevant to the members of the WC. After the members of the socialist party ended their presentation on the Cuban Five, and distributed the merchandize they were trying to sell as part of their fundraising efforts, Guillermina clarified why this case was of relevance for the organization. She noted that these Cuban political prisoners have much in common with immigrants being held in for-profit detention centers, given the corporate interests involved in mass imprisonment. Flor, as a Cuban TransLatina who left the island several decades ago, was not particularly interested in sitting in on a talk about the benefits of socialism. As a relatively new member of the WC, particularly one with little housecleaning experience, she found the meeting unproductive as it did not relate to professional development or employment, which she desperately needed.

In the end, despite being a U.S. citizen and having years of experience in the retail and tourism industry, Flor decided to join the WC because she recently began her transition from a gay man to a transwoman. With the support of El/la, an organization for transgender Latinas (TransLatinas) in San Francisco, she was referred to the WC and assured that she would be able to secure housecleaning work which would provide the flexibility she needed to be able to undergo hormone therapy as part of her diagnosis of gender dysphoria. Flor added that given her recent medical issues and hormonal intake, it would be difficult to maintain a full-time job. Moreover, she noted that transitioning in her previous place of employment, an office supply store, was not an option as she wanted to maintain as much privacy as possible during her transition.

The WC often downplayed or discounted the material motivations behind member participation. Instead the organization focused the bulk of its efforts on its social justice agenda that sought to change societal structures that perpetuate violence, abuse, and exploitation of precarious migrant workers in the U.S. By creating an agenda of political and civic events the women were expected to attend (in order to secure employment), they believed the membership would develop a collective critical consciousness and internal leadership, and at the same time foster community and politicization. Events like the case of the Cuban Five typically appeal to collectivist principles and leftist critical discourse that were unappealing to some of the women in the organization, particularly those who associated politics with authoritarian regimes, corruption, or clientelism. While many of the women I interviewed found the political and social justice goals of the organization to be laudable, some felt that there was a schism between the vision and mission of the organization—i.e., long-term transformational social change—and the member’s immediate goals and needs, which had to do with securing employment.

Securing Employment through Active Participation

Membership at the WC fluctuated between thirty and forty members, with new and older members coming and going as their employment, financial circumstances, and family and household obligations changed. Adela, a twenty-six-year-old *mexicana* who has been in the U.S. for six years, joined the WC after her daughter turned three. Although her family owned a small clothing factory in Puebla, and were relatively well off, she decided to come to the U.S. to live with a high school boyfriend who had been living in San Francisco for a few years. Following the tradition of her small town, her then boyfriend visited her small town in Puebla for New Year and “stole” her. A few weeks later, with the help of a coyote, they tried to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. While their first attempt was unsuccessful, and

landed both of them in a detention center for weeks, they eventually tried again, this time with another coyote. When they arrived to San Francisco, they moved into a shared apartment with two other families.

Adela wanted to work but since her spouse found regular employment as a day laborer in different corners of the city, she decided to take time to figure out what her employment options were. A few months later she found out that she was eight weeks pregnant and postponed her job search until her daughter turned three. Adel describes her first few months as a mother as lonely, stressful, and at times terrifying:

I spent all day in this tiny room with a screaming child, completely isolated and alone since my husband worked ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day. Back then I was too afraid to go outside because I didn't know my way around the city. I was feeling so frustrated and overwhelmed by everything, and when I mentioned this to my doctor, she said that I was experiencing postpartum depression and that it was important for me to get out of the house, even if it meant taking short walks around the neighborhood. So I started to do that, taking my daughter to parks, recreation centers, public libraries. And during one of these walks I found out about a day care program where they could watch my daughter everyday from 8am to 4pm. I put her on the waiting list and when I received a call letting me know she had been accepted, I knew it was time for me to start working so I began to ask around. My neighbors told me about La Colectiva, and invited me to a general meeting. At first I did not like it, they talked about these different political events, rallies, protests, and it just sounded like a lot of work. But at that point I didn't have a lot of options so I stuck to it, and started to attend their events and weekly meetings. My daughter always came along, and she really enjoyed herself at these events, and so that motivated me to continue to participate.

Three weeks after joining the WC Adela received her first job placement. It was a joint assignment, which is standard for new members, but Adela felt unprepared as she had not received any formal training. Other than a brief orientation she received about how to make and use non-toxic cleaning products, she did not know the intricacies of professionally cleaning a house. Adela was paired with someone who had ample cleaning experience and she began to learn the trade by watching others work. For a three-hour cleaning job both

women were paid \$100 each. She described this moment as the first time she felt a sense of purpose and personal achievement since she had arrived to the U.S. She decided to make participating in the WC a priority in order to get more work.

Adele, therefore, saw her participation in the WC as an investment, and for every event she participated in she demanded to get points. Every week Adele would go to the WC and inquire about her points and when she should be expecting a job. She attributed her weekly job placements to being pro-active and “demanding” work since she put in a lot of time and energy into participating in the organization:

These jobs aren't something that is handed to us, they're not charity, we earn them. They cost us a lot of time and effort and so it is not fair that after all that we do we don't get some form of compensation. Some *compañeras* say that I like to “demand” work, as if there was something wrong with asking for what you are owed, but I don't view it as “demanding” because it is something that we earn by attending all their events and showing up every week to their meetings. So I always kept track of my points. I am very active and talk to the staff on a regular basis to make sure I am on the list and that I don't get cheated. I don't let them take advantage of me, and that's how I have managed to secure so much work through *la colectiva*. It's not from the kindness of their heart, but a result of my own hard work.

As I explain in greater detail below, those who stayed and became members realized that it entailed a significant time commitment and that getting a job was constructed as a right that women workers have to earn through “active participation” at different political and civic engagements put on by the WC or their allies around the city and greater Bay Area.

For Ana, a thirty-six-year-old TransLatina from Mexico, joining the WC was a long-term commitment that was shaped by her desire to transition out of sex work, a line of work she had pursued since she arrived to the U.S. more than a decade ago:

I never looked at sex work as a profession, only as a way to make enough money to pay rent and cover my basic necessities. It was for survival and I never really got into it, never really enjoyed it much to be honest. I only got into that business out of financial necessity, not out of conviction. Today, for instance, I rather work for

my money, even if it means working longer hours, because there is too much risk involved in sex work. Many of my friends have died, gotten AIDS, or have become addicted to drugs. I've been out of that lifestyle since 2005, and I would not like to ever go back. That is why I ended up in *La Colectiva*. At a meeting at El/lla, an organization called W.O.M.A.N., Inc. [Women Organized to Make Abuse Nonexistent] came to give us a chat about how to find employment in the city, and referred us to *La Colectiva*. They told us that we could find housecleaning work through them.

Ana began to attend meetings, rallies, marches and participate in civil disobedience on behalf of the WC in 2013. Despite being active in all of the organization's events, however, Ana was only getting one or two jobs per month. She was able to stay active for several months because a former partner allowed her stay in the apartment they had once shared as a couple rent-free, at least until she could find a way to support herself. In order to make ends meet during these initial months at the WC Ana took a job as ghost taxi driver, which allowed her to dedicate much of her week to the organization, attending every general meeting, a weekly self-esteem group (Grupo Sol), theater class, flyering two or three times per week, and different events around the city. She noted, however, that not all the women of the WC could afford to dedicate themselves full-time to organizing:

Not all the *compañeras* have the time that I had to dedicate themselves to the organization. It's really like a full time job, time-wise. And getting work is not automatic, there is usually a period of weeks or even months before work starts coming in so it's a lengthy process. Most women here have children and families to support and care for, or spouses that don't necessarily approve of them being in *la colectiva*. Some are single mothers. The organization doesn't take that into consideration when distributing jobs, and I feel like it can do a better job at understanding the different women's unique circumstances and needs. Yes, like they always say, we are all *mujeres Latinas migrantes trabajadoras, hermanas del mismo dolor* [working Latina migrant women, sisters of the same pain] in a lot of ways, but we are not all the same. I, for instance, don't have a family in Mexico that depends on me, and although I speak to my mom every now and then, we don't have that kind of intimate or loving relationship that compels me to feel any kind of financial obligation toward her or my siblings. They were not kind to me growing up and my mother turned a blind eye to a lot of abuse that I endured so I don't feel like I owe her anything. And here in the city, besides Candelaria, my dog, I don't have

any mouths to feed. It's just me and Candi. But some of these women are still trying to pay off their coyote, saving up money to bring their kids to the U.S., or caring for their families.

Ana, unlike other women who approached the organization for employment, found that her living arrangement and financial situation gave her the opportunity to dedicate herself “full-time” to the WC, echoing what César Chávez, the United Farm Worker organizer, meant with “the rich have money but the poor have time” (Matthiessen 2000). In order to take care of her daily needs she took on additional work as a taxi driver during these initial months of participation in the WC. She was living with her a previous partner during this time but had applied for subsidized housing through a non-profit organization that served Latina transwomen. Other than her dog Candi, she felt no financial obligation to her family in Mexico, which made her job search less pressing relative to other women’s who had families to support and/or outstanding coyote debt. Moreover, she found that the organization failed to take the women’s individual circumstances into consideration when distributing jobs, instead treating them as “hermanas del mismo dolor” [sisters of the same pain] who, as Latina migrant women, presumably shared the same struggles when trying to make ends meet in the U.S. The organization, in other words, applied a system for allocating jobs that treated them as equals, but also as an undifferentiated group of *mujeres Latinas migrantes trabajadoras* [Latina migrant workers].

The Point System

As mentioned earlier, the point system is used to allocate jobs among the membership on a weekly basis. Those on the top of the list, typically resulting from attending 3-5 events a week, are more likely to secure employment. However, even these women are expected to turn down job offers if they interfere with a WC event. This means that women with low weekly scores, usually one or two points, may still be able to secure work despite their “low” levels of participation. The list not only provided a straight-

forward mechanism for dispatching jobs, one that was deemed objective and fair, but also allowed the worker center to keep track of how many jobs had been dispatched on any given week. This is an important calculation that is provided to the city of San Francisco in their end of the year reports, in which the organization has to demonstrate that jobs are being dispatched on a regular basis to ensure continued funding.

The point system then was established in an effort to encourage regular, active participation, but also to make job dispatching a more transparent and meritocratic process. This mechanism for allocating jobs, however, treats members as unencumbered, self-managing individuals who are free to choose, given the wide range of options offered, what they want to attend and what they would find most beneficial for their personal, political, and professional development. However, the women had no say in the types of activities and events they could choose from in order to accumulate points. Instead, the staff and organizers determined which events were worth attending--whether information sessions on changes to immigration policy and deportation or blocking private Google buses in the Mission District.

During an orientation meeting, when a prospective member asked if attending an English class four times a week at a local community college would count toward her points (as a form of professionalization), she was immediately shut down by Aida, the orientation coordinator and long-time member of the WC:

You can learn English on your own time *compañera*. Here [at the Women's Collective] we work toward collective goals. Our mission and vision is to promote the political, social, and economic empowerment of all immigrant women in this country. Your activism and civic engagement, not your English skills, will be your *legado* [legacy] that you will pass down to your children. It's a legacy of *lucha* [struggle], of standing up for yourself and getting things done.

According to Aida, learning English does not count toward “collective goals” and as such, cannot be considered an activity worthy of getting points for. Events like passing out flyers, staging public demonstrations, attending marches, engaging in civil disobedience, and talking to legislators and reporters about the political objectives of the WC were all seen as tasks that directly promote the collective good, unlike English classes which were believed to only benefit the individual member. Their political and civic participation, in other words, was seen as crucial for the formation of politically empowered subjectivities that could challenge the power relations that render migrant women workers voiceless and invisible. The organizer assured this member that the SFDLP-WC would be offering English classes on-site once a week, and that they would cover the basics for her to be able to communicate with employers. Activism and labor organizing, moreover, becomes women's work as it is a way for them to establish a legacy for their children.

Jennifer, the job development assistant at the WC, noted that the point system constituted a structural problem that deeply impacted the WC. This became all the more apparent when the staff decided to make the point list public:

The point system is what is structurally creating tension among the women. The members don't influence anything that I do, the work we do in the office, the dispatching of the work or the services we provide. The membership, in theory, should hold us accountable, should vote on the things that I do on a daily basis, things like, should we have point system in the first place? Should we make the point list public? But instead, we decided to make the list public without consulting with the membership, and that should have been something that they should have voted on.

The point system created tension among the women, in part because they did not get a say in how jobs were to be allocated at *La Colectiva* as the point system predates most of the current members. Since its implementation when the organization was founded, it has not been put up for a vote, nor were the women consulted about whether or not to make it

public. Moreover, Jennifer refers to the job dispatching list as a “black box” that members have a hard time understanding. She noted that, “many members don’t know all the intricacies of what goes into generating it.” As a result, Jennifer deals with daily requests for individual scores, clarification on how points are tallied, and the different WC events that were available to attend on any given week. Despite the organization’s attempt to generate a system for job allocation that would be fair and objective, it is not a straightforward calculation. Jennifer explained that the job dispatching list and women’s placement on it, encompasses more than just the points that they accumulate on any given week. Ranking is also affected by whether or not women paid their monthly dues and attended the weekly general meeting. Moreover, at times job dispatchers have to accommodate employers’ requests, especially when they ask for a worker they have hired in the past, an English speaker, or someone with a working permit.

Another common complaint about the list is that it changes on a weekly basis, as Jennifer explains:

Another common concern among members is that we generate a new list every week. So some of them see this as ‘losing their points’ since they don’t roll over to the following week.

Not only is the list a “black box” that often confuses members but also a source of frustration as their points do not “roll over,” and this is perceived as a loss. As a job dispatcher for the WC, Jennifer received daily calls from members asking about their points, and whether or not they would be working that week. Others would stop by the office to see how far along they were on the list, which compelled the staff to make the list public and available to women so that they could check it on their own. However, making the list public generated a new set of problems as women often compared their scores with others, and kept track of how often other members were going out to work. As such, it created an environment of surveillance, competition, and discontent, even when

publicizing the list was meant to foster transparency and accountability, as well as to dispel suspicion of favoritism and nepotism.

Jennifer explains that many women feel demoralized when their participation does not result in employment. Their discontent results from the fact that for most women, participation is seen as an “investment”:

The thing is, women come to us because they need work and they see their participation in the organization as an investment in terms of time, energy, and resources. They put in a lot of time and energy to attend as many events as they possibly can because they want to increase their chances of getting work. You have to remember that most of these women have families, work, and just very busy schedules, so showing up to events is a huge undertaking.

As an investment, women grow increasingly frustrated when they do not receive a job placement on a regular basis as they are not getting a return on their “investment.” Jennifer added that when women start to feel demoralized, and view their participation in WC as a loss of time, energy, and resources, the organization should reconsider its objectives.

Why make them go to all of these events if they are clearly not getting much out of participating? They’re just doing it for the points, and for good reason! The organization, of course, likes to think that the women are benefiting from participating in these events in some symbolic way, that they are being politicized and radicalized.

But in terms of a tangible benefits, she adds, most feel like they are not being rewarded for their time and effort. Also, she notes that those who have lower levels of participation have an even harder time with the point system as their participation is seen as “minimal” or insufficient. These women, in her view, should be allocated at least one job per month in order for the organization to retain them, as most will get frustrated and go elsewhere, to which she adds: “Where? Who knows because I feel like for many we are their last resort so if we can’t help them, I’m not sure who can.”

The job dispatching list may be a “black box,” which only adds to the confusion and frustration when it comes time to allocate jobs, but it is ultimately reflective of the inherent shortcomings of the point system the organization implements to measure and reward participation. Moreover, while some staff members recognize that participation is a “huge undertaking” and that women come to view it as an “investment,” given how much time, resources, and energy is required to stay active, they are not inclined to put these matters to a membership-wide vote.

Kim, the co-coordinator of the WC also finds the point system to be frustrating, but mostly because the events that the women are asked to participate in rarely result in deeper discussions about politics or broader structural problems the women face. The lack of follow-up or discussion about the nature of the events the women are expected to participate in represents a lost opportunity to cultivate a “sense of popular education,” which is a key objective of the organization. Still, women take part in these civic and political activities to support political allies of the WC, as Kim notes:

We basically feel compelled to show up and support our political allies in the community, so when they invite us to their events, we feel obliged to attend or at least send a few of our members. It's like we have no criteria for justifying the different political causes and organizations we support, and over the years our agenda just gets broader and broader—it's not just labor, immigration, amnesty, but also affordable housing, gentrification, mass incarceration, police brutality, you name it, we're there. I guess what's sad or fucked up about the whole thing is that we have the expectation, as an organization, that members will just show up to these things but we are not really interested in whether or not they are really getting something meaningful out of the experience.

Kim's frustration about the lack of popular education highlights the organization's emphasis on the symbolic rather than more transformative features of the women's activism and organizing. The broad range of issues or causes the organization takes up

keeps them from engaging in deeper conversations about their original mission and vision, which is to empower migrant workers, particularly day laborers and domestic workers. As Kim notes, the organization assumes the women are getting something meaningful out of participating in these various events but rarely do they take the time to ensure that this is the case.

Marta, the Peruvian accountant I introduced earlier in the chapter, also pointed to some of the more pernicious effects of the point system:

At one of our general meetings, the organizer gave us a long lecture about how in order for us to be eligible for amnesty, we had to be extremely active in *La Colectiva*. She said that because, as domestic workers, we don't have proof of our wages or employment status, that the federal government would work closely with immigrant organizations like the SFDLP-WC, and that they would have to vouch for us and provide evidence of our work ethic and civic commitment. Of course, I didn't buy her story because I'm no idiot. I am well informed about immigration policy in the U.S. but I was deeply disturbed and offended that she would think we are so stupid as to believe such idiocy but also that she would use amnesty as a tool to get women to do the organization's dirty work.

Marta, despite originally not wanting to be a part of the WC because of its political orientation, decided to give it a try when she found herself suddenly unemployed and unable to secure work elsewhere. She ended up participating in the WC for over a year and was considered one of the most promising members of the organization by the staff and Guillermina, the WC organizer. Given her advanced educational credentials and vast work experience as an accountant for a transnational corporation in Peru, she wanted to make herself "of use" to the organization by taking on more organizing work than other members and attending conferences and workshops organized by the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Marta, however, was formally reprimanded and silenced (quite literally, she lost the right to speak during member meetings) after demanding greater financial accountability and transparency. Here it suffices to say that Marta found that the organizer

was actively using the possibility of amnesty, and the organization's ties with the state, to compel the women to do the WC's "dirty work." The organizer also took the women to be ignorant or completely unaware of immigration issues, so much so that she concocted this story in an effort to compel to them to be more active in the WC.

Moreover, the organization recognizes that the prospect of employment is what compels women to join the WC, but when it is voiced as such by the members they are seen as motivated by "greed or selfishness." As Guillermina notes, however, this is "both the strength and the weakness" of the organization, and they have yet to figure out a way to retain members and keep them involved once they are "stably employed." Moreover, Guillermina noted that immigration reform was not something that was simply going to be handed to them, but rather something they had to fight for, invoking the sense that citizenship, for unauthorized migrants, is not a right but a privilege that should be bestowed on a deserving few—the "exceptional migrants" (see Nair 2012). Accordingly, this privilege would only to be extended to those who "put in the time and effort" to "participate, march, protest," to the exclusion of everyone else, thereby reproducing the binary between deserving and undeserving migrants. This view also posits the state as a legitimate arbiter of rights and guarantor of freedom and liberty. Here, however, the figure of the underserving migrant is not the "usual suspect" of criminals and intentionally law-breaking migrants (Chavez 2008), but rather, "greedy" and "selfish" job seekers who fail to act collectively in prioritizing their individual needs and aspirations. Women's unwillingness (or inability) to maintain an active presence in the organization is attributed to individual volition, minimizing the range of structural constraints that migrant domestic workers confront when trying to secure a livelihood for themselves and their families.

Barriers to Participation

The way the organization encourages, quantifies, rewards, and monitors participation—through its membership requirements, intricate point system, and job dispatching list—hinges on the idea that women members are equally endowed with time and resources to maintain a regular and “active” form of participation. The point system, for instance, privileged (and benefited) women who could attend multiple events each week, often more than four or five, on top of their mandatory two-hour weekly meeting. In an effort to facilitate women’s participation, the WC provided free child-care so that the members could bring their children along to events and meetings, or as the organizer Guillermina says, to not let mothering obligations serve as a distraction or “an excuse” to not participate:

That excuse doesn't work with me. I have nine children, but I am here. The problem is that some of our members have an unhealthy attachment to their children and spouses, and it's hard to break that because in our *machista* culture, that's how women are taught to be. You have to be home, put food on the table, talk to your spouse when he comes home from work, give him a little massage, *ya sabes* [you know]. But what kind of mother doesn't fight for her children? For her community? So that is part of the struggle, no? To change minds. To convince women that they are also part of a larger *familia*.

For Guillermina, those who “use” their children and husbands as an “excuse” to not participate are seen as having an unhealthy attachment to their families. In her view, traditional expectations from spouses and family members, shaped by a broader culture of machismo, serve as barriers to Latina migrant women’s political participation. As a mother of nine, she viewed this as a poor excuse that only distracts women and keeps them from focusing on the *movimiento*. The struggle, as she saw it, is changing minds, liberating Latina migrant women from the tyrannical grip of their *machista* culture, spouses, and patriarchal family structures, not necessarily for their own good but for the good of the

“larger family.” Paradoxically, as I will discuss in the next section, the WC posited women members' participation in the *movimiento* as an extension of their traditional gender identities and roles as mothers and caregivers. At the same time, as Guillermina's comments attest, the organization simultaneously seeks to challenge these same gender ideologies in their households, where they were viewed as unhealthy and pathological.

The organization's constant pushback against the machismo that allegedly afflicted these women's household and personal relationships did not sit well with many of its members, who expressed feeling uncomfortable with the way the WC promoted its gender politics. Hermelinda, a fifty-two-year-old *mexicana*, perceived that the organizer overstepped her duties in trying to dictate or influence how women members should treat their husbands or run their households. She added that the WC should “stick to what it does best,” meaning, getting women jobs instead of trying to get them involved in politics or telling them how to run their households:

I think that many problems could be avoided if the organization stayed out of our households and bedrooms. So many women stop coming or decide against joining the WC because of problems that arise with their spouses. She'll say things like, “*mujeres*, let your husband cook his own meals and take care of himself, don't let that keep you from coming to our meetings or events.” Being active in the Women's Collective can put a strain on any marriage and cause a lot of problems in the household if they are not taken into consideration. Many women stop coming because of it.

Hermelinda, as other women I interviewed, not only disagreed with the organization's gender politics, but also, its prescription for reconfiguring power relations in the home and in the family. Hermelinda, for instance, noted that participating “can put a strain on any marriage” as some of the member's husbands viewed their time at the WC as time lost from the cleaning, cooking, and caretaking at home. However, for most of the women I interviewed, the problems that they experienced at home, if any, had to do with financial

considerations. That is, often their partners' frustration or discontent had to do with the fact that the women were not getting paid for the "work" that they had to do to *get* work through the organization, and as such, viewed it as a waste of time, time that could have been better spent at home with their families.

As did Hermelinda, Adela took issue with the organization's gender politics, but also the invasiveness and lack of privacy that resulted from the WC attempt to "change minds":

Once I ran into Guillermina on the bus and she asked why I had missed a meeting, and I told her that my husband had gotten home later than usual and so I had to prepare dinner for him. She responded sarcastically, 'so, when you leave the house you also take the refrigerator with you?' Some say that she can boss her husband around because she pays the bills and so he lets her treat him this way. But honestly, I don't think this is any of our business. She can run her household any way she wants but she shouldn't expect us to do the same. What we do in our homes and with our husbands is none of her business, and it shouldn't even be talked about at meetings or events. Those things are private.

Despite the organization's attempt to "change minds" and motivate women to challenge gendered hierarchies in the family, particularly with respect to their husbands, the women viewed conversations about personal matters including household dynamics and spousal relations as private and off-limits. They also viewed these attempts as deeply invasive as they were not directly related to their professionalization or employment prospects. Not only were these women not looking to be politicized but also fundamentally disagreed with the organization's idea of "women's empowerment," at least with respect to the distribution of household work and the strong attachment, identification, and emotional gratification women get from their roles as wives and mothers.

Unlike their male counterparts at the day labor program, women who sought membership in the Women's Collective had to dedicate a significant amount of time, energy, and resources to the organization. The point system was supposed to reward active

membership and allow women to take control over their job prospects by accumulating points and ensuring a top spot on the job list that was generated on a weekly basis. Although a merit-based system that was adopted in an effort to remove any hint of hiring bias or preferential treatment (which had been a major concern among members in the past), it assumes that women members are unburdened by external responsibilities and ultimately “compete” on an equal footing. Some women believed that joining the Women's Collective was a serious time commitment, an investment, one that had serious financial implications as it meant they were forgoing income elsewhere. Through loans from family, personal savings, and other jobs they were able to dedicate themselves “full-time” to participating in the WC, which was necessary if they were to secure regular work. Others, however, simply could not afford to become “active members” of the Women's Collective.

In addition to the significant time commitment and financial implications of joining the Women's Collective, the organization's political nature and/or orientation caused discomfort among some of the members who felt that a particular political ideology was being imposed on them. Although this politicization was welcomed by some, others felt they were being coerced into “being political” in order to accumulate as many points as possible to get work. This level of political participation was not expected of the men who did not rely on a point system to get work. Although a few of the men from the day labor program at times attended marches, protests, or other political events, women were a regular and numerous presence. Women's “active participation” was thus normalized and often explained through gendered stereotypes about “natural” differences between men and women when it came to membership and participation in the organization. Unlike men day laborers who were simply expected to stay off the streets, women's participation, cohesion, and attachment to the organization was viewed as an extension of their gendered roles as community and family caretakers. Men were perceived to be individualistic, self-

interested, and unruly, whereas women members were viewed as “inherently” more cooperative, generous (with their time and money), and self-sacrificing for the good of the collectivity; they did not consider how the organization, through its structure, rules, and point system, was actually producing this cohesion and ethic of care and community. Unlike their male counterparts at the day labor program, women who sought membership in the Women's Collective had to dedicate a significant amount of time, energy, and resources to the organization. The point system is supposed to reward active membership and allow women to take control over their job prospects by accumulating points and ensuring a top spot on the job list that is generated on a weekly basis.

RESPONSIBILIZATION, SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In this final section, I examine two contradictions in the center's organizational goals. The first has to do with the positioning of women's organizing work as an extension of their traditional gender roles as mothers and caregivers while at the same time seeking to alter these same gender ideologies in their households. That is, while the reproductive labor they provided for their partners, children, and families was viewed as unhealthy and at times even pathological—a barrier to their political participation—in the context of the worker center it was rewarded through jobs. The second contradiction I examine here has to do with positing personal transformation as the mechanism through which to affect structural change. Women were expected to reveal the most painful and private experiences of their lives in the context of labor organizing which promotes a particular politics of visibility. I conclude with a discussion of how these hybrid organizations, which are purported to be “safe spaces” for disenfranchised immigrant workers, actually reproduce existing structures of gender and class inequality.

The Domésticas of the SFDLP-WC

With Father's Day around the corner, the women of the WC gathered to discuss the logistics of the event they organize every year for the *jornaleros*, the men of the day labor program. As more women trickled in, they grabbed a chair and joined a large circle of women seated in the center of the room. The women remained in silence until the organizer arrived.

As some of you already know, it is a tradition here at *La Colectiva* to organize a celebration for the men of the day labor program. As we know, many of the men who participate in the day labor program are homeless, have no family in the US, or in their home countries, and so we try to do something special for them every year so that they don't spend Father's Day alone.

After explaining what the Father's Day celebration has entailed in the past, Guillermina, the organizer for the Women's Collective, informed the members that the event would take place on Wednesday during their usual flyering time slot, which was from 10am to 12pm. Each woman would bring either a home-cooked dish or store-bought item, and/or donate money to help pay for decorations and drinks. She asked for a few volunteers to help decorate the center the night before the celebration. As she was taking down names, a series of side conversations ensued. "How am I supposed to carry a hot pot of food on the bus?" "Are we canceling flyering?" "Do we get a point for donating money, or do we have to bring something the day of the event and hang out with the men in order to get a point?" "Do we get a point if we help with the decorating the night before, and another for attending the event?" "How much do we have to donate?" "Can the date of the event be moved to the weekend to ensure more women attend?" "Absolutely not," scoffed Juana, a long-time member of the Women's Collective, "I will not show my face in this place on the weekend, that is family time. It's sacred."

The room grew louder as the women became more agitated about the logistics of the Father's Day celebration. Elizabeth, a relatively new member of the Women's Collective, stood up and waved her hands in the air vigorously to get the women's attention.

Compañeras, I don't know about you but I don't think it's a good idea to cancel flyering on Wednesday. Flyering is how we reach out to potential employers, it's how we get the word out about our organization and its mission, it's how we get jobs. Why not move the celebration to Friday so that it doesn't interfere with flyering?

Guillermina told her that the celebration could not be changed as it had already been decided on by the staff. The meeting, she clarified, was strictly to work out the logistics of the celebration, not to discuss whether or not the celebration would happen, or when. Flustered, Elizabeth sat back down and wondered, loud enough for those around her to hear, why these things are not put to a membership-wide vote. Juana, who was sitting next to her, told her that the Father's Day celebration is a yearly tradition, something the women from *La Colectiva* do to show their support, appreciation, and solidarity with the men of the day labor program.

The room grew silent again as one of the other members went around the room with a clipboard, taking note of what each member would contribute to the celebration. When one of the women handed her two dollar bills, and explained that she could not attend the event because she was working that morning, the organizer took it as an opportunity to address the group:

As with everything else we do here at *La Colectiva*, this has to come from your heart, from a place of kindness and generosity. Don't show up to the event or donate money if you are just trying to get a point. Do it because it means something to you to know that you are part of this organization, and that the men and women here at the SFDLP-WC are working together for the greater good of our community. We are a *movimiento*, not an employment agency or charity organization. A two-dollar donation won't cut it either, that's offensive and it means you probably need it more

than we do. Think of your contribution as another manifestation of your commitment to the *movimiento*, an opportunity to show that you are committed to social change, and that you are willing to make sacrifices for the collective good. There is no half-participation, it's all or nothing.

I start this section with this fieldnote because it encapsulates some of the tensions that emerge out of worker center model. What started out as a meeting to coordinate the logistics for the *jornaleros* father's day celebration, a long-time tradition of the WC, turned into a heated conversation about the "true" nature of the SFDLP-WC, an organization that sees itself as a promoter of structural change and social justice for some of the most marginalized workers, mainly migrant day laborers and domestic workers. As Guillermina notes, the SFDLP-WC is neither an employment agency nor a charity organization, but rather, a *movimiento*. In the quote above Guillermina is addressing the members of the WC with an effort to inspire the women to donate their time and money by participating in the event, but also to make a broader point about the importance of caring for their fellow *jornaleros*, some of whom were homeless and have few, if any, family members in the U.S. The women were called to take on a caring role to provide the men with a memorable experience and remind them that they too are part of the "larger *familia*" of Latina/o migrant workers.

Women are not only expected to feed the *jornaleros*, but also to make an effort to spend time with them at the center, something they rarely get a chance to do as their events are generally separate and women only see and interact with the men when they pick up their work assignments from the center. Moreover, although the care work that they perform at home, for their spouses and children, is subject to much scrutiny and at times even criticism, particularly because it is understood as a deterrence to women's greater political and civic engagement, in the context of the organization it is considered an act of "kindness and generosity." These efforts, which are to come "from the heart" and not from

a place of self-interest, are seen as testament to women's willingness to make sacrifices for the collective good. Women, therefore, are perceived as naturally more benevolent helpers than men and oriented toward collective goals despite the fact that they actually receive tangible (and symbolic) benefits from such efforts.

The strategic deployment of the term *familia*, which is often used interchangeably with community, denotes a rethinking of family and kinship relations. In an earlier quote, Guillermina uses the idea of family synonymously with the Latina/o community, and as a basis for building cohesion and solidarity in which social justice can be achieved through a radical ethic of care. However, as Juana noted, neither the *jornaleros* nor the *compañeras* are family, and the idea of spending time at the center on the weekend, which is "family time," and "sacred," makes this distinction clear. Although Juana did not want to spend her free time at the organization, she reminded Elizabeth and other new members that the Father's Day celebration was a yearly tradition that allows the members of the WC show their support and solidarity with the men of the day labor program. Juana added that the men help the WC by distributing both flyers for the day labor program and women's collective during their flyering sessions, while women only distribute the WC flyers. Although more senior members like Aida agreed that the celebration was a WC tradition, and that it was important to show solidarity with the men, she did not think it was necessary to frame it as a way to show appreciation:

Appreciation for what? They don't move a finger for us. They can't even take care of themselves, half of the time they are drunk or on drugs. I have always participated in the *jornaleros* Father's Day celebration but not out of appreciation for what they supposedly do for us but out of obligation to the WC. I may not agree, I may not like it, but I do it because I am committed to everything the WC does.

Despite the organizer's appeals to family, community, and the importance of sacrifices for the collective good in order to compel women to participate in the Father's Day celebration,

Aida, as others, agreed to participate out of sense of obligation to the WC. For her it was less about showing appreciation to the *jornaleros*, who she portrayed as irresponsible drunks and drug addicts who cannot even take care of themselves—a common belief among the membership—but commitment to the WC.

Guillermina, however, noted that regardless of their personal opinions about the *jornaleros*, they are part of the WC's brother organization, they day labor program, and as a result, part of the family:

Yes, the *jornaleros* have a lot of problems, and yes, many of them drink and do drugs, often on the premises, but that's only because men, unlike women, don't have much self-control. We find healthier ways to deal with our problems, we turn to our families, our children for support. Not men. The important thing to remember here is that even *these* men deserve to be celebrated, deserve to be cared for, they are our *compañeros*, *hermanos en la lucha*. Many don't have families or a home, and are in and out of shelters so let's show some compassion and put our personal prejudices to the side.

As the quintessential caregivers, not only for their families but for the community at large, women are expected to be more compassionate and to reflect social roles such as motherhood (Naples 1992). In the statement above, Guillermina is also marking *jornaleos* as subjects who are “worthy” of care, not by the state, but by their fellow *compañeras*, who can be counted on to provide that care as members of the WC, their sister organization. According to Guillermina, and the organization more broadly, *jornaleros* cannot be expected to care for themselves. As a result, from an organizational perspective, the DLP operates under a lax structure that simply requires their physical presence in the center several hours a day in order to be eligible for jobs. They are only expected to clean or volunteer by flyer-ing or attending SFDLP-WC events after a job placement.

In a lot of ways, as James Quesada, a day labor scholar and partner of the SFDLP-WC, noted, the organization functions more like a (day) shelter for men in day labor. It

provides them a place to go after they leave their shelters in the morning, as well as food, coffee, and a space to socialize with others. Unlike with the women, the jobs that the organization provides them, on average two a month, is not what brings these men to the center.

While the purpose of this chapter is not to compare women's experiences to men's in day labor, it does seek to illustrate how the worker center movement is increasingly bringing these two occupational groups into the same organizational structure. While women may be a minority or relatively "new face" in worker centers, they are not new to day labor. However, day labor centers are now having to contend with women turning to them to secure employment, and many have responded by creating industry-specific programs for women such as cleaning cooperatives or collectives. Gendered norms and expectations, however, shape the differential incorporation of these two populations into the worker center. Through the day to day operations and events, women are positioned as ideal (moral and economic) subjects for targeted intervention in the form of professionalization and leadership development. As I describe below, women come to represent the best hope for a revitalized labor movement and are called upon to "work on themselves." In working on their self-esteem, professional development, and leadership skills, they take on the responsibility for managing a series of social risks including poverty and marginalization. I contend that the "responsibilization" (Foucault 1991 [1978]) of migrant women that these centers promote can be understood in the broader context of the restructuring of capitalism and the criminalization of poverty, which makes men disproportionately the targets of more coercive strategies of containment through the police and courts. In the context of the SFDLP-WC, the most that can be expected of *jornaleros* is that they stay off the street and ultimately, out of trouble. They are, in other words, incorrigible.

The point that I want to make here is that women are expected to perform intimate labor both for their employers (for pay) and for the organization (as a “labor of love”), but not for their own families and loved ones. Again, when this labor is performed at home it is viewed as an impediment to women’s organizing and greater participation in the WC. Women who use their families as an “excuse” to miss meetings or events are viewed as having an unhealthy attachment to their families, as being submissive and held back by a *machista* culture. In the context of the organization, however, women’s caregiving is supposed to come “from the heart” as many of the men lack families of their own who could provide that kind of intimate labor and support. The men then benefit from the intimate labors provided by the women of *La Colectiva*, but the latter do not enjoy the same in return.

Gender as an Organizing Strategy of Control

While the purpose of this chapter is not to compare women’s experiences to men’s in day labor, it does seek to illustrate how the worker center movement is increasingly bringing these two occupational groups into the same organizational structure. While women may be a minority or relatively “new face” in worker centers, they are not new to day labor. However, day labor centers are now having to contend with women turning to them to secure employment, and many have responded by creating industry-specific programs for women such as cleaning cooperatives or collectives. Gendered norms and expectations, however, shape the differential incorporation of these two populations into the worker center. Through the day to day operations and events, women are positioned as ideal (moral and economic) subjects for targeted intervention in the form of professionalization and leadership development. As I describe below, women come to represent the best hope for a revitalized labor movement and are called upon to “work on

themselves.” In working on their self-esteem, professional development, and leadership skills, they take on the responsibility for managing a series of social risks including poverty and marginalization. I contend that the “responsibilization” (Foucault 1991 [1978]) of migrant women that these centers promote can be understood in the broader context of the restructuring of capitalism and the criminalization of poverty, which makes men disproportionately the targets of more coercive strategies of containment through the police and courts. In the context of the SFDLP-WC, the most that can be expected of *jornaleros* is that they stay off the street and ultimately, out of trouble. They are, in other words, incorrigible.

Feminist scholars writing about diverse institutions draw on Joan Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organizations to highlight how assumptions about masculinity, femininity, and gender difference are encoded into the practices, ideologies, and distributions of power. According to Acker, organizations are not gender-neutral organisms that become contaminated by gendered bodies but rather sites in which these attributes are presumed and reproduced. As such, gender is a foundational element of organizational structure and work life. McCorkel (2013), extends these insights into a different institutional environment, that of women’s prisons. Here she notes that the ideology of rehabilitation has occupied a more central role within the feminine side of the penal system. McCorkel shows that at the moment when men’s prison became preoccupied with containing the body, the women’s prison she studied became more invested in the self as the primary object of institutional control, signaling the arrival of a new system of punishment, one that is deeply gendered and racialized and reflects the growing influence of privatization and market-based sensibilities in the governing logic of punishment. The shift she documents is the process of responsibilization, which refers to the notion that offenders themselves, as opposed to the state, must take up the torch of their own

rehabilitation. It is thus a strategy of governance that shifts responsibility for social problems from the state to the individual, encouraging the latter to become self-regulating and self-governing.

I refer to this research in an effort to theorize the SFDLP-WC implementation of “woman-centered” and “gender responsive” policies aimed at empowering women, in this case, members of the WC. These responsabilization efforts psychologize the inequalities that women confront, attributing things like poverty and domestic violence to poor self-esteem rather than structural vulnerabilities and their tendency to position women as victims. Women are expected to take ownership of their problems and resolve them by learning how to make the “right” choices. Lynne Haney, in her study of two community-based alternatives to prisons for women in California, shows how programming was cast as gender-specific and empowering alternatives to traditional prison approaches. This section draws on these feminist insights to examine how responsabilization schemes and gendered governance unfold outside of total institutions, in a distinct institutional environment, that of day labor centers, and why rehabilitating the self is so central to making women proper neoliberal subjects. Also, this section will show how Latina migrant workers carry this burden by being the best hope for a revitalized labor movement.

Self-Esteem and Social Change

A central component of the Women's Collective approach to “empowerment” has to do with building women's self-esteem and the transformation of the self as a catalyst for social change. In order to bolster women's sense of self-worth, a weekly self-esteem group, Grupo Sol, was created as a feminist forum in which women members could come together and discuss a range of topics from marital relations, family life, and domestic violence, among others. (The men in the day labor program do not have a similar group.) This group

is often described by staff as a “safe space” for migrant women, a place for them to come together and discuss the issues that affect their lives as Latina migrant women in the U.S. Grupo Sol meetings run as interactive encounter groups designed to encourage self-disclosure and the sharing of intimate experiences in an effort to raise awareness of how the personal intersects with economic and political processes, as well as to build solidarity among Latina migrant women. Guillermina, the Women's Collective organizer, described the self-esteem group as “a sanctuary” for migrant women. The only topic that was supposedly off limits was religion, although this rule was never enforced as religion was a recurring theme in Grupo Sol discussions.

Grupo Sol

As we walked into the center I noticed that several women were making coffee and cutting up a large chocolate cake. Guillermina arrived with Aida, the orientation coordinator who has been a part of the WC for almost ten years. Guillermina made her way to the front and looked around the room to see who was in attendance. She addressed the group: “I really appreciate the effort and thought that goes into bringing food for our meetings but please keep in mind that we need to have healthier options. We can't always have cake, donuts, or tamales. Maybe next time we can also bring some fruit? We need to keep in mind that what we put into our bodies is also an important part of self-care.” Guillermina later explained that it is important to pay attention to even “the smallest details” like what types of food they provide at WC events. “We teach women to take control of their lives, but in order for them to do so, they have to be able to make good choices. You see? We are a full-service organization!”

Although in theory every meeting addresses a particular topic or question that is raised by Guillermina, who is also the meeting's facilitator, often she will leave it open so

that the women can decide what they want to discuss. At this particular meeting, the issue up for discussion was poverty in Latino communities in the U.S.:

Guillermina: How do we contribute to our own poverty and misfortune? That is the question we will be trying to answer today.

Hilda: I think this is a really important question Doña Guille. You know, in the past when I went to Sunday mass, I never bothered to give the *diezmo* [tithe] because I let people get in my ear about the Catholic Church's opulence and wealth, particularly the Pope's. But I had a change of heart last year and decided to start contributing at Sunday mass. The priest discouraged us to give cash donations each week and asked us instead to use the envelopes to leave a check or a larger sum of cash on a monthly basis. So I started using these envelopes and one month I was able to give \$200. I soon ran out of envelopes because I was giving so much money, and when I asked the priest for more, he told me that I had given enough. But I really felt the desire to continue giving, and so I did. I started noticing that after this I began to get more work from *La Colectiva*.

Guillermina: Yes, God rewards those who give because it is a sin to be greedy and want everything for yourself. We have to give from our hearts, *de donde nos nace dar*, not out of obligation or because in helping others we expect to be rewarded in the future. That kind of giving is not authentic and it is frowned upon by God. Giving has to be done with good intentions. Just like being lazy and not working is a sin, so is giving with the expectation of getting something in return. God knows our true intentions, and so do I because I know most of you really well. [She smiles and points at several women jokingly.] The point I am trying to make is that we have to recognize the role we play in our own misfortune and poverty. So we have to understand poverty not only in the material sense but internal poverty, our lack of self-esteem, our own greed, our own insecurities and traumas. These meetings are designed to encourage *auto-critica* [self-critique] in order to spark change from within. That's how change happens. [Points at Lidia, a fifty-nine-year-old woman from El Salvador.]

Lidia: Why are you pointing at me?

Guillermina: I wasn't pointing at you, I was pointing in your general direction. You are imagining things *compañera*.

[Other women laugh.]

Lidia: I feel like you are constantly picking on me during these meetings. Every time you have something negative to say, you look at me. Why don't you pick on someone else for a change?

Guillermina: Ay, Lidia, you are so traumatized, so damaged that you think everyone is against you. This is exactly why you have a hard time keeping the good jobs the collective gives you. I care for each and every one of you, but you Lidia, you are a special case. You have some unresolved issues that need to be addressed in order for you to be able to get the most out of participating in this organization. You have to open up, share with us, let us in, we can help you.

These types of confrontations are common in Grupo Sol, a self-esteem group where women are expected to open-up and share intimate details of their lives. Given the highly personalistic nature of these exchanges, some women opt for silence in order to avoid external scrutiny or judgment, a strategy I discuss later. Lidia generally remained quiet during the meetings, and preferred not to “open up” because she felt that the organizer was constantly picking on her. This was not the first time Guillermina referred to Lidia as traumatized, or psychologized her inability to secure and retain work the WC provided for her. It was, however, the first time she “talked back” at the organizer for trying to make an example of her. Lidia’s response was not taken well by the organizer, who further compelled her to share what was afflicting her in order for them deal with the “unresolved issues” she was perceived as having collectively, in a “safe” space.

Kathleen Coll (2010), in her research on *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (MUA), an immigrant organization that works with domestic violence survivors in San Francisco and Oakland, argues that the notion of *autoestima* or self-esteem allows women to locate intimate personal issues within a broader social context. According to Coll, it is both a process and an outcome in the ongoing struggle for a more empowered sense of citizenship. She quotes Gloria Steinem, who proclaimed that “there is nothing personal about self-esteem” (2010:231), pointing to the need to approach self-esteem as a social relationship and a political obligation. Barbara Cruikshank, in her study of the self-esteem movements

in the United States, shows how the distinction between the private and the public are re-drawn in the neoliberal model of rationality. According to Cruikshank, the self-esteem approach contends that a range of social problems can be attributed to a lack of self-esteem on the part of the persons concerned. This emphasis on personal dedication and “self-care,” she adds, is not about replacing the political or collective by the personal but rather reorienting the way society addresses social problems.

Poverty, as the discussion above illustrates, is depicted not merely (or largely) as a structural phenomenon but as deeply-rooted in individual psyches, traumas, and personal shortcomings. Described here as internal poverty or “a poverty of the mind,” it is attributed to a lack of self-esteem, insecurities, and traumas, as well as personal greed. Lidia's inability to keep jobs that the WC “gave” her is linked to her traumatized and damaged self. Guillermina, however, offers her a solution, the prospect of liberation through sharing her story, “opening up” and confronting her unresolved issues by talking about them with the group. This is what Coll refers to as a process of political and personal transformation by *aprendiendo a hablar* or learning to speak with other women and understand one's story as an integral part of claiming rights and demanding recognition as political subjects. Moreover, self-esteem, as a form of governance, encourages subjects to participate in their own empowerment and most importantly, to fulfill the social obligation of responsible citizenship. The type of empowerment that is privileged at the WC is that of self-improvement—taking greater control over their lives, gaining skills and confidence, becoming self-reliant. Guillermina, for instance, linked the women's lack of self-confidence and self-esteem to their social and economic marginalization in American society and suggested that self-improvement through training and professional development was the best way to achieve greater inclusion and participation in public life.

During Grupo Sol meetings, the women also receive somatic therapy or bodywork, which is a form of physical therapy that is common in domestic violence organizations as it aims to address the “bodily” memory of trauma by helping individuals recognize where they are carrying physical tension. At Grupo Sol meetings this mostly consisted of warm-up exercises and stretching. This therapy generally focuses on rebuilding women's inner sense of strength and minimizing feelings of low self-worth and helplessness. The focus on trauma and psychological phenomena, however, is about treating symptoms rather than underlying social forces and inequalities that bring it about in the first place. Here, again, Guillermina explaining the importance of these types of therapeutic interventions:

Many of the women that walk through that door are broken. They come from countries where women have no rights, no voice, and no way of providing for their children. They often have to leave their families behind to come to this country and try to make a better life for themselves and their children, but in the process, they have to put up with a lot of disrespect and abuse. They have been beaten, exploited, even raped, and so they come to the Women's Collective looking for someone to extend a helping hand. That is what we do here, we provide them the tools they need to reach their full potential as *mujeres*, to expand their possibilities so that they can aspire to more in life than just cleaning houses, which is hard work, even good work if it's through the Women's Collective. But you see, it can't just be about providing them with employment, although we do that too. It's more than that, they become part of a movement. They come here broken and leave as *heroínas* [heroines].

This passage illustrates why, from the organizer's perspective, it is important for the Women's Collective to provide group therapy sessions and somatic interventions. The assumption being that Latina migrant women are broken as they come from impoverished countries where they are stripped of their voice, political subjectivity, and ability to care and provide for their families. Not only have their psyches been tarnished, but their bodily integrity compromised by domestic violence, sexual abuse, and exploitative working conditions. Accordingly, the role of the WC then is not merely to give them jobs, which

they do, but ultimately to help women heal and become whole again by providing them with the tools and training for them to reach their full potential and aspire to more than “just cleaning houses.” By providing women a space to “open up” and share their personal tragedies (what Coll refers to as *desahogarse* or vent and unburden themselves), particularly through Grupo Sol, the WC seeks to help women regain their voices and *aprender a hablar* (learn to talk) about their social realities and challenges. This type of emotional disclosure then is presumed to be inherently liberating and empowering for women.

Similarly, Allison McKim (2008), in her study of a community-based drug treatment program for female offenders, contends that responsabilization takes on gendered meaning as staff members conceive of criminal women as lacking an adequate self. In order to address the fragmented self, staff members promoted therapeutic forms of governance such as monitoring of self and others, through therapeutic and emotional disclosure. Although worker centers are not “total institutions” like correctional facilities—quite the opposite, they are supposed to be non-hierarchical, democratic, with a social justice orientation—they serve as a particularly compelling site from which to study responsabilization and gendered governance techniques. As the fieldnotes above illustrate, both men and women of the SFDLP-WC were perceived to be “flawed” or broken, albeit in different ways—while migrant women were viewed as psychologically and emotionally damaged, traumatized by poverty and abuse, men were structurally flawed and prone to alcoholism, drug addiction, and homelessness. Women, unlike men, were construed as “broken” but ultimately corrigible, and thus subject to greater (albeit “softer” forms of) institutional scrutiny and control. As McCorkel notes, “habilitation” comprises “a set of social technologies that mobilize surveillance, confrontation, humiliation, and discipline for the purposes of ‘breaking down’ a self that is thought to be diseased” (2013:3). In the

WC, the focus is on empowerment, capacitation, and leadership development, which are promoted through gender-specific programming that would allow for therapeutic and emotional disclosure.

Many of the women that I interviewed expressed feeling that their privacy had been violated at Grupo Sol meetings. Although the organization portrayed them as a “sanctuary” or refuge for Latina migrant women, a safe (both familiar and familial) space where they could open up or *desahogarse* to use Coll’s preferred term, many noted that they tried to disclose as little information about their private lives as possible in order to protect themselves. This was not always possible, however, as women were expected to reveal intimate details of their personal lives in front of other women they rarely knew, did not have a personal relationship with, trust, or even particularly like. Discussions on marriage, for instance, were viewed as particularly problematic and invasive. Emotional confessions were a key component of this governmental strategy (Foucault 1978) as women were expected to divulge their personal narratives and feelings during these group meetings in an effort to find the root cause of their problems. As one of the senior members Aida told another woman, “one can't just show up and take up space”: sharing, opening up, and talking is necessary.

Theater Group

Women were not just expected to share their personal narratives in Grupo Sol meetings but also in other spaces such as a theater group that was created for the women of the SFDLP-WC and facilitated by William Shields, chair of the Labor and Community Studies at the City College of San Francisco. As with Grupo Sol, women who participated in the activities of the theater group received a point for each meeting, performance, or event they participated in, points that would go toward securing employment the following

week. During my time at the WC, I joined the women at these weekly meetings and assisted with child-care but also recording their life histories, which were then turned into short “scripts” for community performances. Every Tuesday evening, a group of eight or nine women would meet to write, discuss, and read each other's life histories. Their life histories were written in a chronological manner that walked the reader through different stages of their lives, including their lives in their countries of origin; their decision to migrate to the U.S. and border crossings; their arrival to the U.S. and San Francisco in particular; and their working lives in the city. The pinnacle of these stories, of course, was joining the Women's Collective and organizing for the rights of low-wage migrant workers.

Writing their life histories, however, was no small task. The women who “volunteered” to participate in the theater group did so knowing that it entailed a long-term commitment as it involved not only writing their life histories, editing them, and preparing scripts, it also involved performing them before a live audience. But they did so with the expectation that they would receive points in return. Out of the twelve women that originally registered for the group, six remained by the time they were preparing for rehearsal. This resulted not only from the considerable time commitment that theater group entailed every week, on top of their mandatory weekly meetings, but also because some of the women who originally registered to be part of the group did so with the understanding that they would not have to share their story. They agreed to be a part of the group and participate in the physical exercises that comprised the first half of these meeting, but not in the storytelling or performance. However, once in the group, they felt pressured, by the facilitator and other women, to at least try.

The weekly writing and editing process often resulted in tears and women breaking down from having to retell (and relive) their experiences, particularly in relation to their

border crossings and the children and families they left behind and have not seen in decades.

Betty, a *mexicana* that joined the WC just a few weeks prior to registering for the theater group, cried as she was reading the part of her life history that deals with leaving her parents behind. She described feeling pressured to leave her parents in Mexico as friends and extended family urged her to join her husband who had left for the U.S. a few years back. If she did not join him as soon as possible, she was told, he would find another woman in the U.S. After almost twenty years in the U.S., she still regretted her decision to leave Mexico as her parents had since passed away and she did not have the opportunity to see them or attend their funerals. Bill, the facilitator thanked her for sharing her story:

It's really brave of you to share your story *compañera*. These are exactly the types of stories we need people to be able to see and hear. And this is why this theater group is so important and ground-breaking because we are capturing these deeply personal stories that often get missed when we talk about the economics of migration, or things like NAFTA. These things are usually discussed in such abstract terms, these stories, however, change that as we are adding a human face to these structural issues.

Betty had to step out of the room, and was followed by Guillermina, who later returned to the room to tell us she had gone home because she was not feeling well. At a later meeting, Lourdes, who has been with the WC for a few months, also broke down as she was approaching the part where she crossed the border:

Lourdes: I'm sorry, Bill. I just can't move forward with telling this part of the story. It deals with my children...so I don't want to talk about it. [pauses] It is about me trying to cross the border with my three small children. We made it through, thank God, during our second attempt but that first time, my God, it's just too painful. It hurts just thinking about it.

Bill: It's okay *compañera*, take your time.

Lourdes: I can't do this. I don't want to do this. [cries]

Bill: Take your time, just give it a try. If you feel like you can't we can move on to someone else.

Lourdes: The first time the four of us tried to cross, two of my children crossed before me with the coyote, and I was in the back with my six-month old baby in my arms. I got caught, and I could see that the coyote just kept walking with my kids. Ay. [cries]

Bill: Breathe, just breathe.

Lourdes: I've never felt so close to wanting to die, but that day, I wanted to die. I felt like the coyote was going to run off with my children and that there was nothing I could do. I wanted to die.

Lourdes could not finish the story and at that point, Bill stopped insisting she try. Given the intensity of these meetings, some women opted for skipping entire sections of their "narrative" in order to avoid touching subjects they were not comfortable discussing in front of others, or did not want to revisit. Carlota, during a theater meeting, told Bill that she no longer wanted to write her life history:

This has caused me too much pain, Bill, I just refuse to write any more. I'm done. You say that it is good for us to tell our stories, but it certainly doesn't feel good for me. I just don't see the point. I don't see the point in any of this.

Guillermina assured her that she did not have to participate or share her story if she did not feel comfortable. She urged the others, however, to be brave and at least make an effort to write down their life histories. Mirroring Coll's discussion of "speaking up," Guillermina told the women that these sessions serve a therapeutic and liberating function as they allow them to process their feelings collectively and in a safe environment.

These things are painful, sure, but we have all experienced them. We have all been there. So it is important for us to share them with the rest of the group because only then will we be able to heal, to see just how much we have in common, how our struggles are our sister's struggles.

Guillermina here is both simultaneously empathizing with and minimizing women's personal experiences of pain and hardship. As a Latina migrant woman, and a former domestic worker herself, Guillermina contends that she too has experienced these traumatic episodes. In fact, she claims that *all* the women in the group have experienced them given their social location in American society. And as painful as these stories may be, they serve an important political function and as a result, opening up should be viewed as a collective endeavor serving a common cause. However, the women's pauses, silences, tears, and constant attempts to get out of sharing their stories were not taken seriously. Rather, sharing these painful experiences was seen as an act of bravery that worked toward collective healing.

Writing one's life history as part of these women's participation in theater group, can be thought of as literary technology or what Steinem referred to as "bibliotherapy" in that the self (whole, healed) is believed to emerge out of confrontation with texts or with the telling and writing of one's personal narrative (Cruikshank 1999). In the context of the theater group, however, women "volunteered" to participate because it would allow them to accumulate more points on any given week. Not all of them wanted to share their life histories with the group, and those that did, did not necessarily experience this as therapeutic or liberating. Those who could get points elsewhere dropped out. Among those who stayed, several opted for silence, which was at times interpreted as a sign of unresolved trauma or worse yet, an unwillingness to cooperate. Silence, however, represented a strategy (Scott 1985) that the women often mobilized in an effort to protect their privacy, or as Betty said, their hearts.

Discussion: A “Safe” Space for Immigrant Women?

Grupo Sol and theater group both were designed as “safe” spaces where Latina migrant women were free to discuss a range of topics from domestic violence, marriage, sexuality, to local politics in effort to build community and heal unresolved traumas. The objective of these meetings was to empower the women to become confident, assertive, self-conscious agents, in the political, economic terrain, but also in the home. The assumption was that that Latina migrant women, given their marginalization, migration trajectories, and social location in the U.S., were “broken” and lacked self-confidence and a positive sense of self. During these meetings the women also received somatic therapy, which is designed to address the bodily memory of “trauma” by helping them recognize where they are carrying physical tension and stress. This therapy focused on rebuilding women's inner sense of strength and minimizing feelings of low self-worth and helplessness. While voluntary, the women who attended these weekly meetings received a point, which would then be tallied up and used to determine their placement on the WC job-dispatching list. They were expected to participate, open up, disclose, speak to their personal experiences in an effort to raise awareness of how the personal intersects with economic and political processes, as well as to build solidarity among Latina migrant women. Their unwillingness to self-disclose could be interpreted as a sign of unresolved trauma or selfishness. The organization, therefore, was determined to get them to open up and ensure that they would not just be a “warm body” that merely takes up space.

In my interviews women often described these group meetings as invasive and anxiety-producing, as they are expected to disclose intimate details of their lives, not just with strangers, but worse, with women they did not like. Some said that they actively refused to speak in an effort to protect their hearts, privacy, and interiority. Privacy here is invoked as "what is most singular, secret, ineffable, internal, that is, private, about

[individuals]" (Morris 2000:323). Debra Morris's (2000) call for a "positive political theory of privacy" is relevant here, as she conceptualizes it as a transitional, psychic space that serves as a reprieve from scrutiny, public judgment, and social control. While some feminists have focused on the negative effects of privacy, rendering it a masculinist prerogative (MacKinnon 1987) and self-serving right (Young 1990) that only serves to keep us from examining oppressive relations and ultimately enhances the vulnerability and powerlessness of women, Morris argues that the exaltation of the public self has come at the expense of our care and concern for the private.

I find Morris's claims about about the importance of privacy particularly urgent in the context of migrant women's organizing. What happens then when the expression of individual voice within a collective context is not affirming and empowering? I contend that the transformation of silence into language and action can also be violent and oppressive. I interpret these women's call for privacy, and their strategic deployment of silence and self-censoring not as antithetical to liberatory agendas and practices in the realm of political activism, but rather, a way to protect the sanctity of inner lives and selves, and ultimately a form of defiance (Scott 1985).

Yolanda Chavez Leyva, in her essay titled "Listening to the Silences in Latina/Chicana Lesbian History," highlights the multiple and complex meanings of silence for Chicana and Latina lesbians, for whom "silence has been an enigma, a survival strategy, a wall" which confines and protects them (2000:427). Black feminist scholars too have pointed to dissemblance and interiority in reference to how black women contest racial domination, economic exploitation, and sexual violence. Darlene Clark Hines (1996) calls this a culture of dissemblance when thinking about how black women—who are often blamed for their own rapes and violations of their bodies and hegemonic codings as hypersexual—retreat within to not disclose their vulnerability to others. Hines argues that

black women have responded to such intrusions with behaviors and attitudes that created the semblance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from others, particularly their oppressors. She thus proposes a theory of black female performance of silence, which would be an example of what James Scott (1985) calls “weapons of the weak.” What does it mean that women in the WC seek a form of self-imposed invisibility or harness to protect themselves in a purported “safe space”? What is lost, politically, in choosing silence?

CONCLUSION

Day labor hiring sites, in operating without the direct oversight of governmental and bureaucratic institutions, are perceived as being tucked away in the crevices of the informal economy and thus outside the purview or influence of the state. However, scholars are beginning to trouble this assumption by pointing to the different and complex ways the state is implicated in structuring, regulating, and monitoring the conduct of “illegal” immigrants through practices such as spatial discipline, city ordinances, and immigration enforcement (Herrera 2010). As this chapter points out, these efforts are often also supported, in some capacity, by non-state actors such as non-profit organizations, day labor organizers, and activists. Local governments, for instance, often partner up with community and faith-based organizations to create, fund, and/or operate immigrant day labor workers' centers (Fine 2006). These hybrid organizations (part labor market institution and social movement) take on the role of labor market intermediaries that sort immigrant workers into particular jobs and help them navigate the world of work in the U.S. They also seek to discipline day labor markets by monitoring employment conditions, increasing transparency of the hiring process, setting a “floor” under wages, as well as providing job training and certification programs to migrant workers (Melendez et al.

2014). Although workers' centers rely on their much needed services—i.e., legal support with wage-theft cases and immigration as well as job dispatching—to draw in migrant workers that have historically been rendered “unorganizable” because of their undocumented legal status and social marginalization, they attempt to mobilize them through appeals to principles (see also Fine 2006; Gordon 2005).

Unlike other labor organizations such as unions, however, day labor centers lack formal accountability mechanisms and their day-to-day operations have for the most part remained unexamined and under-theorized by day labor scholars. This has led some to argue that despite the altruistic and social justice ideals of these organizations and day labor activists, many centers have been created for the purpose of containing community conflict and rarely address the needs of the workers themselves (Johnson 2013).

Transnational feminists, influenced by the Foucauldian idea of governmentality, point to the need to consider the continuities between the state and civil society (Bernal and Grewal 2014), and thus locate non-profit organizations such as these within local and transnational configurations of power (Grewal 2005). In some ways, worker centers such as the SFDLP-WC help produce the state (Mitchell 1999), blurring the distinction between the two sectors. Although the particular assemblage of state and non-state actors will inevitably vary by locale, it is crucial to examine their complex relationships and the role they have not only in the emergence and maintenance of day labor markets, but also in regulating behaviors and practices of day laborers themselves. It is useful then to conceptualize informal day labor sites as state-sponsored projects that are shaped not by an omnipotent state but rather by a diverse set of actors and institutions.

This chapter examined the recent emergence of workers centers in an effort to contextualize the work of the SFDLP-WC and what I refer to as the “organizing imperative,” that is, the impetus to organize immigrant day laborers in a particular political,

economic, and social climate rife not only with nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment but also the progressive criminalization of migrants (Inda 2011). Drawing on Foucault's (2000) analytic of governmentality, I argued that day labor centers actively seek to transform day laborers into respectable neoliberal subjects, which inadvertently calls for their increased surveillance and seclusion. I thus situate the emergence (and proliferation) of worker centers on a continuum of local forms of social control that the state mobilizes, with the support of non-profit organizations, religious institutions, and other actors, to manage “illegal” migrants, making these institutions part and parcel of the national project. The way worker centers are made to manage day labor populations can be understood as what Sabine Hess (2010) has called the new “soft modes” of migrant/migration governance since they are part of the development of new state governing capacities, institutions, and practices designed to monitor immigrant populations. I also showed that through its day to day operations, the SFDLP-WC positioned migrant women as the ideal subjects for targeted intervention as they come to represent the best hope for a revitalized labor movement. Women, unlike their male counterparts, are called upon to “work on themselves,” thereby shifting the responsibility for managing social risks such as unemployment, poverty, and “illegality” on individual migrant women.

Finally, in examining two important contradictions in the center's organizational model—the mobilization of the workers' traditional gender identities to challenge gender inequality in their households, and the focus on self-esteem and personal transformation as a mechanism to affect structural change—I showed how assumptions about gender difference are encoded into the workers' center's organizational practices, ideologies, and distributions of power, which ultimately place undue burden on the women members. Ultimately, I argued that these immigrant organizations, purported to be “safe spaces” by some, may actually reproduce existing structures of gender and class inequalities.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

De Genova notes that the academic home of migration studies has long been a murky “back room of demography” (Kearney 1986:331), and that the study of undocumented migration has “been lost in the shuffle somewhere in a corridor between demography, policy studies, and criminology” (De Genova 2002:421). Accordingly, scholarly preoccupation with undocumented migration, and migrants in particular, has long centered on solving a series of “problems” which have required the application of a wide range of social science techniques in order to assess the “successes” or “failures” of legislative, administrative or enforcement strategies. Portes made this very point almost four decades ago, noting that “illegal immigration” is one of those issues in which the interests of scholars and government agencies have (curiously) converged (1978:469). The same argument can be made about day labor, its problematization, and scholarly preoccupation with policy-relevance, particularly in the areas of health, labor, and immigrant “incorporation.”

This dissertation, by centering Latina migrant women’s experiences in the Brooklyn street-corner market and the Women’s Collective at the San Francisco Day Labor Center, challenges the notion that day labor is a form of procuring employment that is reserved for Latino migrant men in industries such as construction, landscaping, and agriculture. My dissertation cuts across scholarship on gender, labor organizing, and critical migration studies to examine the proliferation of nonstandard work arrangements in postindustrial economies and the organizing strategies that have emerged in recent years to advance the rights of low-wage migrant workers, particularly women. As a comparative ethnography, I am interested in: a) the structural conditions that enable women's participation in this predominately male “regime of precarious employment” (Theodore

2003), b) their livelihood strategies and solicitation practices; and c) how state and non-state actors in various configurations and entanglements employ different tactics to fashion a particular type of day labor behavior and idealized forms of employment solicitation.

I incorporated three levels of analysis. At the micro level, I examined Latina day laborers' employment prospects and solicitation practices across two organizational settings. In the case of *La Parada* in Brooklyn, I found important differences among the women with respect to their “attachment” to the corner. While economists generally use the term labor market attachment to examine the behavior of jobless individuals, here I use the term “attachment” in a more literal (and less normative) way. Attachment, in the context of street-corner solicitation, is a two-fold process: first, it refers to the amount of time an individual spends on the corner (on a full-time, part-time, and seasonal basis), and second, the extent to which workers rely on day-wage labor for their livelihood (as the main source of income, supplemental, or temporary).

I created a typology of street-corner solicitation in an effort to illustrate not only the different types of workers that can be found on the Brooklyn corner and their distinct pathways into day wage labor, but also how these differences shape solicitation practices and outcomes. I used three categories, full-time, part-time, and seasonal solicitation, to capture the heterogeneity of experiences not typically afforded to this group of contingent workers (Peck and Theodore 2012), the so-called “underbelly” of a chronically insecure social class scholars refer to as the precariat (Harvey 2012; Standing 2011). Despite the heuristic value of these categories in helping us think about the multiple ways by which Latin American migrant women come into day labor and their disparate experiences in the industry, I do not wish to overstate the differences between them. That is, all of the women I encountered on the corner were struggling to create some semblance of full and/or stable

employment, and even for the most “successful” of solicitors the boundaries between employment and unemployment were porous and constantly changing.

My findings illustrate that migrant women in day labor are hired to perform intimate labor, mainly domestic work, care work, and sex work. I draw on the concept of intimate labor, as put forth by Boris and Parreñas (2010,) to illustrate not only the range of tasks women were expected to perform in the context of finite economic opportunities on the corner, but also the fluid and porous nature of these occupational boundaries. I show that while only a fraction of women (openly) engaged in sexual commerce on a regular basis, others turned to sex work intermittently, when other type of work was unavailable, undesirable, or in exchange for continued or future employment. Weaved into this section are the subjective meanings women ascribed to their work. I show, for instance, that the domestic labor Latina migrant women performed for the Hasidim was at times not only imbued with religious meaning and purpose, perceived as central to the reproduction of Jewish ethnicity. It also often represented a more appealing income-generating strategy given the limited employment options that were available to this group of migrant workers. I described how for some day labor also represented a more meaningful and advantageous option compared to other forms of low-wage, low-status work, partly because it often afforded them greater control over the conditions of their work. Day labor then provided these women with a greater sense of autonomy in their work experience, which was manifested in their ability to negotiate better pay and a flexible schedule of hours, provisions they rarely enjoyed when working in traditional low-wage jobs in the general economy.

I also found three main ways Latin American migrant women in the Brooklyn corner actively seek to promote their labor in order to maximize their employment prospects and attain some measure of autonomy and financial security in spite of their

vulnerable, subordinate status. That is, by performing social identities, doing extra work, and turning down work offers, women in the Brooklyn street-corner market actively shaped their employment prospects and environment, and cultivated some modicum of job security and predictability against a backdrop of anonymity, hyper-flexibility, and disposability. I argued that our understanding of agency in day labor spaces, and ultimately contestation, need not be limited to the more extreme moments such as those involving wage theft and abuse but rather, day laborers' daily interactions with employers and other workers on the street corner. This illustrates that street-corner markets are not just spaces of subjugation and marginalization, but also political sites of struggle and resistance.

On a meso, or mid-range approach to institutional dynamics, I examined the history of the Brooklyn women's ongoing negotiations with state and non-state actors who seek to address their social, structural, and sexual vulnerabilities. I turned to the case study of San Francisco, where migrant women entered the day labor industry through their engagement in a domestic worker collective, the feminist wing of a day labor program that was originally designed to assist male day laborers in the area. As a comparative case study, I was interested in examining how women's organizing efforts in day labor unfold, and why formal organizing emerges as a palliative to the challenges women confront when trying to make a living through day labor markets. I showed that the worker mobilization and organizing strategies the SFDLP-WC utilized in an effort to incorporate women in this male-dominated industry end up reproducing gender, race and class inequalities.

Unlike their male counterparts, Latina migrant women at the WC were not afforded a right to privacy as storytelling, self-disclosure, and "learning to speak" was perceived as part and parcel of their empowerment and leadership development. These women's private lives, as a result of their immigrant and racialized status, were subject not only to external scrutiny and judgment but also a series of interventions as they were perceived as being

“broken” or traumatized. The class dimension is important here too as these women’s participation hinged on their need to accrue points in order to secure work through the WC. Those who did not have the time, support, or resources to attend the various WC events could not secure work through the organization as their participation was viewed as deficient. For more precarious women then, participating in the WC was not an investment they could afford to make.

In addition, I examined the different ways by which women are incorporated into the organization and compelled to become active members of broader immigrant and labor organizing movements. Through the day to day operations of the center, I show that women are positioned as ideal (moral and economic) subjects for targeted intervention and come to represent the best hope for a revitalized labor movement. Women, unlike their male counterparts, are called upon to “work on themselves”—on their self-esteem, professional development, and leadership skills— shifting the responsibility for managing social risks such as unemployment, poverty, and “illegality” on individual migrant women.

While research on worker centers is scant, researchers and policy makers suggest that these organizations have the potential to significantly transform the day labor market, particularly with respect to the economic outcomes experienced by day laborers. Recent studies found, for instance, that worker centers provide day laborers a modest hourly wage premium (\$0.17, \$10.55 compared to \$10.38) relative to street corner markets, but workers still manage to secure more work on the street. My study supports these findings. At most, women at the SFDLP-WC secured 3 jobs per month from *la colectiva*. Since jobs are tied to active participation, women needed to attend as many events as possible (e.g., rallies, protests, legislative visits) in order to accumulate points to secure a top spot on the point list, which would increase their chances of getting work on any given week. (Women on the Brooklyn corner, on the other hand, secured three to four jobs per week.)

At a macro or structural level, I illustrate how day labor markets have become an especially fertile ground for the enactment of innovative labor organizing strategies, as well as the development of new state governing capacities and institutions. That is, together with the expansion of state apparatuses for border control, immigration regulation and migrant policing, we also see the development of internal governing schemes including migrant-oriented training programs and worker centers. I contend that the “responsibilization” (Foucault 1991 [1978]) of migrant women that worker centers promote can be understood in the broader context of the restructuring of capitalism and the criminalization of poverty, which makes men disproportionately the targets of more coercive strategies of containment such as detention and deportation. Thus the way worker centers are made to manage day labor populations can be understood as what Sabine Hess (2010) has called the new “soft modes” of migrant/migration governance since they are part of the development of new state governing capacities, institutions, and practices designed to monitor migrant populations.

This dissertation, by centering Latina migrant women’s experiences in the Brooklyn street-corner market and the San Francisco worker center, challenges the notion that day labor is a form of procuring labor that is reserved for Latino migrant men. Although women have a long trajectory in day wage labor markets, they have been largely overlooked in the literature on day labor, much of which deals with demographic and epidemiological considerations of the workforce. This omission can be attributed, in part, to inconsistent definitions of day labor. One of most commonly used definitions is that proposed by Valenzuela, as “the practice of searching for work in open-air, informal markets such as street corners or in formal temp agencies” (2003:307). Given that day labor studies have largely focused on informal open-air markets where Latino migrant men are

most visible and employed in male-dominated industries like construction and landscaping (Valenzuela 1999), women are largely ignored. Women, however, working in domestic industries like housecleaning and care work are also “day laborers” in that they typically contract for a few hours and experience the contingency and insecurity that is characteristic of the day labor employment arrangement. Moreover, women have and do solicit temporary employment in public settings such as street-corners and worker centers, and thus can hardly be referred to as the “new” face of day labor (Gorman 2007). Still, much of the literature on day labor, in framing day wage labor markets as male-dominated “islands of despotism” (Peck 2012), suggests that these spaces are somehow unsafe or inhospitable to women.

My findings, therefore, illustrate that women who participate in day labor markets do so in institutional environments that are purported to be safe, in the case of Brooklyn, procuring work for the Hasidim, and in San Francisco, in the context of a domestic worker collective. Moreover, I find that although day labor is typically portrayed as a form of employment that is reserved for precarious worker—i.e., the newly migrated, unemployed, or undocumented—the idea being that nobody actually *chooses* to day labor (Gonzalez 2015, 2007), particularly when it involves soliciting on the street, day labor can represent a more appealing income-generating option for some women given the limited employment options that are available to them. That is, for some, day labor can also represent a more meaningful and advantageous option compared to other forms of low-wage, low-status work, partly because it often affords them greater control—whether perceived or real—over the conditions of their work. Day labor provided women in *La Parada* with a greater sense of autonomy in their work experience, which was manifested in their ability to negotiate better pay and a flexible schedule of hours, provisions they rarely enjoyed when working in traditional low-wage jobs in the general economy. To be clear, to say that day

labor can represent a better alternative for some women does not mean that the jobs they procure through this market are particularly “good” or that the industry is somehow benign and wonderful, but rather, that their options for employment are extremely constrained. As Shah (2014) argues, street-corner markets ultimately serve as a barometer for city’s ability to absorb “unskilled” workers into its paid workforce.

Moreover, my findings suggest that given how these sites are often portrayed as “chaotic” and unsafe (Gonzalez 2015), the “underbelly” of day labor markets, and its inhabitants repeatedly “illegalized” and targeted, scholars and activists often approach these spaces with the drive to elicit sympathy (Small 2016) for these marginalized populations. I draw on Small's discussion of the sympathetic observer and the drive to elicit sympathy for marginalized populations. This commitment to sympathy, Small argues, often yields overly simplistic representations of those we set out to study, ultimately flattening out the heterogeneity of their social world and personal circumstances. Activists, community organizers, and scholars who set out to document and visibilize the abusive and exploitative practices inflicted upon migrant day laborers, often turn to politically expedient solutions to address the range of social problems afflicting this group of workers, from police and community harassment to sexual violence. This commitment to sympathy inevitably justifies taking mental shortcuts to magnify those elements that are most likely to evoke pity, sorrow, and outrage, while leaving out details that may complicate these views.

The SFDLP-WC is a good example of such political and scholarly shortcuts. Worker centers, as community-based organizations, are positioned as a “counter space” that functions as a buffer from U.S. (white) mainstream society in the context of growing criminalization of immigrants, xenophobia, and mass deportations. It is a seemingly autonomous organizational space that strives to create a non-hierarchical environment that

is free from domination or authority. They can be said to represent, at least in theory, a “homeplace” (bell hooks 1990), sites that are positioned to provide an important space of solidarity and resistance for migrant day laborers and domestic workers. As bell hooks notes, in reference to African Americans, a “homeplace” is “a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination” (1990:42). They are also spaces for organizing and forming political solidarity in black liberatory struggles.

The SFDLP-WC, however, was hardly a “home away from home” for Latina migrant women. Although clearly not a “total institution” such as a correctional facility or prison, a gendered organizational logic structured women’s incorporation and participation in the WC, one that focused on women’s ability to cultivate their social and economic empowerment, self-esteem, and ultimately, leadership skills. Not only did the WC psychologize women’s problems, but also used confrontational tactics to compel women to self-disclose and reveal intimate and painful details of their lives. Emotional confessions were a key component of this governmental strategy (Foucault 1978) as women were expected to divulge their personal narratives and feelings during these group meetings in an effort to find the underlying causes of their “traumas.” Ultimately, despite well-meaning organizers and staff, and their imperative to “help” Latina/o day laboring populations, the SFDLP-WC often ended up silencing the very women they claimed to want to serve and protect.

In sum, my dissertation finds that there are two distinct modalities of neoliberal subjectivity emerging from these organizational sites: the first, which corresponds to the Brooklyn corner, is that of a market driven, entrepreneurial subject (e.g., cowboy neoliberalism), and the second, that of a moral citizen/subject, that emphasizes the importance of a political subjectivity resulting out of the belief that democracy works only

if everyone participates. I argue that the material needs of the women at the SFDLP-WC, for instance, are overlooked and their participation becomes highly punitive. The question that the dissertation ends with is then: why is the Brooklyn street-corner market, an organizational type that is generally understood as deeply harmful to workers, more empowering? Why is the worker center, a model that emerged in an effort to improve the working conditions and collective power of migrant workers, more punitive and oppressive?

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