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PUSHING BACK: WOMEN-LED GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM IN NEW YORK
CITY'S TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, 1986-2011

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pushing Back: Women-led Grassroots Activism in New York City's Transnational
Communities of Color, 1986-2011

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Professor Nancy A. Hewitt

“Pushing Back” analyzes women-led activism of transnational communities of color through an examination of social justice campaigns around domestic work, housing, and environmental policies and practices. Through a case study of New York City from the 1980s to the present (2011), the dissertation argues that one key to progressive women’s successful organizing efforts is their ability to draw upon a range of political stances and to cross traditional identity-based boundaries. This study addresses three central questions: Which issues do organizations representing transnational communities of color identify as key to their communities and how do they frame them? What forms of advocacy do they wield and what do such approaches look like in practice? and How do they negotiate internal diversity (gender, race/nationality, class, etc.) and engage the broader community, particularly as women-led groups? The study focuses on two grassroots organizations, the pan-Asian/American CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities and the South Bronx’s largely Puerto Rican and Black Mothers on the Move/Madres en Movimiento. A complex picture of activism is produced

through original archival research in previously unprocessed papers at each organization, oral history interviews, participant-observation, and the evaluation of relevant governmental and media sources.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract of Dissertation		ii
Acknowledgments		iv
Table of Contents		viii
List of Illustrations		ix
Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Changing the Rules: Organizing for Women Workers' Rights	21
Chapter 2	We have a Right to the City: Housing Activism across Communities	64
Chapter 3	Di Algo/Say Something: Fighting Environmental Racism in the South Bronx	105
Chapter 4	Building Bridges, Breaking Divides: Engaging New York	143
Epilogue		178
Bibliography		219

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1	MOM's Parker and CAAAV's Zhu Lead Housing Rally	1
2	MOM Youth at CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union Protest	1
3	CAAAV Logo	13
4	Remembering Vincent Chin Rally Flier	14
5	MOM Logo	16
6	De Leon Conducting Outreach	21
7	Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights March	27
8	Domestic Workers' Rights Rally Outside Philippine Consulate	27
9	May Day Immigrant Rights March	61
10	Parker Speaking at the RTTC Vacant Condos Rally	64
11	MOM Members Marching During Vacant Condo Tour	66
12	Special Rapporteur Rolnick at Townhall Meeting	71
13	CAAAV's Zheng and Lin with Special Rapporteur Rolnick	73
14	Returning Tenants and Allies Examine 81 Bowery Rooms	75
15	Ethnic Population Density of New York City	78
16	Chinatown Community Struggle Exhibition	85
17	Confucius Plaza Apartments Tee-shirt	85
18	Canal Triangle Vendors Tee-Shirt	86
19	CTU Tee-shirt	91
20	Evicted Tee-shirt	93
21	127 Madison Tenants Protest Landlord Harassment	96

22	Strachan Door-knocking at Betances Complex	98
23	Betances Complex Stairwell Steps	99
24	MOM's Rivera, Glover, and Salaman at Green Housing Event	101
25	MOM Activists with DEP Commissioner Lloyd	105
26	NRDC Lawsuit Plaintiffs, NYOFCo and City Waste Plant Locations	107
27	EJ Celebration at MOM's Office	109
28	Truck Routes and Waste Transfer Stations in the South Bronx	119
29	MOM Protesters outside NYOFCo	135
30	MOM's Strachan with Cochabamba participants	139
31	Exit Cuckoo DWU Benefit Flier	143
32	Dancing the Domestic Slide in Albany	149
33	Working Theater <i>Exit Cuckoo</i> Promotional Image	150
34	Publicity Image for <i>Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani</i>	152
35	<i>Diwang Pinay</i> Flier	153
36	Maria with her Angry Employer	155
37	"Papa Pascual" with Promotes Phone Cards for Migrants	156
38	JFREJ <i>28 Condos Later</i> Promotional Postcard	158
39	"Who Cleans Your House?" Image	160
40	Helena Wong Presenting OUR Waterfront Campaign	164
41	"Neighborhood Context" Map from A People's Plan Report	165
42	O.U.R. Waterfront Posters	166
43	ILGWU Pins & Needles Performance	173
44	<i>Pins & Needles</i> Cast Sings "Landlord"	174

Introduction



MOM's Parker and CAAAV's Zhu Lead Housing Rally ¹



MOM Youth at CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union Protest ²

Pushed to the edge of the world
 there she made her home on the edge
 of towns, of neighborhoods, blocks, houses,
 Always pushed toward the other side.
 In all lands alien, nowhere citizen.
 Away, she went away
 but each place she went
 pushed her to the other side, al otro lado

“Del otro lado,” Gloria Anzaldúa³

For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have to learn this first and most vital lesson - that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings... And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength.

“The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” Audre Lorde⁴

“Pushing Back” centers activist efforts to challenge inequalities that arise from their communities’ existence on the margins of political and economic power. During the period under examination (1986-2011), New York transnational communities of color have faced a series of issues, some longstanding and others reflecting recent shifts in local, national and global political economies. In this study, I document and analyze the ways women and their allies identified and responded to concerns around domestic labor, housing, and environmental policies and practices. These issues highlight commonalities across communities as well as the particular forms that inequalities take in specific neighborhoods such as Manhattan’s Chinatown or the South Bronx. In all three issues - domestic workers’ rights, housing activism, and environmental justice - gender is significant as women make up the majority of activists and they and their children are the most severely impacted by these inequalities. Taken together, these areas offer an opportunity to also consider the ways that

organizing is both shaped by the issue being addressed and the political economy within which activism takes place. My analysis thus centers questions of identity and community, while suggesting the different outcomes and shifts in approach that are apparent in each campaign.

This study addresses three major questions: Which issues do organizations representing transnational communities of color identify as key to their communities and how do they frame them? What forms of advocacy do they wield and what do such approaches look like in practice? and How do they negotiate internal diversity (gender, race, class, etc.) and engage the broader community, particularly as women-led groups? The campaigns activists have devised provide valuable information about current issues; their potential to offer positive alternatives for their communities; and their capacity to engage a range of actors within and outside their communities, particularly as women-led groups. These research questions developed out of an interest in presenting an analysis of immigrant women and women of color-led community organizations and their members as knowledge producers. Chandra Mohanty's call for "reading up the ladder of privilege" served as inspiration, as such a practice rejects a focus on studying marginalized groups only to produce knowledge for academic purposes but rather to foreground their active knowledge and participation.⁵

Case studies of two New York-based organizations: CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities (CAAAV) [pronounced "Cav" like the shortened name for the Cleveland Cavaliers], a pan-Asian/American organization with offices in Manhattan's Chinatown and the Bronx's Fordham section; and Mothers on the

Move/Madres en Movimiento (MOM), active primarily in the Longwood, Hunts Point, and Mott Haven neighborhoods in the South Bronx anchor the study.⁶

While CAAAV has been more overtly recognized as feminist, both organizations demonstrate an approach to activism that entails values and practices that I read as “feminist.” This reading emerges from the perspectives offered by bell hooks and others, who consider all “movements to end sexist oppression,” as feminist.⁷ Thus, this study presents a consideration of feminist praxis as it is enacted through in the pursuit of domestic workers’ rights, housing activism, and environmental justice.

Their work fits with Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar’s working definition of transnational feminisms as an

intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that can: (a) attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capitalist patriarchies, and the multiple ways in which they (re)structure colonial and neocolonial relations of domination and subordination; (b) grapple with the complex and contradictory ways in which these processes both inform and are shaped by a range of subjectivities and understandings of individual and collective agency; and (c) interweave critiques, actions, and self-reflexivity so as to resist a priori predictions of what might constitute feminist politics in a given place and time.⁸

This study’s location in New York is tied to this definition, particularly as many community members negotiate overtly transnational concerns such as being Puerto Rican or Filipina/o migrants whose homelands continue to have historic and contemporary colonial and neocolonial relationships with the US. In addition, these activists make connections between the issues in their local communities and those across the world and participate in broader social

movements. In general, my analysis emphasizes “transnationalism,” although terms such as “global” are also used where they seem more appropriate.

In their introduction to *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performances*, Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus note that “community” is an oft-contested term.⁹ For the authors included in their collection, some

work with conceptions of community that center around unifying social locations or cultural roots; other definitions hinge more on shared interests or common points of resistance. Some of the communities they describe are decades or centuries old; some are temporary, disbanding after a single event. **Establishing an ethical link (whether based on shared identity or on differences)** seems to be a common thread connecting these various efforts” (emphasis mine).¹⁰

Taken together with Benedict Anderson’s observations about nations as imagined political communities – that they are “*imagined*” because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹¹ I consider the communities in this study as primarily bound together by ethical links. Activists strive to address issues that they either experience directly or see as negatively impacting those they hold to be members of their community. While aware of the numerous critiques of community, this study nonetheless utilizes the concept around which activists organize. It also serves as useful shorthand for discussing issues such as environmental racism that disproportionately impact groups such as Latina/os and Blacks in dramatic ways (e.g. asthma rates or concentration of sources of pollution in areas with majority people of color residents).¹² The complicated,

even negative dynamics that exist in community organizations is not the primary focus of this study, and are considered mainly in reference to how organizing work is done. That is the study is less focused on interpersonal workplace relations and more on connections with community members and others activist organizations.

Chela Sandoval offers a critical theoretical perspective for analyzing the work of these organizations. Her concept of oppositional differential consciousness illuminates both how activists of color carry out their work and how they engage identities and difference. She draws from Donna Haraway's proposition of "situated knowledges" which "require[s] that what is an 'object of knowledge' also be 'pictured as an actor and agent.'" ¹³ Sandoval delineates differential consciousness as the movement women of color make "between and among" four feminist oppositional ideological approaches: equal rights/liberal, separatist, supremacist, and revolutionary. These approaches are schematized as "'women are the same as men' or liberal; 'women are different from men' or separatist; 'women are superior' or supremacist; and the fourth Marxist feminist catchall category, 'women are a racially divided class.'" ¹⁴ Rather than subscribing to one of these formulations, women of color move across these stances reflecting their "common understanding of the limited relevance of [such] strategies to addressing the complex realities of their own lives." ¹⁵ This political approach entails an engagement of the "simultaneous existence of contradictory and complementary positions," according to Anna Sampaio. ¹⁶ Activists in MOM and CAAAV, by virtue of taking this approach, are able to effectively deploy

identity-based politics to create alliances rather than fuel divisions within their movements. Shifting among stances enables community-based groups to produce analyses that emphasize their communities' needs as both particular and as products of larger political, economic, and social forces taking place at various levels. As a result, such organizations are able to work across transnational borders and social identities to pursue contemporary social justice agendas.

Yet, while emphasizing the marginalization of the communities under study, I am hesitant to oversimplify by identifying community members as “subalterns” since the organizations analyzed here and their broader constituencies are very heterogeneous in terms of class, formal educational attainment and other categories. Even as Mohanty and other subaltern studies scholars inform this project, it is imperative to heed Eva Cherniavsky’s caution that for academics: “[T]he subaltern is inevitably a terrain of representational maneuver in the production of elite knowledge, and that we forget at our peril to mark, however imperfectly, the place of our own desires.”¹⁷ This project seeks to respond to this concern by emphasizing community-based knowledge production and reading activism as inherently about mediated representations that are aimed at obtaining political, social and economic goals. The conscious desire at the core of my analysis is to read such knowledge production and representational practices in and of themselves, as well as in conjunction and at times in conflict with dominate or mainstream representations.

Furthermore, as Roderick Ferguson argues:

If racialization has been the ‘site of contradiction between the promise of political emancipation and the conditions of economic exploitation,’ then much of that contradiction has pivoted on the racialization of working populations as deviant in terms of gender and sexuality... As surplus labor becomes the impetus for anxieties about the sanctity of “community,” “family,” and “nation,” it reveals the ways in which these categories are normalized in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and class.¹⁸

Transnational communities of color are often stigmatized through the deployment of figures that are considered racially and sexually deviant, such as “single mothers.” Examining activism by women in these communities provides a chance to see how they negotiate the terrain where such stigmas are used to marginalize or silence community-based perspectives. This is particularly intriguing when organizations reject a reliance on the politics of respectability. Moreover, it is crucial to note that the subjects of this study are engaged as powerful political actors with respected knowledge, as much as they may personally or collectively struggle with oppression’s many faces.¹⁹

This project derives its title from Gloria Anzaldúa’s poem “Del Otro Lado,” as her words speak to the seemingly never-ending and isolating features of oppression. However, rather than accepting the social norms that maintain their communities’ marginalization or the efforts to push New Yorkers of color out of the city, the activists studied here push back. Their use of identities – gender, race, national, class, neighborhood – to mobilize local transnational networks is central to understanding both the issues activists advocate and the tactics and strategies they employ. As Cheryl Clarke proposes

...we [must] continue to understand the danger of naming, of visibility and go there anyway, and to lay claim to those layers of identities— what my old friend, black bisexual, Elias Farajate-Jones calls “strategies — the ways we get our work done.”²⁰

This study explores the continued relevance of identity to how activists get their work done. It thus responds to Audre Lorde's call in "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action":

What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you... I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself – a Black woman warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours?²¹

MOM and CAAAV have created spaces within which women (and some men) of color have found ways to amplify their voices, learning tactics needed to advocate for themselves and others, and responding to challenges to the survival of their communities. This study highlights the continued salience of identity to such organizing efforts. As Iris Marion Young observed in the late 1990s, despite assumptions that group boundaries have "hardened" as an outgrowth of identity politics, "group-specific political tendencies draw less rigid boundaries around themselves than they did twenty or thirty years ago and they recognize a wider range of internal differences."²² Young in an interview clarified her views about identity politics, which inform this study.

[W]hen I talk about women as a social group... I'm saying: It's not an identity...if you think of it structurally, then it's not about the attributes that a person has, as such. It's about the positioning of individuals within relationships. And that's how I think about women as a category and women as a group.²³

Where I disagree with Young is that, in some cases, like environmental racism in the South Bronx, the structural bases of identity are critical. A whole area is exposed to pollution and evidence suggests that identity shapes both how the

area was chosen to bear high environmental burdens and how policymakers and media outlets view the community. Still, the flexibility that Young references enables groups to utilize identity-based politics in their local work, while they connect with diverse allies and broader transnational movements.

Women's leadership roles in transnational communities of color, particularly in mixed gender contexts, have yet to be deeply explored by scholars of women's studies or migration studies. Reaching across New York's ethnic communities, my dissertation augments our understandings of the significance of class, race, and nation, as well as gender, to women's community organizing and leadership development. By centering the overlooked contributions of immigrant women and women of color, this study expands notions of leadership and community organization. In addition, it deepens analyses of the intersections of gender with race, nation, and class by comparing communities whose significant internal differences are frequently ignored in mainstream discussions of "Black," "Latina/o" or "Asian" communities.

Contributing new data and insights to the fields of immigrant and migration studies through an engagement with ethnic heterogeneity in New York City, this dissertation also makes connections across issues such as worker's rights and environmental justice. Additionally, "Pushing Back" expands on recent studies that document the ways that people of color and working-class people in the U.S. are disproportionately disadvantaged by educational inequities, incarceration, environmental racism and inadequate health care.²⁴ It does so by exploring the particular experiences, analyses, and work of immigrants of color to address

these concerns. The focus on contemporary history (1980s to current) highlights a period of increased immigrant advocacy and heightened leadership by women as immigrant communities face intensified efforts at disenfranchisement, criminalization, and surveillance by local, state and federal governments.

My research has also developed in conversation with feminist historical scholarship on women's community activism as well as discussions of feminist practice, identity and difference, particularly in relation to the development of political alliances.²⁵ Anzaldúa argues that identifications are never homogeneous or simple, that subjects reference identity for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, the need to re-claim or create alternative definitions of categories or to struggle against attempts to eradicate, depoliticize, or assimilate non-normative subjects and their communities. Historians have explored particular moments and movements where her claims are tested on the ground. These studies also highlight the process by which alliances across differences are forged among women activists. Nancy Hewitt's study of Tampa, Annelise Orleck's work on welfare rights organizing in Las Vegas, and Jennifer Guglielmo's study of Italian immigrant women in New York, are part of a growing body of work that demonstrates how women have negotiated these concerns across period and region.²⁶ Here, too, theories of difference and the process of forging alliances are examined through an in-depth analysis of female activists in immigrant communities of color in New York City. In doing so, I seek to illuminate the contexts in and means by which one's community offers the potential for survival and struggle under a system rife with injustice.

Methodology

My project relies on four principal experiential and written methods: original archival research and construction at each organization, oral history interviews, participant-observation, and the evaluation of relevant materials from governmental and media sources. This combination of methods evolved organically over the process of research as I sought to render my research multi-dimensional in order to address the gaps that any one method creates. For example, organizational documents may suggest inaccurate conclusions when not considered in tandem with information gained through interviews, informal conversations on-site, and media sources. When I encountered each organization, the materials documenting their activities were not coherently organized, and I sorted unprocessed collections of minutes, pamphlets, correspondence and other materials in order to develop a more accessible archive and clear timeline. This provided me with a fuller sense of women's leadership in each organization, along with specific information about community issues and actions. Creating archives also helped me learn more about the processes behind the decisions of MOM and CAAAV to act and how to act around issues such as street safety and Asian immigrant women workers' health. Additionally, meeting agendas, notes, photographs, reports, and youth training curriculum enabled me to understand further what is at stake for the communities in which CAAAV and MOM organize.

Oral history interviews supplement and deepen this history through personal narratives, and provide interview subjects with the opportunity to reflect

on their lives and work. Interviews document the range of activist trajectories at each organization as well as how each woman understands and experiences her efforts. Participant-observation as a volunteer allowed me to learn more about the work and networks within each group. Whether it was helping with protest security or doing outreach and support for organizational events, this work along with my interviews allowed me to develop relationships, experience specific group practices, and gain an understanding of the benefits and challenges faced by each group.²⁷ Finally, studying governmental and media materials enabled me to develop a sense of how the communities and organizations I study are represented, and to analyze the disjuncture between community self-assessment and perceptions of community issues and solutions by policy makers and journalists. Through this combination of methods and sources, a fuller picture of women's leadership in transnational communities of color emerged as well as a clearer sense of the variety of issues residents and organizers face in their everyday lives.

Organizational Overviews

CAAAV and MOM are both small, women-led grassroots community organizations that are allied in a number of progressive coalitions at local, national and global levels. Thus, although they have developed distinct styles, strategies and tactics, the two groups also interact on a variety of fronts.

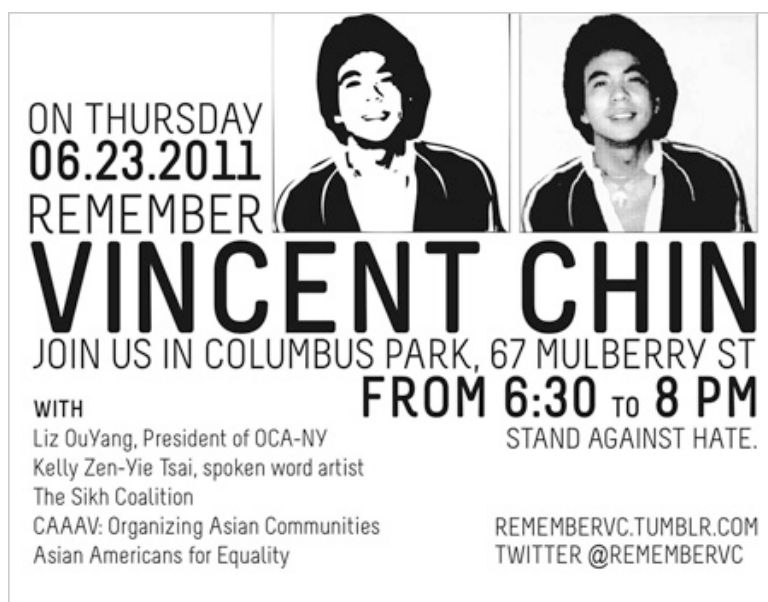


CAAAV Logo²⁸

New York Asian/American women founded CAAAV in 1986, as the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence. CAAAV's founding came out of national concerns about anti-Asian violence, such as the beating death of Chinese American Vincent Chin in Detroit in 1983.²⁹ Emil Guillermo's reflections on the twenty-ninth anniversary of Chin's death emphasize the extreme injustice of the case.³⁰ He reminds readers that the murderers,

Ebens and Nitz were allowed to plea bargain in a Michigan court to escape mandatory jail time for second degree murder. Ebens pleaded guilty; Nitz pleaded nolo contendere. Both men got this sentence: three years' probation, a \$3,000 fine, and \$780 in court costs.³¹

On June 23, 2011, CAAAV and other Asian/American organizations remembered



Vincent Chin by staging a rally in Chinatown's Columbus Park.³²

Remembering Vincent Chin Rally Flier³³

The event recalled what had galvanized groups like CAAAV and asserted the continued need to address police brutality. CAAAV board members Christine

Peng and Scott Lu reflected on this history and called for the community not only to respond to individual acts of violence, but also to contest xenophobia and other biases that are used to divide working class communities.

Over the past twenty-five years, CAAAV developed into a pan-Asian/American and mixed gender organization, working to fight anti-Asian/American violence, including over 250 cases of police brutality.³⁴ CAAAV has participated in many actions around such killings including the 1995 shooting death of Chinese/American youth Yong Xin Huang by police in Chinatown, a case that according to Tomio Geron, was “what some consider to be the highest profile case of anti-Asian violence since Vincent Chin.”³⁵ CAAAV supported his family’s and the community’s efforts to pressure the district attorney to prosecute the killer.³⁶ The group also helped organize the mass protests following the killings of Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, and others, and the acquittal of the accused police officers.³⁷ CAAAV remains an active member of the People’s Justice Coalition that seeks to “win community control and police accountability” in response to continuing incidents of police brutality in New York.³⁸

In the mid 1990s, CAAAV broadened its work and developed community-based organizing projects such as the Lease Drivers’ Coalition that organized primarily South Asian taxi drivers, the South East Asian Youth Leadership Project, Women Workers’ Project, and the Chinatown Justice Project. CAAAV re-imagined its aim as combating “institutional violence that affects immigrant, poor and working-class communities such as worker exploitation, concentrated urban poverty, police brutality, Immigration Naturalization Service detention and

deportation, and criminalization of youth and workers.”³⁹ The organization thus expanded its relationship to feminist, Asian/American and people of color-focused movements and “address[ed] neoliberal globalization” in its myriad forms.⁴⁰



MOM Logo⁴¹

MOM was founded in 1992 in response to educational inequalities between schools in the South Bronx and others in the same district.⁴² It grew out of an adult education program at Bronx Educational Services, in which former community organizer Barbara Gross’ adult students were shocked by the math and reading scores of their children’s schools.⁴³ With the support of founding directors Gross and community organizer Mili Bonilla, the parents decided to make changes in their children’s education and formed the Parent Organizing and Education Project which became MOM. Over five years, MOM successfully demanded changes in the school administration, an equitable distribution of resources, and an end to school board election fraud.⁴⁴ In 1996, MOM decided to expand its mission beyond educational activism to include “tenant rights, environmental justice, and safe streets.”⁴⁵ Former organizer, Lisa Ortega states that, “Our issues come from the needs of the people... If someone complains

about the need for a stoplight at the corner, MOM goes out and investigates if this is indeed a community concern. That is how the campaigns come about.”⁴⁶

An emphasis on a shared identity as South Bronx residents concerned for the well being of their community, and particularly the communities’ children, serves as a foundation for MOM activists.⁴⁷ MOM bridges racial, national and class differences among its membership through its focus on issues like air pollution or housing foreclosures that are problems for the entire area.

Recently, MOM brought together some of its key organizing concerns through its work around public housing. As noted in a May 6, 2011 post by MOM,

More than two-thirds of public housing tenants responding to a survey conducted by Mothers on the Move and the Urban Justice Center earlier this year said they want jobs that would help improve housing conditions and air quality. Nearly all identified poor air quality as a factor contributing to health problems in their buildings.⁴⁸

Through such studies, MOM has demonstrated that not only is there a need to develop a holistic response to issues in the South Bronx, whether it is the lack of employment or high asthma rates, but also that residents are aware of the mix of issues and see them as connected.

Dissertation Overview

The individual chapters focus on specific campaigns as well as the overall trajectory of activism by MOM and CAAAV. Chapter 1 centers questions of visibility and recognition by tracing the development of CAAAV’s Women Workers Project. Beginning with an initial interest in organizing sex workers and nail technicians, CAAAV eventually developed successful campaigns with Filipina domestic workers and helped form the Domestic Workers United (DWU),

which recently ensured passage of a statewide Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. This history highlights how women experience the transnational aspects of domestic work and CAAAV's alliance with a range of groups to advocate for improvements in the industry. The evolution of this campaign suggests the complexities of organizing around pan-Asian/American concerns, and also presents CAAAV's ability to move effectively from a focus on immigrant Asian women to essential support for the development of the multi-racial organization, DWU. This case illustrates how identity and experience both enable and limit contemporary activism, and how developing networks is key to building a movement beyond a single organization.

Chapter 2 examines MOM and CAAAV's efforts to advocate for housing rights in a range of contexts from single resident occupancy buildings (SROs) in Manhattan's Chinatown to New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing in the South Bronx. The work of both groups is considered individually as well as jointly through their participation in the Right to the City (RTTC) alliance. They combine traditional organizing methods and direct action tactics with expert research collaborations to counter threats to affordable housing. Of particular interest is how their efforts echo previous New York housing activism though out the twentieth century, while augmenting their claims by utilizing a human rights framework. Activists' efforts to connect housing injustices in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita with New York housing issues and the recent visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing highlights how this approach works locally.

Chapter 3 links questions about quality of life in New York's communities of color addressed by housing activists, with MOM's work on environmental justice in the South Bronx. In addition to successfully shutting down an unlicensed waste processing plant in the neighborhood, MOM activists have become part of an international movement against environmental racism, participating in meetings most recently in Bolivia and Mexico, as they make connections between their struggles and those faced by communities of color across the US and globally. While the previous chapters have considered gender chiefly in terms of the leadership of these groups and the disproportionate representation of women in domestic work or public housing, this chapter also explores the meaning of gender and "motherwork" for members of MOM who are not women and/or parents. I argue that such activists fit within communal conceptions of mothering while maintaining the centrality of women's experiences and leadership to the focus and efforts of MOM.

The fifth chapter then examines strategies used by the two groups, emphasizing in particular the role that performance, alliances, community and "homemaking" have in the success of their efforts. By looking more closely into these areas, I highlight how activists are making positive connections that impact individuals as well as build support for their campaigns. Plays by domestic workers are discussed both in terms of content and as platforms to communicate the need for gains in domestic workers' rights. Alliances have been key to the use of tactics, and I look particularly at how Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) has worked with these groups to reach Jewish progressives.

MOM's ability to create a supportive space for community members, and how that sensibility informs their work with people receiving public assistance and encouraging the development of staff members is analyzed as well. Finally, CAAAV's effort to highlight community members' perspectives as the Lower East Side's waterfront is redeveloped, takes inspiration from Latin American Leftists and translates it into a form that can reach neighbors, politicians, and developers. Taken together, these areas are read in conjunction with the chapters on particular organizing campaigns, demonstrating that as Chela Sandoval theorizes, activists move across political stances to make positive change in their communities.

The epilogue offers a final reflection on the approaches CAAAV and MOM activists have taken as they seek to strengthen their communities and build coalitions. I return to Sandoval's theory, in particular her proposal of "an original, eccentric, and queer sight where the fifth, differential mode is utilized as a theoretical and methodological device."⁴⁹ Through an exploration of the multiple approaches taken up by the groups, I argue that they pursue a politic that is queer in the sense suggested by Sandoval as well as Cathy J. Cohen. By emphasizing the complexity of the work of these groups, I demonstrate that they are thoughtful and dedicated participants in continually dynamic women-lead and transnational movements for social justice.

Chapter 1

Changing the Rules: Organizing for Women Workers' Rights



De Leon Conducting Outreach¹

In the Parks

In some of New York's most affluent neighborhoods, Manhattan's Upper West and East Sides, West Village and Tribeca, and Brooklyn's Park Slope large numbers of women of color (Filipina, Afro-Caribbean, Black, Latina, Latin American and Spanish Caribbean) push strollers, and hold hands with white children as they walk through the streets and take them to play in local parks. On a warm spring day in 2008, I join CAAAV organizers Carolyn De Leon and Shaun Lin on the Upper West Side handing out fliers for Domestic Workers United (DWU) and an upcoming Women Workers Project (WWP) health fair.² We start off in the Riverside Park Hippo Playground at 91st Street and Riverside Drive.³ The playground swarms almost exclusively with young white children and

the women watching them, some sitting and chatting with their neighbors, some intervening to make sure the children are playing safely.⁴ We make our way through Central Park and come upon a grassy slope near the east side, where a group of white women in their thirties to forties sit on blankets, eating pizza, and watching their children play below them. On one side, separated a few feet from this seemingly close-knit group is a Filipina domestic worker.⁵ She is silently eating and watching the children. I see that De Leon takes care to stop only briefly and hand her a health fair flier instead of her usual practice of trying to start up a conversation in order to introduce DWU's campaign. Shortly afterwards, another Filipina domestic worker walks down the slope, sits on the opposite end of the group of white women and appears similarly quiet and distant.

In this moment the dissonance between the silent separation of the two domestic workers and the more typically animated behavior exhibited by domestic workers in the parks is striking. In these public spaces, domestic workers typically make acquaintances and friends, sitting together, talking, and interacting with the children in their care. Scholars such as Nicole Constable, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Rhacel Parreñas, and Monisha Das Gupta note the prevalence of domestic workers congregating on the job and on their days off in public areas such as parks or interacting with one another on public transportation in global cities such as New York, Hong Kong, and Los Angeles.⁶ The patterns that De Leon, Lin and I notice as we canvass the parks also affirm De Leon's own recollections of her experiences as a domestic worker in New

York City. It was in the these same parks that she had discussed with other women the issues that arise when doing domestic work in the United States. Together, they would try to find solutions to issues such as inadequate pay and time off.⁷ De Leon herself had experienced such problems when she first came to the U.S. to work as a live-in domestic worker in the New York suburbs. Her employers, whom she had first worked with in Hong Kong, violated the contract conditions they had agreed upon, and she demanded that they cover basic needs such as winter clothing.⁸ Fortunately, De Leon made contact with a Filipina domestic worker friend she had also met in Hong Kong.⁹ Her friend showed her how to use public transportation to get from the suburbs to Queens where New York City's Filipino community is heavily concentrated. By connecting with an existing network of Filipina domestic workers for support, De Leon was able to end employment that had isolated her in New York's suburbs and find a more satisfactory job in the city as a live-out nanny. She was thus able to become part of a vibrant Filipino community, and later to become a CAAAV domestic worker rights' organizer.

The difference in behavior we observe as we canvass the parks resonates with De Leon's earlier work experiences and cries out for further analysis. The silence seems to be a response to the presence of the white employers (or perhaps friends of the domestic workers' employers), a subtle, seemingly effortless form of surveillance that makes it impossible for De Leon to start a significant conversation with the two working women or enable them to talk with each other. They sit on opposite ends of the picnic blankets, with the group of

white women between them. De Leon opts to quickly hand the domestic workers fliers and we move on.¹⁰ The presence of the employers (or potential employers) coincides with an apparently related behavior that we encounter during our outreach. When De Leon, Lin or I approach domestic workers, their young charges suddenly begin to demand attention from their caretakers, quickly grabbing at them or verbally interrupting our attempts at conversation. These disruptions again destroy any opportunity to engage these women about their situations and needs, or to begin a discussion of the larger effort for domestic workers' rights occurring in New York. While this is typical of the general difficulties encountered in labor organizing, where there are often workplace barriers to discussing workers' experiences and potential interest in collective action, there is a qualitative difference within the setting and dynamics of domestic work. As the white women sit, chatting, they are enjoying a sunny day in the park with their children, while simultaneously overseeing the labor of other women. Such a scenario affirms the continued significance of "spatial deference" and employers' forgetting about the presence of domestic workers.¹¹

The WWP challenged labor exploitation as employers continued to rely on gender, racial, and national divisions of labor in order to exploit workers. WWP developed from a general concern about the exploitation of Asian immigrant women in New York service industries to a focused domestic worker-organizing project and from an Asian/American-centered to a multi-racial movement vis-à-vis Domestic Works United (DWU). As DWU emerged, pursuing legislative, movement, and community-oriented goals, there were continuities as well as

shifts in the strategies they inherited from the WWP. Yet both CAAAV's WWP and DWU serve as models of an organizing approach based on differential consciousness. They utilized a range of approaches and stances to promote their workers' rights agenda from 1995 to 2011. CAAAV and its allies effectively wielded a variety of techniques including: histories and contemporary understandings of enslavement; claims for liberal citizenship and rights; links to transnational movements of women, labor, and human rights-based mobilizations. These overlapping fields form the platform from which organizers and volunteer members were able to promote the recognition and protection of domestic workers rights within New York City, and from which they continue to make progress at state, federal and international levels.

At the same time, given Inderpal Grewal's call for a "focus on new assemblages of power to examine the impact of the market on the identities produced by new social movements," it is critical to consider the ways in which Asian/American workers' social identities are produced, contested and erased in the organizing efforts examined here.¹² In "Navigating Multiple Modernities," Genzo Yamamoto and Daniel Kim argue that "[i]mmigrants potentially bring... an ability not just to critically appreciate two cultures but also a variety of contexts... that frame the existences of people...[they] bring visions that engage commonly accepted understandings with American society – perhaps to critique, perhaps to learn from, but ultimately through such engagements to enrich."¹³ Through the work of CAAAV's WWP and DWU, Filipina and other immigrant domestic

workers collaborated with allies to question and successfully challenge their exclusion from labor laws.

Taking on Public Space

In her study of domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles, Parreñas states that Filipina domestic workers do not find an “adequate escape from the sense of placelessness that they encounter in the workplace.”¹⁴ Parreñas acknowledges that women do find each other in parks and on buses, and these are places that help them “forge a consciousness of a collective struggle from their shared experience of marginality...[and] this is where they establish standards of wages and evaluate the fairness of their working conditions.”

Nonetheless, she argues, “we should, however, note that these encounters occur fleetingly and not in permanent spaces they can call their own.” While she appropriately cautions us against romanticizing notions of a cohesive Filipina/o migrant community and the spaces in which workers encounter each other, in New York these spaces hold potential to build longer-lasting relationships and serve as a crucial component to the development of a domestic workers’ rights movement. Moreover, in these places, workers forge intraethnic ties, and the WWP/DWU have developed cross-race, class, and national solidarities.

Domestic workers and their allies have overtly made claims to public spaces through marches and protests. For example, a brief vigil during the “We Built This State” march by domestic workers at the African Burial Grounds (see image below) enabled participants to connect the struggles of domestic workers’ today with the experiences of free and enslaved Africans in New Amsterdam/New York

City in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁵



Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights March¹⁶

Similarly, in order to confront abusive employers, DWU and allied organizations have organized rallies in front of institutions such as the Philippine Consulate General (see below).



Domestic Workers' Rights Rally Outside of Philippine Consulate¹⁷

By reclaiming public spaces through marches and protests, public performances of domestic work-themed theater, as well as park outreach and lobbying efforts,

activists temper notions of domestic work as a wholly private issue.

Although laborers claims on public space are often fleeting, they stand in defiance of an ever-shrinking sense of “the commons” in cities.¹⁸ In New York, domestic workers do claim such spaces as their own and utilize them to confront the injustices they experience. Reflecting a broader move within feminist scholarship to complicate notions of agency, resistance, exploitation, and domination, Nicole Constable and other prominent scholars have argued that workers and other actors are both resistant to and complicit with forms of domination.¹⁹ Such domination ranges from the sexist and racist underpinnings of formal labor to everyday interactions on the job between employers and employees, amongst domestic workers themselves, and with children in their care. Thus it is in New York City’s parks that both the potential and the limits of domestic organizing are on display.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free
- Audre Lorde “Who Said It Was Simple”²⁰

Audre Lorde’s poem provides guidance for feminist analysis, though it focuses on the employers rather than the workers. Her lines evoke the continued gulf between feminists with class privilege and women working in industries such as domestic work. The political leanings of the women sitting in Central Park are of course unknown, however the comfort with which they participate in a form of labor discipline echoes the ease that the feminists of Lorde’s poem feel as they commiserate over difficulties with the women in their employ.²¹ As Parreñas

argues such labor relations demonstrate that “women do not subvert but instead pass on their reproductive labor responsibilities to women with less privilege.”²²

Without a doubt, working-class Asian/American immigrant women have often been cast as “problematic” in the American imaginary beginning with the Page Act of 1875.²³ Indeed, the Page Act in conjunction with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first federal immigration laws in the U.S., singled out for exclusion women perceived to be “Asian prostitutes,” and introduced class as a key determinate of one’s ability to immigrate. Though wives of Chinese merchants were deemed worthy of legal entry through a heterosexist family reunification policy, the wives of Chinese laborers were denied the right to join their husbands.²⁴ This history resonates with the experiences of working-class Asian/American immigrant women in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

As noted by Lisa Lowe, these workers, like other women of color, continue to be located “at an intersection where the contradictions of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism converge” and thus produce “a subject that cannot be determined along a single axis of power or by a single apparatus, on the one hand, or contained within a single narrative of oppositional formation on the other.”²⁵ Thus working-class Asian/American immigrant women’s experiences past and present cannot be understood via one mode of analysis, much less can progressive engagements of their exploitation rely on oversimplified political models. The contradictions that Lowe identifies most clearly manifest themselves in “lived social relations, [as] it is apparent that labor is gendered,

sexuality is racialized, and race is class-associated.”²⁶ The complex convergences of sexism, racism, patriarchy, and capitalism demand a range of organizing approaches from CAAAV and other progressive organizations that seek to reach women working in domestic service as well as the sex and nail industries.

CAAAV became interested in organizing around Asian/American immigrant women’s labor in New York City after ten years of focusing on anti-Asian violence. Members and staff consciously wanted to address the effects of racism and classism through grassroots organizing in these communities.²⁷ In late 1996, CAAAV identified criteria for the development of new program areas, including:

- working with “a constituency criminalized by the state...;”
- promoting “an anti-state violence” position;
- having “an anti-racist agenda with an understanding that racism is gendered;”
- organizing “working-class immigrant Asian communities towards self-determination;” and
- facilitating “the establishment of indigenous leadership.”²⁸

The criteria clearly staked out an interest in carrying out community organizing that continued to foreground the salience of identities and the power of state-based violence, while considering more deeply how to empower Asian/American communities in day-to-day life in New York. “Understanding that racism is gendered” underscores CAAAV’s continued stance as a mixed-gender Asian/American organization that refused to center racial identity in a manner that would marginalize or erase other identities.

As former volunteer, then staff member and ultimately executive director, Jane Sung E. Bai recollects, the shift was an overt effort to move into “thinking more long term from moving project to project, campaign to campaign, to building community power.”²⁹ In this sense CAAAV represents a broader progressive grassroots effort to develop a vision that balances local organizing with participating in regional and national movements. CAAAV had been a visible participant in these movements since its inception, but now sought a broader role.³⁰ The idea of creating a project that would look specifically at Asian immigrant women was part of this process.³¹ CAAAV’s Bai and Alexandra Hye were studying sex work in their graduate program at Columbia University and became aware of the Rainbow Center, a Christian faith-based organization that works with Korean women, primarily former wives of American GIs.³² The Center’s work is focused mainly on women who are survivors of “domestic violence, substance abuse, prostitution and mental illness.”³³ Bai and Hye recognized that this was a constituency that was not being organized, and for members like Bai, the concerns of sex workers were connected to larger struggles to address violence against women. CAAAV sought to engage Korean sex workers around their labor in and of itself, rather than providing service to them as the Rainbow Center did.³⁴ The Women Workers Project formed initially as an “intellectual project” based on members’ familiarity with Asian/American and feminist analyses of sex work and advocacy by groups such as the Rainbow Center, rather than responding to an anti-Asian incident or other community concern.

Over the next five years, the WWP would move from being all-volunteer, to having part-time and then full-time staff funded by CAAAV. Each of the industries that the WWP attempted to address is composed of large numbers of Asian/American women in New York City. They also all involve significant threats to, and lack protections for, workers' health and labor rights. The WWP explored all three occupations in its early years, but attempts to organize sex workers and then nail salon workers finally led to a successful, focused effort around domestic workers' rights.³⁵ CAAAV's path through these occupations foreshadows the connections feminist scholars made in their analyses of "intimate labor" by 2007.³⁶

As the WWP began, CAAAV volunteers and staff were also receiving requests for assistance from Cambodian and Vietnamese residents in the Bronx. In response, they developed the South East Asian Organizing Collective (SEAOC) that in turn became known as CAAAV's Youth Leadership Project (YLP). With a broader focus on Southeast Asia, CAAAV reached out to Filipina/o youth and began to meet with domestic workers through existing members and other contacts.³⁷ The WWP's first health fair for Asian/American women workers garnered the most interest from Filipina domestic workers, who attended in larger numbers than Korean women working in either the sex industry or nail salons.³⁸ With CAAAV's existing connections from SEAOC and the health fair, it became clear that the organization would find the most robust base for community-based organizing effort among Filipina domestic workers.

The shift became evident through the WWP's appeal to new members like De Leon. She saw "a group of Asian folks doing outreach in the park, someone with a flier... for a health fair... for Asian domestic workers."³⁹ De Leon's interest was immediate, and she... "showed up [to the health fair] with my two friends [who were also domestic workers]. I was right away helping... helping to set up and serve food, whatever... [I thought] 'Oh I'm finally going to find something to do, really useful... I can do something better on the weekend, when I'm on a day off.'"⁴⁰ While De Leon had experience as a neighborhood and political youth activist in the Philippines, it had been many years since she had been involved in organized political activities. The WWP presented her with an activist community through which to address injustices she had experienced personally and knew were occurring to other workers. Her enthusiasm for the WWP as a volunteer enabled De Leon to make the transition to becoming a paid organizer and in turn taking a leadership role in the growth of the WWP and DWU. De Leon and other workers who were drawn to the 1998 health fair and subsequent events became the focus and backbone of the project's successes in organizing a broader domestic workers' movement locally as well as nationally.

Sex Workers in the City: Crackdowns and Margins

In the wake of the Giuliani administration's efforts to "clean up" New York beginning in 1994, sex workers became even more embattled than before.⁴¹ The efforts to close strip clubs and related venues may have prompted dancers to "turn tricks, which puts them in danger... At least dancing doesn't threaten your health and your safety," according to sex industry worker advocate Rachel

Walsh. Her viewpoint was echoed in Priscilla Alexander's letter to the New York Times letter on July 18, 1994.⁴² As documented by Alexandra K. Murphy and Sudhir Alladi Ventakesh, the administration's efforts pushed much of sex work "indoors."⁴³ They note that for researchers, and arguably by extension, activists, "outdoor" workers are much more "visible and easier to access" than their "indoor" counterparts.⁴⁴ In light of the complications that arose in outreach to domestic workers in New York's public parks, such "access" is relative. From the beginning then, WWP efforts to reach sex workers proved difficult because of the climate of fear, the movement of workers indoors, and sex workers' own strategies to avoid police. Also, unlike domestic workers, whom are already working for a client when they interact in parks, sex workers frequently compete for clients, thus complicating any supportive relationships they might develop with one another.⁴⁵ In addition the Giuliani administration unevenly targeted segments of the sex work industry, focusing on Asian/American massage parlors, for example.⁴⁶ The resulting economic strain caused many Asian/American sex workers to become migratory. Often times workers would spend a few months in New York and then seek work in other parts of the region, thus creating a significant obstacle to any effort to build community solidarity.⁴⁷

Addressing workers who spoke English, Korean or Mandarin, the WWP distributed fliers that addressed women who might "have questions about: POLICE RAIDS; VIOLENCE at WORK; NEW CHANGES IN THE LAW."⁴⁸ WWP introduced itself as "an organization for Asian Women working in massage parlors, to come to improve their working and living conditions... We are

interested in talking to you about important issues in your lives and your experiences with police raids or arrests.” The flier sought to cover a range of potential abuses sex workers face, while simultaneously highlighting the specific threat workers confronted as local governments targeted their industry. WWP explained to its audience: “We are part of an organization who has been fighting police abuse for 10 years. We have a lot of knowledge about police procedure, the legal system, and violence against Asian women in new york [sic].” The inclusion of references to CAAAV’s experience countering police brutality and anti-Asian/American violence suggests a viable link between sex work and the organization’s previous efforts. While seeking to overcome the barriers to organizing sex workers, the WWP also anticipated and addressed other concerns and differentiated itself from groups such as the Rainbow Center. The flier promises that “We are not a religious, legal or government organization” and “We are not advocating for women to leave this work.” WWP activists thus attempted to defuse concerns sex workers might have about the nature of CAAAV’s support and to take a neutral stance toward sex work. WWP thereby encouraged sex workers to attend meetings and provided support such as English classes and translation services for women “in the business.”

While it appears that the number of sex workers coming to WWP meetings was limited, the effort did succeed in addressing specific cases. The project brought attention to the effects of the Giuliani crackdown on Asian/American sex workers in the wake of Michael Sperko’s brutal rape and beating of Korean out-call escort Chung (last name withheld).⁴⁹⁵⁰ WWP member Alexandra Hye wrote

an article for *Colorlines* in 1999, explaining that CAAAV and allied organizations “see Korean massage parlors as sites of labor exploitation as well as sexual and racial exploitation.”⁵¹ Simultaneously CAAAV and their allies distinguish “between massage parlor prostitution or escort services as opposed to sexual slavery, in which women are physically confined and forced to sexually serve clients. We support women's collective empowerment both within and outside the parlors and emphasize the role of U.S. imperialism and militarism in prostitution.”⁵² This navigation of competing feminist political analyses of sex work centers on addressing the impact of capitalism, imperialism, sexism and racism.

The WWP and its allies invoked histories that produced migrations and patterns of sex work among Asian women and particularly Korean women in the wake of World War II, the Korean War and a continued U.S. military presence in South Korea. They were consequently able to present sex workers as having agency in choosing to participate in the sex work industry while focusing their critique on violence perpetrated against sex workers. A progressive analysis and approach to this issue, however, was not enough to garner a substantial amount of participation from sex workers during the legal crack down. As evidenced by an August 1998 WWP meeting agenda, work in this area had been largely sidelined as outreach to Korean and domestic worker communities expanded; and by 2000 WWP had ceased organizing around sex workers.⁵³

“Fake Nails Done By Koreans:” Workers’ Safety and Health⁵⁴

In this same meeting, the WWP gave increased attention to nail salons as places for labor organizing and for raising concerns about work place hazards with the federal government's Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA).⁵⁵ Here, too, WWP focused on an area where Asian/American, specifically Korean, women were concentrated and faced conditions that undermined both their rights as workers and their health. Documents such as "Political Analysis of the Korean Owned Nail Salon Industry in New York" lay out in detail the members' rationale for focusing on this area, including the labor abuses identified by WWP volunteers and staff.⁵⁶ By the mid 1990s, the report noted, "80% of all Korean owned businesses in New York [were] nail/beauty salons... approximately 24,000 Korean owned nail salons in the city."⁵⁷ By 2008, nationally an estimated 42 percent of nail workers were Asian, and of the total nail workers 2 percent were Korean. In New York the nail industry was even more heavily Korean salon owners and workers.⁵⁸ During the mid-1990s, Korean-run nail salons spread into Connecticut, largely in response to tightening regulations on "appearance enhancement" services in New York State.⁵⁹ At the same time, local media raised concerns about the cleanliness of nail salons and debated the need for licensing. Despite this focus on the public health risks for nail salon customers among journalists and legislators in New York, there was little interest in the conditions faced by nail salon workers.⁶⁰

WWP saw this highly visible industry as one in which workers faced both labor exploitation (they bore the cost of licensing, and worked long hours for low wages) and health dangers (with lax health code enforcement despite the

presence of toxic chemicals). Yet, WWP's political analysis reflects an ambivalent relationship toward governmental regulation because of the potential risk to undocumented immigrant women in terms of licensing and workplace investigations. As the project developed, activists attempted to balance their knowledge of Asian/American women's historic and contemporary criminalization and exploitation with the reality that a lack of governmental protections and regulation benefits employers and further limits workers' abilities to advocate for themselves.⁶¹ In the case of Korean nail workers, the organization explicitly foregrounded a class-based analysis as it sought to advocate for workers in an intra-ethnic context. The WWP's organizing efforts and its analysis of the dangers of the nail salon industry for Asian/American women workers proved to be prescient. Within a decade, the topic garnered sustained attention from the broader progressive community in the United States as well as in English mainstream and ethnic media.⁶² Although there were public discussions of WWP and CAAAV's outreach to sex workers, there is scant evidence that they received any mainstream media attention for their efforts with nail salon workers. This lack of coverage may reflect assumptions about what issues were "newsworthy:" Asian women facing sexual exploitation and violence, versus the day-to-day environmental risks faced by nail workers.⁶³

The difficulties organizing sex workers can be explained by local conditions, particularly the policies of the Giuliani administration. The inability to advance a nail worker-focused project likely reflects the convergence of insurmountable barriers at both local and national levels. For example, under the

George W. Bush administration, the federal governmental agencies that would be targeted by the WWP – Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – took on an even more pro-business and anti-worker stance than that of previous administrations, though the government's general pro-free market and anti-union approach emerged across several administrations in the 1980s and 1990s.⁶⁴ According to a WWP document “Update on State Regulations, etc. re: nail salon environmental conditions,” activists were told by Dr. Munhi, a representative of the State Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental Investigations, that the appropriate agencies for filing a complaint would be OSHA or the federal EPA, and that there would need to be scientific, “not just anecdotal,” evidence.⁶⁵ The collection of such evidence in this case clearly would have required significant resources, including access to work sites and laboratory testing. Unless a creative research approach was adopted, it would move the WWP further from its organizing goals, which emphasized community leadership and empowerment, not the role of experts to recognize and represent the issue.

The difficulty in organizing nail salon workers also may be attributable in part to the fact that the direct antagonists of Korean nail workers were Korean business owners. In its earlier work WWP developed a cross-class approach, taking on cases of police brutality and anti-Asian/American violence that could be easily viewed as threats to Asian/American people collectively.⁶⁶ Nail salons reflected the growing economic diversity among immigrants, which increased

between 1960 and 2000.⁶⁷ Organizing nail salon workers challenged the well being of women working within Asian-owned and managed businesses. This issue potentially could have arisen in organizing sex workers. However, in the case of sex work, the high-profile violence against workers by customers and the Giuliani administration's antagonism to the industry muted questions of intra-ethnic discord. If the project had been more successful, it could similarly have brought to light conflicts between Asian/American owners and workers.

By the mid-2000s, there had developed a mainstream understanding of the health risks of chemicals used in the nail trade as well as an increase in the number of organizations, including unions, working with women workers to address their health concerns. In 2009, the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) was conducting its own "Nail Salon Table Evaluation." Such tables were the focus of study because their purpose was to remove chemicals and particles from the breathing space of nail salon workers. Evaluating their efficacy has been central to determining workplace safety. In its description of the project, NIOSH states that within the industry "the workforce is largely female (75%) with the industry employing a large number of minority workers (46%) specifically Asian immigrants (38%)."⁶⁸ As federal officials increased their attention to the nail industry, the WWP shift its attention to New York's domestic workers. The federal government's overt interest in nail salons contrasts sharply with the dearth of governmental efforts to address the unequal labor rights of domestic workers. This fact suggests a critical reason that the WWP found fertile organizing ground among domestic workers since

there was little support for their rights beyond local community organizations. Still, the WWP faced numerous obstacles in forging a powerful movement for domestic workers' rights in New York.⁶⁹

The Challenges of Filipina Domestic Workers

As Parreñas succinctly explains, for Filipina domestic workers “[m]igration is a movement from one set of gender constraints to another.”⁷⁰⁷¹ In what she terms “the international transfer of reproductive labor in globalization,” “women do not subvert but instead pass on their reproductive labor responsibilities to women with less privilege.”⁷² In other words, the dynamics noted by Lorde and Lowe are key to Filipinas and other immigrants’ experiences of contemporary domestic work under globalization. The occupation is shaped in the United States by current shifts in the global economy and earlier migrations that produced the gender, race, and class norms cemented within the domestic work industry. For example, while the racial etiquette developed most notably under slavery continues to be pervasive in employer-employee interactions as witnessed in Central Park, changes in U.S. immigration policy and the results of global restructuring in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, have significantly shifted the racial and national composition of this workforce.⁷³ According to a DWU survey, 33 percent of respondents came to the U.S. because they were “unable to support family in home country,” 28 percent had “[n]o job options in home country,” and 35 percent “[h]ad relatives/friends already working in the U.S.”⁷⁴ Twenty percent of those participating in the survey identified as Asian, 65 percent as Black, and 7 percent as Latina, with only 1

percent as White.⁷⁵ Asian women are disproportionately represented in this population, since according to the U.S. Census, Asians make up only 7 percent of the New York City population.⁷⁶ The concentration of Asian women, particularly Filipinas, in domestic work is directly related to governmental promotion of migration in response to the lack of work opportunities at home.

The Philippines, a former Spanish and U.S. colony, is a leading exporter of workers, functioning as a "labor brokerage state," with domestic work constituting a key sector.⁷⁷ According to Nicole Constable, in 1992 approximately 2 million Filipina/os worked overseas, and by 2003 the number had ballooned to over seven million, representing about 9 percent of the Philippines' population.⁷⁸ She also notes the current migration began with the Marcos regime's reliance on labor exportation in the face of oil-related economic crises in the 1970s. This migration is the third wave since the ceding of the Philippines to the United States by Spain at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. The first occurred in the early twentieth century and largely involved agricultural laborers, while the second emerged after World War II and consisted mainly of U.S. military personnel and relatives of earlier migrants. In addition professionals migrated as part of the 1965 immigration reform that inspired a broader Asian "brain drain."⁷⁹ As Robyn Rodriguez delineates in *Migrants for Export*, the Philippines increasingly depends on the exportation of labor and subsequent remittances to shore up debts incurred under structural adjustment. Thus the state has sought to transform labor migration into a

patriotic act, naming workers Bagong Bayani (New Heroes) as it seeks to maintain strong identifications with home among migrants.⁸⁰

Gender has figured strongly in the latest migration, producing particular responses from the Philippines government and other actors.⁸¹ Anna Guevarra argues that domestic workers' purported "'vulnerabilities' are shaped by a formation of a gendered moral economy linking family, religion, and nationalism with ideals of economic competitiveness and entrepreneurship that seemingly leads to the disempowerment of Filipina workers."⁸² In other words, governmental and NGO practices that are ostensibly aimed at protecting and improving the status of domestic workers in fact undermine women. This claim is supported by political agendas that reinforce an idealized Filipina laborer who works hard abroad not to improve her own status, but to provide monetary support to family members and the Philippine state.

Through "gender-sensitive" training, particularly the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS), future Filipina care workers are taught the importance of remittances and family along with lessons about how to interact with employers.⁸³ Rodriguez explains that building women's "confidence" ends up training workers to be "good and ultimately compliant workers."⁸⁴ While the moral elements of the training appear to reflect dominant religious and national concerns about women's sexuality, the emphasis on compliance is focused on furthering the Philippines' efforts to position Filipinas as proper care workers vis-à-vis the state's relationship with core and newly industrialized countries.⁸⁵ That is, the Philippines is invested in a securing a global image of Filipinas as

possessing an innate “warmth and care.”⁸⁶ This perception then positions Filipinas as well suited for domestic work in global cities such as New York City where “the consumption practices of high-income professionals” and their households, which function without a traditional wife, generate a demand for such labor.⁸⁷ As a result, Filipina domestic workers in New York City navigate both the international division of reproductive labor and its national permutations in the Philippines, the United States and other countries where they have worked such as Hong Kong.

Parreñas contends that Filipina domestic workers, in contrast to their peers from the Caribbean and Latin America, “aspire to return home to the Philippines.”⁸⁸ She attributes this difference to a radical shift in social status that is typical for this group. It involves both a class dimension, with many having had domestic workers in their households when living in the Philippines, and a racial dimension, as they experience lower status based on their nationality. However, the emphasis on returning home, reinforced in Philippine training programs, also shapes the identities of Filipina workers abroad. When women migrate primarily for economic reasons the desire to return home is often strong, but there may be multiple and contradictory impulses, nonetheless.⁸⁹ The marginalization of live-in workers and their lack of mobility isolate domestic workers from the middle-class Filipino/a community and may encourage their desire to return to the Philippines.⁹⁰ There appears to be less marginalization of domestic workers within the New York community, as suggested by the participation of Filipina/o health professionals in WWP health fairs as well as the participation of a

domestic workers rights' organization in New York's annual Philippine Independence Day Parade.⁹¹ Still the shift in class identity appears to limit the interest of some domestic workers in remaining in New York or taking part in any form of collective action.

During a group interview I conducted with De Leon and five WWP members in the spring of 2009, there was agreement that middle-class identity limited the interest in active participation for some Filipinas. When De Leon conducted outreach, workers responded in a range of ways as she moved from initial greetings in Tagalog to direct discussions of work. Some women would become dismissive of the possibility that their work was anything less than satisfactory. Questions such as "Do you have a contract?" or "Do you have health care?" prompted curt responses and a change in tone from friendly to defensive. When asked about these responses, De Leon echoed Parreñas' point as she explained that women who were middle-class and educated in the Philippines tended to think of domestic work as a temporary form of employment and thus not to identify as a "domestic worker."⁹² The series of negative high-profile cases of Filipina domestic workers as victims of abuse may also contribute to a lack of identification by some recent migrants.⁹³ Finally, WWP members pointed out that some women view activism as potentially threatening to a successful application for permanent residency or citizenship in the United States. The fear of retribution from the government as well as from employers is an equally important barrier to participation.

The threat of reprisals suggests workers' skepticism about the Philippines' claims to protect workers from exploitation. While the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) "sets the minimum wages/benefits and designs master employment contracts for each occupation," it does not address:

...unregulated work hours and duties, close surveillance from employers, and debt they incurred to various actors in order to pay for numerous overseas employment processing fees, including recruitment agency and training fees. The proliferation of illegal recruiters who traffic them is another structural reality that exposes them to harmful work relationships.⁹⁴

Perhaps the more salient question is why some Filipinas become active despite these barriers. From the discussion with WWP members, it became clear that women were drawn to the project either because of their own negative experiences as workers or by a concern for friends and sense of responsibility to women of their community. Participant Nancy Vedic's employer attempted to forcibly send her back to the Philippines when he terminated her employment as a live-in domestic worker after she complained about her working conditions, which included ninety hours a week for two to three dollars an hour. She was able to avoid this at the last minute when De Leon and other WWP members met her outside her employers' building, quickly taking her bags when her employer went back inside for a moment and escorting her to De Leon's apartment. With the support of WWP, Vedic was able to bring a lawsuit against her former employer for back pay that gained local news coverage in 2004.⁹⁵ Similarly, Nita Asuncion, after working for a family for seven years in Hong Kong and seven years in the U.S., was terminated. Her employers offered to send her "Maybe one hundred dollars, maybe one hundred and fifty dollars a month" if she went

back to Philippines. Both of these women's experiences drew them for immediate assistance, but they continued to participate in the organization because they recognized that their experiences were not unique. As Asuncion stated, "We make the spring rolls, they make their own rules." This comment received resounding laughter from the group, suggesting the familiarity they all had with a dynamic that is faced by Filipina domestic workers globally.

As the WWP developed its focus on Filipina domestic workers, it took on the name *Kalayaan* (Tagalog for "freedom"). *Kalayaan* is a common name under which Filipina/os have organized globally for women workers' rights and underscores the coalitional aspects of the WWP. The United Kingdom's *Kalayaan: Justice for Migrant Domestic Workers* and Canada's *Kalayaan Centre* that works with the Philippine Women Centre of British Columbia are two such examples.⁹⁶ Still there is a range of political stances represented by groups organizing under this name. In the UK, *Kalayaan* explicitly distances the organization from contentious migration issues. The "About Us" page on the organization's website states the following: "We are NOT involved in helping people to come to the UK from another country. Migrant domestic workers are people who have entered the UK legally with an employer on a domestic worker visa to work in a private household."⁹⁷ This language presents the organization as neither providing support for undocumented workers nor contesting or promoting immigration by Filipina/os to the UK, and puts it squarely in line with official Philippine state policies.

The appeasement of UK anxieties against migration from countries such as the Philippines contrasts sharply with the approach taken by the Kalayaan Centre as well as CAAAV. On January 14, 2010, the Kalayaan Centre led a protest of so-called reforms to Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program that grants workers temporary immigration status while they are

forced to live-in their employer's homes with an employer-specific work permit and must complete 24 months of this type of work within three years of entry into Canada under the program's present arrangement. They are not allowed to bring their families with them during their period of temporary work often burdened with very low wages, precarious working conditions, and human rights abuses.⁹⁸

The Centre reports that over 95 percent of workers brought to the country under this policy are Filipinas, and thus argues that the policy further works to "entrench the use of temporary foreign labour, divides workers, and undermines the struggle for universal child care, health care, as well as women's and workers' rights." The organization states that "Instead of being used as cheap labour to fill the void left by the lack of child care and health care programs that are accessible to all working families, [Filipina workers] are campaigning to be allowed to enter Canada with landed status, with their families, and with the right to choose their type of employment commensurate to their education and skills."

CAAAY also engages questions about Filipina workers status and right to migration as central to workers' organizing.

As New York City's economy increasingly relies on the exploited labor of undocumented immigrant service workers, WWP seeks to develop leadership among and create spaces for Asian women working in these sectors to unite with other immigrant workers to fight sweatshop conditions and build power for all low-wage workers City-wide.⁹⁹

Some Filipinas who became involved in the WWP were indeed undocumented, particularly as a result of losing employer support for their stay in the United States. Also the reference to “sweatshop conditions” speaks both to a growing awareness of movement against the exploitation of women of color globally during the 1990s and 2000s, a movement with particular strength in New York.¹⁰⁰ Finally, an emphasis on building “power for all low-wage workers” foreshadowed the expansion of the WWP beyond its Filipina domestic worker base.

From WWP to DWU

Recognizing that there were large numbers of unorganized Afro-Caribbean domestic workers, many who had friendships with active Filipinas, the WWP moved in 1999 to include Afro-Caribbean women in their organizing. As De Leon explained, “[T]he majority is from the Caribbean... so CAAAV made the commitment that to do that work we need to organize the Caribbean workers because no one is organizing them... so that’s when I got hired... to organize Caribbean workers.”¹⁰¹ Over the twentieth century, immigrant women began to replace native-born Black women in domestic work in New York, yet women of African descent continued to make up the majority of women working in this area. Nonetheless much of the organizing focused on Asian workers, including Andolan: Organizing South Asian Workers and Damayan, which partnered with WWP. The WWP’s incorporation of Afro-Caribbean women transformed the movement into a multi-racial one, helping set the stage for the development of DWU, which included workers from a range of countries into one organization. Simultaneously, it incorporated pre-existing organizations like Andolan and

Damayan. This effort began with outreach in Brooklyn and the establishment of a “Steering Committee of Caribbean workers” in 2000.¹⁰² The past ten years of DWU organizing is well documented in publications by former staff such as Ai-Jen Poo and Claire Hobden, but less attention has been paid to the development of an organizing strategy taken up by the WWP and DWU to gain recognition of domestic workers’ labor rights.

A sense of who was being organized and how their labor was being defined were critical aspects of this strategy. The content of the term “paid domestic work” has become more nuanced as activists and feminist scholars have looked to workers themselves for a sense of the day-to-day realities of the industry.¹⁰³ Bridget Anderson’s discussion of the domestic work industry in Europe, for example, compares “the job description for a ‘domestic helper/cleaner’” used by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1990 with domestic workers’ self-reporting of the work they do.¹⁰⁴ She points to the fact that while the ILO provides a seemingly precise list of tasks, including “sweeping, vacuum-cleaning, polishing and washing floors and furniture, or washing windows and other fixtures,” it “completely fails to describe the jobs done by migrant domestic workers.”¹⁰⁵ Workers repeatedly state that they do “everything” or alternately, “there is nothing we are not told to do,” while the ILO omitted whole areas of labor, such as caretaking.¹⁰⁶

In the case of predominately Filipina domestic work in Hong Kong during the 1980s and 1990s, Nicole Constable identified both a silence about the tasks covered by the term “domestic work” in foreign labor contracts, and an

assumption that “domestic work is domestic work” by government officials.¹⁰⁷ In fact, under the cover of phrases such as “household chores” or “domestic duties,” Constable encountered “‘domestic’ workers employed as secretaries, clothing or architectural designers, accountants, beauticians, manicurists, nurses, waitresses, dishwashers, medical technicians, cooks, salespersons, messengers, hawkers, factory workers and researchers.”¹⁰⁸ She draws the conclusion that “laws and policies are meaningless apart from the ways in which they are interpreted, applied and carried out.”¹⁰⁹ Since Hong Kong was a British “dependent territory” until July 1997, it was considered a subscriber to the ILO conventions.¹¹⁰ In addition, scholars recognize that “[t]he way that rules and policies are enforced and interpreted reflect deeply ingrained cultural biases that favor the rights of the employer (‘master’) over the worker (‘servant’), and that devalue the domestic worker.”¹¹¹ Thus at the heart of questions about making positive change in this area is the significance of regulation when there continues to be gendered, classed, and raced associations across the globe that devalue this work and these workers.

However, scholars have made much progress by not only theorizing such labor, but also revealing “global systems of gender stratification and inequality.”¹¹² They call for future research into “the complex interplay between non-governmental organizations, multilateral lending organizations, local women’s groups, and national state policies.”¹¹³ These connections are particularly significant as feminist activists and scholars have succeeded in garnering the attention of institutions such as the ILO. In contrast to the failures

noted by Constable, by 2010 the ILO had developed a much more nuanced understanding of domestic work that was reflected in its efforts of “to establish a first-ever international standard (‘convention’) to protect the rights of domestic workers.”¹¹⁴ Following the June 2008 National Domestic Workers Congress, which grew out of the formation of the National Domestic Workers Alliance at the 2007 U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta, Ai-Jen Poo noted the plan to “work with international allies to help shape” the ILO convention.¹¹⁵ Indeed, with former DWU staff, Claire Hobden’s 2010 ILO publication about DWU’s Domestic Worker Bill of Rights campaign, it is clear that DWU was able to establish itself with the ILO and help influence the convention.

The ILO’s “Decent work for domestic workers” report was presented at the 2010 International Labour Conference signaling its shift in understanding of domestic work as it drew upon examples from domestic workers’ organizations across the globe. The report identifies domestic work as heterogeneous and the fact that tasks taken on by individual workers are often “difficult to delineate.”¹¹⁶ In terms of regulation, it notes “For some associations of domestic workers, a written employment contract is seen as an important vehicle to overcome challenges to the existence of an employment relationship and its agreed terms.”¹¹⁷ At the same time it makes clear that while there continue to be difficulties with enforcement, that

Studies confirm that well-crafted regulatory mechanisms with a suitable enforcement machinery make an important difference in the everyday lives of domestic workers – and they convey the message that domestic workers are indeed workers who deserve both rights and respect.¹¹⁸

It is important to be aware that there also continue to be significant dissonances between the approaches advocated by international bodies and governments and those sought by groups like DWU. For example, a background paper available from a 2004 International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade and Migration Seminar argues that “structural deficits” in areas such as domestic work in the “developed world” require the promotion of “temporary foreign worker schemes.”¹¹⁹ These plans have been strongly critiqued not only abroad as in the case of the Canadian Kalayaan Centre, but by immigrant and labor rights advocates in the U.S., particularly in light of the labor abuses faced by Mexican migrant workers participating in the Bracero programs of the mid-1900s.¹²⁰ Arguably, the ILO’s steps suggest the development of international support and recognition of domestic workers’ basic rights, even while maintaining support for problematic labor exportation paradigms within the global economy.

The WWP and DWU have been active across a range of arenas from local legislation and alliance building to pushing for changes in state, federal, and international regulations and in the cultural understanding of domestic work that denies workers respect and rights. Currently, within the U.S., domestic workers are excluded from a range of federal labor protections, including the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), Fair Labor Standards Act, (FLSA), Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), and civil rights laws. They were also explicitly excluded in New York State’s Labor Law prior to the passage of the Domestic

Workers' Bill of Rights in July 2010.¹²¹ The Bill of Rights is DWU's greatest legislative success.

To achieve this state legislative victory, DWU began by critiquing earlier labor legislation. Its 2006 "Home is Where the Work Is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry" provides a cogent overview of existing exclusions.¹²² The National Labor Relations Act, for instance, protecting private industry workers from "discrimination based on union-related activity or group action" explicitly excludes workers "employed in the domestic service of any person or family in a home."¹²³ The only other type of workers excluded based on their occupation (who are not regulated by another act such as the Railway Labor Act) is agricultural laborers. Both types of labor were central to American slavery and continue to be sites of labor exploitation of many people of color, immigrant and native-born.

While the NLRA constitutes a complete rejection of domestic workers' right to organize, the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1974 removed its complete exclusion of domestic workers. The FLSA sets the federal minimum wage rate, maximum work hours, and overtime for some employees. Currently "casual" employees, such as "babysitters" or "companions" for the sick or elderly are completely excluded, while live-in domestic workers are only exempted from the overtime pay requirement under this act.¹²⁴ Additional laws at issue include the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) that excludes domestic workers as "a matter of policy" and Civil Rights Law Title VII, which bans discrimination based on "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin," but typically excludes

domestic workers by virtue of its applicability only to employers with 15 or more employees.¹²⁵ New York State's Labor Law 12 (NYCRR § 142-2.2) like the FLSA contains a similar differentiation between live-in and non-live in domestic workers. Rather than excluding live-ins from coverage entirely, however, it treats them unequally. Non-live in domestic workers "are entitled to overtime at a rate of one and a half times their regular rate after 40 hours of work in a week," while "live-in domestic workers are only entitled to overtime at a rate of one and a half times the minimum wage and then only after 44 hours of work in a week" (emphasis added).¹²⁶ This example is striking, particularly as it would seem counterintuitive that workers who are at least hypothetically available to work 24 hours a day are required to work an additional four hours before they may receive overtime based on a wage that may in fact be less than what they make regularly.

As domestic workers are denied the right to organize and lack many other labor protections, they have generally had access to few legal means to protect themselves and their labor in the United States. Despite these glaring exclusions, until the efforts of group such as DWU, domestic workers were often dismissed as an "unorganizable" class of workers by unions because of the highly gendered, private, and isolating nature of the job. Domestic work can produce situations in which workers may not be able to discuss their working conditions publicly and simultaneously have their labor valued. Erasing the value of such work offers a striking repetition of the public/private division in the twenty-first century. However, as Dorothy Sue Cobble argues, the dual feminization and

casualization of work in the United States, in conjunction with women's increasing visible work within the labor and feminist movements, has produced opportunities for women to organize.¹²⁷ By using a range of tactics, such as “[mobilizing] public opinion, political action, and community organizing,” women are working within, in alliance with, and outside of unions.¹²⁸

There have been substantial strides made in union organizing of women workers, such as the Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) organizing of homecare workers and support for domestic workers' right to organize. It is worth noting, however, that in the case of SEIU, the fact that it has “embraced the populations that organized labor has historically excluded — people of color, domestic workers, and undocumented immigrants” since the 1990s, has occurred simultaneously with concerns about internal democratic practices and major conflicts with other unions at a time of rising corporate political power.¹²⁹ In May 2010, with the appointment of the first woman and openly lesbian president, Mary Kay Henry, who worked as head of the union's healthcare division, there is further hope for attention to the concerns of women workers. As described by Colorlines writer Yvonne Yen Liu, organizers such as Leon Chow believe that Henry understands the issues of “constituents: mostly immigrant women from the Philippines, China, or Central America. His workers struggle with low wages, cuts to funding for homecare, and employers hostile to organizing.”¹³⁰ An AFL-CIO article emphasizing its support for the ILO convention also demonstrated its support for domestic workers. Indeed, president John Sweeney participated in Albany lobbying efforts and the 2010

U.S. Social Forum, where he publicly announced that his mother had been a domestic worker for over 40 years.¹³¹

Legislating Rights

DWU's two major legislative successes have been the 2003 passage of Local Law 33 in New York City and the New York State Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights. Local Law 33 compelled employment agencies to provide a "statement a written statement indicating the rights of such employee and the obligations of his or her employer under state and federal law" including information about minimum wage, paid overtime, and unemployment insurance to both potential workers and employers.¹³² In comparison to the limited New York City law, which did not address domestic workers working outside of agencies or raise work standards, the New York State Domestic Worker Bill of Rights did include such changes. For example, live-in domestic workers now are to be paid 1-½ times their regular rate after 44 hours of work instead of 1 ½ times the minimum wage, and all workers are entitled to three paid days off after one year of work. However the law does maintain a differentiation between live-out and live-in workers in the case of overtime. Finally, the law establishes that before November 11, 2010, "the Department of Labor will report to the Governor, the Assembly Speaker and the Temporary President of the Senate on the feasibility and practicality of domestic workers organizing for the purpose of collective bargaining."¹³³ This is a key consideration for future organizing efforts by groups like DWU as it could enable these workers on the state level to exercise a right specifically prohibited in the federal NRLA.

DWU's efforts on the city and state level drew from the knowledge and experiences of WWP's initial domestic worker membership. As mentioned earlier, Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong were used to mandatory contract agreements between themselves and their employers. When De Leon came to New York, she noted the difference between Hong Kong and the United States. While it is well documented that the Hong Kong contract system is far from perfect in preventing labor abuses, De Leon and other Filipinas who have worked in both places observed the difference. In the United States, as De Leon states, "A lot of people are just getting hired through word of mouth, everything is verbal agreement." Thus while there is indeed a global problem of employers making their "own rules," Filipinas involved in the WWP noticed that informal contracts and verbal agreements not backed up by any governmental policies carried more risks for laborers. According to De Leon, "That's when we started investigating... Women Workers Project had standard contract that we tailored... to make it better... easier... hours of work, from what time... super clear." The idea of a contract thus became part of the WWP and DWU organizing work with individual workers and then part of workshops. Finally, it developed into a central component of the organization's efforts to engage employers and set labor standards through Local Law 33 and the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights.¹³⁴

As DWU pushed forward in its Bill of Rights campaign, it encountered resistance from some state legislators who argued that because the majority of domestic workers make a few dollars more than the minimum wage they do not require legal protections. New York's *Daily News* also balked at the bill in its

editorial, “The anti-nanny state: Domestic workers deserve equal labor rights, not special rights.”¹³⁵ The invocation of “special rights” as a means to deny basic labor protections emerges from the undervaluing of reproductive labor associated with women of color, and fails to recognize the skill and importance of care giving, a point that DWU confronted head on.¹³⁶ Riding another upsurge in public anti-immigrant sentiment nationally, *New York Magazine* also intervened in the debate. It cited concern that by making employers’ responsible for following labor laws regardless of the immigration status of their employees, the bill “legitimizes illegal immigrants.” Another key anxiety involved the claim that passage of the bill would price domestic services out of the reach for working New Yorkers.¹³⁷

Similar anxieties appeared in the 1990s. An investigation into New York’s domestic work industry by *New York Times* reporter Deborah Sontag followed the failed nomination for U.S. Attorney General of Zoë Baird after she was found to have hired two undocumented immigrants as a chauffeur and nanny, and did not pay social security taxes for either employee.¹³⁸ Chang makes two key points about the scandal: First, “The public outcry was a reflection of resentment that this practice was so easily accessible to the more privileged classes while other working-class working mothers struggled to find any child care,” and Second, “[C]onspicuously absent from most of the commentary of the Baird controversy was concern for the plight of the undocumented workers themselves.”¹³⁹ Sontag focused on the common employment of undocumented

workers by nanny agencies, which typically paid such workers \$175 a week in contrast to the \$600 a week earned by documented workers.¹⁴⁰

Within popular media there is a similar vacillation between recognition of the abuses domestic workers face in their employment and support for their labor rights, on the one hand, and one-dimensional images of nannies as part of the New York landscape, on the other. The New York Times serves as a key example. It not only offered coverage of DWU's campaign for the bill of rights, but also provided an editorial supporting the bill.¹⁴¹ At the same time, nannies were referenced in other pieces as nuisances who fail to properly care for children.¹⁴² Television and movies offer a wide range of images of domestic workers that contain similar contradictions.¹⁴³ In response, DWU has utilized allies and theater in particular to help counter these popular misrepresentations and raise public awareness about the motivations behind their push for the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. In the last month of the WWP, activists also took on a more direct approach to the anti-immigrant sentiment that undergirds some of the backlash against such efforts.

Conclusion

Free, free domestic workers! End, end the slavery! They say, guest workers programs. We say, full workers rights!

The workers united, will never be defeated! El pueblo unido, jamas sera vencido! Ang tao, ang bayan grayon ay lumalaban!¹⁴⁴

I said, Up with the workers, yeah yeah! Fighting for emancipation, yeah yeah! We're women, men & queers, yeah yeah! Facing the same exploitation, yeah yeah!¹⁴⁵



May Day Immigrant Rights March¹⁴⁶

In the photo above, the marchers behind the DWU banner included not only members and staff from CAAAV's various projects (WWP, Chinatown Tenants Union, and Youth Leadership Project), but also allies from other groups such as Ugnayan and Damayan. A decade after the development of the WWP's focus on domestic workers' rights, its staff, members and allies took to the streets of lower Manhattan as members of the Immigrant Communities in Action Contingent in 2008's Immigrant Rights March.¹⁴⁷ Marking the second anniversary of the historic demonstrations that arose in response to the

December 2005 passage by the House of Representatives of HR 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, marchers affirmed their continued efforts to promote immigrants and workers rights. HR 4437, known as the Sensenbrenner-King Act, included anti-immigrant policies that repeated longstanding efforts to cut off undocumented immigrants from basic social services. But it also explicitly criminalized undocumented immigrants and their associates by categorizing undocumented status as a felony crime rather than a civil violation of immigration law. This change not only threatened immigrants, their families and friends, it also exposed physicians, health providers, teachers, police officers and other workers who provided support to undocumented persons to potential criminal charges.

By 2008, the Sensenbrenner-King bill as well as other efforts towards “comprehensive immigration reform” had reached a stalemate, and the ensuing presidential campaign sidestepped this polarizing issue. Nonetheless, marchers across the country confronted a political environment in which immigrants, across legal statuses, confronted a matrix of anti-immigrant sentiment and surveillance strengthened under the auspices of the war on terror. This anti-immigrant atmosphere included the “the largest single-site operation of its kind in American history” by Immigration Control and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at Agriprocessors Inc.’s kosher meat slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa eleven days after the marches.¹⁴⁸

Raids and deportations were a key concern of the protest as illustrated by the prominence of signs with a child’s face and the words “Alto a las radades”

and “No Raids”. Enforcement activities were occurring simultaneously with the economic downturn that resulted in housing foreclosures and job losses in New York’s working class communities. For these communities, the costs were particularly high as the dismantling of social safety nets under Presidents Reagan and Clinton further limited their opportunities. As protesters chanted slogans, they drew connections between domestic work and slavery and the antithetical relationship between guest worker programs and workers’ rights. Chanting in Tagalog, Spanish and English, their calls for united support of immigrant rights as “women, men and queers” acknowledged the diversity of New York’s immigrant and progressive communities. It was this rich social mix that served as the ground on which the WWP organized. This march provided a fitting end to the project, emphasizing the original impetus for the WWP: a concern for the welfare of immigrant working Asian/American women in New York City.

Chapter 2

We have a Right to the City: Housing Activism across Communities



Parker Speaking at RTTC Vacant Condos Rally¹

On the Streets

On May 11, 2010, Cerita “CP” Parker, a member of the South Bronx’s Mothers on the Move, posed the following question to a crowd gathered in Harlem’s Frawley Circle: “[R]ecently, all these luxury stores and condominiums have been built in our community. Who are they for? I can’t live in these buildings, and I can’t shop in these stores.” Parker joined some one hundred activists from the Right to the City alliance (RTTC), including members of CAAAV, to kick off the public release of their report, “People Without Housing and Housing Without People: A Count of Vacant Condos in Select NYC Neighborhoods.”² The rally and a tour of vacant condominiums highlighted their findings: in the 2000s, areas such as Harlem and El Barrio, historically Black and Latina/o neighborhoods, experienced rising prices and the increased displacement of residents of color, while condominiums sat vacant.³

Parker's statement resonates with the argument made by David Harvey in "The Right to the City." Instead of being perceived as a human right, the "[q]uality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy."⁴ The work of CAAAV and Mothers on the Move around housing rights reflects a permutation of the concerns raised by predominantly female housing activists in the late 1960s and the 1970s. During that period,

...a surprising number of sound, rent-controlled buildings in New York stood vacant, notwithstanding the shortage... these properties were being deliberately emptied by their owners in preparation for luxury renovation or institutional razing... hold[ing] apartments vacant for months or even years.⁵

In response, a squatter movement pulled together community members with Old Left and communist housing activists, Black Panthers, Young Lords, and feminists to take radical action and reclaim vacant buildings. Similarly, the efforts of the Right to the City alliance combine brief direct actions with more sanctioned tactics such as the rally, tour, and report to build support for tenants' rights.

While the tour stopped at vacant condos, event fliers included a map of "Housing Landmarks," such as Taino Towers and Franklin Plaza.⁶ The 1979-built Taino Towers, named in reference to the indigenous people of Borinquen celebrated by groups like the Young Lords, provides Section 8 subsidized housing. So does Franklin Plaza, two community co-op developments created in the early 1960s.⁷ These buildings function as reminders of possible alternatives to vacant condominiums. They demonstrate one important commonality across

time for New York's housing movements, which is their assertion of what Roberta Gold calls "moral ownership." Just as "squatter supporters [of the 1970s] argued "[W]e won't let the landlords tear down our buildings in order to build luxury housing that we can't afford..." today's activists claim their communities' right to live in New York in the face of gentrification.⁸

These efforts echo Sandoval's conceptualization of differential consciousness as both "a symptom of transnational capitalism... as interest in this mode of resistance is arising out of pressures peculiar to this newest form of globalization... [and] a remedy."⁹ MOM and CAAAV's organizing around housing reflects both the symptomatic and remedial qualities of differential consciousness. Thus CAAAV and MOM seek to engage landlords, city officials, and developers as well as community residents and tenants groups in their work, but also utilize a range of tactics to oppose immediate problems, such as the sudden evacuation of 81 Bowery tenants or the rebranding of the South Bronx as "SoBro."¹⁰ Furthermore, in defending the rights of local communities of color, they view their work as part of a much broader struggle for rights in the United States and across the globe.

Community-based Reporting

The RTTC report on vacant condominiums draws from research conducted by a range of member organizations in New York City, including CAAAV and MOM. CAAAV, for instance, led canvassing in Manhattan's Lower East Side, which includes Chinatown, while MOM covered the South Bronx.¹¹ Information gathered by their members was incorporated into the report. The

study is part RTTC's efforts to address the continued lack of affordable housing in the city at a time when gentrification and high-rent condo construction continues despite increasing foreclosures, attempts to privatize public housing, and growing numbers of homeless individuals and families. Through the rally and tour, RTTC created an opportunity for member organizations to speak out publicly on their concerns and to illustrate key points in the report as attendees visited multiple vacant condominiums in Harlem.



MOM Members Marching During Vacant Condo Tour¹²

The report states that in the areas surveyed, out of 264 constructed buildings that held 4,092 housing units, 74 buildings (1,159 units) were completely vacant and 190 buildings (2,933 units) had partial vacancies.¹³ The RTTC argued for conversion of such vacancies into public housing and community land trusts to provide long-term affordable housing. They suggested that governmental tax foreclosures and eminent domain could be used to implement this plan.¹⁴ Typically, such tactics have been used to expand gentrification efforts in New York. While presented as promoting “the public good

by creating economic jobs and economic growth,” RTTC claims that government action should be employed to create and protect affordable housing for the city’s poorest residents.¹⁵

The Wall Street Journal’s blogger, R.M. Schneiderman, covered the event and voiced his skepticism of city government’s interest in taking up the proposed solutions. Yet City Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito introduced Housing Not Warehousing Legislation, supported by the RTTC, to create an annual, city-run count of all vacant properties and lots in New York City. Her stance is fairly simple: “We have to constantly be looking at alternatives, seeing what we can learn...It’s not that we don’t have people who are in need of housing.”¹⁶ The proposed legislation suggests that despite the dominant pro-developer stance among New York politicians, there is some progressive support for addressing vacancies in existing housing.¹⁷ Such legislation would help set the stage for the RTTC’s proposal as well be more effective than programs that rely on voluntary participation by condominium developers. Current initiatives such as the city-run Housing Asset Renewal Program (HARP) attempted to provide incentives for creating middle-income housing but few developers have participated.¹⁸

Despite doubting the existence of the political support necessary for RTTC’s proposals to become a reality, Schneiderman notes that there is a limited precedent for one of its main proposals. He claims, “City officials used tax foreclosure to take control of roughly 100,000 apartments during the 1970s.” However, “those apartments had been abandoned, according to an official in the city’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).” This

example raises questions about how “abandonment” was and is defined by city officials and underscores continuities with the experiences of New York residents in the 1970s and the early 2000s.

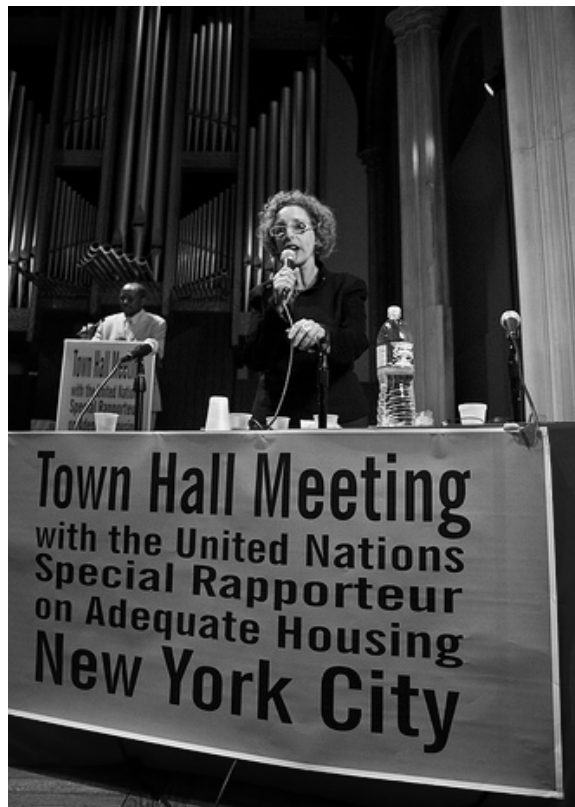
Claiming Rights

Many CAAAV and MOM activists lived through the upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s and understand the complexities of life in New York’s low-income communities. They recall vividly the burning of residential buildings in the Bronx during the 1970s and the crime levels of the 1980s. Nonetheless, as Mothers on the Move executive director Wanda Salaman points out, crises such as the Bronx burnings provided an opportunity for community leaders and youth to work together to offer basic services, such as clean water, to neighbors suffering from the abandonment and destruction of buildings by landlords. Likewise, the current struggle over housing in New York creates an opportunity for activists to push forward their vision and to again express what Gold calls “a distinctive New York view of housing.” This perspective braids “together several ideological threads: a broad vision of state responsibility, a labor Theory of value, and a notion of tenants’ “community rights,” similar [in many ways] to Black Power’s concept of “community control.”¹⁹ All three of these perspectives are evident in the work of CAAAV, MOM, and their allies as they pursue housing justice today.

Over a century’s worth of activism informs this particular understanding of housing and now converges with global human rights-based claims regarding this issue. Such a perspective is crucial to empowering residents such as MOM housing organizer and lifelong NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority)

resident Nova Strachan. Before her involvement with MOM, initiated through her Work Experience Program (WEP) placement, she was focused on survival.²⁰ Through MOM, she became aware of the threat of privatization of her own building and became motivated to defend her home. According to Strachan, not only is she excited about getting the word out to NYCHA residents and connecting them to MOM's broader agenda, but she also knows "where to go to know these things [problems such as NYCHA privatization or pollution] and who to address [to make change]."²¹ This ability to address power brokers as well as community members is crucial to such activist efforts.

Neil Smith notes that the phrase "Housing is a Human Right" was wielded in a May 1991 concert organized in Tompkins Square. Although activists failed to deter then-Mayor David Dinkins' efforts to clear the park of homeless residents, they did gain attention for their cause.²² Dinkins secured the park via chains and police then defended his action by "alleging that Tompkins Square had been stolen from the community by the homeless."²³ The dire conditions faced by many residents in New York during the economic crisis of the 2000s created an opportunity to reject such binaries, which are regularly used to resist claims to housing rights. Moreover, the concerns of residents in areas such as Chinatown and the South Bronx have become part of international discussions through the investigation and reporting of United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Raquel Rolnick.²⁴ Rolnick visited New York and met with a range of organizations, including CAAAV, MOM, and local officials. (Mayor Bloomberg, however, declined to meet with her.)²⁵



Special Rapporteur Rolnick at Townhall Meeting²⁶

Rolnick's October 22, 2009 town hall meeting at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan's Morningside Heights kicked off her tour of the United States. At the event, she heard testimonies from New York residents and activists including Strachan. In his comments, Rob Robinson of Picture the Homeless, a CAAAV and MOM ally and RTTC member organization, declared, "housing is a human right." The presence of Rolnick suggested that such claims might be taken more seriously in New York in 2009 than they had been in the 1990s. Strachan recounted her own experience losing her grandmother, who served as her guardian, at the age of 16, and how fortunate she was that the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) allowed her to continue living in public housing.²⁷ She asked what would happen to children like her if NYCHA

becomes privatized and stated, "I am disgusted by the disinvestment [in public housing]. State, federal, where's the money?... You know, you bailed out Wall Street, bail out the people."²⁸ Her concerns resonate with the findings of scholars. Norman Krumholz, former Cleveland planning director and professor of urban affairs, concluded that privatization through programs such as HOPE (Home Ownership for People Everywhere) VI has produced a situation where

...some tenants are offered the promise of an improvement in their quality of life through a rent voucher or inclusion in a new, mixed-income development, but others who cannot make the transition may suffer because of the loss of their home, no matter how severely distressed.²⁹

Not only are there concerns that the housing being built to replace demolished or privatized public buildings is inadequate, as Rolnick observed, but pushing home ownership has also resulted in people getting loans to buy homes that they could not afford and then lost. This put them in need, once again, of public housing or public assistance that is increasingly being dismantled.³⁰ During a trip to the Bronx, Rolnick encountered high numbers of foreclosures and negligence from owners, including violations such as cutting heat and hot water in the winter. Yet she reported, "I am glad to see that you tenants have organized. Nothing can ever replace people's organizing. Without pushing from below and taking direct action, nothing ever changes."³¹

Rolnick also visited apartments in Chinatown with CAAAV's tenant organizer Zhi Qin Zheng and volunteer Shaun Lin, witnessing the poor housing conditions that are endemic to the neighborhood.



CAAHV's Zheng and Lin with Special Rapporteur Rolnick³²

Rolnick then toured cities throughout the country and on February 12, 2010, released her report on the United States to the General Assembly's Human Rights Council.³³ She stated that:

A new face of homelessness is appearing, with increasing numbers of working families and individuals finding themselves on the streets, or living in shelters or in transitional housing arrangements with friends and family. Federal funding for low-income housing has been cut over the past decades, leading to a reduced stock and quality of subsidized housing... The subprime mortgage crisis has increased an already large gap between the supply and demand of affordable housing, and the economic crisis which followed has led to increased unemployment and an even greater need for affordable housing.³⁴

Her observations echo Columbia University Professor Emeritus Peter Marcuse's foreword to the RTTC report "People Without Housing and Housing Without People." He notes startling statistics related to affordable housing in New York City, including approximately 10,000 homeless families and over 500,000 households spending more than half of their income on housing. He calls for an immediate response to this dire situation.³⁵

These numbers reflect a national crisis, with reports in September 2010 noting that from 2007 to 2009 the number of homeless families with at least one minor child “leapt to 170,000 from 131,000.”³⁶ While the crisis in housing has continued to grow, activists have sought to find ways to highlight an issue that is seen as a problem of individuals. September 2010 was the fifth anniversary of the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe, and a New York Times article points to the continued dire need for affordable housing in New Orleans.³⁷ The experience of New Orleans residents before, during and after Hurricane Katrina and Rita is a touchstone for RTTC and other progressives, as it presented a spectacular example of governmental failure that resulted in the loss of homes and lives for low-income residents. David Harvey uses it as a metaphor, arguing that in cities across the United States, “A ‘Financial Katrina’ is unfolding, which conveniently (for the developers) threatens to wipe out low-income neighbourhoods on potentially high-value land in many inner-city areas far more effectively and speedily than could be achieved through eminent domain.”³⁸ This language underscores how affordable housing in US cities continues to be inextricably tied to race, class and gender inflected issues of belonging: whether residents have a right to return home, the poor management and privatization of public housing, and efforts to rebrand neighborhoods to attract white middle and upper class residents into urban centers.³⁹

On August 29, 2008, RTTC helped organize a rally and march to commemorate the third anniversary of Katrina on the Lower East Side in conjunction with its NOLA working group. They brought marchers past sites

where residents were fighting to stay in their homes as well as neighborhoods where large-scale expensive condominiums' had been built.⁴⁰ The event was coordinated with actions being carried out in New Orleans, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Washington DC, Miami, and Providence. Jordan Flaherty, a reporter for Left Turn, quotes RTTC leaders as seeing New Orleans as "the front lines in the struggle against displacement and gentrification in the US."⁴¹ New Orleans residents have provided inspiration but have also demonstrated the potential for catastrophe for activists in cities like New York.⁴² Survivor-activist Joetta Rogers, a former resident of Mobile, Alabama, argued that she and people like her should be recognized as internally displaced persons (IDPs). She stated: "Our right to return which is a combination of several fundamental human rights, such as housing, health care, education, decent work, physical security and non-discrimination are the key rights that are being violated."⁴³

CAAAV executive director and former housing organizer, Helena Wong, echoed this sentiment when discussing the battle of 81 Bowery tenants with their landlord:

This is really a case of official inaction and neglect – by the City and by the landlord... They've done nothing wrong, and yet they're the ones who are now without a home... [like] New Orleans residents who were forced out by Hurricane Katrina, the 81 Bowery tenants have a right to return!⁴⁴



Returning Tenants and Allies Examine 81 Bowery Rooms⁴⁵

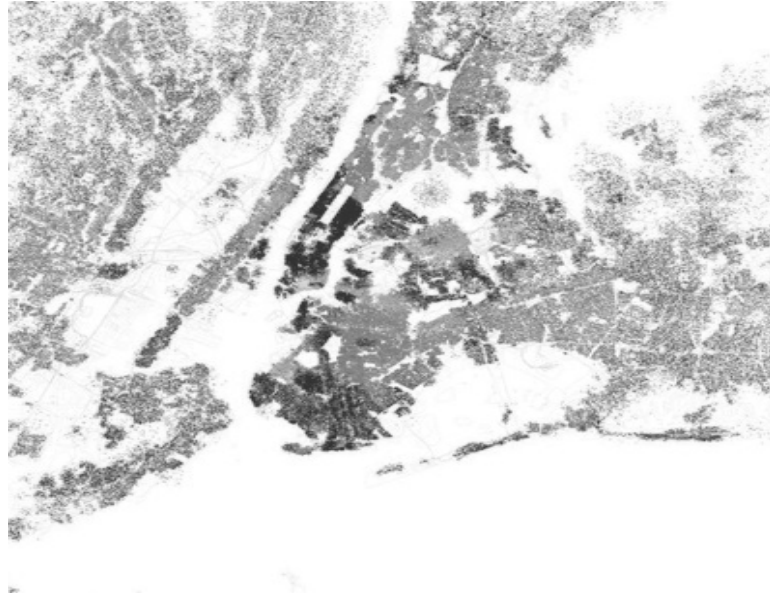
CAAAY's claim of the right to return helps contextualize the experiences of residents and the trauma they experienced when they were suddenly evicted suddenly from their homes on November 13, 2008. Rather an isolated incident, their experience and their response to it are tied to those of Katrina survivors. In these cases, activists buttress the arguments made to local officials and media by claiming human rights as part of an international movement for social justice. These assertions are made in the face of the continued primacy of private property rights in the United States. While temporarily disrupted in the case of the 1970s squatter movement and similar campaigns across the country, private property rights remain a huge obstacle to housing reform. The use of human rights discourse offers one means of creating moral pressure on officials. It also provides residents with moral support as they struggle to maintain their communities by assuring them they are not alone, but rather part of national and global movements.

Fleshing Out Gentrification

While catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina help highlight vital housing issues, the day-to-day nature of gentrification poses equally significant challenges to poor urban residents. CAAAV has defined gentrification as the “physical, economic, and cultural process in which private developers, aided by City policies, invest in low-income and underserved neighborhoods, causing high-income people to displace low-income people, often people of color, from their homes and businesses.”⁴⁶ Their definition highlights the racial as well as class dimensions of gentrification. So, too, does the Institute on Race and Poverty, which quotes Roman Catholic Cardinal George in its November 2003 report *Structural Racism and Multiracial Coalition Building*:

Spatial racism refers to patterns of metropolitan development in which some affluent Whites create racially and economically segregated suburbs or gentrified areas of cities, leaving the poor -- mainly African Americans, Hispanics and some newly arrived immigrants -- isolated in deteriorating areas of the cities and older suburbs.⁴⁷

Computer programmer Eric Fischer, inspired by Bill Rankin’s “Chicago Boundaries,” made the continued results of such practices visually apparent in summer 2010.⁴⁸ Using data from the 2000 Census, his maps show the continued stark racial lines across New York’s neighborhoods.



Ethnic Population Density of New York City⁴⁹

Such maps provide a visual compliment to the claims of groups such as RTTC.

The New York chapter of RTTC, like CAAAV, notes that gentrification transforms certain areas of the city into “‘high-value’ neighborhood[s] causing the displacement of long-term residents and businesses who are often low-income, poor, and people of color.” Such displacement often

...breaks apart whole communities forcing people to move far from their families, schools, places of work, and social life because they cannot afford to live in their neighborhoods and/or because gentrification and privatization has altered the fabric of their community too much.

These shifts are made visible as Fisher’s map above dramatizes these very effects.

Despite the dangers posed by gentrification, debates about its effects, continue in New York City and across the nation, with many so-called authorities proclaiming the utility of gentrification for sustaining urban environments. On December 11, 2009, for example, the New York Magazine published an article “What’s Wrong With Gentrification? The Displacement Myth” by Adam

Sternbergh.⁵⁰ He references the work of urban planning professor Lance Freeman, who in *There Goes the 'Hood*, did not find “any causal relationship between gentrification and displacement.” The article focuses solely on the examples of Harlem and Clinton Hill in Brooklyn, historically Black neighborhoods, without much comment on the complex racial and class dynamics occurring in neighborhoods city-wide. Positing gentrification as synonymous with racial and economic integration, Sternbergh hails it as the sole alternative to past “white-flight disasters” and urban blight. He fails to engage concerns about spatial racism, and the examples of gentrification he cites do not produce racial and class integration, but rather rearrange racially and economically homogenous communities within the metropolitan area, often pushing communities of color into less central areas. These omissions are notable in light of New York’s history of “urban renewal.” Roberta Gold notes that famed planner Robert Moses’ public works projects in the mid-twentieth century “did nothing to improve poor people’s housing.” Rather they dislocated 500,000 New Yorkers and “showed a special penchant for razing black and integrated areas.”⁵¹ Sternbergh’s analysis also contrasts sharply with the working definitions of gentrification and displacement utilized by the New York City RTTC chapter.

Despite such divergent understandings of the significance of gentrification and displacement, Sternbergh does acknowledge that “as neighborhoods gentrify, buildings are sold, landlords raise rents, and some people are forced out.” CAAAV and MOM defend the right to housing for those who are forced out

and work to make them central to discussions of the future of housing in New York City. Their efforts counter the “common sense” acceptance of inequality implied by Sternbergh and others that requires a forgetting or devaluing of many individuals who are deeply impacted by gentrification and its costs. As scholar Mary Hawkesworth states, “social amnesia is produced and accredited by mainstream politicians, journalists, economists and social scientists.” Such forgetting is enabled by the marginalization of poor people and people of color. Moreover, this problem exists in urban areas throughout the world. Thus similar to the case of Tompkins Square, Leela Fernandes describes the city of Mumbai, where “the boundaries of the ‘public’ constituted by such beautification” projects “have in fact been dependent on the politics of socioeconomic class... urchins, beggars and the residents of hutments are viewed as interchangeable with the ‘muck and debris’ which must be ‘cleaned up.’”⁵²

This rhetoric, reminiscent of the language used concerning sex workers, effectively erases the agency of such residents in the imagination of the speaker and her/his audience. Such erasures are part of a high stakes scenario as Fernandes notes:

State practices and exclusionary definitions of community and citizenship produce visions of urban development that exclude poor and working-class communities... [and] are fundamentally shaped by the emergence of a model of consumer-citizenship that seeks to displace the political claims of marginalized social groups to resources such as jobs and housing.”⁵³

In its anti-gentrification organizing efforts, MOM, CAAAV, and their allies attempt to counter such amnesia and reassert the legitimacy of residents advocating for their rights as tenants and community members.⁵⁴

In theorizing the use of experience as evidence, Sandra Soto offers an analysis that is instructive for considering New York housing activism. She states:

The danger of the uncritical experience-as-evidence approach to difference is that it renders difference still more naturalized; rather than historicize the workings of ideological systems that have produced and marginalized accounts of difference in the first place, the exponents of such an approach pursue the unveiling of difference as the end goal.”⁵⁵

In other words, rather than taking experience as the preeminent form of evidence or its recognition as producing solidarities, it is crucial to engage the systems that have produced the contexts, the language itself, through which we understand and express experience. Simultaneously, as Paula Moya argues, the “‘physical realities of our lives’ will profoundly inform the contours and the context of both our theories and our knowledge.”⁵⁶ These analyses suggest that the question is not whether gentrification is good or bad but rather when and how certain residents have the significance of their experiences of displacement undermined. This then leads to a related issue: How do those residents collaborate to express their understanding of their experience, their rights, and their hopes for the future?

Gender and Housing

In “Sex Roles in Social Movements: A Case Study of the Tenant Movement in New York City,” Ronald Lawson and Stephen E. Barton argue that women were “in the forefront of organizing a grass-roots movement that has had a rather long history [and] have been a major force in building and then keeping the movement going.”⁵⁷ Their study uses archival research, fieldwork and

surveys to piece together women's participation in tenant organizing from New York's earliest rent strikes at the turn of the twentieth century through the 1970s. They note in particular the importance of their leadership in neighborhood organizations by the 1920s.⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Roberta Gold observes that "[b]y the late 1950s, local organizers, mainly women, were rallying residents against urban renewal in several neighborhoods" in New York City.⁵⁹ She then traces women's housing efforts through the rise of second wave feminism in the 1970s. In this moment, she argues, "[S]enior organizers did not set out in a programmatic way to advance... women's power... Instead, they were concerned with housing—both a universal need and, ironically, an entity located in the "domestic sphere" of conventional gender ideology."⁶⁰ Organizing by CAAAV and MOM makes clear that housing continues to both a universal and a gendered concern. Yet, their efforts also suggest that housing is gendered in very particular ways in New York's transnational communities of color.

In the case of CAAAV's organizing efforts in Manhattan's Chinatown, single resident occupancy buildings (SROs), such as 81 Bowery, are almost exclusively home to men. The disproportionate representation of men in Chinatown's SROs echoes early patterns of Chinese migration to the United States, as some residents are bachelors while others earn money to send to their families.⁶¹ Other buildings, however, house a range of residents and families. The May 8, 2011, Mother's Day event in Chinatown emphasized women's participation in the movement and framed residents' shared experience of housing concerns as a family issue, both literally and figuratively. While the adult

organizers in this campaign have been and are Chinese immigrant and Chinese-American women, its youth leaders include both adolescent girls and boys. Working across gender differences, they have successfully organized the large number of men in SROs as well as residents from more mixed-gendered buildings to fight evictions, find temporary housing, and return to their buildings.

In contrast, MOM historically has focused on tenant organizing in buildings occupied by families, many of which were female headed. While non-profits or private owners owned some of the properties they organized, MOM has become increasingly engaged with New York City Housing Authority public housing tenants.⁶² According to NYCHA's statistics, as of January 1, 2009, 133,449 families have a "female head of household," compared to 40,493 families with a "male head of household."⁶³ These statistics include the caveat that they only "represent persons authorized to reside in NYCHA developments," suggesting an awareness that there may be much more complex relationships and contributors to families than acknowledged. Still, it is clear that women-headed families comprise the majority in NYCHA buildings. It should prove not surprising, then, that along with women's longstanding participation in housing organizing generally, they currently act as leaders in public housing activism.⁶⁴ Despite women's predominance in leadership positions, case studies of CAAAV's work in Chinatown and MOM's work in public housing units demonstrate that both men and women participate in tenants' rights organizing among New York's communities of color.

Defending Chinatown

CAAAV's Chinatown Justice Project (CJP), which includes the Chinatown Tenant Union (CTU), aims to protect residents and vendors from displacement caused by gentrification and to "build a healthy community environment with decent and affordable housing for all, and clean and safe streets."⁶⁵ New York's Chinatown has been a significant space for CAAAV's organizing over the past twenty-five years. As Zhi Qin Zheng, a CAAAV organizer, observes "The changes [in Chinatown] are incredible – rents are going up all the time and landlords are trying to evict us whatever way they can."⁶⁶ As noted in earlier chapters, by late 1996, CAAAV expanded its community organizing beyond anti-Asian violence. At its 15th anniversary celebration in 1998, the organization stated that it was now clear

...that anti-Asian violence was never perpetrated at 'random' ('it can happen to any Asian at any time'), nor without specificity to class, ethnic, gender, and immigrant status. Rather, it is a form of racial violence that specifically targets poor Asian immigrants: the low-wage and no-wage worker, the migrant woman worker, the undocumented worker squatting a Chinatown tenement, the young urban dweller attempting to survive the collapse of the welfare state. This is the new Asian immigrant working class.⁶⁷

A decade later, on August 24, 2008, the CJP and CTU organized an exhibition, Chinatown Community Struggle, that reflects CAAAV's engagement with the "new Asian immigrant working class." That warm Sunday, youth members in their bright green CTU shirts welcomed passing Chinatown residents to examine rows of tee-shirts hung across a playing field in Sara Roosevelt Park. This long thin city park runs between Chrystie and Forsyth Streets from Chinatown through the Lower East Side. The tee-shirts represented a range of concerns about gentrification in Chinatown, including key moments in its

development since the 1970s as well as current issues like the mass evictions of Chinatown residents and the rise of condo developments alongside proposed privatization of public housing throughout the city.



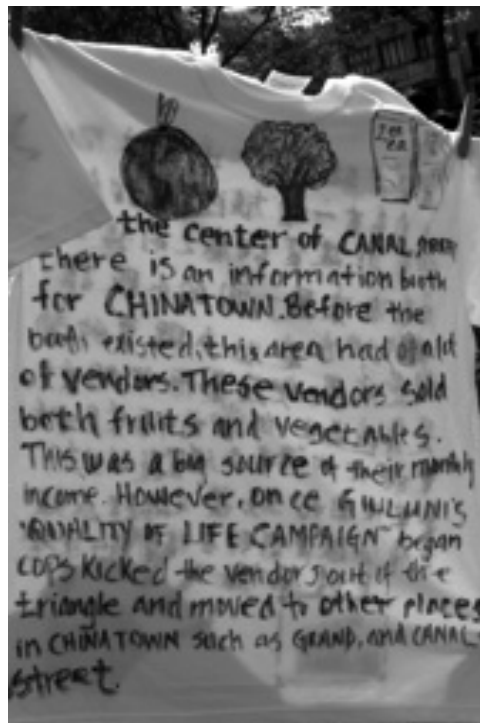
Chinatown Community Struggle Exhibition⁶⁸



Confucius Plaza Apartments Tee-shirt⁶⁹

The above t-shirt, painted in red, gold, and black, details the struggle over the building of Confucius Plaza Apartments in 1974.⁷⁰ The shirt recalls the initial lack of Chinese/American and other workers of color in the construction of this public housing. The resulting protests led to the hiring of non-white workers, which is documented in Christine Chong's film *From Spikes to Spindles*.⁷¹ Memorializing the Confucius Plaza struggle for local residents highlights CAAAV's pan-Asian/American politics and its emphasis on the importance of cross-racial solidarities while simultaneously centering Chinatown as a key site of resistance to gentrification.⁷²

A second tee-shirt narrates the problematic transformation of the triangle at Canal, Baxter and Walker Streets from its previous position as a center for local Chinatown fruit and vegetable vendors to an information kiosk.



Canal Triangle Vendors Tee-Shirt⁷³

The move against vendors who occupied this space began with former mayor Rudolph Giuliani's "Quality of Life" campaign as "cops kicked vendors out of the triangle."⁷⁴ Mayor Bloomberg's administration supported a final effort to gain control over the space, constructing the kiosk there in 2004 as part of the "Explore Chinatown" campaign, an initiative funded by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) and the September 11th Fund" with support from the New York City Departments of Transportation and Parks.⁷⁵ The shirts narrate for viewers longstanding concerns that predate Chinatown's emergence as a "last frontier" in Manhattan.⁷⁶ The destruction of the World Trade Centers in 2001 and global financial and housing crises later in the decade created the conditions for aggressive development plans in Chinatown.⁷⁷

CAAHV's long-standing connections to the community, which include working with tenants on housing issues, enabled it to push forward with the CJP.⁷⁸ On July 27, 2000 CAAHV held a press conference announcing the release of its report on housing and environmental conditions in New York City's Chinatown.⁷⁹ Based on surveys of 100 residents by CAAHV's youth members, the report found that 50 percent were paying \$600 to \$1000 a month in rent while the median family income in the Chinatown/Lower East Side area was \$17,100. As a result, 40 percent to 70 percent of household incomes were used to pay rent. More than a third of those surveyed reported living in one to two-bedroom apartment with households of six or more people. Fifty-eight percent reported hot water as a problem, 42 percent had plumbing problems, and 37 percent had issues with adequate heat in their apartments. JingJing Lin, a youth organizer,

stated, “Many people blame new immigrants as the cause of Chinatown’s housing problems, especially overcrowding, but our research shows otherwise.” They cited statistics to show that 63,000 units of housing existed for the 150,000 residents of Chinatown, indicating that on average only two to three people should live in one unit. CAAAV thus argued that the high rent to low wage ratio was a primary cause in residents’ experiences of overcrowding.

In addition to the high costs of rent and lack of proper building maintenance, residents reported being forced to pay up to \$6000 in key money, with a total of 43 percent having paid key money to secure their current apartments. Key money is an illegal off the books cost demanded by some landlords in addition to standard security deposits. This common practice underscores the gap between the significant amount of money that low-income residents were paying to live in Chinatown and their official rent and the quality of housing they received. Along with exposing these inequalities, the report pointed to the fact that government subsidies for the construction of luxury condominiums on Orchard and Ludlow Streets had resulted in a drastic shift over the past three years from a majority Chinese immigrant area to an increasingly high-income white area.

The consequences of increased investment in housing stock are evident in many ways. Youth member Sauling Chan reported:

There are buildings on Mott and Mulberry owned by the same landlord, but they’re very, very different.... On Mulberry, where there are mostly white tenants, the building is nice and tenants say they don’t [have] much problem with their landlord. But on Mott Street, I was surprised to see the building is so bad. The stairs are broken, there’s holes in the ceilings and

floors, it's dirty and dark in the hallways. We say the landlord has a different face for a different race.⁸⁰

Fenzhen Nie, another youth member, added, "The point is not the race of the landlord but the tenant... Even a Chinese landlord wants to gentrify and bring in white people who make more money. They treat tenants differently based on race." Nie's usage of the phrase "wants to gentrify" underscores a missing part of mainstream narratives of gentrification and ignores the long history of struggles by residents to value and protect their neighborhood.⁸¹ In the case of the Mott and Mulberry buildings, CAAAV members saw that within the same neighborhood, the same landlord made strategic choices about the care of a building. Rather than the neighborhood being "blighted," Chinatown was a patchwork of buildings with and without proper maintenance. Issues of neglect and overcrowding continued to be critical sources of concern for CAAAV activists throughout the decade.

In October of 2000, youth members and Chinatown residents joined the Citywide Tenants Coalition in Harlem to march against gentrification. In the wake of increasing government-subsidized building on 125th street, including the Harlem USA shopping center, Nellie Bailey of the Harlem Tenants Council asked "Why should our tax dollars subsidize these stores, while local small businesses are being driven out of Harlem with no assistance from the [Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone] UMEZ?"⁸² This question returns to the concerns raised in the 1970s about the workers hired to build the Confucius Plaza Apartments and the condominiums developed on Orchard and Ludlow Streets. Community

activists allied with groups such as CAAAV are not opposed to investment in their communities, but rather take issue with the interests that are given primacy.

For example, RTTC in 2009 “called on city officials to revamp the 601 vacant buildings its members identified, from Downtown Brooklyn and Bushwick to the West Village and the South Bronx.”⁸³ They argued for this effort because “the number of apartments low-income families — those earning less than \$37,000 — can afford decreased to 991,592 from 1,189,962 from 2002 to 2008.” Meanwhile the city was spending \$20 million on conversions of condominiums into rental properties for “a program that considers a single person who earns nearly \$69,000 a year eligible” to rent. The affordable housing program that allows middle class New Yorkers to compete with working-class residents for rentals demonstrates the local government’s refusal to focus on the needs of residents who are struggling to live in the city. The overly broad definition of residents eligible for affordable housing programs suggests that the limited recommendations by scholars such as Freeman for providing solutions like tax credits in gentrifying areas cannot sufficiently address the class inequalities in New York’s housing market.

RTTC echoes the concerns CAAAV raised in 2000, as shortages in affordable housing ran alongside investment in housing for middle and upper class New Yorkers. The community’s alarm over gentrification was not lost on District One city council candidates that CAAAV youth members contacted in the spring of 2001. On March 25, CAAAV issued a press release that included quotes from candidates:⁸⁴

“Affordable housing and traditional business are being replaced by expensive housing and chain stores.” – Alan Gerson; “Gentrification will displace Chinatown’s residents and workforce.” – Kwong Hui; “Government needs to create programs to stabilize communities.” – Rocky Chin; “I pledge to fight against displacement.” – Brad Hoyleman

The continued struggle between awareness that there are real costs of gentrification for longstanding community members with the desire to reinvigorate Chinatown provides the context for the struggle over tenants’ rights at 81 Bowery Street. The destruction of the World Trade Centers and the resulting efforts to “revitalize” the area also resulted in development programs pushing into the neighboring Chinatown area.⁸⁵

The 2005 formation of CTU has strengthened CAAAV’s efforts to support tenants’ rights in Chinatown. According to a 2007 profile of Zhi Qin Zheng and Bin Liang--“CJP’s Dynamic Duo”--they were “the driving force in the creation of [CTU]...they have worked tirelessly to build [it] into an organization with over 1,300 supporters.”⁸⁶ Another tee-shirt from the Chinatown exhibit summarizes CTU’s work.



CTU Tee-shirt⁸⁷

“Through organizing residents, direct action campaigns, and working in alliance with other organizations, CTU’s mission is to protect low-income tenants in Chinatown from gentrification and displacement.” While CJP focused primarily on developing youth organizing in Chinatown, similar to CAAAV’s Youth Leadership Project that worked with Cambodian and Vietnamese youth in the Bronx, CTU broadened its organizing base to include a range of residents from high school youth to mature and elderly residents.

Beginning in 2005, CTU organized residents of 81 Bowery Street, an SRO building in the heart of Chinatown. Recently, the building has been a site of struggle between residents, the owner, city officials and the state judicial system. In November 2009, Village Voice reporter Elizabeth Dwoskin wrote an extensive story on the building’s history titled “The Strangest Landlord-Tenant Relationship In Town?”⁸⁸ Beginning with a description of “The smell of piss and fish paste,” smells that I never noticed during months of rallies in the winter of 2009, Dwoskin paints both residents and landlord Donald Lee as caricatured versions of struggling immigrants. Describing the residents’ response to their eviction in 2009, she states “So what did they do? They filed suit and spent a year fighting to get back into their cramped, smelly cubicles at 81 Bowery.” The repeated references to smelliness reinforce the longstanding association of immigrants with odors that “offend mainstream sensibilities by virtue of being uncontainable, unfamiliar and representative of the supposed refusal of new citizens to assimilate and conform to majoritarian standards of odorlessness.”⁸⁹ Dwoskin

emphasizes the residents non-assimilated behavior again when discussing their legal battle with the owner, Donald Lee:

In 2005, Lee sued to evict all of the tenants from the fourth floor. But for an owner concerned about too many tenants, the grounds for his suit were odd: Citing a certificate of occupancy that allowed for 62 cubicles—nearly double the number already in place—Lee argued that tenants were breaking the law by living in too few rooms. In other words, Lee dealt with overcrowding in his lodging house by suing so that he could get even more rooms built. Three years later, a Manhattan judge dismissed the lawsuit.

Dwoskin's description fails to account for two chief concerns that ran through the five-year struggle. First, as noted earlier, as a landlord interested in evicting his tenants, Lee was willing to use whatever approach would work to convince a judge to support his effort. Secondly, the residents' interest in staying in the building reflects the difficulty finding low-cost housing in a community where they have lived and worked for years. A tee-shirt from the Chinatown Community Struggle depicted local residents and called for them to join CTU "to prevent more evictions."



Evicted Tee-shirt⁹⁰

Clearly the organization anticipated the evictions of residents that coming fall and represented the pain that such occurrences caused tenants.

Dwoskin's article ignores the ways that residents became organized and carried out legal battles and protests against Lee. With the support of CTU organizers and lawyers from MFY Legal Services, residents were able to win a summer 2008 ruling that gave them the right to stay in their apartments.⁹¹ This victory was short-lived as on November 13, 2008, the tenants were evicted by the New York Police Department for one fire code violation.⁹² The evictions were part of a series of similar actions in the late fall, and 81 Bowery residents were the only ones provided with short-term assistance in finding emergency housing from the Department of Housing and the Red Cross since all other buildings were illegal SROs.⁹³ According to 81 Bowery residents and CTU organizers, officials had posted eviction notices solely in English that morning, and by the afternoon residents were out on the street. As Helena Wong described to the Downtown Express

The issue is that there's no plan and there's no notice... People are literally yelling, "Get your stuff and go." There is no plan to make sure people are in temporary housing, and there's no information on when [they can] move back.

The abrupt nature of the evictions raised concerns among CTU activists and others about the appropriateness of the city's response as it left residents literally out on the street, often without their belongings and nowhere to go.

Throughout the winter and spring, CAAAV's CTU worked with the 81 Bowery residents to hold protests in front of the building and the nearby video store, which was also owned by the landlord. They also held a press conference

at the local Fukien American Center. On Sundays at 1 pm, CAAAV organizers brought together 81 Bowery residents with CTU members and allies to chant outside the building. To prepare for these protests, they painted pieces of cardboard in red paint that bore messages in Chinese and English about their right to return. Chinatown is a bustling area, particularly on weekends, as area residents, Asian/Americans from the New York/New Jersey region, and tourists flock to the neighborhood to do grocery shopping, purchase goods available in storefront shops, and sight see. The residents and CAAAV protesters were often joined by members of allied organizations including MOM, GOLES, and Picture the Homeless. As noted by Helena Wong, these protests were often the first for residents and CTU youth members, and created a space for them to speak out publicly against the 81 Bowery evictions and broader concerns about gentrification in Chinatown.⁹⁴

While the protests helped strengthen local coalitions against gentrification and provide a sense of community for residents who had undergone a traumatic loss of their home, Lee continued to resist their return. After making the required changes in response to the housing violations cited by the police, the vacate order was lifted, but Lee would not allow residents to come back. It was not until August 1, 2009 that some residents were able to return following an order by a housing judge.⁹⁵ The struggle over the future of the 81 Bowery building demonstrates the utility of direct actions in bringing media attention to an issue, solidifying local alliances, and perhaps most importantly providing displaced residents with a supportive forum to protest their eviction. Nonetheless, as the

key successes continued to occur in housing courts and were subject to being undermined via other city mechanisms, CTU continues to work on local resident issues while also engaging development planning in Chinatown.⁹⁶

Over the years, CTU has gained significant respect from local officials. On February 13, 2011, city councilwomen Margaret Chin and Rosie Mendez, along with Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, and State Senator Daniel Squadron attended their Chinese Lunar Year of the Rabbit celebration. All of these politicians made clear that they appreciated the work that CTU had done to defend area residents and encouraged the group, particularly its tenant leaders, to continue fighting to make Chinatown a livable space for the working-class.



127 Madison Tenants Protest Landlord Harassment⁹⁷

Public Housing under Attack

MOM joined CAAAV in several of their protests in Chinatown. The organization has had a longstanding interest in addressing problems within both public and private housing. Its early work included organizing rent strikes in buildings run by a dysfunctional non-profit. Their efforts helped result in an

investigation by the State's Attorney General, and the replacement of the board and improved services.⁹⁸ A May 2007 rally in Manhattan bridged their concerns about affordable housing in New York. Participating in the citywide coalition, New York is Our Home! MOM members called for affordable housing protections, including preserving the Section 8 program, limiting rent increases for vulnerable residents including the elderly and those living with HIV/AIDS, and repealing city legislation that made apartments that are \$2000 or more a month unregulated.⁹⁹ While MOM continues to work to protect affordable housing broadly, the group is particularly concerned about public housing issues.

The future of US public housing continues to be unclear, as demonstrated by the proposed Preservation, Enhancement, and Transformation of Rental Assistance (PETRA) legislation supported by the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) secretary, Shaun Donovan. (Donovan was the former Commissioner of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development.) This proposal has been criticized by groups like Right to the City as a "first step towards privatization" that "enables private financial institutions to acquire legal interests and rights in public assets," thus threatening the public and community-shared nature of public housing today.¹⁰⁰ UN Rapporteur Raquel Rolnick voices the larger concerns that PETRA reflects:

Federal housing policy has resulted, on the one hand, in the achievement of a high rate of homeownership – about 69 per cent. On the other hand, it has also resulted in the decreasing supply of public housing – currently 1.2 million units. This loss has been accompanied by the progressive withdrawal of Government from the housing sector.¹⁰¹



Strachan Door-knocking at Betances Complex¹⁰²

MOM's housing organizer Nova Strachan frequently conducts door-knocking outreach to help residents become active participants in the broader debate over the future of public housing and to address specific concerns in their buildings, such as lack of repairs or garbage pick up. Visiting local NYCHA buildings, she invites tenants to MOM events as well as tenant association meetings. Strachan usually manages to have extended conversations about current conditions in the building with at least a few residents on each floor.¹⁰³ While door knocking one evening in the spring of 2009, a young woman, who was in the midst of her college finals and lived with her daughter, invited us into her home. Her hallway wall had large chunks of peeling paint and her kitchen was in disrepair. These problems reflected the lack of resources that management typically spends on maintenance in NYCHA, as well as privately owned, low-income buildings. This issue was clear throughout our visits to NYCHA housing, including a fall 2010 trip

with Strachan and two volunteers to NYCHA's Betances Complex in Mott Haven housing.



Betances Complex Stairwell Steps¹⁰⁴

Rusted, cracked steps in the stairwells and peeling paint in hallways reflect a lack of maintenance similar to that found in Chicago public housing by scholars Roberta M. Feldman and Susan Stall.¹⁰⁵

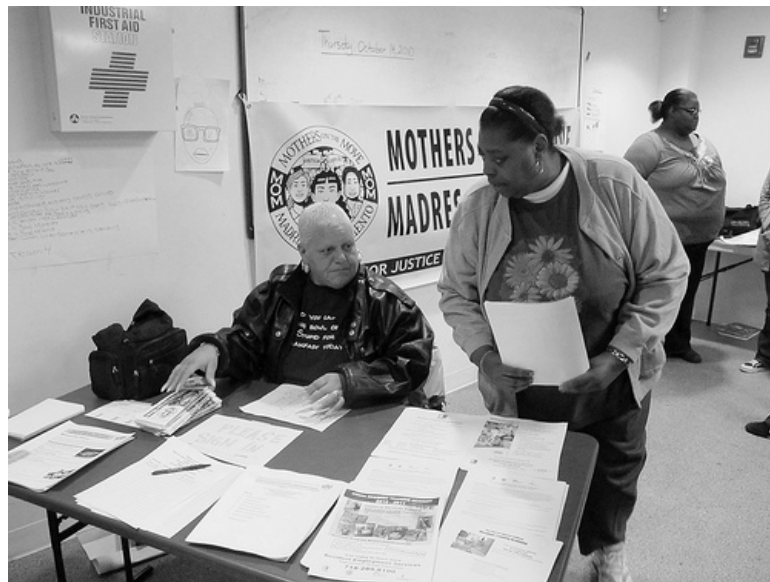
The lack of repair can prove deadly, as documented by the New York Times in 2008 after the death of a five-year-old boy in Brooklyn as he tried to escape from a stuck elevator. The accompanying audio slide show focuses on broken or malfunctioning elevators in NYCHA buildings and includes interviews with frustrated residents. The Times thus put a personal face on NYCHA residents.¹⁰⁶ Such issues have been key to MOM's successes in the 2000s, as they organized in the St. Mary's, E.R. Moore, and Bronxchester Houses to address issues such as lack of trash pickup and elevator maintenance.¹⁰⁷ When NYCHA building managers proved unresponsive, MOM organized residents to protest and drew on its relationship with local politicians to push for the

replacement of ineffective managers. These efforts create real improvements within specific buildings, but also are indicative of the frustrations residents experience living in public housing buildings.

MOM's work includes taking to the streets because as noted by RTTC member organization, Community Voices Heard, in their 2010 report "Democracy (In) action," there continues to be a lack of support for positive and functioning resident associations, and even in the best cases, residents have no actual decision-making power over the policies that affect them.¹⁰⁸ Within New York's public housing, there is low association participation (17 percent) and a lack of awareness about the existence of such groups (47 percent).¹⁰⁹ Similar to the leadership in Chicago's Wentworth Gardens, Resident Association (RA) leaders tend to be older Black women, and there are low levels of youth, men, and Latina/o participation.¹¹⁰ MOM works consistently to raise awareness about RAs in buildings, provides materials in Spanish as well as English, and engages youth in housing activism through Youth on the Move. Yet the limits on resident participation produced by federal and local policies necessitate continued efforts to seek out other paths to helping residents organize and gain resolutions to their concerns.

For example, in 2010, MOM (as part of the NYC Alliance to Preserve Public Housing) once again pushed to defend public housing. The Alliance brought together local organizations and supportive politicians at a June 30 NYCHA public hearing to ask that concerns ranging from uprooting residents to timely repairs be more adequately addressed in the current plan. As the Alliance

stated in a press release, “Expedient decisions in the past have resulted in a form of benign neglect... the current deficit continues this unfortunate trend towards surgical solutions that diminish both the number of units available... as well as the quality of life for residents.”¹¹¹ During the same year, MOM participated in research for the RTTC report “We Call These Projects Home: Solving the Crisis from the Ground Up,” which pushed back against privatization efforts and argued for public housing policies that include “strong community services, job creation and training for public housing residents, educational programs, and environmentally focused design and construction.”¹¹²



MOM's Rivera, Glover, and Salaman at Green Housing Event¹¹³

MOM has taken up the call for job creation, and as part of that project I visited the Betances Complex to handout fliers for an October 14, 2010 meeting with NYCHA's environmental coordinator, Margarita Lopez, to discuss “NYCHA's plan to Green public housing.”¹¹⁴ There seemed to be genuine interest in this program as it provided residents with a chance to hear directly from Lopez and Michelle Pinnock, NYCHA's Senior Advisor for Resident Economic

Empowerment & Sustainability. Held in the community center around the corner from their building, the meeting attracted 55 residents who learned about NYCHA's overall plan to update buildings with energy efficient light bulbs, boilers, and other measures. Officials also discussed the Section 3/Resident Employment Program (REP) and Resident Training Academy.¹¹⁵ While there is relatively little stable funding for these programs, through such forums, MOM is bringing officials into the community and helping residents learn about possible opportunities for them. By creating these face-to-face encounters, MOM makes clear the potential for eliciting community interest for such programs and increases pressure on officials to fight for better funding.

The need for consistent advocacy work was made apparent in April 2011, as MOM members took to the streets of the South Bronx neighborhood of Mott Haven. They demanded that NYCHA "officials live up to a 2001 commitment to spend 15 percent of the agency's labor costs putting tenants to work on renovation and construction projects in the buildings they live in."¹¹⁶ It appeared that Lopez, despite participating in the fall event, had changed her tune, as she reportedly told Strachan "We're not an employment agency."¹¹⁷ MOM's continued effort to promote green jobs in NYCHA buildings responds to related issues that residents face in the South Bronx – joblessness and asthma. As of February 2011, unemployment in the Bronx was at 12.7 percent, "more than three percent higher than the national average, and over five percent higher than Manhattan's, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor."¹¹⁸ Holding NYCHA to its commitments to engaging tenants in work is one local response to this issue.

MOM activists also are concerned that without improvements to NYCHA housing, there will continue to be significant number of “cockroaches, rats, and mold... known asthma triggers.” Such issues are indeed common, according to the 2011 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health Disparities and Inequalities Report (explored in depth in the following chapter) discussion of “inadequate and unhealthy housing.”¹¹⁹ The poor conditions in public housing in the South Bronx are one piece of the large puzzle that makes up the area’s unusually high asthma rates. Residents try to escape the stench of local waste processing plants and to protect their children from dangerous truck traffic by having them play indoors. Unable to find safety indoors or outdoors, residents in the South Bronx can turn to MOM, which is seeking to address pollution and pollutants of all sorts.

Thus, the work done by housing activists in CAAAV, MOM and allied organizations relates to another critical issue in low-income, immigrant, and communities of color: environmental justice. Working to address inequalities that threaten the health of community residents in and outside of their homes, activists demonstrate the necessity of a broad-based approach to social justice to truly improve the lives of community members. Finally, their approach to both housing and environmental justice issues reflects observations about transnational activism by other scholars. Nancy Naples and Manisha Desai note “most [women activists’] local campaigns are, in many ways, responses to broader social, economic, and political changes.”¹²⁰ In a similar vein, Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo observe that “transnational practices,

while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are embodied in specific social relationships established between specific people, situated in... localities, at historically determined times'.”¹²¹ Whether it be the invocation of “housing as a human right” or the need to organize globally to respond to efforts by transnational corporations to continue polluting in urban and rural areas, MOM and CAAAV activists think and act across scale. Be it based on their own experiences as immigrants from China or Puerto Rico, or a progressive political sensibility as people of color, they are seeking to make the connections necessary to hold those in political and economic power accountable to low-income communities of color.

Chapter 3

Di Algo/Say Something: Fighting Environmental Racism in the South Bronx



MOM Activists with DEP Commissioner Lloyd¹

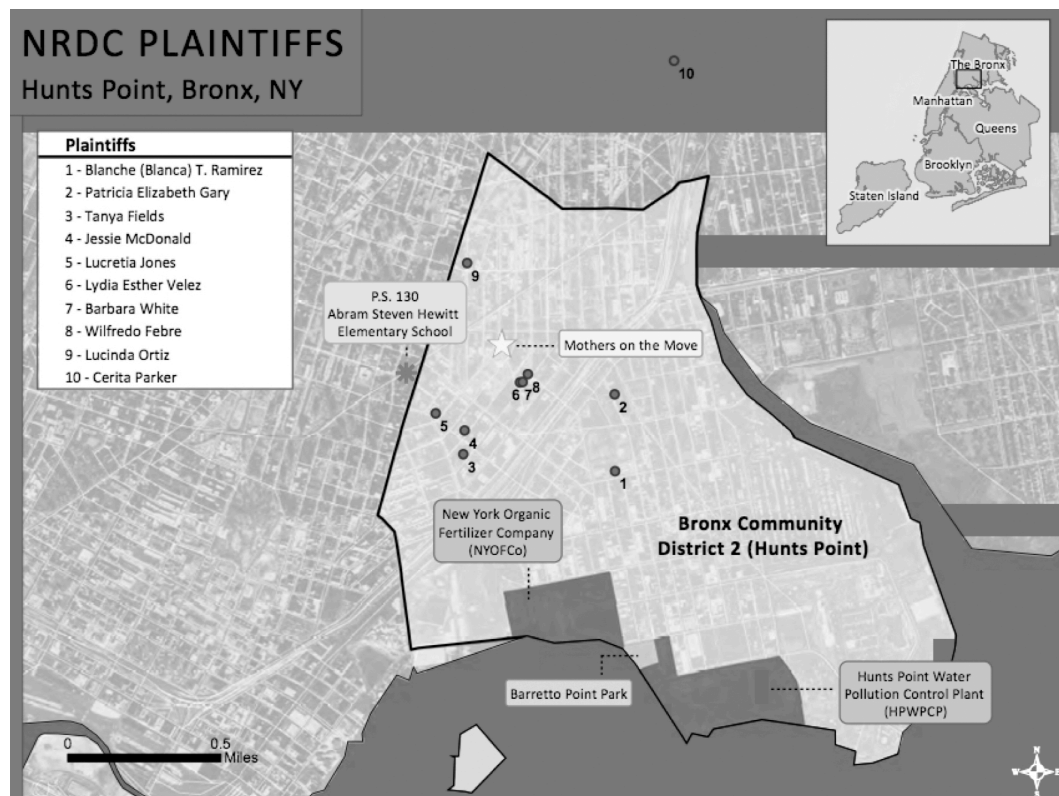
At Power's Door

In the photo above, victorious MOM activists pose with New York's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Emily Lloyd outside of her Park Slope, Brooklyn home on October 27, 2007. They had traveled by bus from the South Bronx to track her down at her home after she twice refused a meeting to discuss their concerns about air quality in the South Bronx.² Traveling across New York's boroughs to make their case face-to-face, they called on Lloyd to acknowledge their concerns about the DEP plan to expand the water pollution control plant in the South Bronx while failing to address poor air quality in their neighborhoods.³ As a result, Lloyd agreed to a sit down with MOM thereby demonstrating that MOM's assertive tactics could compel powerful New Yorkers to engage them around health and quality of life in the South Bronx.

Throughout the history of MOM's Environmental Justice (EJ) campaign, such direct actions were often needed to gain the ears of governmental officials that too often accepted and/or reinforce the marginal place of the South Bronx community in New York politics. As discussed in the previous chapter, such marginalization and erasure of the voices of activists and particularly the concerns of transnational communities of color is not uncommon in New York City. Environmental injustice in the South Bronx exists in part because of negative attitudes and assumptions about these communities long held by many politicians, policy makers, and mainstream journalists. Such attitudes reflect what Zygmunt Bauman describes as "fast rising inequality" and the exclusion of "superfluous" people from "the realm of social communication." He quotes Hauke Brunkhorst's observation that "For those who fall outside the functional system, be it in India, Brazil, or Africa, or even at present in many districts of New York or Paris, all others soon become inaccessible. Their voices will no longer be heard, often they are literally struck dumb."⁴ But Brunkhorst, in claiming that people are struck dumb by marginalization, draws an unsubstantiated conclusion that people do not have critical understandings of their circumstances or the ability to address them. Still, they are often ostracized from social communication and thus rendered mute until they demand a hearing. This chapter explores MOM efforts to overcome these challenges in addressing environmental concerns in the South Bronx.

Activist groups such as MOM come together to make claims for their community that are loud enough to be heard. To do so, they develop and utilize

multiple strategies to confront marginalization and gain accountability from a range of political actors. Beginning in the late 1990s, MOM's EJ activists used dramatic imagery in protests, conducted their own research on traffic safety, utilized alliances with local politicians and created and gained positive media coverage for their campaigns. Members eventually became parties to a lawsuit that produced a major milestone in the campaign's history.



NRDC Lawsuit Plaintiffs, NYOFCo and City Waste Plant Locations⁵

The National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) filed the lawsuit on behalf of multiple MOM members against the City of New York, the Department of Environmental Protection, New York Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFCo), Synagro Technologies (which operates NYOFCo) and its owner, the Carlyle Group. It resulted in eliminating a key source of the stench in the South Bronx

for a minimum of two years as the city agreed to stop sending its treated sewage to the plant.⁶

In 2008, the NRDC approached Mothers on the Move about their organizing campaign against NYOFCo, and the Environmental Justice members decided to initiate the lawsuit.⁷ The lawsuit was a response to the failure of the DEP to adequately record and address complaints by residents. There was a growing sense that without the lawsuit, NYOFCo would continue to ignore the community's concerns. Congressman José Serrano recognized the veracity of MOM's concerns and publicly endorsed its campaign. Then-State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo followed with a lawsuit claiming that the site "create[s] a public nuisance under New York State law by producing odors that 'unreasonably interfere with the comfortable enjoyment of life or property.'"⁸

This case helped bring sufficient pressure to change the DEP's relationship with MOM and the South Bronx community. It also closed the doors of NYOFCo, a triumph for MOM and its allies. Instead of continuing to resist MOM's calls for studying the causes of poor air quality in the South Bronx, the DEP announced independent research into odor, implemented odor controls at its area facility, and contributed money to remediate city-owned land that would become part of the Barretto Point Park.⁹ While these actions alone did not cause major changes, they demonstrated that a significant shift had occurred in engaging community concerns in the South Bronx.¹⁰

On July 9, 2010, MOM held a party celebrating the closure of NYOFCo that resulted from the settlement negotiated by NRDC attorneys.



EJ Celebration at MOM's Office¹¹

The event was held at Mothers on the Move's storefront office, with approximately fifty attendees packing the main room. Barbara White, a community elder and longtime member of MOM, noted that the campaign had brought other changes as well:

We have made the politicians look at us in the South Bronx in a different light. They have to think twice before they put anything in our neighborhood that we don't want, because they know they will have to face Mothers on the Move.¹²

Her statement demonstrates MOM's sense of the need to contest long-standing power dynamics between South Bronx residents and New York politicians.

Members set their experiences with environmental inequalities in a broader context. As Cerita "CP" Parker commented:

Although we are local, we also want to be part of a broader picture... whether it's the South Bronx, south side of Chicago, southeast L.A., or South American, when it affects people of low economics, it's no longer just a South Bronx story.

Throughout the late afternoon festivities other MOM members echoed this concern. When Wilfredo “Mr. Fred” Febre addressed the group, he spoke of the great personal benefits he gained from working with EJ organizer, Thomas Assefa.¹³ Febre expressed his joy with the NYOFCo settlement while assuring the audience that MOM would be vigilant against future attempts to place waste facilities in other low-income communities of color. As one of MOM activists, he recognized that the South Bronx was just one of many areas across the city, country, and globe that bear a disproportionate share of the environmental costs of industrialization. MOM’s EJ campaign against asthma and the pollutants that cause it in the South Bronx is another example of successful activism against these disproportionate costs. The strategies MOM employed, how and why these strategies succeeded at the local level, also inform how MOM has built on its local efforts to become part of the international environmental justice movement.

Asthma and Environmental Racism and Classism

Paralleling the centrality of race and class in contemporary housing inequalities in New York City, these identities are central to the analysis of the South Bronx’s high rates of asthma and other health problems associated with environmental problems. As legal expert, Alina Das, observes, a variety of factors such as “substandard housing, environmental hazards, inadequate health care access, and the insufficient wages and lack of job opportunities that leave families with low household incomes—all contribute to the prevalence and severity of asthma” in communities of color.¹⁴ The latest national health reporting

on asthma was published as part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health Disparities and Inequalities Report in January 2011.¹⁵ The CDC's report is the agency's "first report detailing racial disparities in a broad array of health problems" and demonstrates the lack of cohesive and in-depth examination of these concerns on a national level.¹⁶

Most national reports have highlighted the fact that Blacks are two to three times as likely to die from asthma as whites, with Black women having the highest age-adjusted asthma mortality rate in 2007.¹⁷ The CDC's report, however, states that Puerto Ricans (of origin or descent) have the highest rates of asthma prevalence and mortality of any group.¹⁸ This discrepancy is caused by continued difficulties with the collection and analysis of race and ethnicity-based statistics. There are significant differences within groups labeled "Hispanic" in terms of asthma and other health outcomes that earlier studies have overlooked.¹⁹ Another significant finding, focused on overall prevalence rather than mortality states, "when examined within the three federal poverty levels, prevalence by race/ethnicity was different than when race/ethnicity was examined alone."²⁰ At lower incomes, whites and Blacks tended to have similar rates of asthma, while Puerto Ricans had approximately 10 percent and 5 percent higher rates of asthma when they were poor or near-poor.²¹ These discrepancies suggest that while poverty plays an important role in higher levels of asthma across the board, it is especially important to find out why low-income Puerto Ricans and multiracial people have higher rates of asthma than their

economic peers. This will enable the development of more holistic responses to the problem.

The report makes clear the connection between poor air quality, asthma, and low-income communities of color. It notes that variation in the statistics may have been increased by factors such as “higher levels of exposure to environmental irritants (e.g. tobacco smoke or air pollutants) as well as environmental allergens (e.g. house dust mites, cockroach particles, cat and dog dander and mold).” Lack of “health-care access and actual use of the health-care system, financial resources, and social support [that] are require[d] to manage the disease effectively on a long-term basis,” may also influence the statistics.²² The discussion of asthma concludes with a call for “targeted interventions that take into account cultural differences and population-specific characteristics.” Yet, health experts at the CDC failed to issue a direct call for changes that would reduce the presence of environmental irritants and allergens in communities such as the South Bronx. This suggests that they remain uncomfortable with or unconcerned about the part played by social inequality in these disproportionate rates of asthma.

Asian/Americans were largely excluded from the CDC report’s discussion of asthma.²³ This point is particularly striking since the report states that “minority groups, including Asians and Hispanics” are more likely to live in areas with poor air quality.²⁴ 55 percent of Asian/Americans and 49 percent of Latina/os live in the country’s ten largest metropolitan areas, including cities with notably poor air quality such as New York and Los Angeles. Moreover, the two

groups make up a significant part of California's population, and the state includes 15.4 percent of the total counties with poor air quality.²⁵ A recent poll in California demonstrated that both Asian/Americans and Latina/o voters are aware of these issues, and are more concerned about environmental issues than their white counterparts.²⁶

The environmental concerns of these groups run counter to popular notions that environmentalism is identified almost solely with whites in mainstream organizations such as Greenpeace, Sierra Club, and World Wildlife Fund.²⁷ Professor Jane Junn, who directed the poll research, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "Environmental hazards are a part of the everyday lives of Asian American and Latino voters who are disproportionately represented in locations with high levels of pollution and contaminants." While she notes that the findings "may at first seem surprising," the *Times* reports that mainstream groups are reaching out to Latinos and Asian/Americans, despite having "historically relied mostly on white constituencies for donations and influence in crafting and promoting legislation aimed at protecting the environment and cleaning up pollution." This shift in engagement by mainstream groups reflects a recent awareness of communities of color's concerns about environmental issues.

This whitewashing of US-based environmental justice activism mutes the racial and class dimensions of environmental issues. This is due to the wider name recognition of groups such as the Sierra Club but it is also influenced by the ways in which working class communities and communities of color are perceived as experiencing and responding to environmental concerns. Laura

Pulido argues that what she defines as “subaltern environmentalism is embedded in material and power struggles, as well as questions of identity and quality of life.”²⁸ In other words, questions of political and economic power play as key of a role in such struggles as do concerns about health and livability. This contrasts with the wilderness-oriented or green consumerist approach of mainstream groups that fail to address racial and class inequalities. The late Hazel Johnson, a founder of the modern environmental justice movement, noted that people could have a difficult time taking action even when they were aware that their environment was not healthy.²⁹ A longtime Chicago public housing resident, Johnson fought air and water pollution in local communities and she summed up her experiences with building environmental justice movements in low-income communities of color in this way:

Their mindset is, 'I've got to put food on the table today,' rather than 'I'd better protect the environment for my children's tomorrow.' It usually takes a personal, immediate and urgent concern, such as a proposed waste incinerator or a family member's illness or death, to motivate low-income and minority populations to become involved.³⁰

Thus, we cannot assume that communities of color are less concerned with environmental justice than middle and upper income whites within the same city but the inspiration for and form of their involvement may be distinctive. Indeed, as stated by Rachel Stein, “women of color and working-class women, compose approximately 90 percent of the active membership” of grassroots environmentalist groups.³¹ From this perspective, the converse is more likely to be true: middle and upper income whites are less interested in environmental justice than members of low-income communities of color.

It is important to recognize that only a minority of people in any community become long-term participants in social struggles and that additional economic and social burdens poor and working-class people face limit their time for such activities. Nevertheless, as the case of MOM and numerous other groups demonstrate, some exceptional and many ordinary people will take up the struggle for environmental justice. When MOM Welfare to Work organizer, Maria Rivera, was asked about environmental justice organizing in the South Bronx, she noted that it was initially easier to get homeowners such as Wilfredo “Mr. Fred” Febre and other older community members involved because of their property investments.³² Indeed, as Febre recalled:

I get this whiff, it was as if the sewer main split. It was like raw, raw, raw sewage. And I went nuts, I snaked out the house, I went around to see where the source was and I thought it was between the trap between the house and the street, which is our responsibility as the homeowner... we snaked it out... and the smell went away. Then it happened again... I said it can't be the drain... about five years ago...there was some interns working here [MOM] and they were door knocking... and they were going to have a meeting to discuss any problems you had, and they mentioned the odor from NYOFCo and that was the first time I had heard of it. They were from 1992, now this 2005, 2006... so then I started talking to people in the neighborhood... we've demonstrated [with MOM or others organizations] many times and they haven't done a damn thing.

He became involved in organizing with MOM, appreciating the commitment and sincerity of the members. He was already familiar with three or four of the EJ committee members through work with his homeowners' association. Carmen Silva, a longtime activist in the South Bronx, and other MOM members became involved due to a general concern about the environment in the area. Tanya Fields, Norma Garcia and other mothers joined them as they were worried about the impact pollution had on their children's health. In New York City as

elsewhere, then, working-class women of color make up a significant portion of grassroots environmental justice activism, while white middle and upper class women and men dominate the leadership in mainstream national environmental organizations. In the case of MOM, women of color dominate in the organization, but it also attracts men as well as youth members and outside allies. Together they seek to address local environmental social justice concerns and connect with the international environmental justice movement.

To return to Johnson's observation, illness and death are indeed core experiences in many EJ activists' narratives. As Temma Kaplan discusses in *Crazy for Democracy*, the immediacy of health issues caused by the leaking of PCB-rich transformer oil into local water and land in Love Canal, New York and Warrenton, North Carolina, prompted working-class women and lower-middle class housewives to organize. Losing children to unusual diseases, miscarriages, or bearing children with birth defects and serious health conditions drove these women - white and black - to act when government officials failed to respond to their complaints.³³ As activist turned North Carolina congresswoman, Dollie Burwell recalls, she took action about the improperly dumped waste in her town because "it was about people's lives."³⁴

This emphasis on the life or death nature of environmental harm speaks to what Kaplan refers to as "female consciousness." She argues that many of the women she studies develop into activists because they are motivated by a particularly female consciousness that "develops from cultural experiences of helping families and communities survive."³⁵ The actions of MOM activists of

both genders suggest extension of this paradigm, one closely related to frameworks that center experiences of race and class as well as gender. JoAnne Banks-Wallace and Lennette Parks argue that dominant ideas of motherhood are conceptualized

As individualized and private, with the focus of maternal work largely restricted to one's own children... African American definitions conceptualize motherhood as a group activity that is public and concerned with the welfare of all children.³⁶

This framing of motherwork “blur[s] the boundaries between ‘private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from the collective self determination of one's group.”³⁷

Such conceptualizations are helpful to understanding the context within which MOM activists work. They belong to a group whose values and public identity are highly feminized, raced as Black and Puerto Rican and classed as low-income. MOM activists, however, provide a further complexity to the concepts proposed above. While predominated by women with children, MOM makes a place for men and non-mothers who can identify with and participate in this broader vision of mothering.³⁸ As “Mr. Fred” Febre says, “Just because it's called Mothers on the Move, it's community-based and it involves the entire community, it involves the mothers, the fathers, the sisters, the brothers, the aunts, the uncles, all of us.” It is possible then to center women's leadership and their approaches to addressing an issue such as environmental justice without ignoring the contributions of men like Febre or Thomas Assefa, who do not seek to become the key public leaders or decision makers in the organization.

Asthma in the South Bronx

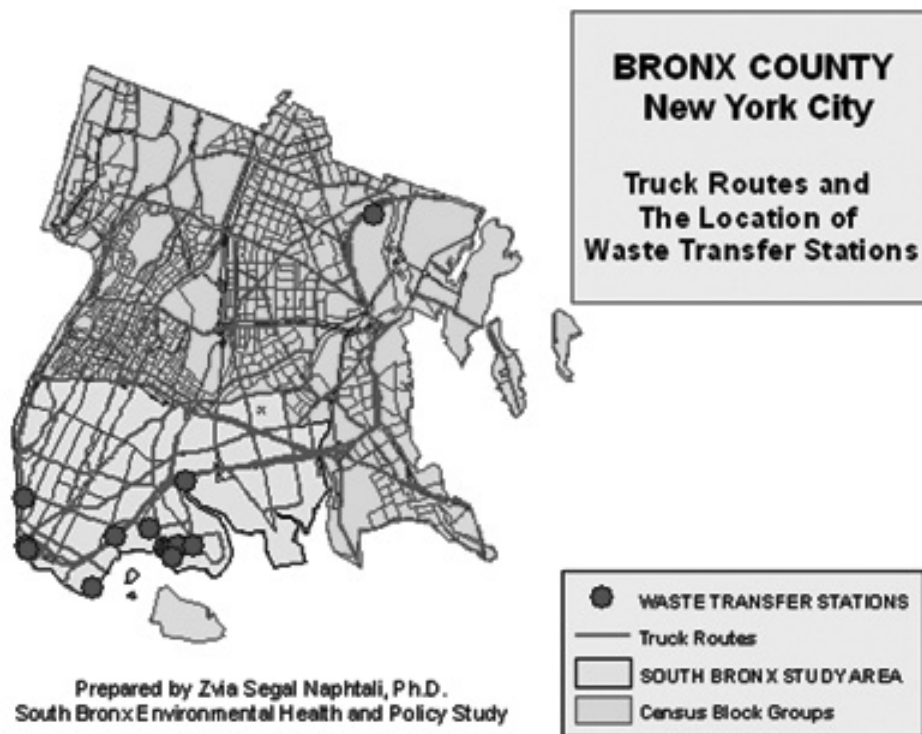
Along with the most recent national health data, high rates of asthma and mortality among Blacks and Puerto Ricans are supported by survey data at state and local levels in New York and the Bronx. According to a 2009 New York State Department of Health report:

Disparities among racial and ethnic groups still persist... for 2005-2007, the age-adjusted asthma emergency department visit, hospital discharge and mortality rates were higher among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic New Yorkers than non-Hispanic Whites.³⁹

Researchers observe, “[w]ithin New York City, Bronx County has the highest age-adjusted mortality rate due to asthma; 35.2 per 1,000,000.”⁴⁰ Clearly, asthma continues to be a serious issue in the Bronx. The researchers are especially concerned about the effects of particulate air pollution inside New York’s public schools, and their report includes a survey of the schools’ ventilation systems. To measure “potential diesel intrusion,” it asks “whether fresh intake were near sources of diesel pollution, including school bus loading areas, truck delivery areas or garbage storage or disposal areas.”⁴¹

Another study of children reiterates the significance of diesel vehicles and waste disposal as sources of air pollution that contribute to asthma. A recent health study focused on young children born and living in the South Bronx and Northern Manhattan, areas that have “very high pediatric asthma prevalence and hospitalization rates and that contain major trucking thoroughfares, bus depots, and waste transfer stations that emit multiple air pollutants.”⁴² The report concluded that “sources such as heating oil combustion and traffic may be important health-relevant PM_{2.5} factors associated with asthma morbidity in urban children as young as 2 years of age.”⁴³ PM_{2.5} is fine particulate matter, less than

2.5 microns in diameter. It is approximately 30 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair, and thus easily inhaled into lungs. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) both acknowledge “air pollution [ozone and particle pollution] can make asthma symptoms worse and trigger attacks.”⁴⁴



Truck Routes and Waste Transfer Stations in the South Bronx⁴⁵

The concern over air pollution’s contribution to the high asthma rates in the South Bronx is compounded by the fact that the community has one of the smallest green space-to-person ratios in New York City.⁴⁶ Although the Hunts Point area of the South Bronx has “approximately six miles worth of waterfront...it has only 200 feet of legal access to the three bodies of water that surround it... [it] has less than half an acre of parkland per 1,000 people, compared to the National Parks Service recommendation of 6 acres per 1,000

people.”⁴⁷ It also is home to “15 waste transfer stations, processing about 25 percent of the city’s waste, and a sewage plant handling more than half the city’s sludge, [along with] more than 11,000 diesel trucks per day drive through the South Bronx.”⁴⁸ MOM’s EJ work has historically engaged these issues. It campaigned to reroute truck traffic that included a call to decommission the Sheridan Expressway to convert the area into green space. It also protested the privatization of the operation and maintenance of existing green spaces.⁴⁹ MOM is also part of the Bronx River Watershed Alliance that helped push for a Bronx River greenway (now under construction.) This Alliance gained city and state support for this project that will significantly improve the borough’s quality of life.⁵⁰

As a result of the many sources of pollution and lack of green space, it should not be surprising that asthma has been an ongoing problem in the South Bronx. A 1995 New York Times article called asthma a “singularly quiet” epidemic in the area. This hush, according to doctors treating asthmatics in the community, had “[o]ne explanation: it is an affliction of the poor, those who have less voice.” Yet it is not so much that the poor are voiceless as residents of the community have spoken out repeatedly. However, politicians, corporations, journalists and health practitioners have refused to, or been slow to, listen to people living in the South Bronx.

In explaining the continued claim that the poor are voiceless it is critical to recognize differences between the types of evidence and interpretations produced and used by community-based organizations and those produced and deployed by governmental officials, politicians, and the mass media. MOM and

other women-led community organizations have been able to analyze local health and environmental problems and formulate effective responses despite the resistance to such efforts by some local authorities. MOM activists have had to confront and overcome normative understandings of “expertise” by using community organizing tactics such as data collection and analysis by residents, protests, and collaborative alliances with progressive institutions that have recognized research and legal expertise. MOM’s environmental justice efforts in the South Bronx thus bring together questions of expertise and accountability and illuminate the meaning of health and survival in an area whose environment has long been exploited. Over the past decade MOM has employed a wide range of organizing strategies to confront public apathy about inequality and move both political and media establishments in New York to engage and support its campaigns.

Starting with a concern for the lives of community members, particularly the safety of children going to school and playing in the neighborhood, MOM activists have organized for more than a decade. Their efforts reflect Aida Hurtado’s claim that “women of color are more like urban guerillas trained through everyday battle with the state apparatus.”⁵¹ The environmental justice movement in the South Bronx faces insidious problems, like the seemingly endless parade of polluting trucks and processing plants, which contribute to the community’s high asthma rates. The complex social inequalities that constitute environmental racism in the South Bronx rarely offer the dramatic cases of oppression that generate media attention. Instead, activists have to sustain long-

term movements that require detailed studies, door-to-door canvassing, and intensive lobbying, in order to achieve campaign successes.

Despite the challenges of this form of activism, MOM's environmental justice efforts initiated members into a broader movement that has long been led by women of color. There have been longstanding ties between environmental activism and participation in broader anti-racist efforts. Grace Thorpe, an American Indian activist and elder, fought against "radioactive racism" by rejecting storage of nuclear waste on her tribe's lands and founded the National Environmental Coalition of Native Americans.⁵² Famously, the United Farm Workers leader Dolores Huerta took on the use of agricultural pesticides in the early 1970s. Although mainstream groups such as the Sierra Club did not see "environmental problems as a function of deep seated racial or social injustices," the UFW found allies among smaller environmental groups.⁵³

While there is a deep history of women of color taking the lead in such activism, an interview with Robert Bullard, hailed as "the father of environmental justice," suggests why women are not as visible as their male counterparts.⁵⁴ Bullard notes that his own entry into environmentalism was prompted by a request from his wife to do research on a landfill plan that she had filed a lawsuit against but he does not elaborate on this point. Instead Bullard states that "In at least a quarter of cases, the leaders that emerge to work on local environmental-justice issues get involved in electoral politics...And 35 percent of them are women."⁵⁵ While he seems to frame women's activism in a positive light, women in fact make up the majority of environmental justice activists rather than only a

third. However, the women that constitute this majority are less likely to pursue political careers than their male counterparts, which in Bullard's eyes is a key goal. MOM demonstrates the powerful role women play in environmental justice activism without disregarding the contributions of men. Additionally, MOM works collectively to make change and self-consciously encourages members to share the spotlight when interacting with reporters and officials, instead of promoting a few members as the sole leaders of the campaign.

Defining Power

On Saturday, January 26, 2008 MOM held a "Power Analysis Training" focused on its three campaigns: EJ, Tenants Rallying In Unity to Maintain Public Housing (TRIUMPH), and Youth on the Move (YOM).⁵⁶ This workshop reflected a growing use of tools gained from MOM's collaboration with Social Justice Leadership (SJL), an organization that provides trainings on a range of activist concerns from strategic planning to organizer trainings.⁵⁷ As "Mr. Fred" Febre observed, through such activities, MOM helps residents learn how to address local problems, particularly through "identifying the people that can help you solve the problem."⁵⁸ Workshop participants discussed three different forms of power relations and organizational structures that supported them:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Unequals | One person has POWER over another; Makes decision for them; But does not have to answer to them! |
| Ignoring Each Other | People share neither their problems nor their dreams; Seek private solutions to common problems; and compete where they could cooperate |
| As equals | People depend on each other; And answer to each other; In this soil of respect, trust and love can grow ⁵⁹ |

These different behaviors are tied to related power structures, “the pyramid,” “the crowd,” and “the team,” respectively. A handout laid out the unequal power dynamics MOM was experiencing in its campaign against environmental injustice and the goals for an egalitarian approach within MOM as well as for the community as a whole. This discussion set the stage for an afternoon power analysis of MOM’s campaign to challenge the DEP plans to build giant waste treatment “eggs” and to combat the stench emanating from NYOFCo’s plant.⁶⁰

The workshop provided insight into how MOM’s EJ members think about themselves, the broader community, and the political players they address in their campaign. Through discussions of power, community, and love, EJ members worked together to get to the foundation of why they were taking on environmental racism. The stated goals for the EJ campaign’s sessions were

To examine different forms of POWER and the various relationships they are used in, compare each, and look at ways of incorporating those methods in our organizing work;

To make a power analysis in examining the external forces surrounding the target and also our current MOM power in order to assess how to get the opposition and decision makers [to] meet our campaign goals.⁶¹

The collaboration bore fruit. An emphasis on developing positive, respectful interactions within the group and a critical analysis of the issues and players involved – already hallmarks of MOM’s efforts – were refined and more clearly articulated via such workshops.

Notably, all the people sitting at the table participated in the discussion, and the conversation flowed easily from one person to another. Not only was EJ organizer, Thomas Assefa, an exceptional facilitator, but EJ members respected

one another enough to listen and respond to each other's ideas. As the day progressed, participants began to define power by identifying words they associate with it. Thinking about money, clout, people, knowledge, communication/dialogue, and union, they struggled to come up with a definition that combined their interest in community and advocacy with their lack of control over the decisions that were being made in and for their community. Two women, Pamela and Terry, emphasized the communal aspects of power, as they each affirmed their right to expect control over the environment in which they live. They argued that MOM should become a strong resource in the effort to gain control for the community. In the end, the definition of power was "to effectively build and utilize resources to control the destiny of our community, while simultaneously gaining name recognition and thus becoming a community resource." EJ members thus marked the balance between community support for their activities and to the need for status in order to more effectively negotiate with decision makers.⁶²

EJ members read out loud quotes to the group from two well-known Black leaders: one from Dr. Martin Luther King that invoked the power of love and one from Frederick Douglass that emphasized the struggle that change requires.

Now power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change... There is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly... Now we've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love. And this is what we must see as we move on. Dr. Martin Luther King

Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation are people who want crops without ploughing the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will. Frederick Douglass

Taking these two quotes together, the group was encouraged to consider how they could use love and dedication to build a stronger campaign in the community.⁶³ The quotes prompted discussions about the successes and failures of the civil rights movement, with an older man recalling how people's power was actualized during the 1960s, and a younger woman commenting on the time that it took to pool resources and fight racism. It became clear that EJ members were frustrated by the lack of active support for their work from their friends and neighbors in the community. As Fields noted, "most people don't realize when they don't make a decision, you are making a decision." She argued that local politicians did not feel a need to engage non-voters so not voting was a critical choice.⁶⁴ While this conversation could have descended into a negative analysis of the community, EJ members explored why some residents were not involved in their campaigns. They reiterated some of Hazel Johnson's observations about Chicago, such as a lack of self-esteem and investment in the community, the primacy of needs such as putting food on the table, and the need to put environmental racism into terms residents could relate to and appreciate. For instance, EJ organizers needed to explain that residents did not have to live with the current conditions of poor air quality or rats in their homes.

The discussion turned to how best to connect with other residents, to build a base of support and close gaps between different groups of people such as

youthful and elderly members of the community. Members then defined and articulated a clear set of practices to strengthen their efforts. They clarified key terms:

Campaign: a set of activities aimed at achieving a specific goal through altering power relationships within a defined time frame;

Demands: goal of campaign

Target: the decision-maker who has the power to meet the demands

Strategy: the overall approach that characterizes the activities you will undertake

Tactics: The specific steps or activities that make up the strategy.

During the afternoon, they identified demands they wanted to place before Mayor Bloomberg and the DEP, primarily to end the stench in the area and to eliminate plans to build further waste treatment plants. They named politicians who were already allies on the issue, such as Carmen Arroyo and Ruben Diaz. The strategies they developed include familiar base building approaches such as door knocking, approaching other organizations and getting in touch with leadership in parent associations, churches, and senior centers.⁶⁵ They also discussed media-related practices such as holding press conferences, creative actions, op-eds, demonstrations, and community-based media announcements, and then brainstormed about youth-produced videos, radio talk shows, and the use of blogging, MySpace and YouTube to engage more directly younger community members and draw upon the skills of Youth on the Move members.

Children First

By 1997, MOM's broadened agenda reflected a more expansive understanding of children's issues. Over time, these efforts not only helped become the foundation for its environmental justice campaign, but also led to its Youth on the Move (YOM) program. YOM members not only worked on MOM's core campaigns, but also wider New York City youth activism around issues like policing in the public school system. In the 1990s, the Bryant Bridge, a pedestrian walkway adjacent to Public School 75 that runs under the Bruckner Expressway, gained the nickname "Needle Bridge" because of the hypodermic needles, crack vials, used condoms, and human feces that littered its length.⁶⁶ While MOM brought the issue to the attention of local authorities, the New York State and city departments of transportation disagreed over who was responsible for its care, with the city initially taking responsibility and then stating that "It's not under our purview."⁶⁷ The abandoned tracks under the walkway became known as a swamp with standing pools of water in the late 2000s, inadvertently redirecting the human traffic on the bridge that was creating much of the litter back onto nearby streets. The lack of governmental accountability and the communal costs of poor street safety – parents having to choose whether or not to send children over the dirty bridge or to have them walk four extra long blocks to the nearest crossing -- were prescient of the struggles MOM activists would encounter later in their campaign.⁶⁸

MOM participated in another complicated negotiation with government officials when it sought improvements to the grossly under-served Hoes Avenue tennis courts, one of the few public spaces where children could still play

safely off city streets. After years of back and forth with then Bronx borough president, Fernando Ferrer, that included broken promises of responses to the complaints of residents and MOM, the dilapidated Hoes Avenue courts and surrounding park were renovated and renamed Printers' Park.⁶⁹ As MOM member Diane Lowman commented to reporters, "It was a fight just to get someone to think about this park."⁷⁰ While the city had failed to maintain the park before the efforts of MOM and other community groups, there was no recognition of community involvement in the reopening of the park.⁷¹ MOM activists attempted to make visible their contribution by hanging their banner at the park's entrance, but Parks Commissioner Henry Stern dismissed their efforts and their concerns about the continued lack of bathrooms and lighting as "ridiculous."⁷² Officials regularly resorted to such condescending language, especially when they found themselves on the receiving end of MOM's criticism. Undeterred, MOM continued to pursue improvements to the environment of the South Bronx, and strove to build on these efforts.

Children's safety and environmental justice also converged when six-year-old Crystal Vargas veered off the Fufidio Triangle sidewalk on July 26, 1998 and collided with a commercial truck on Longwood Avenue. Crystal's death was well publicized both in local English and Spanish media, and brought trucks — one of the key contributors to the low air quality in the South Bronx — to the forefront of MOM's environmental justice activism.⁷³ The Bruckner Expressway that runs through the heavily industrialized Hunts Point area is a main thoroughfare for trucks heading into Manhattan. MOM and other community groups sought to

force New York's Department of Transportation to properly regulate the heavy commercial traffic in Hunts Point and pushed for alterations in truck routes, more barriers, speed bumps, and law enforcement. MOM produced television PSAs, directly confronted government officials and representatives, and undertook their own study of truck traffic in the area. Throughout this campaign, MOM worked extensively with other Bronx organizations such as Sustainable South Bronx as they sought to make streets safer and decrease air pollution from heavy traffic.⁷⁴

In late 1998 and early 1999, then-Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner James Kilkenney, emerged as a difficult but critical target of their campaign. Kilkenney repeatedly refused to meet with the group and then openly dismissed their efforts when he abruptly ended a visit to the area in response to the direct manner of MOM members, accusing them of being rude as they demanded accountability for community safety.⁷⁵ At the same time, the DOT was planning to conduct a citywide truck study to increase routes through Hunts Point. It backed off this plan because of community pressure but troubles continued.⁷⁶ On October 21, 1999, Kilkenney finally met with MOM members and reportedly promised to make marked improvements to the area's roads, including installing "permanent speed humps and traffic medians by Spring 1999, immediate construction of a median.... and a look into other traffic calming devices from signs to wider corners."⁷⁷

By December, Kilkenney had gone back on his word and said he had made no such promises or set any deadlines and refused to meet again with MOM.⁷⁸ MOM's response to his dismissal of their concerns included a march on his

Westchester Square office with members carrying “a Grinch doll labelled [sic] ‘Kilkenny’ and an effigy of a child on a stretcher” and declaring that he was the “Grinch that stole our safe streets.”⁷⁹ By January, the DOT attempted to diffuse the situation by installing a temporary median at Spofford Avenue, but continued to resist working directly with community groups such as MOM. The DOT’s response was criticized by one progressive ally, Transportation Alternatives, which argued that local police were proving to be far more responsive to community needs and had increased traffic enforcement.⁸⁰ MOM did not feel that the police response fully met the needs of the community for safer roads, and was not a permanent solution for transportation issues that should be addressed by the DOT.

During the fall of 1999, MOM began to collect data for its report, “Protecting Our Hunts Point Neighborhood from Dangerous Truck Traffic: A Community Led Initiative to Create Safe Streets. The introduction points out that the traffic calming measures the DOT implemented in response to their demands helped “control (but not eliminate) the illegal truck traffic, [but] legal truck routes still run dangerously close to residential areas.” Moreover, this traffic and truck idling created air and noise pollution in an area already faced with high rates of asthma. As Julie Sze notes, “Research studies, historically a source of disempowerment in minority communities, are often structured to facilitate empowerment,” and this report was an effort to empower MOM members through the collection and analysis of data on a community issue.⁸¹ MOM drew upon data collected through “traffic counting,” where members literally used counters

to track vehicles traveling on local streets, and intersection-turning movements, along with additional data collected by ally group The Point and the City College Institute for Transportation Systems.⁸² This report was produced with the assistance of traffic engineer, Brian Ketcham, the executive director of Community Consulting Services, enabling MOM members to draw upon professional assistance in developing the research plan, gaining funding, and receiving training from Ketcham.⁸³ The resulting findings supported alternative truck routes to create “larger buffer zones separating residences from through-moving heavy trucks.”⁸⁴

The report also served as a useful weapon against attacks on MOM members as hysteric or rude, and therefore not worthy of engagement. This was demonstrated at an April 2001 town hall meeting where MOM members presented their report to then Mayor Giuliani and Kilkenney’s replacement, DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall. The *Daily News* reported that the DOT spokesman commented they had already made some improvements and “We’ll take a look at it,” a marked difference from the dismissive attitude of the former commissioner.⁸⁵ The report put into concrete terms what community residents like MOM member Francisco Perez already knew: “the Hunts Point Market and the Hunts Point industrial area have a lot of truck traffic... unless these trucks are making deliveries to a grocery store, it’s not necessary to go through the residential area.”⁸⁶

In addition to its use of community-based research, in March 1999, New York Spanish-language newspaper *El Diario/La Prensa* reported that MOM had

taken its concerns about waste disposal and air pollution to local airwaves through thirty second and one minute advertisements on Cablevision's local News and Lifetime Channels.⁸⁷ Clearly targeting women and residents interested in local issues, MOM produced the spots with funding from the progressive North Star Fund.⁸⁸ While there were delays in broadcasting the advertisements, due to questions about whether or not they were too political or controversial, they finally aired and as MOM member Edgar Rivera-Colón stated, "Las cuñas son totalmente imparciales..." "No implican a ninguna empresa en particular, agencia gubernamental o funcionario electo" (The ads are totally impartial, they don't implicate any particular business, government agency, or elected official.) Another member added, "El que no ha hecho nada malo (empresas, funcionarios) no tiene de que preocuparse" ("Those who haven't done anything wrong (businesses, officials) have nothing to worry about.") Rather, the emphasis of the ads was on the community's experiences, and they provided a call to action. They show children crossing the streets on the way to school, while industrial traffic rumbles past them, causing the children to cough. After one of the children asks, "¿Porqué debemos sufrir nosotros?" (Why do we have to suffer?) a female voice responds "Es hora de hacer algo al respecto" (This is the time to do something!).

In 2002, MOM continued its campaign against truck traffic by again using direct action tactics. On the fourth anniversary of Crystal Vargas' death, they returned to the intersection of Spofford, Tiffany and Longwood Avenues to demand that the city do more to change truck routes and improve safety in the

area.⁸⁹ Despite its efforts, the DOT until recently continued to delay improvements. A March 2007 study by the DOT found that Hunts Point “has three of the top five truck accident locations in the borough...[and] [m]ore than 40 percent of Bronx truck accidents occur off designated truck routes.”⁹⁰ The DOT’s Pedestrian Projects Group under current commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan has begun to study and envision changes to the South Bronx that were called for by groups such as MOM years earlier. Proposals have been developed for changes to Randall/Leggett/Tiffany Avenues and Southern Boulevard, for increasing pedestrian safety at Cramers Square through shortening crossing distances and adding buffers to calm traffic. However, they do not attempt to make the overhauls in truck traffic that MOM called for in the South Bronx.⁹¹ As it stands, there remains much to be done by city entities, industry, and community residents to develop ways of safely managing traffic in the area.

Si Huele Algo Di Algo/If You Smell Something Say Something

Despite criticism from some progressive allies, MOM activists have made direct actions one of their most successful tactics. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, actions like showing up at Commissioner Lloyd’s home or using Grinch imagery to criticize Commissioner Kilkenney, can help draw media attention as well as potentially get deeper engagement of MOM’s concerns. Similar efforts were used to raise awareness for the stench emanating from a fertilizer and waste treatment plant. These efforts would fail to gain a response from NYOFCo. Instead, such protests became part of a broader set of strategies that helped bring about the end of the plant’s activity in 2010 discussed earlier.

Local coverage of MOM protests outside NYOFCo included Jose Acosta's "*Aquí no hay quien respire*" (Here, no one can breathe) for *El Diario/La Prensa*.⁹² The article title picked up on the dire nature of MOM protestor's claims, while a *New York Times* piece, "What Stinks? The Mourners Wore Hazmat Suits" highlighted the dramatic tactics utilized.⁹³ While some MOM members wore white painters' jumpsuits to simulate hazmat outfits or carried large mock inhalers made out of tubing, bottles, and poster board, almost all wore face masks or respirators. In addition, they brought along a papier-mâché skunk and carried a couple of small black wooden coffins to visually present not only the stench created by NYOFCo, that Lydia Vélez described as "un olor a huevos podridos, cuerpos putrefactos..." "an odor of rotten eggs, putrefying bodies," but also the lives that were threatened by such pollution.



MOM Protesters outside NYOFCo⁹⁴

While MOM's protests outside the gates of NYOFCo drew media attention and provided members with an opportunity to express their outrage publicly, the tactic failed to bring a direct response from NYOFCo management.

MOM continued to build support for their campaign against NYOFCo through their Toxic Bus Tours in 2007 and 2008.⁹⁵ This strategy had been successful in other instances, most notably on Chicago's Southside in the 1990s.⁹⁶ The August 17, 2008 tour that ended at NYOFCo garnered coverage from local television station, NY1. It highlighted MOM's complaints and prompted the DEP to state publicly that it would investigate the smell.⁹⁷ As Carmen Silva recalls, the bus tours brought targets of the campaign directly into contact with the odor that residents complained about. "Everyone was covering their mouths" in response to the smell.⁹⁸ MOM tours were coupled with a longstanding flier campaign across the neighborhood, asking community members to "Si Huele Algo Di Algo/If You Smell Something Say Something." MOM smartly turned a post-9/11 slogan found on city buses and trains, "If you see something, say something," into a call for the neighborhood to turn its critical eye, or in this case, nose, toward the smells coming from corporate and governmental industry in the area.⁹⁹

Fliers asked community members to call New York's non-emergency 311 hotline and report the smell. They were encouraged to keep their complaint tracking number and send a summary of their complaint to EJ organizer Thomas. As Tanya Fields recalls around 2003, "I started noticing signs in the neighborhood bodegas reading 'If you smell something, call 311.' So I knew I

was not the only one being affected by the odors.”¹⁰⁰ The campaign did much to raise awareness, though it was limited in its effectiveness due to the lack of response from the city. As president of ally organization, The Point, Maria Torres observed, “Unfortunately, when people call 311, it takes a while before somebody gets there to even check the complaint...What we want to see is more responsiveness when somebody calls. They are showing us some improvement in that area, but it is still not as quickly as you would like to see.”¹⁰¹

Still, it was the recognition of positive, if slow, change in the city’s response to community complaints that kept activists going. As John Robert, Community Board 2 district manager, observed “...the local consensus was that the blame lies with two sewage treatment plants... But seven months after hiring a consultant to identify the sources of the smells, the city Department of Environmental Protection says it still has no definitive answer.”¹⁰² In fact, the city’s consultant, Chet Morton attributed the source of most odors to “car and truck exhaust.”¹⁰³ Thus the city attempted to fall back on blaming transportation sources as the key problem in the area and shift responsibility for any response back onto the DOT.

The continuing difficulty in getting full city cooperation to improve the air quality in the South Bronx pushed MOM to consider alternatives. Thus, when approached by the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC), they agreed to file a public nuisance lawsuit against the City of New York, DEP, NYOFCo, Synagro Technologies and the Carlyle Group that owned NYOFCo. MOM did not solely depend on the lawsuit but used it as a further opportunity to build

broad support. On September 8, 2008, MOM released testimonials from its members, Lucretia Jones, Tanya Fields, Lucinda Ortiz, and Barbara White, to draw attention to its campaign and put a personal face to the lawsuit.¹⁰⁴ The human cost of the smell was made clear as Barbara White ceased gardening in her yard, losing a source of fresh vegetables in an area notoriously lacking in fresh produce despite its proximity to the largest distribution center in the world.¹⁰⁵ Lucretia Jones' children suffered from asthma, and her son was told to stay indoors by his doctor when the smell occurred in their neighborhood. The smell forced residents to remain indoors and keep air conditioners on at a high cost during the summer, affecting both their quality life and their pocketbooks.

Prior to the city and NYOFCo's settlements in the summer of 2010, the city's DEP took a first step by ending its contract. Finally, real results were being felt by MOM activists. MOM issued a public statement on March 15th. Though obviously pleased by the results, they noted:

...The larger fight is far from over. Unfortunately this recent news doesn't mean that the community's problems with NYOFCo or the underlying issues of environmental racism disappear... We remain cautiously optimistic about the results, and can't wait to celebrate all the hard work that MOM members and our allies have put into achieving them. But we'll believe it when we see it.¹⁰⁶

Their experience negotiating environmental concerns for over ten years had taught them that they would have to continue to be tenacious to assure their voices were heard by those in power. Not only would they need to use a multiplicity of tactics, it was crucial to be part of networks nationally and internationally to make officials understand and respond to environmental racism.

International Alliances and Frustrations

MOM's EJ campaign focused on making tangible improvements to the environment of the South Bronx. Nonetheless, the organization partners with regional and national groups and is part of an international environmental justice movement. As Valerie Kaalund observes, "Black women as EJ activists link their local struggles for environmental justice with global environmental injustice through participation in various national and international summits and meetings."¹⁰⁷ In April 2010, MOM housing organizer Nova Strachan and member Cerita Parker traveled to Bolivia as participants in the Cochabamba ExpoConciencia, a meeting that gathered 35,000 people from 140 countries.¹⁰⁸



MOM's Strachan with Cochabamba participants¹⁰⁹

Strachan observed that such experiences help her understand what is going on in the South Bronx regarding environmental and housing concerns as part of a much larger global struggle. Out of the meeting came the Cochabamba Accord: People's Agreement on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth.

Bolivian President Evo Morales would unsuccessfully present this accord at the 2010 Cancun meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on

Climate Change. Nonetheless, this act cemented his role as a leader of countries opposed to proposed market-oriented solutions to climate change.¹¹⁰ In New York, protesters and journalists, including MOM and CAAAV activists and allies, who had traveled to Cancun for the meeting reported back on their experiences. They described positive experiences meeting activists from all over the world, particularly the youth activists. But they were frustrated with a general lack of access to the meeting and police harassment of caravans organized by La Via Campesina: International Peasant Movement.¹¹¹

CAAAV housing organizer, Esther Wang, was a member of the panel reporting back to New York activists, along with former MOM staff member Taleigh Smith. The tone of the event was mixed, as speakers were encouraged by the clear presence of an international movement, but also unsatisfied by the failure of officials to engage their concerns and the seeming disinterest of mainstream environmental justice organizations. In particular, multiple speakers highlighted the refusal of mainstream organizations to come out against Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). This policy is viewed by groups such as MOM, CAAAV, and others as allowing for further polluting in areas such as New York City while increasing control over indigenous peoples' forests by state entities globally. Frustration with groups such as the Sierra Club, World Wildlife Fund, as well as MOM ally, NRDC, demonstrates the continued salience of scholar Laura Pulido's observation:

There are times when mainstream groups will support such [subaltern environmentalist] struggles, and times when they will not... environmentalism is not an ideology onto itself. Rather, it is a set of

interests expressed through various ideologies and political commitments.¹¹²

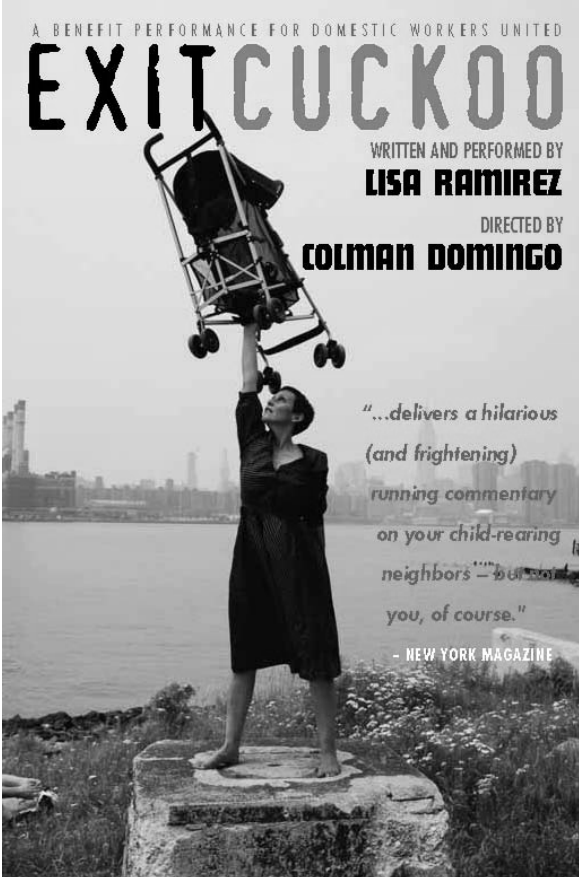
In this instance, speakers tied the failure of such groups to criticize REDD directly to their ongoing relationship with corporate donors. Wang made it clear that while a global movement is important, and the ties between groups across national boundaries was fruitful, that local struggles were more easily taken up than those to entry into international spaces such as the UN's convention meeting. Her concerns speak to Temma Kaplan's understanding that in contrast to other leaders and movements, "grassroots women's groups have attempted through moral claims for justice and human rights, to transform politics in far more democratic directions than ever seemed possible."¹¹³ It is arguably at the local level that groups such as CAAAV and MOM can, at first, make major changes, even if, as in the case of domestic workers' right and environmental justice, campaigns can blossom into a successful international movement.

MOM and CAAAV activists appear poised to participate in such movements on the international stage while remaining committed to make local changes that make New York more democratic. In the concluding chapter, performances by a range of activists concerned with workers' and housing rights are considered as part of the ally work that is central to both organizations. Additionally, I consider how such groups can create a sense of home and possibility for community members seeking to address the daily inequalities in their lives. The approaches they utilize provide a final means to consider how such groups negotiate that many of the issues they organize around are

insidious, rather than being immediately spectacular and grabbing media and popular attention.

Chapter 4

Building Bridges, Breaking Divides: Engaging New York



A BENEFIT PERFORMANCE FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED

EXITCUCKOO

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY
LISA RAMIREZ

DIRECTED BY
COLMAN DOMINGO

*"...delivers a hilarious
(and frightening)
running commentary
on your child-rearing
neighbors -- but not
you, of course."*

- NEW YORK MAGAZINE

*"Ramirez gives us an inside look into
the complicated, disturbing, often
overlooked world of mothers, nannies
and children. Both brave and funny,
Exit Cuckoo deserves our attention."*

- WRITER/ACTIVIST EVE ENSLER

7 PM SAT, NOVEMBER 22

Performance takes place at
Judson Memorial Church
55 Washington Square South
Bet. Thompson & Sullivan
Reservations Required!
(Party following performance)

Tickets: \$30
Call: 718-220-7391 ext. 23
RSVP by phone or e-mail
exitcuckoo4dwu@gmail.com

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED




Photo: Samantha Marble

Exit Cuckoo DWU Benefit Flier¹

Lady Liberty

In the image above, former domestic worker, playwright, and actress, Lisa Ramirez hoists a baby carriage above her head as she stands on a rough cement block with a river way behind her. Her one-woman play, Exit Cuckoo, draws its title from the story of the cuckoo bird. The play's text begins with the following epigraph:

In these days my father and mother gave me up as dead.... Then a certain faithful kinswoman began to cover me with garments, kept me and protected me, wrapped me in a sheltering robe as honorably as her own children, until I, under the garment, as my fate was, grew up an unrelated

stranger. The gracious kinswoman fed me afterwards until I became an adult, could set out further on my travels.

Voice of the Cuckoo Bird-The Exeter Book, AD 950

The cuckoo bird story enters the play through the words of a grandmother, Esther. She disapproves of the employment of a nanny by her son's family to care for her grandchild, Joshua. While Esther criticizes her son, the majority of blame is placed upon her daughter-in-law, who she refers to as a cuckoo bird.² According to Esther, "...the only animal that dumps their own eggs in other birds' nests is the CUCKOO BIRD. It lays its eggs says, 'So long suckers!' And the other birds raise little baby cuckoo as if it's one of their own!"³ A modified version of Esther's words was used in promotional materials for the play, expressing contemporary concerns about such care work.

Despite anxieties about the commodification of childcare and criticism of working mothers, many activists and policy makers continue to emphasize women's participation in the labor market as a hallmark of gender equality. Yet as Elin Kivst and Elin Petersen note in their study of policy debates in Sweden and Spain, there is "silence among left-wing voices about how to improve the conditions for those already working within the domestic service section," while domestic workers help make the dismantling of welfare state support "less inconvenient for white men and women of the privileged classes."⁴ It is this type of silence that Ramirez seeks to break in her work. In the promotional poster, references to the cuckoo bird are combined with a quote from New York Magazine that proclaims the play "delivers a hilarious (and frightening) running commentary on your child-rearing neighbors, but not you, of course." *Exit*

Cuckoo thus addresses the thousands of employers who are one target audience for Ramirez's experientially based work.⁵

While there is clearly an emphasis on employers in coverage of *Exit Cuckoo*, the flier above was used to promote a 2008 fundraising performance to benefit Domestic Workers United (DWU). In this setting, the play's intent to "expose the myth of motherhood" is aimed more directly at domestic workers and their political allies.⁶ While *Exit Cuckoo* presents Ramirez's perspective on New York's domestic work industry, it simultaneously serves as an outreach and fundraising tool for DWU. Ramirez makes the connection between her dramatic claims and DWU's efforts in a scene late in the play when her character Lisa witnesses a march by DWU. She is carrying a sign that reads "Free Domestic Workers! End the Slavery!" and is welcomed into the protest by other marchers. Ramirez thus suggests the importance of organizing (and support for organizing) as one means of addressing the inequalities the audience has witnessed throughout the performance. This interest in engaging both consumers and laborers produces a productive tension that is visible in both Ramirez's work and the broader efforts by DWU to gain support for the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights campaign (See chapter 1 for specifics of the campaign).

Ramirez's mimicking of the Statue of Liberty speaks to both of these constituencies. While on one hand, for US-born employers, her stance may invoke mother's strength or independence; on the other, the carriage and her standing on a rough block of concrete emphasize the devalued physical labor and isolation immigrant domestic workers face. As DWU reported in 2006, 99

percent of domestic workers were foreign-born and 76 percent were not US citizens.⁷ By mimicking the preeminent symbol of America's promise of freedom and a prosperous future, Ramirez foregrounds the unfulfilled expectations of these immigrants for incorporation and upward mobility, while simultaneously emphasizing domestic workers' role as protectors of American children.

Diana Taylor has observed that "bearers of performance, those who engage in it, are also the bearers of history who link the layers past-present-future through practice."⁸ Ramirez's performance attempts not only to bridge the practice of domestic work across time but also the disparate experiences of workers and employers. As the play concludes, she reflects.

I thought that becoming a nanny was the worst thing that had ever happened to me... I think about the park benches I've sat on, the different homes I've been in... I think about all the women who know nothing about each other except that one has money, the other one needs it and there is a child in between them that needs to be taken care of. "We can do together what we cannot do alone." Why did they talk to me? Why not to each other?...If I could just get them all in the same room..."Talk!" I'd say. "Tell her what you told me. Talk...tell her what you told me. TALK!"⁹

Ramirez makes clear that not only did she struggle with internalizing the devaluation of domestic work, but she believes that women can develop better ways to address the issues at play in contemporary domestic work. The organizations examined in this study echo DWU's efforts to promote dialogue and solutions to community concerns by engaging New Yorkers across classes, ethnic backgrounds and boroughs in a range of conversations on critical social, economic and political issues.

Through their differential consciousness-based approach to politics, each group has fought to break down public/private distinctions. In working with allies,

they affirm their ability to utilize a range of political approaches central to their campaigns. By examining activism around domestic work and housing, this chapter explores how MOM and CAAAV develop productive relationships with New Yorkers in spite of seemingly insurmountable differences, including drastic economic disparities. By using performance, forging alliances, and creating a sense of “home” for community members, these groups are able to negotiate complex issues and debates. Such approaches are particularly intriguing when these groups and their allies wield staunch class rhetoric to defend housing, improve conditions for domestic workers, and gain a living wage for New York laborers.¹⁰ These strategic moves reflect the interest of both groups in fomenting mass-based mobilizations while negotiating the constraints of non-profit organizing, or “the non-profit industrial complex.”¹¹

Reaching Out on Stage and in the Community

Theater provides a particularly important opportunity for domestic workers to dramatize their experiences for a broader audience. In the late 2000s, performance became part of the organizing strategies utilized by DWU and its allies, creating a platform on which to express their analysis of domestic work. As Aída Hurtado argues, “the broadening of the paradigm of how gender is conceptualized... requires that other materials besides conventional academic production be used to theorize about women of color.”¹² Engaging public performances as theories of domestic work allows us to analyze the messages that audiences are intended to gain, rather than seeking to critique the authenticity of a particular representation of domestic work. This is not to

undercut claims for authenticity in these performances, but rather to foreground their tactical significance to domestic workers' activism.

In *Exit Cuckoo*, Ramirez takes the audience from an understanding of domestic workers individual struggles to their collective efforts to gain basic labor rights. In scene eight, Ramirez dramatizes one of DWU's many marches for its Bill of Rights campaign. She states:

Hundreds of women are marching for Domestic Workers Rights. They are handing out flyers, selling t-shirts. Talking about fair pay, sick days, paid holidays, health insurance. Hundreds of women, marching out of the Park...fists in the air...marching. I've never seen anything like it...hundreds of women, marching. I march with them fist in the air[...] One of the women marching, walks up to me, puts her hand on my shoulder and says, "Come on girl...you got to keep moving. We can do together what we cannot not do alone."¹³

Ramirez highlights a key site of connection for domestic workers in New York--public parks--and the inspiring power of hundreds of women taking to the street together to demand their rights. In such moments, domestic workers counter popular assumptions that they are satisfied with their conditions or that they are too isolated to fight back against abuses.

The DWU benefit performance of *Exit Cuckoo*, noted above, was held at New York University's Judson Memorial Chapel and attended chiefly by members of the city's broader social justice community. After the performance, many of those who remained were active members or allies of groups such as CAAAV and DWU. The evening's entertainment also included a rendition of DWU's "Calypso," which I first heard at CAAAV's 20th anniversary celebration in 2007, as well as a few rounds of the Domestic Slide, a kind of guerilla theatre that can be joined by anyone who is inspired to do so. The Domestic Slide was

also part of the wrap up to DWU's Albany lobbying efforts, and is succinctly characterized by the Immigrant Justice Solidarity Project – “think the boogie woogie/electric slide with revamped lyrics.”¹⁴



Dancing the Domestic Slide in Albany¹⁵

The Domestic Slide is one of DWU's community-building tools. In May 2008, it enabled over 350 participants from a range of organizations, including FIERCE!, Ugnayan and Damayan, Audre Lorde Project as well as Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) and CAAAV, to celebrate their work together. Taking four buses from Manhattan to Albany, activists were brought together in diverse groups to lobby two to three state legislators about the Bill of Rights. My group, for example, included three CAAAV members, a DWU member, a rabbinical student, and myself. Having been briefed upon our arrival on strategies for conveying our varying experiences with domestic work and the importance of the bill, we were able to provide a range of perspectives on why the Bill of Rights was an important issue.¹⁶ In a way, this approach echoes Ramirez's call in *Exit Cuckoo* for people to talk about problems across vast gaps in experience and income. Such lobbying efforts helped build momentum for the eventual passage of the bill, and as DWU reported, that day's work “received

some great coverage of the Albany Day of Action in the Albany Times Union (the major daily in Albany) and the local TV station... We picked up at least 8 more multi-sponsors in the Assembly, Senator Maltese signed on as the Senate sponsor for the bill, and Assembly Labor Committee Chair Susan John expressed her support at the rally!!”¹⁷

In spring 2009, *Exit Cuckoo* opened at New York’s Working Theater. The promotional material shifted from the photograph of Ramirez hoisting a baby stroller in the air á la the Statue of Liberty to the image below.



Working Theater *Exit Cuckoo* Promotional Image

This image, while more directly reflecting the play’s title, also focuses the viewer’s attention on the care that is provided by domestic workers with the scattered feathers suggesting of the mother’s hurried escape from caring for her egg. It is far less confrontational than the first flier, highlighting the gentle care being given to the egg.

The shift in imagery from a strong domestic worker to a sheltered egg seems geared toward a “general” audience, but it also continued to be used to engage domestic workers and assist DWU in its outreach work. In advance of

the play's off-Broadway premier, the Working Theater, which is home to "high-quality affordable theater for and about working people," sent out a call for outreach:

Domestic workers are currently pushing for a 'Domestic Workers Bill of Rights'... We are determined to share their story with as wide an audience as possible. Working Theater is offering free tickets to domestic workers across the city... We will spend a couple of hours approaching nannies and caretakers in public parks, daycare centers and gymboreses around the city... help us reach out to domestic workers and offer them the opportunity to see theater that is for and about them.¹⁸

Working Theatre offered free tickets for volunteers as well, underlining its mission while utilizing DWU's central outreach tactic. This approach enabled the theater to affirm its solidarity with DWU, actively promote the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights and reach out to domestic workers who might not otherwise see *Exit Cuckoo*. I participated in this outreach effort on the morning of Thursday, April 9, 2009. Along with two Working Theater staff members, Laura Carbonell Smith and Mark Plesent, and a couple of volunteers from local colleges, we approached domestic workers in Madison Square Park in Tribeca and another park along the Hudson River.

Erline Brown, a domestic worker and leading member of DWU since 1999, noted in an outreach meeting held at Working Theater that she had met Lisa Ramirez at a park in Tribeca when both were working. She noted that one way to draw workers to the play was to highlight the fact that "this is a woman you probably know" and that the play reflects their common experiences.¹⁹ Most women we interacted with that day, even if they did not think they would be able to attend, were enthusiastic about the idea of the play and the free admission

being offered them. This suggests that performance can provide more immediate ways to connect with workers than more traditional outreach efforts such as promoting a “bill of rights.”

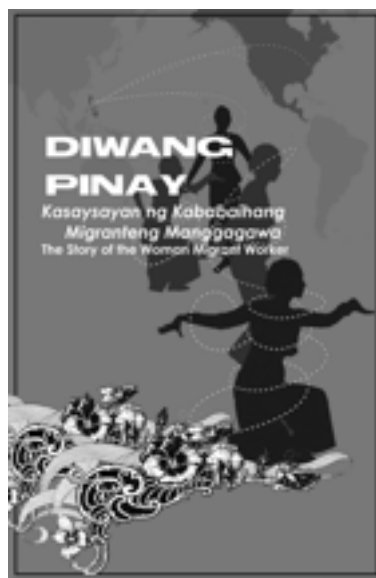
Exit Cuckoo is not the only theatrical production that has addressed domestic workers’ concerns. There have been at least two other plays performed by domestic workers and their allies. In 2008, members of Andolan, an ally organization of DWU, developed and performed its play, *Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani*, a journey of love, risk and loss, in New York City.²⁰



Publicity Image for Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani²¹

Sukh aur Dukh ki Kahani was produced as a response to the experiences of Andolan members whose interviews with journalists were often used to portray “domestic workers as helpless victims, rather than as empowered individuals striving for change.”²² The play gives the workers agency. Using “dance, song, and movement, the stories tell of migration, the mangled American dream and

aspirations of living beyond a meager paycheck.”²³ The effort to promote domestic workers as agents of their own lives is evident in the image above, the woman in a sari holding her head tilted slightly upward with arms spread open. Still, in the after-performance discussion on the evening of April 26, 2008, a man in the audience failed to understand the emotional response to exploitation conveyed by the performers. His seeming incredulity demonstrated the deeply ingrained notion that domestic workers should accept their circumstances happily. The theater project provided an opportunity to engage him as other audience members as well as the actors reiterated their perspective and publicly challenged popular assumptions and common workplace practices. Violet Anthony, an Andolan member, invited the audience to “bear witness” to the injustices workers encounter daily, including being summoned by the disdainful use of a forefinger.²⁴



Diwang Pinay Spirit Flier²⁵

In March 2011, Filipina domestic workers and their allies staged *Diwang Pinay: Kasaysayan ng Kababalhang Migranteng Manggagawa, Spirit of the Filipina: The Story of the Woman Migrant Worker*. The production was a collaboration between Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment (FiRE)-Gabriela USA and Kabalikat Domestic Worker Support Network, a program of the Philippine Forum. Melanie Dulfo, a volunteer organizer for Philippine Forum and the Internal Education Officer of FiRE, summarizes FiRE's work with domestic workers.

[FiRE] is made up of students and professionals, of mostly Fil-Am [Filipina American] women... but their integration with women workers, like the domestic workers of Kabalikat, also serves to heighten their political consciousness... hence, the way they think about politics goes beyond identity politics, into people's movements, like the national democratic movement of the Philippines²⁶

Efforts such as *Diwang Pinay* help bridge class differences between wealthy and working-class Filipinas in the United States and present a political analysis that ties women workers' experiences to structural inequalities and to social movements aimed at transforming systems that perpetuate oppression. The 2011 performance emphasized domestic workers' negotiation of gendered familial roles by "follow[ing] the story of Maria, a domestic worker in the NYC area who left the Philippines to support her family by migrating only to face challenges in a new city and figure out a way to survive. See the world through her eyes as a migrant and mother."²⁷ Maria represents Filipina domestic workers whose identities are indeed reconfigured via global markets and the social movements that seek to support their claims to human rights and labor rights protections.

The performance utilized a similar approach to that of Andolan by emphasizing the stories of participants, and in this case producer Valerie Francisco documented the process.²⁸ Her YouTube reflection highlights a number of practices common to social justice theatre. The women began by writing down personal stories and using Theatre of the Oppressed approaches such as sculpting, acting out webcam conversations, and mapping out their migrations.²⁹ This combination of progressive theatrical techniques with approaches that highlight the knowledge of Filipina migrant women provides the foundation for a production that echoes the performances discussed earlier without losing the specificity of Filipinas' histories.

Coverage of the event similarly demonstrates both commonalities and the specific experiences of Filipinas.



Maria with her Angry Employer³⁰

The full press caption reads: "Maria is confronted by her angry employer when she came late for work. Tension escalates when Maria exclaims she is willing to

do whatever it takes to keep the job.”³¹ While the male employer’s interaction with Maria seems to be a rare exception to female employers’ usual oversight role, the dynamic between the two reflects the denigrating and potentially abusive work situations that domestic workers face, which is also highlighted in Andolan’s play and, to a lesser extent, in *Exit Cuckoo*.

Another aspect of domestic workers’ common experience is addressed in *Diwang Pinay* as well. “Papa” Piolo Pascual, a famed Filipino actor is portrayed “as he walks into a grocery store and starts presenting the evolution of methods by which Overseas Filipino Workers communicate with families back home. In this case, he showcases a phone card.”



“Papa Pascual” with Promotes Phone Cards for Migrants³²

In real life, the actor promotes such methods through advertisements and special appearances. Such promotions by the actor are common place, for example, as a Banco de Oro (BDO) “remittance endorser,” Pascual “made a surprise visit at the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration office (POEA) in Mandaluyong City,” according to the BDO’s website.³³ While remittances and the use of phone cards are not unique to the Filipina/o migrant experience, the level of state investment in labor exporting and the employment/deployment of actors like Pascual to promote remittances are particularly intense (For further discussion, see chapter 1.)

All three performances demonstrate the use of theater to validate the perspectives of domestic workers themselves, and convey the need for support of their rights at both the legislative and community levels. They also suggest the significance of this more public and collective form of organizing and education to creating both a sense of community among domestic workers and a dialogue with allies and even employers.

Religious/Ethnic Alliance

Performance has also served as a significant component in work with allies. Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), an ally to MOM, CAAAV, and the DWU, annually creates and produces a social justice-themed Purim Spiel.³⁴ Held at the century-old Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring building, these Purim spectacles provide an opportunity for JFREJ to reach out to a range of Jewish New Yorkers as well as collaborate with allies.³⁵ On March 22, 2008,

they held a housing rights spiel, *28 Condos Later: A Zombie Purim* (drawing on the 2002 zombie horror film *28 Days Later*).



JFREJ *28 Condos Later* Promotional Postcard³⁶

Drawing upon current housing issues, such as the rise in vacant condos, alongside affordable housing losses in New York, JFREJ members worked with Right to the City (RTTC) groups on the event. The event was described as:

...a ridiculously elaborate and raucous party that talks about displacement, gentrification, housing, and zombies to feed resistance and organizing in our communities. SEE zombie buildings devouring our neighborhoods! HEAR schemes of eviction – and worse! SMELL the bitter scent of betrayal! FEEL the terror of a city without public spaces! TASTE the growing resistance!³⁷

MOM's Nova Strachan performed, as well as the hip-hop collective, Rebel Diaz, which featured Teresita "Lah Tere" Ayala, a former MOM organizer. Over one

hundred attendees filled the room as performers combined traditional Jewish storytelling with hip-hop and marching band music.³⁸ While JFREJ has also attempted to address broad community concerns such as poverty, particularly among recent Jewish immigrants, it has been most successful through events such as the Purim Spiel or ally campaigns.³⁹ In part this is due to the fact that, similar to CAAAV, JFREJ is an organization composed primarily of queer women and men, making it more difficult to organize campaigns in conservative and Orthodox Jewish communities.

Throughout the 2000s, JFREJ's Shalom Bayit House of Peace campaign collaborated with DWU to reach out to liberal middle and upper class Jews in New York, a constituency that has been drawn to JFREJ events. Through Shalom Bayit, they worked with Jewish congregations to gain support for the Bill of Rights and to change members' own employment practices. For example, they supported applying Jewish contract standards to encourage the use of contracts for domestic workers. The campaign is described by Alice Sparberg Alexiou in her awareness-raising article "Who Cleans Your House?" which appeared in the Summer 2006 issue of Lilith Magazine, a publication whose tagline is "Independent, Jewish & Frankly Feminist."⁴⁰ The introduction by editor-in-chief Susan Weidman Schneider observes:

Today women's feelings about housework may still include a sense of the injustice that married women, even those employed outside the home, still do more of the work in the home than their husbands do. But we're also aware of a different injustice, and the responsibility we have – as Jews and as women – to treat fairly the women we employ to do "women's work" in our own homes.

Schneider thus foregrounds the aims of the JFREJ campaign--promoting a progressive Jewish response to domestic workers' rights that insists on full recognition and respect.

The first pages of the article include the images below along with a question and response in the left hand corner: "It's my schmutz. I should take care of it." In the cartoon, on the left, a woman of color wearing a maid's apron holds a quilt over a mattress with a white woman, as a white child observes from below. They all smile as they spread the quilt out, decorated with squares that include the words: safety, contract, mutual respect, loyalty, living wage, trust, in addition to a Star of David, closest to the domestic worker's hand.



"Who Cleans Your House?" Image

The image is complex, presenting a positive relationship between two women who work together and literally hold up the values represented on the quilt. At the same time, the roles of the women are clearly demarcated through the apron worn by the worker. Although a child (presumably the employer's) is present, other potential players discussed in the article – the employer's partner, elders

who need care, or family members of the worker—are notably absent. The image thus suggests limitations that are also present in *Exit Cuckoo*. While activists attempt to improve workers' experiences, they cannot dismantle the nexus of race, class and nation that maintains the hyperracialization of such labor, and the continued absence of men as recognized beneficiaries of domestic work. The article does however present a useful complement to the performances discussed, as it uses a different form of media to address a specific employer audience. These efforts at engagement are part of how CAAAV, MOM and their allies construct community-based responses to campaign issues.

Community Visioning and Advocacy Work

CAAIV and its allies have also sought to draw upon own hopes to imagine a better future for the Lower East Side waterfront. In this case, they encourage community members to They confront a context where local voices have long been ignored. As stated in chapter 2, the September 11, 2001 attacks simultaneously damaged the Chinatown economy and helped open up the area as Manhattan's "last frontier." Cultural theorist Inderpal Grewal describes the representational practices following 9/11 as a

...continuation and a fulfillment of neoliberal practices that had arisen in the last decades of the twentieth century...9/11 does not mark a break, but a fulfillment of some of the directions taken by neoliberal American nationalism, in particular the articulation of a consumer nationalism, the link between geopolitics and biopolitics, and the changing and uneven gendered, racial, and multicultural subjects produced within transnational connectivities.⁴¹

Arguably, all of the directions that Grewal points to are visible in pre- and post-9/11 struggles over housing and development. Residents who lived in substandard housing, paid key fees, or were evicted have been positioned as, at best, worthy of saving through removal from their homes, and, at worst, unwelcome and undeserving of staying in housing. Clearly these residents are viewed as marginal in the eyes of officials and building owners. Consumer nationalism, most gratuitously embodied in calls for “patriotic” shopping, has played a significant role in debates about the future of the East River waterfront, and CAAAV has sought to engage city officials who are responsible for economic development.

In “Non-Profits and the Autonomous Grassroots,” former CAAAV staff and scholar Eric Tang has called for non-profits to...

clear a path for revolutionary change by dismantling the policies and practices that prevent autonomous movements taking hold in the US... [and to] challenge the Left’s discernable shift towards purely elitist strategies – pushing legislative policy, gaining elections in swing states, winning over the commercial media – practices that eclipse the mass strategy of gradually building the base of opposition over time, of truly investing in “change from below.”⁴²

In its participation in the O.U.R. Waterfront Coalition, CAAAV arguably is attempting to navigate the dynamics that Tang identifies. It seeks to increase community awareness and involvement in planning decisions that reflect a broad trend toward “community visioning” that has roots in Latin American Leftist movements, while simultaneously utilizing “professional” strategies for communicating its message. Barbara Allen and Roberta Feldman also suggest the import that such tensions hold, as they call for recognition of the “tacit and

empirical knowledge that citizen-users can offer regarding the built environment.”⁴³

The East River Waterfront runs along the east side of Chinatown and the broader Lower East Side and is largely cut off by the FDR East River Drive. Over the past fifty years, there has been a general lack of investment for public or commercial interests in this area, with the significant exception of the South Street Seaport Mall. In the 1990s, community residents struggled with the city over the creation of a large parking garage on Piers 35-36, resulting in a “community use” compromise to allow the commercial business Basketball City to lease the space.⁴⁴ After 9/11, the area was used for recovery efforts and in 2002, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) was founded by the city to redevelop the areas destroyed or negatively impacted. By 2005, the LMDC released a concept plan “Transforming the East River Waterfront” calling for developing in a manner that was similar to South Street Seaport with an emphasis on commercial and tourist usages of the area.

In 2008, CAAAV and other local community group such as GOLES (Good Old Lower East Side) along with the progressive Urban Justice Center’s Community Development Project formed the O.U.R. Waterfront coalition. Beginning that summer, coalition members collected survey responses from 800 residents of the Lower East Side and Chinatown. The survey asked about current community concerns and about what residents would like to see included in a newly developed waterfront. During the Chinatown Community Struggle event discussed in chapter 2, CTU youth members collected responses from

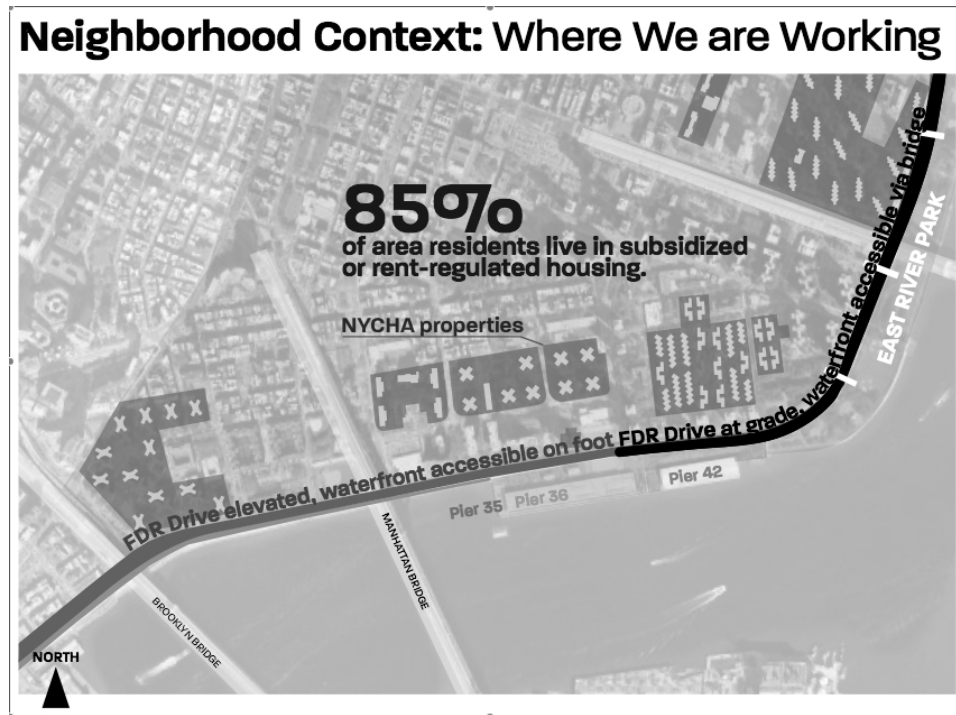
visitors in addition to presenting their own analyses of housing concerns in Chinatown.



Helena Wong Presenting OUR Waterfront Campaign⁴⁵

Along with the surveys, O.U.R. Waterfront member groups hosted three community visioning sessions, which included an overview of the history of the East Riverfront, the proposed development by the city, and the breaking up of participants into small groups. In these groups, residents were encouraged to reflect on their own priorities for the waterfront in terms of use, as well as what they would want to see for their community. Groups were encouraged to pick issues that they were especially interested in and then to build consensus about their priorities. A final town hall meeting drew 80 residents to discuss the production of “A People’s Plan for the East River Waterfront.” The plan draws upon the responses of community members while supplementing their input with financial and business analyses provided by the Pratt Center for Community Development.⁴⁶

The main emphasis of the resulting plan has been on free and low-cost services, including educational programming for adults and children. It calls for the “conversion of Piers 35, 36, and 42 into useable community public space”⁴⁷



“Neighborhood Context” Map from A People’s Plan Report⁴⁸

This contrasts sharply with the emphasis on commercial spaces such as Basketball City or restaurants and bars provided by the city plan. The “People’s Plan,” not surprisingly, reflects the priorities of working-class residents of the area who are the primary constituency of groups like CTU. Nonetheless, through the utilization of experts for financial analysis and design, O.U.R. Waterfront is currently seeking to sway city officials to incorporate their ideas in the plan. Instead of using confrontational strategies such as direct actions, the coalition produced posters and started a postcard campaign aimed at Seth Pinsky, President of the EDC and Robert Lieber, Deputy Mayor for Economic

Development. The following images, almost exclusively feature women of color and address some of the area's main ethnic groups. All three posters begin with "I support the People's Plan for the East River Waterfront because..." The posters were produced in Spanish, Chinese and English for use throughout the area.



O.U.R. Waterfront Posters

The first poster shows a smiling girl playing with a ball, and states: "I want a place to play in my community. Asia C., Resident of the Lower East Side." The middle image features a calm, older woman sitting on a bench, and she supports the plan because "Espacios abiertos benefician a todos los residentes (Open spaces benefit all residents) Olga C., Resident of the Lower East Side." Finally, the third image includes a woman and child, smiling or laughing as they walk, and quotes Ming J., a Chinatown community member, as saying, "My family needs a free and accessible waterfront." Through the representation of women's

voices, the claims made in the posters about family and health are grounded in gender norms.

The same images were used in posters that included the text “O.U.R. Waterfront = Free Recreation More Open Space OUR Community.” These posters have been hung outside places such as the CTU office on Hester Street, and are intended to help draw residents in to the key ideas of “free,” “open space,” and “community.” These images can be read in conjunction with the text of the postcards being sent to Pinsky and Lieber that ask them to “Prioritize OUR Needs!” The postcards ask: “...where is the community-use space that was promised?” and “request that the EDC continue and expand its OPEN PROCESS for the entire East River waterfront development. The community needs to know and give real input on every step of the process!” While using images that are reminiscent of commercial and political campaigns, the coalition contests an emphasis on commercial development that seems out of reach for many of the community’s residents. As this campaign develops, it remains to be seen how CTU will balance its entrance into the complex world of negotiating development plans with a history of more confrontational approaches to the issues of racial and economic marginalization in New York’s Chinatown. In the following section, MOM’s day-to-day practices are read as another form of organizing that activists are using as they seek to support their communities.

From Justice in Homes to Making Homeplaces

The activists discussed thus far seek to address inequalities that arise in relationship to home, but MOM has often defied the public/private distinctions

that support such inequalities. Its housing justice work, for example, shares much with the type of activism discussed by Roberta Feldman and Susan Stall in their study of organizers' "space appropriation" in Chicago. There, Wentworth Gardens women rejected limits on their ability to access local, government-owned space as they sought to reclaim spaces such as an abandoned field house for youth programs, demonstrating a concern for their community as a whole.⁴⁹ Such efforts speak to the similar context of MOM's members in the South Bronx. A 2004 New York Times article on the Bronx reported that single women run over thirty percent of the area's households according to a study conducted at Lehman College. As the reporter Alan Feuer discovers, MOM creates a place where community members can both organize to defend housing and find a sense of home. Following Silky Martinez into MOM's office, the reporter observes "[a] change overcame her when she stepped inside the office. Suddenly, she was smiling. She looked happy. She looked calm. 'This is my little hiding spot,' she said. 'When I need a break, then I come here.'"⁵⁰ The ability of MOM's office to serve as a sanctuary for residents like Martinez suggests that bell hooks' concept of "homeplace" and Feldman and Stall's "space appropriation" are both at play.⁵¹ Breaking down simple public/private divides through their storefront office, MOM's staff and members have created a space where residents not only can stop by to make copies or become involved in campaigns, but also relax and feel part of a community where they are respected and supported.

Strachan reflects on such experiences when she declares, I want to “take Mothers on the Move to my building.” She states that “MOM has become a surrogate mother for me.”⁵² Former organizer and community activist, Catrina Davis, echoes that sentiment as she explains “[My involvement with MOM] was the beginning of my informal family in New York. This is it. Just the people that we meet and people that share my ideals for justice...”⁵³ These interactions help community members survive, a key concern as cities like New York increasingly use strategies based on criminal justice practices to address poverty. Yet MOM’s efforts do more than just give vulnerable women a sense of security, control and support.

Still, survival is critical. Under Mayor Giuliani, the Work Experience Program (WEP) for welfare recipients was vastly expanded and continues to grow under the Bloomberg administration.⁵⁴ As historian Tamar Carrol summarizes:

In essence, the WEP program created a new class of low-paid city workers without benefits, masked in a moralistic rhetoric of public assistant recipients’ obligation to society... HRA required recipients to spend at least thirty-five hours a week (a “simulated” workweek) working or in job training programs... In 1999, HRA broadened its welfare-to-work mandates to include “special populations,” including pregnant women and those with children under three months old, students, people with AIDS, alcoholics, and recipients with little or no English.⁵⁵

The expansion of WEP drove a drastic reduction in New York’s welfare rolls, and as Carrol notes helped create a group of workers that the city could draw from to “clean up” its parks and other public spaces. Although critical of WEP, Strachan notes that the program and the private-public partnership, FECS Health and Human Services System, sometimes brings local residents into MOM as a non-profit placement site.⁵⁶ Maria Rivera, for instance, transitioned from a FECS

worker helping with housing outreach into an organizer. Her bilingual skills were especially critical in working with Spanish-speaking members of the community. FECS workers typically spend two or three days a week conducting outreach to help raise residents' awareness "that there are places they can go... you don't have to go without water or heat, or not having repairs done."⁵⁷

However, most people going through these programs are still not able to find employment, thus creating a cycle of workers who complete programs without gaining stability. Rivera argues,

It's frustrating... most of the people don't want to depend on HRA [Human Resources Administration] all their life... If you go through a program six or nine months, and it's to get you a job... you don't want \$75.50 every two weeks... for toiletries, utilities... you pay 30 percent [of your rent]... So I know you don't go through a program like that and not get a job and be happy.

Rivera sees her experience, like that of Strachan, as exceptional, particularly since organizations like MOM have limited funds to hire FECS workers as staff members. Furthermore, she argues that many people are more likely to end up getting jobs through regular search techniques, like looking in newspapers, than through such agencies. She underscores Carrol's point that the ultimate goal of such programs is to ensure that public assistance recipients "do something," rather than simply receive benefits. In a manner that reflects the "motherwork" approach of MOM, Rivera points out that while it has been difficult for her, as a woman without children, to live on public assistance, it is infinitely harder for women with children who have to find ways to deal with expenses such as childcare.

She argues that MOM has taught her to fight for what she wants, and this

includes environmental justice. She continues, “it can be done... through organizations such as this, that give people the opportunity to polish up on their skills.” Despite the problems with the program, some of the FECS workers that have had placements at MOM continue to come back after they have completed their official time there. Like Strachan, Rivera sees MOM as representing a future in which community members can get together and confront issues like slumlords and dangerous traffic. This type of knowledge is different from what happens in worker placements that involve cleaning parks. As Rivera asks: “What are you getting out of that?... Over here they see people getting involved.”

In sum, while Rivera is clear about the frustrations that FECS workers experience, she passionately believes that MOM can help workers gain a sense of hope and agency, despite the continuing lack of jobs in the South Bronx. It is this insistence on a realistic, but optimistic approach to community-engagement that arguably makes MOM the type of organization that women such as Silky Martinez are drawn to enter. Rivera’s analysis suggest how differential consciousness plays out in the daily lives of activists, as she participates in a program that she is critical of, striving to help FECS workers develop a sense of community and the recognition that they can fight to improve their communities and systems such as the HRA and NYCHA.

Pins and Needles

Strachan has benefited substantially from her relationship to MOM, not only through her experience becoming an organizer, but as a performer.⁵⁸ In 2011, with the support of MOM, Strachan joined the cast of *Pins & Needles*,

participating in a project that emphasized the community values discussed above.⁵⁹ The play, initiated by Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), pronounced “fury” rather than “furry” as one member jokes in the play, is a close ally of MOM and CAAAV. The FUREE project provided an opportunity for Strachan to train and perform in a theater-level production and demonstrated MOM’s commitment to Strachan’s personal development as well as its support for a play that addresses key concerns of the organization.⁶⁰ *Pins & Needles* was a revival of the Broadway musical comedy revue written and performed by International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) members between 1937 and 1941.⁶¹ As FUREE’s description declares, the play is “a community musical – performed by a community that knows what they were singing about in 1937 and what they are singing about in 2011.”⁶² Furthermore, by holding the play’s run in Brooklyn and providing free tickets for members to attend, particularly at the June 24, 2011 benefit performance, FUREE sought to make the production a community event for both the audience and performers. Having sold out that night, it was clear that the hundreds of audience members were deeply engaged by the play and gave the performers a standing ovation at its conclusion.

The original show’s themes included “people fighting for jobs, housing, a minimum wage, immigrants’ rights and economic justice” as well as the satirization of “fascists and the US right-wing reactionaries who rose up against FDR’s New Deal.”⁶³



ILGWU Pins & Needles Performance⁶⁴

The image above was included in a New York Times slide show that accompanied coverage of the FUREE production. Along with sets of words like “arbitrate,” “lockout” and “solidarity,” a baby carriage is seen above the cluster of men to the right, perhaps echoing long-held concerns about women and work.

The FUREE performance adapted the play to reflect its community, while continuing to include songs such as “*Mene Mene Tekel*” (The Writing on the Wall) that reflect the Jewish membership of ILGWU during the play’s original period. The production thus balanced an identity-based approach that emphasizes the centrality of race and class to contemporary struggles fought by FUREE, MOM and their communities and to the period in which Pins & Needles was originally performed. Thus it does not erase the significant role of European immigrants to the ILGWU and the play even as it adds new characters and communities.

Such moves demonstrate a differential consciousness-based approach, particularly as the updated play continues to directly attack figures deemed as threats to working class communities. As the New York Times notes, “To reflect

the times, songs about Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin were jettisoned...

Contemporary sketches zing Donald Trump and applaud new rights for domestic workers.”⁶⁵ The production added “songs and scenes that included more of the experience of black Americans during that remarkable era and that would highlight some of the issues facing FUREE members,” as well as incorporating blues songs and scenes from the “Living Newspapers plays from the Federal Theatre Project.”⁶⁶ “The City Grows” is such a scene, appearing early in the play, with Cynthia Butts in drag as an early New York landlord. Her character purchases a plot of land on the edges of the growing city and over the 1800s, is able to exploit migrants to the area, renting them smaller and smaller plots of land for increasing prices. In response, the renters sing “Landlord,” a 1940s blues song by Gene Raskin and recorded by Josh White.⁶⁷ The lyrics are combined with complaints about housing conditions to tell listeners that the landlord “is against public housing” and that they “need to get wise, we can lick these greedy guys, all you got to do is organize.”⁶⁸



*Pins & Needles Cast Sings “Landlord”*⁶⁹

While these scenes and songs show support for the work of groups such as FUREE and MOM to promote affordable housing and denaturalize landowners' claims, other portions of the play highlight the experiences of the performers themselves. In the song "Chain Store Daisy," Nova Strachan performs a duet with Rita Michelle about working at Macy's.



Strachan and Michelle Sing "Chain Store Daisy"⁷⁰

The lyrics include "Once I had a yearning for all higher learning, And studied to make the grade... And look at the kind of grade I made. I'm selling things to fit the figger, Make the big things small and the small things bigger. I used to be on the daisy chain, Now I'm a chain store daisy." In a later scene, "Activists Born," five of the performers tell their own stories about becoming organizers. Strachan reflects upon the jobs she held before coming to MOM through WEP. The list includes Macy's, and Strachan makes clear that the song's criticism of keeping women in low paying jobs continues to be a concern for women such as her.⁷¹

Conclusion

MOM and CAAAV navigate the contradictions that exist for social justice-aimed non-profit organizations and for low-income communities of color in New York City, which confront a range of oppressions. During the time that I

conducted my ethnographic research, both groups weathered the economic downturn, an increase in policing and surveillance of activists as well as communities of color, and growing frustration within the Left about the inability to produce a sustained radical response to key issues such as the wars on terror and drugs. There is recognition, too, of the contradictions of non-profit organizing, from the difficulties of developing indigenous leadership to the conflicts that develop among activists based on political beliefs or personal goals. Nonetheless, the campaigns highlighted in previous chapters and in this conclusion demonstrate that these activists have been able to respond effectively to critical issues in their communities.

Several significant findings emerge from the histories of these two organizations. The central analytic of differential consciousness helps illuminate how these organizations negotiate competing and conflicting political stances. Throughout this study, flexibility in approaches and alliances has been crucial to achieving concrete successes that are often reformist in nature. At the same time, within each organization and through their participation in alliances such as the Right to the City, political education has provided an opportunity to promote a radical critique, which is, at times, voiced publicly.

While each group has developed its own approach to the management of these concerns, they have often participated in more confrontational actions as well as worked to develop productive relationships with governmental officials. Additional tactics, such as the use of theater and ally-work discussed in this chapter or the toxic tours of the South Bronx described in chapter 3, have helped

both groups win support from wider audiences for their campaigns and provide space for criticism of the status quo. Although these two organizations wield identity politics to focus their work and cohere their membership, this study suggests that their success results from the willingness and ability to combine identity-based organizing with more flexible and shifting perspectives and tactics.

As Mothers on the Move demonstrates, while there may be identity-based tensions, its membership crosses lines of gender, class, age, race and sexuality to successfully organize in a manner that is often underestimated in both academic scholarship and popular media. In the case of CAAAV, their history as a pan-Asian organization includes both shifts in internal demographics and the maintenance of women's leadership. In the case of domestic work, the evolution of the women workers' campaign relied on CAAAV activists' ability to guide their passion for addressing immigrant women's issues and their ties to the Filipina/o community into an area where they could achieve change. In this instance, CAAAV members were able to recognize both the possibilities and limits of a Pan-Asian identity-based approach to organizing and then build a solidarity-based effort with domestic workers across races. Finally, throughout these campaigns, both organizations utilize social movement analyses that promote a transnational understanding of issues even as they primarily organize locally. This point reflects a heightened awareness that draws upon immigrant members' own experiences and the race, class, and gender solidarity that the two organizations value.

To conclude, while the ties that bind activists in these groups often run deep, as shown by a review of their outreach efforts, they have been able to touch the lives of many New Yorkers whether or not those residents recognize the hand of MOM or CAAAV in these efforts. Reflecting a differential consciousness-based approach to organizing, these groups, their allies, and the activists they inspire are able to produce not only concrete improvements in areas where they are so sorely needed, but also support communities of hope for those who want to pursue social justice more broadly

Epilogue

This study has provided an opportunity to explore contemporary activists' ability to work within and across communities as they seek to address domestic workers' rights, housing inequalities, and environmental justice. As discussed throughout the text, Chela Sandoval's theorization of differential consciousness is especially instructive as it illuminates the shifts in political approaches activists take as they pursue their goals. MOM and CAAAV activists have their own analysis of the theory and practice of their work, and I have incorporated these reflections alongside more scholarly conceptualizations. The perspectives of the two groups are captured by Yuri Kochiyama's synopsis of CAAAV:

The string of women spokespersons and organizers... have held the rein because of their diligent, dedicated commitment and their ability to get along with people of various backgrounds, ages, genders, and sexual preferences.¹

It is the political commitment and interest in "getting along," or better yet, working productively with, people across difference, that are intrinsic to both organizations and to Sandoval's analysis.

Sandoval argues that differential consciousness is not only a movement among different political stances. They are also "kaleidoscoped into an original, eccentric, and queer sight where the fifth, differential mode is utilized as a theoretical and methodological device for retroactively clarifying and giving new meaning to any other."² In other words, this fifth mode offers the potential for constructive reflection upon efforts activists make as they pursue justice. In this epilogue, I consider how organizations can utilize a multi-faceted approach to activism, move between strategies and tactics, and pursue justice in a manner

that is queer.³ Taken together, such values can sustain organizations and organizers that pursue justice across difference.

Gloria Anzaldúa argues in her introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul*, “We have not one movement but many... women are organizing, attending meetings, setting up retreats or demonstrations.”⁴ Indeed, MOM and CAAAV’s participation in myriad movements demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of women of color’s leadership in New York’s transnational communities. In the process, both organizations have expanded significantly beyond their origins. CAAAV broadened its focus from anti-Asian violence to address a host of community issues, primarily around work and housing, while also participating in movements for environmental justice and LGBTQ rights. MOM parallels that history as it blossomed from an initial emphasis on parents’ search for educational reform into a group promoting green jobs, environmental justice, tenants’ rights, and youth activism in the South Bronx. As Nancy A. Hewitt argues in her introduction to *No Permanent Waves*, scholars must “insist on the messy multiplicity of feminist activism across U.S. history and beyond its borders. . . .” Moreover, many movements “...radiate out across place and time, although their development is uneven and often contested.”⁵ Such complexities are at the heart of groups such as MOM and CAAAV, where feminism is not always foregrounded, but numerous progressive feminist concerns and commitments are enacted daily.

The unruliness of such organizations and movements, speaks also to Francesca Polletta’s observation that:

Democracy in social movements does not produce dutiful citizens. It produces people who question the conventional categories and responsibilities of citizenship—and who question the boundaries of the political, the limits of equality, and the line between the people and their representatives.⁶

CAAAV's efforts to enhance the valuation of domestic work and MOM's range of strategies for promoting environmental concerns suggest how crucial "people who question" are to making concrete change. As seen in the transition of some politicians from organizational targets to allies or in critiques of allied mainstream environmental groups, questioning tactics, engaging leaders, and shifting relations are part of this process. As Ann Mische suggests, it is important that such groups "not see competition and collaboration as two mutually opposing poles." Both organizations analyzed here demonstrate through their work with other non-profit entities, governmental officials, and professional experts, an ability to work through conflict as well as build longstanding alliances.⁷ By participating in multiple movements and yet directing focused campaigns, MOM and CAAAV present contemporary opportunities for feminist action that are based on women's leadership, but engage communities broadly.

Linking Sandoval's theorization of differential consciousness with Rey Chow's discussion of tactics and strategies offers particular insights for understanding the approach of groups such as MOM and CAAAV. Chow argues that while strategies are focused on reason, legibility, and accruing space and power, tactics are seen as a survival-based approach that bets "on time instead of space."⁸ She argues against solidarities based on a "*strategic* attitude which repeats what they seek to overthrow."⁹ In contrast, Chow proposes "the tactics of

dealing with and dealing in dominant cultures... are tactics of those who do not have claims to territorial propriety or cultural centrality.”¹⁰ CAAAV and MOM activists have deployed both tactics and strategies as defined by Chow, suggesting (à la Sandoval) that the political context necessitates movement among stances, even as activists are aware that this can be problematic. For instance, each group regularly challenges and redefines “commonsense” notions about community issues, but in certain circumstances each draws upon status quo understandings of justice and representation in its campaigns.

The two organizations also shift tactically among their own campaigns, the development of autonomous organizations, and participation in broad progressive coalitions. In cases such as New York Taxi Workers Alliance and Domestic Workers United, CAAAV enabled campaigns to flourish into independent organizations, demonstrating an approach that seems inline with Chow’s (and de Certeau’s) emphasis on effective tactics rather than the accumulation of power. Additionally, both organizations participate in movement building that is not primarily oriented toward promoting an organizational “brand.” For example, Mothers on the Move’s support for the Furee performance of *Pins & Needles* (discussed at length in chapter 4) was not highlighted in publicity, despite the centrality of the organization to performer Nova Strachan’s narrative. In this case, it was clear that the interest for MOM was supporting an ally group’s work that promoted shared analyses about housing and work issues and supporting the development of its staff member. CAAAV and MOM thus make clear that their focus is on promoting justice rather than gaining status.

Both MOM and CAAAV similarly demonstrate their capacity for using approaches grounded in their own sensibilities even as they seek pragmatic means to alter existing power dynamics and thus improve the material lives of their communities. Activists from each group are very aware of the complexities of their choices, and their self-awareness can help us delineate the bounds within which progressive non-profit organizations are able to function today. As former CAAAV organizer, Chhaya Choum, acknowledges funding impacts leadership development:

The 501c3 [status] framed what kind of organizing we can do, and what kind of people [can be put] into those roles. I don't think the way the work is set up now allows there to be indigenous leadership. We get paid, and we want people to volunteer... it can be a huge contradiction.¹¹

Despite the major shifts that have eradicated political support for antipoverty programs in the 1990s and 2000s, as Annelise Orleck notes, “newer organizations... remind us that the light of social change burns brightest and longest where people build real coalitions.”¹² Whether it be the increase in governmental surveillance and policing of organizing efforts (for example, the threat of arrest that has accompanied many protests), or dwindling and restrictive funding, organizations face real challenges to carrying out their daily work. This only makes it more difficult to develop approaches that can help them make positive change. Yet despite such demanding circumstances, it is these groups’ ability to build common cause while taking strong independent positions that drew me to them.

Furthermore, their organizational heterogeneity and willingness to work as allies with a broad array of organizations supports Cathy Cohen's argument for a justice-oriented queer politics:

...we must also fight for a living wage for all workers, independent of sexual orientation, because it is part of our progressive vision of a just society. And as we struggle for transformative inclusion, we must struggle to transform the workplace, guaranteeing at a minimum that everyone has the right to organize.¹³

Cohen proposes a political move beyond "a simple dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed heterosexual."¹⁴ She is particularly concerned that progressive queer activists attend to "heterosexuals outside of heteronormative privilege," which is evidenced "in the debates and rhetoric regarding the 'underclass' and the destruction of the welfare system."¹⁵ For the communities MOM and CAAAV organize, whether it be members who receive public assistance, single mothers or migrant workers, regardless of sexual orientation, they remain outside of heteronormative privilege.

In addition, groups such as Mothers On the Move further challenge normative ideas about sexuality and gender by recruiting men and non-mothers to their organization (see especially chapter 3 on environmental justice). It appears that such nuance are often lost on the media, as in the case of a 2000 *New York Times* article that includes an interview with MOM member, Francisco Perez:

Francisco Perez, 57, a member of Mothers on the Move, a local group that has battled industry in the peninsula, said that breathing can be hard for her, too. "I myself have bronchitis and, at times, it becomes so much worse," she said. "We are waiting for a future when we'll have improvements. It's not easy to work in a community that still needs so many changes."

The day after publication, the *Times* added a correction note:

Because of an editing error, an article yesterday about new residential and commercial development in Hunts Point in the Bronx referred incorrectly to a member of Mothers on the Move, a group battling industry in the area. The member, Francisco Perez, is a man.

Both the initial error and its correction demonstrate how banding together under the name “Mothers on the Move” while recruiting male members, presents a linguistic and imaginative anomaly for outsiders. By members taking pride in being a part of MOM regardless of sex or gender, especially in an area with high rates of single motherhood, the organization suggests the potential to redefine community and how activists fit into it.

Moreover, through groups such as CAAAV and MOM, activists across sexual identities are able to participate in movements for workers’ rights, housing and environmental justice while working as allies with leading progressive queer of color organizations such as the Audre Lorde Project and FIERCE! Such flexibility seems particularly important as issues like marriage and military service continue to dominate mainstream gay and lesbian organizations’ agenda, while teenage homelessness, housing and work protections, and governmental services and benefits gain far less attention. CAAAV members have frequently supported the work of their allies. For instance, they provided security for the Trans Day of Action where trans New Yorkers and their allies presented demands to the public including that “all people receiving public assistance including TGNC [trans and gender non-conforming] people, be treated with respect and dignity.”¹⁶ Such examples suggest how groups can come together in

a movement about queer people's experiences while recognizing that such concerns overlap in important ways with the needs of their heterosexual peers.

This study demonstrates that MOM and CAAAV activists have been able to sustain their organizations and the movements they are part of because of their political commitments as well as their ability to work productively across differences. It is not a coincidence that despite strikingly different histories, both organizations today participate in citywide alliance work through groups such as Right to the City and Social Justice Leadership. In addition, they participate in broader coalitions like the US and World Social Forums and the global environmental justice movement. The two groups are also defined by a dedication to fighting for justice for low-income and working poor immigrants and people of color in New York. Whether members are from Puerto Rico or China, they share many struggles. Issues such as the loss of affordable housing or environmental racism cut across communities, and allow MOM and CAAAV to build effective coalitions. When group-specific concerns emerge, such as the fight for domestic workers' rights, the fact that the organizations have established a broad social justice vision makes it easier to attract or serve as allies.

As a researcher, I have been most impressed by these activists' ability to exercise patience as they rethink campaign strategies or attempt to bridge internal divides. Through the campaigns analyzed in this study, MOM and CAAAV prove that by working together they have been able to make concrete and positive change, identifying and striving to address major concerns in their communities that would otherwise be ignored. Through such work, and the

generosity of spirit evidenced by activists, they have also helped strengthen the bonds within and across New York's progressive communities.

Introduction

- ¹ Photo by author, May 11, 2010, New York, New York.
- ² Photo to Facebook by Youth on the Move, July 12, 2011, New York, New York.
<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=101676413263521&set=a.101675743263588.1778.100002634873752&type=1&theater>, accessed September 4, 2011.
- ³ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Del Otro Lado," in *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians*, ed. Juanita Ramos (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2–3.
- ⁴ Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), 41–42.
- ⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 231.
- ⁶ Further introductions to these organizations are provided later in this chapter. I utilize a slash to follow David Palumbo-Liu's articulation of "Asian/American" as "marking *both* the distinction between 'Asian' and 'American' *and* a dynamic, unsettled, and inclusive movement" (1). David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- ⁷ bell hooks "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression," in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984), 18–33.
- ⁸ Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar, "Introduction," *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 5.
- ⁹ Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus, "Defining Communities," in *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performances*, Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 25–28.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso Press, 2006), 3.
- ¹² Miranda Joseph's *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- ¹³ Quoted in Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 175.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56–58.
- ¹⁵ Anna Sampaio, "Transnational Feminisms in a New Global Matrix," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 6, no. 2 (June 2004): 188.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.
- ¹⁷ Eva Cherniavsky, "The Romance of the Subaltern in the Twilight of Citizenship," *The Global South* 1, nos. 1 & 2 (2007): 83.
- ¹⁸ Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 15–17. Ferguson builds on Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
- ¹⁹ Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 39–65.
- ²⁰ Cheryl Clarke, "Who needs the Master's Tools, Anyway: Black Queer Feminists Reworking the Passion of Blackness" (keynote address, Feminist Fantasies: Future Directions for the Study of Gender and Sexuality Conference, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, May 12, 2011), 10.
- ²¹ Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), 41–42.
- ²² Iris Marion Young, "The Complexities of Coalition," in *Feminist Alliances*, ed. Lynda Burns (New York: Rodopi Press, 2006), 13.
- ²³ Young interview with Vlasta Jalusic and Mojca Pajnik, "When I Think about Myself as Politically Engaged, I Think of Myself as a Citizen: Interview with Iris Marion Young," in *Dancing with Iris*, eds. Ann Ferguson and Machthild Nagal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20.

- ²⁴ Angela Davis, "Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex," *ColorLines*, September 10, 1998, accessed August 12, 2011, http://colorlines.com/archives/1998/09/masked_racism_reflections_on_the_prison_industrial_complex.html; Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, eds., *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007); and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Health Disparities and Inequalities Report - United States, 2011," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Supplement/Vol. 60. (January 14, 2011), www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/other/su6001.pdf.
- ²⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987); Chela Sandoval, "Dissident Globalizations, Emancipatory Methods, Social-Erotics," in *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* eds. Arnaldo Cruz-Malave and Martin F. Manalansan IV (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Janet Jakobsen, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference: Diversity and Feminist Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Nancy A. Naples, ed., *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1998); and Nancy A. Naples and Manisha Desai, eds. *Women's Activism and Globalization*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- ²⁶ Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); and Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution. Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010)
- ²⁷ A common question about my study has been what was my own experience as a non-gender conforming lesbian. To a much lesser extent, others parts of my identity - whiteness, Jewishness, high economic and educational attainment, or as a Midwesterner, have also come up. Sexuality is engaged to a very small degree in this study, largely due to the fact that while both organizations have sexual diversity within their ranks and do at times work with groups that are focused on LGBTQ issues, it was a topic that was rarely raised as a point of chief interest or contention. For example, early on in my research at MOM, I was asked what my preferred gender pronoun was, in a pro-forma manner, which is an increasingly accepted practice in New York progressive organizations with which I have interacted. Members of both organizations were far more welcoming and accepting of me as a researcher and a person than I had assumed, and sexuality mostly came up in informal, friendly conversations about dating, for example, and generally crossed lines of sexuality and gender. Far more of a concern for me was my privileges as a researcher, and I found that over time my difference, particularly in terms of race and regional background, helped position me clearly as an ally. For me, this position held true to my perspective as a researcher, as I clearly had many shared political sensibilities with the groups I was studying. I was always aware, however, that given the lack of geographic stability inherent to academia, even without other differences, I was not certain to maintain my closeness to these organizations, a break with my own activist sensibilities.
- ²⁸ CAAAV, www.caaav.org, accessed September 5, 2011.
- ²⁹ Chin was attacked with a bat by two out of work autoworkers who presumed he was Japanese and therefore to blame for the loss of their jobs. See Alan Shima, "The Differential of Appearance: Asian American Cultural Studies," *Journal of America Studies* 32, no. 2 (August 1998): 283-293. Shima provides an in-depth discussion of Chin's racially motivated murder. He was beaten outside of the bar where his bachelor party was held that night, an occurrence that seemed to echo the later shooting death of Sean Bell in Queens, New York by New York Police Department officers. CAAAV participated in the significant mobilizations following the Bell murder, in keeping with their longstanding work in this area.
- ³⁰ Emil Guillermo, "Vincent Chin? Remembering Ronald Ebens-the guy who got away with murder," Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), June 13, 2011, accessed August 12, 2001, <http://aaldef.org/blog/vincent-chin-remembering-ronald-ebens->

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- the-guy-who-got-away-with-murder.html. Guillermo's blog is featured on AALDEF, a leading Asian American rights organization that was founded in 1974 in New York out of inspiration from the civil rights and antiwar movements. AALDEF, "History," AALDEF, accessed August 12, 2011, <http://aaldef.org/about-us/history/>.
- ³¹ Guillermo, "Vincent Chin?"
- ³² Helena Wong, e-mail to author, June 19, 2011. For a brief discussion of the 29th anniversary of Chin's murder, see Scott McCabe, "Crime History: Slaying of Asian American sparks hate crime reform," June 22, 2011, accessed June 23, 2011, <http://washingtonexaminer.com/local/crime-punishment/2011/06/crime-history-slaying-asian-american>.
- ³³ Angry Asian Man, "Remember Vincent Chin," June 23, 2011, accessed September 5, 2011, http://www.angryasianman.com/images/angry/remembervincentchin_20110623.jpg.
- ³⁴ Fund for the City of New York. "Union Square Awards, 2000 Winners, CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities," accessed May 15, 2007, <http://www.fcny.org/scripts/usq/getpage02.pl?orgid=0003>.
- ³⁵ Tomio Geron, "New York Story: Asian-Asian violence wants new investigation into the killing of Yong Xin Huang; shades of Vincent Chin," *AsianWeek*, October 13, 1995, 17, no. 8: 1.
- ³⁶ This case, like many others brought to the Brooklyn District Attorney, failed to result in even an indictment of the shooters. However, a federal civil suit against New York City, resulted in a settlement for his family, suggesting some admission of responsibility for the killing. "Settlement Reached in Police Shooting Suit," *New York Times*, March 13, 1996, accessed July 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/13/nyregion/settlement-reached-in-police-shooting-suit.html>.
- ³⁷ See Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, "Police Brutality in the New Chinatown" in *Zero Tolerance: Quality of Life and the New Police Brutality in New York City*, eds. Andrea McArdle and Tanya Erzen (New York: New York University, 2001), 221-241; and Chisun Lee "Asian Power: Keeping Up the Struggle Against Police Violence," *Village Voice*, March 21, 2000, accessed July 20, 2011, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2000-03-21/news/asian-power/>.
- ³⁸ Peoples' Justice, "About Us," Peoples' Justice, 2008, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.peoplesjustice.org/site/index.php/ABOUT-US/ABOUT-US.html>.
- ³⁹ CAAAV, "About Us," CAAAV, accessed April 19, 2007, <http://www.caaav.org/about>.
- ⁴⁰ CAAAV, "History of CAAAV," accessed April 2, 2011, <http://caaav.org/about-us/history-of-caaav>.
- ⁴¹ MOM, "MOM Logo," On the Move/En Movimiento, accessed September 5, 2011, http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_X4mwrz1Dj-E/SYvYf98DHII/AAAAAAAAAFs/hH9y7oVQbB4/S1600-R/MOM-Logo.jpg.
- ⁴² MOM, "Who We Are," MOM, accessed April 22, 2007, <http://www.mothersonthemove.org/about.html>. See Kavitha Mediratta and Jessica Karp, *Parent Power and Urban School Reform: The Story of Mothers on the Move*, New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy, 2003, accessed June 5, 2007, <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp.olde/publications/pubs/cip/MOM.pdf>, 3.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 3.
- ⁴⁴ MOM, "Timeline," MOM, accessed April 22, 2007, <http://www.mothersonthemove.org/timeline.html>
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ MOM, "About MOM," MOM, accessed April 22, 2007, <http://www.mothersonthemove.org/about.html>.
- ⁴⁷ This emphasis on concern for the community's children, highlighted by the organization's name, has led me to argue in other work that MOM activists participate in a form of "motherwork" that includes men, youth, and LGBTQ members while maintaining the centrality of women, and mothers in particular, in the organization. Mothering is discussed further in chapter 3's examination of MOM's environmental justice activism.
- ⁴⁸ MOM, "City owes Mott Haven tenants jobs, advocates contend," On the Move/En Movimiento, May 6, 2011, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://mothersonthemove.blogspot.com/2011/05/city-owes-mott-haven-tenants-jobs.html>.

⁴⁹ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 56-58; 44.

Chapter 1

- ¹ Chisun Lee, "Domestic Disturbance: The Help Set Out to Help Themselves," *Village Voice*, March 12, 2002, accessed March 2, 2009, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2002-03-12/news/domestic-disturbance/1>. Photo by Michael Kamber. Carolyn De Leon was featured in this 2002 article that describes DWU's effort to pass the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in the New York City Council.
- ² Domestic Workers United, "Domestic Workers United," Domestic Workers United, accessed July 17, 2010, <http://www.domesticworkersunited.org>. De Leon was the lead organizer of the WWP and is my central source for this chapter, and Lin was a CAAAV intern from Social Justice Leadership (SJL), an organizing institute based in Harlem that counts CAAAV and MOM as member organizations. De Leon, who has organized domestic workers in New York since the late 1990s, brought her own experience as a Filipina migrant domestic worker in Hong Kong, suburban New York, and New York City with her as we walk through the Upper West Side. Lin, a Chinese/American college graduate from the Los Angeles area, had recently begun his SLP internship with CAAAV, and while largely involved with the Youth Leadership Project (YLP), supported organizing efforts by CAAAV's WWP and the Chinatown Justice Project (CJP). By 2008, DWU had become a successful standalone organization, and that fall De Leon's left CAAAV, returned to working as a nanny for two children on the Upper West Side, and enrolled in night classes to continue her education. As a result, the WWP officially came to a close. At the time of our outreach efforts, WWP was functioning as its own entity within CAAAV as well as a means of joining efforts by DWU and its allies to promote the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. This dual role was evident as we handed out fliers for the WWP health fair that was geared primarily towards Filipina domestic workers while simultaneously spreading information about DWU and the Bill of Rights. It is worth noting that DWU is represented as including Asian workers as in the image above, but also typically described as "an organization of Caribbean, Latina and African domestic workers" on its website. This erasure is particularly notable as DWU lists three Asian organizations out of its five organizational partners. Domestic Workers United, "Partners", Domestic Workers United, accessed July 17, 2010, <http://www.domesticworkersunited.org/partners.php>.
- ³ New York City Department of Parks, "Hippo Playground", New York City Department of Parks, accessed July 17, 2010, http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=1233. The entry for the park begins with a discussion of hippos, but with no explanation of why the park's theme is the hippo. This park has been constructed and maintained through a combination of local organization money and funding from the local council members.
- ⁴ Our visits to parks, on the Upper West and East sides and Central Park, demonstrated the significant degree to which women continue to be the primary paid and unpaid caregivers to young children. Given that, with few exceptions, women are the primary caregivers, I refer to women generally in this discussion.
- ⁵ While wary of making presumptions about women and their roles in the parks, through our outreach, when there are visible cross-racial pairings in the parks, typically it is women of color who are being paid to take care of white children. During our outreach that day, the one demographically atypical encounter was with a young Japanese woman who was working as a domestic worker to support her schooling.
- ⁶ Nicole Constable, *Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Worker* 1st ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 2-3; Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 221.
- ⁷ According to Maria Ontiveros, such discussions reflect an engagement of the legal philosophies that undergird employment in the U.S. - "freedom of contract and employment at will" (236). These principles allow for employees to negotiate their labor primarily from "her market value and bargaining position." She argues that in addition to "market forces," "labor standards legislation, antidiscrimination laws, and collective bargaining" "fail to protect female immigrant

- workers" (237). Maria Ontiveros, "Female Immigrant Workers and the Law" in *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor*, ed. Dorothy Sue Cobble (Ithaca: ILR, 2007), 235-252.
- ⁸ De Leon's story is retold briefly in Ai-jen Poo and Eric Tang, "Domestic Workers Organize in the Global City," in *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism*, ed. Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 156. The use of contracts in Hong Kong and Carolyn and other workers' familiarity with the Hong Kong system is discussed later in this chapter as DWU took up contracts as a key component of its work
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ It appears characteristic of domestic work that workers slip in and out of visibility or engagement from the perspectives of their employers. This situation is indicative of the power dynamic within such relations, and makes clear a history of devaluing the subjectivity of domestic workers.
- ¹¹ Parreñas takes up Judith Rollins identification of "spatial deference" as the "unequal rights of the domestic and the employer to the space around the other's body and the controlling of the domestic's use of house space. . . ." She argues that this process "extends to the level of society." Judith Rollins, *Between Women: Domesticity and Their Employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 171. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 98. Lugones uses the dynamic between a white woman employer and her maid as an example of a disruption of memory due to a domination-based relationship. Maria Lugones, "Structure/Antistructure and Agency Under Oppression," *Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 10 (October 1990): 504. This discussion is quoted in length by Aída Hurtado, *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 87-88. For further discussion of white employers' engagements of race and nation, see Amanda Moras, "Colour-blind Discourses in Paid Domestic Work: Foreignness and the Delineation of Alternative Racial Markers," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 2 (February 2010): 233-252.
- ¹² Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 14.
- ¹³ Genzo Yamamoto and Daniel Kim, "Navigating Multiple Modernities: Soon Huyn and the Envisioning of Korean/American Modernities," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 13, no. 2 (June 2010): 152.
- ¹⁴ Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity*, 101.
- ¹⁵ For an exploration of the colonial experiences of Blacks in New York City, including attempts at resisting enslavement and racial discrimination, see Thelma Wills Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ¹⁶ Yana Paskova, *The New York Times*, June 9, 2008, accessed August 12, 2011, <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/06/09/nyregion/08domestic.xlarge1.jpg>. Audre Lorde Project's (ALP) executive director Kris Hayashi is on the right, in a bandana. ALP staff and members have led protest security for many marches, rallies and demonstrations held by DWU and its allies, often in conjunction with current and former CAAAV staff and members. I participated in providing protest security for this event, along with CAAAV staff members.
- ¹⁷ endtrafficking, "alexis, "domestic workers rights are human rights!," Flickr, October 24, 2008, accessed January 8, 2009, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rightsdignityliberation/2971950401/in/photostream/>.
- ¹⁸ In my chapters on housing activism and [does this have a title now? Conclusion], I will further engage this question of access as it is a key concern in the work of Right to the City and in organizing projects such as O.U.R. Waterfront. They are attempting to negotiate for more community-accessible space and resources for the planned East River Waterfront renovation. For contemporary progressive discussion of this topic, see On the Commons, <http://www.onthecommons.org/>, accessed August 15, 2011.

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- ¹⁹ Constable cites anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1: 41-55. Also see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) offers another powerful critique in this area.
- ²⁰ *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1997), 92.
- ²¹ Arguably, the raced and national stratification of domestic labor provides a distance between women consumers and workers that maintains the dynamic suggested by Lorde in which women vis-à-vis their privilege can simultaneously participate in American feminism while complaining about the women whose labor provides them with at least a partial out from the gendered dynamics of household labor. As noted in Michelle Chen's, "Immigrant Workers at Home: Hired Hands Hold Family Bonds," and many other works both popular and academic, it is indeed immigrant women's labor that makes it possible for middle and upper class women to pursue their careers and be part of dual-income households. Michelle Chen, "Immigrant Workers at Home: Hired Hands Hold Family Bonds," *Colorlines*, September 4, 2009, accessed June 6, 2010, http://www.racewire.org/archives/2009/09/immigrant_workers_at_home_hire.html. I engage these questions more deeply later in this chapter when I examine organizing efforts, particularly those targeted at employers.
- ²² Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity*, 17.
- ²³ See Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*; and Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002).
- ²⁴ Luibhéid, 6.
- ²⁵ Lowe, 164.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 164.
- ²⁷ See Tomio Geron, "APA Activism, New York Style: The confrontational Tactics of the Coalition on Anti-Asian Violence are Controversial, but Effective," *Asianweek*, April 5, 1996, 17, no. 32: 13.
- ²⁸ "Proposed CAAAV Policy for New Program Areas; Dec. 5, 1996," CAAAV papers, CAAAV office, Bronx, New York.
- ²⁹ Jane Sung E. Bai interview with Ariella Rotramel, June 5, 2008, New York, New York. Bai left CAAAV in 2008, after being executive director since 1996. Carolyn De Leon e-mail to author, July 9, 2008.
- ³⁰ Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 170.
- ³¹ Bai interview with Ariella Rotramel.
- ³² For a discussion of the history of sex work and Korean and American relations, see Katharine Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Rainbow Center continued to exist into the early 2000s. Its website stated that it was "founded jointly by Rainbow Church, a United Methodist Mission Church and the Free France Chong Campaign supporters in 1993." Rainbow Center, "Our History," Rainbow Center, accessed May 8, 2010, <http://rainbowcenterus.org/english/aboutUs/history.html>. The center is now known as Women in Need Center, www.wincny.org, accessed August 15, 2011. Chong Sun France was wrongfully convicted of the accidental killing of her son in a trial that utilized sexist, racist and xenophobic representations of her as a mother. Her story is detailed in *The Women Outside: Korean Women and the U.S. Military*, directed by Hyun S. Kim with JT Takagi and Hye-Jung Park (New York: Third World Newsreel, 1995/2009). See the study guide Hyun S. Kim with JT Takagi and Hye-Jung Park, "'The Women Outside' Study Guide," Third World Newsreel, 2009, accessed August 15, 2011, www.twn.org/catalog/guides/WomenOutside_StudyGuide.pdf.
- ³³ Rainbow Center, "Our History."
- ³⁴ There continues to be significant debates about sex work among feminist advocates and academics, particularly in regard to concerns such as defining women as survivors or victims as well as whether or not sex work is fundamentally violence against women. The approach taken by CAAAV activists during this period echoes in many ways the emphasis of Stephanie

- A. Limoncelli's "The Trouble with Trafficking: Conceptualizing Women's Sexual Labor and Economic Human Rights," *Women Studies International Forum* 32 (2009): 261-269. Her call for a "gendered political economy of the international sex trade" argues for a deeper engagement of the "gendered component of economic globalization," as well as how "human trafficking is built on and reinforced racial/ethnic and national hierarchies" (266). CAAAV activists have tended towards what Limoncelli categorizes as the "sex work conceptualization," as demonstrated by Alexandra Hye, "From a 'Short Time' to 'A Way Out': Race, Militarism & Korean Sex Workers in New York," *Colorlines*, Summer 1999, accessed October 28, 2009, ProQuest (discussed shortly). Still, their analysis refused assumptions that all sex work is the same and in fact emphasizes an approach that examines not only the gendered, but racial and national components of the political economy of sex work.
- ³⁵ Bai interview with Ariella Rotramel.
- ³⁶ These concerns were taken up in the conference organized by Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parreñas in 2007. See Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, "Intimate Labors: An Interdisciplinary Conference at the University of California, Santa Barbara," Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, accessed July 2, 2010, <http://www.ihc.ucsb.edu/intimatelabors/>.
- ³⁷ Bai interview with Ariella Rotramel.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Carolyn De Leon interview with Ariella Rotramel, July 21, 2008, Bronx, New York.
- ⁴⁰ Health fairs continued to be an organizing approach of the WWP, though the one discussed previously was the last health fair held by the WWP. On Saturday, May 31, 2008, in Woodside, Queens, Carolyn welcomed domestic workers to the office space shared by the WWP and an ally organization, Nodutol for Korean Community Development. For the event, Carolyn gained sponsorship and volunteer services from the Kalusugan Coalition, Philippine Nurses Association - NY Chapter, NYC-AACN (New York City American Association of Critical Care Nurses Chapter), Asian & Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA), Charles B. Wang Community Health Center, Neri Chiropractic, and the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health. However, mainly Latina/o immigrant families and couples from the neighborhood came for services, rather than the target audience of Filipina domestic workers. Nonetheless, the event brought together two strands of the contemporary Filipina worker migration--domestic work and health provisions--to address the lack of access to adequate health services faced by New York immigrants of color.
- ⁴¹ This effort was not only noted in mainstream media, but also in feminist music group Le Tigre's "My My Metrocard."
- ⁴² Andrew Jacobs, "Shattered Clubs, Scrambled Lives," *New York Times*, October 11, 1998, accessed August 12, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/11/nyregion/shattered-clubs-scrambled-lives.html>; Priscilla Alexander, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, July 18, 1994, accessed August 2, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/18/opinion/l-women-in-prison-don-t-get-equal-treatment-crackdown-to-backfire-700703.html>.
- ⁴³ Alexander K. Murphy and Sudir Alladi Ventakesh, "Vice Careers: The Changing Contours of Sex Work in New York City," *Qualitative Sociology* 29, no. 2 (June 2006): 129-154.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 135.
- ⁴⁵ Complications that arise, and the existence of supportive relationships between sex workers across a range of types of services, are discussed by Anh Ngo, et al, "The Lives of Female Sex Workers in Vietnam: Findings from a Qualitative Study," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 9, no. 6 (November-December 2007): 555-570.
- ⁴⁶ Bai interview with Ariella Rotramel.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Women Workers Project flier, CAAAV Papers, Bronx, New York.
- ⁴⁹ Jungwon Kim, "A Heavy Toll: Out-Call Sex Industry a Nightmare for Women," *Newsday*, September 19, 1997.
- ⁵⁰ Thomas Goetz, "Cyberstalker, qu'est-ce-que c'est?" *Village Voice*, December 31, 1996, 23.
- ⁵¹ Hye, "From a 'Short Time' to 'A Way Out.'"
- ⁵² Hye, "From a 'Short Time' to 'A Way Out.'"

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- ⁵³ "Women Workers Project Meeting Agenda, August 26, 1998," CAAAV Papers, Bronx, New York.
- ⁵⁴ This line from Lauryn Hill's "Doo Wop (That Thing)," a 1998 popular song, is part of a short critique of Black feminine beauty standards as discussed in Layli Philips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan, and Dionne Patricia Stephens, "Oppositional Consciousness within an Oppositional Realm: The Case of Feminism and Womanism in Rap and Hip Hop, 1976-2004," *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 268. While they do not note that this line undermines rather than supports interethnic solidarity, this concern is taken up directly in Lisa Yun, "Spoken Word, Hip-Hop and Poetic Consciousness in the 21st century: Regie Cabico and Ishle Park in Conversation," *Wasafiri* 18, no. 38 (Spring 2003): 41. Discussing Orientalism within hip-hop, poet Ishle Park states, "...the few references there are to Asians in American have been derogatory or questionable, like Ice Cube's 'Burn Korea Burn' or Lauryn Hill's backhanded comment about Koreans doing nails."
- ⁵⁵ Handwritten note on "Women Workers Project Meeting Agenda, August 26, 1998," CAAAV Papers, Bronx, New York.
- ⁵⁶ "Political Analysis of the Korean Owned Nail Salon Industry in New York," CAAAV Papers, Bronx, New York.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Gilels et al, "The U.S. Nail Salon Industry: Booming Business, Growing Concern," *Women & Environments Magazine* (Fall/Winter 2008): 18-21. On the West Coast, Vietnamese owners and workers dominated the nail industry, while Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants owned only a small percentage of salons in New York. Miliann Kang, "The Managed Hand: The Commercialization of Bodies and Emotions in Korean Immigrant-Owned Nail Salons," *Gender & Society* 17, no. 6 (December 2003): 824.
- ⁵⁹ Rosalie R. Radomsky, "For the Files: New Rules On Manicures," *New York Times*, January 29, 1995, accessed August 2, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/29/nyregion/neighborhood-report-upper-east-side-for-the-files-new-rules-on-manicures.html?scp=9&sq=nail%20salon%20licensing%20new%20york%20state&st=cse>. Meanwhile, Connecticut continued to not require licensing or similar regulation, see Diane Sierpina, "Fighting for the Manicure Trade, Block by Block," *New York Times*, December 29, 1996, accessed August 2, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/29/nyregion/fighting-for-the-manicure-trade-block-by-block.html?scp=20&sq=korean%20nail%20salon&st=cse&pagewanted=3>.
- ⁶⁰ See Millian Kang, *The Managed Hand: Race, Gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010).
- ⁶¹ Luibhéid, *Entry Denied*; Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and The Making of Modern America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
- ⁶² For example, see Bernhart et al, "Unregulated Work in the Global City: Employment and Labor Law Violations in New York City" (New York: Brennan Center for Justice, 2007); and National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, "Issue Brief: The Nail Salon Industry: The Impact of Environmental Toxins on API Women's Reproductive Health," February 2008, accessed August 15, 2011, www.napawf.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/issuebrief_nailsalon_updated.pdf.
- ⁶³ "Occupational Health Clinics" document and "Proposal for Labor Clinic for Korean Workers," CAAAV Papers, Bronx, New York.
- ⁶⁴ As Joel Mintz summarizes, "Presidents Ronald Reagan and, less overtly, George W. Bush have attempted to assert their influence to dismantle or rein in the EPA's enforcement work." Joel Mintz, "Has Industry Captured the EPA?" *Fordham Environmental Law Review* 17, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 35-36. Bush garnered the nickname "Toxic Texan" during his tenure, see Katty Kay, "'Toxic Texan' Has Poor Green Record," *Times* (London), August 23, 2002, 19.
- ⁶⁵ Document does not provide Dr. Munhi's first name.
- ⁶⁶ Mini Liu, "CAAAB's First Steps," CAAAB 10 Years of Organizing Resistance booklet, 1996, CAAAB Papers, Bronx, New York. As Monisha DasGupta notes in *Unruly Immigrants*, CAAAB has struggled with the complexities of class difference throughout its history (229).

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- ⁶⁷ Liu, Geron, and Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism*, 162. They argue that this divergence contributed to the decline of the Asian American Movement (AAM) in the 1990s.
- ⁶⁸ National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), "Nail Salon Table Evaluation," NIOSH Science Blog, accessed October 10, 2009, http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/blog/nsb031009_nails.html.
- ⁶⁹ While this chapter focuses on contemporary organizing efforts, as Evelyn Nakano Glenn states, "domestic workers have a long history of forming worker organizations. In the 1930s, domestic workers in New York City formed the Domestic Workers Alliance." Glenn, "Caring and Inequality," in *Women's Labor in the Global Economy: Speaking in Multiple Voices*, ed. Sharon Harley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 59. In Alana Erickson Coble, *Cleaning Up: The Transformation of Domestic Service in Twentieth Century*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), Coble footnotes a quote from a member of a "Domestic Worker Union:" "By 1938, Dora Jones of the Domestic Workers Union estimated that 70 percent of all black women workers in New York City (native born or West Indian) were servants, the majority of them general houseworkers, the lowest rung of the ladder" (Footnote 27, 191).
- ⁷⁰ Parreñas, 16.
- ⁷¹ See Helen Schwenken and Anna Basten, "Bibliography: Gender in International Political Economy," GARNET, 2008, accessed February 2, 2010, www.garnet-eu.org/fileadmin/documents/news/Bib-final-update-30-05-2008.pdf.
- ⁷² Parreñas, 17.
- ⁷³ Mary Romero, *Maid in the U.S.A* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Romero finds an overt reference to the expected invisibility of domestic workers in her discussion of the instructions for workers found in the 1959 *Your Maid*. She connects this practice not only to the employment of Chicanas in the West, but also domestic work in the South (89).
- ⁷⁴ Domestic Workers United and DataCenter, "Home is Where the Work Is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry," July 14, 2006, accessed August 16, 2011, www.datacenter.org/reports/homeiswheretheworkis.pdf. See report page 10. This publication resulted from the collection of surveys and interviews conducted with domestic workers across the city under the auspices of CAAAV and the WWP as DWU was coming into fruition.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ US Census Bureau, "New York People Quick Facts," US Census Bureau, 2010, accessed July 2, 2010, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>.
- ⁷⁷ Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, "The Labor Brokerage State and the Globalization of Filipina Care Workers," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 33 (2008): 794-799; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor," *Gender & Society* 14, no. 4 (2000): 560-581.
- ⁷⁸ Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 32.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 32-33.
- ⁸⁰ Guevarra, "Managing 'Vulnerabilities' and 'Empowering' Migrant Filipina Workers," 524.
- ⁸¹ Despite the growth of scholarship focused on Filipina labor migration, an attention to gender as a salient category of analysis has only recently become significantly integrated in such international institutions and in the field of migration studies. See Helen Schwenken and Pia Eberhardt, "Gender Knowledge in Economic Migration Theories and in Migration Practices," GARNET Working Paper 58 (August 2008), accessed February 2, 2010, http://www.garnet-eu.org/fileadmin/documents/working_papers/5808.pdf. Notable early exceptions to this omission are Mirjana Morokvasic, "Birds of Passage are also Women," *International Migration Review* 18, no. 4 (1984): 886-907 as well as the body of work by Saskia Sassen.
- ⁸² Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 96. Originally in Guevarra, "Managing 'Vulnerabilities' and 'Empowering' Migrant Filipina Workers," 523.
- ⁸³ Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, 105; 108.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid, 108.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid, 112-114. Rodriguez, "The Labor Brokerage State and the Globalization of Filipina Care

- Workers,” 794. Guevarra in “Managing ‘Vulnerabilities’ and ‘Empowering’ Migrant Filipina Workers” does note that there are growing employer concerns about “Filipina’s seeming sexual promiscuity” amongst employers, but this statement does not refer to a particular region (531). Later, Guevarra draws on work focused on Hong Kong that notes negative stereotypes of Filipina workers’ sexual availability (536). Contemporary discussions of domestic workers in the U.S., engaged more deeply later in this chapter, seem focused more on issues of affordability and status (e.g. increasing interest in nannies who can teach children Mandarin) rather than their sexuality.
- ⁸⁶ Rodriguez, “The Labor Brokerage State and the Globalization of Filipina Care Workers,” 797.
- ⁸⁷ Saskia Sassen, “The Other Workers in the Advanced Corporate Economy,” *The Scholar and Feminist Online* Issue 8, no. 1 (Fall 2009), accessed August 2, 2010, http://www.barnard.columbia.edu/sfonline/work/print_sassen.htm.
- ⁸⁸ Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity*, 96.
- ⁸⁹ It is crucial to consider that there are numerous reasons for women to migrate to and from their countries of origin. As Carole Boyce Davies suggests economics, even when considered in the more complex manner taken up by Saskia Sassen and others, is one of the reasons for migration. “[E]scaping unsatisfying relationships... [having] control [of] the fruits of their own labor and [the ability to] improve their own and their children’s lives has been less articulated than the issue of economics reasons for migration,” (118-119). Davies, “Caribbean Women, Domestic Labor, and the Politics of Transnational Migration,” in *Women’s Labor in the Global Economy: Speaking in Multiple Voices*, ed. Sharon Harley, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 116-134. As a result, claims about domestic workers’ aspirations and experiences of migration may not be easily compared via generalized categories such as Filipina or Caribbean. Parreñas, on page 97 of *The Force of Domesticity*, cites Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, “Negotiating Public Space: Strategies and Styles of Migrant Female Domestic Workers in Singapore,” *Urban Studies* (1998) 35, no. 3: 583-602. Parreñas suggests that part of the “placelessness” that Filipina workers in Rome and Los Angeles experience can be attributed to their peripheralization by race and class.
- ⁹⁰ Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity*, 97.
- ⁹¹ The Saturday, May 31st, 2008 WWP health fair I observed at the WWP’s shared office with Nodutol in Woodside, Queens evidenced health practitioners’ positive interactions, throughout the day, with domestic workers involved in the event. I did not sense any tensions. Of course, this was a small sample and health practitioners donating their time arguably could be less class-biased than other community members. However, such volunteers could have exhibited patronizing attitudes as they were carrying out their professional roles but they did not. I attended the 2009 Philippine Independence Parade with De Leon and Bai. We stopped at Damayan and Ugnayan’s tent, which was set among stands that were mainly focused on providing food and money transfers.
- ⁹² At the same time I was conducting my research, I became friendly with two women in my apartment building in West Harlem (one from the Dominican Republic and the other from Jamaica) who did domestic work. There were similarly uninterested in the work being done by DWU since they were presently comfortable with their work situations, content with their pay and feeling positive about their relationships with their employers.
- ⁹³ Guevarra, “Managing ‘Vulnerabilities’ and ‘Empowering’ Migrant Filipina Workers.”
- ⁹⁴ Guevarra, “Managing ‘Vulnerabilities’ and ‘Empowering’ Migrant Filipina Workers,” 531.
- ⁹⁵ Leslie Casimir and Paul H.B. Shin, “Group Urges Domestics’ Bill of Rights,” *Daily News*, December 19, 2004, 8.
- ⁹⁶ Kalayaan, “About Us,” Kalayaan, accessed January 14, 2010, <http://www.kalayaan.org.uk/>.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Kalayaan Centre, “Press Release,” Kalayaan Centre, January 14, 2010, accessed February 28, 2010, http://www.kalayaancentre.net/content/pressrelease/2010/jan/siklab_jan14.html.
- ⁹⁹ CAAAV, “Women Workers Project,” CAAAV, accessed January 14, 2010, <http://www.caaav.org/projects/wwp>.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ethel Brooks, *Unraveling the Garment Industry: Transnational Organizing and Women’s Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). As Tarry Hum notes “As in the past

- century, apparel production continues to absorb thousands of immigrants as risk-taking entrepreneurs and low-skill workers who increasingly labor under conditions paralleling those of their counterparts in Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America." Hum, "Mapping Global Production in New York City's Garment Industry: The Role of Sunset Park, Brooklyn's Immigrant Economy," *Economic Development Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (August 2003): 295.
- ¹⁰¹ De Leon interview with Ariella Rotramel.
- ¹⁰² Andrea Cristina Mercado and Ai-jen Poo, "Domestic Workers Organizing in the United States," Association For Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 2010, accessed August 2, 2010, http://www.awid.org/eng/content/download/44879/482251/file/ENG%20Case%20Study_Domestic%20Workers%20Organize%20in%20US.pdf. See page 10.
- Claire Hobden, "Winning Fair Labour Standards for Domestic Workers: Lessons Learned from the Campaign for a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in New York State," 2010, International Labour Office; Global Union Research Network (GURN), accessed August 2, 2010, <http://www.gurn.info/en/discussion-papers/no14-jun10-winning-fair-labour-standards-for-domestic-workers-lessons-learned-from-the-campaign-for-a-domestic-worker-bill-of-rights-in-new-york-state>. See page 3.
- ¹⁰³ The two categories "activist" and "scholar" often times overlap, particularly when there is an appreciation for the intellectual contributions of activists to academic work.
- ¹⁰⁴ Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (New York: Zed Books, 2000), 15.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁶ This inability to account for the full range of tasks taken on by domestic workers is also found in some academic scholarship. For example, Coble in *Cleaning Up*, defines domestic work "solely as those tasks necessary to keep a household running: cooking, cleaning, and laundry" (4).
- ¹⁰⁷ Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, 1st ed, 44.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 44.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 153.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid, 152.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid, 154.
- ¹¹² Jacqueline Litt and Mary Zimmerman, "Introduction," special issue "Global Perspectives on Gender and Carework," *Gender and Society* 17, no. 2 (April 2003): 157.
- ¹¹³ Ibid, 163.
- ¹¹⁴ James Parks, "ILO Takes Big Step Toward Domestic Workers' Rights," AFL-CIO, June 17, 2010, accessed July 3, 2010, <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/06/17/ilo-takes-big-step-toward-domestic-workers-rights>.
- ¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Martinez, "Domestic Workers Rising Up," *Z Magazine*, January 2009, accessed August 1, 2010, <http://www.zcommunications.org/domestic-workers-rising-up-by-elizabeth-martinez>.
- ¹¹⁶ International Labor Conference, "Decent work for domestic workers" (Geneva, ILO Publications: 2010), accessed August 2, 2010, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_104700.pdf; 2, 32.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid, 36.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid, 94.
- ¹¹⁹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO), "Background Paper," Trade and Migration Seminar, October 2004, accessed August 1, 2010, http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/sem_oct04_e/background_paper_e.pdf.
- ¹²⁰ Center for History and New Media, "Bracero History Archive," accessed August 1, 2010, <http://braceroarchive.org/>.
- ¹²¹ NY1 News, "Albany Passes Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights," NY1 News, July 1, 2010, accessed July 3, 2010, http://www.ny1.com/content/news_beats/politics/121447/albany-passes-domestic-workers--bill-of-rights/.
- ¹²² DWU and DataCenter, "Home is Where the Work Is," 3.
- ¹²³ National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), "Employees/Employers NOT Covered by NLRA," NLRB, 2010, accessed July 3, 2010,

- http://www.nlr.gov/Workplace_Rights/employees_or_employers_not_covered_by_nlra.spx.
- ¹²⁴ Wage and Hour Division, "Compliance Assistance - Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)," US Department of Labor, 2010, accessed July 3, 2010, <http://www.dol.gov/whd/flsa/index.htm>.
- ¹²⁵ DWU and DataCenter, "Home is Where the Work Is," 3; US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), "Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," EEOC, 2011, accessed February 2, 2011, <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm>; Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), "Policy as to domestic household employment activities in private residences," US Department of Labor, 2011, http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=11329.
- ¹²⁶ DWU and DataCenter, "Home is Where the Work Is," 3.
- ¹²⁷ Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Introduction," in *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor*, ed. Dorothy Sue Cobble (Ithaca, NY: ILR, 2007), 1-12.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid, 9.
- ¹²⁹ Yvonne Liu, "Who Is New SEIU President Mary Kay Henry?" RaceWire.org, June 2, 2010, accessed August 2, 2010, http://www.racewire.org/archives/2010/05/who_is_mary_kay_henry_seius_new_president.html.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid.
- ¹³¹ Bankole Thompson, "'Excluded Workers' Move from Shadows to Negotiating Table," Inter Press Service, June 24, 2010, accessed July 31, 2010, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=51939>.
- ¹³² New York City Council, "Local Law 33" New York City Council Legislation, 2003, accessed October 21, 2010, <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=437474&GUID=2F3B8F4B-8453-4CD8-AF20-85BB3D03A7BF>; Mercado and Poo, "Domestic Workers Organizing in the United States," 11; and New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, "Statement of Employee Rights and Employer Responsibilities," New York City Government, 2010, accessed August 1, 2010, http://home2.nyc.gov/html/dca/downloads/pdf/employmentagency_english.pdf.
- ¹³³ Domestic Workers United, "Information on the NEW LEGISLATION," 2010, accessed August 1, 2011, <http://www.domesticworkersunited.org/media/files/204/Bill-of-Rights-provisions-english.doc>.
- ¹³⁴ DWU offers contract example, DWU "Resources," DWU, accessed August 1, 2010, <http://www.domesticworkersunited.org/resources.php>. This emphasis on the importance of contracts mirrors the earlier stance taken by indentured Chinese men laboring in Cuba's sugar plantations in the late 1800s. In the US citizen living in Cuba, Elizabeth McHatton-Ripley's autobiographical *From Flag to Flag*, she recalls the frustrating fact that on her husband's plantation even "the poorest, lowest coolie carried his contract on his person, and never hesitated to assert his rights." Elizabeth McHatton Ripley, *Flag to Flag* (1888, reprinted by Gloucester, UK: Dodo Press, 2009), 113.
- ¹³⁵ "The anti-nanny state: Domestic workers deserve equal labor rights, not special rights," *Daily News* (NY), June 6, 2010, accessed August 24, 2011.
- ¹³⁶ In the run up to the final passage of the bill, Robert Kolker wrote an overview of the backlash to the bill in Robert Kolker, "Foes Line Up to Oppose Nanny Bill of Rights," *New York Magazine*, June 13, 2010, accessed July 27, 2010, http://nymag.com/daily/intel/2010/06/assuming_it_doesnt_shut_down.html.

¹³⁷ Discussion of domestic work became fairly heated on the national women's studies listserv during this period in response to an academic inquiry. One post referred readers to a public blog entry, Maryann Breschard, "NYS Domestic Workers' Bill and Working Women," Maryann Breschard@52Women, July 7, 2010, accessed July 10, 2010, <http://maryannbreschard.52women.org/?p=308>. Breschard's entry largely sees the bill as a threat to two-parent double-income earner middle class families by raising the costs of domestic work. Her quick shift to focus on the negative effects on these families is striking as the concerns of domestic workers themselves and their families are erased. Her commentary suggests that granting domestic workers basic rights afforded to almost all other workers in the U.S., including other immigrant laborers outside of farm workers, is seen as indeed "special rights" rather than justice.

The economic downturn beginning in 2007 appeared to have a much more significant impact on whether or not employers could afford domestic workers. See Julie Scelfo, "Trickledown Downsizing," *New York Times*, December 10, 2008, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/11/garden/11domestics.html>.

¹³⁸ Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 51; 55. Deborah Sontag, "Increasingly, 2-Career Family Means Illegal Immigrant Help," *New York Times*, January 24, 1993, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/24/nyregion/increasingly-2-career-family-means-illegal-immigrant-help.html>.

¹³⁹ Chang, *Disposable Domestics*, 55-56.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 55.

¹⁴¹ "Domestic Workers' Rights," *New York Times*, June 7, 2010, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/07/opinion/07mon3.html>.

¹⁴² Jane E. Brody, "From Birth, Engage Your Child With Talk," *New York Times*, September 28, 2009, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/29/health/29brod.html>; Hilary Stout, "The Ruckus Room," *New York Times*, October 4, 2009, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/04/realestate/04playroom.html>; and Deirdre Doland and Jennifer Daniel, "The Daily Grind," *New York Times*, November 27, 2009, accessed November 29, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/11/27/opinion/28opart.html>. Lisa Belkin, "When to Report a Nanny to the Police," January 20, 2010, accessed August 2, 2010, <http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/20/when-to-report-a-nanny-to-the-police/?hp> and Hilary Stout, "How to Speak Nanny," February 3, 2010, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/04/garden/04nannies.html>, offered means on how to judge and manage domestic workers. Notably, all of these pieces focused on women's interactions with domestic workers, with "How to Speak Nanny" including a reference to a "mother (or father)" meeting with a nanny.

¹⁴³ 1995's *Mi Familia* included the character Isabel, a refugee from El Salvador, who while working as a domestic worker is saved from deportation by her benevolent white employer's intervention and a strategic marriage into the Sanchez family. Her employer defends Isabel's subsequent pregnancy against a bigoted friend's statements about how "they" always get pregnant once sufficiently "trained" to do tasks such as answer the phone, declaring that Isabel has worked for her for three years and is "part of the family." Other examples include Fran Drescher's role as *The Nanny* on CBS, Lifetime Television's *My Nanny's Secret* film, ABC's reality show *Supernanny*, and the film *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* that is titled after William Ross Wallace's poem. On December 7, 2009, a *CSI: Miami* episode "Count Me Out" featured a young Haitian domestic worker, whose employer is arrested for "falsely imprisoning" her. Horatio Caine at the end of the episode is working on getting her into university and getting her a student visa. The *New York Times* article "How to Speak Nanny" references *The Nanny Diaries* and *Nanny Returns*. TV Tropes.org lists many examples from television and film under the general heading "Magical Nanny." TV Tropes, "Magical Nanny," <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/MagicalNanny>, accessed July 29, 2010. At the time of this dissertation's conclusion, *The Help* had been released nationally and sparked debates about its racial politics, as well as being taken up as a means to draw publicity to current domestic workers' rights campaigns. See Association of Black Women Historians,

- "An Open Statement to the Fans of *The Help*," August 20, 2011, accessed August 20, 2011, http://www.abwh.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2:open-statement-the-help&catid=1:latest-news; Irin Carmon, "The Real *Help*," Jezebel, August 11, 2011, accessed August 20, 2011, <http://jezebel.com/5830036/the-real-help>; and National Domestic Workers Alliance, "Today's 'Help' Make News!" accessed August 20, 2011, <http://www.domesticworkers.org/todays-help-make-news>. As Roxane Gay observed, *The Help* has "an embarrassment of riches for fans of the magical negro trope," demonstrating the racialized underpinnings of representations of domestic workers that continue today (Gay, "The Solace of Preparing Fried Foods and Other Quaint Remembrances from 1960s Mississippi: Thoughts on *The Help*," The Rumpus, August 17, 2011, accessed August 21, 2011, <http://therumpus.net/2011/08/the-solace-of-preparing-fried-foods-and-other-quaint-remembrances-from-1960s-mississippi-thoughts-on-the-help/>).
- ¹⁴⁴ This chant has at least partial origins in the song of the same name by Chilean musicians Quilapayún and Sergio Ortega in the 1970s, and continues to be popularized both through its common usage in Leftist-oriented political actions and through music such as Mexican rock band, Molotov's, "Gimme Tha Power."
- ¹⁴⁵ "May 1st Chant Sheet, Union Square, 2009; Immigrant Communities in Action Contingent," Miscellaneous Ephemera, in author's possession. (Hereafter Misc Ephem).
- ¹⁴⁶ Photo by Michael Gould-Wartofsky, "El Pueblo Unido: Images of May Day 2008," New York City Independent Media Center, accessed March 5, 2009, <http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2008/05/97205.shtml>.
- ¹⁴⁷ My initial interest in CAAAV as a research site developed out of experiences such as participating in demonstration security at Immigrant Communities in Action's June 2, 2008 action outside of New York Senator Chuck Schumer's home in protest of the proposed Border Security and Immigration Reform Act of 2007 which subsequently failed in Congress. Immigrant Communities in Action, "Action Alert: Immigrant Justice Demo on June 2nd, NYC!," Immigrant Communities in Action, May 26, 2007, accessed September 9, 2009, <http://immigrantcommunitiesinaction.blogspot.com/>.
- ¹⁴⁸ Erik Camayd-Freixas, "Interpreting after the Largest ICE Raid in US History: A Personal Account," *New York Times*, July 14, 2008, accessed November 8, 2009, <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/07/14/opinion/13ed-camayd.pdf>.

Chapter 2

- ¹ Photo by Ariella Rotramel, Right to the City rally in Frawley Circle, May 11, 2010.
- ² Right to the City, "People Without Homes & Homes Without People: A Count of Vacant Condos in Select NYC Neighborhoods," Right to the City, 2010, accessed January 30, 2011, <http://www.righttothecity.org/a-count-of-vacant-condos-in-select-nyc-neighborhoods.html>.
- ³ El Barrio, long dominated by a Puerto Rican community with origins in the migrations following the World Wars, has become home in more recent years to Latina/os from a range of backgrounds including the Dominican Republic and Mexico as well as Central and South American countries. RTTC provides a founding narrative at Right to the City, "Our History," Right to the City, accessed January 30, 2011, <http://www.righttothecity.org/our-history.html>. It includes the statement that "a key resource and touchstone is 'Le droite à la ville' (Right to the City) a book published in 1968 by French intellectual and philosopher Henri Lefebvre." The January 2007 RTTC Conference in Los Angeles "convened over 20 grassroots organizations, allies and formal intellectuals" and set the stage for its further incorporation during the US Social Forum meeting in June 2007. RTTC is strongly based in New York City with a dedicated coordinator and campaign organizer, and ten member organizations, the most of any of the metropolitan areas that are part of the alliance. Right to the City, "Contact Us," Right to the City, accessed January 30, 2011, <http://www.righttothecity.org/contact-us.html>; Right to the City, "Who We Are," Right to the City, accessed January 30, 2011, <http://www.righttothecity.org/WhoWeAre.html>.
- ⁴ David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (September-October 2008), accessed October 30, 2010, <http://newleftreview.org/?view=2740>.

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- ⁵ Roberta Gold, "I Had Not Seen Women like That Before": Intergenerational Feminism in New York City's Tenant Movement," *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 395.
- ⁶ "Operation: Empty Condo-Conversion" flier, Misc Ephem.
- ⁷ See references to the Taino in Darrel Enck-Wanzer, ed. *The Young Lords: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010). Susan Baldwin, "Taino: 'Dream' Housing For Poor Set To Open," *City Limits*, January 5, 2009, accessed August 16, 2011, <http://www.citylimits.org/news/articles/3681/taino-dream-housing>.
- ⁸ Gold, "I Had Not Seen Women like That Before," 405.
- ⁹ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 179.
- ¹⁰ Branding the South Bronx as "SoBro" has raised debates about whether or not there can be "unslumming" without gentrification, as the area continues to face extreme levels of poverty and unemployment. Alice Sparberg Alexiou, *Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 147. For fairly positive discussions of the gentrification of the South Bronx, see James Freeman and Gilbert Marzán, "From the South Bronx to Sobro: Gentrification in Mott Haven, The Bronx," NYLARNet Policy Paper (Fall 2008), accessed August 16, 2011, http://www.nylarnet.org/reports/occ_South%20Bronx%20paper-1.pdf and Mark Naison, "A Bronx Tale: Development Without Gentrification," *OAH Newsletter* 36 (February 2008), accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2008feb/naison.html>.
- ¹¹ New York City includes two major Chinatowns – in Manhattan's Lower East Side area and Flushing, Queens, with additional smaller concentrations in Sunset Park and Avenue U in Brooklyn, and Elmhurst, Queens.
- ¹² Photo by Ariella Rotramel, Right to the City march, New York, New York, May 11, 2010.
- ¹³ Right to the City, "People Without Homes & Homes Without People," 5. The report includes a methodological discussion, and states that RTTC members canvassed "245 census tracts in 9 community districts" over a three-month period in 2009.
- ¹⁴ Right to the City, "People Without Homes & Homes Without People," 49.
- ¹⁵ Right to the City, "People Without Homes & Homes Without People," 50-51.
- ¹⁶ Eileen Markey, "A Push to Lodge Homeless in Vacant Buildings," *City Limits*, May 12, 2010, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.citylimits.org/news/articles/3992/a-push-to-lodge-homeless-in-vacant-buildings/2>.
- ¹⁷ R.M. Schneiderman, "Vacant Luxury Apartments Could Come Within Reach," *Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 2010, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://blogs.wsj.com/metropolis/2010/05/12/will-nyc-vacant-luxury-apartments-go-affordable/>; Right to the City, "People Without Homes & Homes Without People," 55.
- ¹⁸ Right to the City, "People Without Homes & Homes Without People," 48.
- ¹⁹ Gold, "I Had Not Seen Women like That Before," 404.
- ²⁰ WEP is run through the New York City government, and MOM and CAAAV have both served as sites for placements. Many people who discussed WEP with me noted that it typically places people in parks, cleaning up garbage, and fails to provide significant skills training. WEP is discussed further in the conclusion. Nova Strachan's experience was fairly unique as she transitioned from being a WEP worker at MOM into being an organizational staff member.
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- ²² Neil Smith, "New City, New Frontier; The Lower East Side As Wild, Wild West," in *Variations On A Theme Park: The New American City And The End Of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 63.
- ²³ Ibid. On the 20th anniversary of the Memorial Day concert and conflict, see Colin Moynihan "A Turning Point for the East Village, 20 Years Later," *New York Times*, June 3, 2011, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/03/a-turning-point-for-the-east-village-20-years-later/>.
- ²⁴ Rolnik's blog includes links to media coverage to her visit, Raquel Rolnik, "Blog de Raquel Rolnik," <http://raquelrolnik.wordpress.com>, accessed August 15, 2011.

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- ²⁶ Photo by Michael Premo, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nesri/4038156812/sizes/m/in/photostream/>. Rob Robinson is behind Rolnick.
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- ²⁹ Norman Krumholz "The Reluctant Hand: Privatization of Public Housing in the U.S.," CITY FUTURES Conference, Chicago, July 8-10, 2004, [www.uic.edu/cuppa/cityfutures/papers/webpapers/cityfuturespapers/session1_4/1_4reluctant hand.pdf](http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/cityfutures/papers/webpapers/cityfuturespapers/session1_4/1_4reluctant%20hand.pdf), 9. Such mixed results are present in the ambivalent success of mixed-income housing in Chicago. See Emma Graves Fitzsimmons, "A Wish for More Community in Mixed-Income Units," *New York Times*, May 20, 2010, accessed August 16, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/21/us/21cnhousing.html>.
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- ³¹ Aaron Howell, "U.N. Rapporteur For Housing Visits Tenants Facing Foreclosure In The Bronx," *Village Voice*, October 26, 2009, accessed August 16, 2011, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2009/10/un_rapporteur_f.php.
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- ³³ Raquel Rolnik, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, and on the Right to Non-Discrimination in this Context," (A/HRC/13/20/Add.4), U.N. General Assembly, Human Rights Council, February 12, 2010, accessed October 30, 2010, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/13session/A.HRC.13.20.Add.4_en.pdf.
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- ³⁶ Michael Luo, "Number of Families in Shelters Rises," *New York Times*, September 11, 2010, accessed September 11, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/12/us/12shelter.html>. As the National Coalition for the Homeless noted in a July 2009 report, definitions and counts of homelessness vary. However, by all estimates homelessness continues to rise in the United States. National Coalition for the Homeless, "How Many People Experience Homelessness?" National Coalition for the Homeless, accessed September 15, 2010, http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/How_Many.html.
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- ³⁸ David Harvey, "The Right to the City."
- ³⁹ "Social vulnerabilities" figure heavily in the migration of New Orleans residents after Katrina. See Myers et al, "Social Vulnerability and Migration in the Wake of Disaster: The Case of

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- ⁴⁵ Jennifer Lee, "Tenants Return to Bowery 81 After Nine Months," *New York Times*, September 1, 2009, accessed August 16, 2011, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/01/tenants-return-to-81-bowery-after-nine-months/>. Photo by MFY Legal Services.
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- ¹⁰² Photo by author, October 6, 2010.
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Chapter 3

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- ⁹ Commissioner Cas Holloway, "Statement of NYC Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway On Agreement with Mothers on the Move to Study Air Quality and Increase Open Space in Hunts Point," NYC.gov, June 30, 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/press_releases/10-66pr.shtml.
- ¹⁰ This shift is particularly important in a case where, as Julie Sze notes, the contracts under which NYOFCo operated had a notoriously corrupt history. Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 62.
- ¹¹ MOMBX, "Campaign Victory Set," Flickr.com, July 9, 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mombx/4790352210/sizes/m/in/set-72157624360948573/>.
- ¹² Thomas Assefa, e-mail to author, July 2, 2010. Victoria Mackenzie, "The Sweet Smell of Victory," 6.
- ¹³ Assefa would soon leave MOM and relocate to the Midwest with his family, and the celebration functioned as a farewell gathering as well. Assefa is originally from Ethiopia, where his parents continue to reside. Throughout my interactions with him, I found that he had a noticeable calm and patient approach while being deeply passionate about his work at MOM, and the many thankful and kind remarks at the party demonstrated the depths of respect and trust he had earned from MOM members and allies.
- ¹⁴ Alina Das, "The Asthma Crisis in Communities of Color," *New York University Review of Law and Social Change* (2007) 31, no. 2: 273.
- ¹⁵ Jeanne Moorman, et al, "Current Asthma Prevalence — United States, 2006–2008," in CDC, "Health Disparities and Inequalities Report - United States, 2011," 84.
- ¹⁶ Donald McNeil, Jr., "Broad Racial Disparities Seen in Americans' Ills," *New York Times*, January 13, 2011, accessed August 17, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/14/health/14cdc.html?_r=1&hp.

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- ¹⁷ American Lung Association, "Trends in Asthma Morbidity and Mortality," February 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, www.lungusa.org/finding-cures/our-research/trend-reports/asthma-trend-report.pdf, 3; and Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, "Asthma Facts and Figures," accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&sub=42#morb>.
- ¹⁸ Jeanne Moorman, et al, "Current Asthma Prevalence — United States, 2006–2008," 84.
- ¹⁹ Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, "Asthma Facts and Figures," and Das, "The Asthma Crisis in Communities of Color," 273–274.
- ²⁰ Jeanne Moorman, et al, "Current Asthma Prevalence — United States, 2006–2008," 84.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid. 86. The discussion of environmental allergens is taken up earlier in my housing chapter.
- ²³ American Indians were also excluded from this discussion, and the other data in this section did not address American Indian asthma health concerns or responses nationally.
- ²⁴ Fuyuen Yip, et al, "Unhealthy Air Quality, 2006–2009," in CDC, "Health Disparities and Inequalities Report - United States, 2011," 31. The CDC uses the terms in quotes, while I prefer to use "Asian/American" and "Latina/o" in my discussion. Original terminology is used as appropriate in referencing report findings or references to census data that use these categories.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Louis Sahagun, "Latinos, Asians more worried about environment than whites, poll finds," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/20/local/la-me-poll-environment-20101120>. According to the article, "African Americans were included in the survey, but the number of people questioned was too low to analyze reliably," and thus are not included in the findings.
- ²⁷ Community activists have questioned the politics of such groups, as well as MOM allies such as the NRDC, in light of their support or lack of position on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) ("Climate Change Report Back," January 19, 2011, Misc Ephem). This point is picked up at the end of this chapter and suggests the complexities of negotiating with various actors around environmental issues, and the limits to such alliances. CAAAV has demonstrated a concern for environmental issues, while not making it a central organizing issue to date. Research into the early training and development of their Youth Leadership Project included curriculum that addressed environmental racism. South East Asian Organizing Committee (SEAOC), "YLP Organizing Project Strategy Chart YLP Summer 1995;" SEAOC, "Checklist for choosing an issue, YLP Summer 1995;" SEAOC, "Neighborhood & Community Survey, 1995 SEAOC Youth Leadership Project;" SEAOC "YLP Organizing Project Worksheet, 1995 SEAOC Youth Leadership Project," CAAAV Papers, Bronx, New York.
- ²⁸ Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1996), xv.
- ²⁹ Valerie Kaalund, "Witness to Truth: Black Women Heeding the Call," in *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, ed. Rachel Stein (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 79.
- ³⁰ Margaret Ramirez, "Hazel M. Johnson, 1935–2011," *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 2011, accessed August 17, 2011, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-01-16/features/ct-met-johnson-omit-20110116_1_cancer-alley-asbestos-removal-environmental-justice/2.
- ³¹ Rachel Stein, "Introduction," in *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice*, 2. For a historical perspective, see Susan A. Mann, "Pioneers of U.S. Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice," *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (2011): 1–25. As she notes, "Compared with other environmental movements... [the environmental justice] movement boasts significantly more success in recruiting working-class and poor people of color, and has a disproportionate number of women of color involved as both participants and in leadership positions," 2.
- ³² Wilfredo Febre interview with Ariella Rotramel, July 13, 2010, Bronx, New York.
- ³³ Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy*, 28.
- ³⁴ Ibid. 66.
- ³⁵ Ibid. 6–7.

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- ³⁶ JoAnne Banks-Wallace and Lennette Parks, "So That Our Souls Don't Get Damaged": The Impact of Racism on Maternal Thinking and Practice Related to the Protection of Daughters," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 22, no. 1 (2001): 79.
- ³⁷ Ibid. 79. Banks-Wallace and Parks draw from Patricia Hill Collins' theorization of "motherwork," see Patricia Hill Collins, "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood," in *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, eds. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey (New York: Routledge, 1994), 45-66.
- ³⁸ Wilfredo Febre interview. In our interview, Febre did not demonstrate any discomfort with being identified as a "Mother on the Move" because he saw himself as participating in a group that helps his community. Throughout my observations of MOM meetings, events, and actions, there seemed to be a similar comfort among men with the language of mothers. The generalized use of "mothers" to refer to all activists within the group regardless of gender is notable in news coverage, and prompted my initial interest in this point.
- ³⁹ Public Health Information Group Center for Community Health, "New York State Asthma Surveillance Summary Report," New York State Department of Health, October 2009, accessed August 17, 2011, http://www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/ny_asthma/pdf/2009_asthma_surveillance_summary_report.pdf, 14.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid. 124.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. 178.
- ⁴² Patel, et al, "Ambient Metals, Elemental Carbon, and Wheeze and Cough in New York City Children through 24 Months of Age," *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* 180 (2009): 1111. *Gothamist* provided a visualization of the areas' bus depots and asthma rates, and demonstrated the uneven placement of bus depots in Harlem across the Harlem River from the Bronx. Adam Brock, "The Harlem Wheeze," *Gothamist*, November 13, 2006, accessed August 17, 2011, http://gothamist.com/2006/11/13/wheezing_throug.php.
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- ⁴⁴ EPA and CDC, "Asthma and Indoor Air Pollution," accessed January 7, 2011, <http://www.epa.gov/airnow/asthma-flyer.pdf>. The environment of the South Bronx does not have the open space presented in this flier.
- ⁴⁵ Naphtali et al, "Using GIS to Examine Environmental Injustice in the South Bronx," *Connect* (Spring/Summer 2007) accessed August 17, 2011, http://www.nyu.edu/its/pubs/connect/spring07/naphtali_gis.html.
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- ⁴⁸ Municipal Art Society of New York, "Community-Based Plan of the Month: Oak Point Eco-Industrial Park," June 10, 2009, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://mas.org/community-based-plan-of-the-monthoak-point-eco-industrial-park/>.
- ⁴⁹ MOM and Urban Justice Center, "Change Starts with Us," 11. MOM and other community groups' proposal for the Sheridan continue to be debated, and appeared to gain steam in 2010 prior to a State Transportation Department report that suggested that its removal would increase street traffic in the area. Despite the setback, there appeared to be much broader acceptance of the fact that expressway traffic and truck traffic in the area had risen to unacceptable rates, despite opposition from the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association, which emphasized highway improvements over green space creation. See: Kyle Wiswall, "One Less Reason to Keep the Sheridan Expressway," *Mobilizing the Region*,

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- August 13, 2008, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://blog.tstc.org/2008/08/13/sheridan-expressway-continues-its-descent-to-obsolence-this-time-with-the-dots-help/>; Sam Dolnick, "Plan to Remove Bronx Expressway Gains Traction," *New York Times*, July 12, 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/13/nyregion/13sheridan.html>; and Sam Dolnick, "Local Traffic Would Worsen Without Sheridan, Study Shows," *New York Times*, July 13, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/14/nyregion/14sheridan.html>.
- ⁵⁰ Bronx River Alliance, "Bronx River Greenway Plan," 2005, accessed August 17, 2011, http://www.bronxriver.org/puma/images/usersubmitted/greenway_plan/; and Pratt Center for Community Development, "Greening the South Bronx," accessed August 17, 2011, <http://prattcenter.net/greening-south-bronx>.
- ⁵¹ This point is taken up by Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 59.
- ⁵² Donna Hightower Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s," *Hypatia* 18, no. 2 (June 2003): 120-121.
- ⁵³ Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 136, 134.
- ⁵⁴ Gregory Dicum, "Meet Robert Bullard, the father of environmental justice," *Grist Magazine*, March 14, 2006, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.grist.org/article/dicum>.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Along with breakfast and lunch, MOM provided childcare on-site for parents. At the beginning and end of the day, all three campaigns members were together to discuss the aims of the day and what they had accomplished. The bulk of the day was spent having the three campaigns work separately on their current issues, and I spent the day with EJ.
- ⁵⁷ SJL, a New York City organization that functions as a progressive training center and includes MOM and CAAAV among its member groups, is introduced in Chapter 1 on domestic work. MOM's EJ organizer Thomas Assefa, was trained through SJL's Activate! workshop and initially was placed at MOM through the program.
- ⁵⁸ Febre interview with Ariella Rotramel.
- ⁵⁹ "Handout # 18," Misc Ephem.
- ⁶⁰ I introduced myself as a researcher at the beginning of the session, and participated during the day's discussion. During the day, I worked to make sure that I did not become a central person in the group discussion, adding my thoughts when I felt it was appropriate. I was able to get to know many of the EJ members during breakfast and lunch, and appreciated that they were very welcoming of me.
- ⁶¹ "Mothers on the Move (MOM) Environmental Justice Campaign Power Analysis Training January 26, 2008 10am-4pm," Misc Ephem.
- ⁶² This concern about status is supported by officials' unwillingness to meet with MOM members unless under significant pressure from direct action tactics.
- ⁶³ "EJ Handouts," Misc Ephem.
- ⁶⁴ "Fieldnotes," Misc Ephem.
- ⁶⁵ It is worth noting that the South Bronx Clean Air Coalition, whose successful activity against the Bronx-Lebanon BFI medical waste incinerator caused its closure and destruction in 1999, ceased to be a major player by the time of heavy activism around NYOFCo in the mid and late 2000s. For a discussion of the South Bronx generally and the incinerator campaign, see Sze, *Noxious New York*, 63-74.
- ⁶⁶ Austin Fenner, "They Want Bridge to Future: Protest Drug Walkway," *Daily News* (NY), December 19, 1997, accessed August 17, 2011, http://articles.nydailynews.com/1997-12-19/local/18044577_1_prostitutes-homeless-camps-benny; and David Critchell, "A Walkway to School Bears Dangers, Parents Say," April 23, 2000, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/23/nyregion/neighborhood-report-south-bronx-a-walkway-to-school-bears-dangers-parents-say.html>.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid. Then Assemblyman Ruben Diaz, Jr. stood out as a voice in agreement with MOM and other community members concerns, echoing in 2000 the sentiment of MOM member and mother, Martiza Chaves, in her remarks to the *Daily Times* in 1997 (Fenner, "They Want Bridge to Future"). Sewell Chan, "Mott Haven 'Swamp' Was Deeper Than Thought," *New*

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- York Times*, December 17, 2009, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/17/mott-haven-swamp-was-deeper-than-thought/?scp=1&sq=bronx%20swamp&st=cse>.
- ⁶⁹ Ferrer-Mothers on the Move correspondence, Mothers on the Move Papers, Bronx, NY.
- ⁷⁰ Jose Martinez, "Park Renewal Cheered: But moms group finds flaws, says city hogs credit," *Daily News* (NY), July 30, 2001, accessed August 17, 2011, http://articles.nydailynews.com/2001-07-30/local/18366778_1_park-fences-14-acre-park-parks-initiative.
- ⁷¹ Ibid. MOM's entry into environmental justice activism at this point is particularly notable in light of the development of a more public profile of Sustainable South Bronx and its founder, Majora Carter, with whom MOM frequently collaborated.
- ⁷² Ibid.
- ⁷³ See: Amy Waldman, "Trash Giant Skirts Conditions Set for Bronx Station, Critics Say," *New York Times*, August 24, 1999, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/24/nyregion/trash-giant-skirts-conditions-set-for-bronx-station-critics-say.html>; Winnie Hu, "Where a Little Girl Met Her Death, the Big Trucks Now Find a Hostile Welcome," *New York Times*, August 9, 1998, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/09/nyregion/neighborhood-reports-hunts-point-where-little-girl-met-her-death-big-trucks-now.html>; Bob Kappstatter, "Moms on the Line vs. Big Rig Traffic," *Daily News* (NY), July 29, 2002, accessed August 17, 2011, http://articles.nydailynews.com/2002-07-29/local/18204911_1_trucks-speed-humps-big-rig-traffic; Jose Martinez, "Hunts Pt. Group Has Traffic Plan," *Daily News* (NY), April 25, 2001, accessed August 17, 2011, http://articles.nydailynews.com/2001-04-25/local/18163374_1_truck-drivers-truck-traffic-hunts; and Jose Martinez, "Crash Shatters 2 Families: Bronx moms had put their lives in order," *Daily News* (NY), July 22, 2001, accessed August 17, 2011, http://articles.nydailynews.com/2001-07-22/local/18368802_1_moms-south-bronx-city-parks-worker.
- ⁷⁴ Arah Portlock, "Asthma plagues South Bronx neighborhood," *Washington Square News*, December 9, 2005, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.nyunews.com/2005/12/09/27/>.
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- ⁷⁶ MOM, "Protecting Our Hunts Point Neighborhood From Dangerous Truck Traffic" study, February 2001, MOM Archives, Bronx, New York, 2.
- ⁷⁷ Tri-State Transportation Campaign, "Bronx Neighborhood Wants NYC DOT's Word on Truck Safety," *Mobilizing the Region* no. 199, December 11, 1998, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.tstc.org/bulletin/19981211/mtr19908.htm>.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Matthew Corey, "Despite Popularity, City Speed Humps on Hold," *Norwood News* 11, no. 25, December 31, 1998-January 13, 1999, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.bronxmall.com/norwoodnews/past/123198/news/page3.html>; and Transportation Alternatives, "DOT Faces Rough Treatment in the Bronx."
- ⁸⁰ Transportation Alternatives, "DOT Faces Rough Treatment in the Bronx."
- ⁸¹ Sze, *Noxious New York*, 183.
- ⁸² MOM, "Protecting Our Hunts Point Neighborhood From Dangerous Truck Traffic, 2.
- ⁸³ Ibid. 1-2.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid. 3.
- ⁸⁵ Jose Martinez, "Hunts Pt. Group Has Traffic Plan."
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Javier Gomez, "En el aire organizacion `Madres en Movimiento,'" *El Diario/La Prensa*, March 10, 1999, 5, ProQuest.
- ⁸⁸ North Star Fund has historically provided funding to both MOM and CAAAV.

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- ⁹¹ NYDOT Pedestrians Projects Group, "Southern Boulevard: Cramers Square," October 13, 2010, and NYDOT Pedestrians Projects Group, "Randall/Leggett/Tiffany Avenues; Safety Improvements and Barretto Point Park Access," May 12, 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/sidewalks/pedestrian_projects.shtml.
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- ¹⁰¹ Luis Mostacero, "Hunts Point holds its nose," *Hunts Point Express*, April 9, 2008, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://fm.hunter.cuny.edu/huntspointexpress/?p=259>.
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ Assefa, "Noxious Sludge Stench in New York City."
- ¹⁰⁵ Hunts Point Cooperative Market, "Hunts Point Meat Market," accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.huntspointcoopmkt.com/>. There are increasingly community-based attempts to change the South Bronx's position as a food desert or area with high rates of both hunger and obesity. See Lorrie Clevenger, "Bronx Food Summit: Looking for a Change," WhyHunger, May 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.whyhunger.org/news-and-alerts/why-reporter/1047-bronx-food-summit-looking-for-a-change.html>. There has also been a weekday only, early morning market that is not year-round, opened up in the Fulton Fish Market parking lot. Bill Egbert, "'Food desert' blooms in the Bronx," *Daily News* (NY), September 24, 2009, accessed August 17, 2011, http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/bronx/2009/09/24/2009-09-24_food_desert_blooms.html.
- ¹⁰⁶ http://mothersonthemove.blogspot.com/2010_03_14_archive.html
- ¹⁰⁷ Kaalund, "Witness to Truth," 78-92. Kaalund's study focuses primarily on Black women's activism and particular relationship to environmental justice activism, but she does at times speak more broadly of women of color.
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- ¹⁰⁹ Nova Strachan, "Afro Bolivianos," posted April 25, 2010, accessed August 17, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=418341326954&set=a.418331236954.213062.521036954>.

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Chapter 4

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Banco de Oro (www.bdo.com.ph)

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Domestic Workers United Blog (www.domesticworkersunited.blogspot.com)

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Ev Grieve (www.evgrieve.com)

Facebook (www.facebook.com)

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Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment (www.firenyc.org)

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