

Negotiating Justice and Possibility: Alternative Labor Organizing in New York

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Amid broad consensus about the urgency of transforming and revitalizing the US labor movement, alternative labor organizations such as worker centers have emerged as community-based, experimental organizations aiming to address some of the perceived gaps and failures of the mainstream movement. The structures and ideological orientation of worker centers challenge the labor movement's decades-long entrenchment of top-down bureaucracy and its historical exclusion of people of color, women, and immigrants—the very people that worker centers organize. This dissertation uses ethnography and life histories to examine the possibilities and constraints of alternative labor organizing with a radical vision of social change, exploring labor campaigns carried out by the Brooklyn Worker Center and a diverse group of bakery workers in New York.

BWC sought to overcome both the limitations of worker centers in building power and the weaknesses of the mainstream labor movement by pursuing a model based on 'solidarity unionism', a current-day form of syndicalism that centers the principles of solidarity, direct action, and worker leadership within its long-term vision of worker control. Through an affiliation with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), BWC was seeking to unionize workers without using elections or aiming for contracts, but instead relying on worker solidarity and ongoing direct action. Documenting the struggle to manifest this radical vision within the reality of our existing political economic terrain, this study reveals a disjuncture between the Brooklyn Worker Center's vision and its practice, particularly evident in the organization's struggle to foster sustained worker participation in its campaigns and cultivate an active, growing, and militant organization of workers on the shop floor. I argue that this discrepancy between vision and practice was caused by the organization underestimating the challenges of transitioning from an advocacy-centered model to a model rooted in sustained workplace organizing.

This transition is traced across multiple scales of analysis in the dissertation, weaving between BWC's organizational vision and strategies and the experiences of the bakery workers both inside and beyond the workplace. Beginning with a framework that traces the structural formation of the working class along *hierarchies of labor*, the analysis moves to workers' subjective experiences of these hierarchies and imagined possibilities for change, to the moral economy of the shop floor at an industrial bakery. I explore how BWC's organizing strategies strove to help workers prefigure the union through building 'structures of solidarity', seeking to activate workers' sense of justice and to expand their sense of what was possible; meanwhile, the employer sought to reassert maternalism and diminish imagined possibilities. Yet as these workers faced the triple threat of limited structural bargaining power, divisions in the workplace and precarity beyond the workplace, BWC was unable to position the union as a viable source of justice and security. Ultimately, the organization's ambitious, radical vision of worker power was not matched with sufficient organizing capacity to overcome the challenges and divisions; while the organization succeeded in leveraging external sources of power to win certain demands, the cultivation of worker solidarity and internal power faltered. This case study speaks to the inherent challenges of organizing marginalized workers, and draws our attention to the need to attend to the cultivation of workers' bargaining power and their 'internal power'—a balance far more difficult to achieve in practice than in principle.

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Chapter I – Introduction

Amid widespread consensus that the US labor movement is in crisis, alternative labor organizations such as worker centers have emerged as community-based, experimental organizations aiming to address some of the perceived gaps and failures of the mainstream movement. The structures and ideological orientation of worker centers challenge the labor movement's decades-long entrenchment of top-down bureaucracy and its historical exclusion of people of color, women, and immigrants—the very people that worker centers organize. While labor unions have increasingly come to be seen as disconnected from leftist social movements, 'alt-labor' organizations proudly root themselves in broader social justice activism, recalling the labor movement's orientation in the era before the New Deal (Milkman 2013). Yet at a time when the national unionization rate has dropped to record lows in the private sector (Milkman and Luce 2016) and workers face increasingly precarious jobs, stagnant wages, and widening inequality, building the power of low-wage workers is no simple task.

This thesis explores the promises and challenges of alternative forms of labor organizing in this landscape, through the examination of the complex interactions between one worker center in New York, a group of bakery workers, and their employers. Integrating documentation of the Brooklyn Worker Center's (BWC) vision and organizing practices alongside workers' life stories and shop floor experiences, I trace the cluster of tensions that arise in BWC's struggle to manifest a radical vision of social justice through labor organizing. Some of these tensions were reflected in the questions that drove this research project. Inspired by the grassroots energy and creativity of worker centers in New York, I sought to understand the possibilities and constraints they navigated in striving to challenge our socio-economic structures and leverage the power of marginalized workers. While worker centers are looked to as sites of experimentation and potential revitalization of the

labor movement—as well as sources of a broader vision of social justice—they are also often viewed as being limited in their ability to truly build power and strategically scale up in size. I was thus drawn to the Brooklyn Worker Center’s vision of the radical potential of labor organizing. BWC sought to overcome both these limitations of worker centers and the weaknesses of the mainstream labor movement by merging the strengths of the worker center model with ‘solidarity unionism’, a current-day form of syndicalism that centers the principles of solidarity, direct action, and worker leadership within its long-term vision of worker control. This was carried out through an affiliation with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)—commonly known as the ‘Wobblies’—the radical labor union that surged to prominence in the earlier part of the 20th century with a brand of revolutionary industrial unionism. Solidarity unionism seeks to embody both a strategic and an ideological intervention in the practices and goals of mainstream labor organizing, asserting alternate visions of worker agency.

The specific study of Brooklyn Worker Center campaigns offers a unique perspective on the promises and limitations of different organizational models, as BWC was striving to transcend the limitations of the worker center model and the weaknesses of the mainstream labor movement by transitioning to a model of solidarity unionism that straddled the ground between unions and worker centers. Through its affiliation with the IWW union, BWC was seeking to unionize workers without using elections or aiming for contracts, but instead relying on worker solidarity and ongoing direct action. Worker centers have increasingly affiliated with unions in recent years (Fine 2011a; Milkman and Ott 2014), with some worker centers even founded by unions, yet most worker centers are still not engaged in unionizing specific worksites. A longstanding critique of worker centers has been that they are mostly successful at addressing inequalities in the law and failures to properly enforce existing laws, yet do not build sufficient power to raise standards, build on their victories, and intervene significantly in labor market dynamics; this critique points to worker centers’ use of legal

strategies and advocacy instead of workplace organizing and collective bargaining (Jenkins 2002:69), as well as challenges in retaining active members and scaling up (Fine 2006:253; Milkman 2013:657).

While worker centers have taken on increasingly sophisticated and ambitious campaigns over the past decade and have had substantial success in winning protective legislation, improved enforcement, and significant concessions from employers, they have made smaller strides in building workers' labor market power through durable workplace organizing (Fine 2011a; Milkman 2014). In an effort to overcome these limits on building power, BWC was transitioning from carrying out campaigns centered around lawsuits to undertaking targeted workplace organizing campaigns. Yet BWC's critique of business unionism held that a truly powerful labor movement would need to center worker agency and be led and operated by the rank and file. In their analysis, a critical part of restoring workers' agency to the center of the labor movement was eschewing government certification of unions and the attendant features of exclusive representation, mandatory membership, and collective bargaining agreements that give up workers' right to strike, channel workers' right to take collective action into a bureaucratic grievance procedure, and cede the right to make core business decisions (such as shutting down a plant) to management. The actual manifestation of this strategic transition will be a key topic of analysis in this thesis, revealing the difficult negotiation between ideals and the realities of political engagement.

The struggle to manifest this radical vision within the reality of our existing political economic terrain inevitably gave rise to a number of challenges, many of which are the same as those confronted by other groups striving to develop alternative organizing models—particularly those trying to organize and leverage the power and agency of low-wage workers. Although BWC's particular syndicalist vision may be more explicitly radical than the goals of some other organizations, I believe the on-the-ground realities of how they navigated these dilemmas can be

illuminating to those who share the broad aspiration to revive labor organizing as a path toward a more just society and who believe that the labor movement cannot thrive without having actively organized workers at the helm.

In the campaigns documented in this study, Brooklyn Worker Center's model demonstrated that a campaign comprised of a small group of low-wage workers with limited structural power *was* able to win modest changes in the workplace and bring their employer to the negotiating table without the government-conferred compulsion of a National Labor Relations Board election. Yet the pages herein demonstrate a disjuncture between the Brooklyn Worker Center's vision and its practice, particularly evident in the organization's struggle to foster sustained worker participation in its campaigns and cultivate an active, growing, and militant organization of workers on the shop floor. I will argue that this discrepancy between vision and practice was caused by the organization underestimating the challenges of transitioning from an advocacy-centered model to a model rooted in sustained workplace organizing, leading to strategic missteps that were mutually reinforced by the organization's inadequate recognition of two critical challenges it faced: the limitations on workers' structural power in the target worksites and sector, and the substantial difference and divisions among workers.

The desire to prove that the BWC model could overcome worker centers' limitations on building power and simultaneously transcend the failures of mainstream unions to center worker agency led BWC to operate on abstract notions of worker agency and solidarity that were rooted in the organization's political vision. In practice, the organization recognized the need to leverage multiple sources of power outside of workers' direct action and solidarity, and was resourceful in drawing on various external sources of power in the hope that this would reduce barriers to worker organizing and help open the space for workers to build a strong, organized base in the workplace. Yet without

sufficient organizing strategy and capacity, BWC was unable to overcome the challenges and divisions at these workplaces, thus hindering the construction of a sturdy, militant base of workers. For many workers facing the triple threat of limited structural bargaining power, divisions in the workplace and precarity beyond the workplace, the union must seem like a viable source of security in order to foster their willingness to organize. I contend that this requires attending to the cultivation of both workers' bargaining power and their 'internal power'—a balance far more difficult to achieve in practice than in principle.

In order to develop these arguments in the forthcoming chapters, I employ two main analytical lenses. The first is an examination of BWC's power analysis—the different forms of power BWC sought to leverage and actually did leverage, and the ideological and strategic implications of these in centering workers' power and agency and reckoning with political and economic constraints; this is described in more detail later in this chapter. Second, I introduce an intersectional lens that examines at multiple scales how the creation of inequality out of difference—a process intrinsic to capitalism—has been historically structured in the US along lines of race, gender, and citizenship, how it shapes workers' experiences of class and their subjectivity and agency, and therefore how it shapes the conditions for deep organizing and building solidarity across difference. This framework, which I refer to as *the hierarchies of labor*, allows the analysis to push beyond abstract conceptions of worker agency and power and focus our attention on understanding how worker agency is historically embedded. By establishing how labor is stratified into hierarchies of labor—the moral and economic valuation of labor and of those doing that labor along lines of race, gender, and citizenship—this framework highlights labor as a critical site for contesting not only economic value, but also social value and freedom. Given that research on labor organizing models often does not give substantial attention to the experience and perspective of workers, I use the lens of the hierarchies of labor to interweave multiple scales of analysis, linking the structural stratification of

labor to the subjective experience of these hierarchies. This lens will be developed through a historical review in Chapter Two.

The crisis of labor

Organized labor in the United States has been in decline since the 1970s, with only 11.1% (14.8 million workers) of the workforce belonging to unions in 2015. Union density is even more dismal when looking only at the private sector, in which 6.7% of the workforce is unionized; by contrast, the public sector has 35.2% union density (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). The principle architect of this decline has been neoliberal economic restructuring and the manifold efforts to diminish union power (in direct and indirect ways) that fall under its agenda (Milkman 2014:5); yet the labor movement itself holds a number of internal challenges that blunted its ability to fight the neoliberal onslaught, making these challenges ongoing impediments to its own revival (Clawson 2003; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Fletcher and Gapasin 2008; Milkman and Voss 2004). This section will first outline the external challenges the US labor movement has faced in recent decades and then go on to discuss the internal problems that have thwarted its ability to overcome this decades-long decline. Before addressing the challenges in more detail, I will speak to the question of why the labor movement still matters.

Why labor?

Today, labor unions in the US have come to be seen less as part of a social movement toward a just society and more as a set of institutions that offer economic benefits to their (diminishing numbers of) members in the form of increased wages, expanded benefits, and job security; this reflects the shift toward business unionism, described in more detail in the following section.

While activists and organizers within the labor movement take for granted the position that the labor movement should be revived, there have been numerous other voices on the left who have, for decades, largely dismissed the labor movement as conservative, having narrow interests, and no longer ‘tied so explicitly to ideas about the greater common good’ (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014:1). In the eyes of many in the US, struggles for economic justice became disconnected from struggles for broader social justice, such as those represented by ‘identity-based’ social movements.¹ Among anthropologists concerned with social change, particularly in the US and Europe, the rise of the Civil Rights movement, feminism, LGBTQ activism, ethnic-based activism, and environmental activism, for example, cast a long shadow over the unions and other class-based organizations that were facing rapid declines in power. In comparison to these ‘new social movements’, unions in the US were viewed as more conservative forces, and class-based organizing grew to be seen as largely irrelevant. Two other significant factors were the labor movement’s departure from social justice unionism and toward business unionism (which will be described in the following section), as well as the mainstream labor movement’s historical exclusion of Black, immigrant, and women workers. This decline of attention to class is also perhaps least surprising in the US, where popular discourse and persistent national mythology hold that the country is predominantly ‘middle-class’ or ‘classless’.

¹ Within anthropology there has been a resurgence of attention to labor and class analysis since around the turn of the new century (Barber, Leach, and Lem 2012; Carrier and Kalb 2015; Durrenberger 2001, 2007, 2009; Durrenberger and Erem 2005; Erem and Durrenberger 2008; Kalb 1997; Kasmir 1998; Kasmir and Carbonella 2014, 2008; Sanchez and Strümpell 2014; Steur 2014). Most areas of anthropology abandoned class analysis in the 1980s and 1990s (after Marxist analysis peaked in the previous two decades) and delved deeply into analysis of culture and identity, often viewing class analysis as irrelevant or at odds with this project. This trend can be attributed to several related factors: critiques of Marxist and class-based analyses as reductionist (Bettie 2003:37–38; Chibber 2006:371; Friedman 2007:179–80); the general postmodern turn in anthropology and cultural studies (Friedman 2007:179–80; Sanchez and Strümpell 2014:1234–35); and the accompanying focus on ‘identity-based’ social movements, perceived to have replaced workers’ movements as the new site of historical agency, as labor- and class-based organizations in many parts of the world experienced a brutal decline (Chibber 2006; Kasmir 2005:79).

Yet this pattern appears to be shifting. Globally, a surge of protest movements against precarity and political exclusion have brought the issue of social inequality and the centrality of labor into sharp focus (Kasimir and Carbonella 2014:1–2). As the legitimacy of capitalism and neoliberalism is being more widely questioned, labor organizing is once again being linked to broader social justice issues. In the US, worker centers and other alternative labor groups have been an important force in this shift, as they have brought renewed attention to the exploitation that immigrants and other low-wage workers face, framing these as distinctly moral issues (Fine 2006:250; Milkman 2014:20). These organizations are seen to potentially serve as connective tissue between the labor movement and broader visions of social justice—and therefore a potential catalyst in revitalizing the labor *movement*. This potential demonstrates that labor organizing holds the possibility—though it is not inevitable—of being integral to broader struggles for social justice, and is not necessarily confined to addressing narrow, economistic concerns. In Chapter Two I will trace how the historical construction of hierarchies of labor and value have made labor a critical site for struggles not only over economic value but also over social value, freedom, and citizenship.

In the remaining sections of this Introduction chapter, I will first outline the forces that have provoked the crisis of the labor movement, and have given urgency to the creation of alternative labor organizations and models; I will then give an overview of worker centers in general and an introduction to Brooklyn Worker Center in particular; finally, I will elaborate on the analytical question of sources of worker power.

*

Neoliberal economic restructuring, first implemented in the US in the 1970s, is a political and ideological project to restructure the relations among capital, state, and citizens through promoting market liberalization and deregulation, erosion of workers' rights and union power, and a diminished

welfare state. Manifesting as a shift from the primacy of production to the dominance of finance, neoliberalism has served, above all, to restore class power to economic elites, persistently increasing social inequality in the process (Harvey 2005). Its effects have been disastrous for unions and the working class as a whole, as workers experience heightened economic vulnerability in the face of a shrinking social safety net. Unions have been bled of their membership through deregulation in industries that were previously heavily unionized and the privatization of formerly unionized public sector jobs (Milkman 2014:5); deindustrialization and outsourcing have compounded these losses of power.

Ideologically, neoliberalism justifies its practices through the notion that human wellbeing is best served by the market and individualism—‘by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’ (Harvey 2005:2). This ideology has sought to legitimize ‘flexible accumulation,’ in which ‘all the benefits accruing from increasing flexibility in labour allocations in both space and time go to capital’ (Harvey 2005:53), leading to significant shifts in labor relations and labor processes. Flexible accumulation relies on a range of labor contracts and corporate strategies considered ‘post-Fordist’ because they entail a general move away from long-term, stable labor contracts with job security, the ‘family wage,’ and assembly line work, toward forms of labor with greater flexibility and less stability, such as temporary and part-time work, contracting, and employee ownership (Harvey 1989).

Efforts to undermine unions have also been accomplished through fierce employer opposition to unionization and a flourishing anti-union industry (known within the labor movement as the ‘union busting’ industry) of consultants and lawyers who specialize in helping employers avoid unionization. The intensity of employer opposition to unionization in the US is striking, drawing from a toolkit of ‘sticks’ such as threats, harassment, retaliation, and firing workers, as well as

‘carrots’ such as favors, bribes, and emotional appeals. According to a comprehensive analysis of ‘employer behavior in representation elections supervised by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)’:

57% of employers threaten to shut down all or part of their facilities; One-third of employers fire workers for union activity during NLRB certification campaigns; 47% threaten to cut wages or benefits; 28% attempt to infiltrate the organizing committee; 14% use surveillance; 22% offer bribes and special favors; 89% of employers require their workers to attend captive-audience meetings during work hours; 77% had supervisors regularly talk to workers one-on-one about the union campaign, with a focus on threats of plant closings, wage and benefit cuts, and job loss; and [m]ore than 60% use one-on-one meetings to interrogate and harass workers about their support for the union. (Bronfenbrenner 2009:25)

Workers clearly face significant disincentives to supporting unionization in this climate, as fears of facing consequences for labor organizing—or of simply losing—are realistic. Survey research on private sector workers’ views on representation suggest that if all workers who wanted a union had been given the opportunity, union density would have been as high as 58% in 2005, when actual private sector union density in that period was around 7.9% (R. B. Freeman 2007). Even when workers do win a union election, contract negotiations often stall; 52% still have no contract one year later, and 37% are still without a contract two years after winning (Bronfenbrenner 2009).

Internal challenges

While the conditions outlined above present formidable challenges to organized labor in the US, external forces are not the only ones culpable for the labor movement’s decline. There has been widespread acknowledgement since the 1990s that the US labor movement is in crisis and needs to transform in order to grow from its dismally low numbers, or even to simply stop shrinking—yet the rhetoric and plans have not yet translated to consistent, widespread change. Longstanding paradigms of worker organizing as well as existing labor and employment laws are no longer suited to confront contemporary trends in the economy, leading to calls for new organizing strategies and paradigms (Fine 2011a), legislative changes that would remove some of the constraints on worker

organizing, or organizing outside of the legal framework altogether in favor of direct action (Lynd 2015; Ness 2014c). Some proposals call for comprehensive campaigns and more resources devoted to actual organizing (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2004; Milkman and Voss 2004). Many have argued that beyond pursuing new organizing strategies and tactics, the labor movement must seek to re-insert the *movement* amid the institutions, both by working in solidarity with other social movements and broadening its own vision beyond securing contracts and attempting to influence electoral politics (Clawson 2003). These calls for transformation have emerged under the banner of terms such as ‘social (movement) unionism’ (Ross 2007) and ‘social justice unionism’ (Tait 2005). The link between the labor movement and broader movements for social justice has been manifested most explicitly by alternative labor organizations such as worker centers, which are often rooted in commitments to racial justice and immigrant rights’ work.

In basing its organizing model on solidarity unionism, the Brooklyn Worker Center was actively trying to counteract the decades-long descent of the labor movement away from worker militancy toward a bureaucratic, service-provider approach—‘business unionism’. In the following section, I will outline the history of this move toward business unionism in order to demonstrate why alternative labor organizations such as BWC view the reversal of this trend as imperative to the revival of the labor movement.

Constraints and compromises: from labor movement to business unionism

This section will examine how the labor movement was channeled into legal and political constraints that diminished militancy and worker self-activity, draining the ‘movement’ from the labor movement. The operating ideologies of unions in the US today and the legal frameworks in which they operate are largely shaped around assumptions that reflect the labor force and surge of unionization of the 1930s, the decade in which the Wagner Act (the National Labor Relations Act,

or NLRA) legally institutionalized unionism by creating the National Labor Relations Board to hold union elections and regulate labor practices (Voss and Sherman 2000:310); this funneling of the highly mobilized, militant labor movement into legal structures was later followed by sharp constraints imposed during World War II and later implemented as law in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act (Fantasia 1988:26–27). Enacted in the wake of the extensive labor ‘unrest’ of the early 1930s and the famously militant and widespread wave of solidarity strikes in 1934, the NLRA was President Roosevelt’s attempt to calm the intensifying conflict between militant workers and increasingly hostile and militant employers.² It legally protected the right to organize, curbing the practices of placing injunctions on striking workers and prosecuting union leaders on conspiracy charges, and sparing unions and strikers from the repression of ‘federal troops, private armies, and state militias’ and certain other anti-union tactics of employers (Piven and Cloward 2000:419). Collective bargaining was institutionalized by requiring employers to negotiate over wages, hours, and conditions of employment with unions that won majority support in a workplace.

The effect was not immediate, however; as employers challenged the law in the courts for the subsequent two years, they widely disregarded the Act’s provisions, prompting a vast mobilization of hundreds of thousands of industrial workers engaging in sit-down strikes in 1937 and 1938. This wave of militancy demonstrated a strong culture of solidarity emerging among workers during a period when employers were essentially ignoring the law (Fantasia 1988:45–47).

Yet while the NLRA facilitated union organizing, it also functioned to constrain labor organizing into more bureaucratic, legalistic forms, circumscribing the repertoire of strategies workers could

² Legislation passed in the early 1930s paved the way for the National Labor Relations Act. The Norris-La Guardia Act of 1932 prohibited ‘yellow-dog contracts’ (contracts under which workers were prohibited from joining unions) and limited employers’ ability to use injunctions to break strikes. The National Recovery Act (NRA) of 1933 established workers’ rights to unionize; although it was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935, parts of it were revised and became the core of the NLRA (Taplin 1990:254).

make use of to exert and build power and redirecting struggle into collective bargaining and formal grievance procedures within particular workplaces. The power of strikes was diminished as no-strike clauses became the norm in union contracts, and unions became liable for restraining work stoppages while contracts were in effect, thus restricting strike activity to occur more predictably between contracts. Management decisions such as hiring and investment decisions were also ceded to employers as the ‘management prerogatives clause’ became typical. As union dues were paid through employer paychecks under the practice of ‘dues check-off’, unions became more aligned with and dependent upon the companies (Lynd 2015:56–62; Piven and Cloward 2000:419–20).

The consolidation of CIO in the 1930s also illustrates the contrast between militant worker activity and bureaucratic constraints. The vast upsurge of rank-and-file worker organizing from 1933 to 1935 preceded the creation of the Committee for Industrial Organization, later renamed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) upon splitting from the AFL; it followed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA)’s establishment of the basic right to organize, but preceded the passage of the NLRA. Many of these struggles were organized from below, and union leaders such as John Lewis of the newly created CIO sought to capture the energy of this mass movement and ultimately channel it into a top-down union structure that assented to the constraints of the NLRA. Lewis was strongly anti-socialist and anti-Communist, but relied on radical leftist organizers to win tough organizing drives and carry out powerful strikes; he would later purge these leftists from the union as the CIO set down the path to business unionism (Lynd 2015:51–62; McAlevey 2016:30–38).

Not satisfied with these limitations and moves toward ‘labor peace’, however, employers remained on the offensive and sought to more sharply stifle workers’ collective action with subsequent legislation enacted in the years after the passage of the NLRA; the Taft-Hartley Act in particular is

described below. The US entrance into World War II engendered a significant shift in labor relations, as union leadership pledged not to strike in a patriotic show of determination to win the war against fascism; although workers seemed to agree in theory, wildcat strikes swept the industries at an unprecedented scale throughout the wartime period. This ostensible contradiction reflected the worsening conditions workers faced in reality, and the resulting wedge between union leadership and members only grew with time (Fantasia 1988:48–55). The Cold War set the stage for red-baiting of labor activists and helped pave the way for the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947. The Taft-Hartley Act prohibited the powerful strategy of the sit-down strike (which had already been declared illegal by the Supreme Court in 1939, after the immense success of the Flint automobile sit-down strikes of 1937-1939), made secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes illegal, and required unions to expel any labor leaders associated with communism (this purge is described in more detail below). The prohibition of secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes undermined what had been an important source of economic leverage as well as a powerful source of solidarity between unions and potential allies in broader society (Piven and Cloward 2000:419–20), making the Act a ‘direct assault on the traditional expressions of working-class solidarity and action’ (Fantasia 1988:55).

The type of unionism that grew out of the structures implemented by the NLRA and Taft-Hartley has come to be known as ‘business unionism’, a top-down, bureaucratic ‘service provider’ model in which union business agents resolve workers’ grievances for them through bureaucratic and legalistic procedures; business unionism renounces worker self-activity and notions of class struggle, instead confining itself to narrow, economistic concerns through negotiating and enforcing contracts for union members (Moody 1988:162; Ross 2007:16–17; Voss and Sherman 2000:310). Among those seeking to revive the US labor movement, many have blamed business unionism for unions’ apparent inability to fight back against the assault of neoliberalism since the late 1970s (Lynd 2015;

McAlevey 2016; Ness 2014b), charging that unions became accustomed to bureaucratic servicing rather than actively organizing workers.

Another crucial force in crystallizing the US labor movement's shift from an ethos of social justice unionism to one of business unionism has been the repression of leftists within the movement.

Outright repression of strikes and militant mass action featured strongly in employer and government responses to the early trade unions, and repression also specifically targeted the more leftist elements of the labor movement. The state and employers—supported at times by the conservative elements of the labor movement—unleashed fierce repression on the IWW during World War I, imprisoning hundreds of the IWW's most active organizers and rank-and-file leaders, deporting or imprisoning strikers and 'dangerous radicals', raiding IWW halls and offices, and allowing patriotic mobs to attack and lynch Wobblies (Fantasia 1988:41–42; Montgomery 1987:393–94). Ben Fletcher, the immensely effective Black leader of Local 8, was one of the 166 Wobblies who were arrested in 1917 on charges including 'interfering with the Selective Service Act, violating the Espionage Act of 1917, conspiring to strike, violating the constitutional right of employers executing government contracts, and using the mail to conspire to defraud employers' (Cole 2007:87).

A pivotal move in shaping today's mainstream labor movement was the later purging of the radical and Communist left from trade unions in the post-World War II decades (Fletcher and Gapasin 2008:26–31). Employing Silver's analytical framework of repression, co-optation, and restructuring as strategies to limit labor militancy, this was a period during which the co-optation of a large swathe of the labor movement was accomplished alongside the repression of leftists within union leadership (Silver 2003:149–61, 2016:47). Beginning with the Taft-Hartley Act's requirement that unionists sign affidavits repudiating the Communist Party—which ultimately led to the expulsion from the CIO

federation of leftist union leaders within participating unions as well as the expulsion of sixteen left-led unions that refused to sign—the purges continued through the McCarthy era. Aside from a loss in numbers, this also represented the loss of the labor movement’s militant core, as many of them had been affiliated with leftist organizations such as the Communist Party. These militants had carried forward visions of a labor movement rooted in class struggle and democracy, and they had played a critical role in the CIO’s wave of successful labor unrest in the 1930s (Fletcher and Gapasin 2008:20). The loss of this wing of the labor movement deeply shaped the mainstream movement through today, paving the way for a decisive shift toward business unionism and the increasing separation of labor unions from other leftist social movements (Goldfield 1989:236–38; Tait 2016:5).

Over the past couple of decades, a number of bold commitments to change have been voiced within the labor movement, though their fulfillment has been uneven and largely elusive in many areas. An apparent upheaval of the status quo came in 1995, when John Sweeney was elected as president of the AFL-CIO with a sweeping call to ‘organize the unorganized’ and reverse labor’s decline, appealing to member unions of the federation to devote more resources to organizing instead of servicing. While this initiative led to some creative and successful organizing successes, the decline in union density only briefly abated in the late 1990s before settling back into a pattern of membership loss. A dramatic split in the federation in 2005 led to the creation of a new federation, Change to Win, whose member unions such as SEIU had been more aggressively organizing and sought to restructure the AFL-CIO; yet their intentions to reignite the labor movement through creating a rival federation have also largely fallen flat (Milkman 2014:7). Some scholars argue that even when these unions have succeeded in their unionization campaigns, their overall failure to revive the labor movement stems from their reliance on corporate campaigns and political leverage instead of actual grassroots worker organizing (McAlevey 2016:16–18; Ness 2014a:266). It is out of such critiques

that alternative labor organizations and the model of ‘solidarity unionism’ emerge, staunchly advocating for workers to be at the center of labor organizing.

Worker Centers

The organizations and campaigns that have emerged to address marginalized and precarious workers outside of or alongside traditional unions have been variously labeled as ‘alt-labor’,³ the ‘new labor’ organizations (Milkman and Ott 2014), and ‘worker centers’ (Fine 2006; Gordon 2005; Milkman and Ott 2014). Worker centers, which make up the majority of this movement, are community-based organizations that support low-wage, primarily immigrant workers through advocacy, service provision, and organizing. While they embody a wide range of approaches, most of them engage in varying degrees of legal support, leadership development and popular education, rights trainings, and direct action organizing campaigns. Through claims, lawsuits, and public policy campaigns, they address violations of labor law, weak enforcement, and gaps in social protections. They present in a variety of organizational forms, as some are independent organizations, others branches of larger community organizations, while some have been founded by labor unions. They recruit their membership by geography, ethnicity, occupation, or industry, but unlike labor unions, most of them do not organize workers for majority representation or contracts at particular worksites (Fine 2006; Milkman and Ott 2014). Many worker centers that target a particular industry are also rooted in certain nationalities or ethnicities, whether explicitly created as such or ending up that way because of the demographics of the industry, or because the networks of recruitment follow certain channels. For example, there are a number of domestic worker organizations in New York that

³ The term ‘alt-labor’ was coined by journalist Josh Eidelson, and it has since gained traction within the world of alternative labor organizations and within scholarship about them.

Eidelson, Josh. ‘Will “alt-labor” replace unions?’. January 29, 2013.

http://www.salon.com/2013/01/29/will_alt_labor_replace_unions_labor/ [accessed September 10, 2016].

explicitly conduct nationality-based organizing, while an organization for day laborers may have a relatively homogeneous membership of Latino men from Mexico that simply reflects the demographics of the local day laboring industry. An organization in a diverse industry may end up de facto representing workers from one region because of the challenges in expanding to represent more groups.

While many worker centers organize workers in sectors that have been fully or partially excluded from labor laws and sectors that are no longer or have never been unionized, changing economic and labor market structures have led them to also focus on precarious workers in industries that are covered by labor law (Fine 2015a:17). In New York, for example, there are: the multiracial Domestic Workers United; the occupationally-based Street Vendor Project; Damayan for Filipino migrant workers and particularly domestic workers; and Retail Action Project for retail workers. The number of worker centers in the US has risen dramatically in the past two decades, from five centers in 1992 to 214 in 2013, and New York City has the greatest concentration of them nationwide (Milkman 2014:2).

The alternative labor movement is compelling because it not only addresses workers' immediate needs through advocacy, organizing and legal action, but also aims to build a larger social movement supporting worker rights as well as immigrant, racial, and gender justice. Worker centers differ significantly from mainstream unions, which tend to have a top-down, bureaucratic approach and a narrow, economistic framework. Worker centers strongly emphasize democratic decision-making and leadership development, seeking to have workers take action on their own behalf and to give members a central role in campaigns and organizational decisions.⁴ They tend to value a culture of experimentation and reject bureaucracy, and often have loose membership structures. As nonprofit

⁴ The complications of 'member leadership' will be raised in Chapter Three and explored throughout the thesis.

organizations, the majority of their funding is usually from foundations, rather than member dues (Fine 2007). Most worker centers frame economic and social issues through the lens of race, ethnicity, and immigration status, recognizing the significant role these play in social marginalization and workplace exploitation. These unique characteristics strengthen the workers centers and allow them to address the specific conditions of low-wage immigrant workers, yet they also result in some distinct challenges. Worker centers can thus be viewed as ‘organizing laboratories’ that develop and test a variety of new strategies of activism (Fine 2011a:606) as they create spaces and opportunities for low-wage immigrant workers’ political participation through collective action.

Although worker centers were initially quite independent from each other and from unions, they have increasingly formed federations and networks and have also developed more formal and informal connections with unions, whether through direct organizational affiliation, joint campaigns, or mutual support of campaigns (Fine 2011a, 2015a; Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010; Milkman and Ott 2014). Brooklyn Worker Center is an example of a worker center affiliated with a union—albeit a small, radical union—and is also a member organization of the Food Chain Workers Alliance coalition. In 2014, a group of worker centers in New York City joined together to form the New York Worker Center Federation, which had eight member organizations at the time of writing. BWC has not opted to join the coalition, however.

Worker centers today organize those whose work—and therefore whose beings—are devalued and marginalized. They often organize workers within industries that have been explicitly or effectively excluded from legal protections, such as domestic work, agriculture, and taxi driving (where workers are now classified as ‘independent contractors’); these exclusions are rooted in gendered and racialized notions of what constitutes ‘real work’ (Cobble 2010:285). It has been widely recognized that changing work structures—such as the move from manufacturing toward service jobs, the

increasingly ‘flexible’ and temporary nature of jobs, and the rise in sub-contracting and supply chains—call for new organizing paradigms and new ‘repertoires’, a term Piven and Cloward use to describe a ‘historically specific constellation of power strategies’ (2000:414). Given their membership and their overall organizational flexibility, worker centers and other alternative labor organizations are increasingly looked to as sites of experimentation and innovation (Fine 2006:252; Milkman 2014)

Brooklyn Worker Center

The Brooklyn Worker Center had a clear industrial identification—New York’s food processing and distribution industry—but also had a majority membership of Latin American immigrants. This roughly reflected the industry, in which 70% of workers are immigrants and 53% of ‘frontline workers’ are Latino, although BWC’s membership had an even higher proportion of Latino members. This was shaped by the specific demographics of the workplaces where they had campaigns, the networks of the workers who first joined from a workplace, and also by the staff’s linguistic capacities and ethnic backgrounds; for example, all of the organizers at BWC were Latino/a and Spanish-speaking, making it far easier to recruit a Peruvian worker than a Chinese worker, and thus shaping the root nodes of recruitment networks at that workplace. During the course of my fieldwork, the range of nationalities in BWC’s membership expanded, mostly due to the addition of members from a bakery with a relatively diverse workforce.

While the industry in which BWC organizes—food processing and distribution in New York City, and specifically, industrial bakeries—is a manufacturing industry whose workers generally fall within standard labor protections, the workers are mostly immigrants and people of color. Though workers are protected by labor laws on paper, employers in this industry regularly get away with wage theft, discrimination, and flouting health and safety regulations. The labor is largely invisible and is not

socially valued, as evidenced by the relatively low wages at even the factories that mostly abide by the law. Industrial bakeries are not, at first glance, reflective of the broad trends in changing work structures. Industrial bakeries have a relatively centralized workplace, direct relations between workers and their employers, and theoretically, workers retain the ability to disrupt production as a means of leveraging power. While much has been written about the broad shift in the landscape of US jobs, portraying a withering manufacturing sector alongside a robust and growing service sector, the New York food processing and distribution industry stands out as an area of manufacturing that is not actually shrinking. Further, the focus on manufacturers of locally consumed food removes one effective weapon against labor organizing in manufacturing sectors: the ‘spatial fix’ (Silver 2003), in which capital addresses ‘crises’ in profitability (such as unionization) by relocating to a different region or country where they can access cheaper labor. Factories that are producing fresh food specifically for local consumption can of course relocate, but they are limited to a relatively small geographic area that allows products to be delivered to customers the same day they are made. However, in absence of the ability to increase profit by relocating to places with cheaper and more vulnerable labor, the local New York food processing industry has come to mirror hiring trends in the low-wage service sector in its heavy reliance on immigrant workers, as well as smaller numbers of US-born Black workers. In fact, a number of food processing factories in New York City have come to rely on what BWC called a ‘sweatshop model’ of business that includes regular, outright violations of labor law, including wage theft and dangerous working conditions; the two bakeries that feature most prominently in this thesis were not in this ‘sweatshop stratum’, although other factories where BWC had previously had campaigns or sought to have campaigns were. The baking industry specifically has historically been comprised of different immigrant groups, and while workers organized into unions in the earlier 20th century, the industry has largely de-unionized since then (J. B. Freeman 2007).

When I began my fieldwork at BWC, there were five staff members. BWC's founder and executive director, Adam, is a white man in his 30s who grew up in Southern California. The lead organizer, Sara, had originally become involved with the organization by conducting surveys with workers for BWC in 2011 and Adam subsequently gave her a three-month fellowship to work with them as an organizer. The fellowship was renewed a couple of times, and then Sara was brought on as a full-time staff member. Sara's family immigrated to New York from Ecuador when she was nine years old, and she was now in her early 30s. David, who was in charge of the Campaigns area, grew up in Maryland, and was white and Mexican (but he did not speak Spanish). Working alongside Sara was a full-time organizing fellow, Diego, who had started in 2012. Diego's family immigrated to the US from Mexico when he was two years old, and he was raised in the Bronx. Finally, Jennifer was doing development work; because she was transitioning to part-time work when I began my fieldwork and resigned soon after, I spent minimal time with her. Within a month after I began my fieldwork, Alex was hired as development and communications director. Around four months later, Luis was hired to work on both the policy campaign and in development; he later moved into organizing as well, and was eventually promoted to supervisor of the organizing and campaigning areas. Luis was Mexican-American and grew up in Texas near the Mexican border. Diego resigned around seven months into my fieldwork, and an organizing fellow was subsequently brought in for the summer. Luis resigned shortly after I completed my fieldwork, and both David and Alex left the organization within the next year. Indeed, BWC had a high staff turnover during and after the period of my fieldwork.

Adam founded the Brooklyn Worker Center in 2007, after completing his law degree. When I asked him during an interview what spurred him to found the organization, he said he 'had a vision that didn't fit in any box'—he did not believe in the structures of traditional unions as a vehicle for deep social change, and the existing worker centers didn't operate in the two sectors he was interested in,

fast food and retail. He traced his interest in these sectors to having worked at Borders Books while doing his undergraduate degree and then as a barista at Starbucks before and during his time at law school; significantly, Adam had become a leading organizer in the IWW organizing campaign at Starbucks while he worked there. He had started law school while working as a barista, pointing to his motivation ‘to figure out what the playing field in contemporary union organizing was’.⁵ Aside from the specific industrial focus, Adam was inspired by a syndicalist vision that he described as ‘this idea [that] only workers themselves can change their workplace fundamentally... can change themselves, in the process, find their leadership voice, and change society’. He felt there was no fit for this anarchist-inspired vision, which was inspired by the writings of Staughton Lynd on solidarity unionism and so he had ‘to strike out on [his] own’.⁶

That said, during the earlier years of its existence, Brooklyn Worker Center undertook campaigns that fit comfortably within the conventions of worker centers; these campaigns were centered on lawsuits for wage theft and discrimination, organizing workers and allies (supporters of BWC) to put pressure on the companies to settle or to pay the settlements, and winning codes of conduct, though many of the workers in these cases had been fired. The main aspect of BWC’s campaigns that stood out as unconventional was their affiliation with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW’s Starbucks campaign, launched in 2004, was part of a revival of the IWW from relative dormancy since the 1930s; since that period, the IWW had endured mainly as an ideological organization, attracting some activists with its syndicalist politics but mostly no longer operating as a union that organized workers.

⁵ Interview

⁶ Solidarity unionism is described in more depth in Chapter Three.

BWC's first campaign was at a seafood processing plant where an IWW organizer had started organizing Latino immigrant workers who faced discrimination and wage theft (in the form of not being paid for overtime hours they worked). Within two months, several of the worker activists were fired for their involvement in labor organizing; BWC, newly founded as a nonprofit organization, took on the campaign and filed a federal lawsuit that charged the company with widespread failure to pay time-and-a-half for overtime hours and retaliation against workers for involvement in union organizing. This campaign led the organization to focus its attention on workers in the food processing and distribution industry, rather than fast food and retail. As litigation proceeded, BWC organized a group of the workers to carry out a boycott of the seafood company by picketing with allies at the restaurants and markets that were clients of the company; they also launched a media campaign to expose the exploitative labor practices of the company that projected an image of sustainability. The picketing entailed nearly two years of workers, BWC staff, and IWW allies handing out flyers in front of client restaurants that revealed the illegal labor practices of their supplier; restaurants agreed to boycott the supplier perhaps sometimes out of sympathy or solidarity, but more often out of a desire to preserve their image and not see customers driven away by the picketing. More than seventy restaurants and markets ultimately joined the boycott, and after two years—notably, six months after filing for bankruptcy, mainly because of the boycott—the company finally reached a settlement with the workers that included compensation for unpaid wages and for retaliation.

The success of the boycott and the \$340,000 settlement were impressive, yet the campaign also reflected the unforgiving terrain on which workers must struggle for even simply protecting their existing rights. Up to two dozen workers (both fired and current) had joined the lawsuit; participation in organizing the boycott campaign was much more challenging to sustain, as

demonstrated by the fact that only two workers remained active in the campaign by the time the settlement was reached. One worker from the campaign, Jorge, told me in an interview:

...because it took a long time, there were no more than two of us who worked until the end [on the boycott campaign], out of everyone. And to collect the [settlement] money, yes, everyone moves quickly—but only two of us fought until the end. The others [were saying] that we weren't going to win anymore... but the other one who finished [fighting the campaign] with me said that we were doing it solely for pride, because we were going to win the money for everyone who was no longer coming—and so it was.⁷

Although the IWW and BWC sought to build up the presence of the IWW union among current workers as the campaign proceeded, by the time I met BWC in 2011 there appeared to be no active members who were current employees of the seafood company. Along with the settlement, the lawsuit had also won a binding code of conduct protecting all workplace rights. Yet binding codes of conduct only have strong teeth when workers are organized to hold employers accountable; otherwise, they are often more symbolic. The worker activist quoted above described how the code of conduct required the owner to pay overtime wages (as legally required); yet, the worker told me, while the owner was now paying proper overtime wages, he had lowered the hourly wage so that workers ended up receiving close to the same weekly wages as before.

The challenges outlined in the above campaign are ones widely faced by worker centers: retaining and expanding membership, exerting power to raise standards rather than simply enforce existing laws, and emphasizing workplace organizing instead of legal action (Fine 2006:253; Jenkins 2002:69; Milkman 2013:657). BWC had completed four campaigns by the time I began my fieldwork, all of which were referred to as 'legacy campaigns' by staff, indicating not only that the campaigns had ended, but that BWC had since transitioned to a different campaign model focused more on workplace organizing than lawsuits and using a more specific strategy in selecting campaign 'targets'. The four 'legacy campaigns' had all been at food processing and distribution companies and

⁷ Jorge, 2011 interview

involved lawsuits on wage theft (failure to pay minimum wage and/or overtime wages), health and safety violations, and illegal retaliation for worker organizing; most of the settlements included binding codes of conduct. Alongside the lawsuits, BWC and its members carried out grassroots pressure campaigns, encouraging clients of the companies involved in litigation to boycott, as described in the Wild Edibles campaign above.

BWC's strategic shift toward an organizing model based on solidarity unionism—centering the principles of solidarity, direct action, and worker leadership—will be described in more depth in Chapter Four, but here I will make note of the afore-mentioned inspiration of the IWW's Local 8. Local 8, the Philadelphia longshoremen's union that emerged in the second decade of the 20th century, was a historical inspiration to BWC staff (and Adam, in particular) on two counts: its staunch commitment to full racial equality in a multiracial industry and racist society, and its ability to win important concessions and hold power for a decade through direct action rather than contracts or formal negotiations. In Cole's (2007) historical account of Local 8, he describes its commitment to the IWW model of using direct action tactics, most often in the form of brief strikes. For example, the Wobblies maintained union control on the waterfront by effectively controlling the hiring process with direct action; if a worker in their midst was not a Local 8 member or had not paid their dues (as evidenced by wearing the buttons distributed monthly upon dues payment), workers threatened to strike until the worker joined or left the worksite (2007:55). Despite important differences in the social, economic, and industrial context (which will be described later in this chapter), this historical example of longshoremen exerting significant power through direct action was cited as an inspiration for BWC's model; at the same time, staff recognized that Local 8's collapse after a decade meant that its model was not a perfect formula or solution, but rather a starting point for experimentation.

Sources of worker power

Here I would like to elaborate on the aforementioned analytical lens of power—the different sources of power BWC sought to leverage and actually did leverage, and the ideological and strategic implications of these in centering workers’ collective action and agency and reckoning with political and economic constraints. Brooklyn Worker Center had an explicit industrial focus on food processing and distribution workers, and during the period of my fieldwork it was specifically focused on organizing industrial bakeries producing artisanal bread. The organization’s campaigns were centered around legal cases for the first four years of its existence, while the transition to a strategy of industrial organizing began during the year I began my fieldwork; the industrial focus thus remained consistent throughout the years, but the core strategy shifted from being centered around legal action to focusing on workplace organizing and unionization. The organization’s new strategy was often described by Adam as a focus on ‘value tomorrow’—that is, seeking to secure improvements that would affect workers’ lives into the future, rather than simply rectifying past injustices. This concept is standard in union organizing, where collective bargaining is the main channel through which unions secure contracts for workers and therefore ‘value tomorrow’; yet it is less standard among worker centers, which employ a range of strategies but have been critiqued to be incapable of ‘building power’ through organizing at workplaces (Jenkins 2002). Further, the specific strategy BWC championed for attaining ‘value tomorrow’ was not standard among unions; the organization’s affiliation with the IWW reflected its radical vision of labor organizing. Even when it transitioned into workplace organizing, BWC did not seek to negotiate contracts for its members nor did it seek exclusive representation. Instead, the organization advocated the use of solidarity and direct action—described in more depth in Chapter Three—as the means for asserting demands and protecting standards.

Power has been described and classified in various ways in relation to worker centers and labor unions. In the critique cited above, Jenkins (2002) distinguishes between ‘advocacy power’ and ‘social power’, describing the former as the ability to *convince* elite sources of power to take action and the latter as the ability to *force* changes from the institution they are confronting—such as workers’ ability to disrupt production, or tenants’ ability to withhold rent. Worker centers, according to this framework, are often limited to exercising advocacy power because their members are low-wage workers who do not have the ability to leverage social power—that is, the ability to threaten or disrupt production—due to features of these low-wage industries such as the wide availability of surplus labor and work that is considered low-skilled and easily replaceable; this both causes and is compounded by the fact that many worker centers do not engage in workplace organizing.⁸ This reliance on advocacy power limits the demands workers can make to ones that are palatable to elite sources of power, such as remedying illegal practices or changing conditions that are viewed as unfair by ‘even mainstream notions of justice and fairness’ (2002:62), rather than enabling them to demand higher wages or health insurance, as a union campaign might. Worker centers’ reliance on advocacy power is further amplified when campaigns are centered on recovering back wages for workers who have quit or been fired, as was the case with BWC’s ‘legacy’ campaigns. Significantly, the actual participation of workers in campaigns that are reliant on advocacy power ‘become[s] a matter of principle rather than necessity’ (Jenkins 2002:69).

The difference between advocacy power and social power lays bare not only a strategic question but an ethical dilemma as well, as the critique of advocacy-centered work asserts that it is more limited in its ability to shift power structures but also insufficiently representative of and accountable to the

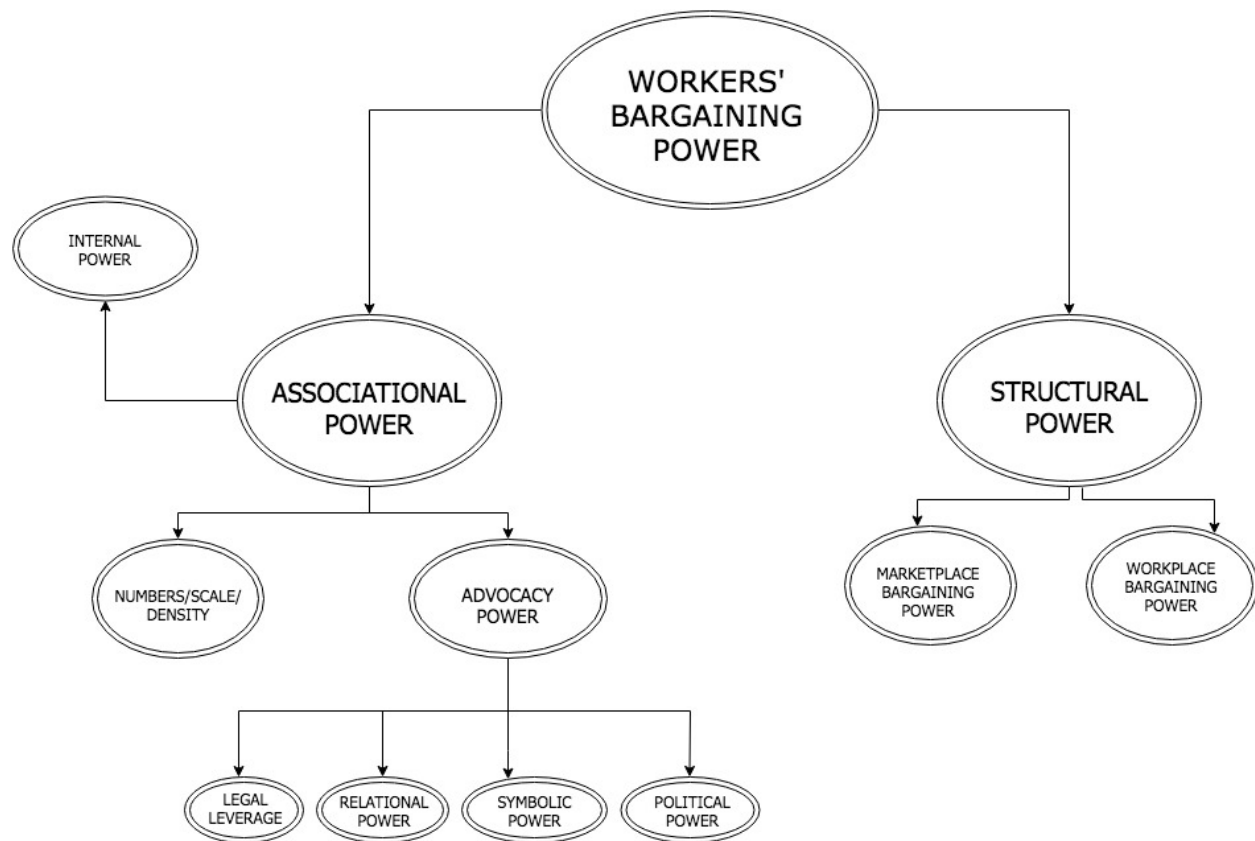
⁸ While recognizing constraints worker centers have exhibited in exercising economic/ ‘social’ power, analysts have pointed out that unions have also demonstrated a decreasing ability to exercise such power in today’s political economy (whether by circumstance or choice), leading them to also rely more heavily on political power in recent years (Fine 2011a:613; McAlevey 2016:195–96; Milkman 2014:19).

people who are directly affected (Jenkins 2002:57). In moving away from its previous strategy rooted in advocacy power and striving to center workers' social power in its campaigns, BWC was explicitly seeking to overcome these strategic constraints of worker center organizing while also putting forth solidarity unionism as strategically superior to business unionism and an antidote to business unionism's top-down, bureaucratic, service provision model.

To add precision to our understanding of workers' potential power, we can turn to Silver's (2003) elaboration of Wright's (2000) schema of the sources of worker bargaining power. Some workers possess 'structural power' by virtue of their location in the economic system. Structural power can be divided into two types: marketplace bargaining power resulting from a tight labor market (whether because of low unemployment or the workers' possession of scarce skills), and workplace bargaining power that derives from a group of workers having a particularly strategic location within a key industrial sector 'where a localized work stoppage in a key node can cause disruptions on a much wider scale than the stoppage itself' (Silver 2003:13). Alternatively, workers can build 'associational power' through the formation of collective organizations of workers such as unions and political parties. While formal articulations of associational power lie in state legal frameworks governing labor relations, associational power understood broadly includes various sources of leverage outside of the field of the law; a group of workers may strengthen their associational power by organizing a critical mass of workers across a workplace or an industry, or by expanding the field of struggle and building deep connections with social movements, fostering community mobilization (Chun 2011), or building cross-class alliances, for example.

In her wide-ranging analysis of global labor unrest, Silver (2003) argues that the 21st century trend of diminishing structural bargaining power for workers is making the development of associational power increasingly important, since workers who possess limited structural bargaining power must

DIAGRAM I – SOURCES OF WORKERS' BARGAINING POWER



compensate by strengthening the basis of their associational power. For a labor organization aiming to build a durable, militant, organized base of workers within such an industry where workers have relatively limited structural power, I contend that this requires paying attention to the various sources of leverage through which associational power can be consolidated. In this dissertation, I am interested in focusing on how BWC draws on different sources of associational power and the implications these have for centering worker agency and the possibilities of consolidating power; here, for example, the balance between leveraging sources of advocacy power and workers' social power will be an important theme. I will also pay particular attention to the cultivation of what Jennifer Gordon (2005) calls 'internal power', comprised of solidarity and a shared sense of identity among worker members, internal practices of deep democracy, and leadership development.

Local 8 & the bakery workers: a comparison

BWC's director often pointed to a historical IWW union as a source of inspiration: the aforementioned Local 8, which held power for a decade in early 20th century through direct action and worker solidarity rather than contracts. The search for new organizing paradigms that could revitalize the US labor movement often leads back to the rich history of the US labor movement. Current changes in the structure of our economy, weakening labor protections, and increasing employer opposition to unionization have led many to draw comparisons with conditions faced by the labor movement before the era of the New Deal—accordingly, this has also sharpened attention to organizing models implemented in the earlier years of the 20th century. That era was characterized by a diverse array of organizing models and representational forms being experimented with as workers and organizers sought to figure out how to best leverage power against bosses, given the diminishing relevance of the previously dominant model of craft unionism in many industries—as well as the fact that it had never been inclusive of or relevant to many workers. The example of the IWW's Local 8 is indeed immensely inspiring and presents a wealth of insight, while also challenging some longstanding assumptions within the labor movement. Yet it is worth exploring to what extent Local 8 is a useful point of comparison for today's workers within New York City's industrial bakeries.

Longshoremen have historically held a particularly high level of workplace bargaining power,⁹ emerging from their strategic location within a key industrial sector. A work stoppage by longshoremen has costly 'downstream' repercussions within a regional and national economy, making direct action, particularly strikes, acutely effective. During the era of Local 8, the intense

⁹ While technological changes such as containerization and dock automation substantially weakened the bargaining power of dockworkers and longshoremen, transport workers continue to hold a relatively strong level of workplace bargaining power (Silver 2003:100–101).

physical difficulty and acute dangers of the work combined with the highly cooperative nature of the work process fostered an occupational and class-based identity among longshoremen, which was further reinforced by the fact that within their respective ethnic/nationality groups, the workers lived in the same areas, socialized in the same places, and also shared many family ties (Cole 2007:18–19). However, the sharp racial divides and entrenched anti-Black racism in Philadelphia at the time made the solidarity of the longshoremen remarkable. Cole notes that the longshoremen workforce was made up mainly of African Americans and immigrants from Poland and Lithuania who ‘still were learning in America that they were “white” and did not view “black” longshoremen in the same terms that native-born whites did—at least before and during World War I’ (2007:53); the IWW was appealing to these groups because they were excluded or at least marginalized by other unions.

Local 8 was born of an industrial strike, which had been inspired by a nearby IWW-led sugar refinery strike that involved many workers from the same neighborhoods and ethnic groups. The broad upsurge of labor militancy during this decade was a significant backdrop and fuel to these strikes; workers nationwide were more militant than they had ever been, with a profusion of strikes not only among those being organized by more radical groups like the IWW but also among members of the AFL craft unions. The longshoremen’s strike began with 1,500 deep-sea longshoremen, who were the most skilled waterfront workers, yet one of their main demands included equal wages for all waterfront workers; these deep-sea longshoremen thus leveraged their workplace bargaining power to the benefit of workers across the industry.

Workers in New York City’s industrial bakeries, in contrast, have far less structural bargaining power than these longshoremen. Their workplace bargaining power is limited; although certain positions within the industrial bakeries do have the capacity to disrupt production within the factory, because

they are not producing highly valuable goods, any disruptions of production have a less potentially damaging ripple effect on the local/regional economy. Nevertheless, they are not entirely powerless in this realm, as a work stoppage by delivery drivers would create a disruption for the restaurants and grocery shops they serve, for example. Their marketplace bargaining power is limited as well, given the relative ease of replacing the workers; there is an ample labor supply of potential workers and the jobs are not considered highly skilled.¹⁰ One important marketplace point of leverage that bakery workers do share with longshoremen, however, is that the worksite is relatively place-bound—while the bakeries could move production to New Jersey, for example, to avoid unionization, they need to remain within a certain geographical radius in order to continue delivering fresh bread daily to local customers. Adding to the challenges was that the jobs at the two bakeries profiled herein had better wages and working conditions than previous jobs many workers had held, both within and outside of this sector (although this was not the experience of all workers). Thus, even if many workers were making poverty-level wages and could not afford healthcare benefits, they were less willing to risk losing the job as they were aware of how much worse it could be. Another potential obstacle to organizing is that the narrow profit margins and relatively high proportion of business costs spent on labor in these bakeries meant that employers were likely to resist substantial increase in labor costs.

Levels of occupational or industrial identity vary within the sector but are generally low, as many workers are moving in and out of jobs in different industries with little connection to particular occupations; in the industrial bakeries, some workers have made a years-long career of bakery work while many others held little identification with the job. Workers come to the factories from homes situated all across NYC's sprawling urban geography (and into cities beyond), making for

¹⁰ This point was true for Local 8's longshoremen as well; the consolidation of their workplace bargaining power, however, made up for this.

workforces that are overall fractured, with certain small pockets of workers who share social, family, and/or geographical ties. Descriptions of difference and divisions among workers in forthcoming chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate that racialized and national divisions within the workforces presented a serious challenge to organizing. Finally—and significantly—the political backdrop today is markedly different in many respects, including the relatively low levels of worker militancy across the country; unlike the formation of Local 8, BWC was not building on an already-existing wave of labor unrest.

The contrasts described above between the Local 8 longshoremen’s workplace bargaining power, shared occupational identity, and backdrop of working class militancy and those among NYC bakery workers throw into question the direct relevance and feasibility of this organizing model for BWC members. Further, Local 8 was an anomaly among IWW union branches, as the main critique of the IWW historically has been that it was rarely able to consolidate power or retain members in the long term; gains won during dramatic strikes were often not sustained in the long term. This is critical, as one of the central goals of BWC was to expand and *retain* membership, recognizing that durability was the consistent weak point of the IWW and solidarity unionism. Accordingly, BWC viewed Local 8’s organizing model as one to build upon, rather than one to emulate exactly. The pursuit of this vision of solidarity unionism is a central thread in this dissertation.

Overview of the thesis structure

This Introduction chapter is followed by a brief **Methodology** chapter.

Chapter Two, ‘The Hierarchies of Labor’, explores the historical context of how the US class structure has been constructed through classifying the value of labor and of workers along lines of race, gender, and citizenship. These intricate hierarchies of labor in the US have been shaped by

racialized and gendered ideologies of value and freedom, as well as by the legal boundaries of immigration and citizenship. Here I seek to demonstrate why labor is, and historically has been, a site for contesting not only economic value, but also social value, freedom, and citizenship. The analytical lens of the *hierarchies of labor* enables subsequent chapters to explore how these hierarchies are experienced and negotiated in workers' lives, and the way difference and divisions manifest on the shop floor and in the context of a BWC organizing campaign.

Chapter Three, 'Navigating the Value and Suffering of Work', engages with the life stories of three bakery workers who were involved, to varying degrees, with the BWC. Drawing attention to the ways race, legal status, and gender shape workers' subjectivities and thus how they experience the hierarchies of labor in their lives beyond the workplace, I highlight the tensions between workers' experiences of exploitation and dependency, and the ways this can open or diminish a 'margin of freedom' that fuels the will to resist and organize. This chapter builds a nuanced foundation for the analysis in subsequent chapters of the challenges of organizing across difference and divisions.

Chapter Four, 'Radical Visions and Practical Challenges: Solidarity Unionism on the Ground', delves into the Brooklyn Worker Center's mission to transition away from an organizing model based on advocacy power toward carrying out a workplace organizing model based on solidarity unionism. Employing the lens of the organization's three guiding principles—solidarity, direct action, and worker leadership—I explore the organization's struggles to implement the vision of solidarity unionism in practice, through examining their campaign at Harvest Bakery. Encountering the challenges of organizing workers with limited structural power, BWC leveraged multiple sources of advocacy power with the aim of opening a 'margin of freedom' for workers to build power on the shop floor. Yet limitations on BWC's organizing capacity and an unsystematic approach to

identifying worker leaders and developing their organizing capacity ultimately hampered the organization's ability to build up a strong membership base at Harvest Bakery.

Chapter Five, 'The Formation of Grievances', shifts the analysis onto the shop floor of a different bakery, examining how grievances form by mapping out how the 'moral economy of the workplace' (Penney 2006; Thompson 1971) is constructed and experienced from above and below at Sweet Tooth Bakery. I explore how perceived violations of the moral economy of the workplace sharpen workers' grievances, revealing how moral and social worthiness are entwined with the economic value of labor. This chapter also demonstrates how workers mobilize discourses on work ethic to assert value and worthiness in the face of exploitation, tracing how these discourses can deepen workplace stratification by reflecting and entrenching racial and national divisions. This sets the stage for examining how the BWC organizing campaign at Sweet Tooth Bakery attempted to overcome divisions and foster worker solidarity.

Chapter Six, 'Cultivating the Path to Solidarity: Organizing and Recruitment Practices', examines the BWC's process of recruiting workers to join labor organizing campaigns. Given the hostile terrain for labor organizing, the goal of building solidarity requires that organizers engage workers' sense of justice and expand their belief that change is possible. This chapter documents the practices of one-on-one meetings with workers and member orientations, highlighting how organizers approach the critical work of tapping into workers' experience of exploitation. I then explore the way workers' lived experience of precarity and caring responsibilities can heighten their sense of dependency on work, diminishing the will to participate in collective action and organizing. Finally, I introduce the concept of 'structures of solidarity' to describe the structures and practices—in particular, organizing committees—that are meant to help workers prefigure the union and thus embody their potential power, solidarity, and expanded possibility. Given these experiences of

precarity as well as the previously-described divisions at the bakery, it was critical for BWC to build structures of solidarity that could convince workers that the union could be an effective vehicle for change. However, weaknesses in BWC's organizing capacity made it a struggle to build a strong organizing committee at Sweet Tooth Bakery, demonstrating how this hindered the organization's to build an adequate foundation of solidarity among workers.

Chapter Seven (the final ethnographic chapter), 'Strategies of Resistance: the Battle to Shape Notions of What's Possible', carries the story of the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign up to and beyond taking the campaign public. The chapter first depicts how the employer and BWC competed to shape workers' sense of what was possible; while BWC struggled to create structures of solidarity that could create a 'margin of freedom' and deepen worker solidarity, the employer's anti-union campaign aimed to reassert the power balance of existing labor relations as the more reliable source of value and security for workers. In analyzing the evolution of the campaign as it 'went public' and beyond, I highlight the increasing discrepancy between the momentum of the 'external campaign'—BWC's leveraging of various forms of advocacy power to strengthen the campaign—and the faltering internal campaign that was unable to build a solid base of worker support. Although the leveraging of advocacy power was meant to open the space for workers to organize and build their power on the shop floor, I contend that the imbalance of leveraging and escalating advocacy power before a solid base of worker solidarity had been built undermined the development of a worker-centered campaign, as weak structures of solidarity and inadequate leadership identification and development left the internal campaign unable to expand the base and overcome divisions.

The **Conclusion** chapter synthesizes the empirical and theoretical contributions of this research, evaluating the successes and failures of BWC's organizing model in overcoming the limitations of worker centers and the failures of business unionism. Recognizing that the organization is still in a

relatively early stage of experimentation, I map out a comparative analysis that situates BWC's organizing practices within the landscape of approaches to organizing low-wage workers, highlighting how other models have navigated the balance between strengthening workers' associational power and cultivating internal power. Finally, I draw attention to the importance of dynamic class analyses that are both fundamentally intersectional and capable of bridging perspectives of structural analysis and subjectivity; I contend that this is imperative in the path to deep engagement with the challenges of organizing across difference and divisions.

Methodology

I had met with a number of worker centers in New York City in 2011, while conducting interviews for my MPhil thesis. Brooklyn Worker Center became my first choice for a DPhil field site, as they seemed to be navigating certain important tensions in striving to move beyond the perceived limits of the worker center model, as discussed in Chapter One. When I met BWC, the organization was beginning its significant transition, stepping away from the reactive legal campaigns of its past to prioritize targeted organizing campaigns. As vigorous promoters of direct action over reliance on bureaucratic or legal tactics, the organization was basically moving to put its money where its mouth was.

Some of the challenges of this transition became apparent during the process of securing permission to do my fieldwork research with BWC. When I arrived back in New York City, I had an initial meeting with the director at a local diner, where we discussed potential research topics, and I raised the possibility of volunteering at BWC as a core element of my field research. The director suggested that I draft a proposal that he could share with his staff, and then we could all meet to discuss this further. Meeting with the staff was a very informal affair; there were only four of us, and we pulled up chairs in a small circle at the back of the office and discussed the proposed idea. They were all very receptive to it, and after asking me a few questions about confidentiality and publication, decided to approve the plan and indicated that it was now up to me to obtain approval from the membership. Happy to support democratic processes, I readily agreed.

The following month, I showed up for the October General Meeting to present my proposal to the members. I had printed out a small stack of proposals in both Spanish and English. There were about eighteen people there, but only half, at most, were members—the rest were staff, volunteers,

and ‘allies’. After introductions, I noticed that no members from their current campaign at Harvest Bakery were present, only members from ‘legacy’ campaigns—campaigns that had ended (and won). I thought this complicated the idea of my research receiving democratic approval, as I imagined the members of the current campaign would be the ones I would be interacting with most. When it came to my time on the lengthy agenda, I passed around copies of the proposal to everyone who didn’t have one, and stood up to give an overview of what I was seeking to do, and why. Everyone seemed to be listening and receptive, and after I spoke, the volunteer facilitating the meeting spoke supportively about the proposal. Nobody asked any questions, though, and so I left the room to allow them to vote. When I returned, the facilitator explained that the members were interested but decided they did not want to make a final decision without the director of BWC, who was away that weekend at a conference. I clarified that he and the rest of the staff supported the proposal but wanted the members to decide if they want the organization to participate, but said that I completely understood and that they could take their time in reading the proposal and calling me if they had any questions. The facilitator suggested that the vote would probably happen at the next general meeting, in four weeks.

A month later, my proposal was brought to vote at the following general meeting. This time, there were around eleven members present and around thirteen staff, volunteers, and supporters; two members were from an active campaign, and one was from an active prospective campaign, while the rest were from ‘legacy campaigns’ that had ended. I handed out the print-out to anyone who hadn’t seen it yet, and I did my pitch all over again, since there were only two workers there who had been there at the last meeting when I first pitched it. This time, there were a few questions—about where the research would be published and privacy. I was happy to answer the questions and pleased to engage with the workers about it. Then I left the room so they could hold the vote. I went downstairs to the ground level foyer and waited for about five minutes. Diego opened the door

and called for me, and gave me a big smile and two thumbs up—yes! When I walked back into the room, everyone started clapping, and I grinned and thanked them. The member who was facilitating then said that he thought I should know that it was a unanimous vote—that they were really interested in my research, and wanted to thank me for taking the time to focus on this topic. It felt really great to know that the workers supported the project—it was an enormous relief, and buoyed me in moving forward. Yet the realities of the challenges BWC faced in maintaining member participation, as first evidenced to me by irregular meeting attendance, meant that informed consent would be an ongoing process throughout my fieldwork.

Data Collection

As described in the previous section, I first met BWC while doing research for my MPhil thesis. That summer, I went to the BWC office several times to meet with staff, attend a general membership meeting, and to interview members (I interviewed one member in the conference room of the office, and two members in their own homes). For my DPhil fieldwork, I engaged in participant observation for a period of fifteen months as a volunteer staff member at BWC, from November 2012 until March 2014, with a month off in the middle to teach. My engagement is more accurately described as ‘observant participation’ (Vargas 2008), as my observations stemmed from and were shaped by my active participation in BWC’s daily work. Participant observation is the primary method of data collection in ethnographic research, defined by ‘a *long-term* intimate engagement with *a group of people* that were once *strangers to us* in order to know and experience the world through their perspectives and actions in as *holistic* a way as possible’ (Shah 2017:51; emphasis in original). In addition to fifteen months of ‘observant participation’, my fieldwork also included oral history interviews, described in more depth below. This combination of ethnographic research methods was a strong fit for my research goals, as it allowed the analysis to go beyond

documentation of alternative labor organizations and their strategies to explore the interplay of structural conditions and subjectivity within the intricate web of interactions among workers, organizers, and employers. This offered critical insight into how organizing approaches actually engaged with the multiple and shifting worker subjectivities that arise amid changing structures of work and shifts in the formation of the working classes; it was also an important route toward understanding the development of wide discrepancies between organizational visions and practices. Ethnography was also a strong match for my ethical and political commitments, as will be described below.

During the period of my fieldwork, I normally spent the entire day working alongside BWC staff and returned home in the evening to write field notes about the activities, conversations, and interactions of the day; I worked there most weekdays and some weekends during busy periods. There was a clear reciprocal relationship between me and the organization; I was volunteering for them and basically functioning as a staff member, and in turn, I had the green light to document the work and focus my research on them. Although it was ‘officially’ decided that I would be called a research fellow, I was introduced in various ways when people came to the office: as a research fellow, an organizer, or ‘our anthropologist’, with the added comment that I was also ‘embedded’ and writing a dissertation (or book) about the organization. Some of the activities I engaged in regularly at BWC included: planning member meetings and events, writing agendas and helping to facilitate member meetings, participating in staff meetings, doing worker outreach at factories, visiting workers in their homes, holding meetings (one-on-one and group) with workers in the office, drafting and editing various campaign documents, research, interpreting at group member meetings, interpreting for workers in meetings with lawyers or tax return preparers, data entry, note-taking, helping prepare and deliver trainings, and attending marches and protests organized by BWC as well as allied organizations.

I also conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with BWC members (nine) and staff (five). These interviews ranged in length from one to seven hours, and most were structured according to the methodology of oral history, focusing on the life stories of the narrators and their experiences with BWC. Offering the workers space and time to narrate their life stories added multiple layers of nuance to my understanding of how people navigate the contingencies of life on the margins, how they ‘make a living’ in the most expansive sense—that is, their ‘struggles and stabilization around the worth of people and how to make life worth living’ (Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S14). We discussed their childhoods, migration stories, personal relationships, work experiences—their sense of constraints and openings, their experiences of suffering and hope. Oral history carries an ethos of ‘history from the bottom up’, a political statement that the fine-grained texture of ‘ordinary’ people’s life stories is a rich resource for understanding long-term social and political changes. Through oral history, we step beyond the question of what people did to explore ‘what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did’ (Portelli 1998:67)—to center subjectivity in our analyses. It was through these oral history interviews that I grasped more deeply the extent to which work was experienced as a site of tension between worthiness and marginalization. The interviews with staff members of BWC also added depth and complexity to my understanding of their visions of social justice, and my appreciation for the different shapes of their political roots and how this framed their understandings of labor and organizing. In offering a deeper look at subjectivity, life histories reveal ‘the relation between the social conditions that determine practice and the future social world that practice brings into being... the making of social life through time’ (Connell 2005:89–90). The limited number of interviews I conducted is of course not intended to serve as any sort of representative sample—it is meant to gain a deeper understanding of some particular aspects that would be difficult to capture through other research methods.

The interviews with workers also extended my relationship with them into new territory; because of the challenges of my dual role described below, members of BWC often engaged with me primarily as an organizer (despite knowing I was also a researcher) and the life story interviews opened a channel of connection outside of the worker-organizer relationship; this was also because I did many of the interviews toward the end of my fieldwork period, when I was preparing to leave or had already left my position at BWC. Since I was no longer calling these workers and attempting to persuade them to attend meetings, they seemed to perceive my presence differently; indeed, a couple of workers were very willing to schedule interviews with me even though they were no longer actively involved in the organizing campaigns. During the interviews, they seemed more comfortable opening up about their doubts and critiques of the campaigns—although some of them had been quite straightforward about their specific doubts throughout the time I'd known them.

Method of analysis

My analysis began during fieldwork with the composition of quarterly overviews of emerging themes, questions, and insights sent to my doctoral supervisors. Once I had completed the fieldwork, I began comprehensive analysis through coding interview transcripts and the nearly 1,000 pages of field notes I had written based on participant observation. I completed two rounds of coding, first manually and then using a CAQDAS program, Nvivo; I then did further coding for particular categories. During the process of coding, analytic memos were also a critical means of documenting and deepening the emerging analysis (Saldana 2009).

Engaged research: ethics and positionality

When I conducted interviews, we often spent a substantial chunk of time discussing the interview and my research project before turning on the voice recorder; during this time the interviewees

asked me questions about the ultimate value of this dissertation for me, my political perspectives, and my positionality as a researcher working at the organization I studied. Throughout my fieldwork, I tried to be transparent about the relative privilege of my position as a white, middle-class US citizen doing a doctoral degree: the various forms of capital I was born into, and the increase in social capital a PhD degree would bring me, for example. My decision to conduct ‘engaged’ research and thus volunteer at BWC was both an ethical choice and an academic one: I felt doing research on a terrain of vastly unequal and contested power relations made it ethically necessary to be clear that my motivation in doing this research was to support the work of challenging oppression, as ‘neutrality’ could effectively be support of the status quo (Vargas 2006). Further, it was and remains clear to me that the quality of my research was enriched by taking an ‘engaged’ approach.

Engaged or activist anthropology encompasses a wide range of approaches. Following Shannon Speed, I aligned my approach with the practice of ‘critically engaged activist research’, combining the practice of critical cultural analysis with ‘overt commitment to an engagement with our research subjects that is directed toward a shared political goal’ (Speed 2006:71). This approach includes a recognition that one can analytically benefit from the productive tensions and contradictions that arise. Other activist approaches entail a collaborative engagement that continues through the period of analysis and writing (Hale 2006; Stuesse 2016); in contrast, a few reasons led me to reduce my engagement with BWC after my fieldwork and not pursue a collaborative process of analysis, writing, and feedback. First, I felt that this distance was necessary and productive for my capacity to delve into the analysis, after such deep engagement; here, I echo Naisargi Dave, who explains that her critiques ‘emerged only in the process of writing and with the seeming clarity of distance’ (2012:27). My experience pursuing both engaged political activity on the ground and critical analysis also validated for me Naisargi Dave’s view that ‘critique is indeed a motor of ethical social action

and of solidarity itself' (Dave 2012:27). A second reason was that several of the staff members had resigned during or after my fieldwork, leaving only the executive director and lead organizer still with the organization; my personal relationship with them remained warm but somewhat distant, and I maintained varying levels of communication and friendship with former staff members.

Despite the challenges of balancing my dual role as researcher and organizer, it's worth noting that there are significant parallels between the relationships organizers develop with workers and those that anthropologists develop with so-called 'informants'. Effective organizers, like effective anthropologists, take time to build trust with workers, and spend a lot of time asking questions and listening to understand what matters to them, what fragile hopes they harbor, what challenges they experience; the significant difference in these two relationships, however, is that organizers are ultimately aiming to guide or persuade people to do something—to engage in collective action.

Anthropologists, on the other hand, reside in the somewhat awkward space of acknowledging that the depth of their involvement 'in the field' must inevitably have some impact on what they study, as indeed it is through this involvement that the 'data' is generated, but at the same time taking the position that they are not seeking to influence what people do. Over the past couple of decades anthropologists have more readily acknowledged and examined their own positionalities and how all knowledge is 'situated' (Haraway 1988), as well as engaging in searching critiques of ethnographic authority and the notion of scientific objectivity (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rosaldo 2001; Scheper-Hughes 1995); yet there is still a strong distinction drawn between 'pure' ethnographic research and 'engaged' or activist research.

The choice to undertake field research as a volunteer at the organization raised certain questions and challenges regarding my dual role. I began my fieldwork post at BWC brimming with excitement for the work, and immediately comfortable among the staff, who felt like 'my' people—young (ages 21-

35), urban dwellers with far left politics. Although I was technically an academic, my choice to work long hours alongside the staff signaled that I took seriously my responsibility toward the work, to engage in it and not simply study it. Balancing these two roles was a constant internal negotiation throughout the period of fieldwork, as I sometimes found it difficult to prioritize my research responsibilities over the constant urgency of daily work at BWC: interpreting for a worker in a meeting with a lawyer, designing a meeting agenda for the upcoming membership meeting, accompanying a member to testify at the National Labor Relations Board about their employer's 'Unfair Labor Practices'—all of this felt more urgent and important than spending an extra hour writing field notes or transcribing an interview for my dissertation, which began to at times seem self-indulgent. On a few occasions, I wondered if I would be ultimately contributing more if I just did this work directly, rather than doing it as part of my PhD research—the underlying question being, would my research be 'useful'?

Questions surrounding my 'objectivity' have come up, but less frequently than I expected; I must note that the workers and organizers I spoke with never cited this as an issue, perhaps speaking to Charles Hale's insight that:

...for people who feel directly and personally connected to broader experiences of oppression and to struggles for empowerment, claims of objectivity are more apt to sound like self-serving maneuvers to preserve hierarchy and privilege; and the idea of putting scholarship to the service of their own communities' empowerment and well-being is more apt to sound like a sensible, if not an inevitable, way to practice their profession. For those, like myself, who do not claim such experience-based connections, the move is one of active alignment, avoiding the righteous fervor of a convert/traitor while rejecting the privilege-laden option to remain outside the fray. (Hale 2008b:3)

I wrangled with this question of positionality and 'objectivity' before, during, and after my fieldwork. I understood that inevitably, my choices of how to approach the research would crack open certain possibilities and close off others. A key illustration of this was my choice to become a volunteer at the Brooklyn Worker Center; I did not choose to get a job at an industrial bakery to work alongside

BWC members, nor did I choose to take on a research method that was heavier on observation and lighter on participation. I feel strongly that the latter would have greatly impoverished my research, as not only would my own experience and understanding of the work have been narrower and more disembodied, I also would not have gained the trust of members and staff that grew from my clear commitment to the work and would thus have had far more limited access (Hale 2008a; Speed 2006). Becoming a volunteer at BWC positioned me as an activist anthropologist, which I understand as entailing a commitment to both critical action and critical analysis (Fassin 2011). This required engagement beyond simply vocalizing support for a group or movement, but rather taking on responsibility within that movement and therefore being held accountable (more on the complexities of accountability below).

It was not until halfway through my fieldwork that I took on the full role of an organizer; the difference between tagging along with organizers while they had meetings with workers and personally taking on these organizing responsibilities was vast. Suddenly, I felt directly responsible to the worker—face to face with the weight of the risk they were taking, the potential for transformation through the process of collective action, and the enormity of all they are up against. This sense of responsibility as an organizer fed directly into a deeper comprehension of what it means to make research that is relevant and useable—it works toward an embodied understanding of what matters.

Positioning myself within BWC staff, and particularly as an organizer, also meant that some people were unlikely to speak with me about certain matters. Some workers whom I approached as an organizer were not interested in being involved in the campaign, so our communication mostly ended—either after a brief conversation of a few minutes, or after a couple of conversations.

Unfortunately, the aggressive opposition against labor organizing in the US as well as the general

sense of risk this engenders often makes conversations between workers and labor organizers fraught with fear. If a worker refused involvement in the campaign out of fear of employer retaliation, it would not have been appropriate for me to ‘switch hats’ and ask if I could then talk to them simply as a researcher; I could not temporarily erase my connection to BWC in order to put them at ease. Further, I felt it would jeopardize the campaign for me to attempt to switch roles in that manner—a standard strategy of union-busting (employer opposition to unionization) is to portray the union as a dangerous third-party outsider rather than an organization of workers, so organizers take seriously the task of building trust with workers. If I were to hastily explain to a worker that I was actually also a researcher who they could speak to separately from the campaign, in an attempt to convince them to continue speaking to me in the context of a different relationship, this could easily heighten their suspicion of the union. I therefore generally explained my dual role to workers once they established an openness to continue meeting with BWC; on the other hand, I normally told members of the organization and workers who visited the office about my research right away, since they had established a connection to the organization right away. Once I told workers about my research, their reactions ranged from indifference to curiosity to enthusiastic approval.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith proposes a series of questions researchers should consider toward the aim of decolonizing research methodologies, particularly in a cross-cultural context, as research has served as ‘an important part of the colonization process because it is concerned with defining legitimate knowledge’ (1999:173); within this valuable list are the questions, ‘For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?’ and ‘To whom is the researcher accountable?’ (1999:173). From the outset, I thought a lot about accountability and what it meant me for me to do research in an activist context. My research questions arose from a desire to support what I saw as a grassroots movement to challenge structures rooted in exploitation—politically, I was broadly aligned with the

organizations and activists who were at the center of my research questions. Although I was conducting field research ‘at home’—I was raised across the river from New York in New Jersey, and spent substantial time in New York City, where my father and other family members lived—the field I was stepping into entangled social experiences that were outside of my own experience in many ways. As mentioned above, I fit in easily with BWC staff and in fact, my own social circle overlapped with them. The staff came from a range of backgrounds—from Adam, the white lawyer who was founder and director of the organization, to Diego, a young Mexican man from a working class family that had immigrated to the US when he was a toddler—all of whom were involved in familiar worlds of organizing and activism. Their own relations to the workers they organized with—‘the base’—was complex as well. Luis, whose role evolved from Development & Policy Associate to Director of Programs, came from a working-class, Chicano family and expressed his position as such:

But in terms of working class, the idea is that when you identify as working class—to be honest and frank—to say you’re working class in an organization that organizes workers is to say that it’s less problematic for you to be there because you’re closer to the base. I do believe that I am—within the universe of nonprofit professionals—I do think I’m somewhat closer to the base than others, especially those who come from very privileged backgrounds. So it’s a balance between being able to embrace an identity like that, recognizing the contradictions and the limits of it, especially now that I’m highly educated, went to one of the best schools in the country, I get paid more than the people I’m organizing with—not much more—[laughs] some. I have a lot of privileges that complicate it. But I guess, going back and just thinking through it, it’s really about having a certain humility. A certain humility and a certain honesty to be oneself, and to appreciate, for better or worse, the way you enter into these settings. So it’s situational too, what it means in terms of being working class—currently my income is higher...my educational accomplishments are higher than most working class people in this country. But like any identity, it’s always having to adapt to changing conditions around.

This honesty and humility was something I too strove to embody in my interactions in the field. I come from a white, middle-class background and the attendant security and opportunities that come with this. My mother is a third-generation immigrant in a family of Russian Jewish background, and my father is an immigrant from Europe; tracing the differences between how my family’s immigration and work pathways were slotted into racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies and how the

members of BWC experienced these hierarchies heightened my commitment to this work, my commitment to challenging the ways these hierarchies are perpetuated and reconstructed through not only violence but also passivity. So, how did this orient my accountability?

In the beginning, I conceived of my accountability in a relatively straightforward way: I saw myself as accountable to BWC—accountable both in the way I carried out my research, and in the way I analyzed, theorized, and published it. This meant that I was committed to taking on responsibility as a volunteer and working hard, and it also meant that my analysis should be relevant, honest, and useful. As my fieldwork progressed, however, I began to see that my accountability was not quite so straightforward, but was actually manifold: to the workers involved in BWC's campaigns; to the various staff members with their distinct positions and perspectives; and to the grassroots labor movement more broadly. Although the goals of these groups often align, the spaces where they do not were precisely what complicated my understanding of accountability and importantly, enriched my analysis (Stuesse 2016).

Chapter 2 – The Hierarchies of Labor

We would get much further along the road to understanding how the regime of capital can function through differentiation and difference, rather than through similarity and identity, if we took more seriously this question of the cultural, social, national, ethnic and gendered composition of historically different and specific forms of labour. (Hall 1986:24)

The US working class has been defined by shifting formations of diversity from its beginnings, and equally shaped by racialized and gendered notions of economic and social worthiness. Dominant ideologies about the moral value of labor have long been employed to construct hierarchies of worthiness by dictating who does what labor, whose labor is honorable, and whose labor even counts as labor; these hierarchies have been entrenched and further constituted through the law. As such, labor has been a central site for contesting not only economic value and inequality, but also social value, freedom, and citizenship. In the United States, capital's demands for labor—and, in particular, its demands for surplus labor that stands ready for exploitation—have historically been filled by racialized groups who 'have a history of being excluded from the rights and privileges of citizenship' (Ferguson 2004:15). Yet while the accumulation of surplus labor ignores and violates normative boundaries of race, gender, and citizenship, those same normative prescriptions are used 'to establish the *value* of that labor' (Ferguson 2004:16, emphasis mine).

In tracing the structural and historical roots of the creation of inequality out of difference as a defining feature of the US labor market, this chapter will serve as a foundation for examining the conditions for organizing across difference among workers today in New York's industrial bakeries. The possibilities of solidarity and workers' willingness to partake in organizing and collective action are shaped in part by materially and subjectively different experiences of class that have been structured through the economic, legal, moral, and ideological realms; this chapter will thus trace some of the historical conditions that have produced what I call the *hierarchies of labor* through the

ongoing, shifting classification of the value of workers and their labor along lines of race, gender, nationality, and citizenship. These stratified valuations of labor—and of those doing that labor—structure and justify global and local hierarchies, ensuring the existence of a lower stratum of the working class—a cheap labor force—whose economic devaluation is underpinned by social and moral devaluation.

As the construction of inequality from difference is intrinsic to capitalism (Mullings 1997:10; see also Federici 2004:63), it is essential work to analyze how hierarchies and inequalities are constructed in the context of capitalism. These hierarchies and inequalities manifest not only in the more obvious dynamic between the working class and the capitalist class, but within the working class as well. Capitalism thrives on the ongoing production of these stratifications, even if the ‘content’ of who is situated where is shifting; in fact, the shifting nature of these hierarchies often serves the interests of capitalism by entrenching competition.

These deep roots of marginalization reveal the importance of an analysis that understands race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality to be constitutive of rather than peripheral to class, the latter view being the traditional analysis of the mainstream labor movement. In rooting their approaches firmly within frameworks of racial, immigrant, and gender justice, most worker centers draw attention to difference and stratification within processes of capital accumulation, resisting the longstanding implication that such frameworks introduce distractions and divisions to a potent class analysis. This study therefore rests upon the premise that people’s class—their ‘positionality in relation to processes of capital accumulation’ (Harvey 1997:359)—is constituted through race, gender, and citizenship to produce historically and geographically specific meanings and experiences of these modes of social organization.

The aim of this chapter is to trace the particular history of how these *hierarchies of labor* have been structured in the US, with particular attention paid to the role of race, gender, and nationality. By establishing how labor has been and continues to be a critical site for negotiating economic and social value, freedom, and citizenship, the historical review in this chapter lays the foundation for the analysis in subsequent chapters of the complex effects of difference and stratification in shaping worker subjectivity and agency, how these hierarchies manifest within the workplace, and how BWC's organizing approach fares in cultivating worker solidarity and associational power within this context.

My reference to the 'value of labor' opens the door to a cascade of debates in both Marxist scholarship and anthropology. For example, there is a vast literature on Marx's labor theory of value that interprets, defends, or roundly rejects its utility; for the most part, I do not bring this literature into my analysis. Instead, my use of the term 'value' follows a certain anthropological tendency in invoking the more general, multi-stranded meanings embedded in the notions of economic, social, and moral value. The following definition of value illustrates my starting point:

'Value' indicates a terrain where people negotiate the boundaries defining worth, operating at the intersection of institutional top-down normative frameworks and collective bottom-up meanings and obligations. (Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S4)

This definition recognizes two aspects important to the *hierarchies of labor* framework: multiple, intersecting scales and multiple, intersecting arenas of value. While discussions of labor organizing most evidently link to economic value in the form of wages, benefits, and economic security, I root my analysis in the assertion that the economic valuation of labor is intimately entwined with the social and moral valuation—the purported *worthiness*—of that labor and of those doing that labor. Regarding multiple scales, this framework will allow me to bridge this chapter's historical review of

the structural construction of hierarchies of labor with later chapters' analyses of workers' subjective experiences of these hierarchies of worthiness.

A single chapter cannot do justice to the enormous volume of historical and legal material detailing the intricate intersections of labor, citizenship, race, and gender in the US; as such, I limit this review to an illustrative discussion of three historical transitions that expose fault lines and turning points, revealing how the construction of the US labor force has, in various ways, been a pivotal site for defining social value, citizenship, and freedom. The first section looks at how the political philosophies of liberalism and republicanism asserted moral ideas of labor that were used to cement the link between race, gender, and citizenship in the United States. These ideas have fueled ongoing notions of what counts as labor, what labor is honorable, and thus who is valuable. The chapter then continues on to reveal how the links between labor and freedom expanded for white men, while the abolition of slavery failed to dismantle racial domination and instead the value of certain labor continued to be degraded along racialized and gendered lines. The third section of this chapter focuses on freedom of movement—and restrictions thereof—as a means of accumulating and controlling labor. I outline the rise of federal immigration law after emancipation, first tracing its continuities with antebellum state-level restrictions on mobility and then demonstrating how immigration and citizenship law have been used not only to build the legal 'borders of belonging' (Welke 2010), but also to fill capital's demands for labor with groups who have been excluded from citizenship. Finally, I expand this analysis to show how exclusions from substantive citizenship—not only formal citizenship—have served to perpetuate racial disparities from the past into the present.

Revolutionaries, wives, and slaves: race, gender, and the capacity for citizenship

The value-laden concepts of free labor and liberal citizenship evolved alongside each other, becoming entangled in the ideal of the (white, male, adult) ‘worker citizen’ (Anderson 2015; Glenn 2002). This section first outlines the liberal roots of the moral value of labor and then traces how these were used to build labor hierarchies along axes of race and gender that gave rise to the (shifting) boundaries of free/unfree labor, honorable/degraded labor, and indeed, what even counts as labor. The organization of labor along dynamic lines of race and gender has been one of the most durable, pervasive sources of hierarchies and inequalities in global power structures since the early development of capitalism (Quijano 2007b:47–48); the class structure and intricate hierarchies of labor in the US did not emerge solely according to the imperatives of capitalist production, but were also fuelled by racialized and gendered ideologies of labor, freedom, and value. Liberal and republican political theory created the boundaries of free and dignified labor, which were continuously contested, but rested consistently upon their dichotomous others—unfree labor and drudgery.

The liberal roots of the moral value of labor

The American revolutionaries, fighting for independence from the British monarchy in the eighteenth century, found substantial inspiration in Locke’s liberalism, which declared the right of men to self-ownership—property in themselves, property in their labor, and, significantly, property indirectly produced through labor that they owned or hired (Brace 2004:32; Welke 2010:22). This Lockean right to property was imagined to be rooted in the divine, moral obligation to improve the earth, to be *productive*, rather than expecting the earth to act as a ‘womb’; all were born free, but only

those who proved rational and industrious were entitled to the fruits of that labor (Brace 2004:13–25). This improvement ideology underpinned much of the European modern, colonialist rationale for violent dispossession and enslavement—the Native Americans, for example, were painted by the English colonialists as savage and incapable of properly using and improving the land God had given them, and they were therefore rightfully displaced (Brace 2004:8–9; Roediger 2007:21).

This Lockean view of property, disconnecting labor from access to land and defending the right to private property as necessary for self-preservation, while increasingly entrenched, did not go uncontested. Winstanley, a seventeenth-century radical theorist who had been active in the Digger movement, argued that private property was incompatible with freedom as it forced the poor into alienated wage labor and divorced labor from the right to land. This dissenting view reflects a current that has run steadily through the anti-property literature—‘from Winstanley through Godwin and Proudhon to Marx’ (Brace 2004:21)—which views private property as rooted in dispossession and therefore as coercing people into wage labor through their loss of the freedom to use and consume resources. The contrast in the moral aspects of these strands of thought is significant as well, with the ‘improvement’ ideology of Locke highlighting idleness as the cause of poverty, while theorists like Winstanley pointed to dispossession and thus lack of access to land as the cause of poverty; echoes of this ideological debate continue to reverberate strongly today. Yet the moral value of labor—and the *duty* to labor—was highlighted on both sides, with the key distinction that while Locke asserted that labor hired or owned by someone became the employer or owner’s own labor, Winstanley condemned those who lived off the labor of others (Brace 2004:29–32).

Since the arrival of colonialists in the Americas, racial difference was mapped onto the liberal ideologies of civility and moral worth, marking white men as self-owning, free, and deserving of

their privileges because of their virtuous and hard-working nature, in contrast to Native Americans, slaves, and landless laborers whose 'labour was stigmatised as inefficient and their rationality and moral autonomy as limited' (Brace 2004:7–8). This moral distinction provided justification for appropriating the land of Native Americans, or conquering and controlling other people's land through colonialism (Brace 2004:7–8; Glenn 2002:18; Loomba 1998), employing racialized conceptions of property rights that served to 'structure inclusion and exclusion, and notions of civilisation and barbarism' (Brace 2004:7). As the lines of racial difference grew increasingly entrenched and the privileges of whiteness thus greater, whiteness came to share a critical characteristic of property—the right to exclude—and indeed, whiteness itself became a valuable property rather than simply an ascriptive or descriptive characteristic (Harris 1993). The conception of whiteness as property underlay both the extermination of Native Americans and the presumed legitimacy of white appropriation of their land, as well as the seizure and appropriation of African and African American people's labor. Whiteness became equated with ownership and blackness with non-ownership, leading to the expectation that property and race defined each other (Brace 2004:2; Welke 2010:30–31). These notions formed the basis of conceptions of property rights in the US, and eventually racialized property rights were codified into law, leading to the enshrinement of white privilege in property rights and far beyond (Harris 1993:1728). Because of the centrality of property and self-ownership in liberal notions of citizenship, personhood, and ability to govern (Brace 2004:7–8), the progressive entrenchment of whiteness as a moral, valuable form of property had deep implications in linking citizenship, labor, and property through the lens of race.

The modern, colonial origins of racial domination

It was no accident that the entrenchment of racism coincided with the emerging foundations of capitalism—race was, in fact, critical to the development of the modern capitalist world economy

(Du Bois 1969; Brodtkin 2000; Mignolo 2006; Mullings 2005; Quijano 2007b; Winant 2009). Indeed, African enslaved labor and the rise of the modern world system were inextricably entwined, as the transatlantic slave trade transformed the terrain of possibilities of production, labor, and consumption, providing the economic backbone for development in the Western hemisphere and for the expansion of European capitalism (Brodtkin 2000; Holt 2009; Mullings 2005; Robinson 2000; Winant 2009).

Racism and the modern idea of race are now widely agreed to have become firmly established with the development of modernity, the expansion of European colonialism and imperialism, and the enslavement of Africans (Mullings 2005:671; Quijano 2007b:45; Winant 2009); Mignolo points to a ‘complicity between political economy and political theory, based on the racialization of human beings, languages, places, cultures, memories, knowledge, etc., is what characterizes modernity/coloniality... This was the “novelty” of the sixteenth century and the historical foundation of the racial colonial matrix whose logic is still at work today’ (2006:18). The label of ‘black’ to signify a *race*, rather than a descriptive color, was first applied to Native Americans during the Conquest, and later to African slaves kidnapped and sold by Europeans (Quijano 2007b:50); the racialized label of ‘white’ appeared later, but was also associated with the colonization of the Americas as a means of first distinguishing European explorers, traders, and settlers from the indigenous people of the Americas and then from Africans (*ibid.*; Roediger 1999:21). In colonial North America, the boundary between white and black became increasingly stark as it was embedded in a widening chasm between white, free labor and black, unfree labor. This transition is an instructive demonstration of how labor hierarchies shifted along lines of race to bolster the ever more prominent ideology of ‘free labor’ as a core tenet of liberal citizenship.

Liberal citizenship after the Revolution

Europeans arriving in the so-called ‘New World’ were lured with the promise that every man could be the owner of his labor and land, an attractive prospect to those emigrating from societies where that possibility was closed off to them (Foner 1995:xiii). The republican ideal upholding economic independence as the true form of freedom became firmly embedded in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, particularly as this aspiration actually seemed attainable for those (white men) who now had access to an expanding economy and expanding land prospects to the West (Foner 1995:xiii; Glenn 2002:59). In fact, these liberal and republican ideologies that had ‘rallied the troops’ for the American Revolution depended on inequality; the vision of freedom and economic independence was for white, able, property-owning—and thus *self*-owning and industrious—men, and it was these men who drafted the US Constitution in 1789 to protect their rights as such, excluding from American civil society women, slaves, property-less men, and those deemed idiots or insane (Welke 2010:22).

The distinctions between free and unfree labor, and independence and dependence, grew more pronounced after the Revolution, in the early years of the Republic. During the colonial period, there had been heavy reliance on both white indentured servants and Black slaves, and the work done by white servants and Black slaves was often indistinguishable (Roediger 2007:25). Indentured immigrants constituted a significant portion of workers during this time—men and women who wanted to immigrate often signed contracts agreeing to serve ‘for a specified period of time, typically four to seven years, in exchange for passage, a living, and the promise of “freedom dues” at the end of the contract’ (Glenn 2002:60). Not all came willingly, however—following the passage of the 1718 Transportation Act in Great Britain, approximately 50,000 felons were shipped to the American colonies, comprising about one quarter of British immigrants to colonial America; many

of them had been criminalized through vagrancy laws, thus creating a source of labor for the colonies, ‘one of the ways that the poor could be turned into the building blocks of Empire’ (Anderson 2013:31).

The quintessential form of involuntary labor was, however, chattel slavery. Although a continuum of labor unfreedom existed for whites during the colonial era—including indentured servitude, un-indentured servitude, apprenticeship, convict labor, and farm tenancy—the extreme end of that continuum, slavery, was solely imposed on Black people (Roediger 2007:25). None of the various forms of unfree labor for white men bound them for life, so their dependence was temporary and could realistically lead to a future in which they worked as independent craftsmen or farmers; this was in sharp contrast with the involuntary, lifelong servitude to which Blacks were relegated (Glenn 2002:60–61). As a result, there was for over a century a diverse range of unfree labor relations among white men, making the association of free labor with whites and unfree labor with Blacks less polarized than it would eventually become. The stage for this transition was set, however, by the critical fact that slavery was and had always been reserved only for Blacks. The egalitarian and libertarian rhetoric of the subsequent Revolutionary era made these varying grades of freedom increasingly untenable among white men, and the various forms of relatively unfree labor mostly disappeared for whites, leaving in their wake a stark dichotomy between white free labor and Black slave labor (Foner 1995:xi–xiii; Glenn 2002:61–62; Robinson 2000:77–80).

Slavery made the connection between work and citizenship unambiguous for Blacks—because slaves were a form of property and deemed incapable of *self*-ownership, they were the ‘quintessential noncitizens’ (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1203). As the US grew to hold four million slaves, the figure of the slave as dependent and unfree became inextricably entwined with blackness, cementing

property interest in whiteness and the purportedly natural capacity for citizenship as its opposing (and dependent) pole.

Women were also consigned to a state of permanent dependence. As the distinctions between independence and dependence grew to be more rigid and prominent along racial lines, they became increasingly gendered as well; independence became the territory of white men, while all Blacks and all women were relegated to dependence (Glenn 2002:23). After the Revolution, women were legally and effectively restricted to ‘enjoy the rights and protections of self-ownership and citizenship through men’ (Welke 2010:64–65). Unmarried, property-owning women—*femmes soles*—who had enjoyed the right to vote in many colonial jurisdictions were, in the new republic, denied the right to vote in all but one of the new state constitutions (Glenn 2002:23). The common law doctrine of coverture meant that after marriage, a woman’s legal identity was subsumed under her husband’s—her surname, her property, and the fruits of her labor were owned by her husband. Thus, the substantial labor carried out by women—including reproductive labor, work in the family business, industrial homework, taking in boarders—entitled them to no payment or shared ownership of family property (Glenn 2002:70). Property reform for married women carried out in the mid-nineteenth century and on gave married women the legal right to enter into contracts and inherit property, but courts interpreted the laws narrowly, ensuring that married women’s income from work inside the home remained the property of their husbands. This, combined with women’s exclusion from certain professions and the legal limitations on women’s work outside the home, ensured that women would be consigned to economic dependence on men (Welke 2010:66–69).

The dichotomy of public/private, like that of independent/dependent, arose from and was legitimated by liberal and Enlightenment theorists such as Locke and Rousseau. With the rise of capitalist industrialization, the public realm of the market and the private realm of the home became

increasingly defined in opposition to each other, leading to more fixed and gendered divisions between productive labor (men's work) and reproductive labor (women's work). As the public realm was associated with citizenship and independence, and the economic system measured value and independence through earning, unpaid labor—productive and reproductive—was not considered real work (Glenn 2002:70–71).

Contesting the boundaries of 'free labor'

The nineteenth century brought conflict surrounding the ideological links between labor and freedom to the fore, as it was the century that encompassed the rise of slave labor, the abolition of slave labor, and the rise of waged labor to outnumber both those enslaved and those self-employed. The marked rise in wage labor grated uncomfortably against the persistent view that the freedom promised to white men in America was rooted in economic independence and therefore the ownership of productive property, prompting social and legal debates about what constituted freedom and what sorts of coercive pressures to labor were legitimate. This disjuncture gave rise to the term 'wage slavery' as a widely used metaphor to challenge how free 'free labor' actually was, as it consigned men to dependence on another; the 'rhetorical mobilization of chattel slavery to criticize labor relations under capitalism' was, however, 'nothing new, or uniquely American' (Foner 1995:xvii). To reconcile the paradox of a 'free labor' system giving rise to 'wage slavery', wage laborers were depicted as being 'free to escape that status' (Montgomery 1967:30) through hard work; wage labor was a step on the ladder toward economic independence, an opportunity to be harnessed through honorable labor. This led to a confusing rhetorical elision of workers and employers, reflected in the labeling of new elites as the 'producing classes' or 'the "self-made man," according to which the employer was but a successful workingman'; in the same vein, the economic system was called the 'free-labor system' rather than 'capitalism' (Montgomery 1967:14–15). These

rhetorical and ideological twists successfully reconciled the valorization of economic independence with a Lockean view of man's self-ownership through ownership of his labor—be that his own labor or labor he owns through contract or ownership.

In contrast, the abolition of slavery in that century did not dismantle racial domination and stratification; instead, the labor of Black people was compelled through alternate legal and extra-legal means and the social and economic value of certain labor continued to be degraded along racialized and gendered lines.

After the Civil War: entrenching racial hierarchies

The abolishment of chattel slavery after the Civil War was accompanied by other federal legislation banning all forms of indentured labor, including an 1867 anti-peonage act that banned involuntary and voluntary servitude—‘free labor’ had become the law of the land. This marked transition coincided with a surge of growth in manufacturing and shifting forms of labor control under this new capitalist industrial system (Glenn 2002:71). Yet the abolition of slavery was not enough to sever the link between blackness, dependence, and unfreedom. The understanding of racialization as a malleable tool for social and economic domination was asserted in the early 20th century by W. E. B. Du Bois, who highlighted the central role of enslaved Africans in constructing and fueling industry and commerce in the US (and beyond). Du Bois argued that labor—specifically, the South's fight to protect a system of unfree labor and the North's drive to impose a free labor system—was a central issue of the Civil War, and that slaves' refusal to work in favor of taking up arms with the Union army during the war was, in effect, a general strike that was decisive in the outcome of the war (Du Bois 1969).

He described the relations between poor whites and newly freed slaves after the Civil War, positing that the ‘public and psychological wage’ of whiteness—that is, the perceived privileges of whiteness—were great enough to cause poor whites to respond to the perceived labor competition and the insecurity of wage labor by aligning themselves with the white planters (the employers), perpetuating white supremacy and violence against Black people rather than seeking class unity with their fellow (Black) laborers. To be sure, it was not only a ‘psychological’ wage—white workers earned a material wage significantly higher than Black workers—but this material benefit was supplemented by the social privileges accorded to white people in the justice system, the education system, the government, social treatment, and beyond.

Right here had lain the seat of the trouble before the war. All the regular and profitable jobs went to Negroes, and the poor whites were excluded. It seemed after the war immaterial to the poor white that profit from exploitation of black labor continued to go to the planter. He regarded the process as the exploitation of black folk by white, not of labor by capital. When, then, he faced the possibility of being himself compelled to compete with a Negro wage worker, while both were the hirelings of a white planter, his whole soul revolted. He turned, therefore, from war service to guerrilla warfare, particularly against Negroes. (Du Bois 1969:117)

Here we see how the foundation of the US economy, built upon the unfree labor of enslaved Black people—a plantation system embedded within a global capitalist class system (Hall 1980:320)—evolved in the particular context of post-war Reconstruction to entrench a racialized class structure even after enslaved Blacks were freed. Du Bois argues that the white working class endorsed and advanced this racial subordination, a pattern that has had global implications for hierarchies of labor. Building on this argument, Roediger (2007) asserts that ‘working class formation and the systematic development of a sense of whiteness went hand in hand for the US white working class’ (2007:8), and that the ‘status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships, North and South’ (2007:13).

The short-lived period of Reconstruction failed to ensure economic independence for freed Blacks, a failure attributed most prominently to the government's weak and limited attempts to undertake land redistribution (Du Bois 1969:611; Marable 1991:6). Once Reconstruction was over, Southern states swiftly began to roll back the modest progress Blacks had made in the years since the Civil War through both legal measures and violent terrorization of Blacks (Welke 2010:48–49).

Significantly, the abolition of slavery did not effectively give freedmen true control of their labor and therefore full self-ownership. The 'freedom of contract' that came with emancipation did not allow free Blacks the freedom to *not* contract; a panoply of laws criminalizing vagrancy, the failure to be employed, or quitting employment imposed compulsory labor as punishment, effectively continuing a system of forced labor in the South through the mid-twentieth century (Steinfeld 2009:4; Welke 2010:31, 77).

Drawing on the work of W. E. B. Du Bois and Silvia Federici, among others, Kasmir and Carbonella (2014) describe how dispossession—which they define holistically as 'the varied acts of disorganization, defeat, and enclosure that are at once economic, martial, social, and cultural and that create the conditions for a new set of social relations' (2014:7)—is intimately linked to the production of difference and inequality. They point to Du Bois' analysis (1920) of the 1917 race riots in East St. Louis, Illinois, another instance in which he describes the making of hierarchies among the working class and the construction of whiteness. As Black workers migrated north to St. Louis, fleeing the multiple oppressions they continued to face in the South, they were blocked from joining unions of skilled white workers, but ultimately invited to join laborers' unions in which white and Black workers briefly exercised solidarity and won changes on the job. But after the government began suppressing workers' collective activity under the guise of wartime production needs, many 'not-quite-white eastern and southern European laborers' (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014:12–13)

chose to abandon that solidarity in fear of insecurity and blocked upward mobility, and they joined with white workers to violently terrorize Black workers and families and drive them out of the city.

If the white workingmen of East St. Louis felt sure that Negro workers would not and could not take the bread and cake from their mouths, their race hatred would never have been translated into murder. If the black workingmen of the South could earn a decent living under decent circumstances at home, they would not be compelled to underbid their white fellows.

Thus the shadow of hunger, in a world which never needs to be hungry, drives us to war and murder and hate. But why does hunger shadow so vast a mass of men? Manifestly because in the great organizing of men for work a few of the participants come out with more wealth than they can possibly use, while a vast number emerge with less than can decently support life. (Du Bois 1920:99)

This perspective is important in directing us toward an analysis that ‘sees the whiteness of the white worker in the broad context of class formation rather than in the narrow confines of job competition’ (Roediger 2007:13). Connecting the concepts of the ‘wages of whiteness’ and the politics of dispossession, then, it becomes clear that divisions are continually mobilized and created during every wave of dispossession—‘the making and remaking of such divisions is the lifeblood of labor accumulation’ (Kasimir and Carbonella 2014:11). Immigration also played a significant role in this process, as suggested by the differently racialized European and European-descended workers in East St. Louis, and more broadly by the explicit use of immigrants as strike-breakers beginning in the nineteenth century with the help of the Commissioner of Immigration (Montgomery 1967:23–24).

Such divisions along lines of race and nationality were persistent issues in the factories where BWC was organizing. At Sweet Tooth Bakery, for example, workers described divisions between Black workers and Latino workers—manifesting particularly as conflicts over work ethic—as well as tensions between Mexican workers and the ‘whiter’ Colombian workers. As I will describe in Chapter Five, stratification of the workforce from above through hiring practices and favoritism was sometimes amplified through workers’ racialized discourses of worthiness, creating fractures in the workforce that impeded broader solidarity.

Racialized boundaries of 'women's work'

The moral value of women's labor was deeply stratified across racial difference. Freed Black women who chose to focus on reproductive labor instead of seeking waged labor were 'scorned as idle' by officials of the Freedman's Bureau (Welke 2010:77) or 'accused...of trying to "play the lady"' by planters who resented the loss of field workers (Glenn 2002:100). This was in marked contrast to the general attitude holding that white women should remain in the private domain and not be made to seek waged work outside the home; the Black man who sought to support his wife and daughters did not earn the economic independence normally associated with the 'provider role' but was instead portrayed by white men as weakly submitting to the will of his female family members (Glenn 2002:100–101).

Because women of color—from times of slavery through today—have worked outside of the house in far greater proportions than white women (Brodkin 2000:245; Davis 1981:5), scholars have argued that women of color are deemed to be *workers* and not mothers (Brodkin 2000; Collins 1991; Glenn 1985). One of the earlier contributions of feminist theory to the concept of class was to challenge the analytic treatment of domestic work—the labor of reproduction—as being outside of class relations, and to argue that the labor of reproduction was in fact integral to capitalist production and the division of labor, and therefore the power differential between genders was due to the mystification and invisibility of the labor of reproduction, rather than its irrelevance to capitalist accumulation (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Hartmann 1984; James 1973). The feminist campaign 'Wages for Housework' exemplified this perspective. Yet feminist theorists of color subsequently challenged white women's feminist analyses for at best, ignoring, and at worst, actively working against the interests of women of color; they revealed how feminist theory had been dominated by a category of 'woman' who was implicitly white and middle-class (Baca et al. 1986;

Collins 1991; Davis 1981; hooks 1981; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Black women employed as domestic workers had been organizing and campaigning for better wages and working conditions since at least the early 20th century; this, and the sheer prevalence of women of color historically either enslaved or hired to be domestic workers by white families, challenged the fundamental premise of ‘Wages for Housework’ to confront the intersectionality of oppression.¹¹

After emancipation: the legal creation of precarious labor immigration

‘The workers, united, will never be defeated!’

‘El pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido!’¹²

May 1st, 2013 — It’s May Day, and a stream of people are chanting and marching through the streets of Manhattan on an ‘Immigrant Worker Justice Tour’. The sun is shining and it’s warm, warm enough that I forget to bring a jacket. I’m marching with the Brooklyn Worker Center staff, some ‘allies,’ and one member from Sweet Tooth Bakery; a few of us carry the BWC banner, while one staff member carries the IWW banner with fellow Wobblies. Although May 1st was chosen as International Workers’ Day to commemorate the Haymarket Affair of 1886 in Chicago, it has long been under the shadow of the official Labor Day federal holiday in September, selected so as not to encourage radical labor protests. But May Day surged back into the public sphere in 2006, when weeks of immigrant rights rallies—organized in opposition to immigration reform legislation that was widely perceived as harsh and repressive—culminated in a widespread strike of undocumented immigrant workers and massive rallies in support across the country: ‘A Day Without Immigrants’. With slogans such as ‘We are not criminals’ and ‘We built your homes’, these immigrants asserted their value as *workers*, in contradistinction to the lazy, the criminal, the parasitic; work ethic was linked to deserving citizenship.

The May Day rallies in New York City gained renewed momentum again in 2011 with the creation of the May Day United network; in 2012 Occupy Wall Street, immigrant rights groups, and labor unions

¹¹ The concept of ‘intersectionality’ first appeared in academic literature in the 1980s, in the field of Critical Race Studies (Crenshaw 1989); striving to move beyond the additive approach of previous theorizing of multiple oppressions, intersectionality highlighted their ‘mutually constituting’ (Brodin 2000) nature, conceiving of them as ‘interlocking oppressions’ (Smith and Combahee River Collective 1986). This theoretical approach was born before being named and applied in CRS, however, in the writings of feminist theorists of color in the 1970s and 1980s (Davis 1981; hooks 1981; Lorde 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Smith and Combahee River Collective 1986), who argued that the specific ways they experienced multiple oppressions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation was not as the sum of independent parts, but as a unique intersection of these oppressions. Marxist feminists were also theorizing ‘triple oppressions’ around the same period (Dalla Costa and James 1975; James 1973), however their analysis followed more of an additive approach than an intersectional one.

¹² ‘The people, united, will never be defeated!’

came together for marches and protests, including the first ‘Immigrant Worker Justice Tour’ planned by the Immigrant Worker Justice group of Occupy Wall Street.

This year, the march makes various stops at restaurants and companies where workers (mostly, though not all immigrant workers) are involved in labor campaigns, stopping outside each one for a quick rally of support. The chants acknowledge the intersecting struggles for worker rights and immigrant justice—for labor justice and freedom of movement—in both content and bilingualism.

“When workers’ rights are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!”

“When immigrant rights are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!”

“Aquí estamos, y no nos vamos! Y si nos echan, nos regresamos!”¹³

The final stop on the tour is in front of Senator Chuck Schumer’s office, because he is in the so-called ‘Gang of 8’ that has been meeting to design immigration reform legislation. At this stop there is a thick line of cops in the street along the curb. A few people make speeches, and then a leader from an anti-deportation human rights organization starts the chant:

‘Schumer, Obama, would you deport your mama?’¹⁴

The crowd continues the chant loudly for a few minutes before the tour wraps up, and then most people make their way downtown to the May Day rallies organized by a broader swathe of political organizations.

*

While the mainstream labor movement has historically had an uneven stance toward immigrants (as described in the Introduction chapter), the majority of worker centers in the US have emerged precisely to fill the gap in support for immigrant workers (Fine 2006). As suggested by the vignette above, their analyses of and approaches to labor exploitation highlight the large role played by restrictive immigration controls that disproportionately affect racialized peoples. Regulation of movement has long been inextricably linked with the control of labor (Anderson 2015:14), and more broadly, with the creation of political orders and subjects (Kotef 2014:3). This section will trace the rise of federal immigration law after the abolishment of slavery, and its continuities with prior state-level restrictions on movement, in order to demonstrate how restrictions on mobility have been

¹³ ‘We are here, and we’re not leaving! If they throw us out, we’ll come right back!’

¹⁴ Chuck Schumer is a US Senator from New York who was part of the ‘Gang of 8’.

combined with exclusions from citizenship in order to fill the labor demands of capitalism while maintaining racialized hierarchies—a pattern that continues to this day. I begin by examining the shift from state-based restrictions on movement to the rise of federal immigration law after the Civil War, then continue on to outline the development of federal immigration law in the US. In doing so, I chart how the legal ‘borders of belonging’ (Welke 2010) were structured around race and gender and consequently have been in a mutually constitutive relationship with the moral and economic value of labor along these lines. I then review the role of race and class in the current situation of immigration law, showing how a significant number of workers continue to be legally subordinated into precarious, cheap labor. Finally, I describe current racial/ethnic disparities in social and economic security in order to demonstrate that these historical exclusions and restrictions reverberate into the present.

From state-based exclusions to federal regulation

The legal precursor to immigration laws were vagrancy laws, which restricted mobility within national borders. These restrictions on human mobility initially stemmed from rulers’ anxieties about social order and labor shortages; the solution was to restrict the mobility of the poor to both exercise control and create a labor force. English vagrancy laws beginning in the feudal era of the fourteenth century classified those who refused to work for local masters as vagrants and allowed for their imprisonment; significantly, these laws also criminalized giving alms to beggars, underscoring that the laws were a means of disciplining the poor and compelling them to labor for masters (Anderson 2013:12–17). Migration restrictions have thus developed along class lines from their prototypical beginnings, and the legacy is evident in historical restrictions of movement in the United States and in their current-day manifestations.

We can begin by dispelling the myth that the United States had fully open borders and unrestricted immigration until the 1870s (Neuman 1993). In fact, in the nineteenth century individual states effected a range of restrictions on the movement of certain people, mainly: slaves, free African Americans, Black sailors arriving on foreign ships, the poor, the disabled, the sick, and those with criminal convictions (Law 2014; Neuman 1993). Many states were firmly opposed to the federal government regulating migration; states in the South were determined to protect the slavery system and the racial hierarchy and opposed any incursion of federal regulation of movement (lest it lessen their power to control the movement of free and enslaved Blacks), while the northeastern states that received the highest number of immigrants were eager to exclude the poor, the sick, and convicts (Law 2014; Neuman 1993). It was thus not until after the Civil War, when slavery had been abolished, that federal control over immigration became possible; significantly, abolition was soon followed by strong pressure to restrict the immigration of Chinese workers, a restriction that required federal regulation because it involved discrimination against a particular country (Neuman 1993:1893). State-level restrictions on freedom of movement before the Civil War thus aimed to maintain and produce a supply of labor, while curtailing the entrance of and limiting state responsibility for ‘unproductive’ and ‘undesirable’ subjects—an impetus that continued into federal immigration regulation through to the present.

In examining the beginning of federal immigration law, Redman (2010) asserts that the Coolie Trade Prohibition Act of 1862 was the first federal law to regulate immigration, as it barred American participation in the ‘international Chinese coolie trade.’ The ‘coolie trade’ referred to the importation of indentured Chinese laborers, mainly to Cuba and Peru, where they were effectively treated like slaves who could be bought and resold; while they were generally under eight-year contracts, most did not survive the brutal working conditions to see the end of their contracts, and those who did either saw their contracts ignored, or were required to extend or return to China (Redman 2010:6–

8). The Coolie Trade Prohibition Act specified that it did not seek to curtail *voluntary* Chinese labor immigration to the United States, but rather to outlaw American participation in the transportation, sale, or importation of Chinese ‘coolies;’ it was thus part of the extended effort throughout the nineteenth century to outlaw American participation in the African slave trade, beginning with the Congressional ban on importing slaves from Africa in 1808. The Coolie Trade Prohibition Act was passed after extensive debate about the coolie trade. It was variously promoted as a replacement for African slavery (in 1852, the *New York Times* argued that Chinese coolies were more hard-working than African slaves and only slightly more expensive), opposed by Southerners who feared it would give Cuba and South America an unfair competitive advantage, and opposed as being immoral because it was basically a form of slavery (Redman 2010:15–16).

Because the 1862 law was aimed at the slave trade but explicitly distinguished that from voluntary Chinese labor migration so as not to impede the latter, Redman points to this law as a ‘bridge between federal recognition of the international slave trade and what eventually became exclusive federal control over immigration’, as it was passed shortly before the abolition of slavery, as ‘the country was moving away from importation and towards immigration of human beings’ (Redman 2010:5). This act was amended in 1875 by the better-known Page Law, which excluded convicts and prostitutes from immigrating to the United States. The legacy of these laws can be seen still in federal immigration law, as they set the stage for an expansion of grounds for excluding non-US citizens who were deemed ‘lunatics, idiots, convicts, and those likely to become a public charge...[and later,] people with relatively minor convictions, communicable diseases including tuberculosis, lack of immunization, membership in the Communist Party, and people who are considered to have provided “material support” to terrorists’ (Redman 2010:52–53).

The legal creation of precarious, cheap labor

The connection between the immigration law, the boundaries of citizenship, and labor subordination become clear if we look at the groups whose labor was welcomed but who were shut out from the possibility of naturalization. Adhering to the equation of male whiteness with independence and self-control, racialized others were imagined as dependent and lacking the capacity for self-governance, and therefore ineligible for citizenship; as such, racialized groups of immigrants, such as the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos were accepted as a labor force, but excluded from the right to naturalize (Glenn 2002:18). This section will examine this process through a closer look at immigration and citizenship law and its role in creating precarious, cheap labor.

Citizenship law is the legal statement of who is allowed to belong. While ‘citizenship’ in popular usage most often refers to membership in a nation-state, the concept of citizenship encompasses a broad range of elements; for example, the liberal theoretical tradition conceives of citizenship as a legal status that confers rights, whereas the republican tradition views citizenship as politics, meaning participation in the governance of one’s community (Bosniak 2006:20). Citizenship is often examined through one or more of its distinct dimensions: legal status, rights, collective identity, and political participation (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008:154; Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1185; Sassen 2011:2), though these four dimensions are by no means rigid. Indeed, scholarship on citizenship often explores how these different dimensions complement or contradict one another in various contexts.

The openness and relative ease of US naturalization has long been upheld as a shining example of an inclusive, welcoming nation. US citizenship can be acquired in three ways: through *jus soli* (citizenship through birth on US territory); through *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by virtue of having a

parent with US citizenship); or through naturalization. Naturalization is relatively straightforward for legal permanent residents who have been in the US for at least five years, leading some scholars to classify legal citizenship in the US as ‘thin’ in comparison with other Western democracies (Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008:6–7). This narrative of openness begins to unravel, however, when we look at who has access to naturalization, and what citizenship has meant in practice for different groups (Schuck 1998:25). The underlying paradox of citizenship—its nature being simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, providing purportedly equal rights for citizens while excluding ‘aliens’ (Bosniak 2006)—allows for the peculiar fact that citizenship has a history as both an important source of rights and as a tool of subordination; it is ‘constitutively ambivalent, or perhaps more accurately, *bivalent*’ (Ahmad 2011:1–2, original emphasis).

If citizenship laws are a statement of who is allowed to belong to a nation, then immigration laws proclaim who is allowed to *be* within national borders—or at least, who is allowed to be there with the protection of legal status. The intersection of exclusion, immigration, and labor has a long history in the United States. This history began with slavery, followed by racially exclusive citizenship criteria that created a large presence of people living and working in the U.S. without a possible path to citizenship, and finally, led to the current laws and structures that leave millions of immigrants without viable chances to naturalize. This practice of ‘[k]eeping some people outside of the bounds of equality and citizenship served employers’ need for cheap labor in the past, and continues to do so today’ (Chomsky 2007:26). Current global divisions of labor and distribution of resources betray the continuation of a pattern of exploitation and social domination described as a ‘racial colonial matrix’ (Mignolo 2006:18) in which ‘the large majority of the exploited, the dominated, the discriminated against, are precisely the members of the “races”, “ethnics” or “nations” into which the colonized populations, were categorized in the formative process of that world power, from the conquest of America and onward’ (Quijano 2007a:168–69).

US citizenship has been determined along lines of race, class, gender, and ability since its legal birth. After declaring independence in 1776, the former colonies adopted English common law as their law, demonstrating that the war for independence had not been fought with the interest of changing the legal system; English common law, which applied only to the ‘landed gentry’, conferred full personhood on white, able, male owners of property (Welke 2010: 22-23). It is thus of no surprise that the first naturalization law of the US, passed in 1790, codified racial and class restrictions by limiting naturalization to ‘free white persons’.

Native Americans were denied birthright citizenship until 1924, and even then were not granted naturalization rights (Chomsky 2007:202–3). Even free Black people were not considered citizens in most states, a reflection of deeply rooted faith in white supremacy that was further established in law with the Supreme Court ruling *Dred Scott* (1857),¹⁵ explicitly excluding people of African descent from US citizenship. The Fourteenth Amendment and its citizenship clause overruled *Dred Scott* in 1868, yet this failed to provide Blacks with substantive citizenship and so nearly a century later, the Voting Rights Act (1965) was passed to ‘secure the franchise for blacks and other minorities’ (Schuck 1998:27). Many other groups were denied substantive citizenship despite holding citizenship in name: women were formal citizens long before they attained the right to vote; US citizens of Mexican descent were deported under the Spolansky Act of 1931 that aimed to root out communist influence in Detroit (Buff 2008:14). Asians were formally excluded from citizenship rights for decades; Chinese were first given naturalization rights in 1943, and other Asians were denied access to naturalization until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 eliminated all racial restrictions on immigration and naturalization.

¹⁵ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1857).

Immigration law and the production of ‘illegality’ have also shaped and been shaped by US class and racial structures. Employers’ valorization of migrant labor—and especially undocumented migrants’ labor—as a cheap, abundant, and vulnerable labor supply is widely recognized (Burawoy 1976; Bustamante 1976, 1978, Calavita 1992a, 2005; Castells 1975; Cockcroft 1986; Galarza 1964; De Genova 2002). The US has long depended on migrant labor to expand the economy and increase profits for the capitalist class, but governments have been consistently forced to contend with political opposition from citizens and labor unions (Allegro 2010; Bach 1978; Calavita 1998, 2005; Chavez 2007; De Genova 2002, 2004). US immigration policy has therefore followed a jagged path marked by ostensibly contradictory deportations and importations of immigrant labor, reflecting that ‘law often represents the state’s attempt to grapple with or reconcile the conflicts derived from those contradictions’ (Calavita 1992a:8–9).

The aforementioned 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, is a clear example of this jagged path; marking the beginning of racial and ethnic barriers being placed on immigration, it is also a significant example. While Chinese immigrants’ labor was welcomed in the massive project of building up US railroad infrastructure, Chinese immigrant workers were racialized as inferior and ‘slavelike’ by white workers from their first arrival in the US. Racist hostility peaked when thousands of workers lost jobs during an economic recession in 1877, culminating in anti-Chinese mob violence and rioting. Ultimately, pressure from white labor groups and politicians prompted Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act, which remained in effect until 1943 (Glenn 2002:85–86).

Another significant demonstration of this can be seen in US immigration policy toward Mexicans, who have been increasingly categorized as ‘illegal’ immigrants according to the fluctuating labor needs and shifting immigration laws of the US. Undocumented migration in the US is mainly labor

migration (Burawoy 1976; Bustamante 1976; Castells 1975; Chavez 1992; De Genova 2002), and labor migrations are primarily fueled by domestic demand for certain kinds of labor (Harris 1995; Sassen 1999). The de facto policy of the US Government over the past century has been to allow the entry of cheap labor from Mexico, whether through an unrestricted border in the late 19th century (De Genova 2005; Ngai 2004), through the Bracero Program in the mid-20th century (Calavita 1992b; Ngai 2004), through present-day guest worker programs, or via the de facto ‘revolving door’ policy (De Genova 2005; Nevins 2002) that simultaneously allows a steady flow of undocumented workers to enter the country while only a limited number of them are deported. The undocumented migrant as laborer is ‘covertly tolerated’, while the undocumented migrant as person is ‘explicitly stigmatized as a person, family and community’ (Heyman 1998:161).

Corporations enjoy increased profits when they have access to workers who are willing to work for low wages, who do not organize and join unions, and importantly, who are vulnerable and temporary (and aware of it). Temporary workers are attractive because they can be summoned and then sent away—or deported—as needed, unlike the domestic workforce; an additional benefit is that the state will not have to support their broader living expenses, such as those needed to raise a family or retire. A workforce of undocumented migrants appears to accomplish these needs, particularly through creating the condition of ‘deportability’—the perpetual threat of deportation that reminds undocumented migrants of their vulnerability, imposing a Foucauldian sort of disciplinary power. It is ‘deportability, and not deportation per se, that has historically rendered undocumented migrant labor a distinctly disposable commodity’ (De Genova 2002:438, 2005; Harrison and Lloyd 2011). Deportability demonstrates the productive power of illegality, which does not only rely on the overt enforcement element of power (Inda 2006; Chávez 2007); many forms of legality are also tenuous in that they depend on employer sponsorship or unlikely renewal, thus also generating disciplinary power. Deporting a limited number of migrants serves as a constant reminder

to the remaining migrants that they are temporary, effectively disciplining them; it is the selective enforcement and non-enforcement—the seeming arbitrariness of enforcement—that accomplishes the imposition of deportability (Bach 1978: 538-9).

Racialization of Immigrants in the US

A final example ties together the racialized ideologies of free, productive labor with patterns of immigration. Upon arrival in the United States, immigrants have historically been racialized roughly according to a black/white binary. Class and colonial history shape this racialization process, which confers whiteness on immigrants according to ideals of liberal citizenship—those who are classified as productive and in-dependent (that is, not ‘likely to become a public charge’) become ‘whitened’, and those deemed inferior and non-productive are consigned to blackness. This process of racialization is ongoing and shifting, with certain ethnic groups fluctuating from whiteness to non-whiteness according to class and historical colonial relations; examples include Puerto Ricans being ‘blackened’, the changing racial classification of Mexicans in California, and the shifting racialization of Jews, all based on converging notions of race and class (Brodkin 2000; Grosfoguel and Georas 2000).

Ong describes perceptions in the US of Asian immigrants from different countries, and posits that notions of productivity and consumption shape ideas of who deserves to belong—who is a ‘good citizen’—‘weighing those who can pull themselves up by their bootstraps against those who make claims on the welfare state’ (Ong 1996:739). As an example, Ong describes how Cambodian refugees in the US were ‘ethnicized’ as people of color in a way that Vietnamese refugees were not—despite their arrival in the same period of time, and the reliance of both groups on refugee aid for the first two years—because the Cambodian refugees were perceived to all be peasants, whereas many of the Vietnamese refugees had been middle-class (Ong 1996:742). This reflects that in the

US, citizenship is treated as ‘the civic duty of the individual to reduce his or her burden on society’ (Ong 2003:12), a trend that highlights the tension between capitalism’s inherent inequalities and the ideals of ‘equal citizenship’ within democratic capitalist states; many scholars have argued that the promises of ‘equal citizenship’ cannot be realized without economic equality (Calavita 2005:160).

Immigration today

Two trends in immigration law over the past couple of decades have served to heighten the precarious status of immigrants working and living in the US: the convergence of immigration law and criminal law (the criminalization of migration) and the diminishment of opportunities for legalization of immigration status (Menjívar and Abrego 2012:1388) or legal immigration in the first place. These trends widen the gulf between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigrants, and map onto existing classed and racialized narratives of worthiness. While reform of immigration law in 1965 diversified immigration flows by finally removing the deeply racialized national-origin quotas,¹⁶ the existing and proposed criteria based in the worthiness and utility of immigrants remain heavily, though not explicitly, racialized. Further, the population of undocumented immigrants in the US today is predominantly non-European people of color, and it is this group that disproportionately experiences the punitive effects of immigration law and enforcement (Keyes 2014).

The move in recent decades toward convergence of immigration law and criminal law began with the harsh legislation in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), passed in 1996. This law, instated alongside two other measures designed to limit rights of all non-citizens (with or without legal status), ‘expanded the range of crimes that make noncitizens deportable, increased border control efforts, and made it more difficult for undocumented

¹⁶ The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Cellar Act)

immigrants to obtain legal permanent residence', as well as introducing the 287(g) program that allows Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to collaborate with local police to detail 'criminal illegal aliens' (Abrego 2011:343). The 287(g) program has had the most negative impact on non-criminal immigrants, rather than the 'criminal aliens' it purports to focus on, and has resulted in more frequent and conspicuous raids (*ibid.*). Immigration detentions have steadily increased in the years since, rising from 85,730 people in 1995 to 429,247 in 2011 (Meissner et al. 2013:14).

The beginning of the 21st century was defined in the first half of the decade by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 and the far-reaching measures taken in response, in the name of the 'War on Terror'. The USA Patriot Act, signed into law in the month following 9/11, increased surveillance of immigrants in the US, allowed government officials to track, detain, and deport immigrants with suspected terrorist links, and exempted these deportation cases from judicial review processes (Rodriguez 2008:381).¹⁷ The Homeland Security Act was passed one year later, increasing the policing and enforcement capacity of immigration authorities, and decreeing that local police units could be forced to work with federal agencies in immigration enforcement; all of these changes paved the way for immigration enforcement to become increasingly localized and conducted in the interior of the US (*ibid.*). Some scholars argue that this move to elide 'national security' with immigration policy—the 'securitization' of migration—was not a new phenomenon, but rather that the 'War on Terror' allowed for the acceleration and consolidation of that process (Coutin 2011:301; Harrison and Lloyd 2011:6).

¹⁷ The USA Patriot Act expired in 2015; a few days after it expired, the US Senate passed the USA Freedom Act, which restored three central parts of the Patriot Act but curtailed the National Security Agency's (NSA) controversial mass phone data collection.

Steinhauer, Jennifer and Jonathan Weisman. 'U.S. Surveillance in Place Since 9/11 Is Sharply Limited'. June 2, 2015. *The New York Times* website. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/03/us/politics/senate-surveillance-bill-passes-hurdle-but-showdown-looms.html?_r=0 [accessed May 20, 2016].

Kelly, Erin. 'Senate Approves USA Freedom Act'. June 2, 2015. *USAToday* website. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/06/02/patriot-act-usa-freedom-act-senate-vote/28345747/> [accessed May 20, 2016].

The past decade has seen a marked increase in the number of state-level immigration laws introduced and enacted. In 2007, 1,562 state-level immigration laws were introduced nationwide, with 240 of those enacted in 46 different states (De Genova 2009:456). These laws make it a felony for an undocumented migrant to work (Mississippi), for example, or a felony to provide shelter for an undocumented migrant (Oklahoma) (*ibid.*). In 2010, Arizona passed the highly controversial Senate Bill 1070,¹⁸ which requires non-citizens to carry verification of their legal status at all times and directs police to check the immigration status of any individual when there is ‘reasonable suspicion’ that s/he may be an illegal immigrant. This bill inspired similar laws in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina and Utah.

The second trend noted—limited opportunities for legalization and legal immigration—speaks to narratives about value and worthiness. While explicit racial restrictions have been removed from US immigration law, existing criteria effectively serve to limit the (legal) migration of the poor—those who are ‘unskilled’, lacking extensive formal education, and lacking wealth. Yet the high number of undocumented immigrants in the US reveals the stark discrepancy between the country’s immense demand for ‘unskilled’ labor and the limited legal avenues that are open for labor migration. Further, the conditions of the temporary work visas that are available demonstrate clearly that unskilled workers are not welcome to stay—to belong—in the US. Unlike highly skilled H-1B visa holders, ‘unskilled’ H-2 visa holders have limited opportunity for visa extensions, do not have the opportunity to apply for US permanent residency or citizenship, and are not allowed to change employers (Griffith 2009:135).¹⁹ Visa options for permanent work immigration to the US are

¹⁸ The constitutionality of SB 1070 was challenged, but the law was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

¹⁹ H-1B visas are for ‘high skill’ temporary workers in specialty occupations, while the H-2A and H-2B visas are for temporary agricultural and non-agricultural seasonal workers.

principally reserved to five categories that essentially include those who are highly skilled, educated, and/or experienced, or those who invest \$1 million into a business that meets certain criteria.²⁰

Is history in the past?

Although some may be tempted to declare the US a ‘post-racial’ society in which the Civil Rights Movement successfully removed all remaining vestiges of structural racism that had marred the core of liberal egalitarianism, a quick look at the state of affairs reveals persistent, glaring inequalities in social, economic, and political realms. Truly progressive changes have been rare, occurring mainly under the pressure of major social crises such as the American Revolution, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s; yet the grim irony is that these expansions of ‘the borders of belonging’ have usually prompted regressive backlashes that erect new exclusions (Glenn 2002:24). To take a quick look at the current economic realm, persistent disparities in work, income, and wealth in the US are revealing: compared to white people, Black people are more likely to work low-wage jobs, and they also consistently have a significantly higher unemployment rate—twice as high as the white unemployment in 2013 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). In 2010, the average income of white people was twice that of Black and Hispanic people, while the average wealth of white people was on average six times that of Black and Hispanic people (McKernan et al. 2013). Looking at *median* wealth, the chasm widens even more dramatically—white households have a median wealth that is twenty times that of Black households and eighteen times that of Hispanic households (Kochhar, Fry, and Taylor 2011).

The recent rise of the Black Lives Matter movement testifies to persistent systemic racism in the US. Although the movement became most visible in protests against police brutality—in the wake of

²⁰ ‘Permanent Workers’. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/permanent-workers> [accessed August 24, 2016].

highly publicized killings of Black people by law enforcement officials—they have also drawn attention to a range of issues including (but not limited to) the disproportionate criminalization and incarceration of people of color, the economic disparities cited above, and housing and education inequalities. The broad popularity of Black Lives Matter (and indeed, the inevitable racist backlash) and the growing number of immigrant worker centers are two strong indications that while the forms and degree of racial and ethnic subordination in the US have shifted and abated, structural hierarchies persist in many areas of society.

Conclusions

This chapter explored how hierarchies of labor have historically been constructed in the US labor force through classifying the value of labor and the value of those doing the labor along lines of race, gender, nationality, and citizenship. The first section examined how notions of the moral value of labor grew from the ideological roots of liberalism and republicanism, and were used to bolster white supremacy and patriarchy—justifying the devaluing of people of color and women and consigning them to dependence and thus an incapacity for self-governing and citizenship. The following section demonstrated how the connection between work and freedom expanded for white men through contestation over the meaning of ‘free labor’, as wage labor was no longer seen as incompatible with independence; yet even after the abolition of slavery, racial oppression was actively upheld and the labor of Black people and women continued to be socially and economically devalued. The final section of this chapter traced the ways restrictions on freedom of movement have been used to accumulate and control labor, from restrictions during the time of slavery to legal restrictions on who was allowed to labor and who was allowed to belong.

This chapter has thus established how contestations over the value of labor are not simply economic struggles—they are struggles to define social value, citizenship, and freedom. This intersectional,

multi-scalar framework pulls the analytical lens toward an ‘expanded’ class analysis (Kalb 1997; Steur 2014) that is relational and dynamic. The complex map that has been drawn of the historical structuring of inequality out of difference will serve as a starting point for examining with nuance in the ensuing chapters the enduring effects of this difference and stratification in shaping worker subjectivity and agency, the ongoing structuring of these hierarchies on the shop floor, and the capacity of BWC’s organizing approach to foster worker solidarity among NYC bakers.

Setting the Scene: Food Factories in New York

The shelves and displays of New York City's upscale markets and specialty shops reflect consumers' increasing desire for bread that is handmade, seafood that is sustainably fished, and dairy that is locally farmed. Yet the rise in demand for local, wholesome, fresh food and the images it conjures up of bucolic pastures in Upstate New York or family-run bakeries belie the often harsh reality of low-wage labor that sustains these industries. Many of the factories that process and distribute these foods and beverages are actually based in New York City itself, mainly in the boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. Although this industrial scene—which, to be clear, includes not just manufacturing of wholesome, artisan goods, but of hormone-injected meat and sugary sodas as well—is largely invisible to consumers, in 2015 the food manufacturing industry was comprised of some 991 firms employing around 13,892 workers;²¹ further, this number is almost certainly an underestimate, as government censuses often miss undocumented workers when employers do not report their employment. The number of workers rose by 973 from 2012 to 2015, while the number of firms increased by 69.²² The food manufacturing industry is the most stable manufacturing industry in New York City, and the only manufacturing sector to show an increase in jobs over the past ten years (Euchner 2016:18), bringing in around \$5 billion in gross annual sales (Friedman et al. 2007). The workers who bake the bread, filet the fish, bottle the beer, and prepare the hummus are mostly immigrants (70%) and mostly people of color (72%). The majority of workers are men, with

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 County Business Patterns.

https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=BP_2015_00A1&prodType=table [Accessed on September 30, 2017]

²² U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 County Business Patterns.

<http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/BP/2012/00A1/0500000US36005|0500000US36047|0500000US36061|0500000US36081|0500000US36085/naics~311> [Accessed on November 26, 2014]

Table I – Size of New York City food manufacturing industry

	# of firms	# of workers
2012	922	12,919
2015	991	13,892

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 and 2015 County Business Patterns

only 38% women workers. Jobs are accessible to those with low education levels, reflected in the fact that 64% of workers in the industry have less than HS diploma. Among ‘frontline workers’—workers not in management or administrative jobs—Latinos represent the majority (53%), followed by Asians (16%) and Black Americans (16%), and finally white Americans (12%).

Industrial Bakeries in NY

Conducting my fieldwork as a BWC staff member rather than as a baker gave me a particular perspective on the bakeries where BWC had members and campaigns. I relate the experience of the jobs not from my own direct experience, but from extensive conversations and interviews with workers. Because of my position as an organizer, discussions about the workplace were often in the context of organizing and the BWC campaign; discussions during interviews, on the other hand, were not framed directly in the context of organizing, but rather in the context of their life stories. My knowledge of the workplace demographics, hours, wages, job assignments, and social dynamics is based on these conversations and a thorough and long-term process of ‘social mapping’ that organizers undertook with workers; a ‘social map’ is meant to give organizers a deep understanding of the workplace in order to approach the organizing strategically. Creating a social map entailed first compiling a list of workers based on workers’ knowledge and their weekly schedule lists, then sitting down with workers who had joined the campaign and working with them to fill the

Table 2 - Case study bakeries²³

	Revenue	# of workers ²⁴	% immigrant workers	% Latino immigrant workers	% African American workers	% white US workers	% women workers
Harvest Bakery	\$27 million ²⁵	210	-	-	-	-	-
Sweet Tooth Bakery	\$14 million ²⁶	210 total; 120 at factory ²⁷	≈80%	>50%	≈10%	≈10%	≈30%

spreadsheet with relevant information about as many workers as possible. Relevant information included standard things like their age, nationality, job position, and length of time at the company; it also included information about who liked who, who hated who, who was the person that everyone listened to, and, importantly, what sorts of issues people had with the job. Because these factories had anywhere from 50 to 200 non-managerial workers, the process continued throughout the campaign as more workers joined.

The lengthy process of baking and New Yorkers' healthy appetite for bread means that most industrial bakeries in New York operate on a 24/7/365 schedule, giving a new layer of meaning to

²³ The demographics listed roughly reflect the workforce during the time of my fieldwork; they are not based on official company hiring records (as I did not have access to these), but rather on my own mapping out of the workforce based on information organizers compiled with workers. The numbers are therefore meant to provide a rough map, rather than precise statistics. I do not have sufficient data to estimate demographic percentages for Harvest Bakery.

²⁴ These numbers include office staff as well. The number for Harvest Bakery reflects the workforce as of 2014, and Sweet Tooth Bakery reported this number in 2017.

²⁵ Revenue amount is from 2013.

²⁶ Reported in 2017.

²⁷ The other employees work at Sweet Tooth Bakery's retail locations.

the clichéd nickname ‘the City That Never Sleeps.’ The four bakeries where BWC had members were industrial bakeries that make artisanal bread. Artisanal bread is baked largely by hand and in small batches, using traditional recipes, no chemicals, and higher quality ingredients than those one would find in a package of sliced bread at the supermarket. These bakeries, making artisanal bread on a larger, industrial scale, deliver the loaves to restaurants, delis, hotels, and gourmet supermarkets across the New York metropolitan area. In the early morning hours—long before the sun rises—trucks roll out from loading decks and parking lots of New York’s industrial neighborhoods. The bakeries are housed in low, nondescript brick and concrete buildings of one or two stories. The surroundings are sparse: rough beige sidewalks, more low, sprawling industrial buildings, and garage grates with graffiti tags scrawled across them. There is little foot traffic aside from those who work in these factories, but there is a steady flow of trucks rumbling down the streets at various intervals. I spent a significant amount of time standing outside of these bakeries, waiting to speak to workers about the organizing campaign. I was only able to enter on two separate occasions, when BWC organizers were given permission to spend an hour in the break room speaking to workers.

As soon as you step through the heavy metal door, the air is saturated with the scent of fresh bread baking; it seems quite pleasant until you remember that a poorly-working ventilation system can mean respiratory problems for workers who spend eight hours breathing in the flour-filled air.

Workers don aprons and hair nets as they navigate through a seemingly endless number of baking racks—the tall metal rolling shelves into which trays of dough and bread are slotted. The ostensible paradox of industrial bakeries making artisanal bread is apparent as you watch workers hand-shape loaves of bread against a backdrop of industrial-sized mixing machines and towering ovens. Baking bread is physically demanding, requiring bakers to, for example, lift large tubs of dough, haul 50-pound (22.7kg) sacks of flour, or wield heavy machinery (over and over again) to divide dough into rolls. An eight-hour shift of this labor can be exhausting, and certain tasks carry a high risk of injury,

whether immediate (a finger crushed by a mixing machine) or long-term (a repetitive strain injury). In much the same way that domestic cooking is feminized while the career of being a chef is masculinized, commercial baking has historically been a male-dominated industry, despite the distinctly feminized image of domestic baking.

These factories divide the labor by shift and section, with some sections devoted to a type of task such as mixing, and others to a specific product category such as pastries. Shifts are staggered throughout the day and night to account for demand and the various baking, proofing, and fermenting times required for the range of breads produced, but are generally centered around either a two-shift schedule (day and night) or a three-shift schedule (day, night, morning). Many of the shifts are at odds with the natural ‘body clock’ and the mainstream social clock, as a worker might have a 3am-11am shift, or from 8pm-4am. One worker explained to me that you never fully adjust to such a schedule—it just becomes normal; another worker, after describing his various chronic ailments since working these shifts described it as ‘work that will be the death of you’.²⁸ The night shift workers I spoke to generally slept three to five hours each day.

Work sections at the bakeries might include *shaping*, where dough is shaped by hand or by machine, depending on the type; *mixing*, where the dough is mixed; *ovens*, where the dough is baked; sections that focus on specific products such as pastries, sandwiches, organic bread, or other specialty breads; *maintenance*, which includes workers who wash dough-encrusted tubs and trays, clean the facilities, and unload enormous amounts of garbage; *packing*, where the bread is packaged and labeled and loaded into trucks; and *distribution*, which includes the drivers who deliver the bread. The work of mixing, shaping, dividing, and baking the bread often overlaps among sections, as many workers

²⁸ Research suggests that human bodies cannot truly adjust to a night shift. After years of working the night shift, people are at an increased risk for cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes.

<http://www.oxfordtoday.ox.ac.uk/interviews/sleepless-oxford>

perform different tasks throughout their shift. A worker might start the shift by mixing dough, then dividing and shaping it, and then spend the rest of the shift at the ovens overseeing the loading and unloading of racks of bread. However, because each task and product requires specific skills, there are limits to what tasks a worker will take on in a given shift; a position such as ‘mixer’ often has three different levels, requiring training and experience to move up. A wide variety of dough recipes—such as sourdough, rye, whole wheat, country white—means that each one calls for a different approach to shaping the dough and working with its unique texture, and different baking times that require vigilance and experience.

Each section normally has a supervisor or shift leader—a worker who has supervisory responsibilities and a little extra pay, but not the power to hire or fire workers.²⁹ Managers, who do have the power to hire and fire workers, oversee single sections or multiple sections, depending on the shift and products; so, the pastries section has its own manager on the night and day shifts, while mixing, shaping, and ovens are normally all under the same manager.

Wages for frontline workers at these bakeries ranged from \$8/hour (the minimum wage in New York) up to around \$22/hour for workers with the most seniority. The living wage for a single adult in New York City is calculated at \$12.75, while the living wage for a single adult supporting one child is \$24.69.³⁰ For some workers who had come from a string of bad jobs, including those paying at or below minimum wage, the wages at these bakeries seemed comparatively good. Yet most

²⁹ The power to hire or fire workers is particularly relevant in the context of union organizing, as it determines which staff are included in unionization; managers and any staff with the ability to hire or fire workers are generally excluded from unionization.

³⁰ Poverty in America: Living Wage Calculator. ‘Our tool is designed to provide a minimum estimate of the cost of living for low wage families. The estimates do not reflect a middle class standard of living. The realism of the estimates depend on the type of community under study. Metropolitan counties are typically locations of high cost. In such cases, the calculator is likely to underestimate costs such as housing and child care. Consider the results a minimum cost threshold that serves as a benchmark, but only that.’ <http://livingwage.mit.edu/> [accessed on December 8, 2014]

workers, particularly those supporting families, struggled with financial insecurity, facing low or stagnant wages or reduced hours, and many had to get second jobs. Benefits varied significantly across different workplaces, with most offering at least a minimal number of paid vacation days and/or sick days for full-time employees. Workers had access to health insurance at a rate partly subsidized by the company, but the cost for employees was prohibitively high for many workers given their pay rates.³¹

The demographics at the bakeries varied, but they all had a workforce comprised of a majority of immigrants and a majority of people of color (both usually around 80%), with Latinos making up over half of the workforce, Black Americans and white Americans around 10% of the workforce each, and African and Asian immigrants comprising smaller but still significant numbers.

The workforce at Sweet Tooth Bakery was comprised of around 80% immigrant workers; over half of the workforce were immigrants from Latin America (Mexican workers comprised about 20% of the entire workforce, and Colombian workers closer to 15%), while immigrants from Africa and Asia made up a bit under 10% of the workforce each, as did the Black US workers and the white US workers.³² The demographics of each shift and department are important to note, as workers were most sensitive to divisions that they experienced in their daily work—so, for example, the day shift workers spoke of a different set of divisions than night shift workers, as they were surrounded by

³¹ One bakery stood out among industrial bakeries in the area because it was unionized; workers had employer-paid healthcare benefits and a pension plan, both things that workers at other bakeries did not have. Many workers at this bakery were frustrated with their union, feeling that it did little to defend their interests. A group of workers joined BWC to pressure their employer on three demands, because they did not perceive their union to be taking action. This was a complicated and delicate situation, because BWC campaigned in a manner that would normally be done by the workers' official workplace union.

³² These numbers reflect the workforce during the time of my fieldwork; they are not based on official company hiring records (as I did not have access to these), but rather on my own mapping out of the workforce based on information organizers compiled with workers. The numbers are therefore meant to provide a rough map, rather than precise statistics.

different people. Nearly every Black American worker was on the night shift, alongside Latino immigrant workers and some white workers. Echoing the quote from a worker who described working the night shift as ‘work that will be the death of you’, another night shift worker described night work as ‘the worst thing’ and said he felt it should be ‘semi-illegal’; when I asked him about the ten-dollar pay differential added to night shift workers’ pay checks, he replied, ‘Oh my god. Ruining my life for ten bucks a day?’ Although he noted that some people did gravitate toward night work, he said that it seemed to him that it was the ‘bottom of the totem pole’ at Sweet Tooth Bakery, a place where people started out but only some people managed to transition out of (into daytime shifts).

The early morning and day shifts were dominated by Latin American immigrants, but were quite diverse: there were a number of Asian immigrants, some White workers, and the Latin American immigrants hailed from a range of countries. Most African workers were drivers in the distribution department. As for gender, the workforce was about 30% women and 70% men; the majority of the women were concentrated in two departments that were staffed almost entirely by women: the pastries section and the sandwiches section. The women who were not in those departments were employed in either maintenance, shaping, or packing (departments mostly staffed by men). The white workers were dispersed throughout different departments.

Chapter 3 – Navigating the Value and Suffering of Work

Grounded primarily in life history interviews with BWC members who work at two different industrial bakeries, this chapter turns our attention to workers' subjective experiences of the hierarchies of labor in order to illuminate the complex terrain that stretches between experiences of precarity and marginalization and the sense that change is possible. The analysis builds on the framework developed in Chapter Two, which detailed how the moral and economic value of labor is stratified along lines of race, gender, and citizenship. In particular, this chapter will build on Gordon and Lenhardt's (2008) theory that different individuals and groups often experience the value of the same work in different ways because of differences in experiences of racial subordination, formal citizenship status, and group histories in relation to labor (2008:1196–97).

The chapter begins by drawing out a nuanced understanding of subjectivity and consciousness as analytical approaches, then delves into the life stories of three workers, illustrating the nuanced subjectivities that emerge from these workers' economically and socially marginalized positions. Following Anderson (2009), my analysis will explore the ways that temporality and changes in family status and responsibilities have a significant effect on how workers experience the social value and suffering of work. This chapter will demonstrate how precarity and the potential for alternative imaginings of a better future (Bourdieu 2000:235; Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S11) are experienced in tension both within the workplace and in the broader fabric of workers' lives.

Complicating worker subjectivities

The jobs at these industrial bakeries in New York provide a useful lens for examining the multiple ways that work might bring both value and alienation. They are factory jobs, but because the product is *artisanal* bread, much (not all) of the production involves skilled, non-mechanized labor,

and workers are not condemned to a single task on an assembly line for eight hours. The jobs are also not on the ‘bottom rung’ of the labor market in terms of wages and working conditions, although there is a range within the sector. Yet many of the workers at these bakeries still struggle to pay the bills without taking on a second job, face abusive managers, and suffer work-related health issues without having access to health insurance.

The social value of these jobs is complex. On one hand, there is, in theory, honor in producing and delivering ‘the daily bread’ of New Yorkers; on the other hand, the labor of food manufacturing in the US is often rendered socially invisible and, when done by people of color, devalued both in wages and in social desirability (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1200). As the historical review in Chapter Two made clear, the social value of work is not constructed on a blank canvas. Historical notions of freedom, moral value, and citizenship have fuelled and shaped hierarchies of race, class, gender, and citizenship within the realm of labor. Access to labor that offers dignity and status is unevenly distributed. First, there are different jobs offering vastly different conditions, even if we narrow our focus to the food processing industry in New York City. A factory job that entails working ten-hour days on an assembly line for minimum wage with no overtime pay provides different value than a factory job requiring a dynamic range of tasks that pays time-and-a-half for anything beyond eight hours per day and offers employer-paid healthcare benefits and vacation days. Second, the way workers perceive and experience the objective conditions of these jobs is deeply influenced by workers’ positions along axes of race, gender, class, citizenship, as well as by their temporalities, family status, and subjectivities. The lived experience of particular structural openings and constraints can make the difference between a tough job being seen as an opportunity to be grateful for, or as a dead end to be escaped. Work has the potential to translate into a source of value in multiple spheres—a source of economic advancement, identity, social value, freedom and belonging—and as a conduit of alienation and suffering through its multiple hierarchies; this

translation is differently filtered through workers' structural positions, subjectivities, and their temporality (Anderson 2009). So, a worker may find the daily experience of her job demeaning, but the fact that it has paid for her daughter to attend college gives it honor and provides her family with economic and social mobility; the same worker, earlier in her life and without children, may have found far less social value in that job.

This all bears great implications for labor organizing. Speaking to workers about their jobs and about prospects for union organizing, it was clear that people derived meaning from these bakery jobs in a wide range of channels. My roles as organizer and researcher both demanded that I seek a deeper understanding of what mattered to these workers, and consequently, what these jobs meant to them within that larger picture; this was critical to understanding what changes would be meaningful to them and what might motivate them to join a labor campaign.

I selected the following three workers' life stories for a few reasons. Two are Latino immigrants and one is Black, giving us deeper insight into how hierarchies of race, nationality, and legal status are lived. The three men have dissimilar family arrangements, creating different temporal and spatial orientations, and demonstrating various ways this can shape their experience of the value of work. They also represent different levels of involvement with BWC: one participated relatively consistently in a BWC campaign throughout the period of my fieldwork, one was earnestly involved for a few months before that campaign lost its momentum, and the third was interested and supportive of the campaign, but never became significantly involved. The final and significant point to make reflects a limitation rather than a choice: they are all men. As noted earlier, only 38% of workers in this industry were women; the gender imbalance among BWC members was even sharper. When I began my fieldwork, BWC had no female members in active campaigns; a number of women joined as they launched a new campaign at a bakery with more women workers, but the

organization membership remained mostly men. From a research standpoint, this presented methodological issues, which were explained in more detail in the Methodology section of the Introduction chapter. Although I had numerous meetings and conversations with women members of BWC and women who were not members but worked at the bakeries, I was unable to interview any of them; the life stories presented in this chapter are therefore all of men. It is also worth reiterating here that the people whose life stories are documented below are of course not representative of all Latino immigrant workers, or of all Black workers, or all bakery workers in New York. The use of life histories as a research methodology generally requires a focus on depth rather than breadth; I employ this method here in order to focus my lens on subjectivity, which will be explained further below.

Subjectivity and consciousness

I will pause here to probe the distinction between ‘subjectivity’ and ‘consciousness’—not exhaustively, as this could comprise an entire thesis in itself, but rather to illustrate how the blurred boundaries between the terms are analytically relevant to this thesis. Anthropologists have mainly used subjectivity to speak about people’s ‘thoughts, sentiments, and embodied sensibilities, and, especially, their senses of self and self-world relations’ (Holland and Leander 2004:127). The lens of subjectivity calls for recognizing subjects as ‘existentially complex’ (Ortner 2005:33), not only because their social, cultural, and emotional worlds are complex, but also because of the ‘ongoing work of reflexivity, monitoring the relationship of the self to the world’ (Ortner 2005:45). Significantly, anthropologists are often interested in exploring how subjectivities form amid domination, suffering, and political struggle—‘subjectivity implies the *emotional* experience of a *political* subject, the subject caught up in a world of violence, state authority and pain, the subject’s distress under the authority of another’ (Luhmann 2006:346, emphasis in original).

The confusion between subjectivity and consciousness begins with the distinct usages of ‘consciousness’, which is, at times, used essentially as a synonym for ‘subjectivity’ (see Ortner 2005) to evoke the reflexivity of individual actors who are navigating historically and culturally specific circumstances that inevitably shape them. At other times, it refers to *class* consciousness, or more broadly, ‘oppositional consciousness’ (Mansbridge and Morris 2001), which can include racial consciousness, ethnic consciousness, or feminist consciousness, for example. Class consciousness, as used in many traditional Marxist analytic approaches, seeks to characterize members of the working class as either having class consciousness or having ‘false consciousness’; I would argue, following Fantasia (1988), that these approaches are often reductive and reveal a narrow interpretation of Marx, focused as they are on the ‘problem of determining to what extent class members are conceptually aware of a class structure, whether or not they employ a language of class, or whether they identify themselves as belonging to one class or another’ (Fantasia 1988:9). Thus, while the former usage (as a synonym for subjectivity) speaks to an actor’s awareness of their position as a subject within social, cultural, and historical worlds and how they make meaning of this and choose to act, the latter invokes an actor’s awareness of their particular ‘conditions of subjugation’ in a way that prompts the actor to struggle to change those conditions.

Stated in greatly simplified terms like this, the most significant distinctions seem to be first, in the multifaceted components of subjectivity/consciousness as opposed to the more narrowly conceived class position inherent to class consciousness (or race to racial consciousness, etc.); second, class consciousness tends to imply a certain ‘correct’ consciousness, and a type of consciousness that one has or does not have, while the other meaning of consciousness—as roughly a synonym of subjectivity—is something that all human beings are expected to possess, even if it manifests quite differently across groups and individuals. We can develop the distinction further by looking at what the two generalized types evoke when used in analysis: subjectivity evokes emotional experience,

meaning-making, and moral judgment, while (class) consciousness suggests rationality, the ability to perceive ‘true interests’, and a sort of consequentiality. Given the substantial ambiguity outlined here, it is not surprising that in practice the meanings of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘consciousness’ and the analyses undertaken within their rubrics exist along a continuum, rather than in two clearly defined camps.

In this thesis, I am not interested in measuring the class consciousness of workers—that is, to what degree their consciousness is true or false, revolutionary or not, correct or not. Rather, in looking at what shapes workers’ willingness to participate—or lack thereof—in collective action on the job, I have chosen to begin with a more expansive emphasis on value, meaning, identity, and temporality, to ultimately examine how these shape workers’ notions of what is just and what is possible. This is not to say that I am abandoning ‘consciousness’ as an analytical lens, but that I am integrating it into a richer landscape; I am interested in concepts that bridge the dynamic, complex, reflexive navigations of subjectivity with the will to participate in collective action.

Oppositional consciousness, understood as an umbrella term that encompasses various forms of group consciousness, can be defined as ‘an empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to act to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of human domination’ (Mansbridge 2001:4–5). When conceived of as dynamic and existing within a ‘loose continuum’ rather than a binary (Mansbridge 2001:6), with a range of possible manifestations, the concept of (oppositional) consciousness becomes more useful for this analysis, and moves us toward an analysis that fruitfully bridges subjectivity and oppositional consciousness. Such concepts recognize the complex conditions and challenges that make the connections between consciousness of oppression and partaking in collective action to address the conditions of oppression unpredictable.

Nash (1979) addresses a significant tension in this vein by distinguishing between *consciousness of exploitation*, ‘which stems from alienation from the rewards of one’s work’, and *consciousness of dependency*, ‘which stems from alienation from the means of production’ (1979:333–34). Nash argues that while these two forms of alienation are often assumed to reinforce each other in breeding a will to resist, in practice they can often clash as the consciousness of dependency understandably leads workers to search for security. In the life stories that follow, I will outline other ‘bridge concepts’ that emerged from the perspectives and experiences these three workers narrated—‘double consciousness’ and ‘peripheral vision’—in order to highlight the space of uncertainty in which labor organizers strive to intervene.

The value of labor: Latino immigrants’ paths

I met Fernando at the BWC monthly member meeting in which I presented my research proposal (for the second time); he had recently become the first BWC member from Sweet Tooth Bakery. Diego had met him earlier that month while recruiting workers in the street; Fernando had asked him for directions, because public transportation was down in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, and they ended up walking together for a long stretch, discussing Fernando’s bakery job and BWC.

Fernando had a serious but approachable manner; he was analytical and engaged deeply in discussions, driven by a deep discomfort with injustice, but also often depleted by the unremitting strain of multiple low-wage jobs, little sleep, and family challenges at home. He had short dark hair, round features, a small mustache, and was not tall but with a sturdy build. I saw Fernando many times during the fifteen months I spent volunteering at BWC, as he was one of the most consistently committed members of the Sweet Tooth campaign; I sat in on meetings with him and other organizers, met him on my own when organizers were not available, and accompanied him and the

organizers to watch him speak publicly about the campaign. When I was no longer working at BWC, Fernando met me for an interview at a small, noisy diner in Manhattan, where we spent a few hours talking over breakfast. We spoke for a while before officially beginning the interview, and Fernando took the opportunity to probe my motivations in doing this research; he asked about my perspectives on immigration in the US, for example, and how I had come to choose this research project.

Fernando arrived in New York City the way many poor immigrants do: in debt, without legal immigration status, and desperate to work. He had grown up in a very poor family of farmers in rural Mexico, but moved to a small city when his family could no longer survive on the earnings from their crops. In the city, his business of selling chickens took a sharp turn toward debt after a suspicious accident left him with no truck, dead chickens, and lost customers. When a friend suggested they migrate to the US together, Fernando found it difficult to imagine, having never travelled farther than Mexico City. Yet he felt trapped and without any more local job prospects or other means of pulling his already-impoverished family out of debt. Given the steep costs of crossing the border without a visa, the decision to migrate meant risking further debt in search of future security; Fernando paid around \$1,800 to cross the border, and had to borrow more money to travel from California to New York. On top of the financial cost, the border-crossing is notoriously dangerous—hundreds of people die there each year, the majority from exposure to the elements.³³

Fernando recounted his arrival to New York in 1997:

³³ ‘The links between increased border security and migrant fatalities have been demonstrated extensively in the literature (Eschbach, Hagan, Rodriguez, Hernandez-Leon, and Bailey 1999; Eschbach, Hagan, Rodriguez, Hernandez-Leon, and Bailey 2003; Cornelius 2001; 2005; 2006; Rubio-Goldsmith, McCormick, Martinez, and Duarte 2006; Jimenez 2009). The 1990s and 2000s saw dramatic increases in the fortification of the U.S.-Mexico border...’
http://bmi.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/border_deaths_final_web.pdf

I felt very confused... on one hand, you're leaving behind all of your family. Your life, your lifestyle. And you're going to an unknown place—you don't know who or what you're going to find. So if you haven't ever been apart from your family before, it's very difficult to leave them—if you've always been with them, during good times and bad, but always with them... then, the moment of leaving where you are from to go to another country where you don't know the language, the bureaucratic system, the culture, you don't know anything—it's difficult. I was married, and we had a five-year-old daughter; they didn't come to the US until later. It was very difficult... I felt very alone.

I arrived in this city with my friend on November 9th, in the fall, and we stayed at his friends' house. It was totally different here—so many buildings, a big city. It seemed like a completely different world than the one I knew. Also, I'm from the countryside, and over there you know your neighbor, you know their family... it's different here. I'm not sure how to say it, but people are, to some extent, very cold. Sometimes you don't know the people who live in the same building as you. You only say 'hi' and that's it. The way of life is much faster here than in the countryside. Everyone is running around here, everyone is going around very stressed, maybe. So when I arrived, it was very strange. I didn't know anyone...

...When we arrived at their house, the friends of my friend said to me, 'So, now that you're here, what are you thinking of doing?'

'Working,' I said.

'Well, what do you know how to do?' they asked.

'I'm from the countryside,' I said. 'I don't know anything about here.'

'Well, I work in a restaurant,' one said to me. 'Let me see if I can get you hired there.'

'OK,' I said. 'All I want is to work.'

Since I had my own family and my parents in Mexico, as well as debts to pay, I had to do something. Within a week, the friend came to me and said, 'You know what? You've got work as a dishwasher.'

'Well, if you have to work, you have to work,' I said. They brought me over there, and I got the job. It was a very big restaurant in Manhattan, a Greek restaurant. When I got there, they said to me, 'This is what you're going to do. Here is the machine, here is the soap. You're going to wash dishes.' I remember that the first day was disastrous for me, because I had never in my life used a machine like this, had never worked as a dishwasher. Someone told me where to put the soap but didn't say how much, so I put quite a lot. When I started the machine, foam started coming out all over the place, and then it completely shut off. I had to wash all the dishes by hand—they served breakfast in the morning, and egg yolk was stuck to all the plates. The hot water was burning me. It was a horrible day for me. And on top of that, many of the managers were abusive. I remember they would curse at me in Greek. They would yell at me to work faster, but cursing in Greek. I didn't respond, and I didn't even know what they were saying, until I asked other people from my country who were working there. The managers were annoyed with me that first day because of the dishwashing machine. I was scared, to a certain point—I didn't know anyone. I thought they were going to fire me. I did what I could. They told me to wash these metal plates that were used to cook fish, but they didn't tell me how hot they were. I went to grab them and burned my fingers, so I yelled. Then the cook cursed at me, telling me not to do it like that.

I worked for ten hours, and was so tired when I left that day. They told me they would pay me \$280 a week, for working ten hours a day, six days a week. But sometimes it wasn't ten hours, because you

had to clean the dining area—sweep, mop. So sometimes it was eleven or eleven and a half hours, and they didn't pay me any extra. It was a really difficult period, but I had to do it because I didn't have another option. I had a family, I had debts... I hadn't had any idea what to expect when I came here. When my friend said, 'Let's go to the United States,' I went because I had a lot of debts to pay and I knew there wasn't a way for me to pay them in Mexico. I came blindly; I had absolutely no idea what I would find. So when they gave me this job—well, it was difficult, I had never done anything like it in my life. I was there for a while working as a dishwasher.

(Fernando, 45)

To Fernando, his first experience of work in the US was humiliating, paid below minimum wage,³⁴ and physically painful, but it represented the possibility of future freedom from debt and economic advancement for his family. Many who migrate from poorer countries to wealthier ones maintain a transnational perspective that allows them to tolerate bad working conditions in anticipation of substantial future benefits, and those with no access to legal immigration status enter a realm of work in which they are legally subordinated through illegality and constrained by debt (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1220). Fernando's entry into the US labor market was thus defined by various intertwined social and legal positions: his class position, immigration/citizenship status, racialized nationality, and gender. These shaped the work he had access to, and, I will argue below, engaged with the temporality of his experience and his subjectivity to influence his shifting experiences of the hierarchies of labor and value.

As the history of immigration law and practice outlined in Chapter Two suggests, most poor Mexicans have little chance of obtaining a US visa, yet the US has a long pattern of accepting the labor of Mexicans without legally sanctioning their social status. The number of undocumented immigrants currently living in the US is estimated at 11.2 million as of 2012, with half of them coming from Mexico and two-thirds of the total coming from Mexico and Central America.³⁵ Given

³⁴ The US minimum wage in 1997 was \$5.15/hour, whereas Fernando's wages were \$4.67/hour or less, depending on whether he worked overtime.

³⁵ Pew Research Center, 'Unauthorized Immigrants: Who they are and what the public thinks'. November 20, 2014. <http://www.pewresearch.org/key-data-points/unauthorized-immigrants-who-they-are-and-what-the-public-thinks/>

that about 3.5% of the US population is undocumented, and they make up 5.1% of the national labor force,³⁶ their status as ‘illegal aliens’—an increasingly criminalized category that has been carved out over more than a century of US immigration laws—belies their significant social foothold in the US and the tremendous demand for their labor.

New York City was not a major destination for Mexican migrants until the 1990s, a decade during which the number of Mexican immigrants rose from 32,680 in 1990 to 122,550 immigrants in 2000 (New York City Department of City Planning 2004). Economic restructuring on both sides of the border prompted shifts in both migrant origins and destinations, with New York drawing migrants from non-traditional sending regions. The Mexican economy had been liberalized as the country entered into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1985, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, and joined the World Trade Organization in 1995; these changes had particularly detrimental effects on people living in rural areas in southern Mexico, and there was accordingly an increase in migration—largely undocumented—to the U.S. from these areas (Riosmena and Massey 2012:5, 11, 29). With increased migration to New York during the 1980s, Mexican migrants solidified their foothold in the New York labor market, and the ‘critical mass’ of New York’s Mexican population decreased the social and economic costs of migration.

The practice of incurring debt to cross the US-Mexico border—now virtually necessary for all migrants without legal authorization—inevitably places immigrants in the position of having to earn money immediately, to avoid the negative repercussions of not paying off the debt. Crossing the

[accessed December 7, 2014]. Although estimates of the number of undocumented immigrants are debatable, the Pew Research Center is a widely-cited source

³⁶ Pew Research Center, ‘5 Facts About Illegal Immigration in the U.S’. November 18, 2014. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/18/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/> [accessed December 7, 2014].

border has become more expensive as it has become more dangerous; as US border security has increased at the easiest and safest crossing points, migrants have had to increasingly rely on *coyotes* (smugglers) who charge higher fees to lead them along the more treacherous routes through the desert. This willingness to incur debt and withstand poor or abusive working conditions in the short term is contingent on the promise, or at least possibility, of a better future—an economically stable and more dignified future. The difficult choice for someone in poverty to take on more debt in the hope of securing future stability exemplifies the saying that ‘it costs more to be poor.’ In making this choice, a worker is taking a gamble, investing in a different temporal—and often, also physical—space at the expense of the present time and location (Bastia and McGrath 2011). Fernando’s orientation upon arriving in New York was toward both the future—a time when his debts would be paid off—and toward Mexico—helping to support his wife, child, and parents.

Having no work visa or legal immigration status in the US, Fernando was constrained in his options for work, and well aware of both his precarious status and the urgency of securing an income. The historic reliance of the US on migrant labor, coupled with the prominence of race as the most evident mode of social stratification, results in ethnic/racial groups effectively being ranked into a ‘hiring queue’ and slotted into different job categories for which employers deem them best-suited; ethnic niches are thus created and then entrenched by immigrants’ social networks (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Gender is of course also a significant marker used in assessing what ‘category’ of worker is most suitable for a particular job, as evidenced by continuing high levels of occupational segregation across many jobs (*ibid*). As such, employers prefer to fill the job of a dishwasher—which is undesirable due to the long hours, very low wages, and physically challenging conditions—with a worker who they see as easily exploitable, namely, a migrant worker from a country with lower wages (and even more well-suited to the job if they are undocumented). In this way, we end up with 50% of New York City dishwashers being undocumented migrants (Kallick 2007:21–22);

dishwashing has also become a male-dominated job in the labor force (as opposed to in the home)—as we have seen with industrial baking—with 79.7% of dishwashers in the US reported to be men.³⁷

In addition to the ways that Fernando's class, immigration status, racialized nationality, and gender shaped the conditions of his work in the US, the way these factors engage with his temporality holds significant sway over the shifting ways work offers him social value. It is critical to note that the willingness to withstand degrading work conditions is usually tied to the perspective that they will be *temporary*; once a migrant shifts toward viewing their stay as longer, indefinite, or permanent, expectations of working conditions often change as well (Bastia and McGrath 2011:25–26; Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1235–36). Migrant workers often initially intend for their stay in the US to be short-term (making them 'sojourners' in sociological parlance), but end up extending their time in the US indefinitely once faced with higher living costs and the challenges of saving money while working low-wage jobs (becoming 'settlers'). Called 'the two-year myth' by some Latin American migrants (Gordon 2005:34), this initial expectation makes immigrant workers more likely to compare their wages and working conditions to those back home at first, thus perceiving their current conditions through a dual frame of reference. This calculation is not based in illusion—in the context of extreme global inequality of wealth and income, remittances are a substantial source of foreign income for many developing countries, increasing in relative importance the lower the income of the country (United Nations Development Programme 2011). Since NAFTA was enacted, Mexico has become far more dependent on remittances as a source of income, to the point that they are now the second highest official source of income for the country and one-third of

³⁷ Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey. 'Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.' 2015. [accessed March 3, 2016]. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>

Mexican families depend on them (Sánchez 2011:4). For several Central American countries, remittances account for 10-20% of GDP (World Bank 2011).

This dual frame of reference often shifts in balance as time living abroad stretches longer. I first met Fernando in late 2012, fifteen years after he arrived in the US. In the years that had passed since that first job as a dishwasher, Fernando's wife and daughter joined him in the US, he and his wife had two more children, and then he and his wife separated. With his three children firmly rooted in the US, Fernando's orientation had drifted farther away from Mexico and toward the US. For the many migrants who eventually end up settling in the US, the arrival of their family members deepens their roots in the US and can prompt or solidify a significant shift in their orientation from their home country to the US (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1235). Yet this shift in reference point is not a linear departure or absolute assimilation; transnational connections manifest in migrant subjectivities as 'peripheral vision' (Zavella 2011) that allows migrants to understand themselves in relation to both sides of the border and 'illuminate[s] the power relations involved in a strategic bifocal point of view.' Peripheral vision 'expresses subjects' sense of economic, social, cultural, or political vulnerability in a globalized world' and also captures 'the experience of feeling at home in more than one geographic location where identity construction takes place in the context of shifting ethno-racial boundaries and gendered transitions in a global society' (Zavella 2011:8-9).

During that span of fifteen years, Fernando managed to move out of dishwashing work after he got a job as a dishwasher at an industrial bakery in New Jersey. Eager to learn new skills and advance beyond dishwashing, he persistently observed the bakers working when he had finished his own work, until a manager finally offered to help train him in baking. This required unpaid work after he had clocked out as a dishwasher, and a good deal of tenacity in repeatedly seeking further training and proving his skills under stressful conditions. He eventually worked his way up to a position as a

machine operator in an industrial bakery in New Jersey, a position that earned him higher pay and thus a greater ability to support his family; this was critical at the time, as his wife was no longer able to work because she was caring for their third child, who had Down's Syndrome. Because he was not the primary caretaker of their children, Fernando was able to work the long hours demanded by his jobs in dishwashing and food manufacturing. Yet the long hours he spent at work and the lengthy commute put a strain on his marriage, exacerbating the distance that was emerging between them as new social and cultural expectations produced shifts in their perspectives and aspirations, shifts about which they had no time to communicate.

While I was working there, it was very difficult being alone. My wife and my daughter were in Mexico. My wife's brother was going to Mexico, and I asked him if he could do me a favor, and bring her back to New York with him. He said yes, so I sent money, and my wife immigrated here. Our daughter stayed with my parents for a while, and then I went to get her later.

When my wife arrived, she began working as well. But when she became pregnant with our second daughter, she stopped working. Later we had a third child, a son, and he has Down's syndrome, so she couldn't work anymore. Since I was working as a machine operator, I was paid a little more, so I was more or less able to resolve our economic problems. But then the company was sold to another company, and they started firing a lot of people. The company that bought it started bringing in their own employees, and, as would be expected, they weren't interested in those of us who were paid a little more, so they started firing everyone. That was in 2007.

The company had moved to a different city before I lost my job, and it was around that time that my wife and I started having problems. I wasn't spending as much time with her, because I had to commute to the other city, and sometimes I would stay over there to be close to work. The time came when we separated. Everything happened at once—I lost my job, the separation. I started to think about whether everything I'd done had been worth it. I don't know if I'd call it sacrifice, leaving my country and coming here... but there was a time when I thought everything I had tried to achieve had gone to the trash. A separation is really hard, especially when you have children. It's very hard, especially when you have children in the middle. But sometimes there is no alternative.

(Fernando, 45)

It is not difficult to understand the disillusionment Fernando felt in this context. Having made the significant decision to migrate so he could escape debt and provide for his family, he encountered the isolation of long work hours and no family in New York. Yet even after his wife and daughter joined him and he and his wife had two more children, it was precisely the conditions that allowed him to provide for his family that slowly chafed at their family structure—first, the absence brought

on by migration, then the absence brought on by long work hours, and finally, the cultural friction arising from migration, which was exacerbated by that absence. On top of that, he was fired from his job precisely for having attained somewhat higher wages. Ferguson (2004) describes how the demands of US capital entwine with immigration restrictions and residential segregation, for example, to create the conditions that subvert the heteronormative ideals of citizenship: 'As capital solicited Mexican, Asian, Asian American, and African American labor, it provided the material conditions that would ultimately disrupt the gender and sexual ideals upon which citizenship depended' (2004:14).

Fernando also described how changes in gendered expectations unsettled their relationship, a challenge compounded by the way his long work hours constrained their ability to communicate:

Maybe I'm wrong, but I think [in the US] a lot of people confuse liberty with license. Women have more freedom here, more freedom of expression and everything, but there are often people who get them confused and say 'I do whatever I want,' or friends influence them and say: 'You can't continue living with him. You can live alone, you can do whatever you want, you can come home at whatever time you want, you don't have to be accountable to anybody...' So, one believes this, and that's when the problems start. I'm guilty. I'm guilty in the separation, because I spent all that time working and very little time with them. I'm guilty for that. This seemed like too much for her, so she decided not to live with me.

I think it's good that women have more freedom here. People need to have freedom. But I think that sometimes what we don't have is communication between a couple. I think the most difficult thing is when you don't have communication, or when you change your way of thinking. Because maybe she didn't think like this [before], but the people she's spending time with are influencing her, or maybe the opposite—maybe the people I am spending time with are influencing me and I am changing. So that's where the problems start; with the distances. And one can't decide for the other person. But it's very hard, because there are children. The children suffer the most, because they're divided, they don't know which way to pull.

In the end, Fernando's attempts to fulfill the role of the male provider with a 'family wage' were thwarted by constraints at various turns, bringing him to an arrangement that was not what he had envisioned but rather a sort of incomplete/fragmented provider role. Although he no longer lives with his children, Fernando goes to visit them weekly, and he took on a second job (and even a third for a stretch of time) in order to support both their living costs and his own. With health problems

brought on by his meager hours of sleep, a doctor had insisted that he find a way to get more rest. Fernando's economic and family responsibilities are now fully rooted in the US, meaning that the wages at the bakery are simply not sufficient; they do not put him on a path toward greater belonging in the US via economic advancement, nor via legal status. Still, his diligent, hard work and commitment to supporting his family allow him to assert his legitimacy and social value as a hardworking, productive (non)citizen. Fernando hopes to return to Mexico one day, but concedes that he doesn't know if it will be possible; for now, he will stay in the US, where his children are and where he has work.

To understand the different ways temporality and family status can shape subjectivities and relationships to work, we can explore the path of Carlos, a Guatemalan worker at a different bakery. Carlos worked at a bakery where BWC attempted to establish an organizing campaign but eventually decided (a few days after I interviewed Carlos, in fact) to put the campaign on pause. I first met him the day after he signed up as a member of BWC and the IWW; this was after he had been introduced to BWC staff by a co-worker one day, and Diego had later called to invite him to visit the office again. Carlos had a quiet, gentle air about him, and real kindness in his manner; although at first glance he might have been read as yielding or passive, he was intentional and decisive in how he lived his life. He was trim and of average height, with short, dark (and slightly greying) hair and a small, neat mustache.

I accompanied Carlos one day to the Department of Labor because he had moved and needed to fill out a change-of-address form to continue receiving settlement checks; a co-worker at the bakery where he worked had made an anonymous complaint to the Department of Labor, and the resulting inspection had led to workers receiving payment for prior nonpayment of overtime wages. BWC staff sometimes accompanied members on bureaucratic missions such as this, in order to help them

navigate the forms, agencies, and language. We spoke at length on the subway and in the waiting area of the Department of Labor, and when I later asked Carlos if he would be interested in doing an interview, he smiled shyly and hesitated, then agreed and suggested we could do it on his day off from work. When I called him a week later to schedule it, he laughed and said, ‘But what would I talk about?’

We did the interview on a warm spring day, and Carlos came to meet me outside the subway station near his apartment. He wore a crisp checked long-sleeved cotton shirt buttoned all the way up, dark jeans, sneakers, and a baseball cap, and greeted me with a hug and handshake. I followed him into a convenience store on the corner and as he scanned the contents of the refrigerator, he asked me if I’d like a juice to drink. I told him that I would be fine with just tap water to drink, but he smiled and said he wanted to buy bottled water for us. We then walked around the corner to a nondescript door of a building a few stories high. We walked up one flight of narrow stairs, and he apologized for the small size of the apartment as we walked through the door. Upon entering, we were in a small kitchen with no table or chair, and Carlos walked into the bedroom, just past the kitchen. The bedroom was small, sparse, and very neat, with a lot of light coming in from the two windows. There were two twin-sized beds, neatly made with white sheets, and a TV atop a shelf.

Carlos opened a fold-up wooden chair and placed it near the entrance, at the foot of one bed. He invited me to sit there, and as I placed my backpack on the ground, he picked it up and placed it on the night table. He sat on the opposite bed, and we began discussing the interview and my research in further detail. As we were talking, a train roared past on the overground rails just outside the window, and light flashed across the room like a strobe light—I interrupted myself to comment on this (loudly, above the thundering noise of the train), and Carlos smiled and said it was the sun being blocked by sections of the train. Considering that Carlos had been shy about doing the interview and

expressed a couple of times that he wasn't sure he had anything interesting to say, I was surprised by how comfortable he was once we began the interview. He sat calmly on the edge of the bed, barely shifting around for the whole three hours.

Like Fernando, Carlos migrated to the US out of a sense of necessity, and without legal authorization. After first having left agricultural work for the city in search of a stable income, he finally decided that emigration was the only way he would be able to afford the medical care his mother needed. Upon arriving in New York, Carlos also immediately began to work the evening shift as a dishwasher in a restaurant; three months later, he managed to secure a second job as a baker, working the day shift. Compelled by the need to pay off the large debt he had incurred from migrating without a visa (\$5500) while also needing to support his mother back home, he worked at the bakery from 9am-5pm, and then at the restaurant from 6pm until anywhere from 1am to 4am, depending on the night. He described how the circumstances surrounding his migration framed his approach to work upon arriving in the US:

When you come, at the beginning, you feel sad... I was desperate to return [home] because there we have—you're living in your country, you know that just Spanish is spoken, and...everything is very different, very different, but... we come here with a mind to get ahead...for our family... And this makes us toughen up. From our desire to get ahead and face whatever God puts in our path... whatever job it may be... or they pay us what they pay us, we're going to do it. ...We don't even ask how much they'll pay us, we're just going to work and work, and when they give us what they give us, it's okay. I didn't ask how much [the restaurant] would pay me. After a week, they gave me \$250.

(Carlos, 38)

Three months later, Carlos got a second job at a bakery:

[After leaving the restaurant job] at 4am, I just arrived [home], bathed, and went to sleep. And at 8 o'clock I already had to wake up to go to work. I passed two years like this. But, thank God, I paid my debt. Thank God. I spent two years...[with] one day off at the bakery, and one day at the restaurant—to sleep, I didn't go out... I never spent more than five dollars [per day]. There were times when I spent ten dollars a week, because there was food at the restaurant. When I started there, the owner told me there was milk, coffee, food... soup... very good people. And at the bakery, a lot of bread.

(Carlos, 38)

Carlos' ascetic lifestyle in New York over the past twelve years has enabled him to keep his mother alive (by paying for her diabetes treatment) and to build a house for his mother and other family members to live in back in Guatemala. In anticipation of his eventual return, he has even bought a small plot of land in the capital city of Guatemala in order to build a one-room house for himself. Though he has been unable to see the house he had built for his family (because he is undocumented and would have to endure the dangerous and expensive journey back and forth with no guarantee of being able to return to the US), Carlos showed me a video tour of the house made by his uncle (who had acquired citizenship through his US citizen wife, and was thus able to travel between Guatemala and the US). The uncle brings the video camera over to different family members, including Carlos' mom and his sisters, who are cooking tamales, and he asks them to say hi to their relatives. The house is a spacious, open, one-floor home, with several bedrooms. I say that the house is really pretty and big, and Carlos smiles and agrees.

I send them more or less 700 [US dollars]... each month... so my mother can buy her medicine. Or if I can, I send more, so she can go see a doctor... because if it weren't this way, I wouldn't have her alive. If I were over there, my mother would no longer be... would have already... I don't know, thank God for this... they say there's no blessing like a mother, right?

...My mother, my two sisters, and my brother are living in the house over there... [the house] that I had built, but with help of my being here, thank God. ... I do my part, but I'm grateful to this country, because... I've already made my house. I've been able to give things to my mom that I never would have been able to give her. Thanks to being able to work...

(Carlos, 38)

Carlos has maintained his orientation toward Guatemala, even after twelve years in New York. His family status has not changed—he remains single and without children—and no one in his family has relocated to New York. His temporal orientation is both toward maintaining his mother's health in the present and toward a future when he will inhabit the land his labor in New York has enabled him to purchase in Guatemala. His work has created a clear path toward social and economic value in his home country—upholding the responsibility to support his family and granting him and his

family access to economic mobility and security through homeownership. Carlos identifies strongly as a good worker, having started work in the fields when he was ten years old; he told me that even at that age, people marvelled that he got as much work done as an adult. He said that it was a beautiful experience in some ways, because it instilled a sense of responsibility that serves one well in life. Carlos clearly derived a sense of pride and honor from being a ‘good worker’, yet it was not honor rooted only in abstract ideals—his sense of responsibility and diligent labor had kept his mother alive and brought a degree of stability to his poor family.

The image of the hardworking migrant is bolstered by this dual frame of reference and the accompanying work ethic, leading employers to often prefer migrant workers over native-born workers—particularly those who are undocumented and therefore perceived as more vulnerable—as they expect them to be more likely to accept subordination (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Yet Carlos is intimately aware of how the immediate experience of his labor is degraded and dangerous, despite the social value it brings him. In his previous job at a different bakery in New York, Carlos’ hand was mangled in a mixing machine that was missing a legally required safety guard. Carlos had repeatedly pointed out this danger to his boss and although the boss repeatedly promised that a safety guard would be installed, it never was. The cruel irony is that Carlos had recently told the owner of the bakery that he was quitting, the day after the owner unleashed a vile and humiliating tirade against him in front of the entire staff. The ‘mistake’ that provoked the owner to curse and belittle Carlos was a misshapen loaf that Carlos was removing from the oven; had he asked, he would have learned that it was simply leftover dough that he was baking to take home. The owner later begged Carlos to stay at the company and when Carlos refused, the owner asked if he would at least stay long enough to train his replacement. Carlos agreed, and it was during the training period that his hand was crushed in a machine. As he described his hand injury to me, he showed me the thick scars on his hand. He then pulled out a photo album from his night table and showed me two

photos he took of the large mixing machine in which his hand was mangled. He pointed to where he had been standing next to the machine, and where his co-worker had been kneeling on the ground when Carlos turned to speak to him. He then traced his finger over the photo to show me where the safety guard cover should have been.

Describing how difficult the employer made it for Carlos to obtain worker's compensation insurance payments, Carlos commented that the owners of these factories don't care about the wellbeing of the workers—they only care at the moment that it interrupts production. At the end of the interview, I mentioned that I think a lot of people don't think about who made the bread they are eating, and Carlos agreed firmly, adding that there are a lot of people who don't *want* to think about it. Carlos thus held no illusions about where his work offered social value and where it did not. His identity as a good, productive worker in the face of the low wages and complete disregard for his health and safety did not preclude opposition to these conditions, as we saw in his decision to quit over degrading treatment by the owner. At his subsequent bakery job, his grievances drew him to join the Brooklyn Worker Center as the seeds of an organizing campaign were being planted, but he eventually distanced himself from the organization as attempts to build an organizing committee fizzled; he said that without solidarity among his co-workers, he doubted the possibility of the campaign succeeding.³⁸ Ultimately, Carlos was navigating the contradictions between his consciousness of exploitation and his consciousness of dependency (the latter reflected most acutely in the imperative of sustaining his mother's health)—sharply aware of both, he fluctuated without settling between an ethos of survival and an ethos of resistance.

³⁸ Carlos worked at one of the bakeries where BWC attempted to begin a workplace organizing campaign, but eventually put the campaign on the 'back burner' because of limitations on organizational capacity and very low worker participation.

The value of labor: a Black worker's path

I met Christopher at 3 a.m. on a frigid winter night, in the parking lot outside of Sweet Tooth Bakery. The campaign had 'gone public' earlier in the week, and BWC organizers were doing rotating shifts of standing outside the bakery to meet and speak with as many workers as possible about the campaign. On this particular night, I was doing the 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. shift with Luis, and we met a number of night shift workers for the first time. Christopher emerged from the bakery on his break, and Luis and I approached him to show him the demands letter other workers had presented to the owner earlier that week; we ended up speaking for about twenty minutes. Christopher holds himself confidently and is highly straightforward in conversation; when we began discussing the campaign, he told us he was interested, but wanted to know 'the good, the bad, and the ugly'. A tall Black man with a strong build, he usually holds a serious expression on his face. His daughter was born just over a month before we met, so I soon learned that supporting her and his girlfriend was at the forefront of his mind.

Over the following months, I became the organizer who worked with Christopher, so we had a number of one-on-one meetings discussing his job, the campaign, and his life more generally. Our meetings were usually somehow involving movement, whether I was accompanying him as he walked his dog, riding along in his car as he made his long commute to the bakery, or walking around Babies 'R' Us as he bought supplies for his daughter. This held true when I interviewed him, after I was no longer volunteering at BWC. The interview took place in the car and in various stores as Christopher ran errands; he assured me that having a baby had significantly increased his ability to multi-task, and indeed, he spoke easily and contemplatively amid the movement. He had a restless, striving energy, and I often felt his palpable frustration in constantly coming up against the constraints that shaped where he lived, the work he did, and the possibilities he imagined.

Christopher's family immigrated to the US from the Caribbean when he was around a year-and-a-half old and he grew up in an area of Brooklyn that is predominantly Black (both US-born and immigrants). He carries his identity as an African American alongside his Caribbean roots, yet he relates to his immigrant status more through the experience of his mother, rather than through his own lived experience. He has traveled to his birth country twice since emigrating, but says that he feels 'like a ghost' there because everyone there knows and talks about their memories of him as a small child, as though he only existed at that time, and he feels no connection to who he is now.

Christopher grew up living with his mother, aunt, and grandmother; as a child, he shared a room with his mother and his aunt, while his grandmother was in the next room. He knows it was always a struggle for his mother to make ends meet, and he had an acute awareness of how much time she had to spend away from the house, working long hours as a home attendant caring for elderly and ill people—caring for other people's families. Yet he felt that his mother always made sure he had what he needed and had 'a talent of always making things seem like [they were] OK,' and so, growing up, he didn't know his family was poor. He described the women in his family as strong, aggressive, and direct—nothing was every 'swept under the rug,' but rather they dealt with problems as they arose. This strengthened him, he said, and he learned how to not define himself through the opinions of others, but rather through his own sense of self.

Despite being the first person in his family to go to college, Christopher has felt unable to break through the ceiling of low-wage jobs that center around manual labor. He described how he felt that the education system and society in general funneled him into a particular, constrained path in which the work he had access to was racially determined.

I've gotta pay bills, gotta do certain things to survive. What can I apply to where I— you know, when I'm put in this lane, I can be successful. And we're not successful... but, the things that we are successful at is pushed in our direction, it's kind of like the slop. Like, 'Oh, you could be an athlete.

You could be an entertainer. You could be...' Like, wow... modern-day minstrel show. Wow. Thank you. You're so gracious. We really appreciate it. You know what I mean? That shit is not helping me.

You know, when I was in—I wanted to be an artist when I was in high school. They was like, 'So, you're gonna get a basketball scholarship, right?' And I was like, 'Yeah, I mean, I guess... I like it.' I'm not saying—I love basketball. I mean, it's fun. I just think we should be pushing our kids in directions in which they want to go. And cultivate what they love doing instead of making them learn one specific thing and we all have to learn it the same way.

(Christopher, 33)

Christopher essentially described the sense that he did not have access to the cultural capital required to be successful in the job market beyond low-wage manual labor, unless he chose from the limited career slots that Blacks are deemed fit for—careers that he sees as 'the slop' and representing a 'modern-day minstrel show'. He described his first jobs, working at a hotel and working at an event space, and explained that he lost those jobs because he did not conform to the expected norms and therefore did not demonstrate his worth and productivity.

I had lost my job at the hotel. I was working as a GSR—a General Service Rep. I lost it because I was immature and I wasn't able to adapt to my environment fast enough. That's why I lost that job... You realize, adapting as far as dealing with people...knowing how to massage egos just to get by. To create a lane for yourself, where you could be productive and they could see your worth. I don't think it should be like that but that's what you need to do to survive. It's just what you have to do. Why is it like that? Because a lot of people in head positions, they like their egos to be massaged. They like to feel needed and respected... Little man's complex, I guess. But sometimes in some situations you just have to be able to learn the lay of the land, and become accustomed, and when in Rome, do as the Romans do. Just do what you have to do to put yourself in a position, that way you can change it. If that's what you want to do. Or you can just add to it, if you just want to be an accessory to it. So, point blank period...I never liked any of the jobs I ever had. I feel like none of my capabilities were ever used to a full potential. ...These jobs that I've had, it's always been—I'm not saying I have to have things catered to me, but I'm not of any use, you know? ... I think as I get older I'm becoming accustomed to what I have to do. And some people see my abilities and try to harness it, but it's always in bad ways.

...Manual labor is not really my thing. I do manual labor because I'm physically capable. But I'm more of a move-around type of guy. You know what I mean? I like projects, I like things that I have to work on—anything that's artistic. Things like that, I mean, I have never—I haven't gone for jobs like that. Because I don't think—I don't have the certification or—you know. I don't have the experience to do these things, but I know I'm capable.

Like Fernando and Carlos, the employment options available to Christopher were shaped by his race and class. Yet, unlike Fernando and Carlos, Christopher did not enter the US labor market with a 'dual frame of reference' that allowed the bottom rungs of work available to seem potentially status-

promoting; Christopher's frame of reference for the value of work was the potential for the economic independence and freedom promised by notions of equal citizenship, and therefore in the same comparative frame as white Americans (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1209). But, as outlined in Chapter Two, promises of equal citizenship have proven hollow to Black people on the whole, from the oppressive Jim Crow system in the wake of emancipation from slavery to inequality that persists today, despite significant but incomplete gains made in the past century.

Within this landscape, Christopher has learned that in order to simply get by, he has to adapt and 'do as the Romans do' by demonstrating his worth according to the dictates of the workplace. Yet this realization coexists with a deep discomfort at the required compromise—the willingness to resign oneself to jobs that do not offer substantial progress on the path between work and belonging (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1221–22). The low-wage work that many people of color are confined to often provides limited opportunity for economic advancement, and they are jobs more defined by drudgery rather than honor (Brace 2004), therefore inspiring little desire to derive one's identity from the work. Christopher perceives that many of the barriers he encounters are structural, yet he has also internalized what he sees as his failure to do better as a reflection of his own inadequacy. This is reflected in a conversation we had, in which I asked about his income and he said his wages at the bakery were not as good as they should be, and that he felt he needed to 'get out fast' and 'find something better.'

C: So I'm not proud of myself.

ZW: But do you feel like that's a reflection of you?

C: It is in a sense. Because if you want more, you do more.

ZW: I mean, you were saying before that you feel like the way everything's set up...

C: I mean, yeah, but—it's like, I'm not comfortable where I am, but there's nothing else I can do. I already took so many state exams and all these different things. It's just not working out for me. [This job] has probably been the most consistent thing I've had, so... It's just difficult. ...And I don't want

the burden to fall on my girls. So I'm gonna have to do what I have to—I'm gonna have to suck it up sometimes. But I honestly don't want to deal with the situation at all.

In the conversations we had, Christopher described the distinct feeling of being inside a game that was rigged for certain people to fail. He fluctuated between expressing, at times, the feeling of being trapped, restrained, and desperate to escape, and at other times, being determined to 'play the game' with focus so that he could push his family ahead. He encapsulated this duality when he told me that he feels there is 'real Christopher' and then there is 'assimilated Christopher.' This internal struggle between what I call an 'ethos of resistance' and an 'ethos of survival' can arise in response to the desire to succeed amid stark awareness of both the structural barriers in your path and the fragility of the threads that maintain any degree of stability and security. Yet this duality also manifests in a specifically racialized tenor, which will be explored below.

I feel like... *The Matrix*³⁹... People aren't awake yet. They don't see it for what it really is. I'm seeing that. Like, even the things that I won, the clothes that I hold in such high regard, mean nothing in the great scheme of things. It means nothing at all. Because when you take off my clothes and when I no longer own these things, I'm still a n*gger. That's what they call me behind my back. And then they look at me, and when they're alone with their thoughts, that's what they call me. That's how they look at me, you know? Not as a person—a n*gger. We're gonna keep you right here. And that's what it is. I feel like, there's not enough people that are open-minded to really think, to see it and be like, 'Yo, we're gonna do the opposite.' I feel like, and it may sound racist, but I feel like Black people should just deal with Black people. It's messed up to say but it's true. Cause every other group—every other culture can get along with each other just fine. They can live in the same neighborhood, they can keep their neighborhood nice. They can keep things up to par, they work together as a unit. And Black people concern themselves with being accepted by so many other people instead of accepting themselves. That's the problem. You yearn for other people's acceptance.

This internal struggle, the feeling of seeing oneself through the cruel lens of dominant, white society, tangles with the fluctuations between choosing to 'play the game', or to escape or resist. These conflicts had recently been framed in a new way for Christopher with the birth of his daughter, who was born about one month before I met him. Playing the game now seemed necessary, as another

³⁹ *The Matrix* (1999) is a science fiction film in which a computer programmer, Neo, discovers that what most humans perceive as reality is actually a simulated reality called 'the Matrix,' created by intelligent machines in order to pacify humans and harvest energy from their bodies. Neo learns this after he is given the option of taking a red pill that will reveal the truth or taking the blue pill that will allow him to return to his life with no memory of this; he takes the red pill.

being's survival was dependent on his ability to sustain a regular income; his consciousness of dependency was heightened. His job as an industrial baker did not allow him to financially support his family fully on his own; his girlfriend worked as well, and his mother often took care of the baby during the hours when they were both at work. The gendered role of the male 'provider' was therefore somewhat out of reach to Christopher; instead, as is often the case, caring responsibilities and the responsibility to earn were shared across the family. Because his wages were too low to sustain a sense of financial stability, the social value of his work was tenuous and vulnerable. Although Christopher became more committed to 'playing the game' with the birth of his daughter, this did not make the internal struggle disappear. Indeed, Christopher's description of this internal conflict strongly echoes W. E. B. Du Bois' theory of the 'double consciousness' experienced by Black people in the US:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,— this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten. (Du Bois 2008:8–9)

These concepts of double consciousness and 'second-sight' draw parallels to the afore-mentioned concept of 'peripheral vision', as they both strive to encapsulate both the relentless disjuncture and chafing of being part of a marginalized group forced to reckon with the field of the dominant group,

as well as the gift (perhaps bittersweet) of possessing a capacity for this broader, deeper vision.⁴⁰

This double consciousness or peripheral vision can hold both the seeds of an oppositional consciousness—an ethos of resistance—and of an ethos of survival; it can function both as a degree of defense against oppression as well as causing a self to be fractured by the heightened awareness and internalization of the oppression (Winant 2004:26). This ‘second-sight’ allows those who are marginalized to shift their participation in the ‘game’ of playing by the rules of dominant society to survive; in other particular circumstances, it can become the catalyst of resistance through collective action. In this latter case, the double consciousness or peripheral vision can be seen as a creating a ‘margin of freedom’ that has the potential to open up space for alternative imaginings of a better future (Bourdieu 2000:235; Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S11). While a range of circumstances can steer it in either direction, our focus in subsequent chapters will be on the strategies through which labor organizers seek to open margins of freedom and expand workers’ notions of what is possible.

Conclusions

This chapter delved into the aspirations, experiences, and structural positions of three bakery workers to examine how these shaped their experiences of the hierarchies of labor and the value of labor. Their life stories largely supported Gordon and Lenhardt’s theory that workers derive different social value from the same jobs in ways that are shaped by race, citizenship status, and group history, while further complicating it with an emphasis on how changing temporalities and family status further shape the connections. This nuanced view of how different structural positions

⁴⁰ Similar parallels have been noted by Martínez (2002) and Falcón (2008) regarding double consciousness and the concept of *mestiza* consciousness as developed by Anzaldúa (1987). Although *mestiza* consciousness invokes ideas similar to ‘peripheral vision’ (and indeed, the latter concept stems from the former), I do not incorporate in the analysis here, as *mestiza* consciousness is conceptualized as a more distinctly feminist and oppositional consciousness.

are subjectively experienced creates a concrete foundation for the analysis in subsequent chapters of the challenges of organizing across difference and divisions.

Tying together this web of factors that sculpt worker subjectivities, the double consciousness or peripheral vision sharpens workers' view of the contradictions between 'consciousness of exploitation' at work and 'consciousness of dependency' in their lives beyond the workplace. This reveals the potential space for the will to partake in collective action to emerge, but the imagined possibilities also depend heavily on shop floor dynamics and union organizing approaches. The following chapter will build on this analysis to examine how BWC's organizing vision and strategies sought to leverage different sources of power in order to open a 'margin of freedom' for collective action and cultivate solidarity.

Chapter 4 – Radical Visions and Practical Challenges:

Solidarity Unionism on the Ground

This chapter examines in depth the vision and strategies of the Brooklyn Worker Center, and begins to explore the challenges that arise when these visions are translated into organizational practice. Beginning with a discussion of BWC’s three guiding strategic principles—solidarity, direct action, and worker leadership, the chapter then examines how BWC navigated its transition away from a model centered on advocacy power and toward a workplace organizing model that was meant to be based on solidarity unionism; I trace the different sources of power that BWC leveraged, including the continued reliance on advocacy power in the face of a challenging organizing terrain. The organizing campaign at Harvest Bakery presents a case study in the complexities of attempting to cultivate solidarity from the outside, demonstrating how BWC struggled to maintain worker participation and to build a durable membership base in the factory. I will argue that the organization’s efforts to cultivate solidarity and militancy among the workers were hobbled by an underdeveloped approach to identifying and fostering workers’ leadership and organizing capacity, despite BWC’s stated commitment to worker leadership.

Solidarity and direct action

Vision – ‘Industrial Control’: Our vision is an organization of food processing and distribution workers who control their industry through direct action, solidarity, and worker-led organizing.

Mission – ‘Highly Valuable Membership Experience’: By creating a highly valuable membership experience, our mission is to build an organization of food processing and distribution workers who control their industry.

On my first day of volunteering at BWC, Adam invited me to join the staff meeting with him, Sara, and David. During the meeting, he occasionally took a few minutes to give me background explanations of some key terms and topics being discussed; one of the first things he described to

me was the ‘value model’ of the organization. He told me that staff had found that members perceived increased wages and benefits to be the most valuable aspect of being a BWC member—‘as it should be’, Adam said, noting that IWW members often get caught up in ideology and forget about the basic, material needs of workers. He told me that BWC then reasoned that the best way to create a long-term pattern of increased wages and benefits was by creating an organized base and thus building worker power; he described it as organizing ‘job shops’ toward the ultimate goal of industry-wide organizing and workers attaining industrial control. BWC’s specific ‘theory of value’ was written as such:

BWC theory of value: material gains (wages and working conditions) + supportive community + professional services + personal development + ideological growth

I was initially slightly confused by the ‘theory of value’, as it seemed to me that most mainstream unions would operate on the assumption that the primary value workers derived from membership was economic—increased wages and benefits. The significant difference here appeared to be a disagreement on *how* that should be accomplished; while business unions relied on NLRB elections and collective bargaining, BWC and the IWW advocated solidarity unionism. Further, most worker centers would assert the value of supportive community, professional services, personal development, and ideological growth. I therefore believe my initial confusion reflected a subtle tension in BWC’s self-definition; BWC was a worker center affiliated with a radical union, and thus saw itself as both pushing past the limitations of ‘the worker center model’ and striving to address the problems of business unionism through this fusion.

Solidarity unionism

At the head of the large wooden conference table where most meetings were held at the BWC office, there was a sign taped to the side of the whiteboard that read: ‘Solidarity, Worker-Led, Direct

Action’. Conceived of as the three core elements of ‘solidarity unionism’, BWC’s organizing model, these terms were used frequently by staff, whether in meetings with workers, in rants about the crisis of the labor movement, or in public communications about the organization and its campaigns. Adam had first learned about solidarity unionism from the writings of Staughton Lynd, a historian, activist, and lawyer who later became a friend and mentor to Adam; they went on to co-author two books related to solidarity unionism. This alternative form of worker organizing stands in contrast to business unionism in its rejection of hierarchy and bureaucracy in favor of unions led and operated by the rank-and-file, its dismissal of the need for government certification of unions as exclusive bargaining agents, and its firm emphasis on direct action.⁴¹ It is, essentially, a call for worker organizing to be rooted first and foremost in solidarity—collective action and mutual support among workers—rather than in the legal system or in bureaucratic procedures.⁴² Framed as an approach or model that can emerge through alternative structures either separately from mainstream unions or as bottom-up resistance to their bureaucracy, Lynd describes this alternative unionism as ‘relying, not on technical expertise, or on numbers of signed-up members, nor yet on bureaucratic chain-of-command, but on the spark that leaps from person to person, especially in times of common crisis’ (Lynd 2015:66). The present-day IWW advocates for solidarity unionism, and Adam explained at various points that it was the answer to what he viewed as three major problems with traditional unions, or ‘business unions’: mandatory membership, exclusive representation, and service provision; these will be explained below.

Three months into my fieldwork, Adam added a ‘staff development’ section into the weekly staff meeting agenda for the first time (that I had observed). The staff meeting was over three hours long

⁴¹ See Introduction chapter for an in-depth explanation of business unionism.

⁴² My explanations of solidarity unionism derive from Lynd (2015), Lynd and Piascik (2014), and from conversations and an interview with Adam.

in total (which was not far out of step with the average length of staff meetings), and the following staff members were present: Adam, Sara, Diego, David, and Alex. Sandwiched between an agenda item on getting health insurance for staff and another on the limits of online storage space in DropBox, Adam gave staff a training on the standard model of unionism in the US (often described as ‘business unionism’ or the ‘service model’ of unionism), in order to critique it and contrast it with BWC’s model of solidarity unionism. After giving a clear overview of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), union elections, and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs—the ‘holy grail of business unionism’), he went on to explain the tenets of solidarity unionism, which he described as the contemporary articulation of syndicalism or anarcho-syndicalism.

Adam was impassioned as he spoke about the advantages of solidarity unionism—about the right to ‘fight without mediation’, to make your voice heard, to fight on your own terms, and ‘to go out in the streets if you want to’. He named three key elements of it: being rank-and-file-led and -operated (i.e., worker-led and -operated); using direct action; and enforcing standards through solidarity instead of through a contract. Worker leadership stood in contrast to the NLRA’s granting of agency to the union as exclusive representative, so that, for example, any grievance a worker had would have to be addressed through a grievance procedure controlled by the union agent and the company; Adam asserted that the business union model turned unionism into a form of service provision, whereas solidarity unionism relied on workers’ agency. He remarked that having rank-and-file leadership was ‘critical for democracy’ as well as for effectiveness. Speaking about the problems of business unionism, Adam said that the union becomes ‘the boss’s cop on the beat’ (a phrase also used in Lynd 2015:25), a reference to the role unions take on in funneling works’ grievances away from militant collective action and toward bureaucratic grievance procedures.

Adam then defined direct action as ‘doing what it takes to get what you need’—as a worker having a direct confrontation with their boss instead of through a mediator. He said that this too was more effective, and that it empowered workers. Finally, he said that unity was enforced through solidarity—whether or not it was a majority of workers—instead of through a contract. Here he referred again to the ‘dues check-off’ that he had described as a key element of ‘business unionism’, noting that the CBA gives unions ‘dues check-off’ wherein the employer automatically deducts union dues from workers’ paychecks. The dues check-off, inextricably tied to exclusive representation, makes payment of dues involuntary and mediated by the employer, which removes workers’ ability to control their membership;⁴³ together, he said, dues check-off and exclusive representation make mandatory membership a key feature of business unionism in the US, acting as a disincentive for unions to engage in militant action.

Calls for the labor movement to make worker organizing—rather than service provision—its central focus have been voiced for decades from a number of different camps.⁴⁴ Some have asserted the need to divert union resources away from servicing and toward ‘organizing the unorganized’, while others have called for deepening the links between unions and communities or between unions and other social movements; then there are those who specifically argue that workers themselves need to occupy the central role in labor organizing. Among these latter voices, there are pushes for this shift to happen within existing mainstream union structures (McAlevey 2016), as well as the drive to

⁴³ Somewhat ironically, this echoes certain conservative anti-union arguments in the US, which have been used to implement so-called ‘right to work’ laws in half the states across the country. Right to work laws prohibit CBAs that require all workers in a unionized shop to belong to the union, thus allowing workers to work under a contract negotiated by a union without paying dues or agency fees to that union. ‘Right to work’ laws are widely seen as part of a conservative effort to weaken the labor movement. While many in the labor movement regard exclusive representation and dues check-off as vital to the labor movement’s survival, proponents of solidarity unionism and certain other critics of the mainstream labor movement argue that ‘solidarity unions should voluntarily choose not to require union membership’ (Lynd 2015:46).

⁴⁴ See Introduction chapter for a brief overview of proposed strategies for reviving the US labor movement.

create alternative forms from below or outside that are wholly led by the rank-and-file, whether they are labeled as ‘syndicalist and autonomist’ worker organizations (Ness 2014c), or ‘solidarity unionism’ (Lynd 2015).

Advocating for and practicing solidarity unionism is not simply the act of asserting an opinion about strategic or tactical superiority; while it has been put forth as a potential strategic solution to the crisis of the US labor movement, it is also rooted in a distinctly radical political vision that sets it apart from what are often conceived of as the bureaucratic, economistic concerns of business unions. Solidarity unionism was envisioned not only as a pragmatic solution to improving workers’ conditions but also a path to greater freedom and agency for workers on the job and in society at large. The following section explores the practice of ‘direct action’, a core element of solidarity unionism.

Direct action

In the same vein, the term ‘direct action’ describes both a type of tactic and a vision. While direct action has been used to describe a wide range of tactics carried out by activist groups with greatly varying purposes, and there is considerable contestation as to what types of actions specifically fall under the umbrella of ‘direct action’, it is most strongly associated with the ideology of anarchism. Direct action tactics generally involve people acting to directly change their own unjust circumstances, rather than acting to influence a political or other representative body to enact changes for them; such tactics speak well to anarchists, who ‘reject states and all those systematic forms of inequality states make possible’ (Graeber 2009:203). Graeber contrasts Marxism and anarchism by noting that Marxism tends to be ‘theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy,’ while anarchism is generally an ‘ethical discourse about revolutionary practice’ (Graeber 2004:6). Yet direct action is not only about protesting or disrupting an injustice—it also entails

prefiguring an alternative. It thus integrates means and ends, manifesting its political vision through its practice: ‘in its essence direct action is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free’ (Graeber 2009:203). Franks describes direct action as ‘synecdochic’ because it ‘stands both as a practical response to a given situation, but also as a symbol of the larger vision of societal change’ (Franks 2003:20).

In popular usage, ‘direct action’ is often used to describe a vast range of protest actions that are seen to be militant, whether or not they embody the qualities of ‘directness’ and prefiguring described above.⁴⁵ At BWC, direct action was often spoken of in opposition to legal action; the merits of direct action were often discussed in the same breath as the weaknesses of relying on the law. Direct action tactics that were employed or discussed included marches, demands letters, strikes, slow-downs, sit-ins, and work-to-rule.

The quintessential form of direct action for workers is, of course, the strike. Many analyses of the current weakness of the US labor movement assert that the relinquishing of the strike tool—in the face of legal and political constraints, as well as the drift toward a business unionism approach—has been one of the most potent factors in its decline (Lynd and Grubačić 2010:240–41; McAlevey 2016). Since the New Deal era, strike activity and related forms of worker direct action have increasingly been made illegal or channeled into conditions whose predictability limit their effectiveness greatly (Montgomery 1979:166–67). In speaking of the strength of solidarity unionism and direct action, Adam and other proponents of solidarity unionism contrasted the presence of no-

⁴⁵ While debating the nuances of the definitional boundaries of ‘direct action’ is outside the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that some of these debates address the question of what workplace ‘actions’ can truly be considered forms of direct action. For example, some anarchists would argue that when workers engage in protest seeking to improve the terms of their employment or contract, this is not direct action because it is ultimately the state that will enforce the terms of this contract. In other usage of the term, ‘direct action’ is used more as an indicator of militancy—the use of tactics that are confrontational. The definitions and uses of violence are another contested aspect of direct action.

strike clauses in most union-management contracts with workers who, under solidarity unionism, would be free to struggle by the means they chose. Worker centers, because they are not constrained by the National Labor Relations Act, have had more freedom to engage in certain powerful tactics that are prohibited or restricted for labor unions, such as secondary boycotts, strikes, and other forms of direct action (Fine 2011a:623; Milkman 2014:19).

But again, direct action was not referred to as a simple matter of strategic sense—it evoked another way of being in the world. During an orientation with a couple of new members, Sara segued into a brief discussion of direct action versus legal action. She spoke about members taking action ‘with their own hands’ and said that legal action was one tool they used but it was not enough. ‘The most *completa, profunda*, is what you win with your sweat, your strength—more than the service of a lawyer. Direct action is ongoing, it’s constant’. The two workers nodded firmly in agreement. Importantly, all three tenets of solidarity unionism—solidarity, direct action, and worker leadership—were imagined as practices that could integrate means and ends, manifesting a radical political vision through their practice.

Solidarity unionism in practice

Brooklyn Worker Center staff acknowledged that they was not employing a ‘pure’ model of solidarity unionism, portraying the organization’s model as being based on historical traditions of syndicalism and the IWW yet experimenting to figure out how it could work for today’s food production workers. BWC’s public materials branded its model as ‘innovative’ within the world of worker centers, and attracted substantial curiosity among those interested in new labor organizing models; Adam had established a name for himself and the organization within the burgeoning world of alternative labor organizing in the US (‘alt-labor’), having co-written two books on solidarity

unionism with Staughton Lynd, penned articles, and given talks at numerous conferences. The BWC office thus had visitors relatively often; academic visitors, activist visitors, and visitors from foundations, all of whom sought to get a glimpse of how the organization worked. One morning in the spring of 2013, Adam was scheduled to meet with some Turkish activist-academics who were interested in learning more about solidarity unionism. Adam invited me to join the discussion, and so I sat with the four of them as they asked Adam a number of questions regarding the big picture and the practice of grassroots labor organizing and solidarity unionism.

As they spoke, Adam firmly located himself and BWC within the historical trajectory of the IWW. He spoke about labor market insecurity in the US, describing its legal roots as having been created in the late nineteenth century, coinciding with the emergence of worker resistance. ‘It was resistance in a very pure form, because they didn’t have a lot of organizational apparatus’, Adam said. ‘This is the tradition I come from—the IWW—we come out of that’. In speaking about repression of the worker resistance during that period, Adam described ‘big, amazing fights’ and said, ‘We were met with outright repression—they indicted our entire leadership, coast to coast’. He told the Turkish academics, ‘Co-optation harmed us more than outright repression’, noting that the ‘business union establishment’ was promoting capitalism and denouncing radicalism, so the mainstream labor movement took a different direction. ‘Some people see that as a good time for labor, but I think that’s where labor started going down the wrong path’, Adam said. ‘It became bureaucratized—more about the union institution than about the workers’. These historical descriptions set the stage for Adam to explain BWC’s model, rooted in the IWW principles of solidarity, worker leadership, and direct action.

After a discussion about the weaknesses of labor law in the US, the visitors asked Adam, ‘So, what is the source of your power?’ He told them it was ‘direct action’, and they remarked that in order to

focus on direct action you have to really persuade the workers, which can be difficult if they are immigrants and have no job security. Adam replied,

You have to take a step back—the first step is designing a valuable membership experience. You have to start with an incredibly powerful understanding of the problems in the industry—the industry dynamics, major employers, supply chain, products, distribution chain. You need a detailed analysis of your audience—their ages, do they have children, their aspirations, the neighborhoods where they live... And I think leadership is important—democratic, accountable, diverse leadership. ...I would argue strenuously that you have to profoundly understand the problems before building solutions. You need hypotheses to test; we have principles we stand by. But nobody has the answer for labor yet. There has to be a better way than capitalism. You have to develop your model, your strategy, and a real vision and mission that you believe in—one that disciplines your activity every day. ...You shouldn't underestimate leadership development, developing a worker's voice. Then you have to test your model: is this really valuable? You need metrics to test this.

The vision expressed above reflects two distinct strands, upon further probing. The first strand described requires in-depth research on the industry and in-depth research on the 'audience'—thus beginning with the assumption that it is not the workers themselves who are launching this initiative, but rather they are the audience. Based on this in-depth research, a model, strategy, vision, and mission must be developed, and then tested. This quasi-scientific approach roughly reflected the approach BWC aspired to, with Adam driven by a fierce desire to test the BWC model. Although the organization did not have as detailed an analysis of its worker base as what Adam called for above, it was something he had brought up several times; he had asked me to map out worker archetypes, and had floated the idea of doing more in-depth research and observation of one or two members, in order to better understand the challenges they face. While this was imagined as a way to increase membership and also worker leadership within the organization, it is worth noting that this marketing approach is quite distinct from the aim of building up member leadership so the workers themselves could assert their needs.

The second strand of the quote above comments on the importance of leadership that is 'democratic, accountable, [and] diverse', and the value of leadership development and 'developing a worker's voice'. The principle of worker leadership will be explored in the following section, but

here we can note that this raises the inherent tension in any organization that seeks to develop true member leadership while also operating with a particular vision and strategy firmly in place, outside of member input.

One of the Turkish academics asked, ‘In this model, who is the organizer?’ Adam replied,

In solidarity unionism, the organizer has to be a worker on the shop floor. But the question is whether you are taking the pure approach. We are taking a different approach here... Our base is incredible, and I bow down to them—I learn so much from them. But... we are offering more support at present than the pure solidarity unionism model.

He gave the example of the recent Harvest Bakery negotiation (described below) and said that if they were using the pure model, BWC staff wouldn’t have been present for the negotiations. ‘We tried the pure model’, he said, ‘but the employer managed to split one ethnic group from the other...’ He described how campaigns had suffered, including with many workers being fired in the ‘legacy’ campaigns and said, ‘Right now, we are offering more outside support...The pure approach wasn’t working in this sector, unfortunately’. He then added that the IWW campaign at Starbucks had made great achievements, which he felt vindicated the model of ‘fighting’ without certification, but that the company had also fought back very hard.

Harvest Bakery campaign

The Harvest Bakery campaign and negotiations that Adam referred to above reveal some of the constraints on BWC’s ability to employ solidarity unionism more fully. Despite Adam’s comment above that ‘direct action’ was the source of BWC members’ power, BWC continued to rely on leveraging ‘advocacy power’ even as it transitioned toward a model that centered on organizing. This was in part because BWC members had limited structural bargaining power, but also because BWC struggled to maintain and expand a solid base of members committed to solidarity. As previously noted, it is common for both worker centers and unions to leverage sources of power other than

workers' power to disrupt production, particularly in the face of diminishing protections for organizing, dwindling union density, and fierce employer opposition to unionization; the amplified challenges of leveraging power among low-wage workers leave worker centers in an especially tough position. This is why far more worker centers are engaged in policy campaigns to expand protective legislation or improve enforcement measures than in workplace organizing campaigns. Labor unions also leverage power in a number of realms outside of workers' social power, engaging in 'corporate campaigns' that are highly dependent on leveraging political relationships, research, legal tactics, and public pressure. Worker centers have been quite successful in mobilizing political power through institutional allies (such as other organizations and unions), support of politicians, and through generating public support with a moral framing of the issues (Fine 2011a)—'symbolic power' (Chun 2011); see, for example, Goldberg's (2014b) account of Domestic Workers United's impressive victory in passing the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, in which she also highlights DWU's recognition that 'bottom-up enforcement' to make the bill meaningful would require base-building on a much greater scale.

Legal tools were one set of tactics that BWC used as leverage. The organization sought to pressure companies to cede to campaign demands by filing 'Unfair Labor Practice' (ULP) charges at the National Labor Relations Board, or in other instances, by wielding the threat of legal action. For example, Harvest Bakery executives agreed to meet with BWC and its members after a lawyer informed them that BWC was preparing a legal case surrounding the bakery's questionable two-tier hiring system;⁴⁶ one of the campaign demands had been that the company end this system and rectify the pay and benefits of affected employees, and the company said it preferred to resolve this

⁴⁶ In 2009, Harvest Bakery instated a separate pay category for delivery drivers hired after 2009; the drivers were put under a contract with lower pay and benefits and under the name of a different company for whom they were purportedly delivering good; yet they were delivering Harvest Bakery bread and wearing Harvest Bakery uniforms.

through meeting with BWC instead of through a lawsuit. At that point, Adam believed it was important that BWC use this settlement negotiation as a platform to address broader issues as well, including the company's retaliation against BWC members and respect for the workers' right to organize. Aside from winning this final campaign demand, BWC sought to 'bring the company to the table'—to open the door to negotiations—and the legal pressure tactic successfully led to a number of meetings between the company and BWC members and staff. The two-tier hiring issue was resolved three months later, after BWC members and staff had held three meetings with Harvest Bakery executives. The president of the company called Adam and said they would settle it, and he pointed to one of BWC's legacy campaigns in which the company filed for bankruptcy in response to a secondary boycott involving more than 70 of its clients—the president said Harvest Bakery did not want to become that company.

Winning the campaign demands and achieving these meetings, then, was accomplished through a campaign that had included: a public march of workers and supporters during which the members presented a demands letter to their boss; an online petition addressed to the private equity firm that owned the bakery; the threat of legal action as a tipping point; and implicitly, the threat the company perceived, based on reading about a BWC legacy campaign, of a potential secondary boycott. Such a blend of direct action, legal tools, and advocacy is typical for worker center campaigns (see, for example, Brady 2014; Goldberg 2014; Ikeler 2014). While this stems in part from the serious limitations workers face in leveraging structural bargaining power in the low-wage industries in which worker centers organize, it is also a reflection of a political economic environment that is extremely hostile to labor organizing in general; every BWC campaign faced pointed and sustained employer opposition. While the worker center campaigns cited above leveraged a relatively similar repertoire of pressure tactics, the outcomes sought ranged from passage of legislation to expand worker protections (Goldberg 2014b), to collective bargaining agreements in a joint union-worker

center campaign (Ikeler 2014), to settlement negotiations that sometimes included changes to workplace policies (Brady 2014). BWC's campaign at Harvest Bakery had a relatively unusual goal of regular, ongoing negotiations between BWC members, staff, and Harvest Bakery executives; this aimed for an ongoing BWC presence at the shop, as with a collective bargaining agreement. Yet BWC's specific avoidance of CBAs meant that in order to be meaningful, the results of negotiations would have to be backed up with workers' power to enforce them on the shop floor, as is usually the case with expanded legislative protections or settlement agreements that change workplace policy. Unlike BWC's own legacy campaigns and the campaigns of many worker centers that achieve codes of conduct or settlement agreements, BWC was now organizing workers currently employed at the worksite, in order to make the possibility of establishing 'value tomorrow' viable.

Yet, another reason the campaign at Harvest Bakery required other sources of power was that BWC members represented a minority of the workforce; this point requires some explanation of the details, however. At the peak of the campaign, the BWC members represented less than 15 percent of the Harvest Bakery workforce, but importantly, they were concentrated in the distribution department; when the campaign launched, the petition was signed by the vast majority of delivery drivers (no workers from other departments were involved at that time). Delivery drivers were among the highest-paid non-managerial workers at the bakery, and the critical location of this position in distribution meant these workers did possess some workplace bargaining power. But several months after the campaign launch, after one campaign demand had been met when the distribution manager was transferred to a different department, one of the prominent worker leaders began to distance himself from BWC and eventually his decisive abandonment of the campaign led to a dramatic split among the members.⁴⁷ This split occurred along lines of nationality and kinship,

⁴⁷ This occurred in the months before I began my fieldwork at BWC; my account is therefore based on descriptions from Harvest Bakery workers and BWC staff.

as several of the worker leaders who withdrew were of the same South American nationality (and two were related), while the worker leaders who remained were from Mexico and the Dominican Republic.

During the period of my fieldwork, BWC was therefore trying to rebuild the organizing committee at Harvest Bakery as well as recruiting members from production departments; success was limited in both respects, resulting in fluctuating member participation, relatively low active membership, and therefore limited cultivation of internal power. For the most part, the members recruited from production departments were not ‘organic’ workplace leaders and were not able to recruit a significant number of coworkers to join (I will turn to the question of worker leadership in the following section). Recruitment was made more difficult by the company’s ongoing campaign against BWC, which included retaliation against BWC members, managerial pressure on workers to stop participating in the campaigns, and anti-BWC communications to workers.⁴⁸

The situation at Harvest Bakery was also unusual in an important way because it was one of the rare industrial bakeries in New York that was actually already unionized; in fact, the above-mentioned prominent worker leader was the union shop steward. The BWC members from Harvest Bakery felt that their union essentially functioned as an ineffective union that was more on the side of the employer than the workers, and did not involve workers in decision-making at all—essentially, a ‘business union’—and so they sought to make changes that their union did not support through launching a campaign with BWC. The fact that the workforce was already unionized and working under a collective bargaining agreement, however, was significant as it meant that the workers had superior pay and benefits to most of their industrial peers and already had an established system of

⁴⁸ I explore the dynamics of anti-union campaigns in more detail in Chapter Seven, in the context of Sweet Tooth Bakery.

representation within the factory. In effect, the BWC campaign functioned like a type of dissident or reform caucus within the union.

The semi-regular negotiations between Harvest Bakery executives and BWC members and staff were regarded by staff as one of the organization's greatest achievements thus far in organizing (as opposed to winning large settlements in legal cases, for example). After describing to me what happened during the first negotiation, Adam had exclaimed, "This is syndicalism!" and told me that it validated BWC's model. It was indeed an impressive achievement for workers to have the opportunity to sit across from the table with their bosses and negotiate about the issues they wanted to change, and for the BWC campaign to have won these meetings and changes without an NLRB election compelling the employer to negotiate. BWC's ability to secure multiple such meetings demonstrated the success of this multi-pronged strategy, combining direct action, the threat of legal action, and advocacy (albeit at an already-unionized factory).

But although BWC spoke of launching campaigns with a 'militant minority', the ultimate goal was to establish an ongoing presence and eventually attain a majority of members at the shop—or at least a proportion of workers that was sufficient to exercise 'job control' through exercising direct action and solidarity; BWC staff did not know what percentage of worker membership that would require, however. Launching campaigns with a small group of workers is common in worker center campaigns, but it was a limitation that BWC was explicitly seeking to overcome. Because of its solidarity unionism model, BWC did not seek an NLRB election or card-check recognition to legally require the employer to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement. Instead, BWC employed a range of tactics to compel the company to engage in negotiation meetings, a strategy that also did not require a majority of workers to support. When the organizing committee fell apart and worker participation was shaky, BWC's use of other sources of leverage was intended to open the space for

worker participation to increase and to build up workers' internal power and capacity to organize and take collective action. The organization was unable to substantially expand its base of membership within the bakery, however, leaving out of reach the prospect of relying primarily on workers' direct action and solidarity.

The challenging reality of obstacles BWC faced in carrying out solidarity unionism was illustrated to me by two conversations that happened in the beginning and at the end of my fieldwork. Early on in my fieldwork, I sat in on a meeting between BWC staff and a consultant, Andrew, who had worked as a researcher at a labor union until recently. Andrew was sympathetic to the radical vision Adam had communicated to him, and had agreed to advise BWC in research and strategy. They discussed the likelihood that Harvest Bakery would be sold in the near future, and how this could mean that the workers would no longer be unionized. 'Then you'd be in another fight', Andrew commented, and Adam replied that this would allow BWC to do a 'full-on' campaign that would push the company to give workers an ideal agreement. Fifteen months later, however, the possibility of Harvest Bakery workers having no union became real—when the contract renewal was approaching, a different union got at least 30% of the workers to sign cards expressing their interest in being represented by the union. This meant that there would be an election, which opened up the possibility of workers voting for no union (BWC/IWW was not on the ballot, as they did not seek exclusive representation).

When Sara first found out that other unions were courting Harvest Bakery workers, Adam instructed staff not to endorse any one union over the others because they were all bad choices and what mattered was the power of the workers; he said that BWC therefore needed to focus on organizing workers to build pressure for the changes they wanted. Yet as the election approached, it came to light that one of the unions appeared to have mafia connections and a generally corrupt

background; BWC then put substantial effort into educating workers about this union and encouraging them to share this information with their coworkers. A couple of BWC members asked BWC organizers why they shouldn't just rely on their membership with BWC and the IWW instead of voting for other unions; at this point, it was clear to staff that BWC did not have a big enough or organized enough base of workers at Harvest Bakery to exert the power necessary to improve or even maintain workers' wages and benefits, and thus the best way they could protect workers' interests was by encouraging workers to vote for the union they already had. This episode was an example of organizational realities chafing at the vision of solidarity unionism; without more significant worker participation, the model's effectiveness was limited in its ability to rely on workers' social power. BWC's leveraging of multiple sources of power did win some concrete improvements for one group of workers, but it did not catalyze the growth in membership and worker power that could lead to establishing a BWC/IWW majority at the bakery. While ideally the use of advocacy power could open up space to increase worker participation and facilitate workers' ability to exercise social power, this could only be accomplished through deepening workers' leadership and organizing capacity. The following section will examine BWC's approach to leadership development and how this affected the organization's capacity to build an active, militant membership base.

Worker leadership

Member leadership. Member-centric organization. What group prioritizes the metrics that we prioritize? And organize the organization around [them], right? It's not, 'did we change this law?'—god bless those groups. Wonderful work. Those groups are necessary. But they're not member-first groups. They're policy-first, put the member in, right? BWC—member first, member-centricity. Partnering with the member. Learning from the member. Making a truly valuable membership experience that's durable. Figuring that out. Difficult to copy that.

Adam, interview

Worker centers generally profess that leadership development and democratic internal processes are critical to their organization's vision and operations (Fine 2006; Gordon 2005), reflecting values that stand in contrast with the hierarchical, rigid bureaucracy associated with large labor unions (Fine 2007). These values signal a vision of what a just world would look like, a vision in which autonomy and freedom on the job—and within the workers' organization—would disintegrate the alienation that so many workers experience. The actual manifestation of this vision in daily practice, however, is often far more challenging than what is portrayed. Further, because these terms are widely used and less often defined, they encompass a wide range of practices and organizational structures, and correspondingly, greatly varying visions of autonomy, democracy, and power. Terms such as 'leadership development' proliferate throughout the world of community-based organizations, becoming part of a diluted and expanding category that appears to no longer require definition because of its ubiquity. Internally, worker centers do not always explicitly define for themselves what this leadership actually entails; distinctions are sometimes not drawn between worker participation and workers holding decision-making power, or between worker leadership within a campaign or at an organizational level. Despite ubiquitous references to it, there are surprisingly few detailed accounts of how leadership development is actually carried out through organizing (Patel 2013:118).

Among mainstream labor unions, while it is difficult to generalize about leadership development approaches, it is instructive to look at their broad pattern of support and abandonment of actual worker organizing—that is, organizing that recognizes worker agency as the most important ingredient of labor organizing. The path toward top-down business unionism (detailed in the Introduction chapter) was also the path away from worker leadership within unions. The shift of many unions toward an 'organizing model' in the last couple of decades has reintroduced the model of 'recruiting worker leaders onto organizing committees, which—generally led by staff organizers or representatives—mobilize members in union workplaces and organize workers in non-union

workplaces'; yet of the many unions associated with this model, only a small portion of them genuinely practice it (Patel 2013:121). Even among unions that do, worker engagement is often viewed as one leverage point among the many leverage points of a corporate campaign, rather than as a central purpose and end of the union (McAlevey 2016:51); workers are mobilized to take action, but not to take part in strategy deliberation or decision-making (Gordon 2005:292). So, while there are certainly some unions that take seriously genuine leadership development as an end in itself, not simply as a means, there is more commonly a sharp contrast between worker centers' approach to member leadership and that of unions.

This contrast has been illustrated in accounts of joint campaigns between labor unions and community-based organizations (CBOs) such as worker centers. Describing a joint campaign carried out by a CBO and a union, Shapiro (2014) highlights the tension between the CBO's efforts to build a Worker's Committee that embodied participatory democracy and worker leadership and the union's resistance to 'bottom-up organizing'. One of the CBO organizers commented that the union didn't 'necessarily see the value or understand the importance of really building worker ownership over the union' (Shapiro 2014:65). A similar dynamic is described by Fine (2007) in a description of a highly participatory worker justice campaign carried out by a faith-based organizing group, paving the way for unionization in Omaha's meatpacking industry; tensions between the community organization and the union largely destroyed their partnership, as 'the social movement orientation and participatory decision-making cultures [of the community organization] collided with the more bureaucratized and top-down culture of the union' (Fine 2007:352).

Among the worker centers and unions that do undertake leadership development processes with workers, the goals that motivate it can be substantially different. Many worker centers and those advocating alternative forms of unionism see worker leadership as critical to changing society's

fundamental power structures and allowing workers to have more control over their lives—essentially, a commitment to the right to self-determination. On the other hand, as described above, some unions and organizations employ leadership development mainly as a strategic device for winning campaigns and strengthening the union (Patel 2013:120). Drawing on Marshall Ganz’s analyses of strategy, McAlevey contends that the purpose, beliefs, and motivations of a leadership team are deeply correlated with their success in genuinely organizing workers and winning. She contrasts the immensely effective leftist organizers in the early CIO unions who were wholly committed to worker organizing with the anti-socialist John Lewis who hired these organizers to expand the CIO and then promptly pushed them out once campaigns were won (McAlevey 2016:21–38). Building on these insights, I contend that the commitment to worker leadership as a central organizational purpose and the belief in worker self-determination—core elements of solidarity unionism—are both political and strategic commitments.

In addition to being a worker center that signals its commitment to member leadership, BWC also advocated solidarity unionism and was affiliated with the IWW union, which is built on a radical vision not only of social change throughout society but also of internal democracy within the union. BWC thus rooted itself in two traditions that particularly emphasize worker agency. BWC’s vision of member leadership within the organization extended to a broader vision of worker control in the industry; member leadership was also a revolutionary ideal, a syndicalist vision of a world with a starkly different power dynamic that would shed the exploitation and alienation of capitalist class stratification.

Worker leadership: practical or ideological?

Although the tension between participatory democracy and efficacy has often been framed as a dualism, organizations often adopt democratic processes for both ideological and strategic reasons.

Polletta (2002) challenges this supposedly ‘intrinsic conflict’ in a wide-ranging study of participatory democracy within social movements, highlighting the ‘solidary, innovatory, and developmental benefits’ it reaps as being not only ideological, but also practical and political (2002:2). Her research demonstrated that solidarity was created through the *process* of deliberating decisions rather than through the endpoint of a decision made, while participatory democracy also fueled greater tactical innovation. Critically for our discussion here, she emphasizes participatory decision-making as a means of developing leaders, pointing to examples such as the civil rights organizing strategies of Ella Baker and Myles Horton:

What counts as winning must be a central concern for people whose exclusion from the structure of political bargaining has always been accompanied by efforts on the part of those in power to define their interests for them. Jointly working through options, with an emphasis on articulating and scrutinizing each other’s preferences, is a way to build people’s capacities for strategizing generally. It encourages decisionmakers to articulate half-formed preferences and concerns, listen to the divergent perspectives of others, make transparent the processes by which they evaluate options and connect means and ends, and introduce alternative ways of conceptualizing problems and solutions. But participatory democracy can also help revise activists’ conceptions of political leadership. (Polletta 2002:211)

Jennifer Gordon outlines a similar set of benefits in her description of integrating democratic structures (such as an all-immigrant-worker board of directors) and democratic culture (‘intensive deliberation and debate at every level’) at the worker center she founded (Gordon 2005:291–92). Gordon argues that participatory democracy is vital for the role it plays in building ‘internal power’ among workers: ‘By internal power I mean the growth in organizing capacity both on the individual and the group level that occurs when people build a shared sense of identity and develop a common purpose, when they strategize together and reflect together on the work they have done’ (2005:143).

During an interview, Adam described to me BWC’s shift from a ‘classic, traditional worker center’ focused on settling lawsuits (often for fired workers) and achieving codes of conduct, to an organization focused on organizing workers into a non-traditional union:

[And the transition to] now, where we aspire to have the most valuable membership experience for workers. Not just today, but for tomorrow. The next day. So I see it as a—kind of a new chapter in the journey. And absolutely, we're constantly obsessed with the value of the membership experience and the leadership of members. I mean, that's a key tenet of...our model. It's the key. So absolutely we want to continue to find ways to increase members' ability to lead. It's absolutely multi-faceted. One is you gotta win the campaigns. You have to win. Because look, at the end of the day, we're a worker organization. No matter how innovative or lack thereof it is. We're a worker organization.

And... not all—but a large part of the value of the membership experience is going to be doing better at work. That's like the *sine qua non* of unionism and hopefully worker centers too, is doing better at work. So you gotta win the campaigns... We have to win the campaigns in the way that our model tells us, you know. We can't just say—I mean, not that we are interested—and we go, 'OK, maybe we'll be a traditional union, maybe that's how we'll win'. No, we have to win in the way that's compatible with our visions and values and strategy. We have to have structures beyond the campaign....where, um, workers can assert their leadership beyond their campaign. We have to flesh that out more...

Here, Adam addressed the balance between focusing on means and ends, and between being guided by principles versus needs; he professed a commitment to both winning campaigns (an outcome) and cultivating member leadership (both a process and an outcome). While the two are certainly not mutually exclusive—and indeed, the ultimate vision of workers holding industrial control rested on the belief that worker control and leadership would lead to the most powerful wins—in practice, the organization constantly struggled to achieve consistent worker participation and to cultivate member leadership. Worker participation and worker leadership are of course completely entwined, as it is impossible to have worker leadership if workers are not involved; but they are also entwined in that expanding an active base of membership within the workplace requires developing the organizing capacity of worker leaders.

Although member leadership was referred to as a central commitment of BWC, the organization did not have systems and structures in place to facilitate the process of leadership development and to foster deliberation about what exactly it meant for the organization; this is the case for many organizations (Patel 2013). The organization did track 'Leadership Development Opportunities' each month, but the category encompassed activities ranging from a worker buying juice for the monthly meeting to a worker doing public speaking at an event. Although changes were later made to track a

narrower set of actions that were more meaningfully connected to leadership development, limited progress was made in systematizing and evaluating leadership development processes. This was in contrast to the increasing number of metrics that were tracked in other areas of BWC organizing and campaigns; during the time of my fieldwork, Adam became increasingly adamant about tracking metrics. But because the meanings of ‘leadership development’ were rarely probed collectively and no clear roadmap to the goal was developed, leadership among BWC members continued to develop inconsistently.

The vision of members as organizers

To examine member leadership beyond rhetoric and ideals, this section will trace the evolution of BWC’s intention to develop members as organizers. The ideal of what being a ‘member leader’ entailed was described (explicitly or implicitly) in various ways among BWC staff, but one aspect that was consistently portrayed as a top goal was to have members act as organizers—members organizing their own co-workers and workers at other worksites. This was tied directly to the organizational vision of building toward an IWW local food workers’ branch (IUB 460),⁴⁹ run by workers and funded by their dues; it was also a matter of efficiency, as BWC had large ambitions but only two full-time organizers. Yet this goal was, to an extent, elusive during the time I spent with the organization. A number of times, organizers intended to do house visits accompanying members visiting coworkers, and the plans dissolved; an organizing training for members that was envisioned as a regular offering occurred once, and it was only half-completed by three members. The members of the organizing committees did not conduct house visits or one-on-ones. The organization did,

⁴⁹ BWC’s vision was that the organization’s members in food processing and distribution would eventually run their own union, IWW Industrial Union Branch 460 (IUB 460), rendering obsolete BWC’s role as a nonprofit organization in this regional industry, since IWW branches are meant to be run by workers within that industry.

however, have some success in working with members to bring their coworkers to have one-on-ones with BWC organizers, or to convince coworkers to attend a BWC meeting.

At a staff meeting that was held a couple weeks after I began volunteering at BWC (in December 2012), the staff were discussing how to increase the number of new members they recruited; the goal that month had been ten new members, and only four had signed up. After a bit of discussion, David suggested that training more members to be leaders and organizers would be helpful. Adam responded enthusiastically, and said that members could be trained to do one-on-ones—‘it’s not as though they’re very difficult to do’—and imagine if they had a few—‘or even just one!’—members who could do one-on-ones with prospective members. Everyone at the meeting agreed that would be very beneficial. Yet when I finished my fieldwork around fifteen months later, this goal had still not been realized.

About a week after that staff meeting, BWC brought in the above-mentioned consultant, Andrew to discuss BWC’s overall vision and concrete strategies, and the discussion turned once again to the prospect of having member organizers. At this point, the Harvest Bakery campaign had won two of its three original campaign demands, but the organizing committee had fallen apart in the ‘split’ described earlier in this chapter. Adam explained to Andrew that the goal was to have at least one hundred members at Harvest Bakery with an organizing committee of 15 to 20 workers.

Andrew asked if it was just Sara and Diego doing the organizing, and when that was confirmed, he said, ‘Wow’, implying that it was a lot of work for two organizers to do this on top of other campaigns they were quietly preparing. Adam told him they were ‘working on it’, and that there would be a five-hour organizer training for members at the end of the month. Andrew nodded, but said, ‘If you want fifteen to twenty on a committee—people who can move other workers, who can stand up to the boss, who will commit time outside the workplace to go help organize—

that's...hard'. He remarked that they would have to have a strong organizing committee at Harvest Bakery that was ready and able to organize at other bakeries, before they could begin organizing new campaigns with any intensity. After Adam and Andrew discussed the strategy at Harvest Bakery a bit more, Andrew said that he didn't see how BWC could do more than two campaigns at a time, unless the additional campaigns were approached more like surveys—the BWC staff laughed and looked at each other as he said this, as they had been pursuing three additional campaigns. Sara said to Andrew, 'The last time we met with you, we had eight or nine targets, and now we've dropped it to four'. She said that they had 'strong communication' with three of those four bakeries, but acknowledged his advice and said, 'But yeah, we want to go all in on each target—not half-assed'.

Before the meeting ended, Andrew asked what BWC's timeline for their campaigns was. Sara said that for Sweet Tooth Bakery—because, Adam noted, 'Sweet Tooth Bakery would be a real game-changer'—she felt it would be great to have a strong organizing committee by March. Andrew agreed that would be great, but asked if it would be reasonable, if they were spending a quarter of their time on the Harvest Bakery campaign. Adam said the goal should be to have three-quarters of the committee by the end of March, and to go public by May 1st. Andrew said he thought it would be a year before that campaign would be ready to go public, saying, 'Maybe I'm wrong... but don't spread yourself too thin across three different places. You need a victory—clean victory'. He reminded the staff that there were not many examples of industries and places that had been organized 'wall to wall', geographically.

This exchange reveals the enthusiasm and ambition that fuelled the expressed intention to develop members as organizers, as well as BWC's potential underestimation of the organizing capacity required to develop a strong base. A few months later, the issue of developing members as organizers was raised again at a staff meeting, as Adam was asking staff what needed to be done to

‘explode out’ BWC’s organizing and increase the ‘virality’ of BWC membership. Adam named a handful of points, including leadership development:

How many of our members are full organizers at this point? Able to do A to Z what Sara and Diego do? Zero. It takes a lot to get to that point, a lot of training and development, a lot of time. Our members weren’t in Amnesty International in college, they didn’t learn how to build meetings... We need a strong process of developing members as organizers. We need to get a few members to the level that our staff organizers have. It won’t happen overnight—it’ll take longer to bear fruit. But it’s probably the best way to recruit new members.

A couple of months later, the issue came up again at a staff meeting. Adam asked the staff what it would look like to have IWW delegates on the shop floor at Harvest Bakery. He noted that BWC’s model was for self-organization, so ultimately, organizers couldn’t be dealing with every single issue at that workplace when organizing was scaling up at other places. He asked the organizers which members were rated as ‘1s’ and could take on the responsibility of mobilizing five to twenty workers. Organizers named two workers, and after some discussion, decided to do delegate leadership development with those two workers. Yet at a staff meeting a few weeks later, one topic of discussion was the health of the Harvest Bakery campaign, and among other things, the specific question of why those two afore-mentioned workers had been less involved lately was discussed. The progression of the goal to train members as organizers—a goal which had been reiterated a number of times—underscored both the lack of a systematic approach to leadership development at BWC as well as a mismatch between BWC’s ambitious vision and their limitations in strategic planning and organizing capacity.

The strategic confusion during the early stages of the BWC campaigns included a haphazard approach to meeting workers rather than a systematic strategy of mapping the workplace to identify leaders. Organizers did carry out ‘social mapping’ with workers in order to have a clear sense of the workforce, creating a spreadsheet with workers’ names, demographics, shifts, positions, and

relationships with each other;⁵⁰ yet there was not a systematic approach to identifying ‘organic’ workplace leaders whose recruitment should be prioritized, and recruitment more often focused on workers likely to support the campaign. Workplace leaders *were* sometimes identified and attempts were made to prioritize their recruitment, but often the temporal pressures of the campaign timeline combined with the challenges in building an organizing committee created a somewhat self-perpetuating cycle that exacerbated organizers’ tendency to hastily identify pro-union workers as leaders.

Although there were discussions among BWC staff about more clearly distinguishing between ratings for workers’ support of the union campaign and workers’ leadership in the workplace, this was not carried out comprehensively, and the primary criteria staff ended up using in identifying ‘leaders’ were interest in and commitment to the campaign. McAlevey notes that in social-movement organizations, community-based organizations, and recently unions as well, staff often identify as leaders ‘just about anyone who enthusiastically shows up at two successive meetings (even one sometimes), making the words *activist* and *leader* interchangeable’ (2016:48). These criteria thus reflect habits more suited to an advocacy campaign, in which it is not necessary to have a majority or even many workers involved in order for the strategy to proceed.

Staff reflections on member leadership

BWC staff reflected on member leadership in different ways. Speaking both to people external to BWC and internally among staff and members, Adam often seemed to conflate the organization’s image and ideal of member leadership with the reality of how the organization operated, as seen in the quotes earlier in this chapter; yet during staff meetings where concrete, practical aspects of

⁵⁰ The process of social mapping is described in ‘Setting the Scene: Food Factories in New York’.

organizing and member leadership were discussed, his perspective seemed more attuned to the organization's persistent challenges with increasing levels of member participation and member leadership.

Sara, the lead organizer at BWC, spoke to me about member leadership when I interviewed her at her home toward the end of my fieldwork. I asked her to what extent she felt BWC was actually member-led at the time, and she responded:

Not very much, unfortunately—not yet. It's a very tough thing... Because a lot of people, it's hard enough to get them to come to their own meetings. And then, at certain moments of campaigns there's various meetings in the month. Or not just the meetings, but... different activities. Like, come to leaflet... come to a training. Come to this, come to speak at this event, to get allies on board.

Sara felt that the two biggest obstacles the organization faced in striving for more member leadership were members' limited time, and the fact that BWC did not have a strong member leader who other members could see as an example—a member who was doing 'almost as much work as a staff person'. She noted that when organizers first met potential or new members, they always told them 'that we want them to take more leadership, to have more involvement in their own campaign', but that many members seemed to see their relationship with BWC as one in which they would wait to be called to attend a meeting or go to an event or action. I observed this as well, among members from both 'legacy campaigns' and current campaigns. This was even more acutely displayed in moments when members expressed their participation more as an act of gratitude toward staff, repaying the organization for its support on their campaigns. For example, one member explained his agreement to be a board member to me by saying, 'If it's necessary to give a little bit of support, I'll give it, but... I don't know, I don't feel like a leader... I feel that if [BWC] needs help, or needs my... presence to [hold a board meeting]... then there's no problem... I'll be there'. Here the member clearly viewed his participation in the Board of Directors as a favor he would gladly do for the organization, rather than as an opportunity to exercise leadership in 'his'

organization. This orientation appeared to be especially prevalent among members of ‘legacy campaigns’; on the occasions when I called to invite them to BWC meetings or events, they sometimes replied that if Adam needed them there, they would come.

BWC staff member Luis described the organization as being in a ‘pubescent’ stage as it transitioned from being an organization more focused on advocacy and lawsuits to one centered on organizing; he pointed to this as a significant factor in creating a ‘confused’ organizational culture and approach to organizing that still did not meaningfully give workers voice and decision-making power. If the dynamic described above, wherein workers did not seem to feel leadership or ownership of their campaigns or the organization, emerges naturally from an organizational model that is more rooted in advocacy and legal action than organizing, then it is not surprising that this dynamic would be strongest among members of ‘legacy campaigns’ but still a common dynamic as BWC struggled to transition to an organizing model. Luis viewed the organization’s approach to increasing member leadership as an ‘additive’ approach—incorporating members into certain events and eliciting their participation in certain leadership or decision-making areas, rather than having the workers be constitutive of the leadership.

Speaking about Alejandro, a BWC member who worked at Harvest Bakery, Sara remarked that she believed his leadership mostly did not derive from undergoing a process of ‘leadership development’ at BWC, but rather that he had come to the organization with a very special quality that was possibly ‘elevated’ through meetings with Sara and a couple of trainings; Sara pointed out that other members had interacted with BWC far more, but did not show as much leadership as Alejandro.

And also I think another one is we don’t—we’re trying, we’re trying to come up with new ideas. ...How can we make that happen? How can you take Alejandro for instance, cause he’s a ‘super leader’—‘cause we’re using that [term] now. How can he be more deeply rooted in this organization? And have a strong sense of membership and ownership of his membership and this campaign, of the organization? So we’re still—we don’t have a sample to follow, and we’re trying to think of ways.

Sara's comment that BWC did not have an example to follow pointed to an interesting aspect of the organization—I never observed specific efforts to learn from the leadership development pathways of other worker centers or unions. Perhaps the idea that BWC's organizing model was innovative was so central to the organizational narrative—as well as Adam's comments that BWC was 'the most member-led' worker center in the country—that it steered staff away from trying to learn from other organizations how they might enhance and systematize the process of building member leadership.

Sara described BWC's vision of an organization led entirely by members, including organizing, development (fundraising), and campaigning; she noted that because the IWW doesn't have paid organizers and business representatives, it would be the workers taking on all of those roles once the IWW Industrial Union Branch 460 was in operation.

If you can imagine, it's so challenging when you are exhausted from going to work, maybe two jobs, and still having the energy to try to connect with your coworkers and socialize with them and get to know them better and build an organizing committee and have committee meetings and discuss strategy, and have the resources to research the connections, building relations with allies and coalitions, and so on, you know? And having that extra energy to do all that. ... I don't think it's impossible. It's been done before. Unfortunately... there hasn't been anything long term, sustained. ... I think that because also now, when people think of unions, they think of someone doing it for you, service provider model. And a lot of people, the majority of people just because—well, because of so many reasons, they just don't think, 'Hey, let's, let's talk amongst ourselves. Let's do something. Let's fix our job, let's organize, let's confront our boss and these are our demands.' Most people are not doing that.

And there's fear of retaliation. Immigration status. Losing your job, that's part of the retaliation. Not knowing how. Not being able to connect with your coworkers. The same base members being against each other in the workplace. Having divisions, national, ethnic... seniority. And departments. And etcetera. Gender. So many things. And it's hard for it to get started just like that, without, in this case—in this particular organization—without me being...trying to meet them, trying to teach them things. Trying to help them overcome some things that create divisions. Help them connect with one another. So I think for now my role is very important for the campaigns to begin. And to grow. And to thrive... I know... I still have my own challenges, and things to improve within me, and the way I do my work. In ... finding better ways to actually— to incorporate more members and to helping us be more member-led.

Beyond workers' leadership exercised within a workplace campaign, Sara's comments speak to workers' leadership at the level of the organization. Staff generally agreed that the organization did

not yet have serious worker leadership at the organizational level, yet the implications of this were expressed in distinct ways by different staff members. While Sara focused on the vision of workers taking on both organizing responsibilities and ‘external campaign’ responsibilities such as research and outreach to allies, Luis noted that members had no say in any high-level organizational matters such as the organization’s public political positions, the campaigns undertaken, the overall targeting strategy, the theory of value, and the theory of change; he felt that the organization would have to transform its practices and structures substantially before it could build genuine member leadership at the organizational level. The fact that most members were not aware of BWC’s long-term vision of workers holding industrial control brings up important questions. If the overall vision, mission, and strategy of the organization has been defined by the founding director and is not discussed with most members, to what extent can BWC be considered member-led? This dynamic essentially put a limit on BWC’s capacity to be truly member-led at an *organizational* level (rather than a campaign level), as members were not defining and deciding the underlying mission and vision of the organization. The implied solution was that members would establish this level of ownership within their regional IWW branch for food workers (rather than within BWC, the nonprofit organization), but the path of the connecting dots toward that point were unclear. While there is enormous variety in worker organizations’ implementation of member leadership at an organizational level, a number of worker centers do take meaningful steps in this direction by, for example, including members in decisions such as staff hiring (McAlevey 2014) and maintaining active member participation in leadership committees and boards (Fine 2006; Gordon 2005; McAlevey 2014).

Conclusions

Through analysis of how BWC’s guiding principles—solidarity, direct action, and worker leadership—were understood internally and how they shaped organizational practice, this chapter

demonstrated first that solidarity unionism and its constitutive elements aimed to transcend the purported tension between ideological commitments and strategic practices. Yet in introducing the challenges that arose when the organization strove to manifest this through the Harvest Bakery campaign, it became apparent that there was a significant disjuncture between BWC's vision and practice, particularly evident in inconsistent worker participation in campaigns and limited exercise of worker leadership. The achievement of negotiations at Harvest Bakery was won through a combination of leverage tactics that are relatively standard for worker centers, but the hope was that advocacy power could be leveraged as a means to open up space—and a 'margin of freedom'—for workers to build their social power at the workplace. However, BWC's lack of an effective, systematic approach to both identifying leaders and developing their organizing capacity hindered the organization's ability to significantly expand the membership base at Harvest Bakery, ultimately limiting the potential to build up workers' internal power and social power. As the organization was transitioning from a model centered around lawsuits and advocacy power to one rooted in workplace organizing, it confronted the challenges of base-building amid the atomizing forces of the low-wage workplace and difference and divisions among workers; these will be explored in the following chapter, which shifts our point of view to the shop floor at Sweet Tooth Bakery.

Chapter 5 – The Formation of Grievances

The day before yesterday... my coworker and I, working with the machine, made an order of 100 dozens of a certain type of bread in half an hour. When we brought it downstairs, I saw that it was being sold for around \$1,300—just that order—what we had made in half an hour. [For that, we were each paid] \$5. Of course, [the company] has to buy everything—the flour, everything, yes. But they're not investing all of that money...and that got me thinking about all the work we produce for them. The \$10/hour isn't about the quantity we produce—we don't stop, and the orders arrive all day long—100 dozens of this kind of dough, 100 of that, 50 of this, 50 of that...and this is what we do all day.

Carlos

The task of exploring how grievances arise requires looking at the circumstances that lead a worker to accept or alternatively to challenge the conditions of their work; how do workers decide what is just and what is not, what they deserve and what they do not? Workers cultivate their subjectivities through an ongoing calculus that navigates the threads of value derived from their work amid the suffering and alienation of much low-wage labor. As explored through the life stories in Chapter Three, their circumstances are a tangled web of material realities and ideas, of structural positions and lived experience, reflecting the complexity of the social world as well as the multiplicity of subjectivity.

This chapter shifts our perspective to the workplace at Sweet Tooth Bakery, examining the formation of grievances by tracing how the moral economy of the shop floor shapes the way workers negotiate their experiences of fairness and worthiness. The chapter begins with descriptions of the workplace 'ethos' and practices implemented by the owner and management of Sweet Tooth Bakery, and then examining how these are interpreted by workers; I use this analysis to map how the 'moral economy of the workplace' (Penney 2006; Thompson 1971) is both perceived and constructed. The subsequent section analyzes what happens when workers feel that the moral economy of the workplace has been violated, revealing how moral and social worthiness are entwined with the economic value of labor; I argue that this is a significant factor in the formation

of grievances. Within paternalistic (or maternalistic) workplace cultures, changes in the structures and dynamics of the workplace can expose the cold dictates of capitalist labor relations on the job, leading workers' grievances to become more pronounced. The final section analyzes workers' discourses about work ethic, demonstrating how assessments of work ethic are mobilized to assert value and worthiness. I probe the ways work ethic is contested; although workers' discourses about work ethic can serve as seeds for grievances that breed solidarity, they can also function to deepen workplace divisions along lines of race, nationality, gender, and class, engendering and feeding on the hierarchies of labor. This chapter thus maps out the challenging terrain on which BWC was organizing, both in terms of the workplace conditions and divisions among workers.

The moral economy of the bakery

In this section I will first analyze the discourse and practices mobilized by the Sweet Tooth Bakery owner and management, in order to demonstrate the 'ethos' they aimed to project to workers and the strategies therein. I will then explore the various ways these strategies and discourse were perceived and experienced by workers, and thus how this informed the 'moral economy of the workplace' (Penney 2006). Elaborating on Thompson's notion of the 'moral economy' (1971) that he used to refer to the popular consensus of 'the poor' as to what were acceptable social and economic relations and obligations (and more specifically, what were legitimate and illegitimate practices in the market), Penney (2006) asserts this as a useful concept for examining workers' collective action at the workplace. He suggests that '[o]ver time, workers create a "moral economy of the workplace" that defines their expectations of management, sense of fairness in the employment relationship, acceptable and unacceptable managerial actions, and their own contributions to the production process' (Penney 2006:145, footnote 4). This 'moral economy' becomes a 'filter through which workers interpreted both union and employer actions' (Penney 2006:140). This framework

proves useful for examining how workers develop expectations of labor-management relations, shaped by their past experience of the employer's strategies, ethical notions of what is fair, and notions of morality, practicality, and value in assessing and asserting work ethic.

The hegemonic frameworks of workplace power relations are never stable and uncontested, but rather worker subjectivities are forged through navigating different ideological and material realities. This is not to say that these forces have equal power, but that it is at the points of tension, conflict, and contradiction that workers' perception of grievances can be activated in different directions. The parallel plane of analysis to the conception of subjectivity as multi-faceted and continually contested and in formation is the understanding of hegemony as a dynamic field of struggle: 'What we are looking for is not the absolute victory of this side over that, nor the total incorporation of one set of forces into another. Rather, the analysis is a relational matter—i.e., a question to be resolved *relationally*, using the idea of “unstable balance” or the “continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria” (Hall 1986:14). We can conceive of hegemony as ‘an approach to the question of power that in its exploration of empirical realities—how power is lived in particular times and places—refuses to privilege either ideas or material realities, seeing these as always entangled, always interacting with each other’ (Crehan 2002:199–200). From this starting point, we can begin to examine with more nuance how the workplace ‘ethos’ and the moral economy of the shop floor shape the formation of grievances.

The factory as family

One discourse that Sweet Tooth Bakery employed widely was the factory as family—not only frequently referring to the workers and management as being ‘a family’ (both in public marketing narratives and on the shop floor) but also in describing how the bakery management was flexible and attentive to workers' needs in caring for their own families. The bakery's branding materials

referred to staff as the ‘bakery family’ and entwined language like this with descriptions of staff members’ (actual) families. This imagery of the family complemented the bakery’s overall branding as an artisan bakery that was community-oriented and local in both who it served and where it sourced its ingredients; although it had moved production from its small retail shops to a factory site, the small shops and their local, homemade feel remained the public face of the company. The trope of family played a significant role in the company’s anti-union activity described in the following chapter, but interestingly, it was also a critical factor in the production of both loyalty and grievances for many workers. This echoes the conclusions Penney (2006) draws from his study based on interviews with workers after union certification election campaigns at two different hospitals, arguing that ‘that past paternalistic relationships between employer and employee shaped both why the union organizing drives began, and ultimately, how they ended’ (2006:140).

Ostensibly in contrast to the rhetoric about the company as family, workers described how management at Sweet Tooth Bakery sometimes promoted a competitive work culture based in favoritism and individualism, encouraging productivity through fostering competition and stoking divisions among workers.

For example, I’m one of the newest ones there. There are others, but I’m one of the newest... So, recently the owner comes over to me with any little thing, says to me, ‘Oh, Fernando [...] you are doing excellent work!’ But she’s not actually doing it because that’s what she really feels, rather it’s nothing more than for other people to hear in one way or another, and this creates a certain rivalry. So there are a lot of people who... I’m not well-liked because of this. [...] I think they do the same thing with others. For example, they did my review, supposedly, last year. They told me, ‘We’re going to give you this [raise], but don’t tell anyone.’ Well, yes... they say the same thing to everyone. To everyone... So, in one way or another, [the owner] manipulates us—manipulates all of us... afterwards, there is this rivalry and all that exists.... [but it’s just] that we are making her money, that’s what matters to her. It doesn’t matter to her if we kill each other. So, when this [campaign started] with the organization, she said, ‘I don’t know why they’re doing this to me.’ She started acting like a victim. She always said, ‘...I’ve always taken care of you...’ So many people believe her. But it’s not real. It’s not real.

Fernando

BWC organizers and I heard this story from multiple workers—they had been given a slightly higher raise than what had been promised to the workforce, but told not to talk to any other workers about it. Through such tactics, management cultivated an individualist, competitive notion of good work; workers were implicitly told that they would be rewarded *more* for doing better and harder work than their peers, rather than working *with* their peers. By giving individual workers the impression that they were in a favorable position with management—a favorable position that they were instructed to keep as a secret from other workers—the company actively constructed a workplace culture that stood in opposition to worker solidarity.

In fact, these dynamics of competition and favoritism are not necessarily incompatible with ideas of the family. Feminist anthropologists Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako have outlined how ‘the family’ is a moral and ideological construct that is defined (here they refer to US society, specifically) by ‘its symbolic opposition to work and business—in other words, to the market relations of capitalism’. The family is projected as a space of nurturance that encompasses love and cooperation, that is enduring, noncontingent, and ‘governed by feeling and morality’. In contrast, ‘it is in the market, where we sell our labor and negotiate contract relations of business, that we associate with competitive, temporary, contingent relations that must be buttressed by law and legal sanctions’ (Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako 1997:77). Yet actual family relations often do not live up to these ideals of the nurturing family; families can be spaces of competition, inequality, and even, not uncommonly, violence. Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako contend that this is not a simple matter of ‘the predictable failings of imperfect beings’, but rather that this construct of the family holds intrinsic contradictions. In addition to being ideologically defined by its opposition to the market relations of capitalism, the family also symbolizes privacy from the state, a space of self-determination and refuge from the intrusive public domain; it thus extends that violence and wrongdoing within the bounds of the family are less subject to punishment, creating ‘the irony that

in our society the place where nurturance and noncontingent affection are supposed to be located is simultaneously the place where violence is most tolerated' (Collier et al. 1997:78).

This analysis is useful in understanding the function and effects of an employer using the concept of 'family' to define the workplace. First, it highlights how the dynamics of competition and favoritism that workers described at Sweet Tooth Bakery stand in contrast to the *symbolism* of the family, but not in contrast to the *reality* of how many families operate. If in reality violence is tolerated in many families, then it is not surprising that exploitation should occur within the purported 'family' space of a factory. Second, the bakery owner's usage of the family trope serves to obscure the capitalist labor relations of the workplace and de-politicize any conflict therein. If relations at the bakery were rooted in care rather than competition and shaped by morality rather than profit, then the law and other external regulating bodies (such as unions) would not be needed to manage relations—they would be an intrusion.

The function of the family trope in obscuring capitalist labor relations and de-politicizing conflict becomes even more clearly relevant when we analyze the labor relations at Sweet Tooth Bakery as a form of 'maternalism'. As in paternalistic labor relations, maternalism describes a form of asymmetrical power relations in which the employer offers workers protection in exchange for their work and obedience; yet maternalism, which has mainly been used by scholars to describe relations between domestic workers and their employers, manifests through dynamics conceived of as particularly 'female' such as kindness, generosity, and caring. Because of the structurally unequal positions of an employer and a worker, kindness and favors can function as a means of asserting power, as the worker cannot reciprocate and thus ends up in a position of feeling indebtedness and moral obligation (Anderson 2000:144–46). While the relations between workers and employer at Sweet Tooth Bakery are not entirely comparable to those between domestic workers and their

employers—given the home as worksite (and sometimes shared living space), as well as the intimate nature of domestic work, for example—maternalism offers a useful lens for examining another facet of the family trope. Some workers expressed hesitance or unwillingness to join the BWC campaign because they felt beholden to the owner for a favor she had granted in the past; for some workers, this favor was not firing them for breaking workplace rules (such as not showing up to work, or showing up to the night shift after drinking alcohol), while at least a couple workers reportedly had support from the company in regularizing their legal status. For these workers, joining a union seemed like a breach of their moral obligation to repay the debt; as such, ‘maternalism’ could function as a means of labor control, leading workers who did want to effect changes at work to avoid joining the campaign. This does not mean, however, that all workers experienced this dynamic as simple exploitation and control, for workers may at times perceive it as being worth the compromise; it can therefore be helpful to conceive of maternalism as ‘a continuum of support and control’ (Arnado 2003:156) in order to acknowledge both the structural inequality that shapes the relationship and workers’ agency within it.

Flexibility on the shop floor

Alongside the family trope, the owner and management of Sweet Tooth Bakery further diluted the appearance of class differences in the bakery by mobilizing images of the ideal worker possessing an entrepreneurial spirit that showed their strong work ethic, enthusiasm for the company, independence, and flexibility. Narratives the bakery published in media and social media lauded workers with a ‘strong work ethic’, a ‘can-do spirit’, and attaining fulfillment through making sure the products came out just right. This discourse reflects the neoliberal project of cultivating ‘enterprising selves’ (Miller and Rose 1995) whose desire for self-actualization is manifested through

work—through working harder, better, and more creatively, thus becoming self-regulating in the service of corporate efficiency and profitability (Kasmir 2014:224).

Profiles of a handful of Sweet Tooth workers posted on the bakery's social media pages reveal this duality of the factory as family and the flexible, entrepreneurial worker. The profiles show glimpses of the 'flexibility' and variety in contract types while situating these potentially negative features within narratives of upward mobility; for example, a worker who started out as an unpaid intern and rose to become manager, or a worker who describes how working a night shift allows her to care for her children while her partner is at his normal daytime job (leaving the reader to wonder when she might sleep), or a worker who was a civil engineer in his home country and chose to immigrate to New York to give his family more opportunities, now having worked over fifteen years mostly in a maintenance position at the bakery. The profiles also highlighted the loyalty of the workers, and several of the workers profiled were said to be grateful for the benevolence of the owner for giving them opportunities and flexibility, as well as the feeling that they are part of a family. The discourse and practices of Sweet Tooth thus straddled, on one hand, the Fordist ideas of long-term employment at one company, a stable 'family wage', and job mobility, and on the other, post-Fordist discourse about entrepreneurial workers who are flexible to the company's needs (as the company is flexible to theirs, the narrative goes). Management thus entwined the seemingly disparate visions of the entrepreneurial, flexible worker and of the maternalistic worker-as-family; the long tenure of certain workers was celebrated, while other workers (even some with long tenure) were seeing their hours reduced or even being fired because 'there was not enough work'.

In ethnographic research on auto workers at Saturn in the US, Kasmir documents how the company's 'team concept' and employee involvement programs strive to tap into workers' desires for greater autonomy and meaning on the job by mobilizing alternative forms of work organization

that essentially serve profit-making needs (Kasmir 1998, 2014). In the ‘regime of enterprise’ at the Saturn factory, the company ‘restructures work and cultivates a corporate ethos to encourage workers to be self-regulating, to feel self-worth through “excellence” on the job, and to take risks in pursuit of goals’; Kasmir argues that through these ideological and material shifts, the company is ‘mining workers’ aspirations and identities in order to extract profit’ (Kasmir 1998:8). In a similar vein, writing about supply chains and new worker subjectivities, Tsing asserts that ‘[s]upply chains tap and vitalize performances of so-called noneconomic features of identity’ (Tsing 2009:157), showing how Walmart’s ‘service leaders’—workers whose title frames them as managers⁵¹—and ‘independent chicken farmers’ in the US who are poorly paid and are effectively employees of corporate producers,⁵² consent to exploitative labor conditions because of the valued identities they derive from their positions, and the imagined possibilities embodied in these identities.

Yet far from straightforward portrayals of workers blindly consenting to their own exploitation, Kasmir and Tsing demonstrate both the complex web of structural conditions, hopes, and ambiguity that shape workers’ participation in these dynamics, as well as the way certain possibilities for resistance and creative alternatives are opened through these dynamics, even as other possibilities are closed. Both of these strands will be important to the analysis that follows, as it was clear at the bakeries that hegemonic notions of ‘the good worker’ were never uncontested, but rather existed in tension with oppositional notions, as well as subversions and expansions of these conceptions.

Such forms of flexible and precarious work, legitimized by neoliberal values, are implemented to facilitate ‘flexible accumulation’, enabling the company to adjust the workforce at will in a way that maximizes profits with little regard for workers’ job stability; workers at Sweet Tooth Bakery faced

⁵¹ Tsing refers here to the study of Walmart done by Moreton (2006).

⁵² Tsing refers here to the work of Watts (2006) on chicken production.

fluctuations in the number of days or hours they worked, unpredictable wage raises, as well as a range of labor contracts that included interns (at least some of whom were unpaid), part-time workers, full-time workers, and independent contractors. The flexibility and changes were sometimes cited as a benefit by workers; for example, one woman told organizers she was fine working one less day each week, as she could take care of her children that day instead of hiring a babysitter, while another worker described how grateful she was that the company let her take a week off (unpaid) when she injured herself outside of work. Yet many workers were continually frustrated by the instability, finding it difficult to get the hours they needed to earn a sufficient and predictable income, or expressing that the company was constantly making incremental changes that allowed it to ‘squeeze’ workers for more labor and stagnant or lower wages. Delivery drivers at Sweet Tooth Bakery were classified as independent contractors—they used their own vehicles, paid for their own gas, maintenance, insurance, parking tickets, and tolls, and were in exchange paid an unusually high starting hourly wage. This is a typical example of the neoliberal transfer of risk from the corporation to the individual. Some of the drivers approved of the arrangement, citing the higher wages as making the risks worthwhile, while others worried about the financial risks it entailed.

Indeed, it is precisely this ‘double-edge[d] sword’ of freedom and flexibility in post-Fordist capitalism that is critical to examine in order to understand why workers may consent to work that is insecure and unstable (Sopranzetti 2013:129–30). Work at New York City’s industrial bakeries, and specifically at Sweet Tooth, occupies an unusual intersection in the realm of changing labor relations. On one hand, it was factory manufacturing in a centralized workplace, with schedules that the workers do not choose—dissimilar from the Uber taxi drivers,⁵³ to give an example paradigmatic

⁵³ Uber is a company that offers a smartphone app to connect taxi drivers with passengers; drivers are independent contractors who drive their own vehicles, pay a commission to Uber, are responsible for all costs incurred such as gas, insurance, maintenance and repairs, and do not receive any benefits. In recent years, large groups of Uber drivers in

of the post-Fordist flexible worker, who earn their money driving around the city on a schedule they choose. On the other hand, the hours and pay structures were unstable as the owner and management adjusted them in attempts to save labor costs, wages for most workers were low, and healthcare benefits were inaccessible to most workers; as we saw above, the company also sought to frame labor relations in a way that dismissed the notion of conflicting interests of labor and management. Workers also experienced the ‘flexibility’ of the bakery through its reportedly lenient approach to enforcing rules, which became both a significant motivation to consent to insecurity for some workers, as well as a site of tension that will be explored in depth in the final section of this chapter.

Management at Sweet Tooth Bakery cultivated a work culture that ostensibly prized transparency and involving workers in management-level knowledge of the business. For example, workers were given a newsletter with each paycheck that contained an overview of the company’s finances, breaking down expenditures on labor, supplies, etc. In one such newsletter that a worker showed me, the owner even praised the fact that the company had spent less money on labor costs that month. On the shop floor, workers reported hearing the owner and management frequently refer to the company’s difficult financial situation and low sales; the ways this functioned to lower workers’ sense of what changes were possible will be explored in the next chapter. Workers at this bakery thus commonly referred to production levels, noting changes in the volume of bread their shift was being assigned to produce, rumors about gained or lost customers, and musing about the company’s financial health. This was evident in the one-on-one meeting with Eduardo documented earlier, as he repeatedly expressed concern about the volume of production and the number of employees, and connected this to his fear that the company was unable to afford changes such as higher wages and

different US cities (and in other countries) have contested the company’s insistence that they are not employees, and have launched lawsuits and unionization campaigns.

employer-paid health insurance. Yet management's ostensible transparency about the bakery's finances did not translate into extending decision-making power to workers to any degree, nor did it entail providing workers with the deeper knowledge and resources they would need to participate meaningfully in such decisions; instead, it seemed to have the effect of deepening workers' sense of responsibility for the company's financial health and profit, and tying their perception of their own security more tightly to the company's security.

There is a practical sense to workers' viewing their own security as tied to the company's security, as they do not want low profits to lead to layoffs or plant closings and thus leave them without a job; indeed, some workers harbored hopes that company expansion and greater profits would 'trickle down' to improve their lot too, rewarding their loyalty. Yet recruiting workers to feel a greater sense of *responsibility* for company profits without giving them either real power in business decisions that greatly affect profit or benefits that rise in proportion to company growth, has the effect of sharing the risks of profit seeking without necessarily sharing the rewards—and the power. Importantly, this shift challenges the idea of inherently antagonistic class relations underpinning workplace relations, thereby delegitimizing class-based activism.

The discourse and practices of Sweet Tooth Bakery thus promoted both the notion of a company 'family' in which the idea of labor-management conflict was obscured, and a workplace in which flexibility, informality, and the mobilization of an 'enterprising self' could generate benefits not only for the company, but for the *individual* worker as well. The moral economy of the bakery, projected through a discourse of family, thereby contained within it the contradictions that would lead to the formation of grievances, as well as the atomization of the workforce in opposition to an ethos of worker solidarity. It is worth reiterating here, however, that the hegemonic framework of labor relations are a site of contestation, never uniform and stable, and that it is at the points of tension

and conflict that workers' interpretations of conditions and therefore their actions may be activated in different directions.

The tipping point

Early on in the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign, Sara invited me to join a meeting she had scheduled with a worker, Elena, who had heard about BWC from one of her coworkers who was a member. Elena arrived a few minutes after the scheduled meeting time, and Sara invited her to sit down at the big wooden conference table with us. She kept her jacket on after sitting down, and left it on throughout the entire meeting. Elena told us she had worked at Sweet Tooth Bakery for over five years, and that she previously worked at one of the retail shops—which she said was a great job—before moving to this factory location. The job has become very high-pressure, she told us, and she added, ‘Now it feels like a factory, which it didn’t before’. Sara replied, disapprovingly, that these negative changes often happen when companies expand. Elena then said that she was actually here to speak about her cousin. She described how her cousin had to take a couple weeks of unpaid leave for health reasons, and upon returning to work, management would not agree to accommodating her health condition by adjusting her work tasks. Soon after, her cousin asked for the workplace benefits she believed she qualified for and was told by a manager that she would need to work more hours in order to qualify; the manager apparently implicitly questioned her immigration status. When the cousin said she was unable to work more hours, the manager said she could no longer work there, and would have to leave the premises now.

‘So, your cousin had been working there for five years?’ I ask, and Elena confirmed that. Sara shook her head and said, ‘*Qué malagradecidos, ¿no?*’ (‘how ungrateful, no?’) and Elena agreed. She said she

wanted to help her cousin ‘demand her rights’ and ‘claim what she deserved’, to see if she could make a legal case for compensation for the benefits she was owed but never received.

Sara and I both nodded, and Sara eased back into the conversation by asking, ‘When you say that the job became more high-pressure when they moved you to this plant ... how exactly did things change?’ Elena gave the example that now they had to sign in and out when they went on their thirty-minute lunch break, because the company had become really strict about workers not taking one minute extra. She said the manager yelled at people, and even made workers cry. She told us that when she worked at the shop in Manhattan, it was a great job; everyone was really warm and like family, and even though they worked hard, it was better because they all helped and supported each other. She said workers were now spread out, people were more isolated, and the manager yelled.

Then Sara said to Elena, ‘You’ve been working there for over five years, working hard, but now the pressure has increased, they’ve changed the supervisor, the company is growing and changing the rules, changing how they treat you—but *¿gracias a quien ha crecido la compania?* [thanks to who did the company grow?].’ Elena said quietly, but firmly: ‘*Gracias a nosotros*’ [‘thanks to us’]. Sara agreed and said Elena should be appreciated for all that she did, whether or not she worked full time, and Elena said, ‘Yes, because I always do my best—always—and I follow the rules. I’m always punctual’. Elena added that the majority of people working at Sweet Tooth Bakery weren’t happy there, and she knew a few people who were already looking for other jobs.

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Within paternalistic or maternalistic work cultures, certain shifts in the workplace lay bare the company’s profit motives and make workers feel more like commodified labor—in sharp contrast to the ‘family’ rhetoric that continues. These junctures, in which certain fundamental contradictions

and hypocrisies of capitalist work structures are exposed, represent perceived violations of the moral economy of the workplace, and they can be fertile ground for the formation of grievances. In some workplaces where management has taken on the rhetoric and practices of team-based production, for example, dissatisfaction has actually increased among workers because their lack of real autonomy lies in stark opposition to the new rhetoric of management (Vallas 2003); the imbalance of power in the workplace becomes harder to stomach.

This section examines how workers perceived the moral economy at Sweet Tooth Bakery to have been violated. When I began meeting Sweet Tooth Bakery workers as BWC first started reaching out to them, it quickly became clear that the family trope was not just part of management discourse, but was also widely used by workers; however, it was most frequently used to draw a contrast between the way things used to be (like a family) and how they had declined (like a factory). One evening, BWC held a ‘happy hour’ at a bar near the office, inviting some members, funders, and ‘allies’ to join staff for some beers and conversation. No BWC members came until later in the evening, when two Sweet Tooth Bakery workers came and brought along two more co-workers who had not yet met with BWC. As we all sat and talked in the loud bar, I spoke to a Central American man named Emilio, who had worked at the bakery for twelve years—for almost the entire time he had lived in the US. He told me that ‘it used to feel like a family shop’ and that it used to be a good job, but that it now really felt like a factory, and was getting worse and worse. By way of illustration, he told me about a woman who had been working there a little longer than him who had just been fired this past week; they told her there just wasn’t enough work. He said that the owner seemed to be firing people with more seniority (and thus higher wages) so the company could hire new people and pay them much less. Another worker who I chatted with at the bar, a young Mexican worker who had been working at the bakery for a few years, told me the job was changing for the worse—that the company was treating workers worse, running the company ‘more like a factory’.

As I met more and more workers from the bakery in the following months, I saw how prevalent these descriptions were. Adriana, one of the earlier Sweet Tooth workers to join the campaign, made her decision to go to the BWC office on the day that two of her co-workers left their jobs—one left because she could not stand the pressure of the work environment, and the other was fired. When Adriana saw the manager laughing after firing the worker (who was crying), she decided to schedule a meeting with BWC; she had heard about BWC from a co-worker. She had been working at the bakery for five years and, like Emilio, she also felt that the company was attempting to tire out workers who had some seniority, in order to drive them to quit.

Based on the grievances that workers expressed during one-on-one meetings with organizers, BWC staff drafted a letter with three campaign demands; workers presented the demands letter to the owner of Sweet Tooth Bakery to make the campaign public, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter. The three demands were: a fair system of regular raises; respectful treatment from management; and accessible health insurance. The sections below will explore the grievances that led BWC to propose these campaign demands.

The grievances described below cover the range from economic value (wages) to moral and social value (respect), yet I want to draw attention to the thread that binds the different types of grievances. Many of the problems that workers described were rooted in a sense that the issue represented a violation of dignity and respect; thus an issue about wages that is seemingly ‘only’ material is framed as the company changing its practices in ways that aim to subtly ‘squeeze’ maximum value from workers. It was therefore not only the grievances explicitly about respect that stemmed from perceived violations of the moral economy; rather, the continuity of these ‘moral triggers’ (West 2012) across grievances of all sorts points to the intertwining nature of economic value and moral worthiness. In earlier research interviewing undocumented workers who had made

rights claims through worker centers, I found that most workers were spurred to make claims and become involved in collective action after experiencing a ‘moral trigger’; even in worksites where rights had been violated for years, it was experiences of disrespect and dehumanization that often spurred workers to claim their rights (*ibid.*).

Wages

Like Elena, many workers viewed the moment that Sweet Tooth moved production from the small retail shops to a factory site as the threshold for when work conditions began to decline. The perceived shift to the job becoming ‘like a factory’ was therefore not only invoking a metaphorical description, but a literal account as well. Shortly before production was moved to the large factory site, workers were told there would be an increased workload. Then, during the first year at the new factory worksite, workers’ shifts were changed from seven hours to eight hours long, without an increase in wages; because workers were paid per shift rather than per hour at that time, a longer shift with stagnant pay meant that their hourly wage effectively declined. Cameron, a night shift worker, told me this meant that his hourly wage had actually dropped below his starting wage from a couple years earlier. ‘It’s just too little,’ he told me, ‘\$12 flat is not fair’. He said he was getting ‘fed up’ with the bakery and had begun thinking about finding another job.

Another worker, Sam, described how this was just one example of the way management regularly instituted new rules and expectations in a somewhat underhand way:

... it seems like, they’re trying to make these changes. They do it by asking someone who’s new to do something, and they don’t understand that it’s not a normal thing. And then [the managers] make it— like they set this precedent with a new person, and it’s suddenly just the way things are.

He told me that when he started working at the bakery, he and another new worker (both young, white men) were offered \$25 extra per shift to stay an extra hour to assist the next shift; he noted

that this wage differential was larger than the differential given to the most senior mixing position. But no more than two months later, Sam showed up at work and noticed on the schedule (with no advance notice from the manager) that the regular shift had been extended from seven to eight hours, and the extra hour they had been paid \$25 for previously was now just part of the standard shift—everyone now had to work that extra hour with no wage differential.

In addition to the increased shift length, many workers also experienced the system of raises as arbitrary and unfair. As described in the previous section, many workers told organizers that, after their ‘annual review’ in which their work was assessed to qualify them for an annual raise, the manager or owner told them that they would be receiving a raise that was a little higher than everyone else’s; each of these workers was then instructed not to tell any of their co-workers. On the other hand, many workers also reported receiving progressively smaller raises in recent years, or sometimes ‘wage freezes’ that kept their wages stagnant for years at a time. For example, one Latina worker reported that after not receiving a raise for nearly three years—which the company attributed to problems with the economy—her request was finally met and she was given a 2% raise of twenty-five cents, bringing her wage to \$12.25/hour after nearly eight years at the company; she was surprised and disappointed.

A further grievance that a number of workers raised in early one-on-one meetings with BWC organizers was the failure to be paid overtime wages when they were paid by the shift rather than by the hour. After the owner of Sweet Tooth Bakery found out there was an organizing campaign brewing (at which point she wrote a letter to all employees, described in detail in the following chapter), workers who had been paid by the shift were switched to hourly pay, and were discouraged from working overtime. It’s difficult to say with any certainty what prompted this change, but BWC

staff and some workers suspected that the owner feared legal action regarding compliance with overtime wage laws.

Respect

Abusive treatment of workers by management has been widely cited as a powerful trigger for worker organizing (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004; Delgado 1993; West 2012). During a meeting between Harvest Bakery workers, BWC staff, and Harvest Bakery executives, Adam offered the executives what he called ‘some free advice’, commenting that the number one thing that drove workers to BWC was when their manager was yelling at them; ‘So, it’s not good for you, it’s not good for them’, he added. In interviews with labor organizers from a range of labor unions, Brodkin and Strathmann were told that a union drive was likely to succeed at a workplace where workers felt disrespected by the boss, even if they were well paid; conversely, organizers reported that it was very difficult to sustain a union drive when workers felt their employer treated them with respect, regardless of pay or hours (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004:13). In an in-depth case study of undocumented workers who organized at a factory in Los Angeles, Delgado asserts that ‘bread-and-butter issues alone do not explain why workers organize and may in fact explain less than is generally presumed’ (*ibid.*); ‘both promanagement and pro-union forces repeatedly cited the abusive treatment of workers by supervisors as the principal catalyst’ (Delgado 1993:96). This observation was supported by workers and organizers from other unions and other factories, citing such dehumanizing treatment as a ‘critical factor in decisions by workers to organize’ (*ibid.*).

Workers’ experiences of management varied significantly across different bakeries and even within each bakery, across different shifts and departments. At Sweet Tooth Bakery, many workers in one department dreaded going to work because their manager insulted and yelled at the workers regularly. This manager had caused a number of workers to cry on the job and was described

variously as callous, racist, and authoritarian; such verbal abuse was widely reported by workers in New York's food processing industry. Other managers at Sweet Tooth Bakery were described in a wide range of ways; numerous workers felt managers were disrespectful or indifferent, while other workers got along well with their managers. Interestingly, one worker told BWC organizers that a manager had recently resigned, stating that the company had changed for the worse and no longer treated its workers well; he was replaced by a manager who was apparently very strict and described by another worker as 'terrible'. On the other hand, there were at least a few workers who socialized with particular managers outside of work. One worker described to an organizer and me how embarrassingly low his wages were, yet he repeatedly declined joining the organizing campaign; he told us that he felt it would seem like betrayal to the manager, who he viewed as a friend.

Other workers at the bakery experienced disrespect not through outright verbal abuse on management's part but through disregard of their needs. For example, a couple of workers described to organizers how their requests to have physical conditions (from illness or aging) accommodated in the work process were ignored or rejected. Another worker said his feeling of being disrespected on the job culminated when he was out with a life-threatening health condition and he felt the owner was callous and indifferent toward him afterward, and acted as though it were 'nothing'; further, she would not allow him paid sick days for the days he could not work. He added that he thought he had never been properly paid for overtime hours worked, and so he was curious to learn more about the union. Workers also felt disregarded when necessary equipment was not fixed, forcing them to do difficult tasks by hand, or when their schedules were changed unpredictably, making it difficult for them to plan for a steady income, for example.

Many workers pointed to these problems as issues of mismanagement, whether it was abusive supervision, a failure to distribute work fairly, or managers' indifference toward workers.

Mismanagement and issues with respect are often connected to a lack of autonomy for workers, which workplace ethnographies have repeatedly shown as having ‘a corrosive effect’ on workers’ experiences of their jobs (Hodson 2004:30).

Health

Bakery work is physical work, entailing hauling sacks of flour, wielding heavy and potentially dangerous mixing and slicing machines, hand mixing and carrying large tubs of dough, withstanding the constant heat of monitoring industrial ovens—or the chill of refrigerated work areas—and scrubbing thick, sticky dough off floors and trays. Workers in the food processing industry are often exposed to dangerous working conditions; recall the story of Carlos, from Chapter Four, whose hand was mangled in a dough mixing machine. In a similar accident with more devastating results, in 2011 a twenty-two year old indigenous Guatemalan worker was pulled into an industrial mixing machine and crushed to death at the tortilla factory where he worked in New York—like in Carlos’ case, the cause of the accident was a missing and legally required safety guard on the machine.⁵⁴ At Sweet Tooth Bakery, several workers told organizers about a senior worker whose finger had been severed in a machine in the weeks just before he retired.

As the United States does not have universal government-funded health insurance, around 57% of people under age 65 obtain health insurance coverage through their employer or through a family member’s employer (Congressional Budget Office 2016:4).⁵⁵ Sweet Tooth Bakery offered employees a health insurance plan in which the company made a partial contribution toward the monthly

⁵⁴ Although this man had not been a BWC member, BWC advocated for prosecution of the factory owner and brought attention to the case through media and public events.

⁵⁵ The US Government subsidizes health insurance through various programs such as Medicaid (which provides coverage for individuals and families with low income) and Medicare (which provides coverage for individuals over age 65 and/or with disabilities).

premium, but according to most of the workers BWC spoke to, the monthly cost was too expensive given their wages. Workers were in an awkward position in which most of them could not afford the company-offered plan, but their income was a little too high to qualify for Medicaid (government-subsidized health insurance for those with low incomes). For some workers, this meant that they simply didn't seek medical care; one worker who had persistent shoulder pain from the job told me that since he could never afford to go to the doctor, he simply took painkillers to treat the pain and whenever he got sick. Another worker who needed coverage to treat a chronic condition ended up requesting reduced work hours so that her lower income would qualify her for Medicaid, since she could not afford the insurance offered by the bakery.

Asserting value through work ethic

During one-on-one meetings with organizers, workers often spoke about the workplace dynamics in terms of work ethic—good workers and bad workers, how hard one should work—and how these taxonomies mapped onto ideas of worthiness and fairness. The abiding connections between labor and ideas about value, freedom, and citizenship infuse work with a deeply moral quality, making it inevitable that work ethic can be a means of asserting value, legitimacy, and even autonomy in the face of exploitation. Given how work ethic is charged with both practical and moral implications, contestations surrounding work ethic were a source of tensions and conflict at the bakeries. At Sweet Tooth Bakery, workers often connected these tensions to what they described as a relatively flexible work environment, favoritism, and unfair distribution of work; some workers extended this to frame them in terms of racial and ethnic divisions. While some workers appreciated the flexibility of the job, many ultimately found that the flexibility manifested as favoritism and inequality among workers, thus entrenching poor working conditions.

Asserting work ethic in the face of exploitation

Julio, a Mexican immigrant, identified as a hard worker and lamented to organizers that while many workers spoke positively about the ‘flexible’ work arrangements at the bakery, this often meant that hard workers like himself were left to constantly fix mistakes and pick up after the less disciplined workers. He had been working at the bakery for nearly fifteen years, and commuted to work from the suburbs, where he, his wife, and two children rented one floor of a house. During the first ‘house visit’ when Luis met Julio, Julio had expressed his distrust of the owner and management, and was immediately supportive of the prospect of joining a union that would help the workers protect themselves. As Luis and I sat in Julio’s living room during the second visit with him, he explained to us that while this was not the worst job he’d had, he believed improvements must be made and he felt frustrated that many of his coworkers seemed to feel indebted to the boss simply for having a job. He noted that some workers said the bakery used to feel like a family and that the owner used to care about the workers like family—Julio dismissed this as an illusion, both in the past and in the present.

He described the work environment as unusual, noting—as other workers had—that people ‘got away with’ things (such as absenteeism or being caught drinking beer at work) that wouldn’t be tolerated elsewhere. Yet in every meeting where this was discussed with organizers, Julio ultimately directed his critique more at management than at his coworkers; for example, he repeatedly complained to a manager that he always had to clean up after other shifts, and management did nothing to change the situation until Julio confronted the owner. When Julio reported a worker to have been physically aggressive with him (and other workers), management did nothing; after the worker started a fistfight at a later point, Julio was frustrated by management’s inaction and he asked them to watch the CCTV footage, finally leading to the worker getting fired. Julio also noted that a

manager had asked him multiple times to fix a persistent leak in the ceiling at the bakery, and Julio told him each time that this was not his responsibility.

For Julio, his identity as a good worker did not depend upon unquestioning obedience to management—rather, it was rooted in his identity as a hard worker, which he felt gave him legitimacy in seeking to exercise some control over the terms of his work and to later demand better working conditions through the BWC organizing campaign. Significant to this linking of the virtue of hard work and the virtue of organizing was Julio’s longstanding political commitment to standing up for just causes; during their first meeting, he had described to Luis how he came from a family of both peasants and unionists, and how his grandfather in particular had taught him that it was necessary to fight against the powerful in order to have anything in this world.

At first glance, Julio’s critiques of undisciplined workers and aggressive workers could be seen to position him as serving the interests of the employer in policing the workforce and ensuring smooth, high productivity. Yet his grievances were that workers were worsening conditions for *each other*, whether through uneven distribution of work or through physical violence, and he consistently framed this critique within the context of the employer’s duty to use their authority to ensure fairness and safety, rather than to divide and conquer. While a sense of responsibility and hard work were clearly central to his worker subjectivity, so too was a determination to exercise control of the terms of work and to organize for greater solidarity among workers.

Another conversation about conflict over work ethic unfolded during a meeting in which the organizer Luis met two Sweet Tooth Bakery workers at a cafe near the bakery for an initial meeting. One of the workers, Alberto, had been working at the bakery for over ten years; he also held a second job at another bakery. Alberto told Luis that the owner of the bakery had changed the company drastically for the worse over the past five years or so. He said she had created an awful

work environment by hiring bad managers and unskilled workers—“The new workers aren’t like us”, he said, noting that they had no experience, no skills, and didn’t care about the work. Further, he said there was significant discrimination, with new non-immigrant workers being offered promotions ahead of the immigrant workers with longer tenure, like himself. Alberto was satisfied with his wages, but viewed work conditions and respect as important issues that needed to be addressed at the bakery. He said that when he arrived at his second job, he felt an ‘internal peace’ that he didn’t feel at Sweet Tooth Bakery. Luis mentioned that other more senior workers had expressed concern that they were being pressured to quit, and Alberto immediately agreed with this. ‘[The owner] is trying to fire me without actually firing me’, he said. ‘She’s making my life so difficult, adding pressure and playing games with people, so that I eventually leave on my own’.

In identifying himself (and the other two Latino immigrant workers with him) in opposition to the newer workers, Alberto asserted himself as a skilled, experienced worker who cared about the work. While he did label these newer hires as unskilled workers who didn’t care about the work, he ultimately blamed the owner and the bad managers she hired for breeding worsening work conditions; he thus positioned the hard, dedicated workers as more responsible than their coworkers and even than management and the boss. Alberto’s grievances arose from a sense that his hard work made him deserving of respect, but instead he faced an increasingly deskilled workforce and discrimination based on both nationality and age, making his job more stressful.

Workers did not embody fixed, rigid attitudes about their work ethics. While some workers pointed to their good work ethic as a means of asserting their value and deservingness in the face of their grievances with the boss and the company, as described above, a number of workers described their own progression from working as hard as possible to actively curtailing the amount of work they were willing to do in order to assert control over their labor and challenge exploitative working

conditions. Cameron, a Black worker, described to me how he had attempted to exceed management's expectations toward the beginning of his tenure at the bakery, but he later abandoned that strategy after seeing that his extra effort was rewarded only with more work. A couple months after he began working at the bakery, he was written up for 'poor work ethic' after he chose to work on a task that required a little less labor than the tasks performed by a worker on the other side of the table.

I don't hate Sweet Tooth Bakery at this point, its just like, I know the bullshit— excuse my French—but I know the bullshit... First and only time I ever got written up. ... I didn't even really have a problem with it. I was just like, "OK this is the way they do things here, let me step my game up"—and I stepped my game up, to the point where no one could come in and tell me "Do this"—it was already being done...

[But] what they do there—and I've been told this before, they tried to tell me before—they said the harder you work in this place, the more work you get. I thought it was bullshit... I didn't think it was true. A guy named Rich...he used to work for Sweet Tooth Bakery... He was the one who told me that, he said, "Oh don't work so hard, bro". and I said, "What do you mean?" and he said, "All they gonna do is give you more work". And he walked away. I didn't understand it until later. Until they showed me.

... So now, what I do is, when I'm done my work I go home. I don't care what time it is—if I'm done with my job, I leave. And [the owner] said that out of her mouth... because she didn't want anybody getting overtime. After everything, when the cat was out of the bag [about union organizing] and she had to pay you for overtime, she didn't want anybody getting it anymore. Which is hilarious... That's a slap in the face right there also. Yeah, [I get paid for fewer hours], but at least I don't have to worry about working as hard as I do and then come behind people that's supposedly fed up after two, three months. That's bullshit. So if I have to pack when I first come in, mix, turn the dough, divide all of the dough, bake, and then go pack at the end of the night? I'm not doing anything else. I'm gonna take those bags and I'm gonna go, whether I'm a half hour early or what have you. That's just how it's gotta be until things even out a little bit.

Many workers attested to the idea that working harder would only lead them to incur more work.

One worker, who had immigrated from Asia, told me that the problem was '*mucho trabajo, poco dinero*'—a lot of work, not much money—he had heard Spanish-speaking workers describe it as such (and I later would hear this phrase from others, too), and he agreed. Diligent output on their part sometimes prompted management to believe they could save on labor costs by extracting the same level of output from fewer workers, assuming the workers could be pushed to work even harder. This worker explained to me that when people worked very hard and quickly during their shift, it

was often not to their advantage because the manager would see the high level of output and sometimes decide to take a worker off that shift. This tactic of requiring the same level of production from fewer workers left the remaining workers with more work than they could handle, since they had already been working at an accelerated pace; this reflects a relatively common tactic employers use to wield ‘flexible’ labor for higher profits. Workers also reported that when their co-workers called out on weekend shifts, replacements were often not called in, leaving those who worked with more work to complete for the same compensation.

Sam, a white worker in his 20s, described to me in an interview how management often changed work schedules in what appeared to be an attempt to expand the number of tasks each worker had to do. He noted that some workers perceived this and resisted, refusing to take on more work without a pay raise—they felt ‘squeezed’ and increasingly alienated.

Sam: I mean, I know that they’re designing the schedules to ... make you work more. Like...the most recent schedule that they put up is—instead of the 8 o clock shift starting at 8 it’s 8:30-4:30. ...And the mid-morning [shift] starts at 3[am]. So you’re working basically the whole night, you know?

ZW: So... the night shift people help out on the mid-morning shift?

Sam: Right. Or take a pay cut... I think [management is] waiting to see what people do. Because some people still refuse to do the mid-morning work. If they can hide in the bathroom, they’ll hide in the bathroom.

ZW: Why? Because it’s hard?

Sam: No, because they feel like it’s not their job. And they’ll say that explicitly. They’ll say, ‘That’s not my job.’

Scenarios like the ones described above create a visceral reminder for workers that the workplace relationship under capitalism is rooted in exploiting surplus value. Workers who chose to refrain from working as hard as they were capable of doing were asserting a measure of autonomy and thus attempting to create a safeguard against both overwork and the effects of ‘flexible’ work and favoritism. Yet discourses about work ethic were not only used to assert value and worthiness

‘against’ the abuses of the company; the following section will explore how such discourses were also sometimes used by workers to further enshrine hierarchies and divisions among workers.

Racialized hierarchies and divisions in the moral economy

One day I accompanied Sara on a house visit to meet with Alfredo, a young Latino worker who had recently become involved with the BWC campaign at Sweet Tooth Bakery. As we sat in a park near his home discussing the campaign and the workplace, Alfredo told us that a Latino co-worker who supervised a section of mostly Black workers said to Alfredo that the Black workers tended to be lazy and leave all the work for him to finish. Sara immediately responded that comments about Black workers being lazy very often come from above, from the bosses; she framed it as one example of a range of racist comments used to divide workers, such as the idea that ‘Latinos steal jobs’. A few months later, I sat in the BWC office as Luis met with a different Latino worker from Sweet Tooth Bakery. This worker mentioned that a Latina co-worker had told him that the Black workers on her shift ‘don’t do anything’. Luis responded by describing racism as a trap, outlining how stereotypes and racism end up benefiting the company at the expense of the workers. The worker agreed and then built on this analysis, describing a hierarchy of how workers were treated at the bakery, with Black, Mexican, and Colombian workers slotted into different strata.

Conversations like this were not uncommon. Workers at the various industrial bakeries often described divisions among the workforce, sometimes citing these divisions as a key reason they believed organizing would be challenging or impossible. Yet divisions were not portrayed uniformly, and they were not neatly drawn across firmly defined groups. Race and nationality were often flagged as prominent divisions, as highlighted in the conversations described above, while at other times, workers described the workforce more generally as divided; one worker at Sweet Tooth

Bakery told me, '[It's] not like other bakeries—I don't see people coming together. People are always gossiping, this group won't talk to that group...'

This section will examine how some workers wielded discourses about work ethic along racial/ethnic lines in a manner that reflected and perpetuated broader societal stereotypes, invoking the tangled relationship between labor, value, and deservingness. The web of divisions that workers felt at Sweet Tooth Bakery echoed the ways in which they were positioned within broader structures of race, nationality, gender, class, and legal status. Upon closer analysis of the divisions workers described, it becomes clear that many of the commonly named divisions were metonyms for a more complex web of divisions that were not explicitly named, but vividly experienced.

As described in Chapter Two, the production of difference and inequality among workers is ongoing and inherent to processes of accumulation under capitalism; stratified valuations of labor and of the people doing that labor are used to structure and justify global and local hierarchies. It is therefore inevitable that 'the outcomes of working classes' attempts to make themselves are multiple and uneven, resulting in attempts at solidarity, but also in racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchy, exclusion, and violence' (Kasimir and Carbonella 2014:7). Workers thus enter the bakeries already marked by their positions within global and local structures, and step into the particular manifestations of these hierarchies as they have been projected on the shop floor. Management practices inscribe difference and competition through stratification of the workplace along racial/ethnic and gender lines, as well as through 'flexible' labor practices; yet these divisions are also sometimes perpetuated by workers themselves, reflecting the effect, described by W. E. B. Du Bois, of the 'public and psychological wages of whiteness' (Du Bois 1969; Roediger 2007), or the 'possessive investment in whiteness' (Lipsitz 2006).

Various workers (of different racial/ethnic backgrounds) told organizers that they had observed white workers advancing more quickly than other workers who had been there far longer. One white worker said this had been true for him; he explained that it hadn't been particularly about a monetary benefit, but that he had been taught far more in both skills and information about the various stages of making bread and was given greater responsibilities. He had observed Black workers with longer tenure than him who were kept in the same role for years, or promoted more slowly. These observations point to the ways 'employers draw upon myths of ethnicity, gender, and nationality to justify hiring, job allocations practices, etc.', (Griffith 1993:205), thus producing ethnic 'hiring queues' (Waldinger and Lichter 2003) and perpetuating the creation of difference. Such practices can generate self-fulfilling prophecies as employers rely upon these myths and stereotypes to decide who has the skills and work ethic appropriate for various jobs and promotions. For example, a recent economics study demonstrated how employers disproportionately scrutinize Black workers and consequently are more likely to fire them, unless they display a substantially *higher* level of skill than white workers; the shorter duration of employment for Blacks then lowers the 'average productivity' of the pool of Black job-seekers, perpetuating the pattern of discriminatory scrutiny and lower wages (Cavounidis and Lang 2015).

Aside from pointing out this preferential treatment of white workers, I mainly heard workers speak about two particular axes of divisions on the job: the divisions between African American and Latino workers, and the divisions between Mexican and Colombian workers. The former was mostly spoken about by workers on the night shift, as nearly all of the African American workers were on the night shift. For day shift workers, the Mexican/Colombian divide was most visible. Both conflicts demonstrated the ways in which labor is a site for contesting not only economic but social value and worthiness, as they invoked stereotypes and structures of privilege from broader society as

a means of classifying themselves and other workers into different strata on the shop floor, and thus attempting to escape or erase some of the stigma of their own positions.

The tensions between Mexicans and Colombians also drew upon global hierarchies of value and power, pointing to a difference in nationality that was treated as a metonym for differences in race, legal status, and tenure. The Colombians working at the bakery generally had lighter skin (they were ‘whiter’) and were more likely than Mexican workers to have legal immigration status; further, there was a contingent of Colombian workers who had started working at the bakery in its first years, whereas most of the Mexican workers started later.

I'm going to say it—it sounds very bad, but among Hispanics of different nationalities, there's always this—sometimes we talk about how there's discrimination from white people against Latinos, but it also exists among the Hispanics themselves. [...] [I've noticed these divisions] since the beginning. There are actually Latinos from various nationalities there, but the majority are Colombians and Mexicans. But the Colombians are the ones who've been—they were the first ones to arrive at the company. So, because they were first, they think they're superior to everyone else. Besides that, since they are whiter, they think they're superior to the others. So there's always been this war. They often think they're superior, better.

... Like, ‘because I'm Colombian, because I'm white, they don't have the right to tell me what I have to do’ or ‘because I'm Mexican and dark-skinned, I don't like for them to give me orders’. [...] And while this exists, the one who benefits is going to be the owners... because she is taking 95% of the pie while one is resigned to the crumbs and at the same time, we're fighting among ourselves. We're fighting over that 5%. It's stupid, but... A person thinks they're superior, or thinks they know everything, and stops learning.

Fernando

Yet even within the generalized perception of conflict between Colombians and Mexicans, other factors drew more nuanced hierarchies. For example, a Colombian man told a Colombian woman from a different department that it was ‘people like [her], without papers’ who were lowering wages and causing the problems at the workplace; legal status was thus a means for him to assert his own worthiness and belonging against her status.

Tensions between Black and Latino immigrant workers generally reflected the patterns of discourse that have been well-documented regarding such conflict: that Black workers are lazy and do as little work as possible, and that Latino immigrants are hard workers—sometimes that they work *too* hard (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008; Stuesse 2008). The longstanding positioning of blackness as representing the antithesis of value, freedom, and belonging has been continuously reinscribed in the realm of labor, historically giving immigrants incentive to position themselves explicitly as *not* Black in order to avoid being branded with this stigma (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008; Roediger 2007). This process of positioning has, at times, taken place through violence and terror, as with southern and eastern Europeans vis à vis Black workers in the St. Louis riots (Du Bois 1920), or through exclusion from labor guilds, unions, industries, and even the country.

In addition to drawing on this understanding that capitalism has consistently relied upon the making of inequality out of difference, here we can also refer back to Gordon and Lenhardt's proposed theory of work as a pathway to belonging, described in Chapter Two and elaborated upon thereafter. They specifically trace how Black workers and Latino immigrant workers differently experience the value of the same work because of differences in their experiences of racial subordination, their formal citizenship status, and their group histories; often, this sparks differing responses to employers' demands.

The very different stances many African Americans and new Latino immigrants have with respect to work and citizenship—African Americans' desire to control work pace and conditions in order to ensure a modicum of dignity and respect within the United States, and immigrants' incentive to do whatever the boss asks in order to achieve greater economic and social status outside this country—sets up a clash when they meet in the workplace; one that is intensified by racial segregation and an inability to communicate with each other. (Gordon and Lenhardt 2008:1222)

One Latin American worker at Sweet Tooth Bakery complained that her manager, who was Black, gave preferential treatment to Black workers. She told an organizer that one Black worker, for example, sometimes stood around for hours without doing any work. Yet she later described how

she had left her previous position in a different department because she felt one co-worker in particular was given far too much flexibility by the manager; this was a shift with no Black workers or managers. Further, this woman added that she sometimes tries to ‘test’ her current manager by sitting around in the cafeteria, hoping that the manager would say something to her and she could then be exposed for giving preferential treatment to Black workers. But the manager did not say anything to her, and she concluded that there was just too much flexibility in the workplace, which works against the interests of those like her who work hard every day. Here we see that what she initially described as a racially charged issue of favoritism—with the implied stereotype that ‘Black people are lazy’—was revealed, upon further unpacking, to be rooted in friction around work ethic and how she doesn’t feel that her good work ethic is being valued in the way it should be.

During an interview at the home of Rafael, a young Mexican worker, he explained to me what he perceived as the different work ethics at the bakery. Initially, he told me that the ‘Black style of working’ was just to show up on time and leave on schedule, and it didn’t matter what you accomplished in between. He said that Black workers were usually happy to leave their work for someone else to do, and that they worked slowly. When I challenged him that this was a racist stereotype about Black workers, he revised the theory and said it was actually ‘the American way’, not just Black workers. He contrasted this with the hard work of Latino immigrants and described the satisfaction he derived from working hard and quickly; he then said he’d heard people saying that Latinos and Mexicans work too hard, but this didn’t bother him because he liked to do his work and get it done.

Yet hours later, after completing the interview with Rafael, we began discussing his employer’s opposition to the organizing campaign (discussed in detail in Chapter Seven). When I asked if he intended to continue his involvement in the campaign, he said he did, because he wanted to ‘screw

over' the company—then he corrected himself, and said he wanted to 'screw over' the boss, because she was the one at the top allowing abuses to happen. He described how the workers in another department (of mostly women workers, I note) had the worst conditions. He then added that he didn't see himself as staying at the bakery in the long term, because he might be moving away from New York soon. 'I could be fired for anything', Rafael told me, and when I asked why, he said he had called out of work at the last minute more than once, for example. He said that he no longer did everything the manager told him to—that he used to say 'yes, yes, yes', but that now he said 'no' when told to do something that wasn't actually part of his job—he would tell the manager that he should be paid more if they need him to do more jobs. 'They think I'm rebellious', he told me.

Within the span of a few hours, Rafael first asserted his value as a Latino immigrant worker who worked harder and more quickly than Black (and white) US workers, and later described how he had started drawing more boundaries around the work he was willing to do, and also ignoring certain rules of the workplace. While he described the satisfaction he derived from working hard, it was clear that the worthiness he felt in that regard now existed in tension with the experience of exploitation. He navigated this tension by holding onto his identity as a good worker while simultaneously trying to 'screw over'—essentially, punish—the owner for allowing abuses to continue, by asserting more control over his workload, occasionally breaking workplace rules, and (inconsistently) participating in the BWC campaign.

Cameron, a Black night shift worker, said that the night shift workers were often spoken about by management and by daytime workers as 'a bunch of drunks that smoke weed and don't really do any work'. He traced this reputation as potentially arising from resentment that night shift workers had more flexibility than daytime workers, particularly that they had more control over when they did certain tasks and when they took breaks. He rejected the idea that they didn't do any work, however,

and noted that the night shift produced better-looking bread than the day shift. It is of course also noteworthy that most of the Black workers were concentrated in the night shift, and this reputation of ‘night shift workers’ could operate as well as a stereotype of Black workers as lazy.

In the absence of channels and structures for collective action and solidarity among workers, and in the face of significant potential risks, the struggle against alienation may take more individualized and fragmented forms (Roscigno and Hodson 2004; Scott 2008). Workers’ individual efforts to either be a ‘good worker’ by working exceptionally hard or to resist exploitation by controlling the pace and amount of work they did inevitably created friction in the workplace, as they perceived divergent work ethics to be undermining each other. Those who identified as hard workers felt that other workers created more work for them through their laziness or lack of competence; on the other hand, workers who valued the ability to control the pace and amount of work resented those who seemed willing to do anything the boss asked.

Conclusions

The discourse and practices of the Sweet Tooth Bakery owner and management served to obscure class distinctions between labor and management through the trope of ‘family’, while also promoting flexibility, competition, and ‘enterprising’ workers. This generated a moral economy through which many workers interpreted changes on the job, and the literal move of production from small retail shops to a large factory site became a symbol—‘from family to factory’—that anchored workers’ grievances. Changes in hours and wage structures, mismanagement, and the lack of affordable health insurance were interpreted by some workers as violations of the moral economy—as insults to their dignity and disregard for their worth as human beings, a framing that BWC organizers reinforced in conversations with workers and in drafting the demands letter. Yet the factory’s cultivation of individualism and the perceived flexibility and disorganization of the workplace generally encouraged

individualized responses to workers' grievances; some workers thus asserted their worth through fractured channels, deepening workplace stratification along lines of race and nationality and entrenching hierarchies of labor.

The moral economy of Sweet Tooth Bakery thus provoked the rise of grievances because of the discrepancy between rhetoric and workers' experience, yet it also undermined the construction of solidarity among workers through its promotion of flexibility and competition among workers. The BWC campaign tapped into rising grievances and built the campaign around these, but the fragmented nature of workers' responses to their issues and the divisions within the workforce made building solidarity a challenge. The following chapter will describe BWC's recruitment and organizing practices, detailing how the organization's struggle to build 'structures of solidarity' for the Sweet Tooth campaign hampered their ability to build solidarity amid difference.

Chapter 6 – Cultivating the Path to Solidarity: Organizing and Recruitment Practices

This chapter will examine BWC's approach to recruiting workers to join labor organizing campaigns, specifically tracing the early stages of organizing with workers from Sweet Tooth Bakery. Given the formidable opposition to labor organizing in the United States, it is often a challenging, uphill path to bring workers on board to campaigns and sign them up for unions. Many workers are understandably and realistically hesitant to believe that organizing will be successful enough to merit the risks and the effort, even if they deeply want change and even if they believe it is a just cause.⁵⁶ Unions and worker centers that seek to do workplace organizing must therefore guide workers along a path that expands hope by demonstrating how worker solidarity and collective action can potentially diminish precarity and become a source of security. In the face of the fractured shop floor relations described in the previous chapter, BWC faced a challenging terrain for cultivating solidarity.

Solidarity and the will to participate in collective action often develop in practice, rather than through abstract or ideological commitments; one basic, central reason is that most people will only fight for something if it seems at least somewhat possible to attain. It is therefore important to understand not only how workers' notions of *what is just* and *what is deserved* are formed, but also how their perception of *what is possible* is shaped during an organizing campaign. Notions of what is possible—imaginings of attainable futures—are of course not static; they are constantly expanding and contracting according to the material circumstances and discourses—both past and present—a

⁵⁶ Lopez (2004) highlights working class anti-unionism as another significant obstacle to labor organizing, and locates the root of this anti-unionism not only in repression of unionization campaigns and anti-union propaganda, but also in workers' lived experiences of business unionism, or 'do-nothing unionism'. He also notes that the literature on union organizing does not substantially address worker resistance to unions (2004:116).

person moves through. Experiences of precarity and uncertainty shape the capacity to hope and accordingly, the ‘practical ability to make the future—the capacity to imagine it in the present’ (Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S11). Organizers presented labor organizing campaigns and worker solidarity as means for workers to diminish their experience of precarity, to exercise autonomy and narrow the margins of uncertainty in their lives, yet these results were not guaranteed—particularly in the face of dogged anti-unionism in the US, workers perceived inherent risks in this investment for a different future, such as losing one’s job or expending enormous energy for little to no gain.

This chapter first examines the delicate process of recruiting workers to labor organizing by tracing how BWC attempted to sow the seeds of unionization through tapping into workers’ experience of exploitation and their sense of justice, and expanding their ideas of what was possible through one-on-one meetings and member orientations. The subsequent section builds on the analysis that emerged from workers’ life stories in Chapter Three, examining in the context of organizing campaigns how workers’ experiences of precarity and their family circumstances can deflate their notions of what is possible, unless the campaign is able to cultivate solidarity and demonstrate potential power. The final section describes how BWC sought to build ‘structures of solidarity’ that would enable workers to both prefigure the organized workplace and exert power, thus expanding their sense of what was possible. Here I will demonstrate how BWC’s difficulty in constructing structures of solidarity for the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign hindered the campaign’s ability to organize across the fractures of difference in the workforce, leaving BWC largely unable to position unionization as a potential source of security.

Tapping into a sense of justice

The ‘one-on-one’ meeting between an organizer and a worker often serves as one of the initial steps in paving the way for a culture of solidarity (Fantasia 1988) to develop—that is, for constructing or bolstering a worker’s sense that solidarity is a promising path.⁵⁷ I find it useful to conceive of the one-on-one—and indeed, of the overall relationship between an organizer and worker—as an ongoing process in negotiating what is *just* and what is *possible*. Organizers attempt to first uncover the worker’s sense of injustice, and then to guide the worker in overcoming the fear, resignation, or sense of futility that the worker may feel in the face of these problems; organizers seek to escalate grievances into demands, or as they sometimes phrase it, ‘turn a problem into an issue’, with ‘issues’ being understood as specific solutions to specific problems. Ultimately, the organizer aims to fuel the worker’s sense of what is *just* and what is *deserved* with an expanded sense of what is *possible*. Most workers will only fight for what they believe is possible to win, so the organization must demonstrate that possibility—essentially, must demonstrate the workers’ ability to exercise power through collective action (Fantasia 1988:170–71). This demonstration of the possibility of winning is enacted first rhetorically through discussions between workers and organizers, and then it must be demonstrated through action, which will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

A-E-I-O-U: framing the organizing conversation

House visits—when an organizer visits a worker at their home—are often considered the ideal way to begin speaking to workers about an organizing campaign. This is firstly a result of NLRA rules, as union organizers cannot claim the right to reach out to employees on company property, for example (Sachs 2010:664); secondly, workers are likely to feel more comfortable voicing or

⁵⁷ In this chapter, I will sometimes refer to ‘one-on-ones’ (often written as ‘1:1s’ in worker center or union documents) as ‘house visits’ when I am specifically describing a one-on-one meeting at a worker’s home.

considering critical views of their job in their own space rather than on the employer's turf. A union or worker center embarks upon an organizing campaign on a distinctly uneven playing field, given that the boss not only controls the workers' ability to keep the job but also has unfettered access to the worker during all working hours (Secunda 2010:385). Organizers, on the other hand, struggle to squeeze meetings and conversations into workers' inevitably busy non-working hours.

Organizers at BWC were trained according to the IWW organizing training, which framed the 'formula' for a successful one-on-one conversation with the acronym AEIOU: agitate, educate, inoculate, organize, 'union makes us strong'. Different unions outline the various steps differently,⁵⁸ but the central logic rests on finding out a worker's issues, arousing their anger about those issues, and framing the union as a channel for addressing those issues. Agitation, in this context, is understood as bringing a worker's issues to the forefront of their mind; the assumption is that many workers suppress feelings of injustice because it feels untenable to live on a daily basis with the weight of intractable or seemingly unfixable problems chafing at them, in which case the organizer may seek to dig past justifications and resignation. During a one-on-one, organizers seek to awaken or kindle a sense of injustice by asking questions that aim to unearth the worker's problems with emotional depth—specifically, to arouse anger regarding their problems. The underlying logic is that anger can be a productive emotion when properly channeled, and that anger is useful in diminishing the fear inherent in challenging the existing power dynamic between workers and boss. To agitate properly, the organizer must understand how the worker perceives their problems and why they matter to that person, which means they must begin by asking questions and listening; at one point during an organizers debriefing meeting at BWC, Luis advised the other organizers and me to follow the '80/20 rule' that dictates 80% of the time spent listening and 20% spent talking. During an initial

⁵⁸ The organizing conversation is often referred to by organizers as 'the union rap' or simply, 'the rap'.

one-on-one, workers will of course respond in various ways—some are forthcoming with the problems they experience at work, others are cautious about speaking negatively of their jobs, and some appear to have no problems they view as particularly serious. A worker might tell an organizer during their first meeting that she has no problems, and then begin to open up in the second meeting when some trust has been built between the worker and organizer. Indeed, I found that the relationships organizers built with workers were often intentional, delicate processes of weaving trust and accountability.

Yet understanding the worker's problems, building trust, and getting them agitated are not 'organizing' without the next part of the AEIOU conversation: 'educating'. The education portion is when the problem begins to be transformed into an issue. It would of course be unproductive and callous to get someone angry about their problems without offering a potential path toward improvement, so here the conversation turns toward connecting the worker's problem with a potential solution; the solution in this context is rooted in collective action and labor organizing. In research based on interviews with organizers from various unions in Los Angeles, Brodtkin and Strathmann described organizers' strategy as the 'Anger-Hope-Action' model, positing that anger enables workers to 'overcome the terror that management and anti-union consultants generate' and that '[a]nger at the boss and hope for change are the emotional foundation of a pro-union viewpoint and willingness to act on it' (Brodtkin and Strathmann 2004:21).

The unique strength and extensive presence of the 'union avoidance' industry in the US (as described in the Introduction chapter) means that labor organizers learn early on to expect that companies will launch an anti-union campaign in response to union organizing; since around 75% of companies facing a union organizing drive will hire lawyers or consultants specialized in 'union avoidance' (Bronfenbrenner 2009), this expectation is a realistic one. Unions and labor organizations

use the term ‘union busting’ to refer to a range of employer strategies to defeat a union campaign. Labor organizations consider it strategic to explain to workers what union busting tactics they are likely to observe; when the workers observe their employer using the tactics they had been warned about, the anti-union campaign is more likely to be perceived as formulaic and predictable, and less likely to serve its intended purpose of instilling fear and a sense of futility in the workers. Labor organizations refer to the process of warning workers about union busting tactics as ‘inoculation’ (the ‘I’ in AEIOU)—they are exposing the workers to the ‘disease’ so they will be immune to it when it comes from the boss. However, these anti-union tactics are formulaic and predictable precisely because they are effective—even workers who perceive them clearly as such are often affected by them, as they exploit the imbalance of power inherent in the boss-worker relationship. Labor organizations therefore often ‘inoculate’ workers on a regular basis, understanding that the lived experience of union busting can be extremely challenging for workers on an emotional and psychic level.

This traces back to the ways that people negotiate experiences of value and alienation in their work. People may engage with their work problems through suppressing feelings of injustice if they feel it’s their own fault, if they feel nothing can realistically be done about it, if they fear it could be far worse, and/or if they view it as a necessary trial on the road to future security. One worker, a young, working-class white man who was ideologically interested in the IWW prior to joining the campaign at his bakery, reflected on the unanticipated challenge of bringing his coworkers on board:

It seems like people a lot of times are just sort of—which, I’ve definitely been there, where you’re just like, ‘Man, this is terrible.’ [But] you just kind of accept it for what it is. And hope that you can improve your life in some way outside of this place. ... I think people accept it because they feel personally responsible for it. Like they made a mistake. So this is their like, sort of like their penance for not finishing schools—or this is just how it is. ... I think a lot of people who are working low-wage jobs have that attitude. And also... kind of, they feel like they don’t have a right to—they don’t have a right to earn a decent wage.

Sam

Sam's comment points to the centrality of narratives of worthiness in matters of labor and labor organizing. Workers' assessments of what is just are relative rather than absolute, and are not forged in a vacuum; as people navigate daily life, they negotiate their notions of what is just and what they deserve with their perceptions of what is possible.

While some may more or less internalize the social and economic value assigned to their position, this does not preclude a sense of unfairness surging within them from time to time; on the other hand, those who actively perceive their lot to be unjust do not necessarily resist or reject it continuously, but are likely to derive some sort of meaning or purpose from it that allows them to continue striving to make a living. Many workers would readily describe injustices at work and highlight the inherent conflict of interest between the boss and the workers; yet if the job was better than the string of awful jobs they'd had before, or if it appeared to them that they wouldn't have access to any better jobs, the risks and uncertain rewards of collective action might not seem worth it. As described in Chapters Two and Three, various facets of people's structural conditions shape their access to the labor market and thus not only the kinds of jobs they have access to, but also their perceived likelihood of advancing within those jobs.

Value, skill, and disparity

Given the invisibility and devaluing of labor in New York's food processing and distribution industry, BWC staff often highlighted the value of that labor and the skill required. This strategy of pushing for the visibility and valuing of degraded, stigmatized and/or 'invisibilized' jobs is common among worker centers, as they tend to organize workers whose identities and labor are devalued in the mutually constituting processes outlined in Chapter Two. Fine (2006) notes that worker centers have 'the moral standing' (260)—or what Chun (2011) calls 'symbolic power'—to challenge these hierarchies of value by altering the terms of debate, redefining the issues, and shifting perceptions of

both the problems and solutions (267). Aside from being used to challenge these hierarchies in social, political, and legal realms, this strategy is often also central to how worker centers engage with workers, as they seek to tap into and expand workers' sense of worthiness—their sense that they deserve more, that their labor and thus they are being devalued, and that they have the right to demand more.

At BWC, this frame was used in one-on-one meetings with workers, in orientations for new members, and in public campaign and advocacy materials; in all contexts, it aimed to challenge existing hierarchies that made the labor of local food production in New York relatively invisible.

What organizers essentially sought to do here was to draw attention to the disparity between the value that others (e.g., owners and investors) accumulated through the labor of these workers and the value the workers themselves were able to accumulate—to draw attention to the dynamic of exploitation. Here I use the term 'value' with the various layers it can encompass; company owners and executives derived profit (economic value) from the workers, but also social capital in the form of validation in being job creators, productive citizens, and creative entrepreneurs. The workers, on the other hand, were constrained in the economic value they could accumulate, but also in the social worth, meaning, and freedom they could claim through these jobs. BWC also highlighted this disparity specifically regarding the rising popularity of local, 'sustainable' food that relied on the socially hidden, low-wage labor of mostly immigrant workers.

To bring this disparity of value into focus, BWC staff explicitly drew contrasts between the boss and the workers in one-on-one meetings and group meetings with workers. In member orientations,⁵⁹

⁵⁹ BWC began the practice of formally holding member orientations after I began my fieldwork. Orientations were held irregularly; the majority of new members were effectively oriented through one-on-ones with an organizer rather than during an orientation session. My description here, nevertheless, is based on observation of two separate formal orientations, as well as reference to the facilitator's guide for BWC orientations.

organizers followed the AEIOU model, beginning by ‘agitating’ workers through an exercise that explored the issues workers faced juxtaposed with the boss’s likely experience with these issues. During the orientations I observed, Sara began with an icebreaker in which members and staff present would tell a story about something challenging or frightening they had experienced, and how they overcame that fear.

When it comes to Cristina,⁶⁰ she says that the scariest time for her was arriving in this country. She says she arrived in this country with her husband and her son, not knowing what they were going to do, starting from zero—it was scary and challenging. She says it was through the unity—*la unión*—of her family supporting each other that they could overcome the challenges and the fear. Smiling, she adds that she would say everything she has now is thanks to her family. Sara agrees, saying, ‘It’s difficult to start from nothing in a new country’, and Cristina widens her eyes and says, ‘Oh-my-god, *¿?*’ She recalls getting lost on the subway, and we all laugh and make jokes about how confusing the subway system is.

Sara would then transition into the orientation by commenting that this is why the workers were here—because they were *luchadores*,⁶¹ and they had come to the right place to fight for better jobs and better lives. Here she began the agitation part, where she would write a handful of issues on the white board and ask the workers about their experience with this issue.

Rent: Cristina laughs and says, ‘Half my paycheck goes straight to babysitting, and the other half to rent’.

Working sick: Cristina says yes, that she has worked sick. Sara asks how many times, or if there’s any particular example she wants to tell us about, and Cristina describes having the flu and having to go to work anyway; she speaks of the pressure she has felt in times like that to go to work.

Paid vacation: Cristina says she has five paid vacation days per year. Sara says, ‘So, that’s five days out of the 365 days of the year’. She talks about the need for rest, and comments that everyone deserves rest. Cristina says she has accumulated 14 days of vacation over the years, but now they’re not even letting her take those days at the time she wants to.

Health insurance: Cristina says she does not have health insurance from Sweet Tooth Bakery, and she then makes a mock face of disgust and laughs, saying ‘I would be left with no paycheck if I paid for the Sweet Tooth health insurance!’

⁶⁰ The excerpts from field notes here are from observation of one particular orientation with a Sweet Tooth Bakery worker, Cristina; the other two workers scheduled to attend this orientation did not show up.

⁶¹ *Luchador* means ‘fighter’ but is also used as an adjective to mean ‘brave’ and ‘tenacious’.

Injuries: Cristina says she has seen people get hurt, but she personally has not been hurt on the job.

Sara then reviews the answers—she has written ‘Si’ or ‘yes’ next to each item (although for injuries, she wrote ‘not personally, but yes for coworkers’). Sara then asks Cristina to answer these questions in regard to *la jefa*, the boss.

Rent: When Sara asks if Cristina thinks the boss has to worry about paying rent, Cristina says, ‘No, I don’t think so’.

Working sick: Cristina tells us that the boss said to her once, ‘You’re always sick! I never get sick.’ Sara replies, ‘You can’t blame people for being sick! Did you tell her that maybe if she worked the job you do...?’ Cristina agrees.

Paid vacation: Cristina says, ‘Ellen can go on vacation whenever she wants, but I’m not even able to take the vacation days that I have’.

Health insurance: Cristina says that she imagines Ellen has good insurance. Diego jokes that maybe that’s why she’s never sick.

Injuries: Sara asks if the bosses get exposed to injuries, and Cristina says ‘No, not at all’.

Sara then gestures to the writing on the white board and says that with these simple questions, we can see the contrast. She talks about the right to be well in body and in mind, to have quality time with your family, and time for oneself. Cristina is agreeing, nodding her head and saying firmly, ‘Mhmm’.

Sometimes the dynamic of exploitation was made even more explicit, with Sara pointing out that the less money was going into workers’ pockets for them and their families, the more money was going into the bosses’ pockets. The following section of the orientation explored the different ways workers can try to address problems at work; the aim of this part was to highlight collective action as the most effective means of addressing problems, in contrast to legal action, which was described as limited and insufficient but sometimes useful as one tool, and individual action, which was framed as often ineffective or counterproductive for workers. Organizers then reviewed the elements of a campaign: worker unity, a plan, research and analysis, strong support from BWC, allies, and leadership development. This was followed by reviewing the steps of a campaign:

1. Build an organizing committee
2. Organize your coworkers
3. Hold a group meeting to decide whether to take action around an issue
4. Make a Direct Action plan

5. Take action and follow the plan

6. Win

The orientation then touched upon the strategy of industrial organizing, noting that BWC organized workers in the food processing and distribution industry of New York. The aims of this section were first, to encourage workers to identify with their industry, and second, to outline why industrial organizing was strategic. The first aim proved challenging sometimes, whether in orientations or one-on-ones. While worker might identify themselves as bakery workers, they didn't naturally come to conceive of 'food processing and distribution'—*procesamiento y distribución de alimentos*, even more of a mouthful in Spanish—as their area of work. Adam commented on this to me once, saying that it was always difficult to get workers to identify with their broader industry. The goal was to build a strong identity within the industry, recognizing that solidarity requires the perception of shared goals and identities; yet this is particularly challenging in an industry where many workers are likely to move into other industries and therefore may feel little attachment to their identity as a baker, or food processing and distribution worker. Changes in the economy and among the working class mean that many low-wage workers no longer have sustained attachment to particular jobs nor to particular industries; this is a key reason why many worker centers have ethnicity as a central unifying identity, even when they focus their organizing on particular industries or occupations (Fine 2011a:606; Gordon 2005:53–54). Because taking on an identity is also tied to deriving some form of meaning or value from that identity, some workers could take pride in their experience as bakers, while others related to the work as 'just a job' or even as a degraded job that reflected their inability to access other work.

Work ethic and ‘the good worker’

The focus on framing the labor as valuable and skilled challenged racialized and gendered hierarchies of value, but also implicitly stood in tension with BWC’s affiliation with the IWW and its stance as an anti-capitalist, syndicalist organization. As described in the Introduction chapter, the IWW historically stood against the glorification of the work ethic, as early AFL craft unions used the value of their work precisely to entrench hierarchies and exclude Black workers, immigrants, and women. BWC staff was thus in an interesting position regarding how to speak with workers about work ethic, and in particular, how to engage with the conflict over work ethic described in the previous chapter. This tension brought to light some underlying questions: Who is to be celebrated as ‘the good worker’ in the context of labor organizing—the worker who is productive and disciplined? The worker who is not afraid to stand up to the boss? The worker who (whether consciously or not) embodies a critique of productivism by working as little as possible and perhaps even flouting the workplace rules? To celebrate the productive and disciplined worker could be seen as upholding the values of capitalism; yet it also acknowledges the practical fact that it is far easier for an activist worker to be fired if they are consistently late, for example, as well as recognizing that unreliable workers often end up creating more work for their hardworking peers. The IWW organizer training manual reflects this tension when it describes how to identify a workplace leader; among other qualities, the list includes both ‘They work hard’ and ‘They refuse to work hard’. Concerns about employer retaliation reveal how employer opposition to organizing can shape both organizing strategy (a subject that will be explored in more depth in Chapter Seven), as well as workers’ notions of what it means to be a good worker.

In practice, organizers engaged with both the practical justifications for the ‘good worker’ and the moral value underpinning it. I often heard organizers advise workers to be responsible, ensure that

they were on time for work, and not break rules that would make it easier for the employer to discipline or fire them; they explained that although it was illegal for employers to retaliate against workers for being involved in labor organizing, employers got away with it more easily if they could find excuses for disciplinary action. Indeed, when I began working with the organizers, I felt a serious obligation to advise workers this way in hopes of mitigating the risks of organizing, given the fierce employer opposition to organizing in the US. Organizers also tapped into the sense of dignity and worthiness that workers felt given their hard work, using it to agitate workers by contrasting their hard work with disrespectful treatment, whether that was through mismanagement, abusive management, low wages, or other grievances.

These questions point to two sets of tensions at play. First, the reality of the US political economy today presents an acutely hostile landscape for labor organizing, inevitably creating constraints in how political projects can proceed on this terrain. So, BWC campaigns confront the reality that workers are dependent on these jobs to survive and operate in an industry that is oversupplied with labor. Workers thus have an interest in showing themselves to be desirable, good workers, and further, not taking the risk of inviting disciplinary action as retaliation for organizing by flouting workplace rules. This reflects the balance labor organizing always must negotiate between short-term, practical needs and long-term visions of social and economic justice.

Second, when BWC organizers spoke of the value of hard work and the skill required, they were echoing a set of values voiced by many workers. As explored in Chapter Five, many workers—though certainly not all—expressed pride in their work ethic and derived meaning and identity from being a good worker, linking this to a moral responsibility. This points to the tensions that arise given the moral valuation of labor, rather than to a simplistic notion that these workers have fallen

prey to the gospel of capitalism. It also points to the contention that workers differently experience the hierarchies of labor and value, according to different structural positions and lived experience.

Opening the margin of possibility

I met Cameron on the first day I attempted to visit him. The organizers weren't sure if the address we had for him was correct, but it was in the right neighborhood (according to what other workers had told us), so I took a long subway ride to test it out. It was a Saturday, and I was working because the whole organizing team was feeling the pressure of the following month's 'going public' date for Sweet Tooth Bakery; we were trying to connect with as many workers from the bakery as possible, and there was still a significant portion of workers, particularly from the night shift, that we had never met.

I rode the subway to the outer edges of New York and descended—the rails are overground in that area—onto a busy commercial avenue. Using Google Maps on my phone to navigate to the address, I walked less than ten minutes off the main road before I arrived. I walked up the front stairs and rang the doorbell, feeling the gentle flutter of nerves that arose every time I went on a 'cold' house visit. A minute passed, and then I heard a man call out 'Hello?' from the side of the house. I leaned over the railing next to the front door and saw a man walking over from the side entrance. 'Hi, are you Cameron?' I asked. He said he was, and so I introduced myself and shook his hand. Cameron was wearing a t-shirt with the Sweet Tooth Bakery logo on it, so I asked if he was on his way to work. He smiled and said that I'd actually caught him on his only day off. He asked me to wait a moment while he ran inside to get some shoes, and then he came back out and invited me over to the side entrance. I explained that I was there to talk about the union campaign, and he smiled and told me that he'd been wondering when we were going to visit him. He said he knew organizers had

visited one of his friends from work, and another worker had been talking to him recently about the history of this union. Considering the vast range of reactions I had encountered upon cold-calling workers at home, I felt buoyed by Cameron's immediate friendliness. We ended up talking for around an hour on his front stoop; he sat on the concrete steps and I leaned against the side of the house. It was the beginning of October, so it was still warm enough to comfortably spend long stretches of time outside. Cameron had a gentle, contemplative manner about him, and our conversation flowed easily.

Like most of the Black workers at Sweet Tooth Bakery, Cameron worked the night shift. Early in our conversation, he explained to me that many workers on the night shift had expressed concern about having to pay union dues, and had pointed to that as the reason they don't want a union; he said that he personally decided that it could be worth paying dues if the union were there to support workers. I explained the IWW/BWC structure and differences between IWW and other unions.

As he explained the problems he experienced at the bakery, Cameron was calm and measured, but his frustration was palpable—yet, so was a thread of guarded hope, as he cautiously entertained the possibility that the union campaign could be a channel for change. Whenever I perceived this dynamic during one-on-one's with workers, it made me sharply aware of how much was at stake. Beyond the concrete and material changes that were on the table, I saw plainly how fragile a sense of hope can be when lived experience has incessantly deflated it.

Cameron and I had many meetings in the following weeks and months, at his house, near the bakery, and once briefly in his car outside the BWC office. In the month leading up to the campaign going public, Cameron joined BWC and the IWW and signed the pledge to join the organizing committee. He consistently expressed his support for the campaign and after the first time we met, he began discussing it with coworkers on the night shift who he trusted, with the aim of bringing

them on board too. Yet it was sometimes difficult for me to pin down meetings with Cameron, and we often had to reschedule multiple times; in particular, it proved impossible to get him to attend group meetings at the office or group actions like the ‘going public’ march. Like many people who work night shifts, Cameron had shift work sleep disorder (SWSD), which meant he was perpetually tired during waking hours and yet suffered insomnia when he returned home from work in the very early morning. The exhaustion frayed his will, and the strain was exacerbated by his precarious financial situation; he was still recovering his losses after losing everything he owned in a fire a couple years before, and so every financial setback was felt in sharp relief. When his car broke down, it meant a loss of money, time, and comfort—he was at the mercy of the mechanic’s unpredictable schedule, his commute time to work was nearly doubled and now required taking a two-hour subway ride home after 2:00am, and he had to pour more money into his car and hope it would not break down again soon. Cameron lived in the basement apartment of the house his brother and parents lived in, and he was also responsible for helping care for his older brother, who had been wheelchair-bound since his heart valve ruptured a couple years prior. He had a young son but was rarely able to see him, because the mother moved to upstate New York after she and Cameron separated; Cameron’s work schedule of night shifts and nonconsecutive days off made it very difficult to make the long drive to visit.

Precarity, temporality, and family

Here I want to extend the analysis, begun in Chapter Three, of how the potential for creating a ‘margin of freedom’ (Bourdieu 2000; Narotzky and Besnier 2014) begins in workers’ experiences of structural marginalization, as experienced both inside and outside the workplace. While organizers tapped into workers’ sense of justice—especially as experienced through their consciousness of exploitation on the job—in order to sharpen their will to resist, workers’ consciousness of *dependency*

was often experienced most acutely outside of work, in the realm of social reproduction: through caring responsibilities, changes in family structures, and the constraints of temporality.

In this section I will elaborate on how these conditions and experiences can alternately function to *expand* or *deflate* workers' sense of what is possible and thus their willingness to engage in collective action; the following section will examine how BWC attempted to build 'structures of solidarity' that would channel these experiences toward demonstrations of potential power through solidarity.

Although Cameron had a serious desire to make some changes at work—changes that could play a direct role in relieving some of the constant strain in his life—and he was immediately receptive to the idea of joining a union, his participation in the organizing campaign fluctuated greatly and he never attended group meetings or actions. Cameron was deeply frustrated when his attempts to recruit coworkers failed or stagnated, particularly after the campaign went public (described in detail in Chapter Seven), and his hope that the campaign could bring about change seemed to diminish.

Temporality, precarity, and caring responsibilities presented significant challenges for his participation, as they did for many of the bakery workers with whom BWC engaged; yet all three can alternately operate to sharpen workers' consciousness of dependency, or expand notions of what is possible—to expand or deflate hope. For many low-wage workers, their relationship with time is marked by a lack of control and excessive demands, as they and thus their time are socially devalued: hours spent each day commuting from their homes in low-income neighborhoods to their more centrally located jobs, schedules and days off that are often beyond their control, unpredictable lengths of time spent waiting in bureaucratic processes, never enough hours of sleep to restore exhausted bodies. People generally hold different temporal orientations simultaneously, so someone may be oriented toward a future in which they can pay to send their children to university or afford to buy a house in their home country, but they may make certain decisions while oriented toward a

present experience of disrespect, for example, or toward the memory of how much worse things could get. Temporality and precarity are entangled, as ‘people’s practical sense of the future, their hopes of a better life, and their investments in terms of continuous oriented action are attuned to the objective possibilities allowed by the social and economic framework of their existence’ (Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S11, paraphrasing Bourdieu 2000). The lived experience of precarity—through stagnant and low wages, rising rents on cramped apartments, the threat of deportation, the looming costs of crises of health or home—can therefore lead one to grip tightly the frail thread of stability, constraining one’s hope within the possibility that playing by the rules will prevent things from getting worse, at least, or even possibly earn greater security. On the other hand, the experience of precarity can give rise to an oppositional consciousness when change seems possible.

Finally, caring responsibilities require time to be spent and money to be earned, thus heightening the perceived risks of investing time into an organizing campaign or risking job loss through organizing. Two women involved in the Sweet Tooth campaign ultimately distanced themselves from the campaign after a period of significant involvement because they no longer believed winning was possible, and felt unable to invest more time in a lost cause when they had ample caring responsibilities at home. Christopher, whose life story was documented in a previous chapter, demonstrated this as well when he told me that the owner of Sweet Tooth was ‘tightening the reins’ on workers who had joined the campaign, amplifying workers’ fears of retaliation for organizing; he said it would be different if he were single, but with his girlfriend and new baby to support, he feared the possibility of being fired was a risk he couldn’t afford.

The gendered weight of caring responsibilities is constantly evident in the particular challenges women often face in participating in labor organizing campaigns. At one point, I had a discussion with two Latina immigrant workers from Sweet Tooth Bakery about the difficulties in scheduling

meetings. Fittingly, we had this discussion walking down the sidewalk as they made their way home after a brief visit to a friend—it had been too difficult to schedule a sit-down meeting. They told me how difficult they found it to make time for one-on-one meetings because the burden of childcare generally fell on their shoulders; when I asked about the possibility of their husbands caring for the children to enable them to attend meetings, they talked about how it was an ordeal to even get their husbands to briefly watch the children, or to take care of one child while they watched the other. They laughed and shook their heads as they said this, and added that it's just the way it is, marking the situation as unfortunate but inevitable. Yet as I prodded further, they began to ask me to clarify why all these meetings were necessary, showing their doubts that more one-on-one meetings would actually lead the campaign to succeed. Here I was reminded that they would make time if they believed there was a real chance of winning. Yet caring responsibilities were by no means simply an obstacle to organizing—for many workers, they served not only to heighten the sense of risk of organizing, but to heighten the sense that it was worth struggling for something better, that their children deserved better.

Fear and retaliation

One of the particular ways in which precarity is acutely experienced is through workers' vulnerability to being fired in retaliation for organizing. Although it is explicitly illegal for an employer to fire a worker for their involvement in union organizing, it is often not simple nor easy for a worker to prove that this has taken place. Workers who are viewed as union activists may, for example, be disproportionately disciplined by management; the 'punishment' for being a union supporter can range from subtle but disruptive moves like manipulating a worker's schedule to make it their life more difficult, to more overt tactics like firing a worker. Many of these 'punishments' are difficult to prove as Unfair Labor Practices (ULPs) in court, as employers can point to various reasons the

changes fit into their business practices. However, if the employer can justify the firing by pointing to some sort of mistake the worker made (and it is common for management to serve worker activists a series of warnings for minor mistakes in order to build up a record of ‘poor work ethic’), then the burden of proof rests on the worker. It is here that the imbalanced power relationship between employers and workers is made clear, and although the legal protections are meant to somewhat reduce that power differential, the fact that they continue to operate within the same structural configuration effectively limits their capacity to subvert the power balance meaningfully. Legal protection of workers’ right to organize is weak enough that there is a widespread, entrenched fear among workers that getting involved in a union organizing campaign will cost them their job. Organizers at BWC were confronted with this fear constantly, and had experience negotiating and litigating the cases of workers who had been fired for their involvement in BWC campaigns, or in the case of earlier campaigns, who had been fired for organizing independently. As detailed in the Introduction chapter, employer opposition to unionization in the US is fierce, and has been devastating to unions.

Workers’ legal immigration status often shaped their engagement with labor organizing and what they perceived to be possible—though it did not by any means *determine* it, as evidenced by the significant number of BWC member activists who were undocumented. The first channel of influence is that described above, the effectively increased vulnerability to firing—and deportation—that undocumented workers face. Although it is US policy to separate the enforcement of immigration law and the enforcement of labor law in order to ensure that all workers have labor rights, these rights are protected to varying degrees depending on local legislation and particular judicial decisions.

Protections for undocumented workers were challenged with the *Hoffman* Supreme Court decision in 2002 that denied back pay for lost wages to an undocumented migrant who had been unlawfully fired for union organizing.⁶² This decision effectively removed the power of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to seek back pay for lost wages or job reinstatement for undocumented workers fired in violation of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), the federal law protecting workers' rights to union organizing and taking collective action to improve working conditions. Undocumented workers are still covered by the NLRA and it is still illegal for employers to fire undocumented workers for organizing or taking collective action to improve workplace conditions; it is specifically the remedies available to them that have been restricted. Yet although worker protection agencies such as the Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission released statements after the *Hoffman* decision assuring they would continue to protect workers' rights regardless of immigration status,⁶³ this ruling has increased the vulnerability of undocumented workers seeking to organize and defend their labor rights, and some courts have allowed employers to use the *Hoffman* decision to deny undocumented workers a range of compensation awards beyond the scope of the decision (Compa 2005:118–20).

Perhaps more viscerally important, many employers exploit this vulnerability by wielding the *threat* of reporting undocumented immigrants, whether subtly or explicitly. During the campaign at Sweet Tooth Bakery, several workers told BWC organizers they had heard a rumor that undocumented workers would be fired if and when the union 'came in'. Though the origins of this rumor at the

⁶² *Hoffman Plastics Compounds, Inc. v. Nat'l Labor Relations Bd.*, 122 S. Ct. 1275 (2002)

⁶³ 'EEOC Reaffirms Commitment to Protecting Undocumented Workers From Discrimination'. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. June 28, 2002. <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/6-28-02.cfm>. [accessed October 5, 2016]

'Fact Sheet #48: Application of U.S. Labor Laws to Immigrant Workers: Effect of Hoffman Plastics decision on laws enforced by the Wage and Hour Division'. United States Department of Labor. <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs48.htm> [accessed October 5, 2016]

bakery were unclear, it seemed that at least some of the fears stemmed from recent memories of labor organizing gone wrong for undocumented workers. One of the very first workers who Sara met with from Sweet Tooth Bakery (who was undocumented) had been interested in joining the union, but hesitated to commit and began to pull away. One day when he and Sara spoke on the phone, he said he felt unsure about continuing to organize—he said he was scared, and referred to a highly publicized incident in 2007 in which the company Fresh Direct fired hundreds of immigrant workers shortly before a union election was scheduled to take place. The company attributed the dismissals to having been notified of an upcoming review of employment records by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); labor organizers and workers widely believed the company sought out the government review in order to make unionization far less likely. Whether or not this worker had other reasons for distancing himself from the BWC campaign, his reference to Fresh Direct demonstrates that episodes like that have a chilling effect that reaches far beyond the individual workplace where they occur. The same day that Sara spoke to that worker on the phone, the director of BWC received a phone call about a mass retaliation against undocumented farmworkers who were organizing in another state; he referred to the pattern of such retaliation as a ‘national epidemic’. Staff discussed these two incidents during a staff meeting that day, deliberating how to help workers ‘get beyond that fear’ and show them how the BWC model works. This awareness that fear—whether fear of losing a campaign, losing a job, or being deported—sharply diminishes hope and therefore deflates the sense of what is possible makes it essential to build structures of solidarity that palpably embody workers’ potential power.

The lived experience of precarity, changing temporal orientations, and family responsibilities are therefore deeply implicated in but not determinant of participation in organizing and collective action, as they can all be activated in a manner that either amplifies or diminishes hope that it is possible to effect change through organizing. Organizers strive to use one-on-one meetings to

channel these into motivation for collective action—yet, it is through the process of ‘prefiguring’ the union, described in the following section and in Chapter Seven, that notions of what is possible are more deeply cemented by embodying workers’ potential power and positioning the union as a potential source of security.

Building structures of solidarity

After initially tapping into or injecting a sense of justice, hope, and possibility during conversations with workers, it is critical for labor organizations to guide workers in ‘prefiguring’ the union through practices that embody worker solidarity—to construct a ‘culture of solidarity’ (Fantasia 1988) that strengthens the internal power of the members. It is through these processes and actions that the space for hope (Narotzky and Besnier 2014) is enlarged. In a social and legal landscape that diminishes possibilities of worker solidarity, and workplace structures that actively counter them, most workers will not commit to organizing unless their potential power—their ability to exercise power through collective action—is demonstrated (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004; Fantasia 1988). Yet it is not solely a question of exercising power, because when the battlefield is inherently unequal, the subordinate group must essentially fight and believe that it is possible to ‘establish their collective power institutionally’ to counteract management’s institutional power to realize its interests (Fantasia 1988:169–71).

I will use the term ‘structures of solidarity’ to refer to the practices and structures that labor organizations create to encourage the cultivation of solidarity among workers and to ‘prefigure’ the organized workplace in ways that expand workers’ sense of what is possible.⁶⁴ Here I am working

⁶⁴ While literature about solidarity unionism emphasizes ‘worker self-activity’ and the practice of non-worker organizers seeking to cultivate solidarity thus seems to contradict it, I established in Chapter Three that BWC is not embodying ‘pure’ solidarity unionism.

with Fantasia's concept of 'cultures of solidarity', which he introduces in order to study 'the active expression of worker solidarity within an industrial system and a society hostile to it' (1988:19) without being constrained by the analytic framework of 'class consciousness' and the 'purely ideational, attitudinal bonds by which it has been shackled' (1988:17).⁶⁵ In examining the forces that expand workers' sense of what is possible and cultivate solidarity, I too have sought to avoid the framework of 'class consciousness' as a set of ideas that individual members of the working class do or do not have and to instead pursue an interactional perspective.

The structures of solidarity that I will describe in this chapter, organizing committees and job shops, are intended to 'prefigure' the experience of exerting power through worker solidarity, and to open a 'margin of freedom' (Bourdieu 2000:235) by modeling the possibilities of worker solidarity; in Chapter Seven, I will describe in detail campaign tactics ('actions') that were also intended to embody and model the potential power of solidarity. Such structures thus sought to create space for participatory democracy—spaces in which workers could redefine meaning and value and collectively reimagine their futures. All of these aims epitomize the spirit of solidarity unionism, and plant the seeds for reordering relations both among workers and between workers and management (Brodtkin and Strathmann 2004:19). This prefigurative ethos is captured by Fantasia, who writes that '[s]olidarity is created *and* expressed by the process of mutual association' (Fantasia 1988:11).

Job shops

The job shop—described by Adam as 'a living, breathing worker organization on the shop floor'—is the IWW term for a workplace with IWW members. While the IWW glossary distinguishes between

⁶⁵ Fantasia (1988) and Marshall (1983) offer thorough critiques of traditional analyses of 'class consciousness'. While I will not describe all of the weaknesses they enumerate here, I will note that they both emphasize that consciousness cannot be analytically separated from action.

a job shop, which has majority union representation, and a job branch, which has five or more IWW members in a workplace but not majority union representation, the IWW constitution presents them as interchangeable terms; at BWC, ‘job shop’ was generally used to refer to a workplace with IWW members who were sufficiently organized to act in solidarity and exert some power, whether or not there was majority representation. For example, a list of yearly organizing goals referred to ‘a worker-run job shop with 50% coverage’ as the goal for one workplace, and a ‘worker-run job shop with 25% coverage’ for a different factory.

The job shop was aspired to as a high-level structure of solidarity, given that it was central to BWC’s vision of a worker-run industry; Adam sometimes casually referred to a future industry-wide strike, and pointed to job shops as a critical ingredient in enabling that possibility. Industry strike aside, the job shop was important more generally for cementing solidarity and validating the idea that workers could exert power and shape working conditions without a contract, relying solely on solidarity unionism.

Organizing committees

The organizing committee of a labor campaign is a group of workers who act as the worker-leaders of the campaign through making decisions about campaign tactics, discussing strategy, and taking responsibility for organizing their coworkers; this group functions as the core of an organizing campaign that is striving to make worker participation central.⁶⁶ As an organizing campaign develops, the organizing committee is a critical platform for workers to prefigure an organized workplace in which they can exercise power and make their voices heard; in addition to actively participating in campaign decisions, they are experiencing worker solidarity as an attainable reality. In

⁶⁶ As opposed to the ‘service provider’ model of business unionism, for example.

choosing which workers to invite to join the organizing committee, organizers are expected to recruit workers who are considered leaders by their co-workers and to ensure that the committee members are representative of the workplace (or bargaining unit) as a whole, considering factors such as race, gender, national origin, and job department. In a comprehensive assessment of union organizing strategies in NLRB certification election campaigns in the US, Bronfenbrenner and Hickey emphasize how critical the organizing committee can be to union success:⁶⁷

Perhaps the single most important component of a comprehensive campaign is an active representative committee that gives bargaining unit members ownership of the campaign and allows the workers to start acting like a union inside the workplace, building trust and confidence among the workforce and counteracting the most negative aspects of the employer campaign. (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2004:24)

Observing the evolution of BWC's campaigns at the bakeries, it seemed that staff were not able to build organizing committees that consistently served their intended purpose; instead, committee members were often selected unsystematically, attendance was irregular, and organizing committee meetings therefore could not serve as consistent venues for campaign decision-making. I do not by any means want to give the impression that every organizing committee meeting was a failure—in fact, many of them were inspiring demonstrations of workers' drive and solidarity. Yet the inconsistency of organizing committee functioning proved a significant obstacle in the campaigns. Without a smoothly-running organizing committee, it was challenging for workers to envision the possibility of institutionalized worker power on the job, and also difficult to inspire confidence among their coworkers that the BWC campaign was strong; this undermined the ability to build an active base of workers at the factory. At another level, this made the goal of member leadership

⁶⁷ This study specifically assessed NLRB certification election campaigns, which is not the route that BWC/IWW took for the campaigns studied in this thesis. However, I include the conclusions here because the elements that lead workers to vote for union representation are surely relevant to the elements that lead workers to join a union organizing campaign.

more difficult to cultivate, as organizing committee meetings were a key site for workers to exercise leadership of their campaigns.

Organizing committees can potentially serve as a site for generating both the ‘qualitative’ and the ‘quantitative’ levels of worker power (Jenkins 2002), as they provide a critical means of base-building and exercising power on the shop floor, as well as being a space that fosters the solidary, innovatory, and developmental benefits of participatory democracy (Polletta 2002) and worker-to-worker culture (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004). Thus the failure to build active, representative organizing committees was also a lost opportunity to cultivate the internal power of the union. In the following section, I will trace BWC’s process of attempting to build an organizing committee at Sweet Tooth Bakery.

Embodying the union: building the committee

One Friday afternoon in August, Sara asked me to accompany her to visit Adriana and invite her to officially join the organizing committee of the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign. There was confusion in scheduling the visit, as Adriana told Sara on the phone that she was leaving the apartment with her children soon and wouldn’t have time to meet; Sara told her we could leave the office immediately and catch her before she left the apartment. So, we grabbed a copy of the organizing committee ‘pledge’, took the subway to her neighborhood, and walked quickly from the station to her home, located in an enormous complex of apartment buildings. Sara called Adriana while we were walking, and Adriana said she would meet us on the ground floor because she had to leave shortly. We finally found Adriana and her children in the maze of hallways and entrances. She greeted us both with kisses on the cheek, friendly but clearly in a hurry. Sara pulled the pledge out of a folder and handed it to Adriana, saying, ‘This is basically just putting in writing what we have been talking about for a long time’. Adriana read through the whole page and then promptly handed it

back to Sara. I asked her, 'What do you think?' and she replied, 'I'm not going to sign it'. She looked at Sara and said, 'You're telling me that it's just going to be three of us? Come back to me when ten workers will sign'. She shrugged and then added, 'It just doesn't seem like much... what are you going to do with just three workers?' Sara said that of course they weren't going to take action with only three workers, and that there were more workers who supported the campaign but who weren't leaders—this meeting was for a few people who have shown a lot of leadership. Adriana replied that she was really busy—she had her kids, she had so much to take care of all the time, so she didn't want to take on this responsibility if she didn't think they would succeed...and, 'Well, it's only three people'. She repeated, 'Come back to me when you have ten people'. Sara tried to convince her, pointing out that if everyone said that, they would never build a committee—that the first person who said yes had to be the first one to do so, and then the second person, and so on. Adriana listened to Sara, but she had a firm and serious look on her face, and it didn't appear likely that she would change her mind. 'Other people on the committee have families, too', Sara continued, 'and this is about making your job better and more secure so you can better support your family'. Adriana nodded and said she knew this. 'I'm not afraid to do this because I'm afraid of being tired or losing my job—it's that I'm afraid of losing, and I don't think it has the strength to succeed with only a few people on the committee. So, I won't sign this'. She then added that she would continue to support the campaign and help however she could, but she didn't want to take on this responsibility until more people were involved. Sara still did not give up, and she told Adriana that we saw leadership in her because she has shown so much responsibility and commitment, and that there were workers from the other bakery campaign who said at first that they couldn't take on leadership roles because they weren't so educated, or couldn't read, or didn't feel confident, and now they've developed into strong leaders. Adriana responded that that was good for them, and that she would continue to be involved but wouldn't sign the document until there were ten people willing to do it.

Adriana was explicit in explaining that she would not join the organizing committee because she felt that it was currently too weak to win a campaign—she did not perceive winning as possible at that point. It was not that she did not have the time; organizers often say that people will make time for a campaign once they believe in it, and in saying that she was not afraid of being tired but rather of losing, Adriana was implying that if she believed winning were possible, she would be willing to make time for the responsibilities of being an organizing committee member.

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This section will trace the frustrated path BWC followed in building the Sweet Tooth campaign organizing committee. The frailty and inconsistency of the Sweet Tooth Bakery organizing committee was a persistent challenge in building the campaign, a challenge that stemmed in one part from problems with organizing strategies and techniques, and in another part from an unsystematic approach to targeting and campaign planning; the latter was a result of BWC overestimating its organizing capacity and underestimating the challenges of transitioning to a model based on workplace organizing.

During the first month that I began working with BWC, Sara and Diego had the first few one-on-ones with workers from Sweet Tooth Bakery, sparking excitement among staff about launching the campaign. Organizers initially recruited these workers by waiting outside near the bakery to speak to workers who were leaving their shifts. Organizers then did social mapping with workers in order to have a clear sense of the workforce, creating a spreadsheet with workers' names, demographics, shifts, positions, and relationships with each other;⁶⁸ yet there was not a systematic approach to

⁶⁸ The process of social mapping is described in 'Setting the Scene: Food Factories in New York'.

identifying ‘organic’ workplace leaders whose recruitment should be prioritized, and recruitment more often focused on workers likely to support the campaign.

In December, about a month after the first meeting with a Sweet Tooth worker, staff were discussing the timeline for the campaign. Sara said it would be great to have a strong organizing committee by March, and Adam suggested the goal should be three quarters of the committee by the end of March, and taking the campaign public by May 1st. As they were building up this campaign, however, BWC was also attempting to build campaigns at two other bakeries while also actively organizing a campaign that had already gone public at Harvest Bakery and had recently lost a significant portion of its membership; with only two organizers on staff at the time, Sara and Diego, the organization was trying to take on campaigns at four industrial bakeries with workforces in the range of 50 to 200 workers. The planned timelines for the different campaigns were shuffled around a number of times during the first six months I worked there; if the organizers had a streak of good meetings with workers from one bakery, the goal ‘going public’ date for that campaign might be moved to the front of the line, switching with another bakery campaign that had stagnated.

After staff agreed on the March and May goal dates above, the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign lost some momentum and, at some point during the next couple of months, they pushed back the goal dates for that campaign by nearly a year while moving the other two prospective bakery campaigns to the front of the line. Progress continued unevenly, however, and when staff held a quarterly meeting at the beginning of April and assessed the campaigns, they discussed the challenges. Sara noted that they had started these campaigns by speaking to workers as they left the bakeries after their shifts, meaning that organizers were not selectively speaking with workers identified as leaders and signing them up first, but rather speaking to whoever they saw. Adam asked if the organizers still thought it was feasible to organize these three new bakeries simultaneously, and Diego replied

that it was ‘really tough’. He said that the work I had been doing to support the organizers had been genuinely helpful, but that even with that support, it was a lot of work for him and Sara. He then qualified this by saying that since he hadn’t yet experienced a campaign launch, it was difficult for him to visualize how intense the work would be in the lead-up. Sara replied that it would be a lot of work, but that she felt it was feasible to continue organizing all three because they also had the support of the organizing consultant.

Yet by mid-April, staff decided to put those other two prospective campaigns aside; the biweekly meetings with a few workers who they had believed to be the beginning of an organizing committee at one bakery fell through, and the campaign at the other bakery stagnated as well, with only one member. The Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign thus became a central focus, as the only active non-public campaign, alongside the public Harvest Bakery campaign. The new goal was to have a Sweet Tooth Bakery organizing committee of about fifteen workers by the end of July, and take the campaign public in September. In mid-May, Sara told staff that she thought four of the workers they had been meeting with would become organizing committee members; of those four, only one ultimately joined the committee later.

At a staff meeting in the beginning of August, it was clear that staff were feeling less confident about the campaign goals; the end of July had passed and only two workers had agreed to join the organizing committee. At this point, Diego had resigned and part-time organizing responsibilities were given to Luis, David, and me by the end of August; further, there had been an organizing intern named Charlie who spent the summer with BWC. The company had learned about the campaign earlier in the summer and had embarked on its own campaign to discourage workers from joining the union; this will be explored in more detail in the following chapter. Adam suggested that for the next campaign, it might be useful to spend more time on carefully building the social map to

identify workplace leaders, rather than indiscriminately doing house visits. As Sara expressed her doubts about being able to take the campaign public in September, Adam reminded her that their conclusion after the organizing consultant's last visit was that they either needed to go public in September or hold off the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign for a year; he added that time was 'not on our side' and moving away from our favor. Sara nodded and said, 'OK—yeah, we want to go public'. They then decided that since there were not yet enough committee members to hold a full organizing committee meeting, organizers would invite two to three workers to a small meeting on Monday, framing it as an opportunity to meet another 'strong worker' in the campaign. The following day, a Friday, Sara and I went to invite Adriana to join the organizing committee and she declined, in the interaction documented at the opening of this section. Over the weekend, Sara and Adam decided that it would be best to cancel the small organizing committee meeting that had been planned for Monday, and to meet with the two workers individually.

The first organizing committee meeting was finally held in early November, twelve days before the members took the campaign public by presenting a demands letter to the bakery owner; it was split into two groups who met on two different days, to accommodate the different schedules of committee members. Four members were present at the first session of the first OC meeting, and three members at the second session; Adriana was one of the three members, as she had agreed to attend the meeting but not to sign the pledge to officially join the committee. That same week, Sara had met two new Sweet Tooth workers and had recruited them not only to join the campaign but to also join the organizing committee; this was an unusually fast path to determining a worker was ready to take on the leadership responsibilities, and it proved too soon, as both workers stepped down from the committee before attending a meeting. While they both remained members of the campaign, at least for the first couple of months after it went public, neither one ever re-joined the organizing committee; Adriana declined to join as well. The only woman on the organizing

committee distanced herself from the campaign when it went public, and did not even sign the demands letter. Cameron, another committee member, continued to be involved in the campaign and attempted to recruit co-workers, but never attended the going public actions or any organizing committee meetings, thus not participating in any of the collective aspects of organizing.

Several factors contributed to the weakness of the Sweet Tooth campaign's organizing committee. Early outreach to workers was conducted unsystematically, without implementing a strategy to prioritize recruiting leaders; further, the attention of the two BWC organizers was divided among four campaigns (one active, three prospective) with constantly shifting priorities. This had two effects: first, a number of workers were identified as leaders and then it subsequently became clear that they were not prepared—or had not been adequately prepared—to take on leadership responsibilities, and/or they were more accurately activists than workplace leaders; second, the early stages of building the campaign became stretched over a longer period of time due to the organization's divided attention among four campaigns, creating the impression for workers who joined early on that the campaign was stagnant. One strategic decision that was explicitly made early on, however, was to maintain a high level of secrecy about the campaign before it went public; not only secrecy from the company (which every organizing campaign strives for), but secrecy among workers. Workers were therefore instructed to hide their membership with BWC and the IWW and not to talk to each other about meetings with organizers. The goal of this secrecy was to lessen the chances of the employer finding out about the campaign before it went public and thus beginning union-busting earlier—yet the employer found out early anyway, which is a common occurrence. Instead, the main effects of the secrecy were to decrease workers' ownership over the campaign and to make participation in the campaign (before it went public) individualized—rooted in collectivity and solidarity in rhetoric and theory, but not yet in practice. This also exacerbated the above-mentioned delays in the early stages of the campaign, as the appearance of stagnancy was augmented

by the lack of interaction with other members of the campaign. The organizing committee therefore was not able to meaningfully carry out its key functions of taking ownership of the campaign, enabling workers to start acting like a union on the job, and nurturing the trust and confidence of other workers (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2004:24).

Conclusions

This chapter delved into the process of recruiting workers to BWC's organizing campaigns, describing the one-on-one meetings, orientations, and campaign structures that are meant to guide workers toward engaging in collective action; these interactions form the building blocks of solidarity. Beginning from the notion that workers' perception of injustice does not guarantee their willingness to partake in organizing, the chapter traced how BWC organizers strove to both activate workers' sense of justice and to expand their perception of what was possible; given the unforgiving environment for labor organizing, workers must be convinced that the organization is capable of leading them toward change.

Workers' consciousness of dependency (Nash 1979) was often heightened by the lived experience of precarity, changing temporal orientations, and family responsibilities, deflating the will to risk insecurity through taking collective action; yet these could alternately serve to expand workers' willingness to organize, if the union was able to pry open a 'margin of freedom' (Bourdieu 2000; Narotzky and Besnier 2014) in which workers could imagine a better future through solidarity. The critical means of enlarging this margin of freedom and manifesting the potential power of worker solidarity was through constructing structures of solidarity that enable workers to 'act like a union' and prefigure the organized workplace. Yet through documenting the difficulties BWC had in building the organizing committee for the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign, this chapter highlighted how weaknesses in BWC's organizing capacity and overly ambitious targeting approaches left the

organization unable to build a strong organizing committee. Given the existing fractures within the Sweet Tooth workforce as described in the previous chapter, this foreshadows the challenges of the campaign's development, which will be examined in Chapter Seven.

Chapter 7 – Strategies of Resistance: the Battle to Shape

Notions of What's Possible

During campaigns, labor organizations and companies engage in a battle of sorts over the hegemonic understanding of workplace relations and control (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004): labor organizers struggle to expand workers' expectations of what is possible through striving to reveal and thereby help them assert their own potential power, while employers attempt to diminish these alternative expectations. Ultimately, this is about exercising power and attempting to make either solidarity or paternalism (or in this case, maternalism) hegemonic (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004)—understanding 'hegemony' as a dynamic, unstable field of struggle (Hall 1986) that is shaped, reinforced, and challenged through entwined ideological and material realities (Crehan 2002:199–200). As documented in the previous chapter, BWC attempted to break through some workers' resignation or fear in the face of the seeming impossibility of change by tapping into their awareness of the dynamic of exploitation and embodying workers' potential power through building an organizing committee as a key 'structure of solidarity'. The owner and management of Sweet Tooth Bakery, on the other hand, reasserted the maternalistic framework through discourse (written and spoken), meetings, and subtle changes in workplace policies, as will be described further in this chapter.

This chapter will examine how BWC attempted to open a margin of freedom among Sweet Tooth Bakery workers in the face of employer opposition and fractures within the workforce. I will begin by analyzing the anti-union activity of Sweet Tooth Bakery's owner and management, primarily through examining the contents of and response to a letter that the owner gave to all employees attempting to dissuade them from organizing; the discourse of the owner and how workers and

BWC organizers responded are instructive in highlighting the ‘Gramscian war of ideas’ (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004) waged between union and company to shape workers’ perceptions of what is possible. I will then describe how BWC’s ‘going public’ actions aimed to prefigure and embody workers’ potential power, revealing how the weakness of the organizing committee as well as the employer’s opposition constrained BWC’s capacity to cultivate solidarity amid the fragmented workforce. Finally, I will assess the forms of power leveraged in light of BWC’s aim to transition away from advocacy power and toward centralizing worker power. BWC drew on external sources of leverage—advocacy power—with the hope that this could open the space for workers to cultivate internal power and expand worker participation in the campaign; but weak worker solidarity and the increasing discrepancy between the strength of the ‘external campaign’ and the ‘internal campaign’ made BWC unable to sufficiently develop a sense among Sweet Tooth workers that the union was genuinely representative of workers and strong enough to become a source of security.

Diminishing expectations: the anti-union campaign

At both bakeries where BWC had active campaigns, the companies engaged in their own anti-union campaigns to counter the BWC organizing campaigns. The tactics employed ranged from subtle to overt, and used what organizers called both ‘honey and vinegar’ tactics, or a ‘carrot-and-stick’ campaign (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004:17)—that is, tactics that aimed to dissuade workers from organizing either by treating them particularly well to give the impression that they could get the improvements they sought through staying in favor with management, or by intimidating them or retaliating against workers who did organize. A ‘honey’ tactic could include offering individual or all workers a raise or trying to activate workers’ loyalty to management through talking about the workers as ‘family’, for example; ‘vinegar’ tactics, on the other hand, could range from changing an activist worker’s schedule to significantly inconvenience that worker, to disciplining activist workers

for behavior that had previously been accepted, to firing an activist worker. At Sweet Tooth Bakery, the owner's anti-unionism centered in reasserting maternalism, as described in the previous chapter and further below.

Union-busting letter

About six months before the Sweet Tooth campaign went public, I went to one worker's apartment to interview him about his life story. After about three hours of interviewing, we decided to wrap up for the day. After I turned off the recorder, he said to me that the owner of their bakery had written a letter to all the employees and went around the bakery personally handing them out that day. He mentioned that she seemed to know all the workers' names. He pulled out the letter and showed it to me, pointing out that it was bilingual (one side of the page was in English and the other side was in Spanish)—he noted with a smirk that it was the first time the boss had ever distributed a letter with a Spanish translation. He then began to laugh as he told me that after distributing the letters, the boss had stayed in the cafeteria with an interpreter (who was a worker from their retail shop) offering to answer any questions that workers might have. I asked him what he thought of all this, and he said he wasn't worried—he was dismissive of the contents of the letter and said he was happy to see that the boss was scared. I took a minute to read through the letter, and then said to him that this sort of letter was pretty typical for companies to send out when they find out about a union campaign and want to scare the workers.

The letter began with the employer saying she had just learned that 'union officials' were visiting workers at their homes, and stating that the company had not divulged their addresses because they value their employees' privacy—the visits were thus framed as an invasion of privacy. She then added that employees had 'no obligation whatsoever' to speak with or listen to union organizers. This first paragraph thus positioned the union as a menace and the company as a protector, advising

employees of their rights and seeking to protect their privacy. The letter continued this framing throughout, warning employees about what the union might do and offering advice for how they could protect themselves from being ‘targeted’ by the union.

Throughout the letter, the union was painted as untrustworthy, as being comprised of salespeople making impossible promises. Workers were warned not to ‘fall for’ the union officials’ promises, implying that anyone who believed the union organizers was foolish—this was underscored by encouraging workers to make ‘an informed decision’, and by later referring to employees who ‘blindly followed’ union leadership at other companies. In the latter, the boss wrote that strikes by ‘this union’ had put two well-known baked good companies out of business recently; the strikes were framed as having been done by the union (rather than the workers), with employees ‘blindly following’ and ending up without a job.

The threats of strike and closure were explicitly tied to the campaign at hand, with the boss suggesting that workers ask themselves or the union officials what the union had promised the employees of those companies that went out of business, and noting that the union certainly didn’t bring them higher wages or better benefits. The theme of impossible or broken promises is an effective example of how companies strive to diminish workers’ expectations of what is possible; and the specific tactic of threatening plant closure (whether indirectly or directly) is extremely effective in weakening or defeating union campaigns, as will be discussed in more detail below.

This framing also slots the union into the ‘third party’ category; anti-union campaigns consistently paint the union as an unnecessary third party in what should be a relationship between employer and employees. Instead of the union being understood as an institution that *represents* workers—or in the case of the IWW, an institution that in theory *is* only the workers—employers use a variety of tactics to encourage workers to view the union as a third party that is untrustworthy, motivated by self

interest, and harboring ulterior motives (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004:14). The language referring to workers ‘blindly follow[ing]’ union leadership supported this view, and the final paragraph of the letter reasserted the employer-employee relationship as primary and as being premised on loyalty and care; the employer cited providing ‘a great place to work’ as her biggest goal since opening the bakery, and noted the pride she took in providing ‘good wages and nice working conditions’. She ended the letter expressing her hope that workers would ‘recognize [her] efforts by telling the union officials that they are not needed’ at the bakery.

It is common for letters like this to encourage workers to ask certain questions of union officials (as this letter does in paragraphs above), as it gives the appearance that the company is not restraining workers from looking into their options, but rather is helping them make an informed, rational decision. Yet this encouragement is usually given alongside explicit indications that the company is opposed to unionization, and in this case, alongside the expressed ‘hope’ that that workers inform union organizers that they ‘are not needed [here]... with their promises they cannot fulfill’.

The letter made it clear that the company was opposed to the union, setting out the oppositional terrain on which the rest of the union campaign would play out. The owner portrayed the union as an enemy of the company, and sought to firmly align the workers’ interest with the employer’s, both by raising the specter of a closed-down company that would leave workers jobless, and by depicting the union as a threat to workers. The company was thus positioned as the protector of the workers, invoking a maternalistic workplace dynamic that anchored the workers’ wellbeing in a positive relationship with the employer.

It is essential to recognize the extent to which such a message, no matter how ostensibly mild its delivery, serves to reassert the basic capitalist labor structure and its attendant power balance. A letter like this reminds workers that their economic security rests on the whim of their employer—

this is particularly true when US law considers employment ‘at will’, which allows employees to be fired at any time without reason, to be the default status for a worker. Fantasia (1988) describes a letter with similar intentions and effects, written in response to a unionization drive among hospital workers:

Although the workers had been prepared by their union organizer for such a letter, most were upset by its contents. The administration had set itself firmly against the union drive, portraying itself as the rational, reasonable figure in the dispute, whose concern and respect for the employees was paramount. The union was portrayed as an “outside party” that would threaten, pressure, and engage in violence to force workers to sign a “legally binding” union card. This set the tone and theme of a message that was to be repeated many times throughout the campaign, one designed to raise fears about the disruptive effects of unionism while reminding the workers of the goodwill of the administration and its ability to provide (and withhold) employment. (Fantasia 1988:136)

Within days of the anti-union letter being distributed to workers at the bakery, several workers who were members of BWC had brought the letter to show organizers in meetings. Although the first worker to show me the letter was apparently unfazed and even amused, reactions among the workers varied quite widely. Some workers, such as the one who first showed me the letter, were dismissive of the letter and portrayed it as pathetic and deceptive. One Latin American woman, who first met BWC organizers one month after the letter had been distributed, laughed as she told an organizer that when the owner had been stationed in the cafeteria with an interpreter, she went to speak to the owner and pretended that she didn’t know what a union was. The owner told her that a union would hurt the company, and the worker responded (sarcastically), ‘How can anyone hate working here in these wonderful conditions? Everyone is so nice! My days were cut from four to three, but I still love it here, and my managers are great!’ The owner smiled and nodded as the worker said this. The worker told the organizer that it had been clear to her that the letter and other such actions demonstrated that the owner was scared.

However, the letter had a dispiriting or unsettling effect on some workers, including some who had been among the most steadily involved in the organizing campaign. One of them described having

conversations with workers in other departments during the week after the letter was distributed and the owner was stationed in the cafeteria, and she recounted that many workers said they did not want a union because they feared it would hurt the company. The other organizer and I responded by describing the campaign as a means for improving the workplace—not destroying the company on which members' livelihoods depended. She agreed, but distanced herself from the campaign by then saying, 'Well, we'll see what you guys do...' We replied that it actually depended most on what they, the members, did. We asked her how she was feeling about the campaign, and she said she felt it would be hard to get more workers to join now, as many of them seemed to feel loyal or beholden to the owner. She added that she could no longer ask co-workers for their home addresses (to facilitate house visits by organizers) because there was now an environment of suspicion—she had heard workers saying they should not give out their home addresses because the union was 'getting addresses somehow'.

This messaging—that the union would hurt the company and was also engaging in suspicious activity—was obviously aligned with the company's messaging. Yet it's not possible to completely disentangle the threads of origin, as anti-union sentiments are not absorbed and spread solely through the employer. Both positive and negative perceptions of unions circulate among workers on the job, among their families and friends, and in society at large, stemming from personal experience, stories heard, and messages absorbed.

One worker, who had been one of the earliest and most committed members of the campaign, came to the BWC office to meet with an organizer and me three days after the letter had been distributed. He immediately informed us about the letter, and noted, as other workers already had, that it was the first bilingual memo distributed to workers, and that the employer had been in the cafeteria with an interpreter for the past couple of days, offering to answer any questions workers might have. He

noded knowingly when we explained to him that a letter like this was a typical tactic employers used in anti-union campaigns, but he was visibly nervous. He proceeded to ask us several questions about legal protections for workers who are fired. Knowing that he was undocumented, I was aware that his anxiety was particularly acute because of this additional layer of insecurity; not only was he an at-will employee, he also did not have legal immigration status in the US. Technically, he was still legally protected—labor law forbids employers from firing workers for union organizing, and workers in the US have labor rights regardless of their immigration status. But the reality of the legal landscape, as described in Chapter Six, is different to an astonishing degree. Employers’ retaliation against workers involved in organizing often goes unpunished (or punishment is mild enough so as not to be a deterrent), as do the specific types of intimidation and retaliation from employers that undocumented workers often face. At the time that the letter was distributed, legal protections for organizing were further complicated by the fact that the campaign was not ‘public’, meaning that workers had not identified as union members or union activists, so it would therefore be more difficult to invoke legal protections should they be fired. This worker expressed his fear that he had been ‘identified’ as a union member and would thus be targeted by the employer.

Going public

By the time the campaign prepared to go public around five months later, there was thus widespread awareness at the factory that a campaign was underway. But the strategy of mostly maintaining secrecy among workers until the first organizing committee meeting, as described in the previous chapter, meant that there had been minimal collective engagement among workers regarding the campaign; their main campaign engagement had been with BWC organizers, leaving many workers with a deep uncertainty about levels of support among their peers.

At the first organizing committee meeting, the four members present approved the ‘high road strategy’ that staff presented to them as the recommended path for the campaign to go public. This strategy entailed an initial internal going public action during which a group of members would present a letter of demands to the owner inside the workplace. If she did not agree to a meeting with the BWC members within five days, the campaign would proceed with a large, public going public action a week after the first one. The logic of this strategy was that the owner might decide she was better off choosing to keep the campaign relatively quiet, in which case BWC and the workers would not need to launch into the full energy of a public pressure campaign (not immediately, at least). Staff operated on the assumption that the second going public action would be necessary, and they framed discussions with members with that assumption as well. It was clear that if Ellen felt the campaign was relatively weak and therefore a public campaign was not very threatening, she may not feel compelled to agree to a meeting.

Regardless of the ‘private’ nature of the first going public action, it demanded that participating workers embody a position that prefigured a workplace of organized workers; specifically, it entailed a collective, direct confrontation with their boss and officially revealing their membership in the BWC campaign. This action thus represented a shift in identity as well as exposure to risk. It was an example of how workers could undertake an action that, in embodying ‘an active expression of worker solidarity’ (Fantasia 1988:19) and prefiguring an organized workplace, could expand their own senses of what was possible—as well as their coworkers’—if it were successful.

The week leading up to the action was thick with nerves, adrenaline, and emotion. BWC organizers scrambled to attain the goal of getting twenty-four workers’ signatures on the demands letter, which entailed organizers scheduling as many meetings as possible with Sweet Tooth Bakery workers and giving extra signature sheets to members of the organizing committee so they too could collect

signatures. At this point, I was in the full thrust of the campaign, working long hours alongside the organizers; I had been dreaming about the campaign for weeks, and it was the first and last thing I thought of each day. Every relationship with the workers felt delicate, as I felt more acutely aware of what was at stake for them and the risks they feared. When a worker wasn't returning my calls for days at a time, I felt like a spurned lover, frantically attempting to figure out what had happened. Six days before the first going public action, organizers and members of the organizing committee had collected one signature; four days before, fourteen. A shared document in BWC's project management website was being updated every time someone signed the demands letter, the tally slowly creeping up as organizers dispersed throughout New York City and even into New Jersey, visiting workers in their homes.

The second organizing committee meeting was held the week before the going public action. Organizers scheduled a role play of the action, to allow workers to practice presenting the demands letter to their boss; yet only two workers attended this meeting, making it impossible to properly prepare and rehearse the action. The logistics of the action—in particular, who would speak and who would definitely attend—were confirmed in the following days leading up to it, as organizers reached out to their contacts who had not attended the organizing committee meeting.

The day before the first going public action, a handful of workers stopped by the BWC office. The conference table had a pile of BWC patches that had been recently ordered, and organizers asked members to bring the t-shirts they wore as part of their uniform to the office so that a patch could be ironed on. One member of the organizing committee stopped by in the afternoon and appeared to be quite serious and nervous. He pulled out of his wallet an old membership card from a worker center he had joined in another city years ago, and told us about a group of immigrant workers who had organized with that worker center and had been fired. He talked to us about the risks, and said

that very careful preparation and strong strategy were necessary. Cameron, another organizing committee member, was scheduled to have a meeting with me at the office; he got lost trying to find the BWC office and couldn't find parking once he arrived, so we had an abbreviated meeting in his car outside the office. He was exhausted but didn't appear nervous about the campaign going public, and he agreed to be a spokesperson at a public forum that was being planned—but he firmly refused to attend the going public action the following morning, because he said that as a night shift worker, that would mean giving up his sleep for the day. I was unable to convince him that his participation in the march, as a BWC/IWW member and an organizing committee member, was critical enough to warrant the sacrifice; aside from his persistent struggle with sleep (as noted in Chapter Four), the fact that he had not attended any group meetings likely diminished his ability to imagine the experience of worker solidarity.

The morning of the first going public action, BWC organizers took the subway to the bakery, the mood a heady mix of anticipation and nerves. Members had been directed to meet each other at a specific point in the factory, and BWC staff would wait outside, on a street corner across the street. As some of the members who had agreed to participate in the action were already at work and others were off that day, they were all meant to gather before walking to the boss's office. The lead-up to their scheduled meeting time was scattered with confusion as organizers received text messages and calls from workers about who was missing. Other workers called because they had been directed to a different meeting point by someone else and found no one there. Other workers could not be reached by their coworkers or organizers. When the time came for the workers to present the demands letter to their boss, I stood on a corner across the street with the organizers, chatting with nervous excitement—it was unclear to us how many people had showed up and how it would go.

Less than ten minutes later, seven workers trickled out of the factory, appearing tentatively excited as they hurried over to our corner. Accounts of the action differed, as there seemed to be confusion surrounding which workers joined in solidarity and which workers were watching but not participating—a few workers who were named as present surprised organizers, as these were workers who had not seemed willing to participate in a workplace action at that point. Some members told us that nevertheless, those workers had joined; others told us that they had just been observing the unusual sight of a group of workers filing into the boss's office and reading a letter of demands to her.

Workers' estimates indicated that there were approximately twelve to fifteen people present when the demands letter was delivered. One member of the organizing committee read the letter aloud in Spanish, and another member of the committee read the English translation. Some workers thought Ellen seemed surprised—they thought it might be because she didn't expect the presence of people who had worked for the company for close to twenty years—but they said she was calm and said little, giving a noncommittal response that acknowledged the letter. The workers appeared buoyed by the action, posing for a celebratory group photo as they discussed what had happened.

One worker, Jon—who participated in the delivery of the demands letter but had been unable to join us outside afterward because he was in the middle of his shift—told me later in an interview that he had felt a little nervous going in and that he was disappointed by the number of people who showed up for the action, as many people who signed the letter did not show up for the delivery. He said he felt really sad after the action because he didn't believe the workers would be able to win affordable health insurance with only around one tenth of the workforce showing up. When he went back to work afterward, one worker—who had been the most vocally anti-union—told Jon he should apologize to Ellen for participating, and Jon replied that he didn't care. This reflected the

tense environment on the shop floor surrounding the union campaign—in particular, the day shift during which the demands letter was presented seemed to have the most overt conflict, with both organizing committee members and vocally anti-union workers on the same shift. This conflict, as well as the relatively small number of participants in the delivery of the demands letter, functioned to deflate Jon and other workers' sense that worker solidarity could overcome company opposition.

I was surprised by another reaction among workers that surfaced in the wake of the first going public action; a number of workers expressed to either organizers or to their coworkers that they were disappointed that BWC staff did not accompany the workers to present the demands letter. Organizers first caught wind of this unexpected reaction when, shortly after the action, a young member who Sara worked closely with came out of the factory for a break, and refused to speak to Sara when she approached him, giving the excuse that he was calling his sister in Latin America. He distanced himself abruptly from the campaign, and later explained to Sara that he was angry that BWC staff had not been there to support them. Other workers later told me and the organizers about hearing a similar reaction from coworkers; Fernando told us he heard many workers say that it made BWC lose credibility, that it didn't appear that BWC was a serious organization. He was not surprised by this reaction and said that this was a 'new model' that most people hadn't seen before, and that many people were used to and expected things to be done for them—'to be served food that was already prepared'. This reaction brought up interesting questions about member leadership, as BWC had previously decided that the workers would present the demands letter because it is they who have the power on the 'shop floor', not the organizers. This arrangement was meant to be an example of how the campaigns were worker-led, and it had not even been a point of discussion when BWC staff presented strategies to the organizing committee.

Low participation in the delivery of the demands letter and the subsequent distancing of some workers (both those who had and those who hadn't participated in the action) stemmed in part from the dynamic described in Chapter Four, in which worker leadership was celebrated as a central value and goal of the organization but the relevant systems and support to cultivate it were not adequately implemented; in a related vein, the lack of a strong organizing committee made the challenges more acute. In this case, staff underestimated the potentially negative effects of going public in this manner without a strong enough base of worker leadership. Although the delivery of the demands letter was not done in an antagonistic manner, it did require a confrontation with the boss in front of the rest of the workforce, and the BWC campaign had uneven support across the workforce; while few workers were, at that point, vocally anti-union, the majority of workers were rated as '3s' who could potentially be moved toward or away from supporting the campaign.

This action had the potential to open a 'margin of freedom' (Bourdieu 2000:235) in modeling the possibilities of worker solidarity, both for workers participating in the action and those observing. Yet various pressures and constraints meant that the time allotted for preparing workers to present the demands letter ended up being substantially reduced and preparations were done shortly before the action. This would be the first collective action Sweet Tooth workers had taken as members of BWC/IWW, and they had not even all been present at one meeting together. Organizers felt pressure from the director to take the campaign public without further delay, so once the proposed going public date was given the rubber stamp by the organizing committee less than two weeks beforehand, the cascade of preparations was set in motion. Amid the intense energy and commitment organizers poured into recruiting and solidifying support during that stretch of time, we were aware of the fragile footing of the campaign and desperately hoped that this momentum would be catalyzed by a successful going public action. When it proved impossible to rehearse the action with the full group of participating workers, it felt like there was little we could do aside from

individually meeting with as many workers as possible in an attempt to secure their commitment to participate. While workers estimated that around twelve to fifteen workers participated in the going public action, the lack of collective preparation beforehand and limited worker leadership meant that there were conflicting expectations among participants and for some workers, it generated an experience of tension and conflict, rather than a sense of the potential power of solidarity.

In analyzing the delicate balance between staff authority and worker participation in union organizing campaigns, Sharpe (2004) asserts that it can be risky for organizers to equate democracy and power when this gives rise to the assumption that workers do not need staff support and training to successfully build power. She points to Lopez's (2000) ethnography on an SEIU campaign in Pittsburgh, wherein he describes a series of planned actions that failed because workers lacked substantial support from organizers and rank-and-file leaders, and so they struggled to take collective action in the face of their fear of supervisors and discomfort around unsupportive co-workers. Lopez blames the union organizers for failing to anticipate these challenges and thus insufficiently training and supporting the workers (2000:167–68). Sharpe notes that the particular risk lies in the effects of defeat, which can extinguish workers' willingness to engage in further collective action unless they are analyzed for learning and, significantly, 'interpreted in a way that boosts morale and encourages further participation' (2004:65). Indeed, BWC staff were well aware of this risk, as both Adam and Luis had commented on this effect as the worst outcome of an organizing campaign gone wrong. The way in which the first going public action unfolded was ultimately ambiguous at the time, refusing to neatly manifest the vision of defiant workers fearlessly engaging in direct action to demonstrate their power. The workers who were able to debrief together and with organizers immediately after the action seemed to interpret the tentative experience of solidarity positively, allowing it to generate 'new spaces for hope' (Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S11) despite the delicacy of the situation. Other workers, however, who either participated without

collective preparation and debriefing or who observed from the outside, appeared to interpret the uncertain experience of the action more as a demonstration of weakness that deflated their imagining of what was possible (or for those who had been more inclined to oppose the campaign, confirmed their belief that it was the losing side). The second phase of going public, described farther below, highlighted another set of tensions as it built upon these divergent interpretations.

‘We’re a family’

In a workplace with a paternalistic—or maternalistic—work culture, as described in the previous chapter, employers often aim to exploit any sense of loyalty workers may have to the company or boss by invoking the ‘crying boss strategy’ (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004:21). Days after the workers at Sweet Tooth Bakery presented a demands letter to the owner, for example, the owner began holding various meetings with workers to talk about the campaign. Such meetings are called ‘captive audience meetings’ in union parlance, referring to the fact that they exploit the employer’s monopoly on workers’ attention by essentially compelling workers to listen to anti-union ideology—this compulsion is not only implied by the economic authority employers wield over their employees, but legally enforced in practice, as the courts have repeatedly upheld employers’ rights to fire workers for refusing to attend, leaving, or even asking questions during a captive audience meeting (Secunda 2010:386).

Many workers reported to BWC organizers that the boss appeared to be on the verge of tears during these captive audience meetings, as she evoked the trope of the workforce as family. One worker said she told the workers on his shift that they were her family in a highly dramatic manner, nearly crying as she spoke the words. In this way, she implicitly framed support of the union campaign as a breach of family loyalty, positioning herself as victim. Several workers reported to organizers that

they were angered that the owner even referred to her need to provide for her own [blood] family, blatantly ignoring the fact that her earnings could provide for far more than theirs could.

The owner never explicitly suggested that workers would be fired or otherwise punished for joining the union—that would, in fact, be illegal—and instead she even sometimes stated that workers would not be punished for joining. However, she did tell workers that their support of the campaign could cause the company to shut down, because BWC would cause them to lose clients. This message, which had appeared in the earlier union-busting letter as well, borders on illegal but is protected by legal precedent.

Another tactic the boss used, also invoked previously in the union-busting letter, was to paint the union as untrustworthy and threatening to workers. Workers who attended captive audience meetings on different shifts at Sweet Tooth Bakery reported that the owner told workers that BWC was pressuring people into signing the petition by saying they would be fired if they did not; she warned workers not to believe BWC's lies. While this sounded to organizers like a ridiculous lie for her to assert, and workers involved with the campaign did not, for the most part, believe it, it had the effect of planting seeds of doubt. When one worker reported this to me, I noted that it would be a very bad strategic move for organizers to threaten workers in any way, particularly when unions have no ability to fire workers. The worker agreed with me, but expressed relief in confirming that it was not true—apparently, the owner's assertion had left him wondering.

The ultimate goal of the captive audience meeting is to firmly establish to workers that the company is against the union, thereby implicitly requiring workers who join the union to feel comfortable taking a clear oppositional stance against their employer. Thus, even workers who derided the owner's behavior as a performance would later display anxiety about the risk of being fired or otherwise targeted if they joined or continued participating in the campaign.

In the wake of these initial captive audience meetings, one worker who had signed the petition and joined the union became afraid, and told a fellow member that he had previously worked at a company where there was an organizing drive, and people had been laid off and fired. Another worker who had signed the petition reportedly received a raise a couple days after the petition was delivered, and subsequently asked a manager to tell the owner to remove his name from the petition. With this oppositional terrain established, a small but vocal number of workers in a couple different departments began treating BWC members with either hostility or mockery. The few members who were most exposed to this treatment ended up feeling increasingly isolated in their support of the campaign.

Going public: take two

One week after the workers presented the demands letter to the owner, the campaign went public in a much louder fashion, with a march to the factory. The march occurred because Ellen did not schedule a meeting with BWC and the members of the Sweet Tooth campaign by the deadline indicated in the demands letter, which was five days after it was presented. Ellen had instead approached one of the organizing committee members to suggest they schedule a meeting with her and the workers who presented the letter, without needing to involve BWC; workers had been ‘inoculated’ that the company would try to disorganize them and separate them from the organization, and this worker promptly (and bravely) responded that she should contact BWC to schedule the meeting.

One of the most striking aspects of the march was the discrepancy between public support and worker attendance; there were close to 100 BWC supporters and allies at the march, yet only six Sweet Tooth Bakery workers were present. The large crowd that joined the going public march to Sweet Tooth Bakery included activists, IWW members, lawyers, students, media, organizers from

other worker centers, and union staff. The workers played a very visible role, as they spoke at the beginning and end of the march, as well as leading the crowd as they carried the BWC banner during the march to the bakery, but the imbalance both reflected and reinforced the weakness of the campaign on the shop floor. Some members of the organizing committee reported hearing other workers—non-members, particularly—talk about the small number of workers at the march as an indication of the weakness of the campaign, and therefore as a reason to not get involved. One member noted that the strong display of public support during the march in contrast with weak support among the workers themselves made it harder to convince non-members that BWC and the IWW were trustworthy organizations, rather than organizations serving their own interests in the guise of supporting workers. This discrepancy between the strength of the campaign inside the bakery and the support for the campaign externally among allies foreshadowed the way this dynamic would define the campaign moving forward, pointing to larger questions about types of power, worker leadership, and representation; this will be examined in the following section of this chapter.

Both of the going public actions were intended to create opportunities for workers to embody worker solidarity and to prefigure a unionized workplace, in order to expand the participating workers' sense of what was possible as well as demonstrating to other workers that worker solidarity was a viable choice. In his ethnography about the hospital workers' unionization campaign, Fantasia describes these dual needs as ones that 'any subordinate group' must address in order to demonstrate its ability to exercise power and thus 'maintain the discipline and coordination of its members, as well as attract new members' (1988:170–71); here he is employing Schwartz's definition of organizational discipline as 'the ability to motivate membership to act and change its action in unison', which is counterposed with demoralization, when members are unwilling to work with the organization because they do not believe it is actually capable of effecting change, or they believe

their own participation will make no difference. He points to Schwartz's analysis of these 'two related but distinct problems':

The question of demoralization is related to that of attracting membership. Recruitment is largely based on convincing those outside the organization that its programs will in fact, help them. Thus, any organization is faced with two related but distinct problems. On the one hand, it looks out to a possible membership which must be convinced of the efficacy of the organization in winning the changes they wish. (Many, of course, must be convinced that changes are needed.) On the other hand, those already inside the organization must be constantly reinforced in their belief that the organization is succeeding. The results of previous actions affect both the recruitment of new membership and the maintenance of discipline among old membership. (Schwartz 1988:189–90)

With these intentions, the union drive in Fantasia's account included a march into the hospital to present signed union cards to management and a series of other confrontations between union supporters and supervisors, all of which served to strengthen the commitment of organizing committee members 'while demonstrating to others the efficacy of a collective response to grievances' (1988:170–71). The going public actions at Sweet Tooth Bakery generated a far more uneven response, as low member participation in the actions seemed to hinder recruitment of other workers, who perceived the organization as weak or as not genuinely representative of the workers.

On the other hand, for some of the BWC members at Sweet Tooth Bakery, participating in these going public actions did bolster their sense of possibility and thus their commitment to the campaign in the short term—but crucially, this amplified sense of the possibility of change was not sustained by the reality of the campaign outside of these moments. Luis, the organizer, reflected on the going public march, describing both the emotional experience of these actions and the constraints on how far that could reverberate given low participation: 'But those [workers] that were present found it, I think—in the moment—they were very overwhelmed with emotion and passion, and the energy needed to continue building up a movement'. Here he captured the affective experience of participating in collective action and the energy it can generate to propel a struggle forward; yet this was immediately after he noted the fatal issue of low worker participation, which

ultimately had a demoralizing effect on members. The important and valid role of emotions in social movements and political action has only been more recently centered in the social sciences, moving beyond false dualisms such as the purported opposition between emotions and rationality or cognition (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). The surge of emotion Luis described when speaking about the workers' experience of the march echoes what has been described as 'something like a Durkheimian "collective effervescence," that is, a collective feeling of unusual energy, power, and solidarity' (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001:289). The important role of this affective experience is also captured in Fantasia's description of the hospital workers, whose 'heightened feelings of solidarity allowed workers to confront authority in spite of rational fears of discharge, isolation, and arrest' (Fantasia 1988:173).

Ultimately, however, the infrastructure of the campaign failed to sustain the enthusiasm and passion generated in particular moments—during the going public actions, or during a powerful one-on-one, for example—beyond those moments; effectively, *feelings* of solidarity germinated but were not able to develop into a *culture* of solidarity. The weakness of the organizing committee was a significant factor in the failure to bridge a path between feelings of solidarity and a culture of solidarity, as the organizing committee was largely unable to 'start acting like a union inside the workplace, building trust and confidence among the workforce and counteracting the most negative aspects of the employer campaign' (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2004:24). Out of the six workers who participated in the going public march, five had been part of the group that delivered the demands letter and subsequently debriefed with BWC organizers; the sixth worked closely with one of them, Julio (who was also an organizing committee member), in a small department of the bakery. Julio was one of the only organizing committee members who had been able to create a pocket of solidarity in his department.

Because of these weaknesses, the affective experience that ultimately dominated most workers' daily engagement with the campaign was one of tension and conflict on the shop floor, generated by the employer's union-busting and the related divisions among workers.

The internal and external campaigns

When BWC staff held a debriefing meeting to review the good and bad aspects of the going public march, the small number of workers who participated was discussed as a serious problem, as both a symptom of weak campaign support in the bakery and a probable catalyst for further decreasing support. While staff viewed the strong turnout of allies as a success and as uplifting for workers, they hastened to figure out a plan to salvage the support and involvement of workers. Adam commented that it was bad when support declined after going public, and that he thought support appeared to have gone down by as much as 80% among Sweet Tooth workers. Luis said it was necessary to 'reconstruct the base' and that organizers should spend extra time with their contacts to prevent them from being demoralized by company and/or co-worker backlash, because other aspects of the campaign such as the website and Twitter activity didn't matter ultimately if the base wasn't solid. He and Adam reflected that organizers probably should have focused their energy on strengthening the commitment of the 20 workers who had signed the demands letter and solidifying their BWC/IWW membership, rather than trying to reach as many workers as possible during the last couple of weeks.

Luis's comment about the campaign's online presence touched on the dynamic highlighted above, the discrepancy between the strength of the campaign inside the bakery and the support for the campaign externally among allies. As discussed in the Introduction chapter and Chapter Three, worker centers and other alternative labor organizations are usually deemed to be constrained in the

types of power they can exert; they often operate within the realm of advocacy power rather than social power (Jenkins 2002), but BWC was explicitly seeking to overcome this limitation. Moments like this highlighted the fragile balance, as the ‘external campaign’—the leverage of advocacy power—was gaining power while the ‘internal campaign’ of organized workers at the bakery was in a steep decline. While it is increasingly true in today’s economic landscape that most labor organizing campaigns cannot win without leveraging some sources of power outside of workers’ direct economic power, the democratic nature of the campaign diminishes when the external campaign becomes the central focus and most significant source of power (McAlevy 2016). Indeed, in enumerating the elements of a comprehensive campaign that are associated with higher win rates for union elections, Bronfenbrenner and Hickey highlight ‘a representative and active committee’ as one of the most important elements because of its critical role in ‘develop[ing] rank-and-file leadership, build[ing] the union inside the workplace, and mak[ing] connections between the workers and the community outside the workplace’ (2004:48).

In the month after the going public march, BWC sought to strengthen the organizing committee by holding regular committee meetings, training committee members to be better equipped to recruit their co-workers, adding members to make it more representative, and actively engaging the committee in a new organizing strategy. The new strategy entailed a focus on expanding and solidifying the base in three particular departments where OC members worked, and thus depended on a strong, functioning organizing committee to ‘build the union inside the workplace’. The plan also aimed to escalate pressure on the company and build worker solidarity by carrying out a direct action tactic within the factory, during the annual staff holiday party. By the end of the month, however, when I sat with the other organizers to review our implementation of these plans, almost none of the goals had been accomplished. No workers had been added to the organizing committee, the OC meetings were not held regularly due to persistent issues with scheduling especially

approaching the holidays, and the leadership of individual committee members either stagnated, marginally increased, or declined; only one committee member, Julio, was strongly active and successfully recruiting co-workers. Because of these weaknesses, the base had not expanded in the three targeted departments and low morale among existing members became self-perpetuating. Cameron, who had not participated in any of the organizing committee meetings nor the going public actions, became increasingly frustrated that neither he nor organizers had convinced more of his night shift coworkers to join the campaign, and he distanced himself from the campaign even more, although never renouncing his support for it. Another committee member, Victor, had been strongly engaged before and during the time the campaign went public; but he subsequently distanced himself from the campaign gradually and then completely. Victor was one of the members who worked in a shift alongside the most vocally anti-union worker, who was joined by other workers on the shift in teasing Victor for his involvement as a leader of the campaign. Indeed, another member of the campaign later confessed to me that he stayed quiet about his involvement while at work, to avoid being teased as relentlessly as Victor was.

One goal that was accomplished was holding a general meeting for all Sweet Tooth workers involved in the campaign; however, because only seven workers attended, including only one OC member, staff struggled to get a formal vote from all the OC members on moving forward with the holiday party direct action tactic. The party had been postponed, but without sufficient commitment from workers to carry out an action, that plan dissolved.

The external campaign during that same period of time included sympathetic media articles; photo ‘memes’ released on social media; a social media ‘blizzard’ in which allies posted photos and messages on social media urging the owner of Sweet Tooth Bakery to meet with BWC members; a public statement of support from a New York City Council member and outreach for support from

other local politicians; and planning for a public forum with allies (which was later cancelled). This pattern essentially continued during the following couple of months, as support among existing members at Sweet Tooth stagnated or declined and few new members were recruited. For the external campaign, staff met with another City Council member to seek his support in urging the owner to agree to negotiations; continued outreach to various allied organizations; and sent a letter to a bank that had made a loan of over \$2 million to Sweet Tooth Bakery advising the bank that there was a labor dispute that could threaten the bakery's revenue if not settled soon. It was BWC's relationship with one ally organization in particular that later proved to play a decisive role; this was a membership organization of consumers dedicated to creating a 'just and sustainable food system' locally. The organization decided to create a sub-committee dedicated to supporting the Sweet Tooth campaign, and it was ultimately persuasion from this organization and their discussions with the owner of Sweet Tooth that drove her to agree to negotiate with BWC members and staff.⁶⁹ Thus, the strategy that ultimately led to meetings between the company and BWC members relied heavily on advocacy power—specifically, political power in the forms of moral and relational power—rather than workers' social power. Accordingly, the strategy was able to succeed despite the low participation of workers; this echoed the Harvest Bakery campaign strategic approach in many ways, and thus carried the same risks.

Opening the space for freedom

As Adam was deeply aware of (and had personal experience with) the destructive effects of employers' anti-union campaigns, he prioritized establishing protection of the right to organize in BWC's workplace organizing campaigns in the hope that it would diminish fear among non-members and allow them to feel free to join the union. In my final week of fieldwork, three months

⁶⁹ This occurred after I had completed my fieldwork and was thus no longer volunteering at BWC.

after the Sweet Tooth campaign had gone public, staff were frankly discussing realistic paths for moving the campaign forward. During an impromptu meeting Adam held with David, Sara and me to troubleshoot the stagnant campaigns at Sweet Tooth and Harvest bakeries, Adam spoke of the ‘militant minority’ needing to fight really hard, ‘and when they win, it opens up the space for everyone to be their full selves’. This was not the first time Adam had spoken of the likely necessity of this strategy in the Sweet Tooth campaign; at the staff debriefing meeting held immediately after the going public march (described above), Adam had commented that BWC wasn’t going to attain a majority ‘anytime soon’ and instead would need a ‘militant minority’. At this stage three months later, it was even more clear that this was true; but it would require careful strategizing in order to avoid alienating workers who were on the fence. Later that week, the senior staff members—Adam, Luis, and Alex—held a meeting and discussed ‘a realistic path to victory’ for the Sweet Tooth campaign. Adam said that because it would be a minority of workers that would bring the boss ‘to the table’, they needed a plan for how that minority of workers would win over the majority in order to build a ‘job shop’. He acknowledged that taking action might push some workers away, but said that overall everything had to be geared toward building worker support. He commented that worker support was especially critical if the campaign got to the point of secondary boycott/picketing, because otherwise workers could end up telling the media that BWC was ruining their jobs.

Six months later, when Ellen agreed to meet with BWC and its Sweet Tooth members in response to persuasion from the food justice organization described above, she distributed a second letter (at BWC’s urging) to all workers, advising them that the meeting would happen that month to ‘explore our mutual goals’. She noted that any employee was ‘free to join’ BWC and had the ‘right to participate in this process’ and would not face retaliation for participating. BWC hoped this explicit recognition of the right to organize, paired with successful negotiations, would open the door to

expanding membership at the bakery and eventually reaching a majority. At the time of the first meeting between BWC and Sweet Tooth management, however, the internal campaign was weak enough that BWC struggled to secure the commitment of three workers to serve as the campaign delegation. Of the three who participated, two had joined in the six months since I left the organization. Yet despite the explicit recognition of the right to organize and the attainment of negotiations between BWC and the owner, worker involvement in the campaign and membership among Sweet Tooth workers did not substantially increase.

The hope that the negotiations, the owner's explicit recognition of the right to organize, and the changes won through negotiations would 'open up the space for everyone to be their full selves' was essentially a vision of solidarity unionism and the democratic workplace as sources of freedom. The leveraging of 'external' (advocacy) power as a means to facilitate building worker power touched a nerve in the tension between principles and efficacy—between the emphasis on worker leadership (internal power) and the capacity to win changes. While the objective of building a worker-led campaign sought to integrate principles and efficacy, the failure to generate sufficient worker solidarity and leadership before and after going public led BWC to rely more heavily on advocacy power. Again, this was not only a strategic dilemma but an ethical one as well; relying on advocacy power constrains an organization's ability to be truly representative of and accountable to the people directly affected (Jenkins 2002). In the case of Sweet Tooth Bakery, the widening gap between the internal and external campaign was certainly not intended—that is, the advocacy power was supposed to pave the way for the cultivation of worker power, rather than remain the engine of the campaign.

While BWC sought to use advocacy power to create space for worker solidarity, the strategy it had used at Harvest Bakery, the campaign's weak structures of solidarity and inadequate leadership

development meant that the ‘militant minority’ was not militant and was a decidedly small minority. It appeared that the discrepancy between BWC’s strong external campaign and weak internal campaign ultimately compounded these weaknesses rather than diminishing them, and made it difficult to increase worker support, even after negotiations had begun.

Conclusions

The spaces of uncertainty that surround workers’ experience of their jobs can serve to alternately amplify or contract their sense of what future is possible; unions and employers thus engage in ‘Gramscian wars of position, where union and management each seek to make their conceptual and emotional framework hegemonic’ (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004:3). BWC struggled to cultivate conditions for workers to embody their potential power through creating ‘structures of solidarity’ such as the organizing committee and the going public actions. These strategies were meant to converge workers’ notions of what was just and deserved with an enlarged sense of what was possible—in effect, trying to create a ‘margin of freedom’ (Bourdieu 2000:235) in which meaning and value could be redefined and futures reimaged, producing ‘new spaces for hope’ (Narotzky and Besnier 2014:S11). The owner and management of Sweet Tooth Bakery, on the other hand, sought to affirm maternalistic work relations as the emotional foundation for workers’ sense of security and worthiness, mobilizing ‘honey and vinegar’ tactics that tapped into workers’ consciousness of dependency, diminishing their sense that unionization and worker solidarity offered a viable or promising alternative future. Although the emotional and ideological currents generated during moments of symbolic and organizational struggle (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004) did open a margin of freedom in which participating Sweet Tooth workers could imagine an alternative future as possible, the strategies and structures of the BWC campaign were not able to bridge these feelings of solidarity into a culture of solidarity; instead, the emotional experience that

dominated workers' everyday perception of the campaign on the shop floor was one of tension and conflict.

This chapter also documented BWC's attempt to leverage advocacy power as a means of opening the space for workers to build social power, as it had sought to do with the Harvest Bakery campaign. In this case, the achievement of negotiations again enabled some concrete changes, but did not lead to a significant increase in BWC/IWW membership and internal power among Sweet Tooth Bakery workers. The contrast between the weakness of the internal campaign and the momentum of the external campaign ultimately seemed to compound the weaknesses of campaign support among workers instead of the opening the door to recruiting more members. I contend that the imbalance was critical in this realm, as advocacy power was leveraged before there was a solid base of worker solidarity and further escalated as the base of worker solidarity shrank. It was not the fact of leveraging multiple sources of power that crowded out worker power—indeed, most successful labor organizing campaigns must rely on diverse sources of power—but rather the imbalance of leveraging and escalating advocacy power to create a strong 'external' campaign before a sturdy organizing committee had been built.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the promises and challenges of alternative labor organizing with a radical vision, through examining the campaigns carried out by the Brooklyn Worker Center with workers at New York's industrial artisanal bakeries. Faced with the decades-long decline of the US labor movement, there is broad agreement among scholars and labor activists that this crisis demands new paradigms to address both the onslaught from without and the failings within the labor movement itself. Amid the profusion of proposed solutions, increasing attention has been directed toward alternative labor organizations such as worker centers, which often organize with workers and sectors that have been largely left out of the mainstream labor movement and that reflect contemporary labor trends under neoliberalism and flexible accumulation.

I undertook this doctoral research project in order to examine the possibilities and constraints that alternative labor organizations navigate in striving to challenge the vast imbalance of power in our socio-economic structures. Brooklyn Worker Center presented an interesting case study because it sought to transcend both the limitations of many worker center models and the weaknesses of the mainstream labor movement by transitioning to an organizing model based on solidarity unionism. Seeking to revive and update an organizing model from the early 20th century, BWC was moving away from the legal and advocacy campaigns more typical of worker centers and beginning to take on workplace organizing, with an ambitious and radical vision of building an industrial union that would hold power through workers' solidarity and direct action instead of through contracts and exclusive representation. This was a vision of labor organizing as a path toward social transformation, rather than simply toward better wages and working conditions. The chapters herein have analyzed from various perspectives how this vision of radical labor organizing fared amid the realities of social and political engagement.

Most organizers and activists in the ‘alt-labor’ and labor movement left would agree that expanding the number of organized workers while increasing worker militancy, internal democracy, and worker leadership are essential ingredients for reviving the labor movement and enabling it to become a vehicle for a broader vision of social justice for the working class; after many years of this refrain circulating, most would also agree it is far easier said than done.

In the sections that follow, I will review and synthesize the empirical and theoretical contributions made by this research, with the aid of a comparative analysis. As worker centers begin to experiment with unionization and unions increasingly recognize the benefits of and potential synergies with worker center strategies, the lessons to be drawn from organizations experimenting at that intersection have valuable implications for the broad project of reviving the US labor movement as a force for justice. As BWC staff were keenly aware, this project will require an ongoing commitment to experimentation, creativity, and courage among labor organizations and workers, as there will be no single, tidy answer.

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Worker centers have made impressive strides over the past decade, leveraging power to secure important wins for marginalized workers; this includes legislative, policy, and organizing campaigns that have enforced and expanded worker protections, raised the floor of wages and benefits, and brought the issues and voices of low-wage workers into the public eye. Still, worker centers have often struggled to exert the power necessary for durably shifting power relations at the workplace and in the labor market through extensive, strategic base-building; this has led an increasing number of worker centers to pursue either independent unionization campaigns or collaborations with existing unions (Milkman 2010:17). BWC’s recognition of these limits to the ‘worker center model’ was a driving motivation in the organization’s transition to a central focus on workplace organizing

instead of campaigns organized around advocacy and legal action. Yet like many in the alternative labor movement, BWC was also critical of business unionism and the bureaucratic, service-provider approach of many unions. The organization's answer was to affiliate with a small, radical union—the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)—and pursue a model based on solidarity unionism as a path toward the long-term vision of workers' industrial control. This model, described in depth in Chapter Four, was upheld as a strategic innovation that could potentially overcome worker centers' limitations in building power as well as the weaknesses evident in the declining power of mainstream labor unions; critically, the model was imagined as an intervention in the failure of labor unions (and some worker centers) to make workers the central agents of change. The practice of solidarity unionism, centered on the principles of solidarity, direct action and worker leadership, held that the most effective means of building power, holding power and gains, and centering worker agency was through ensuring that unions relied on workers' direct action and solidarity instead of on collective bargaining agreements and government-conferred exclusive representation.

The model was therefore viewed as holding the potential to transcend the purported dualism of the ideological and the practical, as it relied on worker leadership and direct action as a prefigurative, political practice *and* the primary, most effective source of power. Brooklyn Worker Center sought to win improved wages and working conditions for workers while placing worker agency at the center of labor organizing and building toward industrial control—a vision of both class struggle and 'bread and butter' gains, much like the IWW unions of the early 20th century and in particular, the historical example that BWC most looked to as inspiration, Local 8.

The documentation and analysis of BWC's campaigns in the preceding chapters demonstrated that BWC's model did succeed in winning certain modest, concrete changes in wages and working conditions for members and in bringing employers 'to the table' without the compulsory force of a

successful NLRB election or a contract. BWC did not, however, make significant progress in its fundamental long-term goal of building and expanding an active, enduring, and militant organization of workers within the factories, instead struggling with inconsistent and often low worker participation in campaigns. Consequently, the changes the campaigns did win were achieved through leveraging multiple sources of power that did not primarily rely on substantial worker participation and solidarity; this undermined the imagined radical democratic potential of the negotiations with employers, as well as the ability to hold and consolidate power in the longer term in order to win more substantial gains and shifts in the balance of power.

What led to this disjuncture between the organization's vision and practice—how did an organizing model based in theory on solidarity unionism yield limited success in cultivating solidarity among workers? This discrepancy between BWC's vision and practice stemmed from several interrelated factors. In its ambitious drive to prove that the model could overcome worker centers' limitations on building power and simultaneously transcend the failures of mainstream unions to center worker agency, BWC underestimated the challenges of transitioning from a model based on advocacy power to a model dependent on sustained workplace organizing; this led to some strategic missteps that stalled their ability to increase and deepen worker participation in the campaigns, and therefore to cultivate the internal power of the base. These strategic missteps compounded and were compounded by the organization's failure to adequately recognize and reckon with two central challenges it faced: the limitations on workers' structural power in the target worksites and sector, and the substantial difference and divisions among workers. The Brooklyn Worker Center was able to develop creative, promising strategies for leveraging various forms of advocacy power in ways that staff hoped would reduce barriers to worker organizing and help 'pave the way' for workers to build a strong, organized base in the workplace. But this was not matched with sufficient organizing capacity to overcome the challenges and divisions at these work sites, and therefore the campaigns

did not develop a sturdy foundation of worker solidarity and internal power. For workers who confront the reality of limited structural power at the workplace and the experience of precarity beyond the workplace, the willingness to organize often depends on prying open a ‘margin of freedom’ in which change seems possible. This sense of possibility can arise from the experience of worker solidarity—internal power; but in the face of divisions among workers, the union must cultivate this solidarity and demonstrate sufficient associational power to foster workers’ confidence in the union as a potential source of security and power.

BWC certainly recognized these challenges of limited structural power and divisions within the workforce, as they were motivating factors in the creation of a nonprofit organization to pursue the strategy rather than striving for the ‘pure’ implementation of solidarity unionism without a nonprofit, but the vision of the organizing model ultimately rested upon an abstracted conception of worker power and agency that was out of step with the existing dynamics in the industry. Further, the inherent contradictions of aspiring to implement a model inspired by solidarity unionism through a nonprofit organization—whereas in solidarity unionism the union ‘lives and dies’ with workers’ agency and collective action—meant that BWC was able to move campaigns forward without a critical mass of worker participation. This held the risk of generating a lack of accountability to workers, rather than the desired outcome of centering workers’ agency.

Because BWC’s campaigns continued to rely on a minority of workers at each workplace bolstered by substantial advocacy power, the model proved most effective in winning modest changes—those requiring lower concession costs (Luders 2010; McAlevey 2016)—and less effective in building and expanding a durable, organized base of workers who could push for more substantial long-term changes in the balance of structural power. This reflects a typical dilemma when trying to do

workplace organizing workers who have limited structural power, and it is the reason many worker centers focus their energy on policy and legal campaigns instead.

As the organizing campaigns documented herein reflect early stages of experimentation, I cannot conclusively say whether holding power through ongoing direct action and negotiations would be genuinely possible in this industry. But the inherent limitations on these workers' structural power, combined with the difficulties BWC had in generating substantial and consistent worker participation in organizing and expanding union membership at the worksites, suggest that the ideal of relying mainly on the constant mobilization of workers would not be a viable long-term strategy for holding power, especially with a minority of the workforce.

In the following section, I will trace the various sources of power that BWC leveraged in its campaigns and the implications of these; I will also review the strategic mistakes that were made as BWC faced the underestimated challenges of transitioning from a model centered on advocacy power to one centered on workplace organizing, indicating how these undermined the expansion of worker participation and leadership. I will then delve into a comparative analysis with other labor organizing models that seek to build power for low-wage workers, drawing out the insights that emerge on approaches to increasing marginalized workers' bargaining power and centering worker agency. Finally, I will address the empirical and theoretical contributions this research has made on the subject of organizing across difference and divisions.

Sources of worker power

In Chapters Three and Seven, I explored the particular strategies and tactics that BWC leveraged during the Harvest Bakery and Sweet Tooth Bakery campaigns, demonstrating that in both cases the organization relied on a combination of tactics relatively standard in worker center campaigns; in

addition to direct action tactics (such as a march to the factory with allies to present a letter of demands to management), the organization relied on various forms of advocacy power, such as the threat of legal action, filing ULP charges, relationships with ally organizations, media coverage, and online campaigning. I highlighted that while this repertoire of pressure tactics to leverage power was not unusual, BWC's goal of *holding* power through regular negotiations with company management and ongoing direct action (instead of collective bargaining agreements or settlements) was quite unique; the model was meant to be a sort of experiment in syndicalism.

BWC made up for the weaknesses of internal campaigns (shop floor organizing) at Harvest Bakery and Sweet Tooth Bakery by leveraging various other sources of power that were not dependent on the number or militancy of workers involved in the campaign; the intention was that leveraging external sources of power to achieve negotiations with the employer would 'pave the way' for building worker power on the shop floor. The organization viewed this use of advocacy power as a tool that could open the space for cultivating worker power by forcing companies 'to the table' and obtaining employers' explicit recognition of workers' right to organize, thus reducing the barrier of fear. Given the hostile terrain for labor organizing in the US, unions and worker centers generally need to leverage multiple sources of power in order to win changes and/or the opportunity to bargain a contract; this is particularly true with workers who have limited structural power, such as the workers at Harvest and Sweet Tooth bakeries, who operate in a 'loose' labor market and can be replaced relatively easily. Yet there is a delicate line between leveraging external sources of power to pave the way for and support the cultivation of worker power and allowing those other sources of power to substitute for workers' organizing in the workplace. In both campaigns, I described how achieving negotiations ultimately lead neither to substantial growth in BWC/IWW membership in the bakeries nor to the existing membership exercising more direct action on the shop floor.

I argued that the imbalance of leveraging and escalating advocacy power to create a strong ‘external’ campaign before a sturdy organizing committee had been built (or in the case of Harvest, after the original committee fell apart) undermined BWC’s ability to pave the way for cultivating workers’ internal power and expanding membership at both bakeries. It was not the fact of leveraging multiple sources of power that created the problem, as it is critical for workers with limited structural power to strengthen the basis of their associational power, and most labor organizing campaigns draw on diverse sources of leverage; but the development of both advocacy power as well as an organized base of workers requires negotiating a balance, as we will see in the comparative analysis below.

This reflects what I described above as BWC’s ‘growing pains’ in shifting from a model centered on legal action and advocacy toward a model focused on workplace organizing. The organization’s existing strategic strengths, as developed and demonstrated in its legacy campaigns, lay in strategies and tactics that did not depend on a critical mass of workers being involved. The organization’s highly effective tactic of carrying out secondary picketing and boycotts, for example, had been an effective means of coercing employers into paying settlements owed and even ended up unexpectedly becoming an implicit threat during Harvest Bakery negotiations—but this tactic could be and was accomplished with active allies and a small core of activist workers. Because BWC faced a challenging terrain for organizing along with setbacks stemming from lack of organizing experience and capacity, the organization ‘fell back on’ leveraging its existing strategic strengths and ultimately stalling (instead of creating space for) the cultivation of worker solidarity and militancy as a basis of power. As a result, BWC could boast the impressive accomplishment of having pushed employers to the negotiating table without the legal compulsion of an NLRB election, but this had not been accomplished through a worker majority or worker militancy. The resulting discrepancy between ‘external campaign’ strength and weak organization on the shop floor did not have the

intended effect of drawing in more workers to join, but instead stumbled over existing fractures in the workplace and stagnated without strong structures of solidarity—such as organizing committees—that could lead workers in ‘acting like a union’ on the job. This left in question the durability of the union campaign and weakened BWC’s legitimacy in calling for continued negotiations.

In describing organizing and recruitment strategies in Chapters Six and Seven, I demonstrated that guiding workers to participate in labor organizing requires not only tapping into their sense of justice and fairness, but also expanding their sense of what is possible. I analyzed how organizers strived to accomplish this through tapping into workers’ sense of justice and their consciousness of exploitation at work; I then highlighted how ‘structures of solidarity’ were an essential means of demonstrating and consolidating workers’ potential power and enabling them to embody worker solidarity. In the face of intense employer opposition to unionism and a legal and social landscape that constrains opportunities for worker solidarity and collective action, it is necessary to pry open a ‘margin of freedom’ (Bourdieu 2000; Narotzky and Besnier 2014) in which workers can imagine creating alternative futures through solidarity and collective action.

One of the key platforms for workers to exercise leadership within their campaigns is through the organizing committee, which I described in Chapter Five as a ‘structure of solidarity’ meant to allow workers to embody participatory democracy and potential power, thus prefiguring the organized workplace. I argued that organizing committees hold the potential to serve as a site for generating both the ‘qualitative’ and the ‘quantitative’ levels of worker power (Jenkins 2002), as they can be a critical channel for base-building and exercising power on the shop floor as well as being a space that fosters *internal power*—the solidary, innovatory, and developmental benefits of participatory democracy (Polletta 2002) and worker-to-worker culture (Brodkin and Strathmann 2004). I traced

the halting process of building the organizing committee for the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign and later identified this as a fundamental factor in the campaign's decline after going public; not only did workers have limited opportunities to experience their potential power, but they also did not have space to engage in deliberation and participatory democracy to overcome the fractured workplace relations and build solidarity across racial and ethnic divisions.

BWC's model was predicated on the assumption that the primary issue blocking effective worker organizing is that workers are naturally inclined to resist exploitation but worker agency must be 'unshackled' from the restraints of labor law and bureaucratic unions, and freed from the fear that arises from intense employer opposition to labor organizing. However, as described above, leveraging advocacy power in order to win a form of recognition from the employers—negotiations—was not ultimately enough to foster expanded participation and militancy among workers. The primary issues BWC faced were how to generate worker participation in organizing, build solidarity among workers, and cultivate the leadership and organizing capacity of workers.

Given workers' limited structural bargaining power and the lack of existing worker solidarity in the bakeries, it was particularly necessary for BWC to convince a significant number of workers that the organization would actually be an effective vehicle for change, and that workers' participation would make a difference. Yet although BWC was able to speak to workers' grievances and sense of injustice, the organization was unable to embody a source of security that could overcome workers' experience of precarity in their lives beyond the workplace and their experiences of tension and divisions on the shop floor.

Strategic mistakes

Low worker participation in BWC's campaigns was a significant obstacle to carrying out the vision of the BWC model, as it was entwined with the organization's struggles to cultivate worker solidarity and leadership, and diminished their ability to build solidarity and overcome divisions within the workforce. BWC's ability to recruit more workers and deepen their participation was hampered by certain strategic missteps that reflected the organization's growing pains in attempting to shift from a more 'traditional' worker center accustomed to relying on advocacy power to doing workplace organizing and relying on worker power. Below I will review three of the strategic mistakes that emerged in the analysis.

First, BWC greatly overestimated its capacity to organize multiple worksites at once and changed its prioritization of organizing targets multiple times, based on shifting levels of commitment among a few workers at each worksite. This resulted in a long, seemingly stagnant period of recruitment marking the early stages of the Sweet Tooth Bakery campaign, leaving workers who became involved with the sense that the campaign had no momentum and little support. This miscalculation was related both to an underestimation of the challenges of organizing in this sector, as well as the ambition of organizing an industrial union subverting a realistic assessment of BWC's organizational capacity. The BWC director's drive to pursue a model of industrial unionization outweighed the organization's capacity, not adequately recognizing the challenges of building a strong worker base these worksites; targeting, strategy, and timing suffered as a result.

Second, BWC pursued a strategy of secrecy while recruiting Sweet Tooth workers to join the campaign, advising all workers to keep their membership a secret from co-workers until the first organizing committee meeting, which was held less than two weeks before the campaign went public. This approach was meant to reduce the likelihood of the employer finding out about the

unionization campaign before it went public and thus reducing retaliation against workers and staving off the union busting campaign; yet the employer found out about the campaign nearly six months before it went public anyway. The ultimate effect of this approach, as described in Chapter Seven, was to diminish possibilities of worker solidarity by making workers' experience of the union individualized and detached from their coworkers until the campaign went public. Workers who joined developed a relationship mainly with BWC organizers rather than their coworkers, a dynamic that echoed the anti-union campaign narrative painting the union as a third party. The secrecy was particularly damaging in the face of the multiple divisions within the Sweet Tooth workforce (a point pursued in more depth below) and the workplace ethos, described in Chapter Five, that encouraged individualism and competition among workers. This strategy of secrecy had emerged from consultation with former staff of a large labor union; after the Sweet Tooth campaign went public and further weakened internally, BWC staff acknowledged that the strategy of secrecy had been counter-productive for their organizing vision and approach.

Finally, another significant factor in BWC's difficulties in increasing worker participation and building an active, organized base of workers at the factory was its approach to leadership identification and development. As described in Chapters Four and Six, BWC's approach to identifying leaders was unsystematic and effectively identified *activists* rather than workplace leaders; this approach to leadership identification is more consistent with the advocacy and community organizing campaigns that worker centers generally engage in, where it is not necessary to have the participation of a large number or majority of workers in order for the strategy to proceed.

In Chapter Four, I noted how the concepts of 'worker leadership' and 'leadership development' are widely used among worker centers and also within unions, yet they are not often defined and thus encompass a wide range of practices, understandings, and intended outcomes. In trying to overcome

the limitations of the ‘worker center model’, BWC believed it was critical to have members develop their leadership by gaining organizing capacity, in order to enhance their ability to strategically scale up union membership within the industry. Yet through documenting the progression of BWC’s stated goal of developing member organizers, I found that the organization’s strong rhetoric about worker leadership was not matched with systematic development and evaluation of leadership development processes; instead, ‘member leadership’ was frequently invoked, but the organization did not have a comprehensive model for developing it. This was a gap recognized by staff, as the need to systematize and improve their leadership development processes was noted many times. While some workers did participate in leadership development experiences such as speaking publicly to allies at an event or rally or speaking to the press, most of these experiences were in the realm of leveraging advocacy power rather than building power through worker-to-worker organizing or cultivating internal power through participation in organizational decision-making. Interestingly, I did not observe BWC staff making efforts to learn from and emulate the leadership development models of other worker centers that have more established processes. While ‘deep’, qualitative leadership development is a noted strength of many worker centers, Adam’s assertions that BWC was ‘the most worker-led’ worker center in the country likely discouraged staff from making serious efforts to learn from others. BWC’s desire to amplify workers’ leadership and participation in organizing was thus impaired by unsystematic leadership development processes and leader identification approaches.

Comparative analysis: labor organizing models

How can labor organizations center the agency of workers who possess limited structural bargaining power? What strategies can shift the terrain of struggle in order to make it more possible for these workers to build their own collective power? Historically and today, workers and organizers have

used a variety of models of organizing and representation to shift power toward marginalized workers and improve their wages and working conditions. This has often entailed shifting the field of struggle from the inherited paradigm of the workplace as central site of struggle to the community, the legal realm, consumers, or the political level. Because workers with limited structural bargaining power must compensate by strengthening their associational power, in the comparative analysis that follows I will map out various organizing models that have sought to strengthen the basis of marginalized workers' associational bargaining power, with an eye toward examining the role of workers themselves in each approach. The analysis will demonstrate the significant constraints such endeavors face, validating the challenges BWC encountered in its campaigns—yet it will also highlight a variety of paths other organizations have taken in aiming to achieve a balance between generating sufficient associational power to scale up organizing and achieve durability and cultivating worker leadership and participatory democracy—internal power.

BWC based its model on the IWW-inspired organizing philosophy of solidarity unionism, and was particularly inspired by the early 20th-century example of the IWW's Local 8, the multiracial union of Philadelphia longshoremen that held power for almost a decade through the power of ongoing direct action and worker solidarity, rather than legally enforceable written contracts. Yet although BWC looked to the example of Local 8's worker solidarity and ongoing direct action as a model of holding power through a means that centered worker agency,⁷⁰ the significant differences between the context of New York bakery workers' today and the Philadelphia longshoremen of the Progressive Era—for example, differences in the structural power they possess, levels of occupational identity, and the fact that Local 8 was born out of an industry strike while BWC was

⁷⁰ See Chapter Four for an in-depth explanation of the solidarity unionism critique of how exclusive representation and mandatory membership smother worker agency.

attempting to seed unionization campaigns as outside organizers⁷¹—suggest that we should not expect the effective expression of worker power and agency to look the same for industrial bakery workers in New York today.

Industrial, craft, and occupational unionism

BWC's industrial organizing strategy was to organize workers on a factory by factory basis with the aim of achieving sufficient density across the regional industry so that workers could maintain robust wages and working conditions (without collective bargaining agreements), and in the long-term vision, eventually secure worker control of production through an industry strike. While the model of industrial unionism cemented its power in the 20th century among mass production industries, significant changes in today's low-wage economy have diminished the relevance of this organizing model for many workers. In certain important ways, however, this was not the case for the bakery workers BWC was organizing—they labor in a centralized workplace where they are classified as employees, subject to NLRA protections, and are not ensnared in a maze of subcontracting.⁷² Yet some of the challenges of the changing economy do present themselves in New York's food processing industry: the industry is comprised of many small businesses whose ownership is not concentrated, making it difficult to organize enough firms across the industry to take wages out of competition; and there is generally low industrial identification among the workers, given that many of them are likely to switch jobs across different industries.

⁷¹ See the Introduction chapter for a more detailed comparison of the social, political, and economic conditions of these two workforces.

⁷² There were certain important exceptions to this, such as Sweet Tooth Bakery's classification of delivery drivers as 'independent contractors' (as described in Chapter Five) and Harvest Bakery's creation of a separate, inferior contract under a different company name for some delivery drivers (described in Chapter Three).

Given the changes in today's economy that make firm-level collective bargaining less relevant for a significant number of workers, some analysts have looked to occupational unionism, a term coined by Dorothy Sue Cobble, as one potential organizing approach that could once again prove effective for organizing workers. Occupational unionism was a prevalent form of labor organizing prior to the New Deal that shares similarities with craft unionism but was less exclusive and not limited to 'skilled' workers (qualities which would make craft unionism a poor fit for bakery workers). Like craft unionism, the strategy was to gain marketplace power through organizing the labor supply—'gaining the allegiance of all those who did the work of a particular trade or occupation within a given labor market' (2001:85). Occupational unionists did this through running hiring halls and other types of job placement agencies, providing 'portable' benefits, and offering job training. They also commonly established their own workplace rules and responsibilities, implementing what Cobble terms 'peer management' (*ibid.*). Unlike craft unionists, who could rely on marketplace bargaining power stemming from the limited numbers of their highly skilled, difficult-to-replace labor pool, occupational unionists had to organize large numbers of workers in order to exercise a measure of marketplace bargaining power within a 'looser' labor market.

While the approach of occupational unions is currently more appropriate for organizing workers such as day laborers, domestic workers, or taxi drivers, other organizations have sought to combine the occupational unionism approach with multiple strategies intended to complement each other in building workers' bargaining power (see, for example, Ikeler 2011). This combined approach recognizes the value of occupational unionism in tying workers' rights and benefits to the union rather than to an employer, while recognizing that the obstacles to sufficiently organizing the labor supply in the retail sector require other sources of leverage to be developed.

An occupational unionism approach for bakery workers would certainly face substantial challenges, however: these workers are not considered very difficult to replace, and there is a large labor pool of workers ready to cycle into these jobs, giving the workers limited marketplace bargaining power; BWC would thus need to organize very high numbers of workers in order to gain any measure of control over the labor supply. Further, the issue of varying levels of occupational identity would need to be overcome.

But even though BWC's strategy relied on firm-level organizing campaigns, its affiliation with the IWW did offer 'mobile membership', unlike most industrial unions that bargain through exclusive representation; in theory, this feature could support the cultivation of an industrial identity for workers that supports building up the union's internal power. The IWW did not offer benefits such as job placement, job training or insurance as part of its 'mobile membership', but BWC did offer member services such as pro bono legal support and support with various administrative procedures ranging from filing taxes to navigating insurance bureaucracy.⁷³ BWC was able to do this through its financial resources (primarily derived from foundation funding) and its strong network of non-profit and pro bono service providers and lawyers. Staff viewed this as an important set of benefits, both for attracting members and for supporting them in dealing with the numerous challenges they faced that were not necessarily directly related to work.

While the focus on such benefits for union members is sometimes criticized as leading to a service-provider model of unionism that is devoid of the power-building needed to wage class struggle, a more expansive perspective on the cultivation of worker agency and power allows us to see that drawing workers to an organization in this way can potentially be a means of cultivating a collective

⁷³ Shortly after I began my field research, BWC had changed their recruitment approach and essentially 'packaged' BWC and IWW membership together; workers who signed the 'red card' for IWW membership were automatically considered members of BWC.

and therefore building solidarity and associational power; it can and has been effectively paired with organizing, politicizing, and ultimately preparing workers to collectively leverage power. In transitioning from its previous model centered on lawsuits toward a workplace organizing model, however, BWC had not yet established a clear means of translating the IWW mobile membership structure into the source of an industrial identity among its members. Unlike the mobile membership of craft and occupational unions, which effectively create *employment* security for workers instead of an employer-based *job* security, the BWC/IWW mobile membership continued to root what Adam called ‘value tomorrow’ in workers’ relationship with an employer rather than with the union.

Union – worker center collaborations

Given the challenges of matching the worker organizing models described above with today’s working class jobs, collaborations between unions and worker centers are often pointed to as a promising path forward for low-wage worker organizing because of the potential of combining the different strengths of each—unions’ associational power in the form of institutional resources, existing membership, and the potential for consolidating power through collective bargaining, and worker centers’ strategic creativity and flexibility, their deeper connections with marginalized workers’ communities, and their strength in leveraging moral/symbolic power. While the structural, ideological, and cultural differences between unions and worker centers often create tensions (Fine 2007),⁷⁴ the potential promise of such collaborations leads many organizers and analysts to remain committed to experimenting with this path.

⁷⁴ See Chapter Three for examples of the challenges of these collaborations.

The collaboration between Brooklyn Worker Center and the IWW differs from other union-worker center collaborations in significant ways. There are no IWW organizers or other staff working on the BWC campaigns (although the BWC director, lead organizer, and campaigns staff were all IWW members and the latter two were delegates)—an arrangement that led one worker to refer to the IWW as a ‘ghost union’; they were not seeking to consolidate power through formal collective bargaining; there was no clash between the IWW and BWC over organizational cultures, ideologies, and structures, as there was no separate IWW oversight of the campaign. Indeed, this was in large part a function of the IWW’s purposefully minimal staff, which is intended as both an antidote to what is viewed as bloated bureaucracy in the mainstream labor movement, and a nod to the fact that the union’s organizing philosophy calls for organizers to actually work at the site being organized, rather than being outside paid staff organizers. Yet given BWC’s ambitions of organizing across an industry, the fact that the collaboration with the IWW brought limited associational power to bear on the campaigns meant that there was no clear path toward achieving density in the industry; the resources and years BWC spent on organizing campaigns at two factories had not yet yielded ‘job shops’ at those sites, and the IWW had no existing leverage or membership within the industry to draw on outside of BWC.

One example of a worker center bolstering its campaigns with the associational power of a union is Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL), a worker center in the ‘Twin Cities’ (Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota) that collaborated with SEIU Local 26 to unionize over 500 janitors subcontracted to clean large retail stores.⁷⁵ This campaign employed strategies including short strikes,

⁷⁵ Information about this collaboration is drawn from Bobo and Pabellón (2016); Fine (2015a); ‘Retail janitors in the Twin Cities unionize, after pressure from retailers on contractors’ by Adam Belz, *Star Tribune*, October 13, 2016. <http://www.startribune.com/retail-janitors-in-the-twin-cities-will-be-able-to-unionize-after-pressure-from-retailers-on-contractors/396967351/> [Accessed on 9/6/2017]; and ‘The Workers Center-Union Partnership That’s Transforming Big-Box Janitorial Work’ by Steve Payne, *In These Times*, January 2, 2015.

public protests and picketing that targeted the large retail companies rather than the cleaning contractors, and lawsuits to recover unpaid wages and damages. An important turning point in the strategy was winning a responsible contractor policy directly with the Target Corporation in 2014 that encouraged Target's janitorial contractors to allow their employees to unionize; it also included an agreement that workers would not unionize until sixty percent of big-box stores in the Twin Cities area had cleaning contractors that allowed their workers to unionize. CTUL and SEIU reached that threshold two years later (after more pressure campaigns involving protests, short strikes, and picketing of these big-box stores), allowing over 500 retail janitors to join the union and attain collective bargaining agreements with the cleaning contractor companies. In this case, the union's associational power—as represented by its resources, existing contracts for janitors in local office buildings and the accompanying relationships, and its research capacity—effectively enhanced the campaign CTUL had started with the mostly Latino immigrant workforce and enabled a broader industry strategy. They successfully used short strikes and public protests to extend the field of struggle beyond the cleaning contractors to hold the big-box retail companies at the top of the supply chain accountable. The combination of grassroots mobilization of workers and lively protest actions that leverage symbolic power (Chun 2011) and community support are familiar strategies of SEIU's renowned Justice for Janitors campaigns, which in certain cities such as Los Angeles relied not only on workers' disruptive power and mobilization but also on political power plays to intervene at the industry level, substantial union resources (for research and legal costs), and the controversial use of top-down union governance maneuvers (Waldinger et al. 1996).

Within the Twin Cities collaboration, SEIU Local 26 staff carried out union activity such as leading collective bargaining, while CTUL staff took the reins in doing deep leadership development and

http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/17497/a_workers_center_union_partnership_in_minnesota_is_transforming_big_box_jan [Accessed on 9/6/2017]

trainings with workers—essentially, the work of cultivating internal power.⁷⁶ As this collaboration continues, it would be interesting to see how workers experience their relationship with CTUL now that they are members of Local 26, and to what extent the workers can genuinely exercise leadership within the decision-making of the union. BWC staff often cited the ‘deeply democratic’ structures of the IWW as a critical reason why BWC was affiliated with this particular union instead of others; as a member-run union, it was seen to be aligned with the goal of promoting member leadership and solidarity unionism. During the period of my fieldwork, these democratic structures were not fully actualized because the IWW Industrial Union Branch 460 (IUB 460) for food processing and distribution workers was not yet operating as an actual institution; as previously noted, BWC members did not attend the IWW General Membership Branch meetings in New York, so their IWW membership was experienced solely through BWC structures.

Paving the way with policy & regulatory unionism

Given the amplified challenges workers face in unionizing and leveraging economic power, the strategic necessity of ‘paving the way’—improving the terrain for unionization—is reflected in various contemporary approaches taken by unions and worker centers. The strategies employed to achieve employer neutrality in the campaigns described above relied on leveraging various forms of advocacy power, such as corporate strategic research, symbolic power and political relationships, in order to pressure employers across the industry. In BWC’s campaign at Sweet Tooth Bakery, it was ultimately also a form of advocacy power—the persuasion of an allied organization—that brought the employer to agree to negotiations (affecting one worksite, rather than multiple worksites across an industry).

⁷⁶ CTUL would not be legally allowed to represent workers in collective bargaining because it is registered as a nonprofit organization (like most worker centers) rather than as a labor union.

As described in Chapter Three, worker centers—and increasingly, unions as well—are often better positioned to leverage political power rather than economic power, and many worker centers have thus chosen to focus their energy into legislative and policy campaigns that seek to more favorably shape the legal and political terrain upon which workers are organizing or to ‘raise the floor’ through approaches such as campaigns for living wages or raised minimum wages (Fine 2005, 2011a; Luce 2015). This has also been an important strategy historically for low-wage workers with limited structural power.

In describing the political and economic organizing projects of a community-labor alliance in Baltimore and a worker center on Long Island, Fine (2005) demonstrates that both organizations were far more successful in intervening in low-wage labor market dynamics through their political and advocacy work than through economic interventions and worker organizing. Fine contends that this is because an organization can win on a public policy issue by mobilizing a small but dedicated group of workers and advocates, whereas changing the labor market dynamics within a particular low-wage sector requires organizing a far more substantial number of workers and workplaces (Fine 2005:187). For example, the Baltimore organization, which was a joint venture of a faith-based community organization and the national public employees’ union AFSCME, was able to win important public policy changes, including a campaign for municipal service contractors to pay living wage that ‘provided some 4,000 part-time contract workers with a “living wage” several dollars higher than the federal minimum wage’ (2005:179) and passing ‘a municipal right to organize ordinance that asserted workers’ right to organize and denied contracts to union-busting employers’ (*ibid.*). However, their unionization efforts among low-wage service sector workers were less successful; after attempting multiple campaigns experimenting with both a members-only union approach and collective bargaining that were preceded by the above policies, attempted agreements with contractors, and the attempt to create multi-employer health benefit fund for public employees

at daycare centers, only one site led to successful unionization (of sixty workers). Notably, this was the site where a very strong organizing committee had been built, reflecting the simultaneous generation of internal power at the worksite and associational power leveraged through the channels of the union-CBO collaboration.

While a raised minimum wage or ‘living wage’ has concrete benefits for low-wage workers, it does not generate a shift in power toward workers in the way that workplace organizing and unionization do; this is why it is generally far easier to win wage increases than to win a union (Luce 2015:77). Brooklyn Worker Center understood this clearly, and thus focused the majority of its organizational energy on workplace organizing campaigns. In light of the immense challenges, however, in improving the working conditions of marginalized workers in low-wage industries and strengthening the basis of their power, some organizations have chosen to pursue a synthesis of these approaches—seeking through public policy to improve minimum standards while also strengthening or establishing bargaining rights and incentives for employers to yield to unionization. This approach, which Fine (2015a) describes as ‘regulatory unionism’, recalls the industrial ‘codes of fair competition’ put in place by the National Recovery Administration (NRA) in 1933,⁷⁷ which established minimum wage and hours conditions by sector and guaranteed workers bargaining rights that allowed them to unionize and participate in establishing the codes.

A recent example of regulatory unionism being successfully implemented among low-wage workers is the CLEAN (Community, Labor, Environmental Action Network) Carwash Initiative, an organizing project carried out by the AFL-CIO and the United Steelworkers of America unions in collaboration with local worker centers and legal advocacy groups to organize *carwasheros* in Los

⁷⁷ The NRA was created by the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA); it was later ruled unconstitutional and then replaced by the National Labor Relations Act.

Angeles.⁷⁸ The collaboration was born a few years after the passage of a law that sought to enhance enforcement of existing labor standards for carwash workers; advocates found that although the legislation did lead to greater enforcement, it was not enough to bring most employers into compliance and workplace changes were often not sustained without active vigilance. Partners in the CLEAN campaign sought to institutionalize and extend the improvements made through four years of their intensive enforcement and organizing efforts, believing that unionization would be essential to this end. They worked with government enforcement agencies to use more aggressive enforcement, litigation, and the threat of large settlements alongside workers' direct action and community protests. A turning point came in creating more auspicious conditions for unionization by securing the passage of a much stronger version of the 'carwash bill' upon its renewal. This new version, while not as strong as the coalition hoped for, substantially raised the cost of surety bonds for registration for carwash businesses and created an exception to the bond requirement for companies with collective bargaining agreements, thus creating a strong economic disincentive for companies to oppose unionization. Twenty-five carwashes subsequently unionized; while the small workforce of each business made this a modest total of over 200 workers unionizing, it is noteworthy that this strategy recognized the importance of organizing across the industry to take wages out of competition.

Critically, the CLEAN initiative is bolstered by its integration into *carwasheros'* communities through the physical relocation of the campaign to workers' neighborhood in South LA, a strong leadership development program that includes an industry-wide committee of workers, workplace committees at non-unionized carwashes, and active partnership with a number of other worker centers and community organizations in supporting workers' needs both inside and outside of the workplace

⁷⁸ The details of the CLEAN campaign example are drawn from case studies by Avendaño and Fanning (2014) and Fine (2015b).

(e.g., through securing access for workers' communities to healthcare clinics). This active organizing approach, which draws on the strengths of community-based worker centers, seems to be critical in boosting the internal power of the workers, by cultivating solidarity and centering the leadership and agency of the workers. Without such internal power, the bargaining power of the workers—even in the cases where it has been consolidated through a CBA—would likely dissipate in the long term, given the challenges of organizing across an industry fractured into a multitude of small businesses.

This example also highlights the substantial potential benefits of effective coalition-building, as the various organizations, unions, and agencies working together were able to effectively strengthen the basis of workers' associational power. In a case study of the Laborers Union attempting to enter the green jobs sector, Fine (2011b) highlights that the union chose to pursue the initiative on its own because it had sufficient power to achieve an agreement they thought would pave the way into the sector; yet they were ultimately unsuccessful in organizing the work because they lacked other sources of power and legitimacy that could have been cultivated in coalition. This insight raises the question of how BWC might invest more seriously in building strategic coalitions in order to bolster its associational power and therefore its ability to garner greater confidence and trust from workers and a stronger foothold in industrial organizing.

Holding power without a CBA

While collective bargaining agreements are often seen as the paradigmatic means of consolidating workers' associational power, the idea that unions are not solely defined by government-conferred exclusive representation has a long history of being voiced and practiced within the US labor movement, in various forms and for reasons both practical and political. Dorothy Sue Cobble (2001) has reminded us that historically, the labor movement was not defined principally by collective bargaining and formal contracts with employers—rather, these were desirable but were among one

of many approaches pursued by unions and were only accessible to groups possessing the power and leverage to win them.

Although the number of worker centers collaborating with unions or otherwise supporting workers in unionizing and seeking a contract has increased in recent years, most worker centers still do not pursue NLRB elections or collective bargaining. Firm-based collective bargaining often does not fit the needs of members of worker centers, whether it is because they are workers who are excluded from NLRA protections (such as domestic workers or taxi drivers), fired workers who are seeking redress, or often simply because their membership bases are not recruited based on individual worksite but rather based on geography, industry, or race/ethnicity. Many worker centers also explicitly avoid being classified as unions because they want to avoid the legal constraints placed on unions and retain their ability to engage in tactics, such as secondary boycotts (and often, effective strikes), that unions are restricted from. The choice to not pursue NLRB elections or collective bargaining often also reflects a recognition that they are not currently in a position to run a full-fledged campaign and win an election. For BWC, however, the avoidance of NLRB elections and CBAs did not arise from a misfit with their members—as noted above, the bakery workers, unlike members of many other worker centers, did not generally face decentralized workplaces, subcontracting, and lack of employee protections. Instead, BWC’s choice to eschew CBAs stemmed from a broader critique of relying on government processes and legal channels instead of worker militancy, and specific critiques of exclusive representation, dues check-off, and mandatory membership as elements of NLRB unionism that diminish worker militancy and remove worker agency by preventing workers from representing themselves.

While the examples above have pointed to the use of diverse sources of leverage to pressure employers to grant neutrality or bargain with a union or worker center, legal and regulatory leverage

can also be used to protect workers' collective action without seeking an NLRB election or formal collective bargaining. BWC's tactic of using Sections 7 and 8(a) of the NLRA to protect workers' concerted collective action while avoiding the use of Section 9 (which regulates collective bargaining and exclusive representation) was an effective tool for leveraging legal pressure to push employers to meet workers demands and/or agree to negotiation meetings.

Other worker centers also use such legal action—or the threat of it—as a means of protecting workers' collective action, while not necessarily using it as leverage toward attaining bargaining (whether collective bargaining or informal negotiations in the style of BWC's approach). Arise Chicago employs the threat of regulatory action to support and protect the direct action campaigns of low-wage, mostly undocumented immigrant workers seeking to enforce or improve workplace conditions when collective bargaining campaigns are unrealistic (Lesniewski and Canon 2016).

Workers who come to the center with grievances go through popular education and are supported in composing a demands letter to their employer that explicitly states that their concerted activity is protected under Section 7 of the NLRA. Garrick (2014, 2017) also documents how a number of worker centers nationwide have effectively used this tactic to proactively (or sometimes retroactively) protect workers' collective action in this way when an NLRB election seem unlikely to succeed. A few of these worker centers, such as Somos un Pueblo Unido in New Mexico, implement the Section 7 protections strategy alongside the creation of workplace committees that function as informal groups 'acting like a union' on the shop floor—in the spirit of a minority unionism or solidarity unionism. This approach bears a lot of similarities with BWC's approach in its use of legal leverage as a tool to protect and pave the way for workers' collective action; but BWC sought to then consolidate this power through having workers join the IWW, seeking regular negotiations with employers, and aspiring to an industry-wide organizing strategy. BWC's struggles with garnering sufficient worker participation and scaling up their organizing, however, raise the

question of how consolidation of power and scaling up can be achieved through minority approaches.

Members-only unionism

BWC's campaigns all involved a minority of workers in the workplace, evoking longstanding debates and questions about the potential power of a 'militant minority'. In the face of wide recognition of the NLRA's deficiencies, there has been increasing talk of minority unionism, also referred to as 'members-only' unionism. Various forms of this have long existed within the US labor movement, and discussions of its merits and dangers have featured prominently in recent debates about how to revitalize the 21st-century labor movement. Minority unions are most frequently invoked as a model that can serve as a 'stepping stone' on the path toward the ideal of collective bargaining and majority (exclusive) representation when, for a variety of reasons, conditions may be too difficult to organize toward winning an election at the time; they are also viewed as a potential strategy for a group of workers who lose an NLRB unionization election, but may choose to 'act like a union' without certification.⁷⁹ In evoking the solidarity unionism approach, Lynd describes minority unionism not as a pathway toward exclusive representation of a group of workers, but rather as an approach in and of itself that is defined by worker solidarity and collective action (Piascik 2014). Solidarity unionism aims to implement a version of members-only unionism without arguing for the NLRB or other legislation compelling employers to bargain, by simply asserting the right of workers to take collective action, whether or not they become a majority.

⁷⁹ Some legal scholars have focused on making the case for legally mandated collective bargaining for minority unions, arguing that the NLRA does in fact guarantee workers the right to collective bargaining through a minority union on a members-only basis (see Morris 2004).

Militant minorities have played a well-known role in labor struggles, as with the many unionization efforts during the 1930s that began with a militant minority compelling employers to bargain with them on a members-only basis (Morris 2004). The success of a militant minority in securing bargaining power, however, generally requires that they are workers with structural power (Silver 2003:47–50)—either being strategically located roles within the worksite, or being considered highly skilled workers who are difficult to replace—and their durability depends on expanding their membership beyond the minority. Minority union approaches can win modest changes without these conditions in place (see Lynd and Gross 2007), but it is difficult to imagine that they could sustain enough power in the long term to make significant, durable changes that intervene in labor market dynamics without increasing their associational power by working toward majority support or achieving a means of consolidating bargaining power.

Based on the insights of a CWA organizer, Nissen (2001) suggests that minority unions require four elements to be successful: a source of outside leverage (beyond the power workers can leverage on the shop floor), strong inside leaders at the workplace (not just supporters), a long-term commitment from the union, and good organizing issues that resonate broadly with the workforce. These findings are echoed in a recent report on members-only unions (Marvit and Shriever 2015), which found that the general problems faced by exclusive-representation unions ‘are felt far more acutely in the members-only context’ (2015:2). Their case study of the members-only union Carolina Auto, Aerospace and Machine Workers Union (CAAMWU), a UE Local 150 affiliate in North Carolina, demonstrates the importance of strong worker leadership on the shop floor, long-term commitment from an established union, and the union’s ability to address issues that resonate with the broader workforce. CAAMWU has persisted as a members-only union for over twenty-five years, having originally been born of an organizing committee created by a group called Black Workers for Justice. During this long time span, CAAMWU has not been able to attain the

membership of a majority of workers at their worksite, but has been able to accumulate a track record of wins ranging from improved wages and benefits to worker reinstatement; their petition campaigns (a key tactic for them) usually garner the support of a significantly larger portion of the workforce beyond their dues-paying members, and they have strong ties with local community organizations. This model is highly dependent on cultivating internal power among the membership and has clearly created a durable foundation of worker solidarity and activism within the workforce; yet it raises the question of how success should be defined. While CAAMWU has been able to successfully address a range of worker issues and cultivate worker leadership, the changes they're able to win have relatively low concession costs for the employer, and they have been unable to scale up their membership.

In response to those who advocate discarding exclusive representation and majority rule as a route to reviving the labor movement, other analysts and labor activists point to the potential risks of this path. Compa (2015) warns that this would further hobble the labor movement, highlighting the risks of persistent inter-union rivalry; a craft union mentality that could lead skilled workers to form their own unions; employers creating *worse* conditions for union employees to dissuade other workers from joining; and the creation of company unions. This raises the point that while minority unions can be an important vehicle for marginalized or dissenting workers to assert their voice, they can also become a tool for privileged workers to maintain their advantages.

Ultimately, one of the strong suits of a minority union approach is also its greatest challenge: a minority union approach, like a solidarity union model, will only survive with ongoing participation, activism, and leadership by its members (Lynd and Gross 2007; Marvit and Shrieffer 2015; Nissen 2001). The militant minority approach advocated by BWC envisioned a group of workers taking militant collective action to win demands and force the employer to negotiate with them, thus

opening up the space for other workers to see the power of collective action and join the union; this was essentially the road taken by many nascent CIO unions in the 1930s. As described in previous chapters and above, the strategy did not develop as BWC hoped, as winning demands and negotiations did not spur greater recruitment of members. Although BWC bypassed the use of NLRB elections and CBAs in order to avoid constraining workers' agency and potential power, the main power sustaining the campaigns lay in forms of advocacy power, which allowed the campaign to continue to exist in spite of low or inconsistent membership and activism among workers. Minority unionism in the face of a divided workforce was risky; the lack of a strong organizing committee and the low militancy of the minority of workers involved created a dynamic wherein the minority unionism approach stalled in the face of a fractured workforce.

This approach raises questions about striking the balance between grassroots organizing and the creation of durable, institutionalized labor unions. As BWC was well aware, the IWW does not have a legacy of building durable labor organizations; Local 8 was a marked exception (and even that only lasted ten years). Even as industrial workers became increasingly militant and engaged in direct action in the second decade of the 20th century, the IWW played a relatively small role in this period of 'New Unionism'. Labor historian David Montgomery suggests that one of the main reasons for 'the IWW's failure to grow apace with the rising militancy of industrial workers' was that immigrant industrial workers increasingly aspired to regulate working conditions and to shorten work hours, and therefore desired more from their labor organizations than 'oratory and strike leadership', seeking 'durable, open, recognized unions' that paired revolutionary leadership with 'business-like organization' (Montgomery 1979:105–6).

CBA, militancy, and majorities

As a point of comparison, it is useful to look at a case study of a union that makes use of both militant collective action and collective bargaining agreements, with an emphasis on organizing majorities of workers willing to strike. In McAlevey's (2016) account of SEIU 1199 New England (1199NE) unionizing 'low-skilled' workers in private-sector nursing homes, a highly organized, militant workforce coexists with CBAs and a union that has significant associational power through its existing membership and resources. McAlevey compares 1199NE's campaigns with a different SEIU local also engaged in private-sector nursing home organizing, in order to demonstrate the superiority of 1199NE's organizing model, which she argues has attained far more significant wins *because* its model relies on active worker participation and leadership and is rooted in class struggle. The other SEIU local won its contracts through an 'advocacy approach using behind-the-scenes political and financial transactions and deal making' (McAlevey 2016:73).⁸⁰ McAlevey highlights two key practices of 1199NE, noting that by 'constantly engaging in strikes and by practicing what is called open collective bargaining negotiations, 1199NE is constantly engaging in the hardest of structure tests—that is, tests that measure both union democracy and the participation levels of the rank and file' (2016:86). 1199NE 'paves the way' for unionization through obtaining neutrality agreements before NLRB elections, yet the strategy and circumstances of their neutrality agreements depend on and are inclusive of a critical mass of organized workers, instead of through high-level, back room political negotiations:

Like the Washington union, Connecticut's leadership places a premium on securing multiemployer election procedure neutrality agreements. But unlike the Washington union's agreement, 1199NE's neutrality agreements are won by worker power and negotiated across the bargaining table, with workers in the room, in a collective-bargaining process transparent and open to all members of the union. Through this approach, they have been able to secure neutrality agreements such as one covering three unorganized nursing homes, an accord in which the workers surrendered nothing and

⁸⁰ e critique has been made that McAlevey's

are not bound by limitations in their contractual rights. In one such recent agreement, there are no binding contract provisions or clauses that are “automatically renewed,” and the union is not required to lobby for money to pay the workers. (McAlevy 2016:86–87)

Importantly, 1199NE’s capacity to command multiemployer election procedure neutrality agreements depended not only on the immediate threat of worker militancy, but also on the associational power of the union as reflected in the number of nursing homes that were already unionized, in the process of bargaining, and prepared to strike, with contracts set to expire simultaneously; this associational power likely influenced not only employers’ willingness to concede, but also workers’ perception that the union could be a potent vehicle for change.

In both the 1199 model and the BWC model, negotiations were imagined and maintained as a space for worker participation. BWC staff insisted that every negotiation at Harvest Bakery be attended by workers (usually there were between two and five workers), and workers had to attend preparation sessions beforehand to decide who would say what, and review what issues would be raised; Adam also gave workers mini-trainings in how negotiations work. It was a unique situation for the workers to be at the negotiating table with executives of the company, and certainly an experience that allowed workers to embody a sense of power and possibility. But the BWC negotiations relied on a different source of leverage than the 1199 negotiations—BWC’s strategy leveraged the threat of legal action and the implicit threat of secondary boycott, leverage that therefore existed whether there were three workers involved or twenty-five. On the other hand, 1199NE leveraged the threat of a majority strike across multiple unionized sites. According to BWC’s power analysis, the 1199 contracts diminished worker agency because they had a no-strike clause during the life of the contract, restricting strikes to the more predictable periods of contract negotiation; yet during the period from 2000 to 2016, the nursing home workers in Connecticut accumulated over 100 strikes. The BWC campaigns did not have enough members at the bakeries to make striking a viable tactic yet, but BWC staff aspired to future IWW ‘job shops’ in which a militant base used strikes and other

direct action tactics to maintain power. Both BWC and 1199 therefore pursued strategies that aspired to center worker leadership and worker agency, but the 1199 model accepted certain constraints on their proven capacity for direct action in order to strengthen the basis of their associational power, while BWC rejected the idea of imposing such constraints even though its members were not yet in a position to strike.

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The first insight that emerges from this comparative analysis is that there is no simple formula for building the power of low-wage workers. The organizing approaches outlined here draw on diverse sources of power, highlighting the difficult questions that arise for any organization striving to find a balance between cultivating worker leadership and participatory democracy—internal power—and generating sufficient associational power to scale up organizing and achieve durability.

Yet this comparative analysis has also demonstrated that centering worker agency and cultivating workers' leadership do not *only* occur within an organizing model that depends entirely on workers' constant mobilization—internal power and worker militancy can be developed within a variety of structures, provided that the organizing capacity and will exist. In fact, the case study of BWC and the comparative analysis above highlight the inadvertent constraints or compromises that can arise from a model that adheres too rigidly to conceptions of 'real' worker power without accounting for the realities on the ground. BWC's model strove to center workers' militancy and solidarity as the key sources of bargaining power—a fusion of the political and the practical—but in practice, the campaigns relied largely on various sources of advocacy power that were skillfully leveraged while worker participation was inconsistent or low. Forgoing NLRB elections and CBAs did not give rise to a durable, militant base of workers, because BWC did not have the organizing capacity to match its large ambitions for industry-wide organizing. This produced an awkward situation in which the

organization continued to assert the political ideal of the union's power emerging from workers' solidarity and direct action while tacitly recognizing that it needed to rely on other sources of power; because this political ideal did not recognize the constraints in BWC's organizing capacity, workers' limited structural power, and divisions among the workforce, it ended up compromising the organization's ability to nurture internal power (normally thought to be a strength of worker centers) and build a base of active worker support in the workplace. In effect, this dynamic of imbalance mirrored the one that BWC was trying to avoid wherein workers' shop floor militancy is replaced by bureaucratic and legal sources of power.

While I agree that the system of exclusive representation and the accompanying weaknesses of the NLRB have played a key role in draining militancy from the labor movement, a wholesale rejection of contracts and the institutionalization that defines mainstream unions does not seem to be a blanket solution that will undo decades of habits and culture formed; worker militancy must be seeded and cultivated through the slow, patient process of deep organizing, and the organizational structure and model is not entirely determinate of whether workers' agency will be centered.

All of the above examples that were able to build a base of organized workers shifted the field of struggle beyond the single workplace in some manner, whether through 'paving the way' for unionization through legal and political strategies or by leveraging associational power across an industry; this was critical to overcoming limitations on workers' structural bargaining power. But the other critical ingredient was the simultaneous cultivation of *internal power*, as a foundation of worker solidarity will not grow from an external field of struggle. Compromises will always be necessary, pointing to the need to be clear about our priorities and boundaries and to continually examine the implications of such compromises in their specific context. While minority and solidarity union approaches demonstrate the potential to be fertile ground for building worker leadership and

solidarity while winning modest demands with a small base of activist workers, they also lay bare the difficulties of consolidating power and scaling up, and push us to ask which compromises and constraints we choose to accept.

Organizing across difference

The move to ground this dissertation in the *hierarchies of labor* framework was intended to push the analysis beyond abstracted notions of worker agency and subjectivity, and therefore beyond facile understandings of organizing across difference and divisions. The intersectional, multi-scalar framework created a foundation for examining how the historical structuring of inequality out of difference—a process intrinsic to capitalism—produces a complex web of hierarchies of economic and moral worthiness; this enabled an illustration of the complex effects of difference and stratification in shaping worker subjectivity and worker agency.

In the search for new organizing paradigms that are relevant to current formations of the working class, our conceptions of worker agency and power should be shaped by an understanding that these are historically embedded; intertwined with changes in industries, economies, and social, political, and legal landscapes, the fact of hierarchies of labor and value continues to shape the *conditions* for organizing, including the necessity of grappling with what it means to organize across difference.

This framework contributed toward an ‘expanded’ class analysis (Kalb 1997; Steur 2014) that is relational and dynamic, expanding class analysis in two key directions, serving as a bridge that productively demonstrated the interplay between structure and subjectivity. This expansion was accomplished in the first place through recognizing the ways that race, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship fundamentally structure and organize class, and are therefore integral, rather than subordinate, to class analysis. By tracing the development of complex hierarchies of labor, the

analysis avoided a simplistic, additive view of how workers differently experience marginalization, and instead drew a nuanced web of the ways stratified valuations of labor have been used to create an array of shifting and historically contingent positions within the working classes.

The second direction in which this theoretical framework expanded class analysis was through creating space for deeper insight into how workers themselves experience the hierarchies of labor and value. By centering the perspective of workers themselves alongside documentation of organizing campaigns, this thesis contributed toward moving our analyses of working class movements beyond narrow, economistic conceptions of ‘worker consciousness’ and into the territory of subjectivity. This enabled me to demonstrate through the life stories in Chapter Three how workers differently experience the openings and constraints of work in ways that are shaped by race, citizenship, gender, family responsibilities, and shifting temporal and spatial orientations.

Building on Gordon and Lenhardt’s (2008) theory of work as a pathway to belonging, I used oral histories of three workers to highlight this broader web of factors shaping how workers experience the hierarchies of labor. The use of life histories to explore subjectivity allowed the analysis to give due attention to the multiple, shifting, and fractured experiences that workers negotiate internally, shaping their evolving notions of what is just and what is possible. As subjectivity highlights the ‘ongoing work of reflexivity, monitoring the relationship of the self to the world’ (Ortner 2005:45), it directs us to focus on meaning, value and identity as they shift over time, rather than simply focusing on whether decisions made align with purported ‘true interests’.

Building a bridge between the dynamic, reflexive processes of subjectivity and the will to participate in collective action, the life histories of Chapter Three revealed the workers’ ‘double consciousness’ (Du Bois 2008) and ‘peripheral vision’ (Zavella 2011) as spaces that could hold both an ‘ethos of resistance’—an oppositional consciousness—and an ‘ethos of survival’. Organizers strived to

activate hope and an oppositional consciousness through tapping into workers' sense of justice and experience of exploitation, and building structures of solidarity; but for many workers, their consciousness of dependency (Nash 1979), experienced acutely beyond the workplace through the lived experience of precarity and caring responsibilities, deflated their sense of organizing as a viable means of effecting change. This insight speaks to the need for organizing that meaningfully reaches beyond the workplace, recognizing that workers' agency and subjectivity are embedded in the collective fabric of families, communities, and society—the fabric of social reproduction.

Chapter Five highlighted the intertwining nature of economic value and moral worthiness, detailing the 'moral economy' through which workers at Sweet Tooth Bakery interpreted changes in working conditions and conceived of what was just and fair. I argued that the bakery owner and management used the trope of 'family' to obscure class distinctions between workers and management, while also mobilizing post-Fordist ideals of flexibility, competition, and 'enterprising' workers. When the bakery expanded from small retail shops into a large factory site, many workers perceived the changes in working conditions as violations of the moral economy, and they anchored their grievances in the symbolic image of the shift 'from family to factory'. In the face of degrading conditions, many workers asserted their worth through evaluations of work ethic and the value of their labor. Yet these assertions of worthiness did not only serve to bolster workers' opposition to the boss—some workers wielded discourse about work ethic in ways that perpetuated divisions. While the BWC campaign built its demands around these rising grievances, the organization was not able to significantly overcome the fragmentations of the workforce; without building strong structures of solidarity such as an active, representative organizing committee, workers were not able to cultivate solidarity and model the possibilities of collective action.

BWC organizers sought to channel these experiences in a way that created ‘new spaces for hope’ through structures of solidarity such as the organizing committee and two going public actions. The owner of the bakery, on the other hand, aimed to diminish workers’ sense that solidarity was a viable alternative through mobilizing ‘honey and vinegar tactics’ that both heightened workers’ sense that organizing was a risk and also aimed to reaffirm maternalistic work relations as a source of workers’ sense of security and worthiness. The analysis revealed the affective qualities of solidarity and collective action, arguing that *feelings* of solidarity emerged for some of the workers who participated in the going public actions, yet the infrastructure of the campaign—its structures of solidarity—were not sturdy enough to bridge the feelings of solidarity into a *culture* of solidarity (Fantasia 1988) that could overcome divisions among workers. BWC was ultimately unable to convince enough workers that the organization could become a source of security that could overcome workers’ experience of precarity in their lives beyond the workplace, and their experiences of tension and divisions on the shop floor.

Confronting divisions

These findings underscore the critical need to directly confront difference and divisions—and particularly, racialized divisions—among workers when organizing, cautioning against reliance on the abstract idea of an automatically shared ‘worker identity’. While it is widely recognized that racialized divisions have long been a tragic stumbling block in the US labor movement, there has also been a persistent strand of thinking that believes, often implicitly, that these divisions will be overcome by revealing to workers that this is an elite strategy of ‘divide and conquer’, thus prompting workers to shed their ‘false consciousness’ and unite in solidarity. Yet turning an intersectional lens onto the historical structuring of these hierarchies of labor, the ongoing structuring of them in the workplace, and the subjective experience of them makes it clear that

overcoming these divisions is not a matter of ‘fixing’ false consciousness and showing workers that their ‘true interests’ lie in worker-to-worker solidarity. The analysis demonstrated both the material differences in workers’ structural positions and the accompanying coercive pressures, as well as the subjective experience of different openings and constraints, social and moral value, and imagined possibilities. This textured view of difference within the working class suggests that solidarity, though a widely revered aspiration, is not as simple a matter as we might hope; it is difficult to achieve and maintain, and must be defined in practice. For labor organizing to cultivate the possibility of sustained solidarity, it is necessary to take seriously the imperative of building a worker organization’s *internal power*, fostering spaces of deep democracy where these differences can be confronted and worked through by workers themselves; this builds on the insights of other scholars who have studied labor organizing across difference (Goldberg 2014a; Stuesse 2016). Deeply shifting current power structures requires engaging with the complex hierarchies and intersections of oppression in order to create space for those who are marginalized to shape new visions and forms of leadership.

Of course, the *vision* of solidarity unionism fits well with this call, given that it seeks to center workers’ agency and leadership in service of solidarity; further, BWC aimed to model itself in part on Local 8, the IWW union that represented an inspiring high point of interracial unionism for a decade in the early twentieth century. While worker centers push back (implicitly and often explicitly) against the historical tendency of the mainstream labor movement to place class analysis before racial or gender analysis (given that their membership is often defined by race, national background more than or equally by industry or occupation), this has not precluded these organizations from encountering persistent challenges in organizing across difference. Yet the prevalence of diverse workforces across many low-wage industries necessitate that we actively focus our attention on dismantling the hierarchies of labor through organizing; zooming out to a wider frame, cultivating

solidarity across difference is also critical to expanding and revitalizing the labor movement as a whole.

The rugged terrain to be crossed toward solidarity and collective action is shaped by myriad forces—structural hierarchies and histories, workers’ lived experiences of these, organizational strategies, and both the seeming inertia and capricious movement of social, economic, political and legal conditions—all of them shaping the potential for imagining and acting on alternative possibilities. The constraints and possibilities that emerge are fluid, a narrative unfolding through the interplay of structure and agency. Arrival at solidarity is not inevitable, and certainly not inevitably permanent; solidarity must be defined in practice.

Appendix

List of interviewees

Name (pseudonyms)	Position	Race, nationality, immigration	Age at time of interview
Sara	BWC staff	Ecuadorian, immigrant	31
Adam	BWC staff	White, US-born	mid-30s
Luis	BWC staff	Mexican-American	27
David	BWC staff	Mexican-American	early 30s
Alex	BWC staff	White, US-born	late 50s
Christopher	Sweet Tooth Bakery worker	African American	33
Cameron	Sweet Tooth Bakery worker	African American	36
Fernando	Sweet Tooth Bakery worker	Mexican, immigrant	46
Jon	Sweet Tooth Bakery worker	Asian, immigrant	early 30s
Rafael	Sweet Tooth Bakery worker	Mexican, immigrant	32
Sam	Sweet Tooth Bakery worker	White, US-born	27
Raúl	Harvest Bakery worker	Mexican, immigrant	late 40s
Manuel	Harvest Bakery worker	Dominican, immigrant	56
Carlos	Worker at different bakery where BWC canceled campaign	Central American, immigrant	38

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