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# The Value of Care Labor

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WGS Capstone

## The Value of Care Labor

We are all connected through care. We exist in a network of caregiving, yet this reality is denied. The labor of care has and continues to be devalued in the USA. This oppression is deeply embedded in the fabric of our country, producing ripples that leave no one unaffected. Ai-jen Poo, a national and global leader of the domestic worker movement believes,

“care is something we do; it’s something we want; it’s something we can improve. But more than anything, it’s the solution to the personal and economic challenges we face in this country. It doesn’t just help or comfort people individually; it really is going to save us all” (2015, 9).

In some form, we are all touched by this web of care. A feminist perspective deconstructs care labor by analyzing its importance and the factors that have led to the labor’s devalued status. The domestic worker movement is forging the way in the struggle for respect, dignity, and protections for care: care labor, care providers, and care recipients.

A multi-pronged approach is necessary in order to restructure and value care. We must think of carework as embedded in discriminatory history, as increasingly global labor, and recognize the symbiotic relationship between those who give and receive care. The legacy of domestic worker subjugation, resistance, and organizing informs and fuels the current domestic worker movement and how they are developing their organizing models and strategies. In order for the USA to thrive, we must restructure how we care for one another and include care workers. This will require the state to take further responsibility to meet people’s care needs and protect workers, for the privatized market to be regulated in just ways that prevent exploitation, and for communities to support and collaborate across varying experiences, cultures, ethnicities, and issues, “it takes personal and social transformation to tackle the more fundamental challenge:

revaluing the labor of care” (Klein and Boris, 239). To overcome this challenge, organizing around domestic worker rights and dignity is essential.

The supply and demand of domestic workers and the structures of constraints that have created the current landscape of care, inform the domestic worker movement. With a unique position in history, society, and the labor market, domestic workers are fighting to take more control of their laboring process. They are building from a legacy of oppression and the close proximity to humanity in which carework puts people, to catalyze further action and inspire a reinvention of how the labor movement can function to elevate all workers. Domestic workers understand that care is central to life and society because they see the need and impact of their labor. Ai-jen Poo explains that,

“any time a single person becomes disposable, it's a slippery slope. You see, the cultural devaluing of domestic work is a reflection of a hierarchy of human value that defines everything in our world, a hierarchy that values the lives and contributions of some groups of people over others, based on race, gender, class, immigration status -- any number of categories” (2018).

This knowledge helps care providers see people in all of their dimensions and understand that hierarchies hurt everyone. Domestic workers are instead building lateral connections between intersecting issues and organizations. Their active resistance to the recreation or reinforcement of hierarchies helps the movement remain inclusive. Domestic workers are organizing to protect the human rights of vital, vulnerable workers. Simultaneously, they are fighting to shift cultural understandings of care and develop a society that respects care workers, recognizing their labor as important and dignified. Care workers are forging new paths for how we can care for and respect one another.

Care labor is not a binary. It can be defined in a multitude of ways because there are innumerable ways to show and practice care. Depending on one’s social, historical position and

the systems of constraint they experience, the kind of care one gives and needs varies. But within this fluid landscape of care, there are patterns of who historically has done the majority of the carework in highest demand. For the purpose of this essay, I will define carework as the labor “of looking after the physical, physiological, emotional and developmental needs of one or more other people” (Barker, 43). I will focus on “interactive care” which Nancy Folbre, a feminist economist, defines as “work in which concern for the well-being of the care recipient is likely to affect the quality of the services provided” (Folbre, 2012, 1). Which is distinguishable from “support care” which she defines as,

“work that enables interactive care... Although emotional attachment does not enter our definition of care work, we argue that it often plays a crucial role in the development of concern for the well-being of care recipients” (Folbre, 2012, 1).

This differentiation outlines carework as direct and emphasizes its intimate and emotional nature.

In the eyes of dominant United States society, this labor has been defined as trivial and unproductive. The development of this construction stems from a historically gendered and racialized division of labor. In the USA, care labor often occurs within some version of the Western family structure, which was born from patriarchy. The word family stems from the Latin *familus*, which translate to ‘a man and his servants’. This illuminates the reality “that throughout much of the ancient world wives were the property of the husbands” (Barker, 19). We must recognize the origins of the division of labor and how it has been enforced and perpetuated over time. Servant work is expected, not compensated. “Women’s work” continues to be expected; unfairly and unevenly compensated. The responsibility of care giving has been placed onto women.

“Caring is more than feelings that women have; it is a specific kind of labor that women perform that requires that women constantly organize and arrange their lives to meet the need of others ... a life-defining phenomenon in women’s existence and medium through which women are accepted into to feel that they belong in the social world” (Misra, 389).

This is deeply engrained in society, accompanied by the expectation that this responsibility will not be questioned. I will be using the title of domestic worker to describe people who for pay participate in caring labor as house keepers, nannies, and homecare providers. Domestic workers are those who engage in the paid labor of taking care of homes, children, elderly, disabled, and ill people.

Carework makes all other work possible. Following WWII, feminists began pushing against the language of social reproduction and instead began to use the framing of care labor in order to emphasize the inherent “centrality of love, empathy, compassion, and connection” (Barker, 42). “Social reproduction” insinuates that the value in care labor comes from preparing workers to contribute to the wage market economy. The intimate role this labor serves in society can not be negated. Care is a fundamental link between social and economic relations. Often, the person receiving care is dependent on the care giver. Care labor is constituted by the relationship between the person giving and the person receiving care (Poo, 2018).

Questions of responsibility and obligation are central to conversations about care labor. Who is obliged to care for who? Are the existing patterns of responsibility functional and just? Each nation has a different balance of state, market, community, and family care in order for their nation and people to survive. The USA has never relied on a state solution and neo-liberal structuring has continued to limit accessibility to state funded care support. This affects paid and unpaid care providers and all people in need of care assistance.

Domestic work is predominantly done by women, disproportionately, by women of color and immigrant women. Currently, there are approximately 2.5 million women who work to care for our families and homes in the USA (National Domestic Workers Alliance). “By 2022, the number of personal care aides in California will have increased by 52% to over half a million

workers. “Nationally, domestic work is our fastest growing industry and is expected to produce a million more jobs—jobs that are, of course, local and cannot be offshored—in the next decade” (UCLA Labor Center, 10). Health and medical advancements plus an aging baby boomer generation has led to the current “elder boom”. Over the twentieth century, the life expectancy of Americans has increased by thirty years (Poo, 2015, 25). Elders are the fastest-growing demographic in the USA, “by 2035 the number [of elders over eighty-five years old] will be 11.5 million, while 77 million baby boomers will be turning seventy. A century ago there were only 3.1 million seniors over sixty-five in the United States – one in twenty-five Americans. By 2020, it will be one in six” (Poo, 2015, 24). America’s massive demographic shift has resulted in increased demand for care labor and long term support. But there has been little public support given to provide aging people and this rapidly growing workforce needed services. Under current public programs, on average, families themselves would pay half of those substantial costs” (UCLA Labor Center, 10).

The type of care in demand is also shifting. Elders and people with disability and illness are advocating for more in-home care options. Domestic workers help provide people with the needed support to feel empowered and independent living at home, rather than having to move to assisted living and nursing facilities. Although there are many people who are happy with their assisted living arrangements, there has been an increased demand for options outside of institutionalization. Also, not all assisted living homes are created equal. Impoverished elderly and disabled people are sent to the less desirable institutions. In-home care provides family and friends with an alternative from choosing between being full caretakers or putting family in assisted living homes, giving them the opportunity to maintain employment and other life

pursuits, in addition to caring for their relatives and friends in need (UCLA Labor Center, 10).

The devaluation of care labor is both a devaluation of care providers and people in need of care.

“Care has been undervalued not only because women’s work is more generally devalued but also because society has devalued persons who need care (especially if they are from subordinate groups) as weak, unproductive, or carriers of disease, Society has also belittled persons needing or providing care because they sometimes require help from the state or charitable organizations, in a country that increasingly vilifies dependency, without recognizing the interdependence upon which we all rely” (Misra, 398).

These societal shifts demonstrate the need for care support restructuring. We must emotionally and physically provide for these people and challenge dominant conceptions that devalue care.

Patricia Sauls, a domestic worker and activist stated in a 2018 interview, “It’s a gift to be helpful to people who are hurting. I want people to know that people who care for the elderly also deserve care. I would want them to fight more for equitable pay and benefits for people who do the work” (Sauls). We cannot expect someone to care for our grandparents, children, disabled, and ill community members, and homes when the care is not reciprocal.

The movement for domestic worker rights is gaining traction like never before. A primary cause of this momentum is that domestic work is a connecting link between many of the most dire issues being faced today in the United States:

“an aging society and an inadequate national long-term care policy, the rise of a vast medical-industrial complex, the neoliberal restructuring of public services, the need for disability rights, the crisis of domestic labor and decline of family income, new immigration and systemic racial inequality, the expansion of the service economy, and the precariousness of the American labor movement” (UCLA Labor Center, 10).

Priscilla Gonzalez, who led Domestic Workers United for 10 years, also believes “intersectional feminist thought coupled with the increase of women of color and immigrant women in the US feminist community” (Bapat, 25) has energized momentum. Although there have been feminists, such as Black and labor feminists, making connections between race, class, and gender for decades, Gonzalez believes there has been an upsurge in “third-wave feminist” thinking. By this

she means there has been an increase in people's awareness and desire to think intersectionally, which has made the movement accessible to a wider range of people. Unlike past labor, feminist, and social movements in the USA that have perpetuated the exclusion of domestic workers, domestic workers are working to empower all marginalized people, "the movement's objective does not end with more regulations; the overarching goal is achieving empowerment and justice for a vulnerable population of workers, revealing domestic labor's value to the broader economy, and establishing its social and cultural dignity" (Bapat, 16). This combined with increased numbers of vulnerable workers and workers of color has created a demand for spaces of solidarity and politicization. The domestic worker movement follows a philosophy of "transformative organizing" in which the goal is to transform the whole system and consciousness of those who participate or interact with the movement. This approach "is in revolutionary opposition to the power structures of colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism in its current form, which is imperialism" (Mann).

The momentum of the domestic worker movement is growing out of centuries of struggle and resistance. As people come together to organize, they are building on the foundation that has been laid by care providers, domestic workers, activists, and politicians of the past. They have learned from their challenges and successes and the current movement reflects those historical gains, obstacles, and conditioning.

#### Feminist Epistemology-

The dominant way in which knowledge is created and valued erases voices, including the voices of those who do care labor. Feminists argue that intentionally or not, dominant epistemologies "systematically exclude the possibility that women could be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge" (Harding, 1987, 3). Care and domestic workers hold unique and valuable

epistemic privilege, situated knowledge. In order to envision liberating structures of care, we must listen to those who most intimately and fully understand the complex dimensions of care, which are the people who give and receive it. We must listen to their demands of how existing systems need change, while simultaneously making space to develop and implement alternative ways for care to function and flourish. This erasure makes it critical to bring light to untold stories and learn from past organizers and care givers.

As Sandra Harding, along with many feminist researchers, would argue, “all knowledge bears the fingerprints of the communities that produce them” (Harding, 1992, 57). All knowledge is socially situated. So, it is important for me to acknowledge that this essay is being written from my position as a white, female, college student, who has neither been a domestic worker nor an employer of a domestic worker.

#### Economic Framework-

The exclusion of domestic workers from recognition and protection is because it has been understood to be economically beneficial to those who hold power, which has primarily been white men. It is also due to who historically has done this labor: women, particularly women of color, immigrants, and slaves. Structures of constraint such as heteronormative patriarchy, racism, and capitalism have caused and continue to perpetuate exclusion from protections afforded to other workers. Using Folbre’s economic framework of structures of constraint is a helpful lens in analyzing domestic worker exclusion and resistance. Structures of constraint can be defined as,

“a set of asset distributions, rules, norms, and preferences that empower given social groups. These structures locate certain boundaries of choice, but do not assign individuals to a single position based on ownership of productive assets. People occupy multiple, often contradictory positions, because they belong to multiple groups” (Folbre, 1994, 51).

Structures of constraint develop through intersecting cultural, historical, and economic forces, and help us understand the complexity of each social position. Domestic workers are often situated in an axis of multiple oppressed identities, “domestic worker exploitation represents a key front in the feminist movement in the United States because it fundamentally necessitates understanding and organizing against race, gender, and class-based oppression at once” (Mercado and Poo, 2). In order to break down oppressive systems of constraint, we must understand the complexity of the systems under analysis. Constraints define our feasible choices, so we must find and expand within the cracks that lead us out of the current systems that devalue care and limit people’s choices inequitably.

As one’s assets become fewer, their choices also become narrowed. “Assets comprise the resources that individuals and groups bring with them to the decision-making process, their individual endowments” (Folbre, 1994, 40). The most basic assets are time and energy. Systems of assets are constructed by sets of rules that often appear invisible but have the effect of distributing unequal access to power, which is often in the form of money. “Rules formally define the parameters of acceptable behavior... they govern the distribution of assets, by stipulating rights of inheritance and taxation” (Folbre, 1994, 40). Specified through law and legal contract, rules are often used as a tool to create segregated groups of people and sustain their economic position in society. These economic groupings then determine the care people receive. Not all Americans are granted the privileges of full citizenship. In 42 states, domestic workers are legally excluded from state labor protections. In some states, lacking the correct paperwork makes you legally more vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse. Inheritance rules often shape the amount of care one can buy. As the USA privatizes care, this has become a pressing problem.

Non-legal norms also contribute to the distribution of assets. “Norms are, in a sense, implicit rules. But they are distinct because they are not enforced by an external authority, such as a boss or a judge” (Folbre, 1994, 41). Instead they are enforced through social conditioning and interaction, they are collective habits and patterns that are resistant to change. Edna Ullmann-Margalit, a professor of philosophy, writes that norms function as,

“a sophisticated tool of coercion, used by the favored party in a status quo of inequality to promote its interest in the maintenance of this status quo. It will be considered sophisticated to the extent that the air of impersonality remains intact and successfully disguises what really underlies the partiality norms, vis. an exercise of power” (Folbre, 1994, 42).

For example, the norm is for mothers to take more time off work than fathers following the birth of a child. This is a social norm that has been reinforced by law, given that in most positions, maternity leave is more accessible than paternity leave.

Preferences are both biological and socially constructed. Assets, rules, and norms impact our preferences. People with shared experience often hold similar desires. Collaboration and group identity are often created based on shared preferences, which can be described as “what individuals like and how much, the dimensions of desire” (Folbre, 1994, 42). When a group of people have been treated or mistreated in comparable ways, their ideas of how they’d like to see things change is often overlapping.

A structure of *collective* constraint can be understood as it “fosters group identity and creates common group interest. It generates patterns of allegiance and encourages forms of strategic behavior based on social constructions of difference” (Folbre, 1994, 57). Often it is through collective race, class, and gender constraints where solidarity is found. Collective constraint also motivates action.

Structures of constraints are an important framework in thinking about the development and current understanding of care labor and the position of those who do that work. Each of these dimensions; assets, rules, norms, and preferences, have impacted the landscape of carework today. Although structures of constraint are not inherently oppressive, “structures of unfair constraint are defined by unfair advantage” (Folbre, 1994, 65). Unfortunately, our society is built from and continues to foster a plethora of unfair constraints. Moving through my historical analysis of the value and organizing of care and domestic work, structures of constraint have been a helpful framework to understand domestic worker empowerment and oppression.

“Women’s Work”-

Domestic work was regulated through unfair law which deemed it as lacking economic value long before the founding of the United States.

“In 1643, farmers and business owners were subject to a tithing, or tax, for their black female and male, as well as white male, servants who worked in the fields, and who were therefore seen as producing wealth. By contrast, white women servants did not trigger a tax, because ‘the law presumed they worked inside the home and were not producing wealth’” (Bapat, 30).

Instead, domestic work was seen as a natural tendency of women. Carework has continuously been conflated with biology, essentialized as naturally feminine. The construction of “women’s work” has resulted in a gendered division of labor. This labor is seen as a “labor of love”, beyond the confines of the economy. The conception of domestic work as rooted in love and inherently intimate has fueled assertions that this makes the labor unworthy of compensation or labor protections (Bapat, 19). Some people believe that if care labor is compensated, it will be tainted, but “paying for caring labor does not negate the emotional content of this work” (Barker, 43). Other people, primarily conservative, male thinkers, justify the current gendered division of

labor by arguing that women are simply more drawn to family life, this innate inclination making them more willing to sacrifice for the family.

“But even if this answer is partially correct, it raises further questions. Are these family preferences biologically determined, culturally constructed, or both? If they are culturally constructed, even in part, then men and women may seek collectively to modify them. The relative power of given groups will influence the eventual outcome” (Folbre, 98).

Neo-classical economists may argue this labor division is natural but feminists counter this, stating that men naturalize women’s ability to do this work in order to escape sharing the responsibility or paying for it. Women’s “tendency for household labor” comes from layers of social construction, not biology. Often, women are in fact highly skilled at care and domestic work, and they should be able to do and excel in that labor if they desire. At the same time, we must recognize that for many women, structures of constraint have trapped them into doing this labor with little or no compensation, protection, or recognition. In 2015, it was reported that the average American women of 15 years or older spent twice as much time doing household labor compared to their male counterparts. This study excludes emotional labor, which would further increase this gender gap (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Whether it is paid or unpaid labor, “women’s work” has been characterized as requiring less skill, resulting in the perception that it is less valuable work compared to work done outside of the home. Due to gendered expectations for women to be inherently nurturing and caring, domestic work is often seen as “help”, feeding into a narrative that refuses to see domestic workers as “real workers”.

The Racialized Legacy of Carework-

Carework has been further devalued by its historical legacy as the work of Black women. In addition to gender, this is another structure of constraint that affects both the view and treatment of domestic labor. During the slave and post-emancipation eras, the majority of domestic workers in the USA were Black. Domestic work employed over half of Black women

prior to WWII (Barker, 49). Primarily in the West and Southwest, Latinas and Native American women also worked in the domestic workforce before industrialization. Through the slave era, womanhood garnered respect when pure, virtuous and white. White women's ability to achieve this idealized femininity depended on the labor of Black women. Terri Nilliasca, a union organizer, explains that Black labor enabled white women to maintain their "virtue" while having their gendered labor duties completed for them, "proper Black womanhood was defined as service to the creation of that White woman ideal" (Nilliasca). This became part of a racialized caste system, in which no affluent Southern women would consider domestic employment.

"In the Southeast United States, it was the enslaved African woman's labor that enabled the aristocratic White woman's lifestyle... Many White women accepted and perpetuated this racist division of labor in order to elevate their status in heteropatriarchy" (Nilliasca).

This is exemplified in the famous archetype of "Mammy", the "quintessential embodiment of the ideal of the Black woman in service to the White woman" (Nilliasca). This portrayal feeds into today's notion of women of color being fulfilled and content serving white families, negating recognition of the skills required and hardship endured through the labor. As a result of gendered and raced constraints, women of color continue to be most vulnerable to the impacts of care work's devalued status. To this day, privileged women have a lot to gain from maintaining the status quo, leading to compliance and reproduction of inequality (Folbre, 1994, 84).

The Private/Public Division of Labor-

Industrialization and the creation of the private/public division of labor has played an important role in the history of carework in the USA. Seen as a private space, the home became separated from the worlds of work, commerce, and government, which has contributed to "troubling informality and an absence of standardized practices" for domestic workers (UCLA

Labor Center, 11). The American Industrial Revolution, which was made possible by the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the labor, resources, and materials provided by the plantation economy, marked a shift from a subsistence-and-agricultural based economy to an economy based on wage labor. The majority of production moved from within the home to increasingly in machine-aided factories (Mercado, 1). Spanning over the course of a century, with a peak from about 1880-1920, the private and public spheres were defined as separate (Rees). As labor outside the home gained hourly wage, carework was rendered economically void. The development of a market economy created a dependency on male wage earners, further diminishing the value of care and home labor (Nilliasca).

“The ‘cult of domesticity’ arose in the first half of the nineteenth century, solidifying boundaries between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ home sphere. The heterosexual family became sanctified as a respite from the competitive industrial world, and women became responsible for the creation of that sanctuary. The resulting regulatory and legal frameworks furthered this social construction, treating housework as indistinguishable from other private family matters while treating paid labor as relevant to legal doctrine” (Nilliasca).

The private/public division is a hierarchical structure. Wealth and power disproportionately flow “upwards” and out of the private sphere. This binary is at the core of domestic worker oppression, “it is a distinction invented by White supremacy and heteropatriarchy, and codified into law in key locations that facilitate the exploitation of Black and immigrant women” (Nilliasca). This system upholds a private, individualized family structure that has continued to serve as conducive to neoliberal development. This division fosters fragmentation, lack of regulation and professional respect, and continues to be a leading obstacle faced by domestic work organizers in the movement today.

A History of Organizing-

There are many forces that make care and domestic work invisible, but the pushback against this erasure is not a force to overlook. Domestic workers and allies have continuously built collective resistance and power, creating a foundation for the organizing strategies practiced and trajectory of the movement today. In this section, I will analysis impactful historical moments in organizing history and how they contributed to the development and current state of the movement.

In 1881, Atlanta Washing Society, a women's laundry worker organization, sent a message out to their employers, "We mean business this week or no washing" (Bapat, 49). They demanded a raise of one dollar per dozen pounds of laundry or they would strike. When nothing changed, 3,000 laundresses went on strike (Nadasen). The city responded with punitive measures, fining and arresting organization members and discouraging businesses and families from hiring Washing Society members. This moment highlights domestic workers' use of mass mobilization. It also demonstrates how those in power, including the state, have resisted recognizing the value of domestic labor by creating rules and norms to maintain unjust realities. Tera W. Hunter, a scholar of African-American history and gender, writes that although wage improvement for laundry workers was not achieved immediately, positive changes did result from the strike, such as "a greater appreciation for the fact that these women should not be taken for granted because of the role they played in the city's economy" (Bapat, 50). The racial and gendered constraints Atlanta Washing Society members shared helped build solidarity and forge collective identity between laundresses. This served as a politicizing tactic for developing the strike and recognizing these Black women as visible and valued workers. Between "1870 to 1940, there were twenty domestic workers' unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, in various parts of the country" (Bapat, 50). In 2012, We Dream in Black emerged from

Atlanta's legacy of domestic worker organizing. We Dream in Black is NDWA's Atlanta based branch. They work to empower and amplify the voices of Black domestic workers and contribute to a diverse and just society and economy for all. This organization fights for pay, professionalism, and respect for domestic workers, honoring the Washing Society strike as a pivotal moment in building the domestic worker movement.

Jane Street, a domestic worker and union organizer, led a short but successful fight in Denver, Colorado, using unions to challenge unjust constraining structures experienced by domestic workers. In 1916, Street founded the Domestic Workers Industrial Union, IWW Local No. 113. This challenged androcentric union rhetoric that claimed women were "unorganizable" and built solidarity among domestic workers. Street expanded the vision of union function, using the union as a platform to not only demand better wages and hours but as "a vehicle to rebalance the power dynamic between mistress and servant" (Bapat, 50). At this time, domestic workers were subject to many constraining systems that excluded them from accessing political power. But, the Domestic Workers Industrial Union worked from within their confines, creatively pushing boundaries from inside. Street's organizing tactics centered around defragmentation of workers and educating employers and employees. She compiled an extensive list of domestic workers, deploying a variety of tactics to obtain the needed information. She published false job ads in the newspaper for a wage above average as one strategy. As women inquired about the position, she would respond with information about the union. Her strategies were designed to build domestic worker community and empower workers. The union compiled and distributed a blacklist of abusive employers. They also created spaces for workers to gather to share grievances and tips. Street published an article describing the abuse experienced by domestic workers and laid out her agenda. She wrote,

“The majority of housewives follow an aged tradition of looking down on those who serve them and their families and refuse to practice patience or give counsel or regard the women they hire as human beings with like impulses, like passions, like aims and hopes as their own...The only way to arrive at a practical understanding is for the girls to become more intelligent and for mistresses to become more humane, and for both to remember that any labor, however human, may be dignified by the laborer” (Street, 1916).

In a letter distributed to members of the Domestic Worker Union in 1917, Street wrote,

“stick to your domestic workers' union, fellow worker, stick to it with all the persistence and ardor that there is in you. Every day some sign of success will thrill your blood and urge you on! Keep on with the work” (Street, 1917).

She was adamant that unions were an effective tool to challenge class division and hostility.

Material changes, such as improved wages and benefits, were secured through this union. But the Domestic Workers Industrial Union also brought an awareness of unjust power dynamics to the official agenda of domestic worker organizing. Respect between employer and employee is a vital step towards domestic worker liberation still being organized around.

In 1934, Dora Lee Jones, a Black domestic worker and organizer, successfully established the Domestic Worker Union in Harlem, New York. Thinking creatively about unionizing a fragmented workforce, Lee and fellow organizers networked with Black ministers. Collective religious and community structures of constraint helped unify domestic workers and mobilize action. Ministers and church communities helped facilitate the dissemination of information. They spread understanding of how the acceptance of horribly low wages and participation in the domestic worker “Bronx slave markets”, which had formed during depression years, hurt both them and the larger community (Matthaei, 170). Instead, they were encouraged to tap into union power. The Great Depression devastated the Black community, with unemployment at unprecedented high. By 1932, approximately half of the Black working population was out of a job (Library of Congress). Within the first year of DWU’s founding,

seventy-five thousand local Black domestic workers had become union members. This incredible organizing feat is a testament to the rampant job insecurity, growing strength of American unions, and use of creative, community based approaches to organizing. DWU secured better wages and working conditions for workers and inspired organizing efforts to sprout up in other cities (Bapat, 51).

The Young Woman's Christian Association (YWCA) also had lasting impacts on the domestic worker movement. Inspired by ideas of social reform from the Progressive Era, YWCA efforts led to the creation of one of the most important organizations committed to reforming domestic labor throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1928, YWCA, which was composed of primarily white, middle-class women, founded the National Council on Household Employment (NCHE). NCHE hoped by making domestic work more appealing, including for white women, they would expand the pool of domestic workers and satisfy an increasing, unmet demand for domestic labor (Bapat, 51). They believed better treatment of workers would improve the level of work performed. This new organization prioritized reconceptualizing the "mistress/maid" relationship to be more contractual. This push for voluntary contracts between employee and employer was an attempt to improve working conditions and "professionalize" domestic jobs (Dudden).

The NCHE is known for the "code for maids" they developed. This "code" pushed the boundaries of union demands. NCHE's success in making demands more radical was made possible due to the organization's lack of class and racial constraints. They worked to create educational programs for employers and employees to make employment standards clear, including overtime, paid time off, and limits on work hours. These standards spread throughout the USA over the 1930s and 1940s, but the organization's struggle to gain employer support eventually led to its disintegration.

During the development and implementation of the New Deal, YWCA advocated to bring domestic worker rights to the attention of the FDR administration. Their attempts were received with little enthusiasm. The National Recovery Administration, a New Deal agency created to codify fair competition and labor practices, rejected the proposals for domestic worker inclusion, asserting that, “the homes of individual citizens cannot be made the subject of regulations or restrictions and even if this were feasible, the question of enforcement would be virtually impossible” (Bapat, 51). This decision left domestic workers in a vulnerable position, often working in unprotected isolation. Within the private/public binary that frames worker protections and rights, it was seen as unfathomable that the home, seen to be private in nature, could be regulated by the state. The essence of the private white home was too “sacrosanct for government intrusion and the housewife was seen as not capable of complying with legal mandates” (Shah and Seville)<sup>1</sup>. Similar logic was used during congressional debates regarding the exclusion of domestic workers from federal minimum wage, “legislators opposed the minimum wage bill because they claimed it would bring ‘the federal bureaucracy into the kitchen of the American housewife,’ and they wanted to protect the domain of white middle-class women” (Nadasen). The argument against the regulation of the “women’s sphere” is a strategy used to deflect responsibility off of policy makers and onto women. Race and class driven exclusion is cloaked in the rhetoric of respect for women and their private space. This rhetoric was utilized in New Deal debates. But the NCHE began to lay “the groundwork for justifying labor protection in the home as it changed the public's perception of the home as a place that could not be regulated and standardized” (Shah and Seville). The domestic work industry continues to be primarily unregulated, largely because of the private location it takes places in.

New Deal Exclusion-

The New Deal codified many ideas of social reform appropriated from social workers and feminists of the Progressive Era. Legislation was passed with the intention of creating opportunities and safety but not all citizens were considered equally. The New Deal primarily benefitted white, male citizens. Southern Senators, not wanting economic disruption, refused to sign the legislation if domestic work and farmwork were included. In the South, this labor was considered to be the work of slaves, so the exclusion of these sectors under new protections reinforced a racial caste system. Although the original National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) legislation had included protections for these workers, in order to pass the NLRA, compromises were made with Southern Senators. This resulted in the exclusion of the majority of Black workers (Poo, 2015, 88). At this time, 4 out of 5 Black working women were employed in agriculture or domestic work (Matthaei, 170). The passage of the NLRA maintained oppressive structures of constraint on which the American economy rested, “reinforcing a racial regime of white domination, and a labor regime of extreme exploitation” (Bapat, 55). The New Deal Era codified the exclusion of domestic and agricultural workers through the NLRA of 1935, the Social Security Act of 1935, and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (Nilliasca). Domestic workers were not granted the right to form unions or to bargain collectively. Working against these constraints, domestic workers have continued to find ways to organize.

#### Union Feminization-

The relationship between unions and domestic workers is one of great tension. A combination of legal restrictions and exclusive union culture has left domestic workers without bargaining power throughout the majority of union history. Restrictions against female membership and narrow ideas of what constitutes as “work” are examples of exclusive constraining rules and norms. The feminization of unions began to pick up momentum in the

1930s and 40s. Women's union membership rates tripled in the 30s, although, the proportion of organized women within unions remained low, at 8 percent in the 1920s to 9 percent in the 1930s. There were many active women participating in union organizing, but Ruth Milkman believes this feminization is largely due to the "logic of industrial unionism", the general increased surge of union organizing, rather than any intentional institutional changes to include women or change the gender consciousness (Cobble, 16). Even though there were ulterior motives behind the union inclusion of women, women took advantage of the openings within constraining structures and joined. Throughout the mid century, unions grew rapidly, impacted by increased wartime production. The rate of women's union membership skyrocketed during the peak of WWII, plummeting as the war concluded, wartime job positions lessened, and men came home. But, the proportion of unionized women remained higher than prior to WWII. By 1956, 18 million American workers were organized compared to under 3 million in 1933, 3.5 million of these workers were women, 18 percent of all union membership (Cobble, 17). This growth in membership fueled a consciousness around workers' rights, resulting in new demands for inclusion in politics and the economy.

#### The Rise of Labor Feminism-

Between the 1940-70s, labor feminism was on the rise. This movement became prominent in social reform efforts, their active presence and influence tied to the power of the union organizing that many of them were part of. Labor feminists fought for women to gain control in both the wage market and the family sphere. The realities of women's lives were central to their class politics. They wanted state, market, and community support for policy and societal shifts that would allow women to "combine wage work and family life and would not penalize women for childbearing and child rearing. They wanted a sufficient standard of living

for workers and a world in which caregiving was as important as wage earning” (Cobble, 144). The post-depression labor feminist movement stemmed from the “social feminists” of the Progressive Era. Their understanding and approach to reform was intersectional and their work focused around the reality that women’s oppression stems from a myriad of sources, requiring a multitude of social reforms that would speak to the varying constraining structures that women experience. They were in opposition to “equal rights feminism” as well as the ERA, believing it to be individualistic. Instead, they promoted “full industrial citizenship”, meaning the right for all people, including women, to gain the right to market work and secure the “social rights, or the social supports necessary for a life apart from wage work, including the right to care for one’s family” (Cobble, 4). Changing the rhetoric from obligation to care to the right to choose to do carework was an important step in the development of women’s rights and liberation.

#### Alternative Models of Labor Organizing-

Domestic worker organizers of the time shared a philosophical framework with labor feminists and in many ways could be identified as such, but there was little tangible connection between domestic worker and union organizing. The majority of domestic worker organizing happened outside of the union movement. Instead, their organizing was grounded in community, in an awareness of class-struggle that was based in a race-gender analysis. Domestic workers held distrust for labor unions. This stemmed from unions’ long disregard for domestic work as “real work”. Unions had historically and continuously been structured to support a demographic different than the demographic of domestic laborers. This combined with a tendency of labor unions to prescribe to “bread and butter” politics, meaning they tended to the economic security and advancement of their members rather than caring about the elevation of broader worker rights, made labor unions unappealing to many domestic workers. Although labor unions and

domestic workers have not always aligned in their organizing visions, their histories have intertwined and impacted each other. Carolyn Reed, a leader in the domestic worker movement, believed that labor unions helped minimize wage disparity among American workers and that, “if it had not been for unionizing in this country, we would have a royal class.’ Her vision was to create union-like structures and collective formations for domestic workers that could similarly reshape the political landscape” (Nadasen). Different than the existing unions though, her vision was one of domestic worker self autonomy and would be led by domestic workers themselves. Reed believed domestic worker rights were the last front of labor organizing. By achieving equity and justice for domestic workers, all workers would be elevated.

#### The Civil Rights Movement-

Domestic workers were foundational within the Civil Rights Movement. The CRM inspired increased levels of domestic worker organizing and nurtured and trained generations of Black domestic workers how to organize and fight for their rights. In the summer of 1968, the National Domestic Worker Union of America was founded and Dorothy Bolden was appointed as president. NDWUA was neither national or a union, but they had a passionate, devoted membership and made big strides in achieving domestic worker rights and dignity. Their name speaks to their boldness. Black domestic worker organizers believed that civil and economic rights were inseparable. Civil rights, such as voting rights and rights to education, needed to be combined with the struggle for economic justice. Domestic worker leaders thought “economic security was the foundation upon which black freedom should be built. In advocating for domestic workers, activists and reformers would address both racial inequality and poverty” (Nadasen).

NDWUA relied on community. They built a collective identity around being domestic workers and organized to claim respect and fair treatment for the work they did (Nadasen). NDWUA recognized that carework had been delegitimized for reasons associated with class, race, and gender marginalization. With the energy of the Civil Rights Movement, NDWUA built off of past domestic worker organizations, developing strategies of organizing and disseminating knowledge. Central to their organizing was their model of leadership which highlighted the voices of poor, Black, domestic workers. Domestic labor was not deemed as real work, but in community, domestic workers built collective power and “in the 1960s and 1970s brought attention to undervalued household and reproductive labor, claimed their rights as workers, and in the process redefined the very meaning of work”. Through this, they began to change the public perception of domestic labor as “real work”.

They practiced organizing in public to combat the obstacle of a fragmented workforce. Often, this organizing took place on buses as women went to and from work. Bolden rode every bus line in Atlanta in an attempt to reach as many domestic workers as possible. Organizing in public continues to be an effective strategy used in the current domestic worker movement.

#### Second-wave Feminism-

Prior to Second-wave feminism, the expectation that women would perform domestic labor was rarely up for dispute, particularly in public sphere conversations. It was seen as women’s duty, done for free in their homes. *The Feminine Mystique* of 1963, written by Betty Friedan, is exemplary of dominant Second-wave feminist rhetoric. It pushed back against the mold of an “ideal American woman”, challenging the notion that to be a fulfilled woman, you must be a happy, obedient housewife and mother. The book was mainly targeted to white women. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century middle-class womanhood was defined as being a

housewife and raising children, a duty perceived as dignified and fulfilling. But as the feminist movement gained momentum during the 60s and 70s, more women began fighting for equal opportunities, seeking employment outside of the home. Some women joined the workforce after being inspired by the popularizing feminist ideologies. Other women joined out of necessity. By 1980, 49% of married women were participating in the wage market (Nadasen). The number of dual income families in the USA has doubled since the 1960s (UCLA Labor Center). This shift was also supported by the economic moment in the USA. The economy was suffering due to a shrinking manufacturing sector, rising inflation, and high unemployment (Nadasen). Cheap alternatives to goods historically made at home, such as bread and clothing, were becoming more common, resulting in the depreciation of household production.

“Traditional restrictions on women’s work become quite costly, creating incentives for reallocation. Women who once busied themselves spinning thread or growing food can contribute more to family income by seeking paid employment” (Folbre, 1994, 98).

As it became more profitable to families for women to work outside of the home, certain patriarchal norms and rules began to lift. In the late 70s and 80’s, state attacks on welfare left single mothers vulnerable, so they began working at higher rates in order to compensate for lost state support. A new norm was in construction. To be an “empowered, modern woman”, a paid job was necessary. But, within the complex dimensions of feminism, there were many who resisted this narrative.

Myra Wolfgang, a labor feminist of the 70s, “accused Betty Friedan and other feminists of demeaning household labor, romanticizing wage work, and caring not a whit about the needs of the majority of women” (Cobble, 3). Gender norms prevented men from taking on care responsibilities. For a man to be seen as feminine was and continues to be socially intolerable, showcasing the devalued status of women and work associated with femininity. To this day, as

more women enter the wage market, “women are promised a form of success defined entirely in male terms – yet another devaluation of feminine abilities” (Folbre, 101). The question being asked was how to assimilate white women into the white man’s sphere, rather than thinking about how the wage market needs to be deconstructed in order to reconfigure gender roles equitably. As more women went to work, a raced and classed patriarchal system was perpetuated, leaving domestic labor undervalued and largely in the hands of immigrants and women of color. Gender inequality experienced by privileged women was absorbed by less privileged women (Folbre, 1994, 118). This patterned has continued into the present.

#### Changing Industry Demographics-

Through the mid to later 1970s there was an exodus of Black women from the domestic work industry, leading to a shift in the demographics of who was doing this labor. The number of Black women working in the private sphere began to decline following the end of WWII. In 1950, 42% of employed Black women worked as domestic workers. This percentage was down to 19.5% in 1970. By 1980, the proportion of Black women employed as domestic workers had shrunk to only 6% (Nadasen). This rapid decline in Black domestic labor was boosted by the CRM, the breaking down of job discrimination, and increased access to higher education. Many Black women, took any opportunity they could to get a job in the formal-sector as a way to defy the history of slavery and Black servitude to white people. Many Black women found themselves in job positions doing institutionalized, social reproduction, caring labor in the public sphere, such as nursing or waitressing.

The landscape of immigration law was changing in the 1960s, resulting in an increase in immigrants in the United States who would work for low wages. The Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the blatantly racist National Origins immigration policies. A quota system

which prioritized skills and family reunification was enacted as replacement. The implementation of per country quotas changed border dynamics. Strict regulation of the Mexican-American border created a large population of undocumented immigrants in the US, who became vulnerable and seen as criminal.

As the number of women in the workforce increased through the later 1900s, the default of who was doing the care labor began to change. The state did little to adapt public infrastructure to care for those who for centuries had been the responsibility of women. The solution to providing care was thought to be private. Rather than addressing the care of children, elderly, disabled, and sick people as a public, collective issue, families viewed their need for care support as a private problem. As more women entered the wage market outside of the home, created need for care was considered a dilemma of the family rather than that of the state. Double-days for mothers were increasing, working outside of the home only to return to a second job of caregiving; cooking, cleaning, listening. Most families began finding patchwork solutions to care. Networks of extended family, community, neighborhood organizations, and public, government-sponsored programs helped close the new gaps. Many families also began relying on private employers or organizations (Misra, 394). The demand for domestic workers increased. Women of color and immigrants were the majority of who filled this demand.

“When the unpaid work of raising a child became the paid work of child-care workers, its low market value revealed the abidingly low value of caring work generally—and further lowered it... the declining value of childcare results from a cultural politics of inequality” (Hochschild, 43).

The continued devaluation of carework did not come from a decrease in need but from a public perception of who was doing this labor.

Impacts of Neoliberal Globalization on Domestic Work-

As the number of people moving for employment opportunities increases due to globalization, the supply of care labor is changing. Immigration is feminizing, reinforcing a historical pattern of women from developing countries and disadvantaged ethnic and racial groups providing care to more affluent people and households. “The ILO estimates there are at least 67 million domestic workers over the age of 15 worldwide, 80% of which are women. About 17% of domestic workers are migrant workers” (ILO- Domestic Workers). In the United States, domestic workers are disproportionately immigrants (Wallis). Globalized care continues to rise. About one in every five women across the globe is a domestic worker (ILO- Migrant Domestic Workers). The infrastructure built through colonialism maintains dependence on colonial nations. This is demonstrated by the flow of domestic workers which is comprised primarily of women from the global South migrating to countries in the global North<sup>ii</sup>. As more American women build careers based on masculine models, a problematic system is being perpetuated, “two women working for pay is not a bad idea. But two working mothers giving their all to work is a good idea gone haywire. In the end, both First and Third World women are small players in a larger economic game whose rules they have not written” (Hochschild).

Neoliberal globalization has become pervasive around the world. The USA, along with other Western nations have been the leaders of dissemination and implementation of “free market” economics and ideologies of privatization. Neoliberalism is a commitment to dismantling social security networks and state institutions that are meant to support citizens through financial troubles, health and safety problems, and other life challenges. Neoliberal structures privilege deregulated markets, transferring power from governments to private firms. These supposedly free markets are managed and controlled by corporate and finance power, driven by their interests rather than the needs of the general population, resulting in dramatic

global wage disparity (Harris, 1541). The expansion of neoliberalism in the USA reinforces the privatization of care services such as healthcare, childcare, eldercare, and education. Neoliberal power has also attacked worker access to unions and collective bargaining.

“Neoliberalism has increased employer power in four main ways: corporate capacity to move jobs and investment globally; supply chains that enable firms to disown responsibility for poor wages and conditions; a vastly increased pool of unemployed and underemployed workers; and public sector restructuring” (Lafferty, 374).

Neoliberalism forces domestic workers to work harder in order to resist fragmentation and privatization. Carework cannot be outsourced. But, neoliberalism works to strip workers of public benefits and protections. It also holds private employers less accountable to pay proper wages and create proper workspaces. The lack of state funded care services to replace the unpaid work of women in the home is a leading factor in the creation of the current American care deficit. For those who do not have the resources to access a private solution, the lack of public support poses as a serious concern. In the USA, the free market is where solutions are supposedly found, leaving the care of people in the hands of capitalist firms and the private family sphere. Patchwork solutions to meet care needs continues to be the method most Americans take to support themselves and families. Highlighting patterns of who is doing care labor helps make sense of the changing landscape of care and why domestic work organizers are responding as they are.

The patriarchy and neocolonialism embedded in globalization needs to be addressed. Mary Romero argues that “the globalization of domestic service contributes to the reproduction of inequality between nations in transnational capitalism...domestic service is increasingly characterized as global gender apartheid” (Nilliasca). Globalization enables wealthy nations to displace their oppressive gendered responsibilities onto poorer women, who disproportionately are women of color. Many American women who need jobs to pay for life necessities also hire

people to work in their homes because collectivized resources like subsidized childcare are rarely available. Not all employers of domestic workers are wealthy. In 2016 in California, “half of homecare employers [were] low-income. The majority of these employers (54%) [were] retired, followed by those working in service jobs (16%) and those not working due to a disability (8%)” (UCLA Labor Center, 19). But, neo-colonialism is sustained through a forced dependence between poor countries and wealthy countries. Currently, many economies of poor nations in the global South depend on the remittances sent home from immigrant family members. Neocolonial and neoliberal economic relations are reinforced and upheld on a global scale because,

“the remittances earned by domestic workers stabilize third-world nations that otherwise would not be able to provide for basic needs of their citizens due to free trade agreements and structural adjustment programs imposed by and for the benefit of first-world economies. In addition, the forced migration of large segments of a nation's population creates havoc in home countries, where families are separated and important social ties are lost” (Nilliasca).

But also, it is important to recognize how vital these remittances are for many families. Katie Joaquin, the campaign director of the California Domestic Workers Coalition said that,

“There is an entrenched devaluation of immigrant women workers. Domestic workers are breadwinners of their families throughout Latin America and Asia. In so many ways they are uplifting the economies of their countries through remittances. We see this as an international struggle that is critical to the leadership of women” (Chitnis).

This power dynamic is largely absent in the conversation around carework and globalization. Immigration and moving for work is part of living in a globalized world. There are a range of pull factors that lead to work migration and this is not inherently bad. But, it is important to recognize that ways these systems function as extensions of colonialism and interrogate new ways for humans to access mobility without being exploited.

Care Deficit-

A “care deficit” has developed in the United States. Our historic structure of care, which has required women to take on the responsibility of care labor, is in a pinch (Barker, 43). An increasing demand for monetary income, has reduced the amount of unpaid labor the average woman can contribute to her family. Family members participate in increased hours of wage employment in order to support themselves and those they are responsible for. Women’s ability to access paid work in a wider range of fields has decreased their willingness to produce free labor (Misra, 387). As it becomes more common for families to move away from one another due to education, work, or other incentives, people are in need of increased non-familial support. Our system of care is reliant on an invisible, uncompensated labor force that no longer exists as it has. This has led to a growing demand for care and domestic workers. More women are striving to achieve jobs and careers that are primarily built for male capitalists, such as competition, building a reputation, and having someone else do the family work. As women join the workforce, the role they have played in the past comes into question.

“The wife oversaw the family, itself a flexible, preindustrial institution concerned with human experiences which the workforce excluded: birth, child rearing, sickness, death. Today, a growing 'care industry' has stepped into the traditional wife's role, creating a very real demand for migrant women” (Hochschild).

As the “caring industry” grows, so does the flow of immigrants moving for domestic labor employment.

#### White Feminism-

Dialogue around the politics of care labor often remain centered on “women’s oppression”, negating the intersecting vectors of power, privilege, and oppression at play. This was exemplified in the uproar of 1993, after it was exposed that President Clinton’s nominee for Attorney General’s childcare provider was an undocumented citizen. Many people were enraged, claiming the attention being brought to the situation was only because Zoe Baird was a woman.

Baird's male counterparts would never be criticized for their childcare arrangements because it would not be an issue at question. Awareness for the struggles of Black and immigrant domestic workers was not part of the conversation. Attention remained on the powerful, white woman's unjust experience of this double standard. Lilian Cordero, Baird's nanny, was deported and white feminists did not object (Nilliasca). Migrant workers' lack of paths to citizenship was not part of the national conversation. The domestic worker movement is actively resisting this dominant narrative of care and are striving to address the web of constraining structures and histories that have led to the devaluation of care and those who give it.

#### Current Domestic Worker Organizing-

Domestic work continues to be devalued and vulnerable labor. Many domestic workers struggle to support their own families. In 2012, NDWA published the results of a national survey which found that 23% of domestic workers and 67% of live-in domestic workers were paid below the state minimum wage. As of 2018, domestic workers are still excluded from:

- “Forming unions or bargaining collectively due to the National Labor Relations Act.
- Live-in domestic workers are excluded from the overtime provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- Domestic workers are excluded from Occupational Safety and Health Act Protections although they routinely work with toxic products.
- Federal anti-discrimination laws, including the Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, generally cover employers with multiple employees, which is not the case for most private households” (Wallis).

This demonstrates the slow legal progress and lack of state care for domestic workers. Domestic work continues to be disproportionately done by women of color, “out of every nine foreign-born female workers with a high school degree or less works in an in-home occupation” (Wallis). But the domestic worker movement is growing, expanding, strengthening, and making impactful, positive change. Domestic workers organize within the state, market, and community realms, working towards a multifaceted approach to dealing with the oppression of domestic workers

and valuing of care. The National Domestic Worker Alliance is working to address all of these areas. They are the leading voice and network of domestic workers in the USA, and I will be focusing on their work through my analysis of current organizing. In 2007, 13 local organizations from across the United States came together to form the alliance. NDWA's mission is to achieve,

“respect, recognition and labor standards... to guarantee labor protections for domestic workers by winning legislation at the state level, pushing for regulatory changes at the national level, through the International Labor Organization at the global level, and elevating domestic workers as key leaders in building a powerful movement for social and global justice” (National Domestic Workers Alliance).

NDWA is striving to build a movement that will help end exploitation of all workers. Many organizations are working to achieve these same goals through a variety of strategies and tactics. The majority of organizing is centered around community, dignity, and protections. They are striving to elevate all workers and create quality care options for people in need. This alliance is actively connecting groups around the USA and globe. They are organizing using a variety of approaches that speak to different ways domestic work has historically been devalued and workers subjugated.

#### Community Building-

Community is a pillar of the domestic worker movement. It is a place of empowerment, leadership building and organizing, collaboration, and a place to access resources. Domestic workers rarely share a central work location. This fragmentation is due to multiple factors, such as the privatization of care and the nuclear family structure which isolates women. Domestic workers have found ways to overcome this obstacle and history that is structured in ways that separate them. Community is essential in order to build collective identity, power, and momentum. It serves as a tool of resistance.

Without a central work location, organizers have had to think creatively about organizing the domestic workforce. Learning from past organizers such as Street, Lee Jones, Bolden and their respective fake ad, church network, and bus line organizing, domestic workers continue to utilize public space. Organizing happens at playgrounds, laundromats, bus stops, and health clinics. This technique is used to share information about rights and resources available to workers which has helped build community and a domestic worker network (Bapat, 85).

Empowerment is fostered within community, which is important for workers to reclaim their value and to envision repaired systems of care. Through community, spaces are created where domestic workers are able to share stories and be honored in their experiences; in the joys and struggles of their work. Tapping into collective constraint is critical to build solidarity and collective identity. It also reframes “women’s work”, as powerful, highlighting femininity as collaborative and strong. Community challenges the neoliberal economy and culture that functions to isolate people and their struggles. Domestic worker organizing emphasizes the importance of the different skills and experiences people bring to the table, honoring that everyone has something to contribute and with support and practice, everyone can be a leader and organizer.

Community workshops are a successful tool to cultivate empowerment. A wide range of workshops are offered, and curriculum and material change in order to best cater the different communities being served. The overarching goal of domestic worker empowerment remains consistent. Workshops promote and teach hard and soft skills while guiding workers to,

“understand the systems that oppress and exploit women, workers, and immigrants... providing workers with the tools to ‘create their own vision for the world, build multi-racial alliances, and gain the tools to launch community education and organizing campaigns” (Bapat, 82).

Many organizations offer educational workshops about the history of domestic work in the USA and how it is tied to exclusion; a legacy of slavery, sexism, and unfair immigration laws. This method is helpful for workers to locate themselves in a larger context. For some domestic workers, learning the history of organizing and resistance inspires them to become politically involved. NDWA offers “know your rights” workshops surrounding carework, immigrant rights, labor trafficking, and worker rights, attempting to spread information about issues that are most commonly relevant to domestic workers.

Mujeres Unidas y Activas, MUA, is a California based organization and an affiliate of NDWA. MUA is a lead organization in the development and execution of “know your rights” workshops. Their work is catered to their community needs, which is majority Latina immigrant members. They offer educational workshops and information surrounding domestic worker rights, immigrant rights, and the rights of undocumented citizens. After completing a MUA leadership training, Lupe Zamudio, an undocumented domestic worker from Mexico, said, “All my life, I walked with my head down. I didn’t know about my rights as an immigrant worker. Today I walk tall and realize that I have value in the society as well” (Chitnis). Learning about their rights or lack of rights also has a politicizing effect, often resulting in domestic workers becoming involved in the movement.

Hard skills are being taught in community as well, helping professionalize the industry and counter the narrative of domestic work as “unskilled” labor. The provision of English language classes is an example of this. Language learning supports worker voices. The tool of English proficiency helps workers negotiate contracts, express needs, and stand up for themselves in the workplace. Other hard skills include first-aid and CPR training, wheelchair transferring, and the prevention of hazardous housecleaning, as well as many others. This

professionalization challenges the mammy archetype of a women of color is a relationship of servitude with her employer. But it is important to be weary of the language of “professionalization”. In some cases, this rhetoric has been embedded in work models of effectiveness and objectivity, which strips carework of its emotion and intimacy, “listening, talking, holding hands, or even kissing scraped knees may not meet procedural standards, but may be the right thing to do” (Misra, 390). Work can be professional without having to fit into a bland, capitalistic model.

The domestic worker movement promotes a leadership model that comes from the community, for the community. Empowerment work feeds into a mission of leadership building. Building leadership within the domestic worker community is essential for domestic workers to find their voice. NDWA emphasizes this model and states that they are,

“not only aiming to change the way domestic work is viewed and valued, but we are also creating new leaders in our labor movement. Our workforce development programs empower domestic workers -- women workers who are often silenced -- to speak up, become leaders in their communities, and make positive change for themselves and others” (National Domestic Worker Alliance).

Leadership ripples out. As domestic workers are organized and gain confidence in their leadership, they are able to organize other domestic workers, further expanding the movement. This movement honors and makes space for different leadership strengths and styles.

The movement for domestic worker rights is a model of cross-issue, cross-ethnic, cross-community collaborative organizing. Collaboration is a priority and strength of the movement. This is exemplified through NDWA, which is “powered by over 60 affiliate organizations - plus local chapters in Atlanta, Durham, and New York City - of over 20,000 nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers for the elderly and people with disabilities in 37 cities and 18 states” (NDWA labs). This showcases the immense energy being put into partnership building.

Very few NDWA's affiliate organizations focus solely on domestic worker rights. But the partnerships are aligned through a shared understanding that collaboration is necessary in order to improve conditions and rights for domestic workers. Central to the domestic worker movement is an intersectional analysis and approach.

The interconnectedness of collective constraints has led to many partnerships and collaborations between organizations, groups, and ethnic communities.

“There is tremendous strength to link with other organizations. We knew that in order to win, we had to be grounded in the leadership of immigrant women and build the strength of coalitions. A lot of worker organizations have worked hard to shift the visibility and consciousness of domestic work ... and the Bill, and the organizing of immigrant women also helped to shift the consciousness of policymakers” -Katie Joaquin (Chitnis, 46).

Strategies and organizing models used to foster worker leadership, economic self-sufficiency, and personal and political empowerment are shared through collaboration (Bapat, 83). There are many roles that need to be filled in the struggle for domestic worker rights. Partnerships are necessary.

Domestic workers commonly find jobs and organize through ethnic community networks. Although, cross-ethnic collaboration is not always easy due to language and cultural differences, there has been a big push to make the movement multi-racial and build a collective domestic worker identity that transcends race. MUA's work is centered around organizing Latina immigrants and community. In 1994, Manos Cariñosas was established. Their first large project provided home-health care aides within the Latinx community opportunities for trainings and jobs. This organization both connected workers to employment and gave them support to help them thrive in their positions.

Community organizations also serve as resource centers. NDWA exemplifies this in the benefits they offer members, which, in addition to workshops, include healthcare support, life

insurance, discounts on entertainment such as tickets to movies and sport events, and member only events. Other common resources offered are childcare, legal help regarding immigration, housing, and resources for women experiencing domestic abuse.

#### Legal Protections-

Fighting to establish fair labor standards is a primary goal of domestic worker organizations, a direct response to historic and persisting exclusion. Domestic workers are advocating for domestic worker bills of rights, regulatory changes, and gaining protections and recognition. NDWA is working on the local, state, and national levels, connecting organizations and coalitions, while simultaneously building multi-national collaboration.

In 2010, New York was the first state to enact a landmark Domestic Worker Bill of Rights, which, “was the first law in the United States to establish statutory employment protections for domestic workers” (Bapat, 65). Since then, seven other states have passed Domestic Worker Bills of Rights, including California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Oregon. Each state’s bill of rights is different, but they all work to expand protections for domestic workers. DWBR provide benefits that the majority of American workers already have access to, such as sick time and compensation for overtime (Quinn-Szcesuil). Many organizers are also fighting for other basic protections that domestic workers are lacking such as rest breaks, social security, and health coverage.

Gaining bills of rights is an important battle within domestic worker’s struggle. The language of a bill of rights brings the struggle of domestic workers into the public sphere, making visible the “invisible”. The bill of rights legally acknowledges that care and domestic labor is a part of the economy and that workers are worth protecting. This legal recognition breaks down unfair constraining rules that have long excluded workers. Domestic work is

generally an unregulated, unprotected industry, resulting in extreme worker vulnerability. “First-world capitalist economies such as those in the United States rely on a steady supply of immigrant women workers who labor with little to no protections under the law” (Nilliasca), which makes the implementation of standards, protections, and systems of legal enforcement critical. Enforcement is lacking in the domestic work industry, solutions for which are being addressed within community, the private market, as well as in legislative discussion.

The implementation of DWBR and other material protections is only one piece in the fight for respect and protections for workers. There is debate over whether it is worth spending limited assets such as energy, time, and money on these bills rather than using those assets to make change through other channels. Can a DWBR “adequately address the forces of racism, heteropatriarchy, immigration, and structural neoliberalism that all contribute to the subjugation of domestic workers?” (Nilliasca). Some domestic workers argue that law is inherently conservative. When legal changes are made in order to destabilize preexisting power structures and patterns of wealth distribution, there is a danger that rather than reconciling inequality, “legislative reform within the neoliberal framework will not end the subordination of domestic workers, but will instead lead to a legal system that transforms itself to maintain the current unequal distribution of wealth and power” (Nilliasca). For example, undocumented workers are exempt from protections. Also, the New York DWBR was used by the state to codify official exclusion of companionship workers from protections. Companionship work is a subset of domestic work which has been defined by the FLSA. Prior to the passage of the bill, companionship service providers did not receive FLSA coverage, which had been granted to the majority of domestic workers in 1974. Through the passage of the DWBR, this exclusion of companionship workers was extended into the official language of labor protection, exempting

home health care aides and other workers who fell into this category. Now officially omitted, it has proven more challenging for activists to gain rights for these workers. Inclusion into labor laws also restricts certain tactics of organizing, for example the passage of the New York DWBR restricted workers' ability to "use of secondary boycotts (boycotts and/or picketing of customers of the employer) as an organizing tactic" (Nilliasca).

Although not all campaigns for legal change are successful, organizers strategically use all exposure to help bolster their movement. For example, in 2006 Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed the "Nanny Bill", the first domestic worker focused legislation introduced in California. His decision was disappointing, but contributed to a raised awareness for domestic workers and the economic value held by their labor. Emma Delgado, a domestic worker and MUA organizer said, "He vetoed the bill, but he can't take away everything we have learned. We are ready for our next campaign" (Bapat, 81). For many, the "Nanny Bill" was the warm up in their activism.

In 2011, AB 889, California's first DWBR was vetoed, this time by Governor Brown. He claimed that although he supported fair pay and safe working conditions for domestic workers, his veto came from concern that this legislation would harm the elderly and disabled communities. His veto explanation stated that he was afraid the passage of the bill would create unfair impacts, financially, and emotionally on disabled and elderly persons.

"What would be the additional costs and what is the financial capacity of those taking care of loved ones in the last years of life? Will it increase costs to the point of forcing people out of their homes and into licensed institutions? Will there be fewer jobs for domestic workers? Will the available jobs be for fewer hours? Will they be less flexible? What will be the impact of the looming federal policies in this area? How would the state actually enforce the new work rules in the privacy of people's homes?" (Brown).

Nancy Becker Kennedy, is one of many disability rights activists who agreed with Brown's veto decision. She was in opposition to this bill because she felt that rather than helping domestic workers or disabled people, it would institutionalize care and help the wrong people. For

example, the majority of people who give 24-hour care are family members. She was skeptical that this bill would give family members who didn't care for their disabled or elderly family the ability to claim overtime money which would take money out of the health system for the elderly and disabled communities. She is in full support of domestic worker rights and improved working conditions, but felt this bill had too many loopholes for the government, corporations, and individuals to profit off of disabled people (Becker Kennedy).

Danielle Feris, a founder of Hand in Hand: Domestic Employers Network and organizer around the bill, believes the real reason for Governor Brown's veto was due to pressure from the Chamber of Commerce. Governor Brown was influenced by their political position because he needed their support for the passage of future legislation. This demonstrates the bureaucracy that legislative change has to find its way through (Bapat, 95).

The California Domestic Worker Bill of Rights, AB 241, was finally passed in 2013, extending overtime pay and protections to domestic workers. By the time it passed, the bill had been watered down significantly from the original proposal which had included a wider scope and depth of protections. This legislative dilution process is common and is an obstacle that organizers are constantly resisting. Organizers and politicians within the domestic worker movement are working to craft legislation that supports workers, elderly, and disabled people without perpetuating systems of oppression. They are also working to find more reliable systems of enforcement, which is the most challenging and unregulated dimension of domestic work labor law. Kamala Harris has announced that she will propose a National Domestic Worker Bill of Rights to congress in 2019. Although governmental changes are slow, the domestic worker movement has gained enough momentum to bring their agenda to national attention.

Social Innovations-

A prong of the domestic worker movement is social innovation through the private market. Domestic labor has never had high value in the private market of the USA.

“Problems arise when commodification rests on exploitation... When caring labor is left to private markets, its value and compensation are low... traditional dualistic views of masculinity and femininity define maternal love as natural. Being natural, this trait does not require training or skill; therefore, it does not deserve a high rate of pay” (Barker, 51).

There is currently momentum within the movement to take advantage of the private market by using entrepreneurship and technology as platforms for social change. This is an attempt to use powerful platforms for domestic workers to claim agency over their labor and selves. By asserting themselves into the private market, domestic workers are hoping to decrease exploitation. These social innovations are creative ways to protect workers outside of governmental bureaucracy. There is space for flexibility on private platforms and people who experience exclusion from state protections, such as undocumented workers, have more safety and accessibility in this sphere. It is also crucial to maintain an awareness for how private social innovations may feed into neoliberal individualism, supporting the American trend in divesting from social security nets and state labor protections. This is part of the balance of taking advantage of the benefits of the private innovations while not forgetting that the state is also responsible for protecting and respecting workers and providing appropriate opportunities for care.

NDWA founded NDWA Labs in 2015, as a place to engage with the private marketplace and experiment with social innovations that would improve the private sphere as a workplace for domestic workers. Partnering with the growing private, technological sector is a strategy to create space for domestic workers and women of color to be part of the development of the economy. NDWA Labs approaches old solutions with innovation, striving to,

“build smart and practical tools and products, and form partnerships that help us reach and lift standards for domestic workers. In particular, NDWA Labs has been experimenting with ways to use technology to ensure we are shaping a future of work that works for all of us, not just some of us” (NDWAlabs).

They have launched many campaigns that stem from exclusion and previous organizing. Alia and the Fair Care Pledge are two leading innovations.

Alia is the first portable benefits platform. Founded in 2018, by Palak Shah, the Social Innovations Director of NDWA, this platform provides an innovative solution to domestic worker exclusion from benefits. Domestic workers have long struggled with a lack of reliable, accessible benefits. This deficiency creates instability and stress. The fragmentation of domestic workers, informality of contracts, and history of legal exclusion from labor protections have worked to cultivate a context where domestic workers are usually without benefits. Alia works from within the cracks to provide domestic workers with paid time off, life insurance, and accident insurance. Alia benefits are attached to the employee rather than the employer, making it possible for domestic workers to manage their own benefits and have multiple employers contribute to their benefit fund. Alia functions by employers making contributions, a suggested \$5 per cleaning or shift, to their employee’s Alia account. Then, when a worker needs paid time off, they are paid from their account. They can also use the funds to buy insurance plans (Alia). One domestic worker who was interviewed about her experience with Alia said,

“I felt very happy because they valued me like a person not like an employee. Its very important because when I get sick, I call Alia and I tell them I need a sick day, and so they send me the day’s pay. Life insurance is very important because it covers us for a certain amount. So if something happened to me, that money is going to be very useful to my girls” (Introducing Alia: A Personal Story).

Conditions that have unfortunately come to define the reality of domestic labor in the USA such as a lack of access to a safety net, control over hours, and economic and job security, are becoming the norm for increasing numbers of workers in the USA. Alia is part of a solution to

this problem. If this model of portable benefits is able to support domestic workers, it could likely be used to support many sectors of vulnerable, under-protected workers (Introducing Alia: A Personal Story).

Another monumental campaign is the Fair Care Pledge. This platform was created through collaboration between NDWA and Hand in Hand. This pledge helps domestic employers understand their responsibility as an employer. There are many companies and people who want to be a good employer but don't know what that entails. In 2016 in California, 49% of domestic employers made contracts for their employee without seeking advice. Many contracts are verbal, resulting in an informality that is almost always most harmful to the domestic worker (UCLA Labor Center, 11). This campaign lays out clear steps employers should take to ensure their business or home is a fair workplace. This includes fair pay, clear expectations, and paid time off (Fair Care Pledge).

Hand in Hand was founded in 2010, emerging from the struggle for the passage of the NY Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. Through organizing around this bill, many employers and allies realized the importance of recreating the role of domestic employers as active participants in the fight for domestic worker rights, dignity, and protections. Hand in Hand sees employees and employers as interconnected. They also believe that some unjust working conditions are due to employer poverty and lack of recourses. Because of this, Hand in Hand is simultaneously working to transform the care sector to be accessible and affordable to all people while protecting, compensating, and respecting the people doing the labor (Hand in Hand). Awareness of the Fair Care Pledge has spread between employers as well as employees sharing the pledge information with their employer. In 1916, Street was working to shift the power dynamic of employer and employee, and Hand in Hand is continuing in that legacy.

The newest dimension to the domestic worker movement is the global vision. Domestic workers are building a global network of organizing efforts and solidarity. In 2011, the International Labour Organization Convention 189, *Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers*, was adopted. This was a landmark moment for the global movement and has since catalyzed further global action and organizing. Analysis of the global movement is outside the scope of this essay, but the history and present moment of the American domestic worker movement is inseparable from the global reality of domestic labor.

As the domestic worker movement continues to grow, we must honor all those who have been part of the struggle and those who continue to organize around the creation of a more caring world. Within a context of interdependence, in some way, we are all both giving and receiving care. We must change that language of care from a “right” to a “need”, in order to emphasize it as,

“perhaps the most powerful expression of our human interdependence... The more we embrace the role of caregiver ourselves, and the more we affirm the experience of depending on others in order to get our own needs met, the clearer our realization will become of how vital care work is” (Poo, 2015, 69).

The domestic worker movement is a product of historical organizing and oppression, organizers and domestic workers are continuing to resist and fight for alternatives. Constraining structures limit the rights, dignity, and respect of careworkers and care labor, but they can be lifted.

Organizing and change needs to happen within the realms of the state, market, and community.

The conception of domestic work shifts to be global, creating new pathways to citizenship and an expanded conversation around global citizenship. The state needs to prioritize people’s ability to access care and workers need to receive reciprocal care. Men need to take on more responsibility of care giving and be held accountable. This can happen through the expansion of paternity leave

and teaching young boys to care. We need to continue dreaming of reform and supporting the voices and wisdom of care workers from the past, present, and future.

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Notes

<sup>i</sup> Lack of Protection of POC Homes-

It is important to recognize that the rhetorical strategy employed by male politicians spoke to the need to protect the private nature of white homes. Respect and protection of the private sphere quickly disappears when it is the homes of Black people, POC, and immigrants who are being regulated. The state has and continues to allow for the intrusion into homes of poor people and people of color. This is an extension of white supremacy which fosters the belief that the state and white people should have access to all spaces and information at their beck and call. This looming threat of invasion is a violent technique to control and marginalize communities. Today, this can be seen in our foster care system which disproportionately strips parents of color of their rights to care for their children. Often, this process begins through a state funded visit into a family's space, in which poverty is conflated with neglect, leading to the removal of children (Nilliasca). This is also seen in ICE raids on immigrant homes, a reality that threatens many domestic worker homes today.

<sup>ii</sup> "Nanny Chain"-

Globalization and the increase of domestic work migration has led to a phenomenon coined by Arlie Hochschild, the "nanny chain", which is "a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (Hochschild). A woman from a rich country hires a foreign-born care provider to look after her children, so that she is able to maintain her career. This care provider often leaves her own family and children to be cared for by either a grandmother, a female relative, a father or a care provider who is paid significantly less than she'll be paid. This is the globalization of mothering. These "care chains"

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have many configurations and variations, but the “feature they have in common is that the flow of caring labor is always from the poor to the rich” (Barker, 49). This geo-political power dynamic creates environments where migrant domestic workers are vulnerable to exploitation. This is a subset of neo-colonialism, where wealthy nations abuse the labor and resources of less affluent countries. This has created a care-drain in countries where there are high rates of people immigrating from domestic work employment (Barker).

A plethora of problems are produced from this flow of labor. Children of domestic workers are limited in how they are able to be with their mothers, which has been shown to make children more susceptible to illness, anger, apathy, and suicide (Hochschild). Poverty is often perpetuated through domestic service jobs where pay is low and benefits and protections are rare. The “nanny chain” perpetuates a race and gender division of labor into the future. Barker suggests that the solution will come when we challenge our assumptions of caring labor as natural and private and revalue and better compensate caring labor (Barker, 50). Non-exploitative immigration reform is also needed in order for these patterns to change.