

Grounding the Organizing of Building Cleaners Worldwide: The Role of the Justice for Janitors Model in Place.

2. Detailed Description

Objective: The objective of this research is to answer the following question: is the Justice for Janitors model a new form of global unionism for the 21st century? I seek to do this by investigating the global expansion of the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) model of unionism. The following questions are also central to this study: How (and why) has the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) exported the JfJ given that building cleaning work must be done onsite since it cannot re-locate in search of cheap labour or state incentives? What are the local motivations for pursuing the JfJ to organize and represent cleaners? What is the role of social reproduction in this globalizing model as the household endures work intensification and rising financial burdens? How is gender dynamics being shaped by this model and how does it impact organizing campaigns? Can site-specific gender issues be articulated into an unorthodox organizing model (see below) imported from elsewhere? (Mohanty, 1991; 2003; Freeman 2001). What local negotiations are taking place to successfully unroll this model while respecting the historical trajectories and institutional histories of unions in the global labour movement? These questions will be examined in a three-year ethnography on the unfolding of the JfJ in France and Australia. This account will elicit data necessary to map the topography of the JfJ and understand the developing transnational relationships of unions seeking to address the difficulties cleaners face in negotiating with a powerful transnational industry. The findings from this project will be disseminated to academic audiences, trade unions, governments, building cleaners, the global cleaning industry and the general public.

Context: Today building cleaners labour in a post-industrial citizenship climate where their conditions of work continue to decline, their wages stagnate, social reproduction is intensified, and the prospects of halting all of these remain uncertain (Aguiar 2006a). At the same time, cleaning firms are consolidating and centralizing ownership as they expand to the globe (Herod and Aguiar 2006). Given the declining conditions of work for cleaners and the increasing commonality of employers, a research program on a globalizing organizing model that sets out to tackle these developments is timely, and an important undertaking for global social justice for marginalized workers.

In the difficult and challenging political and economic context of the collapse of the post-war social contract (Bakker 1994; Carroll 2005; Harvey 1989; Vosko 2000), the deconstruction of the male standard on employment relationship and the feminization of employment (Armstrong 1996; Cranford 2004; Vosko 2000), the rise of economic restructuring (Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002), rapidly declining union density in western countries (Davis 1986; Jackson 2005; Ross and Martin 1999), and SEIU controversies within the American Labour Movement (Clawson 2009), the SEIU remains defiant and is one of the most aggressive forces in organizing workers anywhere (Lopez 2004; Waldinger et al. 1998). Many of its successes are attributable to the ideas, tactics and strategies embedded in the union's JfJ campaigns (Aguiar 2007a), including: a direct approach to organizing workers; a focus on alternative forms of organizing to bypass the National Labor Relations Board; grassroots methods of gathering strength and resiliency often through civil disobedience (Savage 1998); public shaming of building owners and managers; a focus on immigrant and visible minority workers as organizable (Milkman 2006; Waldinger et al. 1998); the national union's use of trusteeship to impose the JfJ approach in reluctant locals (Fantasia and Voss 2004: 136), employer neutrality, and a focus on women workers and social reproduction as critically important to organizing gains (Cranford 2004; Savage 2006). The success of the JfJ has elevated the status of the JfJ campaign to the "ideal model" for organizing workers in the current economy where small workplaces proliferate, culturally diverse

workforces are the norm, capital's slipperiness, and anti-labour legislation pervades (Erickson et al 2004). Yet, for all the SEIU's militancy, the union remains regionally grounded (SEIU 2004: 4), and a national strategy is only now taking shape (Erickson et al 2004). Still, the SEIU has "jumped scale" by going global (Lerner 2007). In 2004 it marked out a blue-print for the future which included developing "global strength" by establishing alliances with unions in other countries to unite workers doing the same job (e.g. cleaning) (SEIU 2004). The nature of the alliances, however, remain little explored even though the SEIU's "global partnerships" is in place in Australia with the Liquor, Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) (Aguiar and Ryan 2009) and is in assessment mode with the Solidaires, Unitaires, Democratiques (SUD-Rail) union federation (Jefferys 2006: 225-6) in France (Crosby 2006a; Mahieux 2006; Malvaud 2008). Preliminary research shows that these partnerships are key to the SEIU's global ambitions since it appointed Debbie Schneider as Head of the union's "Global Strength" effort (Adler 2006), Michael Crosby as Global Partnerships Organizing Director for Australia and Pacific countries (Crosby 2006a), Nick Allen as a special envoy to Paris (Adler 2006) and Christy Hoffman as Head of Union-Network-International's (UNI) Property Services Division in Geneva (Hoffman 2008). Recently, Hoffman replaced Schneider (Williams 2009). The JfJ model is core to all these developments.

The cleaning industry is still composed largely of "mom and pop" businesses. For instance, in Australia 80% of companies employ less than 10 cleaners per outfit. On the other hand, barely 2% of firms employ 100 or more workers but "generate 52% of industry income" (Ryan and Herod 2006: 492). The situation is similar in France: 75% of companies employ 9 or less workers, while just 5% employ over 100 workers but control two-thirds of the industry's business (Meilland and Dufour 2001: 371, fn 20; SUD-Rail 2008). The large majority of cleaners are immigrant women (Ryan and Herod 2006). In both countries cleaners endure growing work intensification, an entrenched gender division of labour, and strained pressures in the sphere of social reproduction to cope with change (Puech 2004). Further the global cleaning industry has been centralizing ownership and "substantial specialization of cleaning work [is taking place] as companies have focused upon particular economic sectors (offices versus factories, healthcare facilities versus banks), with the result that firms such as the Danish cleaning giant International Security Systems (ISS) now typically market themselves as having specific expertise in a host of arenas, [...] require[ing] quite different and unique sets of cleaning skills" (Sogaard et al 2006: 580). Cleaning skills go largely unrecognized and unrewarded in the industry (Herod and Aguiar 2006) and employers rely on migrants from the Global South to take up jobs with deteriorating labour rights (Zlolsnisky 2006). For this reason the global cleaning workforce exhibits common social characteristics (e.g. gender and culture), labour market precariousness and poor union protection (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Puech 2004).

There are four main reasons for studying the JfJ in France and Australia: (1) both countries are in the grips of aggressive economic restructuring though experiencing it in different intensities (Howell 2006; Jefferys 2000; Prasad 2005; Ross, G 1993; Ryan and Herod 2006; Smith 2004). Unions are seeking best strategies (Damesin and Denis 2005) to respond to government policies, and shrinking union density, which in France is less than 10% (Jefferys 2006) and about 26% in Australia (Griffin et al 2003: 80, table 4.1). (2) The cleaning industry in each location has fragmented; the deregulation of the labour market is pervasive, as is contracting-out of work; risk is shifting to the individual and away from business and government, while also intensifying women's unpaid domestic work, social reproduction and women's work generally (Bakker and Silvey 2008; Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Bezuidenhout and Fakier 2006; Puech 2004; Vosko 2000) (3) Because economic restructuring is spatially specific and responds and adapts to the resistance mounted against it, different industry strategies and government policies are enacted. For instance, in Australia "enterprise unionism" was pushed by the Howard government (defeated in 2007 by Kevin Rudd's Labour Party) and the labour movement's adoption of "Organizing Works" failed to stymie the decline in union membership (Griffin et al 2003). In France, different socialist governments over the last twenty-five years (Jefferys 2000; Marian 2002; Sassoon

1996) have done little to improve workers' lives through unionization (Daley 1999; Dubet et al., 2006; Labbe and Croisat 1992). (4) The JfJ seems to be at different stages of partnership and implementation in each of these two countries and this makes it attractive to study in order to discern the processes by which the model is being integrated to an existing union history and unique industrial relations regime. The SEIU is engaged in a JfJ campaign in Australia known as "Clean Start," and not yet in France save for a recent attempt to set-up a global partnership with SUD-Rail. Each of these locations will show the flexibility (or not) of the JfJ as it is managed in different locations and scales under pressing social, economic and political forces. In doing so, I hope to better assess the JfJ as the organizing model of the future of labour organizing especially in the context of debates about the "epochal changes" (Jamieson 2006: 60) the Australian Labour Movement is experiencing and enhanced by the Fair Work Act legislation of the Rudd Government, and the pessimism that French trade unions may be close to their end (Daley 1999; Labbe and Croisat 1992; Pernot 2005).

Theoretical Framework: The end of the "golden age" of liberal democratic economies (Hobsbawm 1996) not only punished workers in their workplace, domestic sphere, and in relation to the state, but showed that the existing models of organizing and representing workers were outmoded and slow to innovate to deal with neoliberal globalization (Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Gindin and Stanford 2003). Soon critiques appeared on the problems associated with the "business unionism" model of the post-war unions in North America (Moody 1997; 2007). Alternatives such as: "occupational unionism" (Cobble 1991); "community unionism" (Banks 1991/2; Tufts 1998); and "geographical unionism" (Savage 1998), each with different scalar emphasis and gender dynamics (Bronfrenbrenner 2005) began to appear to re-energize and renovate the contemporary American labour movement (Cobble 1991; Fletcher 2004; Wells 1995). It has been argued that in these developments the concept of "community" is often narrowly defined (Cranford et al 2006: 354) and workers' empowerment, in many instances, is more rhetoric than real (Savage 2006; Ross, S 2008). More importantly, the community unionism model is often bound to a locality which limits its ability to address issues that transcend community borders, or give full weight to the sphere of social reproduction (Ledwith 2006). This is crucial given the rise of globalization, which has unmoored political, economic, cultural activities and social identities from national boundaries, restricting in some cases and re-focusing in others the nation-state's role in the arena of politics (Freeman 2001; Guillen 2001; Mohanty 2003; Peet 2003). Recognizing this new context, unions have followed suit by going global in four important ways: (1) joining global labour organizations such as the Union-Network-International (UNI) for political action, (2) establishing and working through Global Unions Federations (GUFs) for coordinated action against a common company operating globally (Croucher and Cotton 2009; Windmuller 2000), (3) developing solidarity links with unions and NGOs elsewhere to organize workers across borders in the same industry or with the same employer, to push for codes of conduct, independent monitoring, worker rights petitions, etc. (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005), and (4) grassroots internationalism connecting rank-and-file workers and their activism (Castree 2000). Though important gains have been made via these routes (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005), Moody (1997: 233-237) warns about the spread of "global business unionism" in organizations such as the International Trade Secretariats (now GUFs) and Brooks (2007) about gender stereotyping in campaigns. Seidman (2007) questions the effectiveness of NGOs in securing significant workers' rights through campaigns that often sideline the workplace. Yet, there is an emerging literature on labour transnationalism that theorizes the promise, necessity, and challenges in organizing across borders (Bronfrenbrenner 2007; Fairbrother and Hammer 2005; Gordon and Turner 2000; Harrod and O'Brien 2002; Herod 2009; Stevis and Boswell 2008). Few in this literature follow the transferability of an organizing model for marginalized workers – visible minorities, women and undocumented workers - across different places, spaces and scales. Fewer still focus on social reproduction as key to workers' grievances and mobilizing for unionization (Luxton 2006). My proposal seeks to build on this more recent research by examining how one union is proposing to organize janitors globally by exporting the JfJ worldwide. Globalization,

the transnationalization of the cleaning industry, ownership and working conditions, as well as social reproduction issues, is impetus for JfJ organizing. Here I follow Ross and Martin (1999) who view unions as social actors with goals and strategies in their own right. But unions are also ‘path dependent’ given that their options are emplaced in particular historical trajectories due to the internal and external pressures they face over time. They are also male-dominated organizations which make them especially challenging for women workers, activists, and “marginal” workers like cleaners (Foley and Baker 2009; Ledwith 2006). My focus is on union relationships and internal dynamics in the adoption of the JfJ. The JfJ challenges unions’ reliance on an interventionist state for legislative changes to facilitate organizing and improving workers’ lives. This may be the remedy for unions in France that are being pushed to the sidelines by the state and finding it increasingly difficult to work with political parties for legislative change that can protect workers (Howell 2006; 2001). Therefore, my focus on a global model to organize cleaners gives rise to the following five themes and research questions, all of which will enable me to develop a better theory to organizing cleaners globally:

1. Changing unions: The increasing number of women and visible minority union members has pressed for internal reform to the culture, leadership and representation in unions (Yates 2006). This has been a spatially-marked undertaking with some unions being more successful than others in making the cultural switch to a new model of organizing workers (Bronfrenbrenner 2005; Carter and Cooper 2002; Kumar and Murray 2006). This raises questions about the willingness of unions to meet new organizing challenges. For instance, Voss and Sherman (2000) found that unions are changing but they usually require one of the following: (1) a crisis in the union which then leads it to change; (2) the infusion of new leadership often from other social movements; and (3) the imposition of control and process from the international union on the local. Are any of these conditions present in unions adopting JfJ to organize cleaners in France and Australia? What gender dynamics are in play as women assert their views in changing unions by raising different grievances for organizing? How are women making spaces for these grievances to be heard and met?

2. Room for local autonomy: Michael Crosby says that the strategy in Australia “is pure J4J” even though the campaign is named “Clean Start” since Australians don’t use the word janitor (Crosby 2006a). What does “pure J4J” mean? If the campaign is indeed “pure J4J”, does it mean that the transfer of the model is *in toto*? What happens to local autonomy, democracy, negotiation and space? More importantly, what type of model for organizing cleaners is being developed as the JfJ encounters local traditions and attitudes affecting the organization of workers? How is gender affected by these developments? Will change address gender inequities or exacerbate them in restructuring unions (Foley and Baker 2009; Ross, S 2008; Warskett 2000; Yates 2006)?

3. The role of scale in organizing: The JfJ cannot simply be “up-scaled” in “pure” form since scale is not just another level where organizing takes place but is complicated by different and often more powerful forces (Savage 2006). My purpose, then, is to investigate the extent to which the up-scaling of this organizing model is unfolding in global spaces with different histories, social actors, models of organizing workers, labour relations systems, gender histories, and scales of action and intervention (Chun 2005; Tattersall 2007).

4. Gender and the JfJ: While gender is embedded throughout the conceptualization of this project, I want to make it more explicit by outlining the issues it raises: To what extent will the JfJ model embrace or sideline local women’s unique position and challenges within unions and their organizing activities? What role does social reproduction (still predominately women’s responsibility) play in upscaling organizing cleaners? What specific leadership role will women play in organizing cleaners using the JfJ

model? Does the adoption of the JfJ facilitate or hinder women's agency in making change in their unions (Cobble 2007; Milkman and Voss 2004)?

5. Is the JfJ model the future? The history of labour internationalism is long (Herod 2009; Munck 2002) with plenty of evidence of less than model collaborations between the US, Canadian and some other national unions (Carew 1998; Gandall 1986; Sims 1992). So, what changes have been put in place to guard against exploitation of one union (model) by another? Where the JfJ is being adopted and implemented one needs to investigate the relationship between top-down impositions (Moody 2007), gender inequities and spontaneous organizing initiatives from below (Castree 2000). There is a danger here in adopting a pre-determined model which could interfere with cleaners' own spontaneous organizing campaigns (Castree 2000). There is also the danger of marginalizing internal gains and innovations – especially those made by women and visible minorities – for the imposition and adoption of an external model. Are these issues being recognized? If so, how and by whom are they being addressed?

Methodology: Increasingly researchers are using a mobile ethnographic approach to follow commodities, workers, cultures, discourses or ideas transnationally (Alvarez 2005; Barndt 2002; Burawoy 2000, 2009; Gille and O'Riain 2002; Satzewich and Wong 2006). For example, Martin (1994) traces the construction of AIDS as “disease” by assuming the status of a mobile ethnographer and accessing different sites to examine the metaphors by which the “disease” is constructed and the scale in which this is articulated. This approach has a lot of merit (Hannerz 2003) since it lends itself to examining the trajectory of social forces and processes - such as the mobility of the JfJ - across various places while also paying attention to the scale of JfJ initiative and implementation. Here, I model my research after Martin's innovative example by following the JfJ model across borders to produce a global ethnography of its configurations.

Year One: Begins with a two-week visit to the headquarters of the SEIU in Washington, DC to interview key union officials about the globalization of the JfJ. I will interview Debbie Schneider, who was the Head of SEIU's “Global Strength” initiative, and Christy Hoffman, the new Head of this initiative, about the origins of exporting the JfJ, the goals, locations and how they are negotiating the implementation of the JfJ taking into account local union traditions and political histories. Stephen Lerner will also be interviewed since he was one of the creators of the JfJ model in the 1980s and has recently theorized global unionism (2007). A key question for him is: does the JfJ have the elasticity necessary to be deployed worldwide? These union officials will be asked to provide names and contact information of other personnel for interviews on the SEIU and its global partners in organizing cleaner's worldwide (Bryman 2004: 100; Ross, G 1995: viii). The interviews will be recorded, transcribed and imported into ATLAS.TI for data management and analysis. A bilingual (French and English) MA student will be hired to assist the project and facilitate preparation for fieldwork in France. She will collect all the published materials on the JfJ, summarize all union documents that speak to the union's global vision, and help me develop an interview guide. She will also assist in managing the content of the website set-up for this research project. Furthermore, she will research secondary sources in French and English to collect and report on the labour movement in France (e.g., union density; specific union numbers; the cleaning industry, etc.) as well as unions historically charged with organizing cleaners. I will spend three months (May-July) in Paris during Year 1 doing participant observation in the offices of the Solidaires, Unitaires, Democratiques (SUD-Rail) to study how the SEIU and this union debates and negotiates the implementation of the JfJ. Preliminary correspondence with SUD-Rail officials (Christian Mahieux and Dominique Malvaud) has been established, and an onsite interview in 2008 was conducted regarding the JfJ in France (Mahieux 2006; Malvaud 2008). My fluency in French will help adopt this ethnographic approach, and participate in conference calls, meetings, workshops and visits to local sites

to discuss the organizing of cleaners and the JfJ. My goal is to set up in the office of the head of organizing at the SUD-Rail and “shadow” her/him in observing the establishment of the JfJ model (Ross, G 1995: viii). Field notes will be added to ATLAS.TI.

Year Two: A second MA student will be hired to assist with the collection, reading, summarizing and organizing of SEIU’s JfJ documents relating to activities in Australia. She will also collect data on recent developments in the Australian labour movements (e.g., union density; specific union numbers; the Organizing Works phase; Fair Work Act legislation, etc.) and help prepare an interview guide. A history of the Liquor, Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers’ (LHMU) will be sketched focusing on the union’s relationship with the JfJ. Finally, I will visit Sydney for three months (May-July) in 2011 to study the LHMU as it enrolls the JfJ model in organizing cleaners under its “Clean Start” campaign. Contrary to France, the SEIU-LHMU relationship is on-going and so I have established contact with Michael Crosby, who is Organizing Director of the SEIU in Sydney, about my research interest. He was interviewed onsite in 2007 (Aguiar and Ryan 2009) and has agreed to offer access to the union’s campaign (which has a total staff of 52 [Crosby 2006b]), and union organizers for interviews (Aguiar and Ryan 2009; Crosby 2006a). The interview material will be transcribed by the MA student and imported, along with my fieldwork notes, onto ATLAS.TI software programme. The student will assist in managing the data and the website for the project. During this year, analysis of the data will begin and findings will be presented at the American Sociological Association annual meeting and the Canadian Congress.

Year Three: Brings the research to a close by ensuring that all critical questions are answered and all relevant materials collected and analyzed. The bulk of the writing will be done during this year. Findings will be presented at various conferences and a manuscript will be prepared for submission to an academic press. In these undertakings, a third MA student will be hired to assist in tying up the loose ends of the research (e.g., locating just-published key writings) and support my various writing assignments.

Communication of Results: Research on the globalization of the JfJ was first presented in a session of the Association of American Geographers annual meeting in San Francisco (Aguiar 2007b). Since then I received SSHRC funding to organize a workshop on global unions (see CV and attachments), was invited by Dr. Paul Durrenberger to present my thoughts on the global geographies of the JfJ at the American Anthropology Association meetings in November 2008 (Aguiar 2008), and in March, at the invitation of Dr. Chris Benner, I presented on the export of JfJ at the 2009 annual meetings of the American Association of Geographers in Las Vegas. The findings from this proposed research programme will be disseminated in the following way: (1) to an academic audience via presentations of papers at conferences such as the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association and the annual Canadian Congress.; as well, articles will be submitted to these journals: *the Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *the American Journal of Sociology*, and the emerging online, peer-reviewed *Global Labour Journal*. Internationally, the journals are: *Global Networks*, *Work, Employment & Society* (UK), *Economic and Industrial Democracy* (Sweden), and *Journal of Industrial Relations* (Australia). (2) The popular dissemination of the results of this study will be: via a web-site constructed and regularly updated for this study; through articles in labour magazines like *Our Times*; and in newspapers such as the *Globe and Mail* (Canada), *Le Monde* (France) and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia). (3) Finally, I will prepare jargon-free reports for participants in this study outlining the major findings in the research. These reports will be available on the project’s website.