

“Gender Equality and Labor Movements: Toward A Global Perspective”

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Report

This report offers a critical review of the English-language research on gender equality and labor movements with an eye to highlighting theoretical insights and “best practice” case studies around the world most relevant to those engaged in building democratic, just, and humane societies. Where possible, I utilize case studies that illuminate developments in the Global South, including but not limited to Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Throughout, I seek to specify existing gaps in knowledge as well as identify areas where new research would assist labor organizations and their partners in better meeting the needs of all workers, their families, and their communities. The report does not pretend to be comprehensive or fully global in scope. It is a first step toward assessing the extant research on gender equality and labor movements around the world and determining areas for further research.

Scholarly research on gender equality and labor movements -- particularly in the field of industrial relations which is given priority in this initial report -- has been concerned primarily with three issues: 1) the gender gap in union access; 2) the gender gap in union leadership; and 3) the gender gap in union priorities. In each of these three areas, I assess the degree to which gender differences exist, summarize the research findings on the implications of these differences for the promotion of gender equality, and detail some of the “best practice” approaches for lessening gender inequalities and ensuring greater opportunity, freedom, and security for all. The report concludes with reflections on new avenues for future research. The environment in which traditional trade unions operate has changed dramatically. As this report details, there have been significant demographic and global shifts in traditional trade union membership and leadership as well as an upsurge of new female-led unions and worker organizations. In addition, economic restructuring, globalization, and feminization of market work are continuing phenomena. Given these complex new realities, researchers concerned with advancing gender equality

and democratic worker organization will need to ask and answer a different set of questions than those central to the field over the last quarter century.

1.2 Terms, Definitions, and Concepts

The phrase “gender equality” remains an ambiguous and contested concept among researchers. Although the meaning of “gender equality” continues to vary widely in the literature, there has been a noticeable shift in its usage, particularly among Western scholars. Many Western researchers initially conceived of “gender equality” as ensuring equal treatment of men and women and equal access for women to the same opportunities, rights, and resources possessed by men. Increasingly, however, the “equal treatment” approach has been recognized as of limited utility, especially in situations in which the men to whom women are being compared are also disadvantaged. Moreover, the “equal treatment” approach failed to address the sex-specific disadvantages many women faced due to child-bearing, disproportionate responsibility for reproductive labor, and sexual and physical violence. The limitations of an “equal treatment” approach to gender equality were especially evident when considering the “gender equality” of low-income and socially-marginalized women.

Consequently, a second approach gained currency among researchers and policy advocates. This approach, called by some “gender mainstreaming” or by others “substantive equality,” is more attentive to “equality of results.” Practitioners of this second approach are more amenable to policies that recognize the sex-specific needs of women and that allow for different kinds of interventions for different groups. There is a focus on “real,” “true” or “substantive” equality rather than “formal,” “legal,” or “abstract” equality (ETUC 2003, 15).

The 1979 U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), for example, often seen as the Bible of women’s rights advocates, is hailed increasingly as a call for “substantive equality.” As elaborated by Sri Lankan feminist jurist Savitri Goonesekere (2007),

CEDAW “promotes a substantive model of equality,” which includes “equality of opportunity and women’s entitlement to equal access with men to resources and rights” and the “practical realization of rights” through a focus on “equality of results,” whether achieved by “gender-neutral framing of policy” or policies treating men and women differently. A similar philosophical orientation is articulated by the Rutgers University Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL), one of the more prominent of the global women’s movement NGOs and a key player in redefining human rights as women’s rights and more recently, labor rights as human rights. Noting that women are the majority of the world’s poor and disproportionately affected by economic inequality and social marginalization, CWGL points to the need for “substantive equality” and heightened attention to the social and economic dimensions of women’s rights to ensure full equality for all women (CWGL 2011).

A third development also warrants comment: the rise of “popular” or “grassroots feminism.” Although this third approach to gender equality is diffuse, fluid, and not yet reflected fully in the research literature, it is an influential orientation among working women themselves, particularly in the Global South. Many “popular” or “grassroots feminists” insist that initiatives affecting both men and women such as minimum wage legislation or campaigns for water or land rights benefit women disproportionately and should be recognized as part of the struggle for “gender equality.” Although these policies may not be self-consciously framed as advancing gender equality, they too serve not only to improve women’s lives overall but also to move women toward equality with men by lessening the gender wage gap, for example, or the time spent in unpaid labor. Significantly, women labor organizers and leaders rarely hew strictly to one approach to gender equality. Rather, they are pragmatists and draw judiciously on the tools at hand to achieve the desired end.

In this report I define “labor movement” broadly as any institution or movement composed primarily of working people and organized to advance the economic, political, and social status and rights of

workers. I include in this group “traditional” trade unions, or organizations whose primary emphasis is on collective bargaining; I also include a group of labor organizations, what I call “new unions,” which may or may not rely on collective bargaining as their principle strategy. Taking a page from labor’s past, these organizations might constitute themselves primarily as mutual aid organizations or as community or political entities concerned with changing labor and social policy or with democratizing the larger society. Many may also call themselves associations and not unions. Some of the largest of these new unions – the Self Employed Women’s Association of India for example – are registered as official “trade unions” and recognized as such in their own nation and by international bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO). Other new unions discussed in this report are independent entities, remain unaffiliated with any other trade union body, and are not considered part of the official trade union movement.

1.3 Overview of the Report

In the report that follows I analyze the gender gap in union access (Section 2); the gender gap in union leadership (Section 3); and the gender gap in union priorities (Section 4). Section 2 opens with an exploration of the available data on women’s membership in trade unions. Given the startling lack of such data, especially from a global perspective, I have compiled an original preliminary table that allows for some initial assessments of patterns and trends in women’s trade union membership. Table 1 also illuminates where the data exists and where better data is needed. I then review the debates among researchers over the implications of the feminization of trade unions.

The gender gap in membership may be closing in established unions, but in many regions of the world overall opportunities for collective representation remain rare or are in serious decline. In order to assess the gender gap in collective representation, researchers will need to expand their lens to include the new labor movements that are emerging. Thus, in 2.2 and 2.3 I provide examples of the new labor

movements being pioneered by women in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In many of the cases, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center) and other labor-oriented NGOs and agencies played a key role in seeding and sustaining these new female-led worker movements. The movements are notable for their attention to the community, family, and personal needs of participants as well as their workplace concerns. They are also deeply involved in campaigns to end sexual and political violence and in democratic and popular movements for civil, political, and economic rights for women, workers, and the poor. These new models suggest the need for labor researchers to rethink their theories of organizing and of collective mobilization and to expand their research foci beyond traditional trade unions. It is the jobs once thought so difficult to organize that are now unionizing; it is the workers once denied access to unions who are revitalizing labor movements and advancing democracy movements across the globe.

Section 3 moves to the gender gap in union leadership. I first assess the progress in moving women into decision-making positions within trade unions. If, as some claim, the entrance of women into union leadership is “progressing at two speeds,” are we seeing the bifurcation of trade unionism into two different wings, one highly sympathetic to gender equality projects and one still determined to resist? Where specifically are the pockets of resistance to women’s leadership and which women are affected? I review one exemplar of unions in the “fast lane”: UNISON, renowned for combining a top-down and bottom-up approach. I then turn to an examination of how the current research literature explains the continuing gender gap in union leadership. Section 3 concludes with a dissection of the recent debates in the literature over the meaning of “leadership,” whether adding women at the top advances the larger gender equality agenda within unions, and the effects of sex-segregated organizing within trade unions, commonly referred to as “self-organization.”

Section 4 takes up the question of how well trade unions are representing the interests of their female members. I discuss the difficulties of knowing how to evaluate unions in this regard, given the diversity and fluidity of women's interests. I then detail the shift in the formal policies of unions from non-discrimination to gender mainstreaming and review the growing consensus among researchers that some sectors of the labor movement are among the leading global vehicles for advancing gender equality. However, there are unions in the "slow lane" as well as unions in the "fast lane." Section 4 ends with a discussion of how researchers explain the variation in union responsiveness to gender equality and an analysis of the recent turn in the literature toward coalition-building and democracy as paths forward.

The final section of the report looks to the future. Given the transformations outlined in the preceding three sections, what new challenges are emerging for those concerned to strengthen labor organizations and the practice of gender equality within the labor movement? I focus on three: the role of NGOs, the gendered effects of union mergers and other structural transformations, and the relationship between union renewal and gender equality. The report concludes with a discussion of the need to map both the global and local initiatives for gender equality within unions.

In the report that follows I assume that women are as diverse as men and that their experiences can vary based on such factors as geographic location, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and economic circumstance. At the same time, in part because women are often treated legally, politically, and culturally as a group by the society in which they reside, reforms on behalf of women as a group are not only necessary but practical.

2. The Gender Gap in Union Access

2.1. Women's Trade Union Membership: The New Majority?

Reliable data remains the starting point for credible research and analysis. Unfortunately, data on union membership (the number of workers in unions) and union density (the percent of workers unionized) is often incomplete or non-existent, inconsistent, and misleading. In many countries, data is simply not collected or is not made available to researchers. Governments often do not compile sufficient information on workers and their organizations; the labor organizations themselves have neither the time nor the resources to take on what can be a labor-intensive and daunting undertaking.

Even when data is collected and made available to researchers, cross-national comparisons are difficult because of lack of commensurability in terminology and methodology. In addition, union membership may be inflated due to self-reportage and/or the inclusion of labor organizations considered by most researchers not to be independent or credible labor organizations. This latter problem is acute, for example, in Mexico as well as in other countries where many labor organizations are dominated by employers or the state or are corrupt. At the same time, collective organization among “informal” sector workers and workers not in “official” trade unions is severely underestimated in most reported union membership figures. Hence, available data on union membership does not fully capture membership in what this report considers to be the “labor movement.”

The lack of reliable data on union membership disaggregated by sex is particularly glaring. The problem is widespread in poorer countries but extends to wealthier regions. Of the twenty-six European countries surveyed in 2003 by the European Industrial Relations Observatory, for example, only fourteen had approximate figures for the national breakdown of union members by sex (EIRO 2012). Of the sixty-one countries included in the union membership data published by the ILO in 2011, only 18 had at least one year of data on women and not all of it was recent (ILO 2011).

Despite these limitations, however, it is valuable to gather and analyze the extant data on women's trade union membership. Although generalizations based on such data remain tentative, discernable patterns do emerge. In addition, the gaping holes in available data can be highlighted.

Table 1 below, which relies on data from the ILO, EIRO, and multiple other sources (listed in Appendix A), offers a first step toward a global view of women's trade union membership. In writing this report, no similar table was located in the published literature. As a consequence, the author, working with Anna Harewood, a PhD candidate in Sociology at Rutgers University, constructed Table 1.

Table 1: Women's Trade Union Membership by Nation

	% Female TUM, Most Recent	% Female TUM, 2000s	Percent Female Labor Force	Overall Union Density
Latvia	68.0 (2008)	58.9 (2003)	48.4 (2009)	10-19 (2008)
Poland	59.2 (2008)		45.0 (2009)	10-19 (2008)
Lithuania	56.3 (2008)	57.1 (2003)	49.0 (2009)	0-10 (2008)
Estonia	55.6 (2009)	64.0 (2003)	49.1 (2009)	10.7 (2009)
Finland	54.7 (2008)	53.1 (2003)	48.1 (2009)	90-100 (2008)
United Kingdom	54.5 (2010)	47.3 (2000)	45.6 (2009)	20-29 (2008)
Ireland	53.3 (2009)	43.5 (2001)	43.1 (2009)	32.1 (2008)
Norway	52.1 (2008)		47.4 (2009)	70-79 (2008)
Ukraine	52-48.2 (2011)		49.1 (2009)	47.2 (2011)
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	51.8 (2009)	56.5 (2001)	41.1 (2009)	
Sweden	51.5 (2008)	52.0 (2003)	47.3 (2009)	80-89 (2008)
Denmark	50.4 (2010)	49.2 (2003)	46.9 (2009)	80.5 (2008)
Canada	50.0 (2005)		47.0 (2009)	27.5 (2010)
Slovenia	49.9 (2008)	49.7 (2003)	46.2 (2009)	30-39 (2008)
Taiwan	48.3 (2008)			36.1 (2008)
Luxembourg	48.1 (2008)		43.9 (2009)	50-59 (2008)
Australia	48.0 (2010)	42.4 (2000)	45.3 (2009)	20.3 (2006)
Bulgaria	46.9 (2008)	49.7 (2003)	46.1 (2009)	20-29 (2008)
Hungary	46.2 (2008)		45.1 (2009)	20-29 (2008)
United States	45.7 (2010)	41.0 (2000)	46.0 (2009)	12.1 (2007)
Hong Kong	44.5 (2009)		46.3 (2009)	22.5 (2009)
Mexico	42.4 (2000)		36.1 (2009)	11.2 (2008)

Portugal	41.9 (2008)	41.5 (2003)	46.8 (2009)	20-29 (2008)
Slovakia	41.9 (2008)	42.1 (2003)	51.0 (2009)	10-19 (2008)
Namibia	40.7 (2004)		46.1 (2009)	
Brazil	40.6 (2007)	40.1 (2005)	43.7 (2009)	17.8 (2007)
Malaysia	39.5 (2010)	38.0 (2005)	35.5 (2009)	10.1 (2008)
Belgium	39.1 (2003)		44.9 (2009)	79.2 (2009)
Cyprus	37.3 (2008)	36.3 (2003)	42.8 (2009)	50-59 (2008)
China	36.4 (2009)	37.8 (2000)	44.6 (2009)	90.3 (2000)
Nicaragua	35.6 (2009)	44.7 (2006)	38.7 (2009)	
Austria	33.3 (2008)	33.2 (2003)	45.5 (2009)	30-39 (2008)
Netherlands	32.4 (2008)	28.1 (2001)	45.7 (2009)	20-29 (2008)
Germany	31.8 (2008)		45.6 (2009)	20-29 (2008)
Chile	30.6 (2009)	19.7 (2002)	37.2 (2009)	12.5 (2009)
Malta	30.5 (2008)	27.3 (2003)	32.4 (2009)	50-59 (2008)
Bangladesh	14.0 (2009)		24.0 (2009)	5.0 (2007)
El Salvador	13.2 (2009)	12.5 (2005)	41.5 (2009)	8.0 (2009)
Pakistan	3.2 (2007)	1.5 (2000)	19.7 (2009)	15.7 (2009)

Table 1 suggests that trade unions may be at a tipping point in terms of sex composition by nation. Women are the majority of trade union members in a third of the nations (13 of 39) for which data was available and in another third (13 out of 39), women are over 40 percent of the membership. Thus, in two-thirds of the nations, women's trade union membership is over forty percent of the total. Using the female percentage of the labor force as a comparison, women are now *over-represented* in a majority of the countries included in the table and approaching *parity* in a half dozen others. In only a third of the nations are women *under-represented* in trade union membership.

Of course, in many countries, the feminization of trade unions is a result of the decline of private sector unionism, which tends to be male-dominated, and the rise of public sector unionism, a sector in which large numbers of women work. Thus, feminization per se should not be taken as a sign of a change in attitude toward female union membership on either the part of women or trade unions. Nevertheless, the increasing numbers of new union members who are female (compared to the number of new members

who are male), some argue, does reflect, at least in part, a growing interest in and openness on the part of trade unions to expanding unionization to new groups of workers, including women, and a heightened desire by women to join unions (Bronfenbrenner 2005).

Despite the fragmentary nature of the data assembled in Table 1, geographic patterns in the gender demographics of trade union memberships are visible. The most feminized unions (in terms of numbers of women) are concentrated in former Soviet bloc countries (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Poland) and in Nordic countries such as Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Other Global North countries (Canada, Ireland, United Kingdom) also have majority-female trade union movements. Surprisingly, with the exception of El Salvador and Pakistan, the trade unions farthest from gender parity are Global North countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany. Moreover, it appears that the feminization of trade unions is generally greater in more industrialized countries, although this generalization must remain highly tentative given the absence of the majority of Global South countries from Table 1 and the lack of data on independent and noncontract-oriented labor movements. At the same time, it should be noted that the Global South/ Global North divide is belied by the variation in the gender patterns of national trade union membership *within* regions, including within Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

In the majority of countries surveyed the percent of female trade union membership increased over time, and in the countries not following this pattern (for example, Belgium, Slovakia, Malaysia, China), the decline was often minimal. Thus, the overall trend pattern suggests continuing, modest levels of global trade union feminization.

2.2 Assessing the Implications of Trade Union Feminization

What are the implications of union feminization for gender equality? As suggested in 2.1, to answer that question researchers will need a more comprehensive global mapping of the patterns of national trade union membership and more complete data on the sex composition of unions by nation. Gathering this data will require the cooperation of established trade unions and governments; in addition, NGOs and other partnering groups can play a crucial role in providing expertise, resources, and more precise information about the new labor movements.

More data will also need to be gathered at the *sub-national* level. Some figures exist on peak bodies (for example, EIRO 2012), but much less is available on (inter)national union institutions or on regional and local organizations. Data by nation is helpful but it tells us little about the sex-balance of the actual union institutions in which men and women reside. Although data by nation shows a feminizing of union membership and hence suggests increasing gender-balance, sub-national data may reveal high levels of sex segregation within national labor movements. Ruth Milkman (2007), for example, examined sub-national data in the United States and found a “sharply bifurcated” pattern of gender demographics: what she called the “two worlds of unionism.” Most of the unions she examined at the state level were highly segregated by sex, with membership either heavily female or heavily male. Only a small subset of unions had a sex-balanced membership with neither women nor men more than 70 percent. These patterns mirror the persisting occupational segregation by sex of market work.

Sub-national data is also necessary to identify where female exclusion from trade unions continues to exist. Pockets of exclusion persist and should not be obscured by the larger trend toward what appears to be increasing access for women. Any discussion of global female access to trade unions will need to consider not only barriers specifically targeting women but barriers that limit female access even though women as a group are not named. For example, constitutional and collective bargaining provisions have been reported in some unions (in Austria, for example), that discourage the hiring and

hence union membership of migrant or non-citizen workers (Greene and Kirton 2006). The institutional exclusion of women from unions in the twenty-first century may thus result as much from barriers tied to race, citizenship, sexuality, politics, religion or other factors as those linked specifically to gender.

A number of researchers have commented on the limited effects of feminization (in terms of numbers of women) on the promotion of gender equality within individual unions. Many unions, for example, both historically and cross-culturally, have failed to elect women leaders even though women are the majority of members and participate equally in lower-level committees and mobilization activities (Wertheimer and Nelson 1975). Neither is there an automatic correlation between female-majority membership and female-friendly policies. Thus, most researchers agree that feminization in and of itself is not a guarantee of greater attention to gender equality. At the same time, a large body of literature also suggests that feminization (or whether a union has a large number of women) correlates closely with whether a union has women-friendly policies and practices (Hunt and Boris 2007; Hunt 1999; Cobble 2004; Milkman 1990, 1993). And, as will be discussed more fully in Section 3.2 and Section 4, it is the female-majority unions that have most energetically-promoted female leadership and a more inclusive and gender-sensitive trade union agenda.

Before much definitive can be said about the implications of the feminization of trade unions globally, however, researchers will need to construct a more reliable global map of trade union membership, male and female, and begin to analyze the changing global influence of particular unions, nations, and regions. How large are the female-majority unions and where are they located? How does the global influence of the women's wing of unionism compare with the men's wing?

Much has been made of what we can term "lemon feminization" whereby women move into organizations or jobs that are declining in power or status. Is this phenomenon an accurate portrayal of union feminization? It appears that in the case of union feminization by nation, the "feminizing nations"

are not necessarily the ones that are losing power and membership. Significantly, the Nordic countries, where a large number of female-majority unions are concentrated, have not followed the larger OECD pattern of rapid union decline. Thus, union feminization in these nations is not correlated with declining status and power. The Nordic female-majority unions – as well as others in Canada, the UK, and elsewhere – continue to have great influence and power. These unions are also among the leaders in promoting gender equality as later sections will detail. Thus, these examples suggest that it may be the more influential sectors of the labor movement that are feminizing, not the reverse. If that is true, the power of those advocating for gender equality within the global labor movement will continue to grow in the future. Still, it is important to note that unionization is quite low in the Baltic region among many of the countries with the highest feminization rates (Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia). These nations also recorded large declines in union density between 2003 and 2008 (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2009, 7-8).

Unfortunately, we lack sufficient information on the gender composition of trade unions in the regions of the world where trade unionism is growing the fastest. Docherty (2004) presents a revealing overview of shifting global patterns of trade union growth from 1870 to 2001 in Table 2, reproduced below. (His figures are compiled largely from ICFTU data from 1950 onward. A full list of sources for Table 2 is available in Appendix B).

Table 2: Growth of Organized Labor in the World, 1870-2001, Membership in Thousands

Year	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Americas	Other	Total
1870	486	4	300	0	790
1880	545	0	50	11	606
1886	828	0	1,010	53	1,891
1890	1,917	0	325	263	2,505
1900					

	4,193	235	869	133	5,430
1913	10,060	685	2,787	589	14,121
1920	27,692	8,501	6,367	1,221	43,781
1930	17,357	2,538	6,199	4,780	30,874
1939	11,493	100	9,111	2,920	23,624
1945	17,913	0	13,632	4,020	35,565
1950	31,194	0	20,523	12,063	63,779
1960	32,768	0	25,364	17,853	75,985
1970	39,591	0	34,005	24,687	98,282
1980	49,270	0	38,103	30,317	117,690
1990	45,484	5,000	30,328	33,207	114,019
1995	42,416	11,839	42,503	42,996	139,754
2001	39,615	37,526	36,890	52,268	166,229

Source: Docherty (2004).

Although unfortunately a dated view, Table 2 is an important reminder that, at least according to ICFTU figures [which are not fully global in reach, failing, notably, to cover China], trade union membership in absolute numbers continues to grow globally, particularly in the Global South. Since 1980, despite the decline of trade union membership in Western Europe, Japan, the U.S. and other OECD countries, Docherty finds that globally the trade union movement added forty-eight (48) million members. According to Docherty, union membership jumped considerably in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. That rise, however, may be an artifact of better data collection by the ICFTU after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Moreover, it is difficult to interpret the figures given the debate over the meaning of trade union membership in regions such as Eastern Europe where union membership was mandatory rather than voluntary. Docherty also calculates considerable growth in the “Other” column, which he uses as a catch-all category including Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Unfortunately, Table 2 does not capture the

growth of trade unions in Latin America since the figure for the “Americas” is an aggregate which includes the rapidly-declining and large U.S. figures mixed in with the rising or stable figures for the many other nations in the “Americas.”

Before moving on, it is important to underscore again the degree to which official trade union membership data seriously undercounts the number of women union members as well as women’s overall contribution to the labor movement and thus precludes an assessment of the gender gap in collective representation as opposed to the gender gap in established trade union membership. Historically, working women expended most of their labor power in unpaid and non-market activities. These women, however, also were significant participants in the affairs of labor organizations, though not considered “official” members. They created robust and flourishing auxiliaries in many regions of the world, particularly in transportation and mining (Cobble 2004). They also formed substantial producer cooperatives and participated in labor parties and other political organizations, many of which historically affiliated with the trade union bodies of their country. In addition, they were the primary organizers of union boycott and other consumer actions on behalf of working people (Frank 1994).

Moreover, as discussed earlier, the official trade union membership figures do not reflect the many independent unions women are organizing that are not affiliated with larger union bodies, national or international. Nor do these figures capture the many worker networks and associations that are emerging in both the Global North and South. There is not to my knowledge any systematic effort underway to collect global data on these new organizations but it is clear they are becoming an increasingly large share of the labor movement and that some of the largest and most influential are female-dominated. In the next two sections, I discuss some of these organizations in greater detail. Their growth suggests not only that the feminization of labor movements is under-reported, but also that women workers by pioneering new forms of labor organizing are helping close the overall access of women to collective representation.

2.3 From Women in Unions to Women's Unions

Working women have long organized into all-female unions. These unions have sometimes affiliated directly to larger mixed-sex labor organizations; they have also remained independent and operated as unaffiliated labor bodies (Cobble 1990, 1991a; Curtin 1999; Hill 2008; Broadbent 2011). The number of all-female unions has declined considerably in some regions (Western Europe and North America). In 2004, for example, after over a hundred years of continuous operation, Denmark's National Union of Women Workers (KAD), one of the largest all-female unions and the last remaining in Western Europe, merged with two other unions to form Fagligt Faelles Forbund (3F), a mixed-sex union. Significantly, however, all-female independent unions have been on the rise in other regions of the world, most notably in Asia (Broadbent and Ford 2008a; Broadbent 2007; Moon and Broadbent 2008).

The Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) is the best known and is widely chronicled (Rose 1992; Jhabvala 1994; Vosko 2007; Hill 2008; Jhabvala, Desai, and Dave 2010). It emerged from a union of textile workers founded in 1920 by leaders inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. Although SEWA was officially registered in India as a trade union in 1972, it struggled much longer to achieve recognition by the ILO (Vosko 2007). Namrata Bali, SEWA's General Secretary and Director of their Training Academy, reported SEWA's current membership at 1.4 million, making it one of the largest single unions in the world (Bali, 2011). Only such giants as IG Metall (Metal Workers' Industrial Union) or Ver.di (United Services Union) in Germany, UNISON in the UK, or SEIU (Service Workers International Union) in the USA are comparable. SEWA's global influence is also evident in the emergence of SEWA "sister" organizations outside of India (in Cambodia and Thailand, for example) who have adopted its philosophy, organizational structure, and many of its practices (Nam 2011; Saeng-Ging 2011). In South Africa, the Self-Employed Workers Union (SEWU), a COSATU affiliate, is also organized along similar lines (Gallin 2000).

SEWA differs from traditional trade unions. It does not rely primarily on collective bargaining with employers. Rather, it works first to empower its members -- mainly rural self-employed producers and sellers -- to better represent themselves in negotiations with a variety of parties, whether employers, consumers or government officials. It also offers assistance, financial and otherwise, to those seeking to expand their entrepreneurial skills and activities, either as individual independent contractors or in cooperative groups (Jhabvala 1994; Bali 2011).

The constraints on organizing for SEWA are formidable: illiteracy, poverty, harassment and violence, cultural barriers to women's public speaking and participation, and resistance from family members. Yet the union has grown in size every year since its registration as a trade union forty years ago. The first step is helping women see themselves and their work as important. Because poor rural women often "see themselves as nobody," Bali explains, workshops begin with the women learning to speak their own names in public and claim the work they do as valuable (Bali 2011).

SEWA is a direct challenge to those who seek to eliminate "informal" work. As SEWA demonstrates, informal work can be improved and regulated through collective organizing; it can also be included in labor law and social policy. Many of the problems so closely associated with "informality" and "informal" jobs, SEWA argues, can be solved through collective organization (Jhabvala 1994; Bhatt 2006).

In addition to India's SEWA and SEWA-like sister organizations in Cambodia, Thailand, and South Africa, all-female unions exist in Korea, Japan, and other Asian countries. These organizations are less celebrated than SEWA as models of innovative organizing and representation. Still, by insisting on including "regular" and "nonregular" (or "atypical") workers in their ranks and by making a priority of equal pay, the elimination of sexual violence and sex discrimination, and the opening up of employment

and training opportunities to women, Japan's Josei Union and other "women-only" unions have helped expand the agenda of the mainstream labor movement (Broadbent 2011; Moon and Broadbent 2008).

In Bangladesh, women garment workers have organized as well. In this case, however, their unions are mixed-sex, although female-majority and female-led. Bangladeshi women had very low labor force participation rates before the garment export sector's meteoric rise in the 1980s as the "Asian Tiger" countries shifted production to Bangladesh. By 2004, Bangladesh had close to two million garment workers, 80 percent of whom were female, and close to 70 percent of all employed women were in the garment industry (Rahman 2008).

In 1997, women garment workers launched the Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF), an independent female-majority and female-led union unaligned with any political party. The Solidarity Center, which had established a program for labor organization and social development in Bangladesh in 1973 under the auspices of the Asian-American Free Labor Institution, played a "pivotal role" as did women's rights and human rights groups (Rahman 2008). BIGUF, working with other unions such as the National Garment Workers Federation (founded in 1984), took up a range of issues, including day care and breast-feeding at work. With the help of the Solidarity Center, BIGUF opened its own schools where it offered remedial classes for workers over 14 years of age who had been unable to attend school previously. Twenty-four factory unions affiliated with BIGUF, and it is estimated to have 50,000 members in Dhaka and Chittagong. Of its twenty-five member executive committee, twenty are women, including the president and general-secretary (Rahman 2008).

The context for organizing women in many Asian nations, Broadbent and Ford (2008a) stress, differs from other regions. Religious doctrines have a strong presence, whether Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, or Confucian, they note. Unions may also operate as part of the state apparatus. Because many unions still remain male-dominated numerically and culturally, female labor activism may also occur on the "fringes

of the formal labor movement,” and include “spontaneous labor protests and non-union labor organizing” as much as union-building, whether in mixed or all-female organizations (Hill 2008). Yet the distinctiveness of the Asian situation can be overdrawn. Religious doctrines, for example, remain strong in many parts of the world, including Africa and the Middle East, as do male-dominated and state-led unions.

Moreover, labor movements, including working women’s organizations, have been central to democracy movements in Asia as well as in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. In Korea in the 1970s, it was a factory girls’ movement, embodied in the Chunggye Pibok Union (Garment Makers Union) that was crucial in sparking democratic reform and the expansion of democratic unionism in the 1980s (Louie 2000; Koo 2001; Soonok 2003). In the 1980s and 1990s, in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, and elsewhere, working women once again were on the forefront of democratic protest and citizenship rights efforts (Brickner 2006a, 2006b; Tirado 1994; Selwyn 2009; Di Marco 2011; Seidman 1994). In the twenty-first century, Lee (2007) suggests, there is a similar rising tide of democratic labor protest among Chinese women workers in textile, apparel, and other sectors, with many parallels to Mexico, Korea, and other countries. Scholars writing on women and trade unions in the Middle East (Moghadam 2011; Chefir and Arafoui 2011) find trade unions there central to democratic popular protest as well and crucial to the expansion of women’s political, social, and economic citizenship.

2.4 Women and New Models of Labor Organizing

In section 2.3 I focused on the new unions emerging in Asia. New models of labor organizing, pioneered often by women, are evident in other regions as well. Some of these organizations call themselves unions and are closely tied to mixed-sex national or confederated labor bodies; others remain peripheral to the organized trade union orbit and rely heavily on support from women’s organizations,

NGOs, community groups and foundations. Here I highlight only a few such additional examples, including new forms of labor organizing in Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and South Africa.

The organizing of women factory workers in free trade zones (FTZs) around the world has received the bulk of scholarly attention. In particular, the maquila women concentrated along the Mexican-US border have been much studied (Cowie 1999; Collins 2003; Salzinger 2003; Quan 2007; Plankery-Videla forthcoming). They face such classic workplace problems as low pay, unhealthy and unsafe working conditions, and speed-up pressures; they are also subjected to sex-specific injuries such as pervasive sexual harassment and extreme hostility directed toward them because they fail to conform to traditional gender roles. In the maquiladora, for example, the notorious and ongoing multiple murders of maquila women is suspected in part to be a backlash to women's growing economic independence, their participation in wage work outside the home, and their presence in the public sphere without family or male supervision. The situation of maquila women is replicated in many other regions of the world (for example, Soonok 2003). Indeed, there's a substantial historical and social science literature revealing the ways in which women's transition from farm to factory and from non-market to market work has similar dimensions no matter when or where it is taking place. For some, despite the abysmal factory working conditions, there can be a modicum of economic independence, a new urban sociability, and a welcome respite from the demands of a patriarchal and restrictive family and rural community. For others, however, their situation has worsened: most of their income is returned to their family, there is little time for recreation, and they are caught in a new web of patriarchal and market constraints (Dublin 1981; Freeman 2000).

The support of NGOs and other labor, women's, and community organizations has been essential in furthering the collective empowerment of maquila women and those working in FTZs. Katie Quan (2007) documents two such cases in Mexico and El Salvador. In Mexico, twelve hundred maquila

workers employed by the Sara Lee-owned Confecciones de Monclova (a garment plant in Frontera, Coahuila producing apparel for Disney, Champion, and Hanes) sought the right to choose their own independent union and better working conditions, including enhanced unemployment protections. They worked closely with US labor rights groups and with SEDEPAC, a local, community-based women's group of former factory workers founded in 1983. The maquila workers, with the support of Enlace, an Oregon-based NGO, and other labor, student, and women's groups across the United States, launched an international 10 by 10 Campaign to raise their pay to ten dollars a day, win the right to freedom of association, and secure guarantees of future employment. By 2004, their campaign resulted in the establishment of a new independent union, CETRAUMP, new collective bargaining rights with their employer, the re-hiring of almost all the laid-off workers at a second Monclova plant, and severance pay for others.

In San Bartolo, El Salvador's oldest FTZ, women apparel workers at the Taiwan-owned Tainan Enterprises organized successfully to *re-open* their plant – one of the few unionized among the 230 plants in San Bartolo -- when it shut down in 2002. They had the support of their union, the Textile Industry Workers Union (STIT), who filed lawsuits claiming the closure violated Salvadoran law. They also secured international pressure from unions, labor NGOs, churches, and other organizations. In this particular case, Quan (2007) highlights the crucial role played by the Solidarity Center. Through the advice, technological resources, and international networks of the Solidarity Center, the women workers established mutual aid ties with Tainan workers in Taiwan, Indonesia, and Cambodia. The Solidarity Center reached out to a small solidarity group, Focus on Globalization (FOG) in Taiwan, who coordinated activities there. In conjunction with the U.S. union UNITE, the Solidarity Center also set up an internet chat between the Salvadoran women and trade unionists in Indonesia and Cambodia. Tainan workers in both countries wrote letters protesting the Salvadoran plant closing. Cambodian workers, under the leadership of the late Chea Vichea of the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia,

refused to work overtime for Tainan until the Salvadoran plant reopened. Cambodia, Quan remarks, was considered Tainan's "jewel," responsible for 60 percent of their production worldwide. In July 2003, Tainan Enterprises re-opened the unionized factory and rehired the fired workers (Quan 2007).

We need more studies of successful organizing among women such as those presented by Quan. Considerable ink has been spilled calling for women workers in FTZs to organize and form cross-border alliances and coalitions with community groups, NGOs, and other civil society organizations. Yet too few studies actually document in close detail how these alliances work or attempt to understand the conditions under which these solidaristic actions can be successful.

Dana Frank's *Bananeras: Women Transforming the Banana Unions of Latin America* (2005) is one of the best and fullest accounts of women's new labor organizing. Her study is an unusually rich and vivid depiction of the ways in which the new labor organizing among women intertwines class and gender concerns. Set largely in Honduras, Frank documents the ways in which the education and literacy programs organized by community and women's NGOs were essential to helping women banana workers claim their rights as women and as workers. She traces the evolution of a core group of women activists as they moved from being silent participants in union meetings to being full-throated labor leaders and shows how their networks expanded from local to national to transnational to global.

The goals of the banana women remained remarkably consistent: demanding fair value for their labor; the right to security of person, including an end to sexual and political violence and harassment; and freedom of association on and off the job. Honduran banana women, working closely with community and labor program partners, learned to read, write, and advocate for themselves. They helped transform the Coalition of Honduran Banana and Agroindustrial Unions (COSIBAH) into a more powerful force; they helped cement the ties between banana workers in other South and Central American countries, creating a regional network, COLSIBA, the Coalition of Latin American Banana Unions, with 45,000

members in eight countries. One of COLSIBA's great achievements was the 2001 Agreement with Chiquita, brokered through the International Union of Food Workers (Frundt 2007; Frank 2005).

In August 2011, Iris Munguia, the central figure in Frank's book and the lead organizer and women's coordinator of COSIBAH, was elected the top executive officer of COLSIBA, making her the first female president of a Latin American regional farm worker organization. In February 2012, COLSIBA will host the Second Conference of the World Banana Forum in Ecuador and Iris Munguia will preside. She has also decided to call a World Women's Banana Worker Conference a few days before the mixed-sex conference is to start. Women banana workers will testify publicly about the conditions they face as farm worker women and in particular speak about the problems of sexual and political violence. Although Iris Munguia occupies the union's top executive position, she believes that for women's needs to be addressed, women must continue to organize within the union and seek spaces apart where they can speak freely about their experiences as women.

Sikhula Sonke, a South African female-led union of Western Cape farm workers, and SADSAWU, the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union, will serve as final examples of the new labor organizing among women. Like many other new female-majority labor organizations in poorer regions of the world, Sikhula Sonke began as a group of local women who first attended literacy classes and women's rights workshops being run by an NGO, in this instance, Women On Farms (Salo 2010; Claasen 2011; Sikhula Sonke 2012). Gender-based violence (physical, verbal, sexual), poor employment conditions, farm evictions, and high levels of HIV/AIDS were among the most pressing problems for women farm workers. Like men, they also faced what Sara Claasen, President of Sikhula Sonke, describes as "farm slavery." Workers had few, if any, rights, and were dependent on land owners for housing, food, and access to water (Claasen 2011). Women on Farms began organizing in the early 1980s. In the mid-1990s, after apartheid officially ended, the new ANC government instituted a highly

progressive set of constitutional and legal guarantees designed to protect labor rights and promote gender equality. Although these formal guarantees remain in place and are among the strongest in the world, much less has changed in practice (Jara, Webster & Hunt 1999; Makgetla 2011). Sikhula Sonke, however, has persisted and evolved. In 2004 it took on collective bargaining rights. In 2008 it opened its doors to men. Currently it has 5,000 members, 90 percent of whom are female (Salo 2010; Sikhula Sonke 2012)

Sikhula Sonke has accomplished a great deal: two months paid maternity leave, school fees paid for the children of union members, day care, rights to toilets in the fields, running water and other basic amenities in the houses land owners provide. They continue to offer literacy classes. They also remain dedicated to female leadership and to ending male violence against women and children (Claasen 2011). To ensure Sikhula Sonke continues as a female-led organization, they have adopted a constitutional provision requiring the highest officers be female. Male members who join Sikhula Sonke must sign a vow printed on the single-sheet application form (Sikhula Sonke 2012). It reads: “as a male member of this union I hereby pledge not to exercise any violence against women and children. I am aware that my membership will end if I am guilty of this and that Sikhula Sonke will not represent me in any disciplinary processes if I am charged with this.” [translated from Afrikaans by Sahra Rykief]. Both of these unusual union practices warrant further study. They reveal how much a female-led, female-majority labor organization can accomplish in reordering conventional gender regimes.

South African domestic workers are among the leaders of the global movement for domestic worker rights, currently one of the most visible and vital transnational working women’s movements. Myrtle Witbooi, a leader in SADSAWU, is chair of the International Domestic Workers’ Network, which grew out of a 2006 Amsterdam conference sponsored by the Dutch-based NGO IRENE, the Dutch union federation FNV, the IUF, WIEGO, and the Committee for Asian Women (IDWN 2011). The story of

South African domestic worker organizing has been eloquently recounted by sociologist Jennifer Fish (2006a; 2006b, 2009), among others, and will not be detailed here. Suffice it to say, however, that the vibrancy and longevity of domestic worker organizing confounded the expectations of many, including labor researchers and leaders. Strong domestic worker organizations now exist, and have existed for decades, in the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, and Africa (IDWN 2011; Lazarini and Martinez 1994; Nagombe 1994; Anderfuhren 1994).

Domestic workers have even organized successfully in the United States. The New York City-based Domestic Workers United, for example, a majority of whose members are Caribbean, Latina, and African immigrants, convinced the New York state legislature in 2010 to pass a Bill of Rights for domestic workers, which, among other items, included the right to a paid day of sick leave, a right not enjoyed by other U.S. workers (Poo 2011; IDWN 2011). Domestic workers around the world, including those in the United States who belong to the National Domestic Workers Alliance set up in 2007, are building on their June 2011 victory at the ILO in passing Convention 189, Decent Work for Domestic Workers. The next step is to secure country ratifications in Brazil, South Africa, India, Kenya, Senegal, and other nations. The goal is 12 x 12, or twelve country ratifications by 2012 (Witbooi 2011).

What working women want around the world reflects the realities of their lives. A billion people are still illiterate globally; two-thirds of whom are women (Seager 2009). Women are 70 percent of the world's poor and the majority of the world's victims of violence. Thus, it should come as no surprise that many of the female-led unions in the Global South emphasize these concerns.

2.5 Expanding Frames and Rethinking Theories

Preceding sections of this report document the continuing feminization of union membership and the dynamic and expanding labor organizing women are doing in new women's unions and associations. I have noted the dearth of statistical data on women's traditional trade union membership as well as their

membership in the new unions and associations that are arising worldwide. In addition, it should be emphasized that although the case study literature on the new labor organizing among women workers is growing, it is still woefully incomplete. Some of the most vital and inspiring new labor organizations have not been studied. They are essentially invisible to all but a handful. The relationships between academics who study such activist organizations and the women leaders they profile can be complicated and the potential for unequal exchange is present. Nevertheless, the benefits of having these inspiring and instructive stories more publicly available are great.

The preceding sections further suggest the need for expanding the conventional frameworks still dominant in labor and gender scholarship. The older industrial relations literature on “women and unions,” for example, focused primarily on traditional unions; it also reflected the concerns of women in situations where they were a minority group desiring access to and leadership in a male-dominated trade union. The research posited women as outsiders in a “men’s movement” and one of its primary orientations was to understand the gender dynamics and “sexual politics” of male-dominated organizations (Pocock 1997; Franzway 1997). These problems still exist for many working women and, as section 3 details, the gender dynamics of male-dominated institutions and the experiences of women within such trade unions need further study. Studies utilizing approaches conversant with a broad base of disciplinary methodologies and theory would be particularly helpful. At the same time, more attention needs to be given to the reality of the rising number of female-majority unions. How does the organizational gender dynamic change once women are the majority? How does the rise of labor organizing among women in the Global South challenge received theories, priorities, and policies? Are there organizing and representational approaches in the Global South that could be appropriated by workers in more industrialized nations?

In a recent article I explored how the upsurge of collective organizing among some of the most excluded women workers – domestic workers, day care, home care and others – challenges conventional theories of collective mobilization (Cobble 2010). I argued that although the myth of women as unorganizable has largely disappeared, the myth of women’s jobs as more difficult to organize lingers. Theories of collective mobilization are still premised on outmoded notions of how “producerist” consciousness and “factory-style” workplaces are necessary for the rise of collective organization. Yet the organizing of women in the non-factory jobs often deemed the least likely to organize belies these premises. It appears that workers, once stirred by a sense of injustice, are capable of creating viable collective strategies no matter what kind of jobs they hold. Indeed, in the United States, before the New Deal, the dominant form of unionism was not factory unionism but what I have called “occupational unionism,” and it was practiced primarily by workers in non-factory sectors (Cobble 1991a, 1991b).

There is much to be learned about organizing and union revitalization from the new unionism being pioneered by women. Excluded from legal protection and without designated employers with whom to bargain, the new unionists invented other approaches. They forged partnerships with community groups and with the care recipients, customers, patients, or clients with whom they worked. They asserted their human rights to a living wage and to social protection. They turned to public opinion and changed the conversation about how certain kinds of jobs should be valued and rewarded. They advocated for the larger social good and vowed to secure better conditions for care recipients as well as caregivers (Barnes 2001; Cobble and Merrill 2009; Reese 2010).

As I discuss more fully in the next section, a large slice of the English-language “women and unions” literature is concerned with moving women into leadership in traditional trade unions (Trebilcock 1991; Gray 1993, 2001; Muir 1994, 1997). After a review of the progress that has been made in this struggle and an analysis of the debates over what interventions are most effective, I suggest once again

that the research frame needs expanding. Those concerned with union renewal and union women's empowerment need to study the institutional innovations and styles of leadership emerging in the new unions, many of which have historically been seen as outside the official union family.

3. THE GENDER GAP IN UNION LEADERSHIP

3.1. Union Women Decision-Makers: Progressing at Two Speeds

To what degree are women coming to lead labor movements globally? Efforts to secure greater equality and power for women in trade union institutions have always been part of labor history. In the 1970s, however, in many parts of the world, the pressures on labor institutions to increase women's participation and leadership intensified, fueled by the new numbers of female union members and the rise of a new feminism. By the 1990s, in many regions, nations, and unions, significant change had occurred. Yet in 2001 the ILO estimated women held only 1 percent of union decision-making positions globally, despite their rise to nearly 40 percent of union membership (McBride and Waddington 2009). Although updated aggregate data is lacking, preventing broad generalizations about nations and regions -- let alone about the world as a whole -- some excellent studies of individual regions, nations, and unions exist, as this section details.

Most researchers agree that considerable change has occurred in women's access to the top positions in some of the most powerful labor bodies. Most notably, in the ITUC, the global trade union federation with 175 million members and 305 affiliates in 151 countries, a woman, Sharan Burrow, moved into the top office, General Secretary, in June 2010. Prior to her election in 2010, she had served as the first woman ITUC President (2006-2010), the first woman ICFTU President (2004-2006), and the second woman to head the Australian Council of Trade Unions (2000-2004), following Jennie George into office.

Still, “women’s pyramid of exclusion” (with women occupying fewer and fewer spaces the higher up the pyramid one ascends) has not disappeared (ETUC 2003). Although data is patchy or non-existent in most regions of the world, the 2006 ETUC survey of affiliates provides a glimpse of the persisting “gender imbalance” in union leadership in 81 confederations with 52 million members representing 32 different countries (Sechi 2007). Although women comprised 42 percent of ETUC membership in 2006, they were 17 percent of the Presidents, 36 percent of the Vice-Presidents, 10 percent of the General Secretaries; and 20 percent of the Deputy General Secretaries (Sechi 2007). The percentage of women holding decision-making positions had increased since 2002 (with the exception of the office of President), but in no office had women reached parity. And as Homa Dean (2006) cautions in her analysis of an earlier 2002 ETUC survey, there’s a “positive trend” but the extent of progress can be exaggerated because position titles do not necessarily translate into power or authority.

The *variation* in the numbers of union women decision-makers within and between regions and nations appears to be wide, paralleling the “two world” pattern observed in Section 2 in regard to union feminization. Moghadam, Franzway, and Fonow (2011:7) report “impressive inroads into trade union decision-making” in Latin America, the Caribbean, Philippines, Australia, Canada, and Scandinavia. Morris (2011) documents the doubling of women General Secretaries in TUC affiliates between 1998 and 2004. Cobble and Michal’s 2000 survey of women’s leadership in the ten largest unions in the United States -- the most recent national survey available for the United States -- found women “made noticeable inroads into the executive suites of a growing number of the largest and most powerful of the national unions, broadening a trend evident in the 1980s (Cobble and Michal: 236-237).

Nevertheless, other regions and nations lag far behind. Earlier regional surveys for Central and Eastern Europe, for example, revealed few or no women in top leadership in peak bodies, despite the high percentage of women trade union members in this region. The problem was most acute in the Balkans

with women holding only 2 percent of decision-making positions (Petrovic 2000; ETUC 2003). Although dated, national studies of women's leadership in German and Italian unions found progress dispiritingly slow as well (Boch-Baumgarten 2002; Beccalli and Meardi 2002). In addition, recent assessments in South Africa note "a weak showing of women in national leadership" with only 3 of COSATU's 21 affiliates having women at the very top (Makgetla 2011).

In one of the first full-scale studies in English of women's leadership in Tunisian trade unions (Chekir and Arfaoui 2011), the authors present 2001 data documenting extreme gender disparities in who sits on executive boards in three of the largest unions, including the country's largest trade union, the Union Generale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT), whose 517,000 membership in 2005 was 35 percent female. Only one woman sat on their 100-person executive board in 2001. Yet given the influx of women into Tunisian trade unions over the past decade and the organized and persistent pressure of labor women's committees and networks, in alliance with women's rights NGOs, the Solidarity Center, and other groups, the situation in 2012 and in the future may look dramatically different. In a sign of mounting pressure for women's rights, including access to positions of public authority, in March 2011, the ITUC launched a new network of women trade unionists from 10 Middle Eastern and North African countries (Moghadam 2011; Burrow 2011). Such regional networks are also active in Central and Eastern Europe, where active women's committees exist in the Ukraine's Confederation of Free Trade Unions and in many other bodies (Petrovic 2000; WCFTU of Ukraine 2012).

The situation for aspiring women leaders in individual national and local unions is equally mixed, with some national unions reporting sizable gains and others none at all (for example, Cobble and Michal 2002). In short, in regard to women's leadership, union institutions are "progressing at two speeds," with rapid progress being made by some while others trail far behind (ETUC 2003:97).

To understand this “two-speed” divergence among unions, I examine a small group of labor organizations in the “fast lane” of female empowerment in Section 3.2. Then I turn in Section 3.3 to the various explanations for why the gender leadership gap persists and what can be done about it. Finally, in Section 3.4 I review the debates over whether women’s collective empowerment and the promotion of gender equality is well-served by a primary focus on moving women into executive office.

3.2. In the Fast Lane: UNISON’s Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approach

UNISON, the million-plus UK public sector union formed in 1993 from a merger with three unions, is routinely hailed as in “the vanguard” of gender equality and democratic unionism (Lawrence 1994; Mann, Ledwith & Colgan 1997; Colgan 1999; Colgan and Ledwith 2002a). Significantly, in this merger, unlike in many others, the best past practices were carried forward into the new organization. All three unions had gender equality policies, including a commitment to “reserve seats” for women, an approach to balancing union leadership that would become increasingly common among European and other unions in the 1980s and 1990s (Till-Retz 1986; White 1997). One of the unions, NALGO, also encouraged “self-organization,” or the development of women’s committees, conferences, and other woman-only structures. It was this combination of top-down and bottom-up pressure that would make the union a leader in inclusiveness and equality. Eventually, UNISON adopted a policy developed in Denmark, “proportionality with fair representation of all groups in the union,” which aimed at ensuring gender balance and democracy simultaneously (Mann, Ledwith & Colgan 1997). This top-down revolution, in conjunction with continued agitation from below, paid off not only in diversifying UNISON leadership but also in ensuring the union’s agenda reflected the interests of all its members (Colgan and Ledwith 2002a; Rayside 2007).

By the 2000s, many other labor organizations followed UNISON’s lead. In the 1990s, the ICFTU reported that at least sixteen trade union confederations, including many non-European, had “set aside”

seats for women on their top governing bodies (ETUC 2003; Briskin 2011a). Set asides also resonated in Canada, Australia, and in Latin America. In Argentina, for example, quotas of 30 percent women in union elected positions, including bargaining -- or proportionality if women's membership was below 30 percent -- became widespread after 2002 (Di Marco 2011). Brazil's CUT requires a minimum of 30 percent and a maximum of 70 percent of either sex in leadership (ICFTU 2005:27).

In 2002, PSI, a female-majority public sector GUF with 20 million members (the largest of the eleven ITUC-affiliated GUFs), amended its constitution to "mandate" rather than "encourage" gender parity on all decision-making bodies." Quickly, the Executive Board moved from 22 percent to 50 percent female. Affiliates, however, have yet to follow suit, with men still holding 85 percent of the top slots (Wintour 2011). Although not all GUFs have as impressive a record of action as PSI, a majority now have some form of set-aside to help integrate their leadership ranks (Franzway and Fonow 2011).

3.3. Identifying and Explaining the Continuing Gaps

If UNISON and others are in the "fast lane," who is in the "slow lane" and why? Why does the gender gap in union leadership persist and what can be done to move unions into the "fast lane"? Some researchers, as will be more fully detailed in 3.4., now question the desirability of focusing on moving individual women into leadership and, among other criticisms, object to the conflation of formal executive office-holding with "leadership." But until recently, the bulk of academic research on union women's leadership devoted its energy to strategizing about how to equalize office-holding between men and women.

The first wave of researchers pinpointed numerous obstacles to women's advancement: women's second shift in the home; men's determination to retain power; women's unfamiliarity with the technical skills needed for high office; women's own socialization and lack of self-esteem; union traditions such as choosing leaders from inside the ranks; lack of democratic union structures; and broader cultural

resistances to women's authority (Wertheimer and Nelson 1975; Glassberg, Baden, and Gerstal 1980; Gray 1993). Most researchers brought a multi-dimensional view to the problem, but a few, notably Pocock (1997: 9-25), prioritized male agency as primarily responsible for the leadership gap. Union leadership programs rarely took this tack, however. Indeed, many focused on how *women* could change and encouraged women to leave behind traditional female ways and learn assertiveness, bluff, and bluster.

The emphasis on the individual agency and personal attributes of either men or women lessened over time, with most studies continuing to point to a multiplicity of structural and cultural barriers, internal and external to unions (Greene and Kirton 2006). The list of barriers identified by researchers is long but often includes women's double day; women's lack of exposure to leadership skills and competencies; trade union structures and culture; and cultural constraints within the family and the broader society. This last obstacle is emphasized in the recent case studies from South Africa (Makgetla 2011) and Tunisia (Chekir and Arafoui 2011) mentioned in 3.1. Effective interventions most typically include training and educational programs (Greene and Kirton 2002; Kirton 2006), women's committees (Healy and Kirton 2000; Parker 2003) and other forms of self-organization (Makgetla 2011; Briskin 1999, 2011b) in conjunction with reserved seats or set-asides (Braithwaite and Byrne 1994; Chekir and Arafoui 2011). The need to address the gender division of reproductive labor remains a minor but persistent theme.

Pointing out the many obstacles to women's leadership and noting effective responses has been helpful and will continue to be so. Next steps are needed, however. Much of the literature on union women's leadership, for example, remains disconnected to the voluminous body of social science theory on the gender dynamics of organizations or the broad problems of "glass ceilings" and "sticky floors" for women (for example, Williams 2010). There are exceptions, of course. In a recent U.S.-based study for Harvard University's Labor and Worklife Program, Kaminski and Pauly (no date) rely on Kurt Lewin's

theories to argue that “greater change comes from removing restraining forces than adding supportive ones.” But in general, more disciplinary boundary-crossing would deepen and extend the thinking in the field and enable researchers to develop better theories of organizational change.

Studies of high-level career women, for example, reveal a dual problem: access and retention. The problem is not just getting women into the executive office; it is how to keep them there and how to make it possible for women to hold high-level paid jobs without giving up everything else. The emphasis has been on job and career redesign and how to change what is expected and required of executives. The demand of long hours and “undivided loyalty” weighs heavily on women, particularly those with care-giving responsibilities. Franzway (2000), using Lewis Coser’s (1974) term “greedy institutions,” has done exemplary work in drawing attention to how these pressures affect union women leaders (Franzway 2000; Franzway and Fonow 2011). These kinds of job redesign reforms remain difficult ones for labor organizations, given the stretched resources and the heightened expectations that accompany social reform work.

In the last decade, the study of women’s union leadership has shifted ground and redefined itself as concerned with gender, unions, and diversity (Oppenheim 1993; Colgan and Ledwith 2002b; Green and Kirton 2006; Dickerson 2006; Hunt and Rayside 2007). The conversation about “extending equality” (European Commission 2009) to new groups of marginalized workers and how women’s groups can make alliances with others has been rich theoretically. A cross-national literature has blossomed on unions and sexual diversity as well as on unions and racial diversity (Hunt 1999; Hunt and Boris 2007; Healy, Bradley and Mukherjee 2004; Kirton and Greene 2002; Greene and Kirton 2006). It overlaps with and enriches the older literature on women and union leadership. It also parallels the growth of “diversity initiatives” within unions, with those occurring in Canada, the Netherlands, the UK, and the United States the best documented.

In addition, until recently, the existing English-language literature zeroed in on Western Europe and English-speaking countries such as the UK, Canada, and Australia. Most studies were national, and comparative approaches were rare (for exceptions, Cook, Lorwin, and Daniels 1984; Cook 1992). Over the last fifteen years, however, a newer, more fully global body of literature has appeared, offering national, regional, and transnational studies of women's trade union leadership and gender and diversity initiatives within organized labor (Hunt 1999; Curtin 1997, 1999; Briskin and Eliasson 1999; Colgan and Ledwith 2002b; Hunt and Rayside 2007; Broadbent and Ford 2008b; Moghadam, Franzway, and Fonow 2011; Franzway and Fonow 2011).

3.4. Debating “Leadership” and “Representation”

Some researchers are critical of what they see as a narrow focus on the advancement of individual women into executive leadership. Briskin (2011b) argues that such a focus reinforces individual advancement at the expense of collective voice and mobilization. Further, it obscures other forms of “post-heroic” leadership and impedes “diversification of leadership and union renewal.” It is “not the few in top leadership,” Briskin claims (2011b), but rather the mobilization of groups that creates change.

A second line of criticism has to do with the question of “representativeness” and how individuals are “represented” in an organization. Some argue that having more women executives will not mean that women as a whole are better represented (Briskin 2011a, 2011b). There is no guarantee, for example, that women executives will pursue “women’s issues.”

This problem is correlated to some degree with numbers, however. When women are “tokens” or isolated at the top, often without allies or sufficient political clout, it is harder for them to take on “women’s issues.” Thus, the problem could be partially resolved not by lessening efforts to move women into leadership but by increasing such efforts. Still, as Wintour (2011) observes, even with PSI’s gender-

balanced executive boards and significant numbers of women in formal leadership positions, women lacked access to the informal and backroom sites where real power often lies.

Other critics, however, point to the diversity among women and the impossibility of one woman “representing” all women (Curtin 1999, 2011). The answer in part to this objection is also to move more women into office, and to insist, as have UNISON and many other unions, that “proportionality” be accompanied by “fair representation.” Seats should be reserved for women, but within that quota, diverse groups should also be represented.

Yet the “like representing like” perspective reflected in setting aside seats based on multiple categories of diversity has its opponents as well. Some note the impossibility of finding exact one-to-one correspondence or “representatives” for each different group and the possible infinite expansion of such categories. Indeed, in the end, we are all different and distinct. In that sense then “representing” is always about learning about the “other” and trying to understand and address the needs of someone who is not like you. Indeed, one promising intervention is a call to move beyond “face politics,” or the idea of simply electing someone who resembles you, to a debate about more substantive politics. The conversation thus shifts to the political agenda being advanced by various candidates rather than their sex or color or sexuality.

A related and continuing divide also exists over whether set-asides should be voluntary or mandatory. In the 1970s and 1980s, Swedish unions in particular rejected “imposed quotas,” and trumpeted an “incrementalist” approach (Till-Retz 1986; Peterson and Runyan 2010; Curtin and Higgins 1998; Curtin 2011). These “soft” Nordic policies are now being replaced by statutes with stronger requirements.

Increasingly researchers have become strong advocates of the bottom-up or “self-organization” approach (Braithwaite and Byrne 1995; Dean 2006; Briskin 2011a, 2011b; DiMarco 2011). “Self-

organization” or the embrace of separate women’s structures, committees, and divisions within unions is valued because it encourages “collective leadership,” preserves a “space” for the emergence of “women’s voices,” and makes it more likely that the women holding executive positions will actually be able to wield power and influence. Although a few researchers remain skeptical of the efficacy of strategies aimed at moving women into executive positions, most advocate combining the “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches modeled by UNISON.

There’s a somewhat hair-splitting debate at present over whether gender equality advocates should pursue “separate” organizing (organizing inside unions) or “autonomous” organizing (organizing independent unions) (Briskin 1999). It is a debate with a long history, with union women bitterly divided and with working women’s movements abandoning “autonomous” organizing at one historical moment only to embrace it at another (Cobble 1991a, 2004, Curtin 2011). Both approaches continue to have their advocates in the academic world and in the union movement itself. Both approaches can prove to be dead-ends as well. The key to whether separate structures “ghettoize” women or empower them may be in the particular kinds of separate structures advocated and in the legitimacy and resources enjoyed by those structures (Cobble 1990; Braithwaite and Byrne 1995). In my view, the question is contextual, with different strategies appropriate in different circumstances. Moreover, in practice working women’s movements frequently combine approaches, setting up multiple and complicated structures allowing for both female-only organizing as well as organizing alongside men.

But in the end how much difference does moving women into leadership positions make in advancing gender equality? The set-asides and other top-down reforms instituted by many unions after the 1970s did lessen obstacles to women’s equal access to resources and power, and in that sense, the effort to move women into leadership has made a real difference in advancing gender equality. In addition, as Wintour (2011) concludes, having more women had a “real” impact on the frequency and

seriousness with which gender equality issues were pursued in executive board meetings. Of course, as with union feminization, the addition of more women to the union executive suite by itself is no guarantee the union will increase its commitment to a program of gender equality, particularly if women remain tokens. At the same time, even individual women who are committed to advancing a program on behalf of all women can make a difference and that difference can be enhanced when they enjoy the support of a determined and well-organized women's group.

4. The Gender Gap in Union Priorities

4.1. What Are Women's Interests and Priorities?

Section 4 considers the difficult question of whether there is a gender gap in union priorities. Even if sufficient studies existed for some preliminary generalizations – and they do not – to answer such a question would be neither straightforward nor simple. Women's interests and priorities are hard to define. The goals sought by women unionists, whether they fall under the umbrella of “gender equality initiatives” or not, have varied over time, and from place to place. In addition, some researchers caution against using a single or pre-given definition of “women's interests” or “gender equality” (Curtin 1999, 2011). In Curtin's formulation, neither of these terms have a stable or universal meaning. They are always in flux and are being defined and redefined by women themselves as they learn from each other and from the world around them.

In what follows, I try to be attentive to these difficulties. I begin by offering a brief overview of how the formal union policies on gender equality have evolved from non-discrimination to gender mainstreaming. I then consider the degree to which unions have implemented their stated commitment to gender equality. I find that increasingly unions make women's concerns a priority and that in response to women's own shifting articulations of their interests, unions too have expanded their gender equality

agendas. This section concludes with a discussion of the new research on coalition-building and democracy initiatives and how these efforts intertwine with the quest for gender equality.

4.2. From Non-Discrimination to Gender Mainstreaming

Broadly speaking, in many of the regions of the world, there has been a decided shift from pursuing non-discrimination as a stated goal to instituting “gender mainstreaming.” Until the 1990s, gender equality was typically framed in union documents as ending sex-based discriminatory practices. What was enumerated as “discriminatory” expanded over time from an initial focus on ending sex-based barriers in employment, wages, and other working conditions to a broader definition incorporating the elimination of sex-based violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination based on sexual orientation. In many regions of the world, trade unions were ahead of the societal curve on these issues. In the 1980s and 1990s, they pushed hard to change public policies and employer practices on these matters, and there were notable successes.

By the late 1990s, gender-mainstreaming emerged as the preferred language in which to discuss gender equality. First developed in the mid-1980s as a way of integrating women and their values into international development efforts, “gender-mainstreaming” took center stage after its adoption into the 1995 Beijing Action Platform, agreed upon at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women (Hawkesworth 2006:96; Dean 2006). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the ILO, ITUC, ETUC, major GUFs, and other union institutions (and their partners such as the Solidarity Center) also embraced the concept (ICFTU 2002; ETUC 2005, 2007, Olney 2011; Franzway and Fonow 2011; Sechi 2007; Dean 2006; Yuki 2008, 2009; McGowan and Sparr 2005).

Gender-mainstreaming required the integration of a gender perspective into every organizational policy and practice. Its adherents claim gender-mainstreaming as the most “far-reaching,” transformative approach to gender equality (Dean 2006). Gender-mainstreaming moves beyond simply eliminating

barriers to gender equality; instead, it is a commitment to making the achievement of gender equality central to an organization's mission. Gender mainstreaming requires that institutions assess their actions to determine their gendered effects and take steps to correct gender inequalities and gender discrimination.

The critics of gender mainstreaming see it as an “expert-bureaucratic model” rather than a “participative-democratic model.” From their perspective, it requires batteries of experts, turns the achievement of gender equality into a technical and quantitative rather than a political issue, and “diverts energy away from social movements” (Peterson and Runyan 2010: 15). Yet gender mainstreaming is best understood as one among a battery of tools and as an intervention with different effects depending on who is wielding the surgical scalpel.

4.3 Increasing Union Responsiveness to Gender Equality

Since the 1970s, in my view, unions have become one of the primary global vehicles for advancing gender equality. Union leadership in the global movement for women's rights is evident in the activities of the ITUC for example. After growing pressure from its Women's Committee, the ICFTU set up an Equality Department in 1992 and in 1996, named gender equality as one of the ICFTU's five priority areas (Petrovic 2000; ICFTU 2005). Working closely with UN Women, headed since its establishment in July 2010 by former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, the ITUC has taken a leading role in the global campaign to end violence against women (“Say No to Violence”); it is also deeply involved in a range of other gender equality initiatives, including the ILO's “Decent Work, Decent Life for Women” campaign. At the ITUC's 1st World Women's Conference in 2009, 450 trade union delegates gathered in Brussels to consider how to advance this campaign (ITUC 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Like the ITUC, the GUFs, especially PSI, EI, UNI, and IMF, are global leaders in gender equality campaigns, including efforts to eliminate the global gender pay gap (estimated at 20

percent), the full integration of women into decision-making, responding to the needs of women in the informal economy, and linking gender equality and sustainable economic development (Pillinger 2005; Wintour 2011; Franzway and Fonow 2011).

As the priorities of their members shifted so did the priorities of labor institutions. As the language of human rights and women's rights gained greater currency, for example, many worker movements, including female-majority movements, adopted an expandable rights-based framework and identified such basic necessities as housing, access to water, and the right to security of person as a woman's human right. Sikhula Sonke, for example, judged preventing evictions and raising the statutory minimums as among its highest priorities. At the same time, Sikhula Sonke pursued issues more typically identified as "gender equality" issues: ending violence against women, preserving women's leadership in the union, and insisting that housing contracts be signed by wives as well as husbands. PSI and other unions have adopted a similarly broad approach to gender equality. "Access to safe and affordable water," PSI asserts, "is pre-eminently a human right and a gender issue" as it is predominantly girls and women who do this work and "bear the consequences" of poor water and sanitation" (Wintour 2011). EI, ITUC, and PSI also have joined with the UN to combat female illiteracy (EI, ITUC, PSI 2011).

An increasing number of peak bodies and other unions have incorporated women's demands more fully into their agenda. The list of peak bodies in the "fast lane" is long and frequently includes, but is not limited to, the British TUC (Morris 2011) and the peak bodies of Sweden, Norway, and Finland (Dean 2006). Canadian unions receive high marks as well. "More than any other social institution," Briskin (2011a: 228) concludes, [in Canada] "unions have taken initiatives to transform organizational practice and culture to ensure fairness and representation for equality-seeking members." For decades, "equality bargaining" has been a high priority for Canadian unions (Briskin and Yanz 1983), and most researchers find considerable progress, though (Forrest 2007) sees Canadian unions as lagging on

remedying sex segregated jobs and sex-based pay scales. Rayside (2007), however, judges Canada as the world leader, along with the Netherlands, in sexual diversity initiatives.

As earlier sections of this report demonstrate, however, many Global South unions in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, are also leading advocates for the rights of women and other marginalized groups. One recent assessment (De la Cruz and Francisco 2008: 508-9) from the Philippines, for example, found considerable expansion in the scope of women's issues taken up by trade unions. Traditionally, Philippine unions had focused on the right to work, on equal pay, maternity and health issues, and social benefits. More recently, the authors conclude, unions have taken up the "gendered power relations between men and women," sexual harassment, gay and lesbian concerns, and the problem of "machismo."

Overall, however, unions evidence a divide in their responsiveness to prioritizing gender equality, with some unions much more engaged and gender-sensitive than others. In Sections 2 and 3 I discussed some of the progress that has occurred in increasing women's access to collective representation and to decision-making positions in unions. Yet I also noted the "two worlds" pattern (or the tendency for unions to be either heavily female or heavily male) as well as the "two-speed progress" of union women's leadership (with some unions going much faster than others). In Section 3 I find a similar bifurcated pattern of union responsiveness to gender equality concerns.

Researchers point to a number of factors to explain the variation among unions in responsiveness to women's issues. The list is not surprising and is indeed somewhat tautological: the number of women members; the power of women's caucuses, committees, or structures; the degree of commitment from the leadership to gender equality; and the political ideology of the union (those with prior commitments to a broad "social unionism" are more amenable to "gender equality") (Bielski 2005; Hunt and Boris 2007). Milkman's (1990) analysis is among the more sophisticated explorations of the conditions under which unions support gender equality initiatives. She assumes demographic, leadership, and ideological factors

as influential; to that list, however, relying on an historical-institutional framework, she adds the historical moment in which a union's institutions took shape. The more responsive unions, she argues, are those whose birth coincided with a more "gender-friendly" moment. Her research suggests how hard it is to change organizational practices and cultures once the institutional tracks have been laid.

Hunt (1999) and Rayside (2007) offer a preliminary analysis of the global variation of union responsiveness on sexual diversity initiatives. Hunt (1999) found a gap between the Global North and the rest of the world, with "real responsiveness" in many of the largest trade union federations in the Global North -- the British TUC, the Canadian Labor Congress, FNV in the Netherlands, DGB in Germany, the AFL-CIO in the United States, and the ACTU in Australia -- and "inactive" or "openly antagonistic" responses in "Africa, India, South America, Asia, Russia, China, and the South Pacific." Rayside's (2007) later global mapping of union responsiveness to sexual diversity is similar. Their generalizations remain tentative, however, as they should, and await a fuller analysis of the variation within region and nation.

4.4. Coalition-Building and Democracy

Closing the gender gap in membership and leadership (individual and collective) will help close the gender gap in union priorities. Yet as documented throughout this report, the feminization of union membership and leadership is helpful but not sufficient to ensure that gender equality is a priority. Recent research stresses the efficacy of coalition-building and democracy initiatives for enhancing gender equality.

Coalition-building has proven effective in changing the gender policies of unions, even in unions lacking female majorities in membership or leadership. In the U.S. labor movement, for example, gender equality was advanced by the formation of coalitions. In 2005, after over a half century of agitation, the AFL-CIO changed its constitution to expand its Executive Board, bringing in more women and people of color. It was a determined coalition of women's rights and civil rights advocates who made the difference

(Nussbaum 2007). Similarly, coalitions between women and men have been successful in advancing other “women’s issues” such as pay equity or family leave. Coalitions are complicated of course and each partner faces the possibility of giving up a crucial part of his or her agenda. For example, family and medical leave coalitions in the United States, as effective as they have been, secured legislation that still disadvantages low-income women (Cobble and Michal 2002; Cobble 2004). Nevertheless, on many issues common ground can be found and both the interests of men and women can be advanced. Not surprisingly, coalition-building has been more successful where the interests of men and women are complementary or more amenable to being aligned – for example raising the minimum wage or family leave. Where the issues are more difficult to define as aligned or mutual, as in the case with sexual violence and harassment, mixed-sex coalitions are more difficult to sustain (Cobble and Michal 2002).

The push by gender equality advocates for more female leadership at the top and more women’s self-organization is often credited for making unions more democratic. Gender equality advocates, it is asserted, have made it easier for other marginalized groups to gain a voice and a seat at the table. Women’s demands for inclusiveness legitimize the claims of other groups and the structural changes pushed for by women’s groups create greater possibilities of leadership for other marginalized groups. Indeed, as some gender scholars have observed, by increasing democracy in unions and by pioneering community partnerships and a more “social unionism,” union women activists have been engaged in “union renewal” strategies for a long while (Kainer 2009).

Efforts to democratize unions often benefit women and help advance gender equality. Democracy can mean more women’s voices present at the table and thus a more fluid and diverse perspective on women’s needs and aspirations can be articulated. Democracy also means the energies of more groups can be mobilized to make rhetorical promises reality. Neither coalition-building nor

democracy movements are aimed at gender equality, but they each appear to have the potential for substantially advancing a gender equality agenda.

5. Challenges for the Future

5.1 NGOs, MBOs, and Grassroots Leadership

The established trade union movement in many regions of the world is increasingly partnering with a variety of civil society organizations. NGOs are flourishing, with their number and influence on the rise (Sikkink and Smith 2002; Kidder 2002). Many women's and human rights NGOs are integrating the labor and economic rights of women and working people into their frameworks and programming priorities. In addition, they are increasingly recognizing the crucial role of democratic trade unions in furthering those rights (Basu 2010). This growing partnership between economic and gender justice organizations is promising, and as Sections 2.3 and 2.4 documented, these alliances have produced beneficial change for working women and strengthened democratic trade unionism.

At the same time, the increasing class inequality globally (Munck 2002; Seager 2009) as well as what Sonia Alvarez (1998) calls the NGOization of reform presents challenges for the union movement as it does for the women's movement. NGOs are often led by professionals and, as is true in any cross-class alliance, the distinctive perspectives and voices of grassroots and working-class women may be overshadowed (Castillo 2010; Brooks 2007; Ford 2008). Elites may exert undue influence over the agenda of grassroots movements by virtue of their greater expertise, resources, and self-confidence.

Gender scholars have been attentive to the power differentials and class tensions in cross-class women's movements (Basu 2010). Yet few of these studies focus on partnerships involving labor or union women. Scholars need to assess this new emerging partnership between unions and NGOs, with an eye to both the advantages of such coalitions as well as the disadvantages and challenges.

Some helpful and specific institutional responses to the potential power differential that can exist between grassroots organizations and other groups come from working women's unions and organizations themselves. SEWA, for example, has an extensive training program on creating membership-based organizations (MBO). Although becoming an MBO does not mean severing ties with NGOs, foundations, and other groups, it does help the grassroots organization maintain more control over its own direction and to further democratize. SEWA argues that working women's organizations are strengthened by having a portion of income come directly from the members themselves and by setting up democratic structures that encourage member participation at all levels (Bali 2011).

The historical practices of the National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), a multi-class U.S. women's labor organization closely affiliated to the American Federation of Labor, are also instructive. The WTUL, in existence from 1903 to 1951, organized women into trade unions and lobbied for worker rights and social protections. Wealthy female allies both funded the organization and belonged to it. Concerned with the power that class privilege and wealth bestowed, the WTUL passed a constitution provision requiring that a majority of the WTUL Executive Board be drawn from the ranks of working women (Cobble 2005).

5.2 Mergers and Gender Equality

The continuing wave of union mergers presents a second challenge for the promotion of gender equality. It is crucial to study this process and ascertain the gendered effects of such structural changes.

McBride and Waddington (2009) review the published case study material that examines gender equity in mergers and find a mixed picture, with some mergers – UNISON for example –resulting in greater gender equality. Yet other research on the gendered effects of union size suggests that by increasing union size mergers may discourage women's leadership and participation. Sayce, Greene, and Ackers (2006) and Blaschke (2011) found greater participation and leadership by women in small unions.

Indeed, to the degree that post-merger structures fracture communities and relationships, mergers may disproportionately lessen women's participation. Workers are more loyal, involved, and committed to institutions in which their interests are directly reflected and where they share mutual interests with other members. Thus, mergers and acquisitions may strengthen a labor organization by increasing overall membership, but merged structures may also weaken a labor organization unless local structures are designed that preserve workers' "communities of interest."

Lastly, to the degree that mergers include the dissolution of female-only organizations and their absorption into mixed-sex organizations they can be problematic for the advancement of gender equality. Mergers have the potential, for example, to diminish the legitimacy, power, and resources of separate-sex organizational structures. Such structures, researchers have found, are important in ensuring the advancement of gender equality.

5.3 Union Renewal and Gender Equality

Kainer (2009), among others, calls attention to the failure of the union renewal literature to credit the longstanding revitalization efforts of women unionists. Women, it is argued, advocated and pressed for many of the same reforms now routinely touted as the answer to union decline: increased democracy, and union inclusiveness as well as coalition-building and community alliances. Yet this perspective, as important as it is, misses what some scholars argue is crucial for union renewal and greater gender equality: the rethinking of inherited and outmoded institutional and legal frameworks.

The Canadian legal scholar Judy Fudge, among others, pointed out in 1993 that unions would need to rethink their legal framework if they were to organize the new workforce of women, part-timers, temporary, and casual workers. I came to a similar conclusion in 1994 in analyzing the labor law reforms that would benefit women as part of the debate generated by the Dunlop Commission on US Labor Law Reform (Cobble 1994). Many of the union structures and practices inherited from the past act as barriers

to women's access to representation and leadership. They were not necessarily instituted with the intention to exclude or disadvantage women but in effect they do. They were designed with the dominant workforce and family forms of the time in mind: that meant an industrial workforce, largely with full-time jobs, and male breadwinner families with female dependents and children. These practices were not suited to all workers, including many women workers, at the time they were designed. They are even more of a mismatch now.

In short, closing the three gaps discussed in this report – the organizing, leadership, and priorities gap -- will require rethinking legal frameworks as well as representational forms. It will also require thinking more about how different sectors of the workforce require different kinds of unions. Informal sector workers, for example, are capable of collective organizing as SEWA powerfully demonstrates. Yet their unionism differs dramatically from the unionism typical of factory workers. Union renewal and gender equality will require that established trade unions reach out to new groups of workers and make their concerns priorities. Established unions will also need to welcome the structures and organizational forms these new groups of unionists creating. One size unionism never fit all. That is even truer today as economic restructuring, globalization, and feminization continues.

5.5. Mapping the Global and the Local

Throughout this report, I have identified gaps in the research on gender equality and labor movements and suggested new avenues for research. Here I return briefly to that topic.

More global and comparative research on women and unions is long overdue. At the same time, attention will need to be retained on the national and local contexts in which so much depends as well as on the relation between the local and the global. In particular, there is a dearth of case studies of grassroots and local labor organizing efforts by women workers. Researchers and policy makers have much to learn from workers themselves as well as those who partner with them to help create more

democratic societies. More collaboration and exchange between those who study labor organizations and those who lead and sustain them would be beneficial.

Mapping the global and the local will require that the scholarly conversation be less insular, less parochial, and less disciplinary-bounded. It will require scholars to broaden their intellectual frames and cross disciplinary and geographic boundaries. It will require that research expand to include the new unions and networks working women are pioneering around the world. Lastly, it will require that conversations be initiated and sustained between researchers, practitioners, and policy-advocates.

The unionism built by women Honduran banana workers recounted by Frank (2005) is remarkably similar to the “Bread and Roses” unionism advanced by Italian, Russian, and Eastern European garment workers in New York City a hundred years earlier. The unions that arose in New York’s sweatshops ended cut-throat competition in the industry, raised the working and living standards of the workers, provided protection against injury and insult, and gave workers the time and resources to pursue education, enjoy culture, and participate more fully as citizens of a democracy. In Honduras, the women too sought dignity on and off the job, access to learning and literacy, an end to sexual and political violence, and a more democratic society.

Mapping the global and local initiatives for worker democracy and gender equality is an ambitious research agenda. But it is well worth the effort. Those who are struggling to create democratic and just institutions and societies around the world deserve to have their stories told.

APPENDICES

A. Sources for Table 1: Women's Trade Union Membership by Nation

Table 1: Women's Trade Union Membership by Nation¹

	% Female TUM, Most Recent	% Female TUM, 2000s	Percent Female Labor Force ²	Overall Union Density
Latvia	68.0 ³ (2008)	58.9 ³ (2003)	48.4 (2009)	10-19 ⁸ (2008)
Poland	59.2 ³ (2008)		45.0 (2009)	10-19 ⁸ (2008)
Lithuania	56.3 ³ (2008)	57.1 ³ (2003)	49.0 (2009)	0-10 ⁸ (2008)
Estonia	55.6 (2009)	64.0 ³ (2003)	49.1 (2009)	10.7 (2009)
Finland	54.7 ³ (2008)	53.1 ³ (2003)	48.1 (2009)	90-100 ⁸ (2008)
United Kingdom	54.5 (2010)	47.3 (2000)	45.6 (2009)	20-29 ⁸ (2008)
Ireland	53.3 (2009)	43.5 (2001)	43.1 (2009)	32.1 (2008)
Norway	52.1 ³ (2008)		47.4 (2009)	70-79 ⁸ (2008)
Ukraine	52-48.2 ⁴ (2011)		49.1 (2009)	47.2 ⁴ (2011)
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	51.8 (2009)	56.5 (2001)	41.1 (2009)	
Sweden	51.5 ³ (2008)	52.0 ³ (2003)	47.3 (2009)	80-89 ⁸ (2008)
Denmark	50.4 (2010)	49.2 ³ (2003)	46.9 (2009)	80.5 (2008)
Canada	50.0 ⁵ (2005)		47.0 (2009)	27.5 ⁹ (2010)
Slovenia	49.9 ³ (2008)	49.7 ³ (2003)	46.2 (2009)	30-39 ⁸ (2008)
Taiwan	48.3 (2008)			36.1 (2008)
Luxembourg	48.1 ³ (2008)		43.9 (2009)	50-59 ⁸ (2008)
Australia	48.0 (2010)	42.4 (2000)	45.3 (2009)	20.3 (2006)
Bulgaria	46.9 ³ (2008)	49.7 ³ (2003)	46.1 (2009)	20-29 ⁸ (2008)
Hungary	46.2 ³ (2008)		45.1 (2009)	20-29 ⁸ (2008)
United States	45.7 (2010)	41.0 (2000)	46.0 (2009)	12.1 (2007)
Hong Kong	44.5 (2009)		46.3 (2009)	22.5 (2009)
Mexico	42.4 ⁶ (2000)		36.1 (2009)	11.2 ¹⁰ (2008)
Portugal	41.9 (2008)	41.5 ³ (2003)	46.8 (2009)	20-29 ⁸ (2008)
Slovakia	41.9 ³ (2008)	42.1 (2003)	51.0 (2009)	10-19 ⁸ (2008)
Namibia	40.7 (2004)		46.1 (2009)	
Brazil	40.6 (2007)	40.1 (2005)	43.7 (2009)	17.8 ¹¹ (2007)
Malaysia	39.5 (2010)	38.0 (2005)	35.5 (2009)	10.1 (2008)
Belgium	39.1 ³ (2003)		44.9 (2009)	79.2 ¹² (2009)
Cyprus	37.3 ³ (2008)	36.3 ³ (2003)	42.8 (2009)	50-59 ⁸ (2008)
China	36.4 (2009)	37.8 (2000)	44.6 (2009)	90.3 (2000)
Nicaragua	35.6 (2009)	44.7 (2006)	38.7 (2009)	
Austria	33.3 ³ (2008)	33.2 ³ (2003)	45.5 (2009)	30-39 ⁸ (2008)

Netherlands	32.4 (2008)	28.1 (2001)	45.7 (2009)	20-29 ⁸ (2008)
Germany	31.8 ³ (2008)		45.6 (2009)	20-29 ⁸ (2008)
Chile	30.6 (2009)	19.7 (2002)	37.2 (2009)	12.5 (2009)
Malta	30.5 ³ (2008)	27.3 ³ (2003)	32.4 (2009)	50-59 ⁸ (2008)
Bangladesh	14.0 ⁷ (2009)		24.0 ⁷ (2009)	
El Salvador	13.2 (2009)	12.5 (2005)	41.5 (2009)	8.0 (2009)
Pakistan	3.2 (2007)	1.5 (2000)	19.7 (2009)	15.7 ¹³ (2009)

¹ Unless otherwise noted, data is taken from the International Labour Organization (2011).

² Unless otherwise noted, all data in this column is taken from the World Bank (2012).

³ European Industrial Relations Observatory On-line (EIRO) (2012). EIRO includes the following disclaimer: “This report provides data about trade union membership over the period 2003–2008 in the current 27 EU Member States and Norway. The membership figures provided are those made available from national sources – usually the trade union organisations themselves – and reported by the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO) centres in each country. No attempt has been made to assess their accuracy or to harmonise them...[and] this should be borne in mind when reading the information provided.”

⁴ These figures refer to differences in the percentage of female membership in unions inherited from the Soviet Union (about 52%) and in independent unions (48.2%). The former figure is from information supplied by Tatiana Solodovnyk in an email dated January 30, 2012. The latter figure is from the Women’s Committee of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (2012).

⁵ Morrisette, Schellenberg, and Johnson (2005). This figure is an estimate. Despite Canada’s status as a developed, industrialized nation, there appears to be very little national-level data on Canadian women’s trade union membership.

⁶ This figure is based on information supplied by Lorraine Clewer in an email dated January 5, 2012 and Monica Garcia in an email dated 2 February 2012. The figure refers to all unions in the industrial sector and does not distinguish between independent, democratic unions and the much larger proportion of Mexico’s workforce that is unionized in state-sponsored unions.

⁷ International Labour Organization (2009). According to this report, an average of about 14% of the membership of 17 national-level union organizations is female. The figure for the female percentage of the workforce is an estimate.

⁸ European Industrial Relations Observatory On-line (2012). Overall union density is defined as the unionized proportion of the eligible workforce. EIRO includes the following disclaimer: “The crude density figures given...are based on figures for the total number of employees, as measured in national labour force surveys. There are no guarantees that they are calculated in the same way in every country, or include the same categories of people.”

⁹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development StatExtracts (2012).

¹⁰ Hayter and Stoevska (2009), p. 10. Overall union density is calculated using a percentage of total employment. When considered as a percentage of wage and salaried earners, Mexico’s union density is 17.0%; this table uses the more conservative statistic.

¹¹ Hayter and Stoevska (2009), p. 10. Overall union density is defined as a percentage of total employment. When considered as a percentage of wage and salaried earners, Brazil's union density is 20.9%; this table uses the more conservative statistic.

¹² Hayter and Stoevska (2009), p. 10. Overall union density is defined as a percentage of total employment. When considered as a percentage of wage and salaried earners, Belgium's union density is 93.2%; this table uses the more conservative statistic.

¹³ Hayter and Stoevska (2009), p. 10. Overall union density is defined as a percentage of wage and salaried earners. No data for union density as a percentage of total employment was available for Pakistan.

B. Sources for Table 2: Growth of Organized Labor in the World, 1870-2001.

The Table was reproduced from Docherty (2004), 408. His explanation for sources is as follows: "The membership of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has been used as the basis of the world total of union membership from 1950. It should be noted that the figures compiled by the ICFTU are incomplete for a number of countries and periods and therefore require some upward adjustment. Other sources include H. A. Marquand et al., *Organized Labour in Four Continents* (London: Longmans, Green, 1939), p. 438 (for Mexico in 1940) and Elias T. Ramos, *Philippines Labor Movement in Transition* (Quezon City: New Day, 1976), pp. 8-9 (for the Philippines in 1940)."

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