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Advancing Immigrant Worker Rights through Labor-Community Coalition:  
Comparative Case Studies on Strategy of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Social Welfare

by

Mindy Minyi Chen

2017

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### Advancing Immigrant Worker Rights through Labor-Community Coalitions: Comparative Case Studies on Strategy of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign

by

Mindy Minyi Chen

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Yeheskel Hasenfeld, Co-Chair

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Since 2008, a coalition known as the CLEAN Carwash Campaign has been organizing car wash workers in Los Angeles. How did CLEAN manage the divergent interests of its coalition members and strategize? What is it about CLEAN that led the labor-community coalition to achieve gains for *carwasheros* when conventional wisdom dictates that low wage immigrant workers were too vulnerable to be unionized? Given the dearth of empirical research into how social movement coalitions strategize and how campaign strategies link to outcomes, this dissertation seeks to add to the understanding of social movement strategies by examining the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to answer the following three questions:

- What are the strategies used by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign?
- How are CLEAN's strategies determined?
- How do strategies relate to outcomes?

For the dissertation research, I conducted comparative case studies of four local campaigns undertaken by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign in two distinct regions of Los Angeles—the Westside and South LA. A two-by-two case study design across two victorious and two failed cases was used to understand CLEAN’s campaign strategy development and subsequent outcomes. Findings suggest that strategy setting is influenced by a complex array of structural factors including interaction with targets, workers, and allies that shape available tactical options. Outcomes of victories and losses demonstrate the challenges for campaign leadership in pursuing choices that take advantage of target vulnerabilities, foster worker ownership and commitment in organizing, rally community and coalition support, and capitalize contextual political opportunities.

The dissertation of Mindy Minyi Chen is approved.

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2017

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“All over America, workers are organizing in all kinds of ways... We heard that people want to be part of our movement too, but it’s too hard to join. We have to change so that our unions and union movement are open to everyone.” During the AFL-CIO 2013 Quadrennial Convention in Los Angeles, President Richard Trumka of the national labor federation called for a reawakening of working people’s movement in the U.S. Noting the urgency of the need to improve work conditions for low wage immigrant workers, Trumka urged unions to form stronger alliances with community organizations through labor-community partnerships. Standing alongside Trumka, car wash workers representing LA’s CLEAN Carwash Campaign cheered while the audience erupted into standing ovation.

The AFL-CIO 2013 Quadrennial Convention marked an important shift in the American labor movement’s official stance toward organizing low wage immigrant workers. Often perceived as compliant and uncritical of degraded conditions, immigrant workers were long thought to be un-organizable and a threat to the standards of unionized work (Milkman, 2006). Over time, as unions experienced decline and loss of membership across industries, they gradually recognized the importance of engaging immigrant workers as a way to preserve standards for all workers while bringing in new members (Bronfenbrenner & Juravich, 1998). Consequently, there has been increasing convergence of union and community-based organizing approaches in the last decades that has ushered in new experimentations and partnerships across the U.S. (Fine, 2011; Milkman, 2011). In the early 2000s, when founders of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign first approached the AFL-CIO about their organizing plan, they were

skeptically received as naive daydreamers. Fast forward to 2013, CLEAN's unionized *carwasheros* have become poster children for labor's new commitment in organizing low wage immigrant workers through collaboration and community engagement. In simultaneously intervening at the workplace and in the broader community through direct service, advocacy, and grassroots action, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign casts a wide organizing net, reflecting the capabilities of its coalition partners. In fact, the campaign would not have been possible without an alliance of organizations to share resources and coordinate efforts, as the AFL-CIO and many community-based organizations (CBOs) play key roles in funding and supporting the coalition that has since successfully unionized more than 30 car washes across California.

Scholars agree that modern social movements are generally not unitary actors; rather, they consist of interconnected social movement organizations (SMOs) that are formally tied into coalitions (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978; Meyer & Whittier, 1994). Many studies show that coalitions contribute to activists' success by improving access to elites, mobilizing widespread support for issues, and adding legitimacy to demands (Heaney & Rojas, 2008; Steedly & Foley, 1979). More importantly, coalitions augment groups' resource base and strategic capacity to enable the pursuit of campaigns involving multiple tactics (Reese, 2011; Tarrow, 1998). Despite the advantages, working in coalitions can be difficult, as member organizations can have diverging identities and must compromise on expectations and choice of strategies (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Hula, 1999; Staggenborg, 1986).

Scores of articles and handbooks have been written for activists, social workers, and other practitioners of community organizing on building coalitions for causes ranging from affordable housing advocacy to asthma prevention. With regards to developing effective coalition strategies, these guides make recommendations such as outlining key measurable goals

and engaging diverse rank-and-file members (La Botz, 1991), anticipating stakeholder concerns to maintain broad-based institutional support (Brown, 2015), adopting consensus and conflict resolution procedures (Butterfoss et al., 1993), and establishing quality interactional processes to align identities and interests (Staples, 2004). Unfortunately, few references to rigorous research have found their way into such guides to substantiate why strategy setting should be conducted a certain way, or why particular activities should be chosen over alternatives. On the other hand, scholars of organizations and social movements have amassed many studies examining coalition dynamics and various aspects of strategy over recent decades. Yet the tendency toward specialization and compartmentalization in the social sciences has resulted in a paucity of integrated research: while cursory searches of “social movement strategy” and “coalition strategy” in academic journal databases yield many empirical case studies across disciplines, strategy is rarely well defined and frequently taken for granted simply as decisions pursued. There is scant in-depth examination of what makes an action strategic, how strategies are devised, and the mechanisms that link strategies to outcomes within individual social movement organizations or coalitions.

I argue that more research into how social movement coalitions strategize and how strategies relate to campaign outcomes is needed; my dissertation does so in an in-depth study of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign. I examine how strategy setting is influenced by a complex array of structural factors including organizational context and interaction with others that shape available strategic options; at the same time, I investigate how a skilled campaign leadership pursues choices that capitalize on contextual opportunities, balance multiple stakeholder demands, strengthen the coalition, and ultimately achieve mission goals.

## ***Organization of the Chapters***

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters. In Chapter One, I begin with a brief description of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign, its campaign approaches, and its formal coalition structure, before introducing the research questions. In Chapter Two, relevant literature on social movements are reviewed to contextualize the need for deliberate investigation on coalition strategy. In Chapter Three, I draw on field theory as conceptual framework to guide and focus my inquiry. Chapter Four describes the comparative case studies research design, primary data source, and course of action for data collection and analysis. Chapter Five presents findings in two cases—one victory and one loss—located in the Westside of Los Angeles, while Chapter Six presents findings on two more cases—another victory and loss—in South Los Angeles. Chapter Seven focuses on comparisons of factors that influenced strategy and outcomes in all four cases. In Chapter Eight, I conclude by summarizing key findings and presenting their implications.

## **Background of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign**

Throughout Los Angeles County, about 500 car washes employ approximately 10,000 workers to provide labor-intensive handwashing and detailing services for personal automobiles (United Steel Workers, 2008). As part of a largely unregulated industry dominated by low road employers, car washes routinely subject workers to occupational hazards such as exposure to toxic chemicals, denial of water and meal breaks, off-clock work, poverty wages, and even withholding of payment (Barry et al., 2009; Garea & Stern, 2010). While the reported revenues of LA's car washes total more than \$250 million each year (Narro, 2007), the average car wash worker earns an annual salary of \$12,932 (United Steel Workers, 2008). Because most workers—*carwasheros*, as they refer to themselves—are primarily of foreign-born Mexican and

Central American backgrounds and approximately 25% are undocumented (Milken Institute, 2005), they are highly vulnerable to employer retaliation and termination when they try to challenge injustices at work.

In the early 1990s, attorneys from legal services and immigration advocacy organizations across Los Angeles County noticed the frequency of labor abuses affecting car wash workers and formed an informal coalition to advocate on their behalf (Garea & Stern, 2010). After realizing the limitations of litigation-based strategies, advocates reached out to their networks for support from other organizations across LA. After almost two decades of organizing, the Community Labor Environmental Action Network (CLEAN) Carwash Campaign officially emerged in 2008 as a joint project of the AFL-CIO, the United Steel Workers (USW), and many community-based organizations (CBOs) in a concerted response to the exploitation experienced by *carwasheros* throughout Los Angeles. The CLEAN Carwash Campaign, with its stated mission to elevate industry standard for wages and work conditions through unionizing car washes, exemplifies the AFL-CIO's new vision for labor-community partnership as it combines the strengths of coalition organizations to not only address worker grievances, but also to achieve long-term union contracts or collective bargaining agreements with employers. As a coalition, CLEAN receives fiscal and personnel support from various organizations. In addition to combining actual and symbolic resources, CLEAN's coalition structure also enables its members to overcome tactical constraints of single organizational forms by benefiting from additional organizational expertise: CBOs such as the Clergy Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE-LA) come to mediate employer behaviors, while unions such as USW Local 675 come to advocate for immigration reform outside of its traditional purview of representing oil refinery workers.



As of 2014, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign coalition comprised approximately over one hundred organizations that include civil and immigrant rights nonprofits, occupational safety groups, health clinics, legal-aids, worker centers, and unions. There are many distinct levels within the coalition's structure: a Steering Committee, consisting of CLEAN's Executive Director and Strategic Campaign Coordinator along with representatives from the AFL-CIO, USW International and USW Local 675, UCLA Downtown Labor Center, Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund, Koreatown Immigrant Worker Alliance, and the Wage Justice Center; a Community Advisory Board, consisting of a dozen organizations that hold official advisory roles; other allies, including Southern California CBOs and unions that collaborate on a more ad-hoc basis; the Carwash Worker Organizing Committee, comprised of *carwasheros* engaged in unionizing campaigns to become recognized members of USW Local 675; ten professional campaign staff, whose salaries are funded by Steering Committee organizations; and a number of *carwashero* "*brigadistas*" and student interns who receive scholarships or stipends from various organizations to help carry out some organizing tasks for the campaign.

In order to organize within today's service economy, Martin (2008) notes that by casting organizing drives as broadly as possible, labor groups can mobilize coalition partners and other actors to help influence targets' behavior. Aside from widening its resource base, CLEAN's labor-community coalition structure allows it to draw on an expansive tactical repertoire as it formulates and implements strategies critical for reining in egregious employers. In utilizing multiple campaign approaches, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign combines capabilities of social service agencies, civil rights organizations, and unions as it employs tactics including but not limited to holding boycotts, performing publicity stunts, bringing clergy and community residents to "walk-on-the-boss", lobbying for new labor regulations and immigration reform, and

pursuing wage and hour lawsuits and unfair labor practice (ULP) claims as means toward unionizing car washes and improving standards for car wash workers.

Given the parameters of its own expertise, coalition organizations' strengths, target characteristics and vulnerabilities, and other contextual opportunities and constraints, CLEAN mounts its challenges in two main forms: the "comprehensive" and the "small operator" campaigns. The comprehensive campaign, built on lessons learned from recent corporate campaigns and CLEAN's own trial and error, utilizes an array of political, legal, and media tactics along with boycotts and pickets to undermine a target over time. On the other hand, the small operator campaign primarily relies on intensive boycotting to quickly achieve economic damage and pressure the employer to negotiate with CLEAN. While both the comprehensive and the small operator approaches serve as broad organizing plans for CLEAN, the actual development and implementation of strategies vary as CLEAN tailor its general approaches to fit the idiosyncrasies of specific campaigns. Finally, grassroots worker organizing at the worksite remains the backbone of all campaigns.

### **Problem Statement and Research Questions**

As a joint project of multiple labor unions and nonprofit community-based organizations, CLEAN seeks to improve car wash workers' conditions through recovering unpaid wages, advocating for better labor and health code enforcement and policy reform, and developing worksite leaders—all as means to achieve collective bargaining agreements with employers to institutionalize gains for workers. CLEAN simultaneously intervenes at the workplace and in the community through service, advocacy, and economic action; its ambitious organizing drive is made possible by the labor-community coalition structure. In 2011, three years after its official

founding, CLEAN finally unionized its first car wash, Bonus Car Wash, on the Westside of LA, and subsequently negotiated its first collective bargaining agreement with the employer that resulted in immediate improvement in worker wages and work conditions. Since then, CLEAN has successfully unionized many more car washes across Southern California.

How did CLEAN, a relatively new campaign seeking to unionize some of the most disenfranchised low wage immigrant workers in LA, succeed in securing collective bargaining agreements for car wash workers? What is it about CLEAN that led the labor-community coalition to victorious outcomes when previous efforts by attorneys and nonprofits could not bring lasting gains for *carwasheros*, and the better-resourced traditional labor movement experienced decline and loss of membership everywhere else? In order for the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to achieve its stated goals, it must be armed with winning strategies. What are they? Given that the campaign simultaneously tackles multiple organizing priorities, how did it negotiate with the coalition's funders and stakeholders to conceive coherent plans of action? What influenced the development and implementation of CLEAN's strategies, and how do campaign strategies relate to outcomes? Finally, what does this tell us about coalitions and the contemporary labor movement?

The aim of this dissertation is to explore these questions by examining how the CLEAN Carwash Campaign arrives at its strategies. I seek to answer three interrelated research questions:

- 1) What are the strategies used by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign?
- 2) How are CLEAN's strategies determined?
- 3) How do strategies relate to outcomes?

Recognizing that strategy can determine success and failure, it is important to know how a social movement coalition arrives at its strategies so we can understand why some campaigns are more successful than others and how unions, community-based organizations, and their coalitions can effectively strategize to tackle social problems.

### **Examining Strategy through Comparative Case Studies**

This research provides in-depth case studies of four local campaigns that the CLEAN Carwash Campaign launched within two distinct regions of Los Angeles: Westside and South LA. Specifically, a two-by-two case study design involving two victorious and two failed cases is used to trace the evolution of four of CLEAN's campaign efforts. Two types of cross-case comparisons are conducted: across the geographic locations, and across campaign outcomes. The purpose of these comparative case studies is to better understand what strategies were employed, how they were determined, and how strategies relate to whether CLEAN was or was not able to achieve a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with the target employer. As will be discussed later in more detail, the Westside and South LA were chosen for their contrasting contexts as well as their prominence in CLEAN's campaign priorities.

Outcome / Location	Win (CBA)	Loss (failed to gain CBA)
Westside	Bonus Car Wash	Millennium Car Wash
South Los Angeles	Vermont Car Wash	Thee Spot Hand Wash

### ***The Role of Research in CLEAN's Strategy Setting***

While many campaigns begin when workers approach CLEAN about injustices at work, research helps to determine the feasibility of victory and aid in the development of actual

strategies. CLEAN realized the value of research in its early days, after mounting a long and unsuccessful campaign against the Pirians in north-central LA that drained much of its resources: half way through that campaign, CLEAN learned the extent of the car wash owners' wealth and ability to outlast CLEAN's boycotts and lawsuits. Since then, before devoting significant resources to any new organizing projects, CLEAN conducts research on the front end to help determine target strength and vulnerabilities.

Analysis of target characteristics through research has helped CLEAN to conceive the comprehensive and the small operator campaign approaches. Through online searches and field visits, CLEAN's staff and interns mapped all LA-area car wash establishments. Using a variety of sources including databases of publicly available records, CLEAN acquires as much information as it can about the owners—their backgrounds, networks, and wealth and other business holdings. With such target profiles available, CLEAN's organizers situate the car washes in the industry and local contexts, evaluate the targets' vulnerabilities, and then devise campaign strategies according to target type. Simply put, employers with more modest means are expected to be susceptible to the economic impact of boycotts of the small operator campaign. On the other hand, while wealthier employers can weather boycotts, their relations with community stakeholders and ownership of other businesses create other liabilities that are vulnerable to the comprehensive campaign. It turns out that target types—and CLEAN's organizing plans—fall along geographic lines, given LA's landscape of regional inequality.

### ***The Westside and the Comprehensive Campaign***

Westside LA—the geographic region stretching from west of Downtown Los Angeles to the Pacific Ocean and encompassing the cities of West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica,

Culver City, and Los Angeles—is an area of relative affluence compared to the rest of Los Angeles County. Serving primarily White customers, the car wash establishments in the Westside tend to be large—employing as many as 50 workers for hand washing and detailing of luxury cars—and the employers themselves are often wealthy residents, owning multiple car washes or other businesses in the area.

Many of CLEAN’s coalition’s founding organizations are located in the Westside. Among them, an especially enthusiastic ally is Community Advisory Board member CLUE-LA, (Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice), which boasts a latent network of clergy that formed around a living wage campaign for hotel workers in the 2000s. Eager to reactivate this faith network to revitalize its own organization, CLUE-LA vouched for CLEAN to incorporate clergy in actions. Thus, in the Westside, CLEAN’s key allies influenced CLEAN’s strategy as organizers drew on tactics made available by coalition partners—such as, in CLUE-LA’s case, sending delegations of rabbis to broker meetings with car wash owners and holding candlelight vigils to signal community support and create visibility and legitimacy for CLEAN.

In the cases of both Bonus and Millennium Car Washes—located 1.5 miles away from each other in the Westside, on Lincoln Boulevard—the owners belong to affluent families that own multiple car washes. At both car washes, the workers have suffered egregious wage theft that led them to approach CLEAN and motivated their initial desire to organize. Given CLUE-LA’s local presence and in consideration of target sizes, at both Bonus and Millennium, CLEAN pursued comprehensive campaigns incorporating clergy action involving CLUE-LA, along with street theaters, wage and hour litigation, boycotts, and media work in the local press. In 2011, one year after CLEAN launched a public campaign against the target employer, Bonus Car Wash became the nation’s first union car wash to settle on a collective bargaining agreement, resulting

in immediate improvements for workers. However, despite this precedent, CLEAN was not able to pressure Millennium Car Wash to do the same—and eventually had to shut down its comprehensive campaigning there in 2013. Given the similarly positioned employers, why did CLEAN win at Bonus, and not at Millennium?

### ***South LA and the Small Operator Campaign***

In contrast to Westside LA, South LA—the area bounded by the 10 and 105 Freeways directly south of Downtown LA—is a region historically resided by working class African American and increasingly lived in by immigrants of Mexican and Central American backgrounds. CLEAN’s field probing efforts revealed that the car washes located here are generally small, serving local residents with modest cars, and are owned by Latinos or Korean Americans. By 2011, given the lack of victories three years into CLEAN’s founding, CLEAN’s Steering Committee became reluctant to support additional resource-intensive comprehensive campaigns that CLEAN was concurrently engaging in the Westside. With that in mind, South LA became a geographic region that CLEAN decided to focus on as it developed the small operator campaign approach.

In South LA, CLEAN’s coalition partners were more service-oriented CBOs. As result, CLEAN’s collaboration with them revolved more around worker service activities such as guiding *carwasheros* toward job training and other types of assistance. Once CLEAN decided to undertake campaigns in South LA, it tried to strengthen and establish new ties with CBOs in the area. However, unlike in the Westside, collaboration with community partner organizations took place more on an ad hoc basis—leaving CLEAN’s organizers to be the main drivers of strategy development.

In contrast with Westside LA, CLEAN did not have large coalition partners such as CLUE-LA in South LA. However, South LA is home to many of LA's working class union members and the *carwasheros*' sympathizers—a group of community allies ready to honor boycotts and walk the picket lines. When CLEAN first launched its campaign at Vermont Car Wash in April 2011, it filed wage and hour lawsuits against the employer for wage theft. By July 2011, CLEAN escalated its efforts by initiating a boycott picket made possible by the influx of picketers responding to the plea of the LA County Federation of Labor on behalf of CLEAN. After only four days of intensive boycotting, where picketers successfully dissuaded majority of customers from patronizing the car wash, it was apparent that Vermont Car Wash's owner had felt the economic damage and settled on a collective bargaining agreement with the workers within weeks. A very similar course of events took place at Thee Spot Hand Wash in 2013. However, shortly after pressuring the owner to sit down and bargain with CLEAN, he transferred ownership of the car wash—and the new owner decided to not honor the successorship of the contract. Thus while the small operator strategy is effective in forcing the employer to quickly recognize the union, it also is not a sure way to victory in leading to a lasting CBA. How did the strategizing vary at Vermont Car Wash and Thee Spot Hand Wash that caused these two campaigns to have different outcomes—a contract at Vermont, and none at Thee Spot?

### ***Direction for Dissertation Research***

Based on initial observations, it seems that coalition organizations, targets, and distinct environmental contexts set conditions of opportunities and constraints that influence CLEAN's strategies. It also appears that CLEAN crafts strategies based on the capabilities of coalition organizations, and that dependency on an organization's resources or capabilities compels CLEAN to revise its organizing plans to accommodate coalition organizations' preferences.



Given the strategic capacity at its disposal, CLEAN then seeks out appropriate targets and activates different coalition partners. CLEAN's campaign leadership thus plays a critical role in perceiving opportunities, evaluating target vulnerabilities, activating resources, and negotiating funder mandates to conceive and execute actual strategies. My comparative case study aims to further understand the strategies, the dynamics that lead to their development and implementation, and how variations lead to different campaign outcomes.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the present research is to add to the understanding of recent low wage immigrant worker organizing efforts in the U.S. by investigating the strategy setting process within labor-community coalitions. As a prominent case, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign is studied to investigate factors that exert influence on the campaign's strategies and how coalition strategies affect campaign outcomes. The CLEAN Carwash Campaign's unique coalition of multiple organizations of various types across social movement boundaries merits investigation. CLEAN is also chosen because it is a mature and formalized labor-community coalition located in Los Angeles—a city recognized as an important site for the revival of the labor movement (Milkman, 2006, 2011).

Since the CLEAN Carwash Campaign bridges local and national level actors, studying how the campaign considers multiple factors in its strategy determination can help shed insight on the complexity of the contemporary labor movement, which increasingly involves collaboration and coalitions across social movement sectors. In addition to adding to academic understanding of social movement coalitions, my analysis of how CLEAN's strategies are linked

to outcomes aims to add scientific insights to guide individuals and organizations on best practices to advance immigrant and worker rights.

Throughout the 20th century, social workers have used community organizing to intervene on consequences of economic exploitation (Garvin and Cox, 2001). Well positioned as practitioners of community organizing and managers of nonprofit organizations, social workers have much to gain from identifying how to develop effective coalition strategies and intervene on the economic exploitation, political exclusion, poor health, and isolation that low wage immigrant workers often face.

Today, powerful proponents of deregulation remain strongly entrenched in U.S. politics and continue to contribute to the increasing demand for low wage immigrant and native-born workers in degrading work conditions. In the midst of the current trend toward precarious economy and further de-unionization, innovative new organizing is taking place in response to the ongoing assault on workers' rights. Although CLEAN is relatively new on the scene, its recent victories have inspired similar campaigns to emerge across the nation as it signals that broadening support, building alliances across various types of organizations, and pursuing effective coalitional strategies might just be a possible answer in improving the lives for not just low wage immigrants, but all American workers.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I present relevant literature that grounds and motivates my research. First, I survey studies on coalitions, noting the lack of explicit examination of coalition strategy. I proceed to review definitions of strategy from organization and social movement theories, outlining the influence of environmental, organizational, and cultural factors while drawing attention to how scholars' structural focus has obscured a comprehensive understanding of strategy development. The literature on targeting is then presented to bridge structural forces and human choices by suggesting that effective social movements must accurately perceive external conditions and anticipate target responses. I conclude by suggesting attending to the concept of social skills toward developing a model to illustrate how the leadership of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign must contend with environmental conditions, determine its choices based on perceived opportunities and threats, and plan and implement strategic actions accordingly.

#### **Basics of Coalition Dynamics and Collaboration**

Coalitions are means oriented alliances among individual groups formed around a shared interest (Gamson, 1961). A coalition represents a unique organizational form which results when organizational networks are formalized into an entity that is comprised of member organizations, yet that has an identity distinct from any single member organization (Croteau & Hicks, 2003). Social movement coalitions can consist of one type of SMOs, or they can take form as cross-movement coalitions consisting of groups focused on different single movement issues (Van Dyke, 2003). Coalitions often facilitate success by mobilizing widespread support for an issue

(Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 1978) and combining intelligence, analyses, expertise, networks, and resources (Rochon & Meyer 1997). At the same time, cooperation among coalition organizations is notoriously difficult, as conflicts can arise among participants over differing ideologies and identities (della Porta & Rucht, 1995; Staggenborg, 1986), resources and other organizational needs (Heaney & Rojas 2008; Zald & McCarthy, 1987), positioning in conventional or extra-institutional politics (Meyer & Corigall-Brown, 2005), and organizational cultures and practices (Weare et al., 2014). It has been well documented that diverging expectations of coalition members can adversely impact planning and mobilization around goals, demands, and strategies to be deployed (Ansell, 2001; Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Meyer & Corigall-Brown, 2005) and lead to power struggles that result in loss of coalition effectiveness or dissolution of the coalition (Balser, 1997; Heany & Rojas, 2008; Staggenborg, 1986).

Surprisingly, few studies explicitly focus on social movement coalition strategy setting. Nonetheless, scholars studying coalition dynamics hint at resource and collaboration concerns as key factors in influencing a coalition's choices and practices. With regards to a coalition's general decision making, Gamson (1961) suggests that the weight associated with each participant is related to the resources it wields. Croteau and Hicks (2003) supported Gamson's proposition by demonstrating that power, as related to resource potential of a member organization, is central to that organization's ability to impact coalition decision in terms of framing. Besides resources, collaboration concerns also shape coalition organization and behavior: case studies in welfare rights, labor, and public health campaigns have found that many coalitions strive to enlist diverse membership, encourage mass participation, and promote group cohesion across ethnic and class lines through incorporating "bridging" cultural practices such as art and prayers (Braunstein et al., 2014; Milkman, 2006; Reese, 2011; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006).

Similarly, studies on the American legislative process suggest that coalitions often opt for actions that requires the least modification of members' policy preferences (Arnold, 1990). Parallels insights are found in empirical studies of community organizing where congregation-based coalitions adopt non-controversial issues and less disruptive tactics in order to appeal to a wider constituency and build larger support base (McCarthy & Walker, 2004). In summary, those that contribute more resources to a coalition have more sway on its directions, and collaboration concerns often push a coalition to pursue courses of actions that keep the coalition intact.

It can be inferred that coalition strategy setting involves much negotiation among coalition organizations to ensure coalition sustainability and ongoing resource support. However, while the coalition studies mentioned above discuss factors that shape coalition structure, framing, and other actions, they largely do not address strategy setting as focus of examination. In addition, my review highlights another problem in the muddled definition of strategy and success: some studies regard the formation of coalition itself as a strategy (Brilliant, 2000), which is not particularly useful in advancing understanding of the day-to-day campaign decisions or management of stakeholder concerns. In many of the studies, a coalition's structure is considered a strategy in itself and a determinant of success (Gamson, 1975; Staggenborg, 1986). Other studies on coalition collaboration judge coalition choices as effective simply because they maintain coalition cohesion; yet these choices may not be strategic for the attainment other goals such as achieving victory over a target.

Strategy is important for any individual or group to attain success—especially when one seeks to simultaneously confront powerful employers and hostile labor and immigration policies on behalf of marginalized low wage immigrant workers. When considering how a coalition such as CLEAN might arrive at its strategies, organization and social movement theories are consulted

to provide foundational insights to guide my inquiry. To better understand the possible mechanisms of coalition strategy determination, I now seek to clarify the definition of strategy and further explore factors that might affect its determination.

### **Theoretical Background on Strategy and Strategy Setting**

In organizational studies, a widely adopted definition of strategy is “the determination of basic long-range goals and objectives and the adoption of courses of action and allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals” (Chadler, 1962: 13). In terms of strategic actions, scholars emphasize that organizations must manage their institutional environment, accrue resources, and ensure competitive advantages against others (Scott & Davis, 2007). The context in which organizations are situated puts pressures on how organizations structure themselves to ensure resource flow. However, instead of being passive recipients of environmental demands, organizations can engage in purposeful strategic actions ranging from passive acquiescence to active cooptation of challenges in response to those external forces (Oliver, 1991; Westphal & Zajac, 1994).

Building upon insights of organizational theorists, scholars of social movement organizations (SMOs) examine how SMOs strategize to negotiate their environment—so that they can redress injustices or gain power for themselves or others (Gamson, 1975; McAdam & Snow, 2010). Among social movement theorists, strategy has typically been defined as a broad plan of action encompassing a series of choices on how to use resources and tactics to achieve desirable outcomes that reflect SMOs’ long range thinking (Jasper, 2006; Downey & Rohlinger, 2008; Snow & Soule, 2010). Similar to other complex organizations, SMOs are deliberate entrepreneurs who channel economic and social resources to mobilize towards the attainment of

goals (Ganz, 2009). However, in contrast to organizations such as firms whose priorities are to maintain stability and profits, SMOs' goals can be highly varied and multipronged. Because most social movements operate from a position of fewer means, they must simultaneously consider strategic action not only to sustain themselves, but also to maintain status and achieve greater power (King & Walker, 2014). Thus, SMOs may pursue many goals at the same time, often with unclear and changing priorities as they interact with allies, opponents, and other audiences (Jasper, 2006). Implied within social movement strategies are activists' reasoning and familiarity with how courses of action are related to outcomes as they evaluate and execute choices (Jasper, 2006; McAdam, 1983). In addition to how the external environment facilitates and constrains mobilization, analysis of social movement strategy draws attention to the complexity and importance of dynamic interactions of within-organizational processes in a context of uncertainty (Ganz, 2009; Jasper, 2006).

### ***Influence of the External Environment***

As with all organizations, forces in the external environment exert significant influence on SMO behaviors. Many scholars in the resource mobilization tradition have examined how SMOs organize themselves in strategic manners so that they can successfully respond to threats and opportunities in the institutional and political contexts they are situated in (McAdam et al., 1996; Zald & McCarthy, 1977). Prominent among the early resource mobilization literature was William Gamson's seminal book, *Strategy of Social Protest* (1975)—one of the first systematic researches aimed at understanding how SMOs' strategies affect their challenges. Gamson examined SMO organization as a focal strategic activity—and found that whether a SMO makes single or multiple demands, pursues radical or moderate goals, and has centralization or diffused power, etc. led them to fare differently under various historical periods. Gamson's work

illustrates the importance of SMO strategies in assessing the external conditions. Given similar contexts, some SMOs seem to have done better jobs at structuring themselves to capitalize on the environment—and organize in ways that allow them to achieve their goals.

Gamson's work dovetails with the political process tradition in social movement research that emphasizes historical and place-based threats and opportunities' effects on social movement emergence, mobilization, and outcomes. With regards to how SMOs mobilize, studies also examined other strategic activities such as activating allies and choosing tactics (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; Tilly, 1979). As scholars explored why and how revolutions happen in some places but not others during specific time periods (Goodwin & Skocpol, 1989), the external environment's influence on the SMO—such as a state's openness to reform and capacity to meet activist demands—became even more evident in explaining differences in the strategies and impact of various movements (Kitchelt, 1986). In exploring how strategies are decided in poor people's movements, Piven and Cloward (1977: 14) stated that “strategies are determined by the institutional context in which people live and work.” In response to environmental conditions, social movements interact with opponents as they learn and develop new tactics (McAdam, 1983), mobilize resources and prepare for counter-mobilization (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996), and challenge the rules and change them altogether (Clemens, 1993).

Social movements must interpret cues from the broader social and political context in order to make choices that alter trajectory of their groups (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). However, as the resource mobilization and political process traditions became paradigmatic in social movement research, scholars have placed more emphasis on structural position of SMOs within the environment as causal to movement outcomes. While SMOs are still considered as deliberate actors to some extent, external environmental conditions are often depicted as the



central explanatory variables in most of the studies; how social movements monitor the environment and respond accordingly is still unclear. But by themselves, environmental opportunities do not create outcomes; rather, strategies allow social movements to achieve success (Ganz, 2009). What processes take place within the SMO in terms of evaluating what need to be done? Some social movement scholars turn their attention to in-group attributes and processes such as organization culture to explain strategy determination.

### ***Internal Factors of Culture and Identity***

Culture denotes a set of norms that shape an organization's behavior and set of routines (Osterman, 2006). Beyond the environment, among the most important factors in influencing social movement mobilization is cultural knowledge of any given tactic (Snow & Soule, 2010). In an effort to study social movements' internal strategy setting, some scholars examined how activist cultures led movements to define and construct collective identities for solidarity (Bernstein, 1997; Fantasia, 1988), shape emotions to mobilize followers (Polletta, 1998), and meaningfully frame contentious politics to engage the public and bridge issues for coalitions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al. 1986) as aspects of strategic action.

To investigate how strategies might be determined, some scholars honed in on group identities and styles of deliberation to clarify how cultural patterns influence SMOs' strategies (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Lichterman, 2006; Polletta, 2002). Jasper (2006) suggests that individual personalities and organizational cultures constrain strategic choices, and Polletta (2002) found that a strategy is often chosen because it is ideologically consistent with activists' worldview. Further building upon Tilly's (1978) insight but putting more emphasis placed on SMO culture, strategies might be chosen not necessarily because they are instrumentally

effective, but rather because they are part of repertoires essentially linked to activist identities. Tactics might be picked not only because they are consistent with a movement's principles, but because they also appeal to its audience and supporters (McCarthy & Walker, 2004). Furthermore, the perception of effectiveness of particular strategies in achieving desired outcomes can be highly influenced by activists' underlying values (Snow & Soule, 2010). Empirical studies support these claims: during the Civil Rights Movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) considered the philosophical ideal of nonviolence as essential to the purpose of its foundation. As a consequence, its strategic considerations did not veer far from nonviolent methods—even if they did not yield tangible victories (McAdam, 1988). Similarly, in the 21st century, the anti-consumerist “freegan” movement in New York City practices public dumpster diving as acts of strategic performances—not because they are necessarily effective in converting others to the lifestyle, but because the practice is ideologically consistent with an anti-capitalist subculture to which freegans adhere (Barnard, 2011).

In short, culturally oriented scholars, in efforts to look beyond the external environment's influence in determining strategies, focused on the role of within-group cultural patterns in facilitating mobilization and strategic possibilities. However, their tendency to focus solely on culture has obscured the ongoing importance of wider structural contexts in influencing social movements and their outcomes (Polletta, 1999). While culture helps to explain how SMOs' perceptions of political opportunities and modes of mobilization are shaped by a SMOs' preferences, routines, and identities (Meyer & Corrigan-Brown, 2005; Osterman, 2006; Snow & Soule, 2010), in the end, an SMO's deployment of tactics and strategies is constrained and enabled by its complex relations with others and the context in which it is embedded (Miche, 2003). Furthermore, culture has also become a structural metaphor on its own that left human

agency elusive (Jasper, 2004). Earlier, Tilly (1979) mentioned that in accordance to need, strategies are selected from among “repertoires of contention” familiar to the activists. But how are choices made within a repertoire (Jasper, 2004)? What are the processes that allow strategic repertoires to even originate?

### ***Targeting and the Role of Leadership***

As scholars continue to better understand how SMOs strategize to engage and manage their environment, some have come to investigate SMOs’ interaction with their targets. Studies on targeting attempt to bridge the split between structural forces and explore the processes of human choice—for an effective social movement must accurately perceive external conditions and its own positionality, anticipate target responses, and formulate and choose tactics based on what it knows and thinks would be effective.

Targeting refers to a focused choice by social movements to commit resources to a specific outcome and a concerted effort to organize around an opponent (Ganz, 2009). A strategic social movement considers its target’s openness to influence before making tactical decisions as to how to exploit target weaknesses (Walker et. al., 2008). Through interaction with the target, SMOs innovate and adapt their tactics as they prepare for and encounter the target’s countermobilization (Bernstein, 1997; McAdam, 1983). Building on other social movement traditions, empirical studies on targeting recognize not only the ongoing importance of environmental influences and SMO’s own cultural constraints, but also the role of agency on strategizing and acting in ways congruent with environmental demands. To achieve effective targeting and win, SMOs must carefully consider opportunities and choose the best courses of action by evaluating their opponents’ strengths and vulnerabilities.

In an analysis of protests from 1960-1990, Walker et. al. (2008) found that institutional targets' susceptibility to de-legitimation and capabilities in responding to social movements are a central factor in shaping activist strategies. In matching appropriate tactics to targets, social movement actors contemplate carefully in anticipating target responses—for example, Piven and Cloward (1977) contend that the poor people's movements are successful when they pursue a strategy of disruption instead of conventional electoral politics, because disruption is more effective in getting the attention of the decision-making elites. With regards to contemporary union organizing, Martin (2008) noted that labor groups working beyond the traditional National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections—through a better analysis of the modern day corporate target—are strategizing in ways to exploit target weaknesses by mobilizing religious and civil groups, consumers, government agencies, and even other employers to influence target behavior (Martin, 2008). The effectiveness of these comprehensive campaigns has been acknowledged, as management advisers note that organizers are strategizing with an understanding of the modern corporation as a social institution whose vulnerability lies within its relationship with the stakeholders (Manheim, 2001). Examination of how an SMO's interaction with its target shapes strategy thus not only upholds the importance the environment, but also attends to the importance of human agency in weighing the potential impact of strategies, given the circumstances.

The literature on targeting expands on earlier traditions by considering how SMOs anticipate target vulnerabilities and draws attention to the importance of SMOs' ability to perceive conditions and assess their own capabilities. While contexts and resources remain important to outcomes, leadership allows a group to recognize structural opportunities and one's own resources in order to act strategically (Andrews, 2010). Given similar contexts and targets,

why might comparable social movements devise different courses of action and fare different fates? In response, Ganz' (2009) argues that strategic capacity, or the ability to better strategize, allows SMOs to engage, respond to, and capitalize on the environment. By comparing the United Farm Workers (UFW), the AFL-CIO, and the Teamsters' farmworker organizing drives in California's Central Valley from 1959-1967, Ganz argues that only the UFW succeeded because it devised strategies that took the target grape growers by surprise. Despite the UFW's modest resources, its strategic capacity was elevated by having superior leadership; the diverse identities and experiences of its organizers enabled the UFW to accurately recognize opportunities and threats while drawing on an expansive tactical repertoire that enabled the UFW to outpace its opponents' countermobilization.

Ganz provides significant insights into the origins of UFW's strategic innovations and highlights the importance of leadership in perceiving, managing, and capitalizing on structural conditions. While leadership appears to be a promising trajectory to understand how social movements and their coalitions strategize, Ganz's work focuses on how team structures endow or constrain leadership capacity for good strategy (Jasper, 2004). In Ganz's comparison of the UFW with the AFL-CIO and Teamsters, the variability in strategic determination lies mainly within different organizational structures, while how the UFW successfully grasped cues from the environment and made strategic decisions to appease allies or confront targets on the day-to-day is still unclear. Lastly, as Fligstein and McAdam (2012) noted, while Ganz attributes UFW's successful outcome to a skilled leadership that made superior strategy possible, the actual resources that the leaders were able to mobilize might be equally important to UFW's victory.

In end, strategies are determined within a complex set of cultural and institutional contexts involving environmental forces, cultural and organizational factors, and human choices.

Therefore, a more comprehensive examination of strategy determination must attend to all of these factors and their complex relationships and influences on one another. Once again, the contributions of various factors that influence strategy development need to be synthesized to offer an integrated understanding on how strategy determination takes place. To complicate the matter even more, just as a more comprehensive model of strategy development within individual social movement is needed, a better understanding of social movement coalition strategy determination is still called for.

### **Toward a Comprehensive Model of Social Movement Strategy**

The reviewed literature highlights a number of factors that could affect social movement coalition strategies. Despite the paucity of research focusing on coalition strategy determination, scholars of social movements noted the influence of various environmental, cultural, and organizational factors—which by extension could affect social movement coalitions' strategy setting. As reviewed, social movement strategy research has examined the influence of external environment and internal cultural processes on SMO behaviors and strategies, but not so much how SMOs actually strategize. Some scholars have studied how organizational identity shapes SMO mobilization; however, their emphases on culture obscure the persistent influence of external contexts, while the actual strategy setting process of how a SMO monitors and responds to the environment remain unclear. Jasper (2004) has critiqued the persistent overarching determination of social movement outcomes through structure; while Jasper acknowledges that strategic choices are made within contexts that shape options perceived, he argues that only through further examining strategy choices faced by actors and how they make those choices can we better understand social movements. As social movements and their coalitions craft strategies based on what they think will be successful given the contextual conditions and organizational

constraints, a comprehensive examination of strategy development must simultaneously consider the interaction of the environment, the movements' own attributes, and the human choices involved at key decision points.

Studying social movement coalition strategy determination can offer fruitful insights on dynamics within today's social movements where coalitions are ever present. Within a coalition, strategy setting would be influenced by complex and varying external opportunities and compound internal organizational factors. Comprised of many organizations with divergent goals, varying cultures, and completely different resource requisites, a coalition must craft strategies with the utmost skill and foresight to understand the positionality and capabilities of both its members and composite self, manage complex organizational needs, and negotiate among its stakeholders in order to win. CLEAN's leaders must strategize effectively in order to seize opportunities, respond to targets, maintain the coalition and resource flow, bridge interests, and balance multiple demands to ultimately build power for *carwasheros* in LA. Indeed Fligstein and McAdam (2011) suggest that skilled actors are the sources of coalition building, as their ability to understand situations, interpret rules, and mobilize resources allow them to align priorities and achieve social change. CLEAN fits this profile: as a relatively new actor entering the emerging field of low wage immigrant worker organizing, it has since become a broker among labor and community organizations as it builds a progressive coalition around itself and its mission. So how does CLEAN accomplish effective strategy setting? In the following chapter, I will lay out how the insights garnered from my literature review can be integrated into a field theoretical conceptual framework that will guide my inquiry.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

How does the CLEAN Carwash Campaign advance rights and achieve collective bargaining agreements for *carwasheros* at the workplace? In order for the coalition to attain its goal, it must have winning strategies. As reviewed earlier, there has been a lack of empirical research detailing how social movements arrive at strategies and how strategies relate to outcomes. For coalitions, the issue is further complicated by the compounding of organizational and contextual factors that can influence strategy determination. Fortunately, social movement scholars have provided many valuable insights from which I synthesize and formulate my conceptual framework.

Given its multipronged organizing approach involving many coalition partners, CLEAN's strategy is accordingly influenced by a complex array of factors including but not limited to preferences and resource capabilities of funder and coalition member organizations, characteristics of target car wash owners, reactions of consumers and bystanders, and the involvement and participation of the *carwasheros* themselves. With these in mind, CLEAN's organizers must exercise judgment to develop and implement strategies. In other words, how CLEAN engages others in its environment shapes the nature of strategies and their potential success. To guide my study on how CLEAN strategizes, I draw from field theory to describe the interaction between actors and the structure in which they are embedded (Fligstein, 2001). Viewing the context within which CLEAN resides as a strategic action field, I investigate decisions CLEAN must contend with based on its positionality and relationships with targets, workers, coalition organizations and community members, and state actors.



## Situating CLEAN within Strategic Action Fields

Strategic choices are made within a complex set of cultural and institutional contexts that shape actors' choices in strategic fields (Jasper, 2004). Accordingly, fields are useful metaphors to illustrate the embedded environments CLEAN is situated in (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). A strategic action field describes a meso-level social order where individuals and groups interact and collective action by any cannot be understood without examining how that action is oriented to others (Jasper, 2004, 2006; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). Within a strategic action field, participants share a general common understanding of what is happening, are influenced by existing rules, but also jockey for positions of power through conflict or cooperation (Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012).

A field theoretical perspective emphasizes interdependent relationships among actors as they take one another into account when carrying out activities (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; McAdam & Scott, 2005). In mobilizing *carwasheros* and allies to confront target car wash owners, CLEAN is suited for a field theoretical analysis to examine how interactions with various others affect campaign strategies and outcomes. In addition, as a coalition spanning the labor and community-based organization fields from which it draws resources, CLEAN maintains complex relationships with funders and coalition member organizations which make strategy setting delicate work and especially interesting to analyze in field theoretic terms.

Conceptualizing strategic action fields provides much insights into what might motivate CLEAN's strategies. Drawing from field theory, King and Walker (2014) emphasize that field positions influence social movement actors' decisions and suggest that issues relating to power, influence, and status are all integral to strategy; thus, strategies are multi-prone and encompass

three dimensions in order to: 1) accrue and mobilize resources, 2) maintain organizational status, and 3) achieve greater levels of power and influence. Although CLEAN's primary mission goal is to raise industry standards for *carwasheros* through unionization, its strategies toward meeting that goal contain all three strategic dimensions. These strategic dimensions also characterize key interactions between CLEAN and others. Specifically, in planning and implementing strategic actions, CLEAN is shaped by its relationships with coalition member organizations that help to maintain CLEAN's resource base and status; at the same time, in its effort to change car wash owners' behaviors, CLEAN must consider its status as a challenger as it seeks to gain power and influence over targets.

### ***The Strategic Action Fields***

Boundaries or strategic action fields are not fixed, but shift depending on the definition of the situation. Fields also do not exist in vacuum; rather, they can be embedded with other strategic action fields and these relations shape the developmental history of the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Finally, the relations between strategic action fields can be unconnected, hierarchical or dependent, and reciprocal or interdependent based on relationships of resource dependence, mutual beneficial interactions, sharing of power, information flows, and legitimacy (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). These theoretical insights aptly illustrate the genesis of CLEAN and the actors in various fields with whom it interacts.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) and labor unions have long advocated for social and economic justice across U.S. cities. However, they have different organizational practices and historically operated independently of one another (Milkman, 2011). Occupying distinct strategic action fields, immigrant advocacy CBOs typically offered direct service and sought

legal remedy for individual labor violations, while unions focused their work on forging long-term representation for entire workplaces and building a dues-paying membership base (Milkman, 2011). In recent decades, the high concentration of low wage immigrant workers in LA forced CBOs and unions to overcome their differences and join forces to contend with abuses immigrant workers face at the workplace. As result of the interaction and cross-fertilization of CBOs and unions across two distinct fields, LA's low wage immigrant worker organizing field emerged.

In the mid-2000s, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign formed as LA's CBOs and unions sought collaboration specifically to address *carwasheros'* plight. As a result of this partnership, the CLEAN coalition formalized and CLEAN entered the adjacent low wage immigrant worker organizing field as a major player with resource backing from both the CBO and labor fields. At the same time, CLEAN was catapulted as an invader into a previously unconnected strategic action field—the car wash field where few regulations existed and rules favored owners over the *carwasheros*. CLEAN, as a social movement coalition, thus spans multiple fields yet does not neatly fit into any one; rather, it interacts with supporters in CBO and labor fields and participates in the low wage immigrant organizing and car wash fields. Engagement with others in the various strategic action fields contextualizes CLEAN's strategic activities—those that serve to manage resource relationships with funders, achieve status among coalition member organizations, and allow CLEAN to achieve victory over targets are critical.

### ***Collaboration across Labor and CBO Fields***

Within a strategic action field, initial resource allocation affects how fields are organized (Fligstein, 2001). CLEAN was originally conceived by attorneys in LA's legal services and

immigration advocacy CBOs who advocated on behalf of *carwasheros* before eventually inspiring unions to become involved. Since the 1990s, advocates' work comprised two key elements: collaboration with a wide network of attorneys across Los Angeles, and commitment to change conditions for car wash workers (Garea & Stern, 2010). Today, CLEAN's CBO origin continues to endow the coalition with credibility among local nonprofits, as one of CLEAN's key allies shared that it collaborates with CLEAN because it is an LA-based coalition founded by those from LA. To further illustrate the point, CLEAN's reputation comes from its CBO allies that enable CLEAN to engage *carwasheros* and other community members who do not necessarily trust the traditional labor movement. The CBO field gives CLEAN flexibility to engage multiple audiences: in the Westside where consumers and residents, although by in large progressive, do not identify with low wage immigrant workers, CBO allies help frame CLEAN as an environmental and health issue watchdog; in South LA, an area undergoing drastic demographic changes, CBOs focused their appeals on economic empowerment and help bridge distrust among African American, Latinos, and Korean Americans and build CLEAN's reputation as an advocate for the entire region.

Considering founders and founding practices exert strong imprinting effects on later roles and structures (Stinchcombe, 1965) and that CLEAN's CBO supporters contribute much to its status and legitimacy, CLEAN is likely to identify strongly with the CBO field and have a dependent relationship with it. Thus, CLEAN must comply with preferences of its CBO supporters, and its strategies are both enabled and constrained by the capabilities of the CBO coalition member organizations. In fact, many of CLEAN's original CBO founders still exercise power over CLEAN's campaign directions through their representation in CLEAN's Steering

Committee, while many of the early legal strategies continue to constitute a major part of CLEAN's repertoire.

However, during the process of formalization, structure of relationships and roles may shift (Scott & Davis, 2007). As the CLEAN coalition matured and formalized in 2008, it became more reliant on the labor field when the AFL-CIO and United Steel Workers (USW) committed long-term fiscal support for CLEAN. Although CLEAN received some foundation grants available only to 501c3 nonprofits through its CBO supporters, union funders have come to fund most of CLEAN's operational expenses. With labor's formal support, CLEAN was able to hire professional organizers and access the union's research department, which in turn allowed it to develop new organizing plans and institutionalize gains for *carwasheros* through unionization (Garea & Stern, 2010). CLEAN's resource dependency on the AFL-CIO and USW thus situates it in hierarchical relationships in the labor field, and CLEAN must take into account of its labor funders' mandates and preferences in its strategic actions. In addition, in contrast with CBOs, unions tend to adopt stricter evaluation criteria that demand CLEAN to report concrete numbers in its unionizing efforts. As the labor field provides major resource support for CLEAN with funding, staffing, and the institutional framework to engage in organizing campaigns, CLEAN's former dependency on and identification with the CBO field may have transformed over time.

### ***Achieving Status through Brokering for Adjacent Fields***

Although CLEAN is supported by and comprised of many organizations, as a coalition, it is a distinct entity of its own (Croteau & Hicks, 2003). Even though CLEAN's founding and growth were driven by activities in adjacent CBO and labor fields, CLEAN's primary fields of interaction—the low wage immigrant worker organizing and car wash fields—are places where

CBOs and unions have limited presence and effectiveness. CBOs, whose legal work could not usher in permanent gains for *carwasheros*, rely on CLEAN to obtain collective bargaining agreements for *carwasheros*. Similarly, the AFL-CIO and USW, who traditionally have not been able to unionize low wage immigrant workers, rely on CLEAN to carry out their new organizing directions. As a nexus of collaboration, CLEAN has evolved into a broker that secures continual cooperation among actors in the CBO and labor fields. Along with the new status and independence gained from becoming a coalition builder across fields, CLEAN gradually reshapes its relationship with coalition member organizations and redefines its own directions.

Strategic actions are those that create and sustain social worlds by securing the cooperation of others (Fligstein, 2001) and their ability to do so requires actors to work to fashion shared worlds and identities (Jasper 2004, 2006). In its strategy setting, CLEAN interacts with coalition member organizations that both provide resource support and constrain CLEAN with preferences and mandates. Managing coalition organizations with divergent goals and varying cultures, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign cannot be effective unless it understands the positionality and capabilities of its members and composite self to execute strategies that most appropriately capitalizes on target vulnerabilities—and CLEAN does this by bridging interests among stakeholders and negotiating its shifting needs. In engaging actors in various fields, CLEAN gradually repositioned itself as a source of coalition building that re-aligned the priorities of supporters in CBO and labor fields, which in turn allows it to achieve social change and participate as a key player in LA's low wage immigrant worker organizing field.

### ***Leveraging Influence and Changing the Rules in LA's Car Wash Industry***

Actors' positions are based on their relationships with one another, and these positions endow them with power and affect how they understand their ability to shape their own environments (Fligstein, 2001; King, 2008). Within any field, there are incumbents and challengers. Incumbents are those who wield disproportionate influence within a field, whereas challengers are those who occupy less privileged positions and articulate alternative visions of the field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). In addition, many strategic action fields also have non-state internal governance units that are charged with overseeing compliance with field rules (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). These actors are all present in LA's car wash field.

The LA car wash industry was largely unregulated—often, workers are subject to poor working conditions in violation of labor and occupational safety codes; in some cases, car washes operate as unregistered businesses. In the car wash field, owners exerted control over the *carwasheros* who occupy subordinate positions of power due to their status as immigrants and low wage workers. The field, however, is highly fragmented and the owners do not appear to be organized; of what few alliances there are among owners of primarily Persian, Korean American, and Latino backgrounds, they tend to run along ethnic ties. While an internal governance unit known as Western Car Wash Association exists in an attempt to advocate for industry standards, a brief search on the trade association's database shows that of LA's 500 car washes, only 15 are registered members. Thus, although owners dominate over *carwasheros* because of *carwasheros'* lack of information on rights and limited means to individually contest conditions, the owners are susceptible to a more powerful insurgent who can better exploit their vulnerabilities and maneuver around their divisions.

LA's car wash field was formerly distant from both the CBO and labor fields. Through the imposition of hierarchical power by incumbent car wash owners, the car wash field was relatively stable until an exogenous shock emanated from CLEAN's invasion. The CLEAN Carwash Campaign formally entered the car wash field in 2008 as a challenger. Despite its origin elsewhere, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign soon became a full participant in the field as it outreaches, educates, and recruits *carwasheros* to join in its Carwash Worker Organizing Committee and actively take part in organizing their worksites. To maneuver over incumbent car wash owners, CLEAN draws on resources from other fields enabled by its coalition structure: through labor's research departments, CLEAN identifies targets' weaknesses before launching campaigns; through its CBO allies, CLEAN files lawsuits and stages other tactics aimed at inflicting economic and/or reputation to the target. Through popular education and worksite organizing, CLEAN empowers *carwasheros* and changes their understanding of their own places. Finally, through strategic actions that aim to achieve collective bargaining agreements, CLEAN seeks to transform the car wash field by altering the power relationship between workers and their employers. In short, the following key interactions between CLEAN and targets contextualize CLEAN's strategies to gain influence and change the rule of the game:

- CLEAN learn about target vulnerabilities and capabilities for countermobilization through research and initial engagement; through continual interaction during campaign, CLEAN learns from target responses and revises tactics.
- Through challenging current targets, CLEAN signals to others in the car wash field that "low road" employer behaviors warrant punishment.
- Through working allies from other fields, CLEAN seeks to change the rules of the car wash field and regulate car wash industry work standards.



## Strategy Setting as Skilled Social Action

An actor's ability to accurately assess conditions of the field, find opportunities, and obtain the cooperation of others is conceptualized as "social skill" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Within strategic action fields, skilled social actors are especially effective in contexts of uncertainty because they are flexible and good at reading evolving situations (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011). As mentioned earlier, CLEAN's strategy setting reflects its social skills—as it manages its CBO and labor supporters with different preferences and pushes to reorder those preferences. At the same time, it mobilizes the same coalition organizations to wield influence over car wash owners and convince them that it is better to comply and settle on a CBA for *carwasheros* than to risk income loss, lawsuits, and other state regulatory actions resulting from CLEAN's campaign actions.

While the structuring of the field determines what types of strategic action make sense at that moment, social skills enable actors to accurately interpret the circumstances—which allow them to better perceive the state of affairs and their own positionality, what opportunities and threats are present, and how they can affect changes through their interactions with others—and strategize accordingly. However, although social skills matter, the positions actors occupy and the resources they mobilize are just as crucial (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Therefore, conceptualizing CLEAN's world as strategic action fields provide an integrated perspective that not only recognizes the role of leadership, but also attends to the persistent influence of the environment and resources in influencing strategies and outcomes.

*Carwasheros*—many of whom are undocumented immigrants working for poverty wages and enduring hazardous work conditions—face domination from multiple sources of power.

Accordingly, CLEAN's challenge on their behalf has been mounted on multiple fronts, even as it strives toward a single mission goal of improving car wash industry standards through unionization. Through CLEAN's engagements with multiple strategic action fields, it interacts with and seeks cooperation from friends and foes, policy makers and bystanders. Drawing on the concept of strategic action field highlights the importance of relationships among the various actors in CLEAN's field as CLEAN must engage funders, allies, targets, and other audiences in order to achieve its goals. Not only are CLEAN's strategies influenced by its interactions with others, as a CLEAN skilled actor, CLEAN also carries out strategic action to reshape those relationships in order to acquire more resources, elevate its status and influence, and gain power to change target employer behaviors.

In summary, CLEAN's relationships with others situates itself in context in the various strategic action fields that it engages with. CLEAN is influenced by broader dynamics in these fields, as well as its relationship with specific actors in and across fields. As noted, interactions that are key in shaping strategies are those that maintain CLEAN's resources and strengthen its challenges against targets. To succeed in meeting its mission goal, I anticipate that CLEAN determines its strategies with these intersecting goals in mind. In order to achieve unionization and collective bargaining agreements, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign must simultaneously attend to multiple strategic dimensions in its engagement with others across multiple fields. Again, strategy determination would fall along key interactions with actors across CBO, labor, car wash, and low wage immigrant organizing field: 1) those that help CLEAN to sustain its coalition and acquire resources necessary for mobilization, 2) those that help CLEAN to gain legitimacy and influence, better manage relations with coalition organizations, and augment its on status among unions, CBOs, political elites, and other members of the public in local and

national contexts, and 3) those that enable CLEAN to pressure targets into signing CBAs with *carwasheros*.

Why might a SMO, or an SMO coalition such as CLEAN, develop and implement one strategy over another? What external factors and internal processes lead CLEAN to make one choice over another at critical decision points? As reviewed before, a host of factors can influence strategies. The moment of CLEAN's strategic decision making takes place in campaigns when the organizers assess and balance the urgency and importance of funder mandates, evaluate contextual conditions and their own capabilities, manage the deliberation among themselves, negotiate with resource-rich coalition member organizations on their preferences, and adapt tactics from their repertoires according to target responses and worksite organizing progress. Japser (2004, 2006) has suggested to better understanding strategy setting through dissecting choices around specific strategic dilemmas. Within CLEAN's relationships with key actors in its fields—coalition member organizations, targets, customers, community members, *carwasheros*, etc.—are decision points at which CLEAN's strategizing take place. This research examines such decision points in the unfolding of four of CLEAN Carwash Campaign organizing drives to see how strategic action is developed in the context of these interactions.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

Strategy is important for any organization to succeed in attaining its goals. However, existing empirical studies on coalition strategy have been largely limited to how coalitions maintain themselves. While social movement literature offers rich perspectives on strategy, structural conditions are favored as central explanatory variables for how social movements mobilize—and the process by which strategy is actually determined by SMOs remains unclear.

In this chapter, I present the methodology I use to answer the three research questions, restated below—including the rationale for the comparative case study design.

- 1) What are the strategies used by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign?
- 2) How are CLEAN's strategies determined?
- 3) How do CLEAN's strategies relate to outcomes?

I then describe the research design, including a description of the primary data sources and plan for data collection and analysis. I conclude by detailing the timeframe of my research.

#### **The Comparative Case Study**

A case study is useful when methodology seeks to address “how” and “why” questions and when events occurring in the research setting cannot be controlled (Yin, 1999). Since case studies emphasize the rich, real-world context in which the phenomena occur, much research on organizational processes and strategy have been conducted through case studies (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Given similar reasons, a case study approach is appropriate for my research, which seeks to better understand how CLEAN's strategies are developed given its relationships

with allies, targets, and other involved parties. In addition, using a case study approach can help extend theories that guide my research: while existing theory will inform my interpretation of data, inductive methods can help uncover new insights that are not explicitly laid out in theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Wilson & Chaddha, 2009).

It has been suggested that research on social movement strategy would be stronger with more comparative methods to offer explanation for difference in mobilization and conflict (Jasper, 2004). While Ganz (2009)'s research compared the UFW, AFL-CIO, and Teamsters' campaign efforts and contributes important insight on the origins of strategic capacity, the explanations for difference in strategies across Ganz's cases are based on variability in organizational structures of the unions involved. The CLEAN Carwash Campaign—a coalition that simultaneously engages in several local campaigns against target car washes—offers comparative opportunities of multiple embedded cases that can help further explicate the processes involved in strategy determination. In an attempt to hone in on how one focal coalition determines strategies, my study compares only campaigns conducted by CLEAN—thus limiting the variability in challenger organizational structure.

For my dissertation research, I compare strategy setting processes by CLEAN as I trace the evolution of four of CLEAN's local campaigns. The timeframe of the study is bound from January 2011 to December 2014, before CLEAN shifted to a drastically different organizing approach, and the investigation of strategy determination is focused on activities conducted by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign toward achieving a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with a target car wash.

The study consists of three main research components:

1. Analysis of CLEAN Carwash Campaign's overall organizing plans and comparison of campaign-specific strategies across cases.
2. Examination of how CLEAN's interactions with other actors in strategic action fields influence its campaign strategies and outcomes.
3. Collection of additional qualitative evidence to strengthen conclusions.

Theoretical sampling is appropriate to select cases that best extend constructs and offer insight on the phenomena of interest for my research: what strategies CLEAN employs, how CLEAN devises them, and how campaign strategy relates to outcomes. Comparisons across cases allows me to test my hypotheses and explore counterfactuals. For the first research component listed above, I conduct two types of cross-case comparisons: across the geographic locations of West LA and South LA, and across victorious (achieving collective bargaining agreement) and failed (failing to achieve collective bargaining agreement) outcomes:

Outcome / Location	Win (CBA)	Loss (failed to gain CBA)
Westside	Bonus Car Wash	Millennium Car Wash
South Los Angeles	Vermont Car Wash	Thee Spot Hand Wash

### ***West vs. South LA***

Comparison of cases across two distinctive geographical areas of LA is relevant for all of my research questions. The Westside and South LA are chosen for their contrasting contexts as well as their prominence within CLEAN's organizing priorities. In LA, race and class relations are spatially segregated; the two locations encompass different contexts where organizational ties can be formed and social movement claims can be articulated (Wilton & Cranford, 2002).

Given that good strategy implies skillful engagement with one's environment, studying and comparing how CLEAN's strategy varies across its campaigns in West and South LA can shed light on how CLEAN monitors and interacts with local opportunities and constraints. Subsumed under LA's geography are variations in target wealth and capabilities, ethnic makeup of customers and residents, sets of allies that are available and can be activated, and other audiences and political elites to be engaged. All of these factors affect CLEAN's field positionality, which CLEAN must properly consider in its strategy determination and maneuver around in order to attain its goals.

### ***Winning vs. Losing Campaigns***

Comparison of CLEAN's winning and losing campaigns can help address all, but particularly my third research question: how do strategies relate to outcomes? Once again, a win is defined as the achievement of an enforceable collective bargaining agreement, as it embodies true employer recognition of the union and worker power sufficient to gain a good first contract (Brofenbrenner & Juravich, 1998).

In campaigns with clearly victorious outcomes, I assume there to be proper alignment between strategy and goal, and that the winning cases therefore provide illustration of how CLEAN has accurately assessed the target car wash owners' capabilities and weaknesses, interpreted environmental cues, and engaged with various actors in its field environment in strategy determination. On the other hand, by studying cases that failed to achieve lasting collective bargaining agreements, I hope to gain insights into what it is about the strategy setting process that caused CLEAN's strategy and goal to be not as well aligned—for example, by

focusing on complying with a coalition organizations' preferences to conduct a certain type of action, CLEAN may in turn fail to fully capitalize on a target's vulnerability.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Case studies are rich, empirical descriptions of particular instances of a phenomenon that are typically based on a variety of data sources (Yin, 1994). Accordingly, I use multiple types of data and sources of information to investigate how CLEAN determines its strategies.

#### ***Course of Action***

I first examine how CLEAN's interactions with others shape its general mechanism of decision making before delving into how they influence strategy setting in the four specific campaign cases. For my initial inquiries, I first draw on data I had collected for UCLA Luskin Community Partnership Project (Phase 1 of the research), as much of the existing data from observations, interviews, and documents is relevant in addressing these research components.

Using data from Phase 1 of the research, I construct profiles for each of the four campaigns chosen for my comparative case study and organize the data under these four cases. These profiles include target characteristics such as location and size of the car wash, campaign durations, and some general campaign histories based on existing data and publicly available records. Then, I work to fill in the details and track how strategy decisions were made in each of the cases. Because the data from Phase 1 of the research were collected for a different, albeit related, research project around CLEAN's coalition dynamics, they do not address all of my dissertation research components. As such, I conducted new observations, interviews, and document collection in another phase of research (Phase 2) to help reconstruct how strategy was set for each of the four campaigns. Along with embarking on a more focused examination of



strategy determination for the four campaigns of my case study, re-entry into the field and additional observations and interviews help to clarify and strengthen previous findings.

### ***Gaining Entry and Previous Research***

From June 2011 to September 2011, I was employed by the AFL-CIO as Student Internship Coordinator to train college student interns on grassroots organizing and provide general assistance to the CLEAN Carwash Campaign. I informed CLEAN's Executive Director that as a PhD student at UCLA, I was also interested in better understanding CLEAN's campaign efforts from an academic perspective. The Executive Director, upon learning that I had previously worked as a professional union organizer for over six years, then invited me to attend and participate in all of CLEAN's weekly staff meetings. As I participated in CLEAN's day-to-day operations and campaign actions, I built rapport and trust with CLEAN's organizers and *carwasheros*; these connections would eventually help me establish a research relationship with CLEAN. Given my experience in leading campaign staff, I was asked to also occasionally represent CLEAN at actions and lead members of CLEAN's *brigadistas*. As I interacted with CLEAN's staff to design daily training for students and *brigadistas* under my supervision, I also began to formulate initial impressions on CLEAN's strategies. During the 10 weeks of my employment with the AFL-CIO, I worked approximately 50 hours a week and was able to directly observe and participate in meetings and activities related to the Vermont and Bonus Car Wash campaigns. Although these observations are not part of systematic research, they would later inform my inquiry and provide motivation for my study.

From July 2012 to June 2014, through the UCLA Luskin Community Partnership Grant, I officially established an institutional connection with the CLEAN Carwash Campaign as a

UCLA researcher. With a sponsorship from CLEAN's Executive Director, I obtained informed consent from all of CLEAN's staff to pursue a research project aimed at understanding how CLEAN manages collaboration with its coalition partners. I was given full access to observe and interview CLEAN's organizers as I examined how interactions among CLEAN and its coalition organizations affect CLEAN's campaign directions. For the duration of the UCLA Luskin Community Partnership Project, I was able to observe meetings and actions directly related to the Millennium and Thee Spot Hand Wash campaigns.

Throughout the UCLA Luskin Community Partnership Project, I did not act as a member of CLEAN and explicitly informed CLEAN's staff, *carwasheros*, and representatives of coalition members about the objectives of my research. Understanding that a primary reason why I was granted permission to study CLEAN was due to my background as a former union organizer, I clarified my role as a UCLA researcher—that in term led to increased comfort and forthrightness on the part of respondents. Beyond collecting informed consent to correspond with IRB requirements and making all aware that data collected could be used for related future research, I continuously reminded all potential respondents that they were free to opt out of participation at any time. At the conclusion of the UCLA Luskin Community Partnership Project in June 2014, I provided feedback for CLEAN's campaign staff during a team meeting and was extended an invitation by the Executive Director to pursue additional research with CLEAN.

For the present dissertation research, I have reconfirmed consent with CLEAN's Executive Director, Strategic Action Coordinator, and Lead Organizer to use the Phase 1 data collected from the UCLA Luskin Community Partnership Project. I also obtained verbal permission from the same parties to conduct observations and interviews with CLEAN's staff

and coalition member organizations as addition data collection (Phase 2 of research). I obtained IRB approval to conduct Phase 2 of research from December 2015 to March 2016.

### ***Data from Phase 1 of Research***

As part of the UCLA Luskin Community Partnership Project, I collected data focused around how coalition dynamics affect CLEAN's campaign work. These include observations of meetings, interviews with CLEAN staff around coalition collaboration, and documents shared with me by CLEAN's Executive Director.

#### *Observations*

My observation took place in a variety of venues, including day-to-day operations in CLEAN's office where I observed interactions among CLEAN staff with one another; staff meetings in CLEAN's office where I observed CLEAN's organizers discuss specific ongoing campaigns; Community Advisory Board meetings taking place at the offices of various LA CBOs where I observed CLEAN's Executive Director and Community Organizer engage representatives from coalition organizations; and rallies and actions in various locations where I observed CLEAN's staff engage allies, targets, media, and members of the public.

On average, I spent about 6 hours a week for routine observations at weekly staff meetings and around CLEAN's campaign office. In addition, I spent about 3 hours a month observing CLEAN's Community Advisory Board Meetings, and 9 hours a month observing CLEAN's various events and actions. In total, I attended a total of 25 of CLEAN's weekly staff meetings, a total of 14 of CLEAN's Community Advisory Board meetings, and a total of 18 of events and actions. Data from the observations was recorded in handwritten or typed field notes in real time. These field notes recorded the concrete and specific behaviors of those present along

with content of discussions and actual events that took place. Immediately after observations, I jotted down my impressions and inferences on a separate column in my field notes.

### *Interviews*

Semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted to illuminate observations and clarify my understanding of CLEAN's coalition dynamics. Typically, I secured interviews with respondents immediately after observations. Interviews generally took place after CLEAN's staff or Community Advisory Board meetings where I observed interactions among individuals. As my previous research focus was on CLEAN's actions around coalition collaboration, I focused my interviews on CLEAN's campaign staff members and representatives from key allies that responded to my interview request. The following are a list of individuals I interviewed, along with the number of interviews conducted per respondent:

- CLEAN's Executive Director (3 interviews)
- CLEAN's Strategic Action Coordinator (2 interviews)
- CLEAN's Community Organizer (2 interviews)
- CLEAN's Lead Organizer (1 interview)
- Executive Director of Clergy Laity United for Economic Justice-LA (1 interview)
- Secretary-Treasurer of United Steel Workers Local 675 (1 interview)

Given the spontaneity of some interviews, I obtained verbal consent beforehand and reminded respondents that they were free to refuse participation. Each interview was conducted in a closed room where privacy was assured. I typically began by asking open-ended questions to make sense of discussions or events that had just taken place. These open-ended questions then allowed me to tailor conversations to the experiences respondents described and to provide room

for additional probing when patterns emerged throughout the conversation. Then, I asked each respondent more focused interview questions around how coalition dynamics affect CLEAN's general decision-making using an interview protocol. I also asked respondents to name from their own perspectives who CLEAN's major stakeholders are, how those actors' needs or expectations might affect collaboration in the coalition. In-depth interview questions not only helped me to interpret my observations, but also to further examine how coalition dynamics and interactions with various actors affect CLEAN's decision making. Repeated interviews with key respondents helped to clarify points made in previous interviews. When allowed by the respondent, interviews were recorded and the recording immediately destroyed upon transcription. For Phase 1 of research, I conducted ten interviews with six respondents. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. In total, interviews generated 23 pages of transcripts.

### *Documents*

Along with observations and interviews, a variety of documents were released to me by CLEAN's Executive Director. These documents were used to analyze the nature, frequency, and content of many of CLEAN's campaigns and how interactions with others affect CLEAN's campaign actions. In addition, they reveal the contributions and preferences of coalition member organizations, strength and vulnerabilities of targets, and action and reactions of various stakeholders and audiences. The documents include:

- List of CLEAN's Steering Committee organizations and representatives
- Annotated Steering Committee Agendas from 2011-2013
- List of CLEAN's Community Advisory Board organizations
- Sign-in sheets from all Community Advisory Board meetings in 2013

- List of all public campaigns from 2011-2014
- CLEAN's target research notes from 2011-2014
- All of CLEAN's official press releases from 2011-2014
- Flyers and brochures of various campaigns and actions from 2011-2014

### ***Data from Phase 2 of Research***

Between December 2015 and March 2016, I conducted additional data collection around CLEAN's campaign strategies for my four cases to help ensure that all research components are addressed. Based on existing data and publicly available records, I constructed profiles of the Bonus, Millennium, Vermont, and Thee Spot Car Wash campaigns. I then outlined data on campaign variations to be collected to reconstruct the four cases:

Campaign Variations	Type of Data	Source of Data	Research Component
Target characteristics	Observations, interviews, documents	CLEAN staff, field, public records	interaction with others
Car wash customer demographics	Interviews, observations	CLEAN staff, field	interaction with others
Campaign history and details	Interviews, documents, news	CLEAN staff, coalition organizations, media	Strategy, interaction with others
Strategy and tactics used	Interviews, news	CLEAN staff, coalition organizations, media	Strategy
Allies involved and level of participation	Interviews, documents, news	CLEAN staff, coalition organizations, media	Strategy, interaction with others
Political support	Interviews, documents, news	CLEAN staff, coalition organizations, media	Strategy, interaction with others
Reaction of public	Interviews, news	CLEAN staff, coalition organizations, media	interaction with others
Target counter-mobilization	Interviews, news	CLEAN staff, coalition organizations, media	interaction with others
Worksite worker engagement and activism	Interviews, news	CLEAN staff, media	Strategy, interaction with others

## *Observations*

Between December 2015 and March 2016, I attended three of CLEAN's 3-hour long staff meetings that took place on Monday mornings in CLEAN's office to observe the interactions of CLEAN's staff members and discussion of campaigns. Although in 2015-2016, the campaigns for my case study had already taken place, these new observations helped to corroborate and strengthen my existing understanding of CLEAN's general decision-making mechanisms, how CLEAN's relationships with others situate it in a strategic action field, and how field dynamics affect CLEAN's campaign strategy setting process.

In addition, in January 2016, I conducted site visits to Bonus, Millennium, Vermont, and Thee Spot Car Washes to better understand target characteristics: the number of workers, customer demographics, the physical layouts of the car washes, and the geographical and neighborhood contexts in which the car washes are situated. These observations added to my understanding of target strengths and vulnerabilities—for example, how the number of driveway exits can affect staffing decisions for boycott pickets. I conducted one site visit to each of the car washes on Wednesday mornings between 10 am and noon. Understanding that the currently car wash sites may not be operating in the same way as they had been during my study time frame of 2011-2014, I presented my observations to my respondents in the CLEAN staff to check for changes that have taken place since June 2014 when I concluded Phase 1 of research.

As in Phase 1 of my research, I utilized field notes to record the concrete and specific behaviors of those present along with content of discussions. Data from the observations were recorded in 11 pages of handwritten and typed field notes.

## *Interviews*

In March 2016, I conducted semi-structured interviews with CLEAN staff and representatives of key coalition partner organizations. These interviews consisted of related, open-ended questions focused around the four campaigns of my comparative case study. For each of the four campaigns, respondents were first asked to specifically recount what happened in each of the campaigns, what CLEAN's strategies were, how they were determined, and how they relate to outcomes. For this round of interviews, each respondent was asked about all four of the campaigns. The leading questions were the following:

- What was your role in the campaign?
- What happened in the campaign?
- What was the strategy of the campaign?
- Why was the strategy chosen?
- How was the strategy decided?
- How did the strategy relate to the outcome of the campaign?

In addition, in an effort to probe how interactions with others in CLEAN's field impact CLEAN's campaign efforts, respondents were asked to identify the general relationships they have with others within the CLEAN coalition. I administered interviews to each of the CLEAN campaign staff members who held the following respective positions during the study frame of 2011-2014. Note that in parenthesis are the positions they held during Phase 2 of data collection.

- CLEAN's Executive Director (in same position)
- CLEAN's Strategic Action Coordinator (employed as Senior Organizer at the AFL-CIO)
- CLEAN's Community Organizer (promoted to CLEAN's Strategic Action Coordinator)



- CLEAN's Lead Organizer (in same position)
- CLEAN's Staff Organizer 1 (in same position)
- CLEAN's Staff Organizer 2 (in same position)
- CLEAN's Staff Organizer 3 (employed as organizer for Community Advisory Board organization IDEPSCA)

In Phase 2 of the research, I conducted 7 interviews with CLEAN's staff in the CLEAN Carwash Campaign office with each interview taking approximately two hours. In addition to focusing the interviews on how strategies were determined during the four campaigns, these interviews served as opportunities for member checking where respondents could clarify findings from data from Phase 1, which in turn can serve as a validation technique to help strengthen credibility of my study in progress (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Padgett, 2008). In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views on findings by taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 2007). Finally, these interviews were used to as an opportunity to reconfirm consent and check respondents' levels of comfort with disclosure and dissemination of findings.

Aside from CLEAN's campaign staff, interviews were administered to members of CLEAN's Steering Committee representatives when possible. Based on Phase 1 data, the organizations of the Steering Committee are CLEAN coalition members who took major part in funding operational costs or directing CLEAN's campaigns. As I could not obtain permission to observe closed Steering Committee meetings, interviewing individual members of the Steering Committee helped me better understand coalition funder demands. The same semi-structured interview protocol used for CLEAN's campaign staff was used here. In addition, the respondents

were asked to assess their influence in shaping CLEAN's overall strategy and strategies of the four campaigns. With the help of CLEAN's Executive Director, I conducted in-person interviews lasting about 2 hours each with three members of the Steering Committee:

- Representative from AFL-CIO
- Representative from United Steel Workers Local 675
- Representative from UCLA Downtown Labor Center

Along with observations, the interview data were used to reconstruct events that had taken place, strengthen conclusions made from other forms of data and analysis, and provide additional insights on how the various coalition partner organizations shape CLEAN's overall campaign trajectory, behaviors, and strategy choice.

In Phase 2 of the research, I recorded interviews through handwritten or typed field notes only. In total, I conducted ten interviews with ten respondents. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. In total, interviews consisted of 19 pages of transcripts.

### *Documents*

To help reconstruct events that have taken place for the four cases of my study, I supplemented data from observations and interviews by collecting additional documents.

First, I gathered additional information on targets of the four campaigns using public records. The websites of California Secretary of State and the California Department of Industrial Relations—specifically, the Car Wash and Polishing Registration Database website—were searched for information pertaining to registration and owner information of the car wash establishments for the four campaigns. In addition, I monitored newspaper coverage of each of the four campaigns by searching for newspaper reports in the *NewsBank Access World News*

database which includes local, regional, state, and national newspapers. To gather media stories pertaining to the four campaigns, the following terms appearing in all U.S. newspaper for the period January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2013 were used in searches: “car wash,” “car wash workers,” “car wash union,” and “CLEAN Car Wash Campaign.” After verifying the accuracy of the search terms in returning appropriate articles, the media stories were collected and analyzed.

The document research in Phase 2 of research helped reveal additional information on target characteristics, the role of allies, reactions of targets and the public, and other campaign history and details. In addition, the use of these sources helped me to compare and cross check information obtained from CLEAN’s organizers, coalition member organizations, and Steering Committee members.

### ***Data Analysis for the Comparative Case Study***

I organized all field notes, interview transcripts, and archival data from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of research by first grouping CLEAN’s activities into tactical categories and emergent strategies by hand. With different colored highlighters and pens, I noted strategies, strategy determination, and outcomes. I also watched for emerging themes around CLEAN’s positionality in the field. As analysis proceeded, I focused on emerging patterns.

Final analysis consisted of re-reading data and refining existing schemes. In re-reading data, I looked for factors that influenced CLEAN’s strategy determination, and how strategies relate to outcomes of the campaigns. I utilized Excel spreadsheets to detail sources of variation and systematize comparisons across the four campaigns.

Memo writing was used to connect themes that I found. I revised perceived connections and emerging themes by going back to the data to assess whether these ideas were accurate, if

there is disconfirming evidence, and if I can find alternatives to expectations. As I continued to write memos, my findings became more focused and clear as I built my dissertation narrative in answering my three research questions.

### ***Limitations and Efforts to Ensure Validity***

Because my research relationship with the CLEAN Carwash Campaign was through CLEAN's Executive Director, coalition organization members could freely avoid interactions with me. As a result, some of the interactions where strategy setting took place were not observable, and were not possible to witness systematically. Some of the strategy setting took place within Steering Committee meetings, which I did not have permission to observe. In addition, because my research relationship with CLEAN was established through CLEAN's Executive Director, I relied on the Executive Director and his staff as a source of data, making my research subject to bias in their perceptions and attitudes. Finally, because I am studying events that have already taken place, I must be mindful that respondents' recall can be imperfect.

Case study research must pay special attention to validity; much of this is accomplished through the use of triangulation techniques, including using different types and sources of data (Yin, 1984). As outlined, my research proposes using several types of data including observations, interviews, and documents involving different sources during different time periods—as events were unfolding, and after they have taken place—to answer my questions.

To increase internal validity, prolonged engagement in the field was proposed and conducted. I had spent time in the CLEAN campaign environment since June 2011. Not only did my rapport with respondents ensure that my data was more accurate, it also provides me with insights and perspectives on how the campaign changed over time. Because the campaign

outcomes have already taken place for my four cases, comparing how events took place during the study period and how organizers retrospectively reflect how their courses of action contributed to victories and losses can offer interesting insight. In addition, re-entering the field between December 2015 and March 2016 constituted a continual engagement with the field in a different time period, which strengthens the validity of my findings (Creswell, 2007; Padgett, 2008).

### ***Issues of Reflexivity***

I had been previously employed as a professional union organizer from 2002-2008. This experience allowed me to be hired by the AFL-CIO in 2011 and subsequently establish a research relationship with CLEAN. My background as a former organizer built trust with organizers, who invited me into their meetings when sensitive strategy matters are discussed. At the same time, my role as a PhD student allowed me to be viewed as a learner and welcomed to ask questions. Because of my previous professional experience, I am aware that I hold a variety of assumptions and preconceived ideas about what constitutes “good” strategy. While my practical experiences motivate my research, I am aware that my understandings are ultimately based on the specific circumstantial contexts of my own campaign experiences. In interpreting data, I will be wary of how my own experiences may lead me to biased conclusions.

## CHAPTER 5

### VICTORY AND LOSS IN THE WESTSIDE

Los Angeles's Westside conjures up images tourists typically associate with LA: beautiful homes, sandy beaches, and expensive cars. Roughly defined as the region north of the 10 Freeway stretching from west of Downtown LA to the Pacific Ocean and encompassing cities of West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Culver City, and Los Angeles, the Westside boasts some of the most affluent neighborhoods of LA County where median household incomes surpass \$200,000 (Los Angeles Times Mapping LA, 2016). On any given day, many tour buses frequent the Westside; yet as tour guides draw attention to luxury estates in Bel-Air and shiny cars cruising along Sunset Boulevard, there lurks behind the glamor low wage industries that maintain the Westside's manicured image—landscaping, domestic work, and car washes.

Of the approximately 500 car washes in LA County, about 25 of them are located in the Westside. In contrast to small “driveway” operations with only a few workers found in many other parts of LA, car washes in the Westside tend to be medium to large establishments employing at least a dozen workers located on major thoroughfares. Upon driving into a Westside car wash, a customer would be approached by an attendant or *ticktero* who presents choices of car wash packages ranging from “basic” to “deluxe” to all-inclusive hand wax and detailing. After the order is recorded on a ticket, the customer is asked to hand over the key and wait in an air-conditioned lounge area as a driver maneuvers the car through an automatic wash tunnel on a conveyor past high pressure water jets. As the car emerges from the tunnel, the driver parks it in another area where 4 to 5 workers and detailers rush over to scrub the wheels, dry off the exterior and windows, and vacuum the carpet. When the car is ready, the customer is notified

by the cashier as another driver pulls the cleaned car to the curb. It is customary for the customer to leave a cash tip for the driver, although not all customers honor this practice—for few know that many *carwasheros* are *propineros* or workers who earn only tips but no hourly wages.

Many Westside car washes advertise quick turnaround times for busy customers—young professionals in BMWs, middle-aged executives in Land Rovers, and an occasional celebrity in a Maserati. On any non-rainy day, up to 200 cars patronize a Westside car wash. Unless the customer opts for a detailing package, a typical car wash process lasts less than 30 minutes during which 5-10 workers are involved for packages costing between \$10 to \$250 dollars. As many Westside car washes boast hand washing to appeal to owners of luxury vehicles, as such, the car wash workplace relies heavily on manual labor. Given the fixed expenditure of water, electricity, and equipment, owners informally surveyed by AFL-CIO's Union Summer Interns revealed that they increase profit margins through speeding up work and relying on undocumented workers laboring in hazardous conditions. Many car washes operate in violation of labor laws in part because the fines are low relative to the money saved through exploitative practices common in the industry (Barry et.al., 2009).

Glaring contrasts exist between the typical Westside customers and *carwasheros* in race and class. In the Westside, the typical car wash customers are affluent Whites—reflecting the demographics of over 60% of Westside residents (Los Angeles Times Mapping LA, 2016). On the other hand, *carwasheros* are predominantly Latino men who earn an average \$12,500 per year and commute home to other parts of LA at the end of their shifts. Interestingly, CLEAN's organizers noted that many *carwasheros* in the Westside are first-generation immigrants from Mexican provinces of Oaxaca and Puebla who, through hometown associations and migratory social networks, find employment in Westside car washes (Malpica, 2002; Waldinger, 1996).

Compared to car washes in other parts of LA County where workers are predominantly from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and other Mexican provinces, Westside car washes employ many *cawasheros* of Zapotec and Mixtec indigenous heritage recruited to come to the U.S. by “networks of exploitation” into this particular ethnic occupational niche where poor conditions result in quick turnover and a continuous demand for low wage workers (Cranford, 2005; Waldinger, 1996).

Similar to the *carwasheros*, there appears to be an ethnic network among car wash owners in the Westside. CLEAN’s organizers estimated that at least a third of all LA car washes—and majority of the Westside car washes—belong to Iranian owners. The Westside is home to approximately 45,000 Persian Jews who left Iran in the 1980s and took up residences in Beverly Hills, Westwood, Brentwood, and Pico-Robertson (Bozorgmehr, 1997; Soomkeh, 2011). For a variety of reasons including a sense of exclusivity resulting from exile, self-sufficiency from having capital, and lack of need to socialize with outsiders through having a large population residing in a concentrated geographic region, LA’s Persian Jews tend to be an insular and cohesive community (Soomkeh, 2011). Although not well understood, it appears that car washes are popular with many Persian Jewish ethnic entrepreneurs who see them as profitable cash businesses with low barriers to entry. As noted earlier, because many carwashes employ undocumented immigrant labor to increase profit margins while keeping prices low, both the car wash owners’ network of cooperation and competition with one another may contribute to the business logic and practice of employing undocumented immigrant workers and engaging in labor code violations.

While the Westside sets the stage for a complicated story of racial and class inequality, it also provides the context for an active network of community allies who made comprehensive



campaigns against egregious owners possible. The Westside, as the first targeted geographic area for CLEAN's campaign since it regrouped from a previous major loss, became a site of collaboration between the labor movement, legal and immigrant advocacy CBOs, and religious and faith groups. As will be discussed later, the community allies and the resources they bring played big roles in shaping strategy in the Westside. In addition to the deployment of campaign strategy and implementation of worksite organizing, target characteristics and the surrounding customers and residents' support to the *carwasheros*' cause helped to determine the outcomes of CLEAN's campaigns.

### **A Westside Victory: Comprehensive Campaign at the Sikder Carwashes**

#### ***Background of the "Westside Strategy"***

Two years into its official founding in 2008, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign had been waging a multi-year comprehensive campaign at Vermont Hand Wash, owned by the Pirian brothers in the north-central region of Los Angeles. Although CLEAN's campaign efforts brought to light abuses such as denying breaks, withholding wages, and threatening violence, and led the Pirian brothers to be sentenced to prison by the LA City Attorney and ordered to pay back \$1.25 million to 54 *carwasheros*, CLEAN did not achieve a collective bargaining agreement for workers. While CLEAN publicly framed the jailing of the Pirians as victory, the drawn-out fight had exhausted much of CLEAN's resources. CLEAN's organizers and coalition partners—especially funders in the Steering Committee—were eager for a morale-boosting clear-cut win.

By early 2010, CLEAN's Steering Committee directed CLEAN's Executive Director to change CLEAN's organizing plans. Exiting the Pirian fight, the Steering Committee decided that lengthy comprehensive campaigns involving highly coordinated wage and hour litigation,

community actions, and media work were simply too costly for the fledgling coalition to conduct. In addition, to allay doubts in the labor and CBO fields on the labor-community coalition's ability to actually unionize low wage immigrant workers, the Steering Committee mandated that CLEAN must shift to a "small operator" model targeting modest-sized car washes whose owners might be less likely to countermobilize in a unionization campaign. As funding organizations' commitment to financial support was on the line, CLEAN complied. With assistance from AFL-CIO's Center for Strategic Research, CLEAN's then Lead Organizer, Justin, proceeded to prepare a list of small car wash operators as a bargaining chip in the 2010 Steering Committee meeting.

Although the Steering Committee believed CLEAN should pursue only smaller targets, CLEAN's campaign staff thought otherwise. Despite the equivocal outcome at Vermont Hand Wash, CLEAN's organizers had gained valuable lessons: that car wash owners do not necessarily respond to comprehensive campaigns the same way corporations with shareholders do, and that wage and hour lawsuits do not automatically lead to lasting improvements nor urgency to unionize among the workers. With new insights fresh in mind, CLEAN enlisted help from the AFL-CIO Center for Strategic Research to persuade the Steering Committee that CLEAN be given permission to continue refining its comprehensive campaign strategies. Thus, a compromise was made: in 2010 CLEAN was authorized to run another comprehensive campaign if it also began exploring small operators.

CLEAN had the perfect target already in mind: the Sikder family's Bonus and Marina Car Washes—both large establishments employing 30 and 40 workers each, located on Lincoln Boulevard, in Santa Monica and Venice respectively. By April 2010, CLEAN began its a "Westside strategy" launched with a wedding march attended by over 100 labor, immigrant and

civil right activists throughout Santa Monica to celebrate the marriage of immigrant worker advocate and one of CLEAN's founders, Victor Narro, to his wife, whom he met on a CLEAN picket line. Intensive campaigning at the Sikder car washes ensued for the next year. A year later, in 2011, Bonus Car Wash would become CLEAN's first signatory to a collective bargaining agreement, making it the first unionized car wash in the nation.

### ***The Billionaire Family's Car Washes***

Although Bonus Car Wash in Santa Monica became the first unionized car wash, the Sikder car washes campaign actually began at Marina Car Wash a mile south when workers took matters into their own hands and initiated workplace action.

On July 24, 2008, when Marina Car Wash workers received bounced paychecks for the fourth time, 40 *carwasheros* coordinated among themselves to walk out of work in the middle of their shifts and staged a "wildcat" strike independent of any formal organizational support. As customers learned the news, an anonymous sympathizer called the CLEAN Carwash Campaign. CLEAN quickly arrived to support the strike with bottled water, picket signs, bullhorns, and knowledgeable organizers. After confronting the manager, Marina workers received what they were owed within a week. In the months following the action, Marina *carwasheros* were so encouraged that they became highly motivated about the prospect of unionizing their workplace. Later that summer, CLEAN began forming an organizing committee at Marina Car Wash and engaged the activists by involving them to speak about the plight of *carwasheros* at several Westside churches and synagogues. During this time, CLEAN uncovered numerous labor and health and safety violations at Marina Car Wash: *carwasheros* received payment less than the minimum wage, were paid no overtime, were not allowed to clock in until customers arrive, had

no consistent lunch breaks nor access to drinking water, and were exposed to sun and corrosive cleaning chemicals without adequate protective equipment.

Despite the initial “heat” or enthusiasm of the Marina *carwasheros* to unionize, during this time in 2008, CLEAN and its coalition member organizations were embroiled in the aforementioned campaign against the Pirian brothers and did not have the capacity to initiate another comprehensive campaign. As public campaigns frequently put workers at risk of termination, CLEAN would not escalate its campaign at Marina Car Wash beyond base-building if it could not commit resources or personnel to fully support worksite organizing. To the disappointment of Marina activists, organizing at Marina Car Wash fell to a maintenance level. As the coalition was preoccupied elsewhere, Marina Car Wash was put on the back burner until CLEAN exited the Pirian campaign.

When CLEAN was finally given the green light to conduct a new comprehensive campaign in 2010, CLEAN already had Marina Car Wash in mind. Between June and September, with the research help of student interns from the AFL-CIO Union Summer program, CLEAN discovered that Marina Car Wash belongs to the Sikder family. Through a variety of sources, CLEAN learned that the Sikders are billionaires with international holdings: the patriarch resides in Bangladesh and is well connected to the Prime Minister as an infrastructure developer, whereas sons Nick and Dipu Haque grew up in Westside LA, attended Venice High School, and own a fleet of luxury cars and a mansion in the Hollywood Hills. In contrast with each other, Nick managed the family’s luxury resort in St. Kitts and high-end Koi Restaurant chain frequented by celebrities and socialites in West Hollywood, Las Vegas, New York, Bangkok and Abu Dhabi. Dipu, on the other hand, managed the car washes that he convinced the

family to buy in the early 2000s as investment—including Bonus Car Wash in Santa Monica just a mile north of Marina Car Wash and 13 other car washes throughout California.

As it is strategic to consider target’s openness to influence before committing resources to organize around it (Walker et. al., 2008; Ganz, 2009), CLEAN found the Sikder car washes to be the perfect target for a comprehensive campaign because of their multiple vulnerabilities. At both Marina and Bonus Car Washes, there were many labor violations for potential litigation—standard repertoire for CLEAN to build pressure on owners. In addition, besides car wash customers and local residents, CLEAN would have an additional audience of A-list diners and “celebrity connections” which expanded the coalition’s tactical possibilities should it proxy-target the Koi Restaurant in West Hollywood. Finally, and most importantly, at both Marina and Bonus Car Washes, the workers were genuinely excited about organizing, committed to carry out the actions, and unafraid to stand up as public faces of the campaign.

### ***Evolution of the Campaign at Marina and Bonus Car Washes***

CLEAN’s organizing team began exploring how the campaign should proceed at the Sikder car washes. For the time being, Marina and Bonus car washes were chosen to be simultaneous targets because of their similarity and geographic proximity with each other. CLEAN would first collect evidence to mount multiple wage and hour violations suits against the Sikders—since lawsuits are major components in most comprehensive campaigns to leverage state regulatory actions (Manheim, 2001) and the expertise of many CBOs and founding organizations in CLEAN’s coalition (Narro, 2007). However, as the team had learned from the Pirian campaign, litigation-based strategies alone do not institutionalize worker power; to do so, CLEAN had to strategize on how it could move toward union recognition and gaining a

collective bargaining agreement (Garea & Stern, 2010). As four out of ten of CLEAN's professional campaign staff—including then Executive Director Art and Lead Organizer Justin—had previously worked as organizers for major labor unions, CLEAN vouched to opt away from a traditional certification election with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in favor of a union recognition “card check” process, which is increasingly routinized as standard repertoire in modern unionizing campaigns (Martin, 2008). In many NLRB elections, employers illegally suppress unionization efforts because by the time an unfair labor practice (ULP) complaint can be filed, worker interests and organizing momentum is effectively chilled. On the other hand, the card check process is one where the employer signs onto a neutrality agreement or a code of conduct promising non-interference—after which, if the majority of workers sign up for union recognition, the union is automatically ratified by the NLRB. Thus, the plan was hatched: a comprehensive campaign involving litigation and community actions at Marina and Bonus Car Washes would be mounted to persuade the Sikders to sign the neutrality agreement; simultaneously, organizers would build rank and file worker commitment to organize the workplace so that workers would be ready to testify for the lawsuits, participate in the picket lines, and sign the cards to become members of the United Steel Workers (USW) Local 675.

CLEAN immediately appointed Luis, a USW organizer assigned to CLEAN, to be the dedicated organizer for the “turf” of the Marina and Bonus worksites. Luis was charismatic and very successful at rebuilding relationships at Marina Car Wash, where workers quickly recommitted to meet regularly as organizing committee members. Subsequently, Luis began visiting Bonus Car Wash to build contact with workers, later meeting them through house visits. At the same time, CLEAN assigned other organizers to begin probing Sikder-owned car washes

in Orange County and maintain contact with workers who called CLEAN from another Sikder car wash in San Bernardino County.

Around then, CLEAN's Strategic Action Coordinator at the time, Chloe, began to intensify its working relationships with one of its coalition members—Clergy and Laity United for Economic justice (CLUE-LA). Many of CLUE-LA's members in the Westside had hosted Marina workers in their churches and synagogues since the Marina workplace action in 2008. Rabbi Klein, Executive Director of CLUE-LA, did not hesitate to pledge support for CLEAN's major comprehensive campaign, which as he saw it as an opportunity to revitalize CLUE-LA's own latent network of clergy activists who were involved with a living wage campaign for hotel workers in Santa Monica in the early 2000s. CLUE-LA assigned one of its own faith organizers, Reverend Tamayo, to support the CLEAN Carwash Campaign full time. Reverend Tamayo would attend all of CLEAN's staff meetings and work closely with workers—as she was also fluent in Spanish—to help organize the Westside clergy to support CLEAN's actions.

Given the number of egregious wage and hour violations, Justin and Chloe wanted to hire a private attorney for the litigation. However, out of cost concerns, the Steering Committee directed CLEAN to utilize the California Attorney General. While the Attorney General would take on the wage and hour cases for free, CLEAN knew that it would not necessarily be able to control a state actor and time the lawsuits in accordance with the pace of the campaign and worker organizing momentum. While CLEAN had much autonomy in many of its strategy decisions, this was a major one that the campaign staff could not make without the Steering Committee's sanction. In the end, Attorney General Jerry Brown's office was contacted. CLEAN now had to wait for its legal tactics to fall into place before moving forward with other organizing plans.

The Marina *carwasheros*, having waited for two years, were eager to begin partaking in more workplace actions; yet, as the Steering Committee cautioned against any moves before the lawsuits materialized, CLEAN faced the challenge of having to dampen the workers' enthusiasm for a second time. Around the same time in May 2010, changes in CLEAN's campaign leadership took place as Art suddenly left CLEAN to pursue work elsewhere and Henry, who had not been on staff at CLEAN before, took over as Executive Director of CLEAN. The transition was disruptive to the team, and communications between Luis and Marina and Bonus *carwasheros* became inconsistent for several months. Luis, who self-identified more as a USW organizer than as a member of CLEAN's organizing team, blamed the AFL-CIO and the Steering Committee in front of the workers for the delay in actions. After CLEAN's Steering Committee learned of this, Luis was reassigned elsewhere by the USW and Justin, CLEAN's Lead Organizer, took over the turf. Nevertheless, Marina Car Wash activists became frustrated and distrustful of CLEAN, while the Bonus Car Wash workers—who were never as committed as those at Marina to start with—began to lose support for the campaign and the coalition.

As workers continued to wait, one of the key Marina Car Wash activists, Rogelio, was terminated after the manager instituted a new speed-up policy as an act of retaliation for worker organizing. Rogelio approached one of CLEAN's Steering Committee member organizations, the Wage Justice Center (WJC), to seek a private lawsuit against the Sikders. The WJC assigned one of its legal organizers, Neidi, to the case. When Neidi arrived at CLEAN's office to discuss with the staff, an argument ensued between her and Justin: while understanding Rogelio's eagerness for restitution, Justin worried that an individual lawsuit would undermine the wage and hour cases that CLEAN spent several months preparing for the Attorney General. In CLEAN's own weekly staff meeting, organizers debated whether priority should be given to the autonomy



of the worker versus coordinated action of the coalition; tension flared among organizers at CLEAN and the WJC. Eventually, the WJC agreed to hold off Rogelio's lawsuit, but also reassigned Neidi to the CLEAN campaign as its full-time legal organizer so the WJC can be more closely involved with CLEAN's strategy.

### ***Sequencing of Tactical Mobilizations***

To push its wage and hour cases forward, CLEAN enlisted the assistance of another coalition and Steering Committee Member, the Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF), which has existing relationships with the Office of Attorney General in Sacramento. Finally, on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, after a five-month investigation and interviews with over 80 workers at Marina, Bonus, and six other Sikder car washes in Sacramento and Orange counties, Attorney General Jerry Brown filed a \$6.6 million lawsuit against Dipu Haque Sikder and eight Sikder corporate entities doing business as car washes for unpaid wages, illegal business practices, and operating without licenses from the California Labor Commissioner. The lawsuits from the Attorney General came in a timely manner when the Sikder family was financially vulnerable. The multiple car washes that Dipu convinced his family to invest in the early 2000s had become financial liabilities by 2010, as revenue dropped during the late-2000s recession. According to public records, the Sikders began closing several of their car washes across the state and filing bankruptcy for at least two Southern California car washes in 2009 and 2010. As pieces of the comprehensive campaign started to fall in place, CLEAN anticipated that the lawsuit from the Attorney General naming Dipu as an individual plaintiff would push the target to take the *carwasheros* and CLEAN's demands seriously.

The following Monday, on October 4<sup>th</sup>, CLEAN staged a large press event on the sidewalks of Bonus Car Wash to announce the Attorney General's lawsuit and elaborate on conditions in Marina and Bonus car washes. Dozens of *carwasheros*, clergy, LA union members, and supporters from CLEAN's coalition organizations attended, and the story was covered by news outlets including the Associated Press, Los Angeles Times, CBS LA, West Hollywood Patch and various online outlets. In addition, foodie websites such as the Los Angeles Eater picked up the news, with the headline "Proprietors of Koi Sued Over Worker Exploitation at Secondary Car Wash Business." In the LA Weekly coverage, the writer suggested,

*"Celebs are quick to act righteous about their latest causes...a boycott of Koi sounds like it could be a pretty hot cause."*

The writer seemed to have predicted one of CLEAN's next moves.

The publicity was much needed in reviving the excitement of Marina and Bonus workers. Once the lawsuits were in place, the *carwasheros* escalated their worksite organizing—as activists shared information with one another on the job and planned their next actions during evening meetings held at CLEAN's office in north-central LA. Then, more timely assistance arrived: the Carwash Worker Leadership Brigade or *brigadistas*—a group of fired car wash activists, including Rogelio—had just been given scholarships by coalition member UCLA Downtown Labor Center to train in grassroots community advocacy with CLEAN. Now, even if the *carwasheros* were working their shifts, CLEAN would have the personnel to run simultaneous organizing tasks. Intensive weekly boycott pickets were conducted at both car washes, from 1-5pm on Fridays and from 10am-5pm on weekends when most car wash customers patronize the two car washes. *Carwasheros*, *brigadistas*, and CLEAN's staff walked

the picket lines on car wash driveways to persuade customers to not patronize the car wash. While not all customers were sympathetic to the workers' plight, organizers reported that customers responded well to a particular flyer talking point written by one of CLEAN's environmental organization allies:

*"At Bonus Car Wash the storage tanks underneath the car wash was found to contaminate the soil and possibly the surrounding Santa Monica groundwater."*

While CLEAN experienced only about a 50% success rate in turning cars around at Marina and Bonus car washes, the boycotts created some economic damage and disruption for the target and more importantly, media attention and visibility for the *carwasheros*.

On December 9, 2010, the Sikders shut down operation at Marina Car Wash and locked out the workers. CLEAN immediately filed an ULP case with the NLRB alleging retaliation for workers' protected organizing activities. The target's countermobilization came as a surprise right before the winter holidays, as 25 committed Marina activists were suddenly out of work. CLEAN's organizing staff cancelled their vacation plans, and CLEAN began hosting emergency fundraisers in the parking lots of various Westside churches and at the LA County Federation of Labor where Marina workers could wash cars for donation. On the evening of December 20, with the help of CLUE-LA, CLEAN held a multi-faith prayer candle light vigil in front of Bonus Car Wash followed by a Christmas *posada* where two *carwasheros* dressed as Joseph and Mary led a procession through Santa Monica's streets to The Church in Ocean Park. Two days later, CLEAN staged an evening picket and street theater where *carwasheros* and organizers reenacted the course of events at Marina Car Wash in the valet parking space of Koi Restaurant—which caused much inconvenience and commotion among the diners.

By January 2011, organizing efforts at Marina Car Wash had been effectively quashed as unemployed activists had to move on to find work elsewhere; for the organizing at Bonus Car Wash, the shock of the Marina lockout also created a sense of uncertainty and took a heavy toll on worker morale. During this time, Executive Director Henry quietly withdrew, leaving Chloe and Justin to assume roles as acting directors of CLEAN. Although the campaign seemed to generate much less excitement in contrast to the series of escalation the previous fall, CLEAN—under Chloe and Justin’s committed guidance—was actually buckling down for a war of attrition. Throughout spring 2011, Justin continued to regularly meet with the Bonus workers, while the rest of CLEAN’s campaign staff and *brigadistas* relentlessly picketed Bonus Car Wash and Koi Restaurant on a weekly basis. In the meantime, CLUE-LA’s clergy members continued to invite *cawasheros* to speak to their congregations, after which congregants signed cards urging the Sikders to negotiate with the workers. By June 2011, as another cohort of ten college student interns from AFL-CIO’s Union Summer arrived, CLEAN scaled up the picketing efforts once again. After a street theater performance in front of Bonus Car Wash on August 13 where the interns performed “Day in the Life of a Carwash Worker,” a play they wrote depicting the abuses suffered by *carwasheros*, CLEAN received a call from a representative of the Sikders. Apparently, the Sikders were under the impression that if they signed a collective bargaining agreement with workers, the Attorney General might deal with them more favorably with the outstanding lawsuits. While this was not necessarily true as CLEAN had no control over the Attorney General’s actions, Chloe and Justin took advantage of the sentiment to press for multiple in-person meetings with the Sikders immediately after. By August 25, 2011, the Sikders signed a neutrality agreement with the stipulation that CLEAN would sign a memorandum of understanding to no longer picket or perform street theatres at Koi. By late August, union

certification cards were circulated among Bonus Car Wash workers for the card check procedure, and a majority of the Bonus workers quickly signed.

A collective bargaining agreement was ratified on September 1, 2011 for both the Marina and Bonus Car Washes. A press conference was held at Bonus Car Wash on October 25, where *carwasheros* in white t-shirts, standing alongside American-flag clad USW union members, USW Local 675 Secretary-Treasurer Dave Campbell, and leaders from the AFL-CIO, applauded the Sikders for their cooperation. A *carwashero* expressed relief:

*“Now we have 10 more minutes of break. We have our water to drink. If they say ‘Show up at work at 10:30,’ I start work at 10:30.”*

Although the contract gave the workers only a modest 2% raise, it established standardized rules on wages and hours—setting minimal standards for *carwasheros* unheard of in the industry. As part of the contract, the Marina workers received severance pay, while the workers at Bonus Car Wash became the newest members of the USW Local 675. Immediate workplace improvements were made: guaranteed 7-hour shifts for workers, a minimum of 35 hours of work per week, worker input on scheduling, and—one that *carwasheros* vehemently demanded—clean uniform provided by the employer every morning when they come to work.

### **Westside Loss: The Damavandi Car Washes**

#### ***Background***

When Bonus Car Wash in Santa Monica signed a Collective Bargaining Agreement with CLEAN and became the first unionized car wash in the U.S. in 2011, then Secretary-Treasurer Maria Elena Durazo of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor issued a call to allies in the

labor movement to patronize Bonus as a union establishment. The LA Labor Movement knew all too well that having union density in an industry is key for the preservation of standards. For example, since the de-unionization of LA's garment industry in the 1970s, downtown LA's union factories that once supported middle class families in the post-war period have all been replaced by sweatshops today (Milkman, 2006). Conversely, if the newly unionized Bonus *carwasheros* were to preserve their gains, CLEAN must also elevate standards in the entire regional car wash market. In short, it was imperative for Bonus Car Wash not to be undercut by its non-union competitors; CLEAN knew the urgency to move on and organize other car washes in the Westside, and it had already been making plans.

Through the research that led CLEAN to target the Sikders, CLEAN learned that the Westside, especially the city of Santa Monica, was ripe for organizing. In Santa Monica, there were only four car washes all located in proximity with one another in competition for customers and contracts to wash the city's police, parking enforcement, and other official vehicles. In addition, through the Sikder campaign, CLEAN had activated a trusted coalition partner in the Westside, CLUE-LA. The mutually beneficial partnership between CLEAN and CLUE-LA strengthened during the year-long Sikder campaign; through CLUE-LA's deepening involvement and growing stake in the coalition, CLUE-LA also became more interested in shaping strategies and involving other CBOs, as Rabbi Klein became increasingly vocal during CLEAN's monthly Community Advisory Board meetings and challenged other coalition organizations to patronize the newly unionized Bonus Car Wash attend the vigils for *carwasheros*. According to Rabbi Klein, CLEAN and the *carwasheros*' struggles were so compelling that they not only energized CLUE-LA's existing membership, they inspired new clergy to become involved with CLUE-LA. In the immediate aftermath of the Sikder campaign

victory, many Westside faith activists requested to host *carwasheros* to present in their own congregation meetings and were already discussing possibilities for the next neighborhood campaign with CLUE-LA.

Months before the collective bargaining agreement at Bonus was even signed, Kevin, senior researcher from AFL-CIO Center for Strategic Research, assembled the profiles of the remaining three car washes in Santa Monica: Wilshire West Carwash, Lincoln Carwash, and Santa Monica Carwash. Early in 2011, Kevin met with Chloe and Justin to discuss initial findings: the land on which Wilshire West was located had been sold and slated for new condo development, rendering any campaigns there futile; Lincoln Car Wash showed some evidence of wage theft, yet initial contacts there suggested that workers were largely apathetic to unionizing; Santa Monica Carwash, on the other hand, held a \$12,000 contract with the city of Santa Monica to wash its fleet and deserved further exploration. Chloe and Justin agreed with Kevin's recommendations. In July 2011, in order to help satisfy the field research component of their internships, Justin had sent teams of Union Summer interns all over LA to speak with *carwasheros* and document conditions of car washes. The interns' field notes from Santa Monica Carwash recorded that workers there were made by the manager to work for 8 hours, clock out, and then return to work for cash payment below the minimum wage. Furthermore, the manager made known his policy of not hiring women except for cashiers—a clear violation of federal law enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC). By the time the Bonus victory was finally cemented in October 2011, CLEAN already has its next Westside comprehensive campaign in mind.

### *The Damavandi Car Washes*

Since intelligence gathering on the target was instrumental in helping CLEAN refine its strategy and tactical decisions throughout the Sikder campaign, CLEAN sought to do the same again. As CLEAN zeroed in on Santa Monica Carwash, it learned that the owner, Bijan “Ben” Damavandi, also owned two other car washes: Millennium Carwash in Venice, and Bubblebee Carwash in the city of Lakewood in southeast LA County. As it was common for comprehensive campaigns to take on multiple targets within geographical proximity of one another, these three car washes would simultaneously be organized. In October 2011, Justin approached the Steering Committee with the proposal for a comprehensive campaign at the three Damavandi car washes. This time, buoyed by CLEAN’s recent victory and confident in Justin’s leadership, the Steering Committee quickly endorsed CLEAN’s plan.

By late October, Justin and the organizing team had already been talking to workers at the Santa Monica, Millennium, and Bubblebee car washes. Through approaching workers at bus stops after work to acquire phone numbers and addresses, then later visiting them in the privacy of their homes in one-on-one meetings, CLEAN organizers Juliet, Maria, Flor and Jose listened to workers’ grievances, assessed leadership potential, and mapped out workplace dynamics. From the get go, organizers reported strong initial “heat” from workers at Santa Monica and Millennium and an adequate amount of worker support for unionizing at Bubblebee. CLEAN’s recent campaign efforts had earned it name recognition, as many *carwasheros* had learned about Bonus workers’ wage increases not only from English language news outlets, but also from the Spanish language newspaper La Opinion and channels Univision 34 and Noticias 62. Serendipitously, the closing of Marina Car Wash in late 2010 ended up helping CLEAN recruit its first worker organizing committee members at Millennium, as three former Marina activists



had found work down the street at Millennium Carwash in Venice. At the inception of the Damavandi campaign, CLEAN already had a handful of supporters who were knowledgeable about the challenges an organizing campaign entails.

Shortly after the public announcement of the contract signing at Bonus Car Wash, CLUE-LA sent a delegation of enthusiastic clergy members to all three Damavandi car washes on behalf of CLEAN and to see if Ben Damavandi would be willing to also become a “high road” employer like the Sikders. According to Rabbi Klein, who led the delegation to Santa Monica Carwash, Ben Damavandi, his wife Edna, and son Shawn responded with great hostility. Justin, who was also present, reported that Shawn, who managed his father’s car washes, loudly berated the workers who gathered as onlookers during the meeting.

The Damavandis were a wealthy family of Persian Jewish background residing in the affluent neighborhood of Pacific Palisades. Business records from the California Secretary of State show that Silver Wash, the corporate entity doing business as Santa Monica Carwash, was registered to Edna Damavandi and linked to a hilltop residential address in a gated community with property values over \$2 million per home. However, unlike the Sikders, Ben and Edna Damavandi owned only the three car washes; and while at one point, Shawn ran an internet business Kushpon that provided medical marijuana discounts, it was not a brick-and-mortar establishment suitable for secondary boycotts. Also, unlike the Sikders whose social networks with Hollywood power players and gastronomical elites compelled them to settle with CLEAN’s in order to keep disruptive spectacles out of the Koi Restaurant, the Damavandis were largely a private family that appeared to perceive CLEAN’s efforts to organize *carwasheros* as assaults on the family’s livelihood. In addition, CLEAN’s previous campaign against the Pirian brothers, who were also of Persian Jewish heritage, had apparently caught attention of LA’s Persian

community in which CLEAN did not have a reliable insider contact. Extrapolating from an anecdotal exchange with another Persian Jewish car wash owner during a research probe, Justin suspected that the Damavandis were advised by the ethnic entrepreneur network of Persian Jewish car wash owners to push back against CLEAN and their allies who were “politically singling out Persian Jews for common industry practice [of hiring undocumented workers] and to punish them for not bowing down to the [pro-Latino] labor unions.”

Shortly after CLUE-LA’s delegation, the Damavandi family hired an anti-union consultant and held multiple bilingual English-Spanish captive audience workplace meetings at Santa Monica and Millennium Car Washes, cautioning the workers to not to speak with any organizers.

### ***Litigation as Comprehensive Campaign Foundation***

CLEAN’s strategy at the Damavandi car washes was roughly modelled after the Sikder campaign. Hoping to replicate the victorious results at Bonus Car Wash, the comprehensive campaign would complement worksite-level worker organizing with litigation for wage theft, an EEOC claim with a federal field office, community organizing involving CLUE and other allies in public actions, media work involving press release to shame the employer, and finally, policy action to persuade the city of Santa Monica to withdraw its contract at Santa Monica Carwash. Since initial contacts with the Damavandis did not fare well, Chloe and Justin wanted to begin “hitting them with as many tactics as possible and see if what they respond do.”

In winter 2011, Justin designated turf to the four CLEAN staff organizers—Maria would be in charge of keeping in touch with workers and having her fingers on the pulse of everything happening in Santa Monica and Millennium car washes, while Flor would do the same at

Bubblebee. The other two organizers, Juliet and Jose, would be assigned to other simultaneous car wash campaigns taking place in South LA, although the entire team would all pitch in for major actions at the Damavandi car washes. In early 2012, CLEAN began to prepare the wage theft cases. With the benefit of recent experience, CLEAN considered carefully who should conduct the litigation; while the California Attorney General was again an option, it had been difficult to coordinate the Sikder campaign actions along the Attorney General's timeline. Meanwhile, during CLEAN's January Community Advisory Board meetings, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), a civil rights organization, answered Rabbi Klein's challenge to deepen its involvement with CLEAN by expressing interest in taking on a case that could potentially impact the car wash industry and elevate MALDEF's own records. Since MALDEF's leadership was well connected to others in LA's progressive networks and endorsed by individuals on CLEAN's Steering Committee, the decision became easy. MALDEF, together with Steering Committee member Wage Justice Center (WJC) that funded Neidi's position as legal organizer of CLEAN, would begin collecting testimonials from *carwasheros* to build the case throughout spring 2012.

On May 21, 2012, MALDEF and WJC jointly filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of Esteban, Marcial, Anselmo, Pedro, and all *carwasheros* employed at all three Damavandi car washes against Ben, Edna, and Shawn Damavandi for purposefully depriving them of what they rightfully earned. In the lawsuit, it was stated that the workers were "told not to clock in at work until enough customers arrive and forced to work off the clock, without overtime pay, and without rest or meal breaks, among other violations." CLEAN held a press conference outside of Santa Monica Carwash, where the *carwashero* plaintiffs were joined by clergy, union leaders, and a board member from the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified District calling the community to

support the *carwasheros* in upcoming hot summer months when they would be expected to work longer and be even more vulnerable to abuses. During the press conference, then LA County Federation of Labor Secretary-Treasurer Maria Elena Durazo remarked,

*“I would call on the Santa Monica City Council to step up and defend and protect these workers within Santa Monica.”*

The lawsuit garnered substantial media attention and reporting in the Los Angeles Times, Santa Monica Daily Press, Jewish and Spanish-language newspapers, and the Professional Car Wash and Detailing trades magazine. At this time, CLEAN’s comprehensive campaign went public for friends and foes—and bystanders would eventually have to pick a side.

### ***Polarization in the Turfs and Communities***

When the MALDEF-WJC lawsuit was filed, CLEAN was under no illusion that it would produce immediate results. Class action lawsuits are complex and expensive to litigate, and it can take years before settlements are reached. In the grand scheme, the MALDEF-WJC lawsuit would provide a foundation from which CLEAN would launch the public phase of the campaign. However, while CLEAN’s organizers knew that the lawsuit was simply one tactic to elicit responses from the Damavandis after they repeatedly refused engagement, not all of the workers understood the plan, nor had the patience. It would be up to the turf organizers, Maria and Flor, to organize, rally, and constantly check in with the *carwarsheros* to make sure everyone was on the same page.

Justin’s suspicion about the car wash owners’ ethnic network proved to be correct, for as soon as the lawsuit was filed, the Damavandis proceeded to retain former federal prosecutor and white-collar criminal defense lawyer Mark Werksman as counsel—the same attorney who

represented the Pirian brothers. After the MALDEF-WJC suit was announced, Werksman countered CLEAN's claims by depicting the Damavandis as hard-working entrepreneurs whose small family businesses were unfairly targeted by the unions' agenda to gain political favors with Latinos. This framing would seem to polarize the campaign.

In May 2012, through joint advocacy work with CLUE-LA, CLEAN was able to have Santa Monica City Councilmembers Kevin McKweon, Terry O'Day, and Mayor Pro Tem Glean Davis introduce a measure intended to ensure that the city would "monitor working conditions for wage and hour compliance at car washes which hold City contracts." On May 22, Justin, *carwasheros* Marcial and Pedro, three clergy members, and six Santa Monica resident supporters arrived at the Santa Monica City Council meeting to speak in favor of the measure. During the discussion, there were no objections on the floor; however, when it came time to vote, Mayor Richard Bloom—who was courting votes for his California Assembly bid that year—abstained, and technicalities resulted in the Council not adopting the measure. Disappointed with Bloom's move, CLEAN responded by releasing a press statement detailing how Bloom refused to withhold spending tax dollars to wash cars in an establishment that failed to provide fair wages nor dignified work conditions. Interestingly, a month later, the Santa Monica City Attorney's Office formed its own car wash task force that would later investigate car washes alongside the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement.

Meanwhile, the Damavandi family continued to hold anti-union captive audience meetings and distributed a bilingual document to the workers entitled "Learn the Truth Before You Sign an Authorization Card! 36 Things the Union Cannot Do for You" claiming that unionizing would not prevent employees from being fired nor was guaranteed to improve conditions. In response to worker organizing, the Damavandis cut worker hours for activists and

intimidated workers with threats of deportation. In June, a Santa Monica activist was cited by LAPD for selling fruits on Venice Beach without a vendor license; after Shawn Damavandi learned of this, he fired the worker and called Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—the worker subsequently became involved in deportation proceedings. The Damavandis' retaliations had a strong chilling effect on CLEAN's organizing efforts. Furthermore, they sent a strong signal to the workers that the Damavandis would be vindictive to worker actions.

Organizer Maria, unfortunately, had trouble holding onto her turf at Santa Monica and Millennium car washes as workers began to distance themselves from CLEAN for self-preservation. Maria, a former *carwashera* activist, was of Oaxacan heritage and also from the Westside. Although her background and understanding of Westside car washes were assets to the campaign, it also led her to organize in a didactic style that often alienated *carwasheros*. Since the beginning, Maria had a hard time recruiting new organizing committee members beyond the initial activists at Santa Monica Carwash. As CLEAN was rapidly losing support at Santa Monica and Millennium, Maria became discouraged and disinvested in the campaign.

On September 10, Santa Monica City Council finally decided Santa Monica Carwash did not qualify for contract under the new labor and environmental factors standards set up by Santa Monica City Attorney's Task Force. As result, the city withdrew its contract with Santa Monica Carwash. Although this came late, it demonstrated that the Damavandis were on the outs with the city— still good news for the campaign. Throughout the month, CLEAN escalated public community actions. In time for Rosh Hashanah, CLUE-LA mobilized Westside rabbis and Jewish leaders to conduct another delegation visit to the Damavandis at Santa Monica Carwash. This time, the family was presented with two baskets—one with apples and honey along with a card signed by local clergy, a second basket with symbols of bitterness and sour reputation such

as bitter herbs. However, the delegation still did not elicit any positive responses from the Damavandis: Edna Damavandi broke down crying, accusing the delegation of threatening her family's wellbeing and ability to support Shawn's college tuition. Ben Damavandi called those present at the delegation "a bunch of communists," but otherwise refused to engage.

Throughout the fall of 2012, CLEAN would picket at Santa Monica and Millennium car washes whenever it could muster the manpower to do so. However, the pickets were less than enthusiastically received by car wash patrons. In many cases, customers put their personal conveniences first, as one customer crossing the picket line at Millennium explained:

*"I really need to wash my car today. I am sorry to hear about the wage violations, but here, people are generous tippers, and that should make up for the workers' income."*

In some other cases, customers were even hostile as an organizer recounted:

*"When we walked boycott picket lines, both workers and organizers, no matter their race, were told by customers 'you should be glad to work for pennies or go back to Mexico.' We had customers throw pennies at us, aiming to hit. We were sometimes called communists, sometimes spat on, and in some cases, even threatened by speeding drivers impatient in getting their SUVs into the driveway."*

Knowing that boycotts did little to damage the Damavandis' earnings nor reputation and pressing to escalate, CLEAN solicited the suggestions of its coalition members in the October 2012 Community Advisory Board meeting. Several organizations recommended a clergy-led vigil in front of the Damavandis' residence in Pacific Palisades, to which Rabbi Klein agreed. A couple of days later, to CLEAN's disappointment, Reverend Tamayo reported that several individual Westside CLUE-LA clergy leaders, discouraged by the recent encounters with

Damavandis, perceived the vigil at the Damavandis' house to be too confrontational and did not wish to participate in future delegations. CLEAN had no choice but to respect CLUE-LA member's wishes and cancel the action.

Despite CLEAN's persistence, the Damavandis continued to intimidate workers while refusing to meet with CLEAN. That fall, Ben and Shawn Damavandi also began to circulate a document for workers to sign at Santa Monica and Millennium car washes: as condition to continue employment, workers must forfeit any right to litigate over wage and hour issues and opt only for arbitration. By December 2012, at Santa Monica Carwash, the Damavandis managed to convince a worker leader to withdraw his support for CLEAN. This worker, in turn, convinced a key Evangelical Latino clergy member to begin publicly denouncing CLUE-LA as a network dominated by Ashkenazi Jews with liberal agendas. During the same time, Reverend Tamayo, who had been instrumental in mobilizing the Westside clergy, relocated out of state with her family and CLUE-LA's new and inexperienced organizer, who was a monolingual English speaker, could not foster relationships with the clergy nor workers in the same capacity. Already discouraged, CLUE-LA members became even more disheartened; the comprehensive campaign suffered as clergy support began to wane.

CLEAN had depended on CLUE-LA as its major coalition partner to help implement boycotts and other actions for its comprehensive campaigns in the Westside. In the middle of an uphill battle against the Damavandis, as clergy members began to withdraw support, it was difficult for CLEAN to shift strategy or call on other coalition member organizations. For the remainder of 2012 and spring 2013, as the wage and hour litigation gradually moved up to the appeals court, CLEAN persisted to occasionally picket in Santa Monica and Millennium car washes with just a handful of organizers and *brigadistas*. On multiple occasions, Santa Monica



and Millennium workers were ordered by Shawn Damavandi to counter-picket CLEAN at the same time. As *carwashero* activists continued to be fired or otherwise silenced by the Damavandis, organizing momentum began to die down at both Santa Monica and Millennium car washes. Without the anchoring of the worksite organizing in the Westside car washes, the handful of Bubblebee activists in southeast LA County could not move the comprehensive campaign. Although many of the Damavandis' tactics were highly illegal, they showcased the Damavandis' domination over workers and intimidated them to the extent that no one would come forward—rendering CLEAN's organizing ineffective from this point on. Although CLEAN had gathered evidence for unfair labor practices (ULPs) throughout the campaign, by late 2013, no worker was willing to testify at the National Labor Relations Board. The Damavandi car washes had essentially become “burnt turf.”

As of fall 2013, while CLEAN continued to picket Santa Monica and Millennium car washes occasionally, CLEAN lacked the resources for further boycotting and became increasingly unwilling to devote additional resources to the comprehensive campaign. Throughout 2014, more workers were fired; Maria left CLEAN for a position elsewhere; and MALDEF took on additional lawsuits against the Damavandis for retaliation against protected union activities. By the end of this research study frame in December 2014, CLEAN withdrew all turf organizers from the Damavandi car washes, and the MALDEF lawsuits have yet to yield results. The Damavandi campaign demonstrates that if the target could countermobilize in such a way that obliterates worker organizing efforts, the campaign would not be able to last the comprehensive campaign. In many ways, the Damavandi campaign followed the course of the aforementioned Pirian campaign where outstanding litigation persists, yet the prospect of workers winning a collective bargaining agreement become an impossibility.

## CHAPTER 6

### VICTORY AND LOSS IN SOUTH LA

#### **Introduction**

In contrast to the affluence and idealized Southern California beaches of the Westside, South LA frequently conjures images of rundown public housing and street gangs. Known as South Central before a Los Angeles City Hall decree changed its name in the early 2000s, South LA encompasses a collection of working class neighborhoods directly south of Downtown Los Angeles along South Central Avenue. Spatially segregated by non-pedestrian roads that constrain markets and other geographic resources, South LA lies between the 10 and the 105 Freeways, bounded by Alameda Avenue to the east and La Brea Boulevard to the west (Grannis, 2005). Before the 1950s, LA's racially restrictive covenants led to a concentration of African Americans living in the area, and South LA was home to the rise of a Black middle class. Subsequently, post-World War II racial violence escalated in the 1965 Watts Riot and resulted in White flight, deindustrialization, and divestment (Gottlieb et. al., 2006). Gangster rap groups kept South Central in the popular imagination in the 1980s as South LA became both romanticized and feared; images of a city on fire were further memorialized by the 1992 LA Riots sparked by the LAPD beating of Rodney King and acquittal of the involved police officers. While the media focused on the violence and racial tension, many failed to recognize that the civil unrest was an expression of frustration over decades of poverty and inequality in the region.

In the decades since, South LA has quietly rebuilt. Since the mid-1990s, many stores and dilapidated houses have been reconstructed, and immigrants of Mexican and Central American backgrounds have moved into the census tracts within South LA's boundaries (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2011). While some locals resist the renaming of South Central as South LA as a loss of heritage, others hope that doing so would imbue the area with new outlooks. Although crime, unemployment, and ethnic divisions persist along with gentrification and displacement brought on by the University of Southern California (Wilton & Cranford, 2002), South LA is also home to growing ethnic entrepreneurship by small business owners (Gottlieb et. al., 2006). Driving along the Figueroa corridor, one would see many Black, Latino, and Korean American-owned salons, grocery stores, automobile body shops, and other small businesses. The car washes in South LA are generally modest in size, operating in small parking lots and often displaying a simple spray-painted banner advertising washes for as little as \$5 catered to the local residents. With lower startup capital necessary to open such small car washes, owners of South LA car washes are also more diverse than those in the Westside: CLEAN estimated that half of the car wash owners in South LA are Latinos, while another half are Korean Americans. Many South LA car washes have no mechanized wash tunnels and rely completely on hand washing and drying by workers, and approximately 1/3 of the car washes were unlicensed “pirate car wash” operations (CLEAN Carwash Campaign, 2012). In the enclave economy of South LA, many existing employment opportunities are available for undocumented immigrant Latino workers, but often at low wages (Stoll, 1999). In this context, *carwasheros*, who are typically of Salvadoran, Guatemalan, or Honduran decent and residents of South LA themselves, quickly cycle through various area car washes in a revolving door manner.

It is important to note that South LA is also the site of renewed community efforts by an alliance of labor and community groups working on issues of economic development and poverty alleviation (Pollin & Luce, 1998; Soja, 2014). Since the 1992 LA Riots, dialogue between Black, Latino, and Korean American groups have led to the growth of many multi-issue

organizations working on broad-based organizing in the area. In the labor field, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 770 and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1877 (later SEIU-United Service Workers West) focused on organizing South LA residents who are retail workers, janitors, security guards, and other service workers around living wages and union jobs. As for the CBOs, a host of organizations such as the Community Coalition, Strategic Action for a Just Economy (SAJE), St. John's Well Child and Family Center, Black Worker Center, and Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) focus on workplace justice, health disparity, immigration reform, and sustainable development to improve the lives of LA's low-income residents. The work toward social change in South LA reflects a concerted "spatial consciousness" in challenging class, race, and gender-based inequalities that have long plagued Los Angeles (Soja, 2000). As South LA gradually became one of CLEAN's new geographic foci in 2011, CLEAN would join in as a participant in the vibrant landscape of South LA social and economic justice organizing.

### **South LA Victory at Vermont Car Wash**

#### ***Background of the Small Operator Strategy***

As discussed, since 2008, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign had been waging a multi-year campaign against the Pirians and their car wash located in a north-central neighborhood of LA. While the comprehensive campaign landed the Pirian brothers in jail, it did not produce a collective bargaining agreement for the *carwasheros*. Throughout the drawn-out campaign, the Pirians' wealth and resources enabled them to fight back, outlast CLEAN's boycotts, and drain much of CLEAN's resources. In 2010, CLEAN's Steering Committee mandated that CLEAN

shift focus to smaller car washes. In moving forward, CLEAN was asked to wield shorter, more intensive campaigns to quickly overpower the target before it countermobilizes.

While CLEAN was able to negotiate with the Steering Committee to continue pursuing comprehensive campaigns against large car washes in the Westside, the team also prepared a list of smaller car washes in the mid-city and Westside in compliance with the Steering Committee's wishes. In a meeting with the Steering Committee, acting directors Chloe and Justin shared what they knew had not worked—and proposed exploring alternatives. So far, all of CLEAN's campaigns began with solicitation of worker testimonies followed by gradual building of lawsuits and public campaigning. In these campaigns under the comprehensive campaign model, waiting for the various tactical components to align while not losing worker momentum had been one of CLEAN's main challenges. On a shorter, more aggressive campaign timeline, CLEAN would have to launch boycott picketing while simultaneously establishing a worksite organizing committee. Hypothetically, a car wash owner of modest means would succumb to the disruption of an intensive economic boycott and sign a non-interference neutrality agreement around the same time that workers were ready to sign union authorization cards.

Since CLEAN had been conducting research in the Westside and had familiarity with the area, the team decided to first test the new “small operator” approach at Robertson Car Wash—also located in the Westside. In spring 2010, CLEAN began a boycott picket at Robertson Car Wash shortly after being contacted by Felipe, a *carwashero* who slept in the grounds of Robertson Car Wash at night because his meager income as a *propinero* paid only in tips could not cover rent. Throughout 2010, boycott pickets continued at Robertson as CLEAN gained the help of the newly formed *brigadistas* to staff the picket lines with personnel every weekend. However, CLEAN's efforts were thwarted when the owner hired an attorney specialized in anti-

union consulting, fired Felipe, rallied the South Robertson Neighborhood Council through an anti-noise campaign, and intimidated Robertson workers from speaking with organizers.

Although Robertson quickly became “burnt turf” as the workers no longer wished to engage CLEAN, the loss provided new insights for CLEAN to refine its small operator approach: first, the employer or rather “employer’s pocketbook” as Justin noted, must be small enough. Second, boycotts do not work when customers and neighbors are completely unsympathetic. Finally, by not building any worker committee before picketing, CLEAN commenced campaign actions without adequate base support within the worksite, which ended up alienating workers as soon as the target responded with retaliation. By spring 2011, CLEAN realized that for the small operator strategy to work, it must focus on finding a financially modest target in a supportive neighborhood and not shortchange the building of a solid worker organizing committee. The test run at Robertson Car Wash, while a setback, was another trial-and-error that helped CLEAN develop and fine tune its strategy forward.

### ***Initial Worker Contact Vermont Car Wash***

In summer 2011, when 10 student interns from AFL-CIO’s Union Summer program were assigned to the CLEAN Carwash Campaign, CLEAN launched a “water bottle drop” action and sent student interns to car washes throughout LA to distribute bottled water with stickers containing information on heatstroke prevention. During that time, as events at the Sikder car washes were still unfolding and CLEAN could not involve inexperienced interns in the rapidly evolving campaign efforts there, the “water bottle drop” action provided outlet for the interns’ energy and enthusiasm. For CLEAN, this move also satisfied multiple coalition partners: by distributing bottles with stickers prepared by the Southern California Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (SoCal COSH), CLEAN gained goodwill from one of its coalition

organizations; meanwhile, the action helped satisfy the outreach and research component of the students' internships stipulated by the Union and Dream Summer programs; finally, CLEAN would use the opportunity to assess conditions and probe potential targets for future campaigns.

For two weeks, three teams of interns, accompanied by *brigadista* members, drove to a dozen car washes throughout LA daily. As interns passed out water bottles to *carwasheros*, they were instructed to observe the physical structures of the car wash, note any potential labor and health and safety violations, and chat with workers when possible and walk away when noticed by managers or owners. During a visit in late June 2011, a team of interns found out that workers at Vermont Car Wash, a small car wash with two driveways located on the corner of Vermont and Gage Avenues in South LA, worked in the midday heat without shade and protective equipment. The interns' field notes mentioned that a number of workers seemed to be highly dissatisfied with work conditions. As denial of lunch breaks and drinking water was a common abuse in many LA car washes, CLEAN's organizers applauded the interns for their discovery but did not recall the notes from Vermont Car Wash to be particularly memorable.

A couple days later, a worker from Vermont Car Wash called the CLEAN Carwash Campaign office and asked to speak with an organizer. Justin sent Juliet, a bilingual Spanish-speaking organizer who recently graduated from UCLA's Labor and Workplace Studies program, to meet with a group of Vermont *carwasheros*. Immediately, the team pursued additional research to investigate the car wash. Kevin from the AFL-CIO Center for Strategic Research identified that Vermont Car Wash was owned by Mi Sook Kim who did not own any other businesses, appeared to have been in some debt, and was also president of LA's Korean Car Wash Owners Association. Given the target's small size and financial vulnerability, waging a boycott-based campaign at Vermont Car Wash could yield success. Furthermore, as head of a

regional ethnic business association, Mrs. Kim—as she was referred to by workers—may care enough about her social standing to comply with CLEAN’s demands. Although CLEAN had yet to conduct any campaigns in South LA, the working class area offered a welcoming change to the hostile neighbors of Robertson. Most importantly, at Vermont Car Wash, there were not just wage-and-hour violations to be used for lawsuits; rather, the workers seemed to be so galvanized by the grievances that they “had heat” and were ready to actually organize.

By the end of June, Vermont Car Wash was slated as the target for the revised small operator strategy. Around the same time, one of CLEAN’s coalition partners, Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), was called to help initiate conversations with Mrs. Kim.

### ***Channeling “Heat” to Build Worker Organizing Committee***

In the initial meeting with Vermont Car Wash workers, Juliet met with three *carwasheros* in one of the workers’ homes in South LA just after they had completed their shifts. The workers spoke about their experiences, and Juliet explained CLEAN’s goals in improving conditions and the necessity for worker participation. According to Juliet, the meeting went well, and the *carwasheros* agreed to speak with their co-workers and arrange for additional meetings. Even though the Steering Committee wished for quick victories with the small operator campaign, CLEAN did not want to make the mistake it had made at Robertson Car Wash and begin actions without a proper worker leadership structure at the workplace. Juliet recounted that she met with workers almost every other day so that workers were “inoculated” to potential retaliations and made commitments to one another as organizing committee members.

In contrast with the Westside, where *carwasheros* often commute across town on long bus rides to work, workers at Vermont Car Wash were residents in the same South LA



neighborhoods, thus facilitating frequent face-to-face meeting time between organizer and workers. In subsequent meetings, more workers came to share stories of wage violations at Vermont Car Wash: many were paid only half for their daily hours worked, asked to clock out after 8 hours and continue working, and had their tips taken by the supervisor. Besides the egregious wage theft, workers seemed more indignant about the disrespect they experienced. One worker recounted an incident when the manager, supposedly Mrs. Kim's brother, kicked his lunch off his hands during break and told him to return to work. A number of workers told stories of the same manager berating them in front of customers and brandishing a machete, combat knife, and .38 caliber bullets kept within reach at the office "just in case workers rebelled." Through house meetings, Juliet worked with the Vermont *carwasheros* to overcome their fears, educate them on the unionization process, and delegated small tasks such as speaking with another co-worker about organizing.

The worker organizing committee at Vermont Car Wash started out strong with strong supporters, Juan and Miguel. Shortly thereafter, Manuel, a seasoned *carwashero* and a patriarch figure well-liked by many at Vermont Car Wash, was convinced by his co-workers to also begin attending house meetings held in rotation in various *carwasheros'* houses. Manuel asked many questions about the unionization process; however, Juliet patiently addressed them and guided him to overcome doubts and reservations. Once Manuel was recruited to the worker organizing committee, his presence as a respected leader further legitimized CLEAN among co-workers. Manuel also helped ground the campaign, as he became vocal at the house meetings to remind other *carwasheros* that the goal of their organizing was to improve work conditions for everyone through unionization, especially undocumented Central American immigrant workers like themselves, instead of jumping on short-term settlements and payouts for individuals. The

regular house meetings, sometimes over an occasional *carne asada* cookout, helped to establish solidarity among Vermont *carwasheros* and accountability to one another. By July, Vermont Car Wash workers were ready to collectively demand respect.

### ***Workplace Action and Subsequent Escalation***

In the first week of July 2011, Vermont *carwasheros* commenced their first direct workplace action by conducting a “march on the boss” and telling the manager that many of his practices are illegal. Led by Manuel, Juan, and Miguel, the delegation of half a dozen *carwasheros* demanded full pay for their work, uninterrupted lunch breaks, and that the manager meet with workers and the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to discuss work conditions. Shocked, the manager dismissed the workers. The workers recounted that they were hesitant, but felt enthralled with a sense of pride and accomplishment afterwards. As other workers saw the delegation happen—especially that nothing bad had happened to individuals in the delegation, dynamics at Vermont Car Wash between the owner and *carwasheros* began to transform as activists became emboldened.

Mrs. Kim, who typically did not show up at Vermont Car Wash except on an occasional weekend, appeared to have become alarmed as organizing committee members reported that they began seeing her Lexus SUV rushing in and out of Vermont Car Wash daily since the delegation took place. Shortly after, the manager at Vermont Car Wash reduced work hours of all *carwasheros*; around the same time, the paychecks that the workers received in June also bounced. Fortunately for CLEAN, the owner’s apparent retaliation was unleashed onto all workers without singling out the key leader, Manuel. In addition, the workers had already been “inoculated” by Juliet to anticipate management response; as *carwasheros*’ hours were cut, they

became further agitated while their trust for Juliet and CLEAN grew. Juliet continued to work with the *carwasheros* to transform their indignation into commitment for action. During the same time, CLEAN's coalition member organization Koreatown Immigrant Worker Alliance (KIWA) initiated the conversation with Mrs. Kim to urge her to work out a neutrality agreement with CLEAN, under which she would agree to not interfere with the card check process should the workers decide unionize. However, days passed by and neither the workers, CLEAN, nor KIWA received any call back.

The sequence of the campaign escalated quickly at Vermont Car Wash, as the workers were eager and prepared. The organizing committee members decided that they would like to launch a boycott picket; with Juliet's recommendation, CLEAN slated the picket at Vermont Car Wash on Friday, July 8. For the rest of that week, CLEAN's organizers who were staffed on campaigns at various car washes throughout LA were asked to reschedule meetings so that they can be "on call," while all Union Summer interns and *brigadistas* were told that they would be spending their weekends at Vermont Car Wash. On Wednesday, July 6, Betsy, CLEAN's community organizer, assembled a Community Advisory Board meeting where she personally solicited commitments from individuals representing CLEAN's coalition member organizations to attend the picket slated for the weekend. The same afternoon, Vermont Car Wash workers asked CLEAN's leadership team and a couple *brigadistas* to join them in a final delegation to their manager at 4:30pm shortly before the car wash closed. Once again, CLEAN was given the cold shoulder, as the manager left the office before the delegation could approach.

On Thursday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, Chloe and Justin divided organizers, interns, and *brigadistas* into two teams: one team staying in the office to staple picket signs, assemble supplies, and replace megaphone batteries, another team walking the neighborhood blocks around Vermont Car Wash

distributing “do not patronize” flyers to residents and surrounding businesses. On Friday morning, July 8, all 10 Union Summer interns, 9 *brigadistas*, and 9 members of CLEAN’s paid staff met at Vermont Car Wash’s driveways to turn potential patrons away from the car wash. From 10:30am to 4:30pm, the group picketed Vermont Car Wash while the Vermont *carwasheros* waved and cheered from inside the car wash during their shifts. The interns were energetic, as this was a welcome change from the demoralizing picketing at Robertson where customers hurled racial epithets at interns and workers while driving across the picket line in manner that jeopardized everyone’s safety. In contrast, Vermont Car Wash customers, who were mostly Black and Latino, responded well to CLEAN’s boycott picket as they would roll down the window to listen to the interns’ explanation on the boycott. When a customer turned away from the driveway, the picketers became even more encouraged. Interns and *brigadista* members competed for a turn holding the megaphone and a chance to lead the group in English and Spanish chants. By the end of the day on Friday, the boycott picket had diverted 80% of the cars coming to Vermont Car Wash.

CLEAN drew much attention in the surrounding South LA neighborhood. On Saturday, when CLEAN’s picketers returned, Justin assigned the interns to take breaks from picketing by walking around the neighborhood and distributing flyers. Residents and customers, made up almost entirely of working and middle class Blacks and Latinos, were largely sympathetic to the *carwasheros* who lived and worked in their neighborhood. During a walk, one neighbor shared:

*“People in South Central are mostly Black, although there are many Latinos now too. I am Black, but I am from Belize, so that makes me relate to both being Black and being an immigrant. I know how it’s like to have to work to support your family, and I know how it’s like to be without papers. Of course I will not cross your picket line...”*

The boycott picket was slated throughout the weekend beginning Friday, July 8. By Sunday, July 10, CLEAN's picketers were so successful at turning away customers that the management of Vermont Car Wash shut the car wash down three hours early and sent all the workers home. The Union Summer interns, who were prepared to stay at the picket line until much later, celebrated their early afternoons off over burgers and *pupusas* in a South LA restaurant two blocks away from the car wash.

On Monday, July 11, 2011, Mrs. Kim called KIWA and asked to meet to work on drafting a neutrality agreement promising non-interference should the Vermont Car Wash workers choose to unionize through the card check process. Justin immediately notified the CLEAN campaign staff and coalition partner organizations that the boycott at Vermont has been lifted "unless the owner fires a leader, or refuses to sign neutrality." However, weeks would go by before CLEAN hear from Mrs. Kim again. In the meantime, Juliet continued to meet with workers to assuage doubts and channel the workers' frustration into a pledge to maintain pressure at the worksite. By August, Mrs. Kim continued to stall the meeting for neutrality agreement, claiming scheduling conflicts with her and her attorney. In the meantime, incidents of wage theft reappeared at Vermont Car Wash. As the Union Summer interns were preparing to wrap up their summer program, CLEAN decided to take advantage of their presence one more time by slating another boycott picketing from Thursday to Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>. Workers at Vermont Car Wash openly announced news of the upcoming picket to their manager.

Three days before picketing commenced, on August 8, Mrs. Kim called KIWA and asked to meet with CLEAN. Within a day, with KIWA's help, Mrs. Kim signed a neutrality agreement drafted by the AFL-CIO and USW legal departments on behalf of CLEAN. For their final

weekend with the CLEAN Carwash Campaign, the union summer interns were called off from the Vermont picket and sent to picket Robertson Car Wash to let off their energy one last time.

### ***Neutrality, Card Check, and Eventual CBA***

Throughout the weeks of August 2011, the Vermont Car Wash workers began the union recognition process via card check and a majority of *carwasheros* quickly signed the authorization cards. As agreed, the management at Vermont Car Wash did not interfere with the signing process. In the meantime, news of CLEAN's victory at the Sikder car washes also reached the Vermont Car Wash workers. Energized by the historic first union contract at a car wash, Juliet continued to encourage the Vermont *carwasheros* that they would be next, preparing them so that they understood that their strength and unity would contribute to their being in a better position to negotiate for a more favorable collective bargaining agreement.

By fall 2011, although the majority of the Vermont Car Wash Workers have signed to become members of the United Steel Workers (USW) Local 675, Mrs. Kim again became difficult to reach with regards to pinning down meeting dates to negotiate the collective bargaining agreement. Just as CLEAN was in the midst of escalating actions for its contemporaneous Westside comprehensive campaigns, Juliet and the Vermont organizing committee scheduled another boycott picket for Wednesday, December 14th from 12pm to 2pm to remind Mrs. Kim that stalling would not make CLEAN and the workers go away, even over the holiday period. Then, Mrs. Kim finally responded.

Negotiations with Mrs. Kim on the collective bargaining agreement for Vermont Car Wash workers finally commenced as the new year began. On February 1, 2012, after several months of organizing, Mrs. Kim finally signed a collective bargaining agreement with the

*carwasheros*—now as union members represented by the USW Local 675. Altogether, it took CLEAN almost eight months from initial worker contact to contract settlement at Vermont Car Wash. In contrast to the lengthy comprehensive campaigns, the Vermont Car Wash campaign using the small operator strategy moved expeditiously. As new members of USW Local 675, Vermont Car Wash workers quickly voted to ratify a two-year collective bargaining agreement offering an immediate two percent wage increase, safety equipment, on-the-job training, and job security provisions. USW staff would then be responsible for enforcing the contract terms.

On February 21, 2012, Vermont Car Wash workers announced their victory alongside workers from neighboring Navas Car Wash at a press event organized by CLEAN attended by AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, then LA Mayor Villaraigosa, civil rights leader Reverend Copeland of the AME Church, and South LA community organization leaders and members. During the press event, multiple speakers made a point to mention the importance of small business owners such as Mrs. Kim taking a role in ensuring that South LA is home to good jobs. Alexandra Suh, Executive Director of KIWA applauded,

*“We commend Mi Sook Kim for her willingness to work with us on this campaign, and encourage all other Korean car wash owners to follow in her footsteps.”*

Since, CLEAN worked with its members to advertise business for Vermont Car Wash. A collection of Black, Latino, and Korean American community leaders gathered again on November 16, 2012, for a pre-Thanksgiving dinner and press event to advertise Vermont as a model business and celebrate the “one year of progress and peace.” *Carwasheros* were joined by an audience of community members. *Carwashero* leader and now shop steward Manual, Secretary Treasurer of USW Local 675 Dave Campbell, Vermont Car Wash owner Mrs. Kim and her pastor, and members of South LA CBOs and local Black churches joined in prayer

before feasting on *carne asada* and Korean *kalbi* grilled by *carwasheros* in the parking lot of Vermont Car Wash. California State Senator Curren Price presented Mrs. Kim a certificate of recognition for being a business leader and helping to build community in South LA. Mrs. Kim spoke in Korean to mixed audience and English, Spanish, and Korean language media:

*“It’s not easy being a small business owner, but I’m proud that I’m paying my employees above the minimum wage, and look forward to a brighter future with the support of the community.”*

### **South LA Loss: Thee Spot Handwash**

#### ***Background***

In September, 2011, with the Vermont Car Wash campaign well underway, CLEAN was learning how to successfully wield the small operator campaign in South LA. Encouraged by the turn of events at Vermont Car Wash and confident in eventually winning a collective bargaining agreement there, CLEAN’s campaign team also gradually recognized the organizing potential in South LA. By then, several staff transitions took place: Justin was promoted to be CLEAN’s Executive Director and Juliet became CLEAN’s Lead Organizer; Chloe left CLEAN to work for the AFL-CIO and WJC legal organizer Neidi became CLEAN’s new Strategic Action Coordinator; Betsy left for graduate school in social work, and Rose came on board as the new Community Organizer. Rose had known Juliet as an undergraduate in UCLA’s Labor and Workplace Studies Minor; as a former organizer for Unite-HERE, Rose also had a wide network of friends and colleagues who worked in LA’s union and CBO fields. Energized by the organizing progress at Vermont Car Wash, the team was enthusiastic about organizing South LA car washes. In the September, Justin proposed to the Steering Committee meeting that CLEAN



would be launching a South LA regional organizing plan relying primarily on the newly honed small operator strategy complemented by a community organizing agenda to engage a new set of South LA community-based organizations. In addition, CLEAN would make plans to move its office from inside a north-central LA church basement to a much larger warehouse space in South LA along the Figueroa corridor by 2012. Since CLEAN's recent organizing progress earned it newfound trust with the Steering Committee, the South LA plan was quickly approved. Throughout the weekly staff meetings in fall 2011, the team often discussed their vision of achieving a density of unionized car washes in South LA and improving standard of living for workers throughout the region.

When the Vermont Car Wash workers gained neutrality from Mrs. Kim and signed union authorization cards in August 2011, the news had spread among *carwasheros* in South LA; one city block southeast of Vermont Car Wash on Hoover Street and Florence Avenue, workers at BJ Carwash decided to call the CLEAN Carwash Campaign. Since CLEAN's large comprehensive campaigns had been well covered by LA's major TV and print media outlets such as KNBC, Univision 34, Noticias 62, KCRW, LA times, and La Opinion, many *carwasheros* already had some sense of what the CLEAN Carwash Campaign was about. In addition, a number of BJ's *carwasheros* had worked at nearby Vermont Car Wash in the past; hearing about their former colleague's organizing success played a major role in influencing the workers' decision to organize with CLEAN. When CLEAN received the BJ workers' call, Juliet went to meet with the workers the next day.

During the first house meeting, Juliet learned that BJ Carwash workers had many of the same grievances as those at Vermont Car Wash: wage theft, poor safety standards, lack of respect. The workers at BJ earned a flat rate of \$50 dollars for a 12-hour work day, washed cars

by hand with no protection from the sun, and endured verbal abuses from the owner. As in Vermont Car Wash, the workers reached out to CLEAN on their own and there was much initial “heat” on the ground to be channeled into a workplace organizing structure. Juliet quickly arranged additional meetings with the *carwasheros* and recruited key worker leaders, Exar and Edwin, onto the worksite organizing committee. Within a month, Juliet had assessed nine of BJ’s ten car wash workers to be pro-union.

Guided by her experience at Vermont, Juliet was also cautious in her organizing approach at BJ and diligently met with workers through one-on-one and house meetings to establish a solid workplace organizing structure that would weather eventual target countermobilization. Throughout the fall, Juliet continued to educate the workers on the organizing process, “inoculate” them against retaliation, and firm up commitments through daily meetings. By December, as *carwasheros* were planning and preparing to launch workplace action to commence the public campaign phase, BJ Carwash was suddenly sold to its manager, Luis Navas, who then changed name of the car wash to Navas Carwash. Despite the transfer of ownership, Juliet and the *carwasheros* pressed on with their organizing efforts.

### ***Ownership Change and Collective Bargaining Agreement***

When Luis Navas took over the car wash, Juliet and the *carwasheros* decided to use the opportunity to assess the new owner and conducted a “walk on the boss” to ask Navas to promise non-interference with unionization through signing a neutrality agreement. Predictably, Navas brushed off the delegation and subsequently evaded all of CLEAN’s follow up phone calls. In January 2012, the workers conducted another delegation after work; when Navas refused to meet again, CLEAN’s entire staff and team of *brigadistas* picketed Navas Carwash on the first

weekend of January. As in the case of Vermont Car Wash, CLEAN's boycott picket was highly successful at turning away a majority of the customers and redirecting them to the now unionized Vermont Car Wash a block away, thus inflicting damage to business at Navas. By the end of January, after four consecutive weekends of picketing, Luis Navas called Justin and asked to negotiate. Quickly, CLEAN secured a neutrality agreement from Navas, launched the union authorization card check process, and subsequently met with Navas to sign a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) based on the model contract at Vermont Car Wash: a 2-year agreement guaranteeing 2% wage increase and specific contract language to improve work conditions for all *carwasheros*. The CBA at Navas Carwash was ratified in time for it to be announced in the same press conference with Vermont Car Wash in February 2012. At the press conference attended by union leaders and LA politicians, Navas stated to the press that he thought the move would be a win for him as well. He commented in Spanish,

*"They aren't slaves, right?"*

In 2012, Navas Carwash joined Vermont and Bonus car washes as one of CLEAN's three new union signatories within an eight-month period. The *carwasheros* had become members of the United Steel Workers (USW), and Juliet transitioned out of the campaign as CLEAN handed off contract enforcement to USW Local 675. By fall 2012, CLEAN exited the turf at Navas Car Wash as it was preoccupied with its move to the new South LA office and pursuing other campaigns in the Westside and South LA. Everything seemed to be going well, as Navas *carwasheros* were content with concrete improvements at work such as uninterrupted breaks and consistent and predictable scheduling. However, a number of *carwasheros* expressed frustration with the transition from campaign mode under CLEAN to contract enforcement mode under the

USW; they expressed to CLEAN dissatisfaction with the change from seeing Juliet daily to meeting the USW union representative only once a week.

By late 2012, conditions at Navas Car Wash suddenly took a downward turn. Instead of hosting a pre-Thanksgiving celebration as the *carwasheros* did at Vermont Car Wash, Navas *carwasheros* were also experiencing delay in payment from their employer once again. When the USW Local 675 union representative tried to trace down Luis Navas for a meet and confer in December, Navas was nowhere to be found. Shortly after, USW and CLEAN realized that Luis Navas had left LA and moved to Mexico without any notice of transfer of car wash ownership.

According to the *carwasheros*, Navas disappeared because he mismanaged money and owed the workers back pay. As enforcement of labor and health codes was already difficult, tracking down a former owner and filing claims to enforce pay could be even more time consuming—especially when challenging deteriorating conditions and reorganizing the workplace was the most urgent priority. As USW 675 jumped into action and notified CLEAN’s Steering Committee, it also drew from its union hardship funds to pay the *carwasheros* what they were owed. As the USW, CLEAN, and members of the Steering Committee scrambled to find out how the car wash managed to continue operating, no one could track down any records of sales or new registration in the California Secretary of State or Department of Labor Standards Enforcement’s databases. By May 2013, it was revealed that Navas Carwash, formerly known as BJ Carwash, was renamed Thee Spot Hand Wash as Eric Rodriguez, a former *carwashero* from Vermont Car Wash, took over the operation. With the turn of events, Juliet and CLEAN would be called back to deal with Rodriguez.

### ***Successorship at Thee Spot Hand Wash***

In all of the collective bargaining agreements (CBA) it had recently negotiated, CLEAN had the foresight to include successorship language that requires successors to be bound by the terms of CBA. In other words, in the event that a unionized car wash changed ownership, the new owner must continue to honor the contract. However, as soon as Rodriguez took over, many *carwasheros*' wages and hours were unilaterally reduced. In May, Rodriguez called a meeting, told the workers that "the union is not here anymore," and changed all workers' pay to a flat rate of \$6 a day. In addition, Rodriguez further reduced work hours for the union shop stewards, Exar and Edwin. When Exar and Edwin contested, they were terminated.

Through not honoring the collective bargaining agreement and firing workers for protected union activities, Rodriguez had openly flaunted the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) warranting multiple Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) suits. Although USW Local 675 immediately filed ULPs against Rodriguez, the Steering Committee knew that CLEAN had to act quickly beyond legal means. Labor attorneys and organizers know all too well that even with egregious employer violations, it often takes more than two years for the NLRB to make decisions on ULPs (Compa, 2004). In addition, not only do ULPs take a long time to litigate, they also frequently fail to offer recourse for many low wage immigrant workers since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Hoffman Plastic Compounds v. NLRB* in 2002 that those who are undocumented are not entitled to back pay under the NLRA (Delaney, 2016).

By May 2013, CLEAN was focused on organizing other targets in South LA and concurrently waging a comprehensive campaign at the Damavandi car washes in the Westside. The team was also spread thin, as Strategic Action Coordinator Neidi was temporarily reassigned

to work on an immigration reform project with the AFL-CIO and lead organizer Juliet was pulled in multiple directions overseeing CLEAN's worksite organizing throughout LA. After some deliberation, Executive Director Justin took over Juliet's duties of supervising the Westside campaigns so that Juliet could return to Thee Spot because of the relationships she built with the workers during the unionization drive. Immediately, Juliet scheduled house meeting to plan for action at Thee Spot—now without Exar and Edwin in the workplace. Fortunately, there were openings in the car wash workers brigade, and Exar and Edwin joined the *brigadistas* so they could assist with organizing efforts with their former co-workers. Within days, Juliet had revitalized the worker organizing committee at Thee Spot and conducted a march on the boss. Rodriguez responded to the action with hostility, as shortly after, Rodriguez threatened to conduct E-Verify, a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services program that determines workers' eligibility to work in the U.S. to help him decide who he should terminate. For many of the undocumented immigrant *carwasheros*, Rodriguez's posturing had a strong chilling effect. On behalf of the *carwasheros*, USW Local 675 and prominent labor law firm Gilbert & Sackman filed additional ULPs against Rodriguez for retaliating against workers for concerted union activities. Unfortunately, the ULPs were afterward thrown out by the NLRB District 31 under a jurisdiction clause: for the NLRB to have jurisdiction over a private employer, the employer must have an annual revenue of \$500,000 or more—and Thee Spot was too small. This sequence of events discouraged the *carwasheros*, as Rodriguez could apparently defy the union and flout labor laws without consequences. Without Exar and Edwin's leadership in the workplace, Thee Spot *carwasheros*' commitment to take additional risks waivered as they began to see failure in CLEAN and the coalition's tactics and promises of the collective bargaining agreement.

Justin, Juliet, and the team realized that they may have exhausted tactics against Rodriguez through existing legal routes. Yet, it was important to let Rodriguez know that his union-busting actions warrant serious consequences. On Sunday, May 26, 2013, CLEAN conducted an emergency boycott picket at Thee Spot Hand Wash. For the remainder of that week, all of CLEAN's organizers and *brigadistas* rescheduled activities elsewhere so that they could picket at Thee Spot from 10am to 4pm. On May 30 and June 1, CLEAN conducted another weekend picket. Throughout the week leading up to the pickets, Rose made personal phone calls to staff and members of coalition partner organizations and asked for their presence at the picket lines. This time, news had circulated among CLEAN's allies, and over two dozen supporters from UFCW and SEIU locals, St. John's Well Child and Family Center, Community Coalition, SAJE, and many other South LA CBOs came to walk the picket lines with CLEAN. From 12pm to 4pm on June 1, the boycott picket was so successful that only one car crossed the picket line. On July 7, CLEAN organized another intensive all-day boycott where picketers re-directed most of the cars coming into Thee Spot up the block to the union Vermont Car Wash.

### ***The Fight Became Personal***

According to Juliet, when he was still a *carwashero* at Vermont Car Wash, Rodriguez actively participated in the organizing campaign and that on a couple occasions, he even offered his house for meetings. However, Juliet suspected that unlike the "true" leaders who transform throughout the organizing progress, Rodriguez participated for personal gain. In the midst of the Vermont Car Wash campaign, despite worksite leader Manuel's disapproval, Rodriguez hired a private attorney to pursue his lost wages and ultimately undermined CLEAN's wage claims on behalf of all *carwasheros* at Vermont Car Wash. Shortly after, Rodriguez received some money through a settlement and quit Vermont Car Wash before the collective bargaining agreement was

signed in 2012. Rodriguez had left a bad impression on Juliet, and she turned out to be correct in her assessment of his character. From the Vermont Car Wash workers, CLEAN learned that Rodriguez was already economically better off in comparison to most *carwasheros* and that he often bragged about being married into a wealthy family; in addition, Rodriguez's brother-in-law Jesse whom Rodriguez made a supervisor at Thee Spot, owned an automobile body shop on Manchester Avenue. CLEAN concluded that the settlement payout, in addition to belonging to a family of some means, enabled Rodriguez to become owner of Thee Spot.

As a former *carwashero* who had engaged with CLEAN, Rodriguez was knowledgeable of CLEAN's strategy, the limitations of its tactics, and concerns and fears of the typical *carwashero*. As Juliet had predicted, unfortunately, Rodriguez used this insider knowledge to exert control over his own employees at Thee Spot Hand Wash. Rodriguez's understanding was apparent, as he targeted the leaders Exar and Edwin and effectively neutralized the worksite organizing committee structure early on. In addition, he drew on his understanding of the anti-immigrant political climate and misalignment between immigration and labor laws to exploit *carwasheros*. Although worker support at Thee Spot Hand Wash quickly waned shortly after Exar and Edwin were fired, CLEAN and *brigadista* members were outraged and the Steering Committee and USW sanctioned CLEAN to escalate matters. In CLEAN's weekly staff meetings, Justin and Juliet emphasized the importance of defeating Rodriguez to signal to employers everywhere that the seriousness of Rodriguez's offenses.

Throughout May 2013, CLEAN continued to boycott picket at Thee Spot Hand Wash every weekend. In addition, CLEAN performed secondary picketing at Jesse's body shop where organizers stood outside the driveway with banners announcing the family's union busting actions at Thee Spot. Jesse responded by making verbal threats to Juliet, along with knocking



down CLEAN's banners and throwing bleach at *brigadistas* as acts of intimidation. The altercation was such a spectacle that many bystanders came to learn about Thee Spot from the *brigadistas* present at the body shop. By June 2013, with the arrival of yet another cohort of ten interns from AFL-CIO's Union Summer program, CLEAN and the USW picketed at Thee Spot Hand Wash five days a week. In one instance, Rodriguez responded by hiring a DJ in attempt to drown out the picketers' chants to no avail. On multiple occasions throughout summer 2013, CLEAN's picketers were able to turn away all traffic coming into Thee Spot and effectively shut down the car wash. Organizers and *brigadistas* were fueled by emotions as they rallied with classic union chants and improvised ones such as "*Hey Eric, hey scab, how can you treat your own this way?*" Juliet recounted,

*"We attacked Eric Rodriguez personally, and we've never gone this raw before. Members of the brigade took it very personally that he turned on the campaign, his co-workers, and other carwasheros. Once, when his wife came to the car wash, we chanted 'oh your grandma is here to change your diapers.' We know it wasn't nice, but we wanted to provoke him and stress him out. He singled out the workers and hurt their families, so it was only fair for us to get him back."*

CLEAN's picketing garnered sympathy from neighbors in the area. Throughout their weekly afternoon picketing from June to August, Union Summer interns and *brigadistas* walked the picket line at Thee Spot Hand Wash and outreached in the surrounding businesses and residences with door hangers asking community members not to patronize Thee Spot and choose Vermont Car Wash instead.

One supportive neighbor arrived at the picket line to drop off two cases of bottled water, some Mexican sweet bread, and shared:

*“I am a union member myself, I’ve gone on strike before. I know how hard picketing in this heat can be.”*

CLEAN’s relentless picketing was effective in generating much economic damage for Rodriguez and provoking him to exhaust his resources. Although Rodriguez had some knowledge of the campaign and was relatively well-off, he was not as wealthy as the Pirians or the Damavandis, and could not afford to retain expensive anti-union consultants. On one occasion, Rodriguez and Jesse attempted to intimidate CLEAN’s picketing *brigadistas* and Union Summer interns by calling the police. However, as CLEAN and its labor allies maintain good relations with LAPD’s Labor Relations Unit, an officer arrived only to dismiss all of Rodriguez’s accusations. In July, Jesse filed restraining order against two of the *brigadistas*; at the hearing, the judge threw out the case for lack of evidence. On July 17, 2013, Rodriguez filed two ULPs with the NLRB to accuse the USW of illegal picketing; within two days, the allegations were similarly thrown out. Observing Rodriguez’s increasingly desperate moves, CLEAN knew that Rodriguez would run out of money before too long and succumb to CLEAN’s boycotts, especially given the timing of Union Summer interns’ presence.

Finally, in September 2013, around the time of the AFL-CIO 2013 Quadrennial Convention, CLEAN’s boycotts forced Rodriguez out of business and permanently shut down Thee Spot Hand Wash. The ten *carwasheros*, who had already been gradually disengaging CLEAN and the USW throughout 2013, were left without a job nor collective bargaining agreement. According to Exar and Edwin, most Thee Spot *carwasheros* found work at other car

washes in South LA shortly after. Exar and Edwin continued receiving training through the UCLA Labor Center as *brigadistas*.

CLEAN did not achieve victory at Thee Spot. Through the ordeal, there was no lasting collective bargaining agreement in the end. In fact, during the fight with Rodriguez, CLEAN's other campaigns suffered; picketing at Thee Spot Hand Wash took away the personnel necessary for intensive picketing at the Damavandi car washes in the Westside and another fledgling campaign at Aztec Carwash in South LA. In fact, because of the intensive manpower needed at Thee Spot, CLEAN lost organizing momentum at Aztec and eventually withdrew organizing efforts from what could have been a successful campaign. However, given the circumstances, CLEAN had no other choice but to picket Rodriguez out of business, as Juliet explained,

*"We have to send the bad owners a message that we will fight you until the end, and this is part of our work."*

## CHAPTER 7

### COMPARASION OF CASES

What were the strategies used by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign? What explains differences in CLEAN's mobilization at the Sikder, Damavandi, Vermont, and Thee Spot car washes? Previously, I traced the evolution of CLEAN's Westside and South LA campaigns, paying attention to factors that influenced CLEAN's campaigns. In this chapter, I identify and discuss variables that appear as most consequential to CLEAN's campaign development and their subsequent results. Comparative analysis of the four cases suggests that CLEAN's interactions with targets, workers, coalition organizations and community, and state actors had most impact on CLEAN's campaign outcomes.

Viewed from a field theoretic framework, in which no collective action can be understood without examining how it is oriented to others (Jasper, 2004, 2006; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012), development of the four cases demonstrate that CLEAN's interactions with others in the strategic action fields with which it engages shape strategies and their outcomes. In order to win a CBA for *carwasheros*, CLEAN seeks to simultaneously alter target behaviors and organize the *carwasheros* before it can enter into contract negotiation with the target. To facilitate the process, interactions with actors in the labor, CBO, low wage immigrant organizing, and car wash strategic action fields are also important, as CLEAN seeks to mobilize resources and support among coalition organizations, community members, customers, and state actors to help achieve leverage over the target.

Derived for the aforementioned interactions are a number of variables that jointly determine the degree of success or failure in CLEAN's campaigns: target characteristics, worker

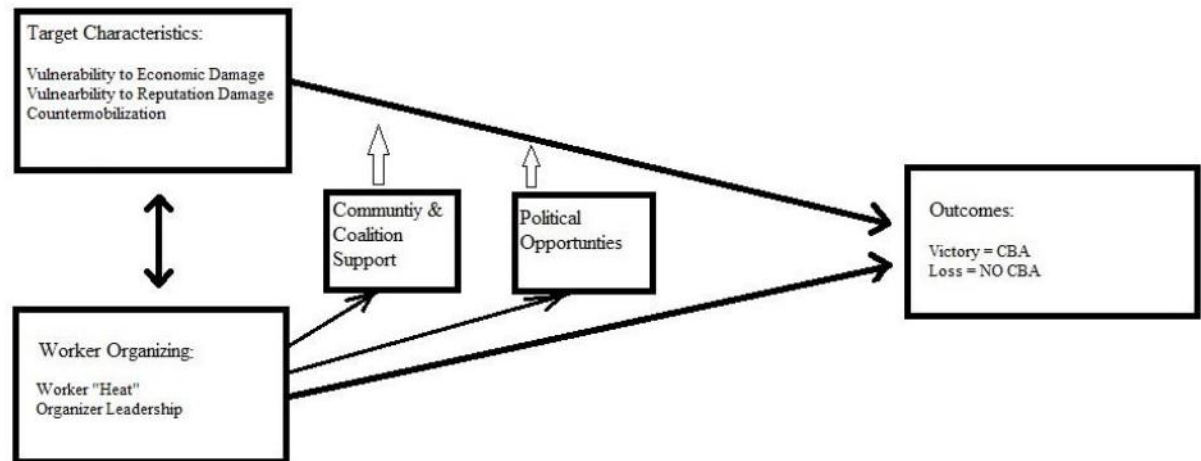
organizing, coalition and community support, and political opportunities to engage state actors.

The following table highlights the levels of key variables in each case:

	<b>Westside Win: Bonus (Sikder)</b>	<b>Westside Loss: Millennium (Damavandi)</b>	<b>South LA Win: Vermont</b>	<b>South LA Loss: Thee Spot</b>
<b>Target characteristics</b>				
Vulnerability: Economic damage	High	Low	High	High
Vulnerability: Reputation damage	High	Low	High	Low
Countermobilization	Med	High	Med	High
<b>Worker organizing</b>				
Initial heat	High	Low	High	High
Organizer leadership	High	Low	High	High
<b>Coalition and community</b>				
Coalition support	High	Med	Med	Low
Community support	Low	Low	High	High
<b>Political opportunity</b>	High	Low	Low	Low

First and foremost, target characteristics in terms of a target’s vulnerability to economic and reputation damage and its ability and propensity for countermobilization were a major factor in determining campaign outcomes. Second, the quality of worker organizing—whether worker “heat” or enthusiasm was present, and whether CLEAN’s organizers exercised leadership that transformed initial worker interest into sustained commitment that in turn contributed to the campaign’s ability to weather retaliations and achieve CBA with a target. Next, support by CLEAN’s coalition partner organizations and community members, comprised of car wash customers and local residents, acted as a moderator which, in varying levels across cases, strengthened or diminished CLEAN’s ability to inflict economic or reputational damage on the targets. Also acting as a moderator to CLEAN’s ability to exploit target vulnerabilities is political opportunity— the possibility to invoke state action that is also dependent on state

actors' receptivity to CLEAN. The following figure describes the pathways of variables in explaining outcomes:



In all four cases, social skills of the CLEAN's organizers ultimately affected the campaign's ability to effectively capitalize on target characteristics, organize workers at worksites, rally coalition and community support, and perceive and seize political opportunities when they are present. Surprisingly, some factors that are recognized by social movement research as important in shaping mobilization, yet were not critical in determining CLEAN's campaign outcomes were the roles of national unions and other funders, the amount of media attention garnered, and framing of arguments in each of the local campaigns.

### Target Characteristics

Targets have varied strengths, weaknesses, and capacities for response that shape patterns of action by its challengers; thus, social movement repertoires are often contingent on the selected target's characteristics (Walker et. al., 2008). As strategic actors, social movements assess their opponents before making decisions to commit resources to organize around the

target (Walker et. al, 2008; Ganz, 2009). In accordance with previous findings in the literature on targeting, before launching a campaign, CLEAN selects a car wash to target by first evaluating whether a win would be feasible. Accordingly, target characteristics in terms of vulnerabilities and capability for countermobilization play important roles in shaping CLEAN's strategies and campaign outcomes. The unfolding of CLEAN's four campaign cases shows that employers' location and wealth were primary considerations that influenced CLEAN's initial targeting and the eventual sequencing of campaign tactics. Analysis of the case outcomes suggests that whether CLEAN was able to achieve a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) for workers at the target car wash was highly dependent on what type of employer it was, whether the target was vulnerable to economic or reputation damage brought upon by CLEAN's challenge, and whether it effectively retaliated in response.

Since CLEAN's geographic scope focused on the Westside and South LA, and the sizes and wealth of target car wash employers are geographically dependent, location of the target constitutes an environmental constraint that dictates the model of campaign to be embarked on. As a challenger to incumbent car wash owners in the car wash field where existing conditions long favored the owners over *carwasheros*, CLEAN had choose targets carefully to increase the likelihood of victory. All of CLEAN's campaigns were launched after CLEAN conducted background research on the targets that deemed them suitable for one of CLEAN's two primary campaign approaches that were developed according to general field conditions among car washes in Westside and South LA. In the Westside, the Sikders and Damavandis were wealthy employers that owned several car washes with noticeable labor abuses that enabled CLEAN to wield comprehensive campaigns incorporating multiple tactical components; in South LA, Vermont and Thee Spot car washes were modest-sized targets who foreseeably would yield to

the economic damage brought upon them by the intensive boycott picketing of the small operator strategy. Drawing from the repertoire of its two major campaign approaches, CLEAN then deployed tactics that capitalized on perceived weaknesses of the target. However, once the campaigns began, the targets' responses and countermobilization shaped the continual updating of strategy, as well as determined whether CLEAN was able to pressure the employer toward reaching a collective bargaining agreement with its workers.

### ***Target Vulnerabilities and Countermobilization***

In the Sikder campaign, CLEAN began organizing Marina and Bonus car wash workers when research first revealed that victory was achievable based on target characteristics. At both Marina and Bonus car washes, *carwasheros* experienced egregious wage and hour violations that provided CLEAN the foundation for a comprehensive campaign that draw on an array of legal and media tactics along with boycotts and pickets to undermine the target. The Sikders, as an international billionaire family, owned multiple businesses beyond the car wash field—such as the high-profile Koi Restaurant in West Hollywood, which actually rendered the family more vulnerable to reputation damage. CLEAN enthusiastically launched the Sikder campaign to organize around these perceived target weaknesses.

In terms of vulnerability to economic damage, as CLEAN had uncovered through background research, several of the Sikders' dozen or so car washes throughout California had lost revenue or become bankrupt during the recession of the late 2000s. Although the Sikders' large wealth cushioned them from the moderate income loss inflicted by CLEAN's boycott pickets at the car washes, the Sikders' recent experiences of overall profit loss in car washes across the state heightened the target's sensitivity as well as increased its actual vulnerability to



economic damage brought about by the \$6.6 million lawsuit prepared by CLEAN and eventually filed by then California Attorney General Jerry Brown against Dipu Haque Sikder for unpaid wages, illegal business practices, and operating without licenses from the California Labor Commissioner. In addition to vulnerability to economic damage, the Sikders were also preoccupied with the potential damage CLEAN presented to its reputation. In line with research showing how the social embeddedness of firms shapes their behaviors (Burris, 2005) and how they understand that their ability to generate profits requires the socio-political legitimacy conferred by key audiences (Walker & Rea, 2014), the well-connectedness of the Sikder family actually became its liability. When CLEAN proxy-targeted the Koi Restaurant, the Sikders quickly moved to make concessions in order to halt CLEAN's highly visible picketing and street theater performances that disrupted the dinner of Hollywood celebrities—an audience that the Sikders cared much more for with regards to tarnished reputation and legitimacy. When the Sikders signed the neutrality agreement with CLEAN, it was stipulated that CLEAN must halt its picketing and street theater actions at Koi, illustrating the targets' concern over the spatial transgressions (Wilton & Cranford, 2002) by CLEAN's *carwasheros* enacting their daily struggles in the parking lot of the fine dining establishment.

Besides the Sikders' vulnerability to economic and reputation damage, how the Sikders countermobilized also played a role in shaping CLEAN's campaign development and outcomes. On being targeted by CLEAN, the Sikders did not retain anti-union consultants, and there was no aggressive countermobilization against the *carwasheros* early in the campaign. Almost seven months into the campaign, in response to CLEAN's organizing, the Sikders did eventually retaliate through locking out the Marina workers and targeted firings of other worker leaders. Although this had some chilling effects on worker organizing, the Sikders responded relatively

late in the campaign, when the workers already had a strong worksite leadership infrastructure and it was no longer able to stop the organizing momentum that had already been building for months. In the end, while the Sikders were wealthy, they were still vulnerable to the economic damage and settled with CLEAN in effort to show good faith to California Attorney General on the outstanding wage and hour lawsuit. In addition, as car washes were not the family's main source of income, the Sikders appeared much more concerned about their popular delegitimation to elite audiences besides car wash customers. To end their troubles, the Sikders behaved pragmatically as they moved to settle a collective bargaining agreement with the workers to end the negative publicity inflicted by CLEAN's comprehensive campaign tactics.

Like the Sikders, the Damavandis were very affluent, and CLEAN similarly targeted the Damavandi family's car washes because of the many labor violations present at Santa Monica, Millennium, and Bubblebee car washes. However, in contrast with the Sikders, the Damavandis did not have existing bankruptcies, and CLEAN's boycott picketing—which turned away only limited numbers of car wash customers—presented low threat of economic damage to the target. In contrast to the Sikders, who were well-networked beyond the car wash business that made them susceptible to delegitimation among a wider audience, the Damavandis were a closed family that had low vulnerability to reputation damage. The car washes were the Damavandis' primary source of income, and the family's immediate circles and car wash customers seemed to be the only audience that the Damavandis were concerned with. As will be further discussed in a following section on coalition and community support, the Damavandi car washes' location in the Westside made them relatively immune to both economic and reputation damage through boycotts, as the typical Westside car wash customer is unlikely to sympathize with the *carwasheros* and thus honor boycotts. Given the typical Damavandi car wash customers' social

distance from and apathy to the *carwasheros*' cause, CLEAN had limited ability to exert pressure on the Damavandis' as it had no secondary brick-and-mortar businesses to proxy-target.

As the Damavandis relied primarily on car washes for income, the target also countermobilized in a much more combative manner than the Sikders. The Damavandis appeared to have perceived CLEAN's boycott pickets as a direct threat to the family's livelihood, and the target's hostile reactions to CLEAN's actions and delegations demonstrate its predisposition to fight CLEAN every step of the way. In response to CLEAN's organizing, the Damavandis retained the Pirian brothers' anti-union consultant, who advised the Damavandis to aggressively retaliate through firing key worker leaders, threatening immigrant workers with deportations, holding captive audience anti-union meetings during work time, and directing individual workers and even CLUE-LA's affiliated clergy to withdraw support for CLEAN. The early countermobilization and aggressiveness of retaliation commanded chilling effect on the campaign and effectively halted CLEAN's worker organizing efforts.

Compared to the Westside car washes, both of the South LA car washes were small. CLEAN had launched the small operator campaigns at Vermont Car Wash and Thee Spot Hand Wash under the assumption that their middle class employers were highly vulnerable to economic damage by intensive boycott picketing. In addition, given their locations in South LA, where car wash customers were typically sympathetic of *carwasheros* and supportive of boycott efforts, CLEAN's small operator strategy was effective in inflicting economic damage on targets. On multiple occasions in both the Vermont and Thee Spot campaigns, the targets had to shut down their car washes because CLEAN's boycotts had turned away majority of potential business for the day.

Although both of the South LA targets were highly vulnerable to economic damage, their varied vulnerability and sensitivity to reputation damage contributed to the different responses by Mrs. Kim at Vermont and Eric Rodriguez at Thee Spot—and consequently different outcomes for the campaigns. Mrs. Kim, as president of LA’s Korean Car Wash Owners Association and a Korean American ethnic entrepreneur in South LA, which is fraught with racial tension, appeared to be aware that she was evaluated not just by the surrounding South LA residents who were also potential car wash customers, but also peers in the Korean American community. As a consequence, Mrs. Kim seemed to also be much more sensitive to the reputation damage brought upon by CLEAN’s boycotts and neighborhood outreach, while immediately receptive to initial settlement conversations brokered by CLEAN’s coalition partner, Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA). In contrast, Eric Rodriguez, although equally vulnerable to the economic damage of CLEAN’s boycott as Mrs. Kim, was not as concerned with similar delegitimation. Rodriguez postured himself as a former *carwashero* whose opportunism enabled him to become an employer over other *carwasheros* while flagrantly flaunting the successorship language of the collective bargaining agreement during the transfer of car wash from previous owner. Instead of seeking concessions to mitigate economic damage exerted by CLEAN’s intensive boycott actions, Rodriguez chose to hire a DJ in efforts to drown out the chants of the picketers while opting for his own eventual business failure.

At Vermont Car Wash, Mrs. Kim’s vulnerability to both economic and reputation damage made CLEAN’s boycott-based tactics there effective, as CLEAN advanced its campaign within a very short amount of time. Although Mrs. Kim initially resisted unionization and retaliated by cutting workers’ hours, instead of a sophisticated countermobilization directed at specific worker leaders, Mrs. Kim’s retaliation was unleashed on the entire workplace, providing

no disincentive to union activity. Combined with the solid worker organizing efforts at Vermont Car Wash, proper “inoculation” by CLEAN’s organizer, and short duration of the campaign with uninterrupted momentum, the retaliation actually further galvanized the workers and strengthened their commitment toward achieving the collective bargaining agreement. Toward the end of the campaign as Mrs. Kim stalled engagement, CLEAN responded with additional picketing, after which negotiations quickly resumed—illustrating the target’s continual concern over its vulnerabilities.

Similar to the Damavandis, Vermont Car Wash was Mrs. Kim’s main source of income. However, in contrast with the Damavandi’s relative immunity from economic and reputation damage due to Westside customers’ apathy to boycotts, Mrs. Kim was not insulated because the residents of South LA community could readily be enrolled as car wash customers honoring the boycott at Vermont Car Wash. Interestingly, the different responses by Mrs. Kim and Damavandis reflect findings from literature on ethnic entrepreneurship in LA, which suggests that Korean American businesses on average are smaller, of more modest means, more concentrated, and serve more co-ethnic and low-income minority customers, while Iranian businesses are larger, of more capital, more dispersed, and largely serve White customers (Min & Bozorgmehr, 2000). As a result, Koreans have encountered severe intergroup conflict and are thus forced to be mindful of relations with other ethnic groups when doing business, whereas Iranians have sidestepped similar conflict (Min & Bozorgmehr, 2000). In contrast to the Damavandi’s relative lack of vulnerabilities due to their wealth and insulated position, for Mrs. Kim, settling with CLEAN not only stopped the financial damage but also restored her reputation in the surrounding community—which was tied to her business success. Indeed, after the target had reached a collective bargaining agreement with the workers, Mrs. Kim was

alternatively rewarded and honored as a “South LA model business” by labor leaders and local politicians; Mrs. Kim continued to make efforts in seeking the goodwill of surrounding community, hosting a Thanksgiving dinner and press event attended by Black, Latino, and Korean American clergy and community members. Similar to the Sikders, the target’s sensitivity to both economic and reputation damage contributed to its pragmatic stance toward settling with CLEAN at Vermont Car Wash.

At Thee Spot Hand Wash, as in the case of Vermont Car Wash, the modest wealth of the target made it vulnerable to economic damage of boycotts, which did pressure the car wash’s original owner, Luis Navas to settle with CLEAN. When Eric Rodriguez took over the car wash, changed the name to Thee Spot, and chose to disregard successorship of the existing collective bargaining agreement, CLEAN responded with emergency boycotts and was able to turn away a majority of customers to Thee Spot. However, in contrast to Mrs. Kim, who made efforts to preserve her standing in the surrounding community, or the Sikders, who were preoccupied with their restaurant’s elite patrons, Eric Rodriguez did not appear to be sensitive to reputation damage. Similar to the insight the Damavandis gained by retaining the Pirians’ anti-union consultant, Rodriguez, as a former *carwashero* activist, drew on insider knowledge to conduct union busting. The target effectively countermobilized by singling out worker leaders in firings, intimidating others with deportations, and physically threatening CLEAN’s organizers—which did discourage workers with wavering faith in the union’s promise after the CBA was openly dismissed. Combined with weakening worker willingness to organize as the campaign dragged on, the target’s countermobilization thwarted the campaign at Thee Spot and efforts toward restoring the CBA eventually failed.

However, in contrast with the Damavandi's insulated position, Thee Spot could not truly weather CLEAN's economic damage. Initially, Rodriguez relied on his family's relative wealth to cushion him from immediate business failure, yet CLEAN's relentless boycott pickets eventually managed to severely damage the target, closing the business. Given the target's unwillingness to negotiate and weakened worker organizing, in the end, CLEAN's campaign at Thee Spot failed in restoring the CBA for workers. Rodriguez embodies the inflexible and non-adaptive target that refuses to yield to the demand of the boycotts despite outside pressures (Friedman, 1999). Although this is considered a failed case at the closing of the campaign, CLEAN's strategy could have led to a successful outcome had the target behaved rationally. In this case, Rodriguez chose to fight CLEAN to the end when CLEAN and surrounding community residents boycotted the car wash until it permanently went out of business and led to Rodriguez's own ruin.

### **Worker Organizing: "Heat" and Organizer Leadership**

As Milkman (2006) observes, in any unionizing campaigns, organizing efforts from workers must be present in order to extract victory. Besides target characteristics, the quality of worker organizing played an important role in determining whether CLEAN succeeded or failed in achieving a collective bargaining agreement. Quality of worker organizing denotes how well CLEAN is able to engage the *carwasheros* in a workplace and deploy necessary worksite actions so that the majority of the workers would sign authorization forms ("card check") for union recognition and build leverage to bargain for a CBA. How well CLEAN can organize a workplace is based on interplay between workers' enthusiasm as well as organizers' ability to sustain worker commitment through building a sense of solidarity and inclusion among workers (Fantasia, 1988). In all four cases, CLEAN launched a campaign only when there was a certain

threshold of initial “heat”—or worker eagerness to organize toward a CBA. However, whether the initial “heat” could be transformed into commitment that could weather countermobilization depends on the organizer’s leadership and ability to interact with workers in such a way that builds rank-and-file leadership infrastructure. In the cases where CLEAN was victorious, such as at the Sikder and Vermont car washes, there was strong initial worker support that provided foundation for CLEAN’s organizers to cultivate indigenous ownership and willingness to actualize the collective bargaining agreement. In contrast, at the Damavandi and Thee Spot car washes, due to interruptions in staffing or lack of organizer leadership, worker organizing efforts did not produce continual worker commitment to organize once the targets aggressively retaliated. Quality of worker organizing, thus also interacts with target characteristics in producing outcomes, as solid worker organizing could prepare workers for retaliation while galvanizing their willingness to win in the long run.

At the Sikder car washes, the workers were eager to improve their conditions since before CLEAN officially took on the campaign. As the workers coordinated their own “wildcat” strike at Marina Car Wash two years before CLEAN launched the comprehensive campaign, the worker organizing at the Sikder car washes was worker-initiated. In addition to having “heat” or initial worker enthusiasm, the first organizer assigned there, Luis, also built great rapport with the workers, ensuring that there was strong worker ownership throughout the duration of the campaign. As commitment to win rests on organizers’ ability to mobilize and direct the cooperation and accountability of voluntary participants, good leadership on the part of organizers can ensure the effectiveness of the campaign (Andrews et. al., 2010). Throughout the Sikder comprehensive campaign, CLEAN’s organizers continued to build capacity in worker leaders as they pushed them to be the public faces of worker organizing, to represent CLEAN at



various community outreach events, and to provide guidance to their co-workers at the worksites. Although some staff transitions took place when Luis left CLEAN, leading some workers to be frustrated when Justin took over the turf, the robust rank-and-file leadership infrastructure and commitment to organizing toward a CBA enabled the campaign to push through challenges as various pieces of the comprehensive campaign—such as the lawsuit by the Attorney General—fell into place. Despite the eventual countermobilization by the Sikders, the quality of worker organizing generated enough momentum that enabled CLEAN to achieve victory when the Sikders, under threat of economic and reputation damage, came to the bargaining table to settle.

At the Damavandi car washes, in contrast, the worker organizing efforts were much less substantial in terms of initial heat as well as commitment throughout the campaign. Although some former activists from the Sikder car washes provided initial contacts for CLEAN at Damavandi's Millennium car wash, the Damavandi campaign was mostly initiated by CLEAN after the organizers probed the car washes, found adequate worker heat present, and decided that the Damavandis would make a good target for another comprehensive campaign in the Westside. Not only was there less worker enthusiasm from inception, the main organizer assigned to the Damavandi car washes, Maria, was unable to cultivate rank-and-file leadership, which led to waning commitment and growing mistrust between workers and CLEAN as soon as the campaign faced the inevitable obstacles. Unlike in the Sikder campaign where Luis and Justin pushed for involvement from the *carwasheros*, and the Vermont campaign, where Juliet conducted almost daily house meetings, through which the workers developed leadership capacity, Maria had trouble organizing the Damavandi workers. Despite being a former *carwashera* herself, Maria's knowledge of working in car washes in the Westside led her to

assume an organizing style that was not conducive to recruiting and retaining activists. As Maria compensated by taking on more organizing tasks instead of delegating to worker organizing committee members, she was also unable to build a grassroots worksite leadership infrastructure that could outlast the Damavandis' aggressive retaliations. Discouraged, Maria would leave the campaign before it was over, resulting in additional staffing disruptions. Worst of all, due to a combination of the target's countermobilization efforts and weakening worker organizing, a worker leader at Santa Monica Carwash actually began organizing his co-workers against CLEAN, leading the workers to further waiver in commitment. The less-than-solid worker organizing resulting from weak initial heat and organizer leadership, combined with momentum loss from waiting for coalition partners to execute components of the comprehensive campaign, resulted in petering out of worker organizing. As the Damavandis continued to countermobilize by holding captive audience meetings, threatening deportations, and firing several pro-union workers, CLEAN's ability to pressure its target through campaign tactics was drastically reduced, as there were few willing workers left to even testify for wage and hour lawsuits. Over time, the Damavandi car washes eventually became "burnt turf" where workers no longer wished to follow through with the plan to organize toward a CBA. Without worker organizing, no unionization was possible at all, much less settling a collective bargaining agreement for the workers.

Unlike workers at Damavandi and similar to those at Sikder car washes, the workers at Vermont Car Wash were enthusiastic about organizing toward the CBA since the beginning. Considering that the workers called CLEAN on their own hours after the AFL-CIO Union Summer Interns conducted a probe and left CLEAN's phone number at the car wash, the campaign at Vermont Car Wash was worker-initiated from the get go. The high level of initial

heat provided the foundation for the organizer, Juliet to subsequently develop strong worker ownership and grassroots infrastructure through regular house meetings that took place in *carwasheros*' homes after their shifts were over. Facilitated by the close distance between the target worksite and workers' homes in South LA, Juliet and the Vermont Car Wash workers were able to conduct frequent meetings that enabled daily debriefs and regular engagement that built individual worker leadership, social relationships and trust among workers and between workers and organizer, and shared visions and practices that further solidified the group's commitment and preparedness for target countermobilization. The strong initial heat, Juliet's leadership and interaction with workers, and resultant worker commitment toward securing a CBA provided momentum for the campaign to achieve unionization and eventual CBA shortly after Mrs. Kim gave in to the economic pressures exacted by CLEAN's boycotts.

At Thee Spot Hand Wash, the workers also were also enthusiastic in unionizing when the car wash operated as BJ and subsequently Navas Carwash. As the workers had called CLEAN on their own shortly after Vermont Car Wash campaign was underway, the campaign was also worker-initiated and there was strong worker buy-in in the beginning. Similar to the Vermont campaigns, the initial heat provided the basis for commitment, as Juliet, who was also the organizer assigned, developed worker leadership capacity through frequent house meetings in similar fashion to the Vermont campaign—which contributed to the strong organizing campaign that secured a CBA with former owner Luis Navas. However, during transitions between CLEAN's organizer and the USW's contract enforcement representative, the ownership transfer from Luis Navas to Eric Rodriguez, and Rodriguez's subsequent disregard for the CBA, various interruptions resulted in the dampening of worker organizing momentum at Thee Spot where local leadership development also halted. Toward the end of the Thee Spot campaign, as the

target's directed retaliation resulted in termination of key worker leaders, Thee Spot workers' interest and willingness to regain their CBA quickly dissipated. In the end, CLEAN's efforts to mobilize against the target was mostly directed by CLEAN's staff—and not so much from Thee Spot *carwasheros* themselves—to picket and punish the target until it closed down. Even though Rodriguez was forced out of business, without a CBA for the workers, CLEAN could not claim Thee Spot as a case for victory.

### **Coalition and Community Support**

In each of the four campaigns, whether CLEAN was able to ultimately achieve a CBA with the targets depended on whether it was able to exploit target vulnerabilities while mounting solid worker organizing campaigns. However, CLEAN's ability to successfully challenge targets also depended on its ability to mobilize others in the field to help alter target behaviors. Specifically, coalition organization and community member support acted as moderators that helped exert pressure to enact economic or reputation damage to the target. Coalition support denotes the level of cooperation and backing by CLEAN's coalition partner organizations in dedicating resources and executing CLEAN's campaign tactics, while community support refers to the level of support and endorsement by car wash customers and surrounding local residents. These two distinct types of support are discussed together here because when community support is difficult to enlist, as in the Westside cases, coalition support becomes highly salient in contributing to CLEAN's ability to inflict reputation damage on the target. Alternatively, in the South LA cases, the high level of community support enabled CLEAN to levy heavy economic damage on the targets through economic boycotts alone. In all cases, coalition and community support interact with target characteristics—as there must be some support from either car wash customers, community residents, or coalition organizations in order for CLEAN to successfully

administer boycott pickets or more elaborate comprehensive campaign tactics that capitalize on target vulnerabilities.

One of CLEAN's main tactics to exact economic and reputation damage on a target is the boycott picket, where effectiveness is dependent on community willing to support the boycott (McAdam, 1997). Success of the boycott, thus, rests not only on CLEAN's tactical execution, but on the level of endorsement by car wash customers. Existing research has shown that boycotts typically do little to hurt companies' revenues—in part because boycotters are not usually consumers of target companies' goods or services, and consumers are not easily recruited as boycott supporters (King, 2011). This was certainly the case in the Westside car washes, where the affluent White car wash customer often displayed apathy or even hostility to the low wage immigrant *carwasheros*' cause. In contrast, at the South LA car washes, the typical Latino or Black car wash customer resides in the same neighborhood as the *carwasheros*, could empathize with the *carwasheros*' economic struggles, and were easily enrolled as boycott supporters who found CLEAN's causes legitimate, relatable, urgent, and necessary.

LA's geography has contributed to different community and car wash customer profiles between the Westside and South LA. As discussed, the different community and car wash consumer bases in the Westside vs. South LA make community support more readily available in South LA than in the Westside. As consequence, in order to exact some form of economic or reputation damage to the target, coalition organizational support was more critical to success in the Westside. In the Westside, there was great social distance in terms of race and class between the *carwashero* and car wash customer; the typical *carwashero* is a low wage immigrant worker who commutes from a working class neighborhood, while customers who patronize Westside car washes are most often affluent Whites from the area. On the other hand, in South LA, the

carwasheros live among the working class Latino and Black residents who also patronize the more modest-priced local car washes.

In the both the Sikder and Damavandi campaigns, car wash customers were an audience distinct from community residents. While community residents might feel affinity to *carwasheros'* plight, the same community residents were typically not car wash customers, and the enrollment of community members as supporters for consumer boycotts is thus difficult. For example, while local Santa Monica residents might be sympathetic to the plight of the *carwasheros*, they would have limited abilities in assisting with CLEAN's boycotts as the customers who patronized Westside car washes were a different constituent largely indifferent to CLEAN's cause. As evident from the modest impact CLEAN's picketers had in turning away cars and frequent hostile encounters with potential customers in the Westside campaigns, CLEAN could not rely on community support for effective boycotts—because the customers largely did not care, and the local residents that did care were largely not regular car wash customers. Combined with the larger wealth of the targets and more limited vulnerability to economic damage through boycott alone, CLEAN must draw on coalition organization partners for support to orchestrate the various pieces of the comprehensive campaign to leverage additional pressure on the target. Thus, coalition partner organizations became more important to execute the various components of the comprehensive campaign. In the case of the Sikder campaign, CLUE-LA and various legal CBOs became important coalition partner organizations, as collaboration with clergy and legal experts enabled CLEAN's comprehensive campaign tactics and litigation to take place. By contrast in South LA, the community audiences are overlapped: local working class residents are also car wash customers who find the *carwasheros'* challenges relatable and were readily enrolled as boycott supporters. In both the

Vermont and Thee Spot campaigns, CLEAN cultivated and capitalized on public indignation against sweatshop conditions as local residents expressed sympathy for the *carwasheros*; through this identification, community support enabled CLEAN to effectively exploit target economic vulnerability as majority of car wash customers turn away at CLEAN's boycott pickets.

In both the Westside campaigns where coalition organizations were called for, the coalition organizations exerted great influence in shaping the CLEAN campaign: in terms of shaping the available repertoire of contention, as well as in the actual deployment of tactics. In the Sikder campaign, CLEAN relied on the various legal CBOs to prepare the lawsuit against the Sikders, ultimately was taken on by California Attorney General Jerry Brown, as well as CLUE-LA to conduct frequent clergy delegations and large publicity-oriented actions, such as the Christmas *posada*. In the comprehensive campaign model where CLEAN relies on various coalition organizations to execute campaign components—such as lawsuits, marches, etc., the coalition partner organizations become more prominent, and their input more heavily weighed. In the Sikder campaign, support and engagement by the coalition organizations worked to effectively move the target toward eventual victory for CLEAN. In the Damavandi campaign, as in the Sikder campaign, CLEAN relied heavily on legal CBOs to litigate and CLUE-LA to conduct clergy delegations to bosses and large publicity-oriented tactics. As in the Sikder campaign, where CLEAN had to give more consideration to coalition partner preferences along with being subject to their timing for tactical deployment, CLEAN's strategy and the ultimate campaign outcome at the Damavandi car washes were deeply influenced by coalition organizations' support and willingness to execute campaign actions. Despite similar goals, to advance the interests of the *carwasheros*, CLEAN's various coalition partners were constrained by different culturally acceptable conceptions of mobilization. In the Damavanadi case, this

caused CLUE-LA to not provide the coalition support needed. Specifically, in the middle of the campaign, when CLEAN planned to conduct a candlelight vigil at the Damavandis' house to escalate pressure on the target, the clergy members of CLUE-LA deemed the surprise visit at a private residence overly confrontational. Given CLUE-LA's key role in its Westside campaigns, CLEAN had to comply to the coalition partner's preference and consequently not implement a potentially effective tactic that might have pushed the target to respond. Since CLEAN could not rely on community support to exert economic damage on the Damavandis, when coalition organizations failed to provide adequate support and deliver effective tactics, CLEAN had even less ability to organize around the target or effectively exploit target's already low vulnerabilities to economic or reputation damage.

In contrast, at both the South LA car washes, the nature of the small operator campaign enabled CLEAN to exert significant economic damage and pressure the target through boycott picketing alone. This was moderated and augmented by the community support, again, because the community residents of South LA could be easily enrolled as boycott supporters who turned away from patronizing Vermont Car Wash and Thee Spot Hand Wash. At Vermont Car Wash, CLEAN could mostly rely on its own staff in the picketing efforts at Vermont while turning away majority customers who visited the car wash. In South LA, critical to the effectiveness of pickets was the support of community residents. While coalition partner organizations helped to turn out essential numbers of people to picket in the later phases of the campaign at Thee Spot, CLEAN relied less on the coalition organizations' input on strategy. Similar to Vermont Car Wash, the community residents were sympathetic and supportive of CLEAN's efforts. In the case of Thee Spot, the support of the community members enabled CLEAN to picket the target intensively to exploit the target's vulnerability for economic damage. Although the economic



boycott did not make the target comply—in this case, it was due to the inflexibility of the target and unwillingness to settle, rather than the lack of effectiveness of the boycott. The support of the community in honoring the boycott allowed CLEAN to eventually shut down Thee Spot and put Eric Rodriguez out of business.

### **Political Opportunities: State Actors' Receptivity to Support CLEAN's Actions**

Political opportunities denote how existing sociopolitical conditions create or constrain possibilities for collective action and social movements (Snow & Soule, 2010; Tarrow, 1994). As part of the political opportunity structure in which CLEAN is embedded are various local, state, or federal actors or enforcement agencies with which CLEAN interacts. In three of the four campaigns—Sikder, Damavandi, and Thee Spot—as CLEAN sought to exact economic or reputation damage on the targets, organize the workers toward a CBA despite target mobilization, and draw on community and coalition support to best exploit target vulnerabilities, CLEAN also sought to enlist various state actors to help create additional pressure to shape target behaviors. The moderating effect of state actors on target vulnerabilities, however, is not easily enacted. The state actors, as distinct, independent actors, not subject to CLEAN's influences, may or may not be receptive to support CLEAN's actions at any moment—and taking advantage of political opportunities requires worker organizing efforts (e.g. workers must be willing to testify for a lawsuit to take place) and leadership on behalf of the organizers to recognize state receptivity.

Due to the significant presence of legal CBOs in CLEAN's coalition since its founding, along with the importance of legal strategy as an important alternative workplace organizing tactic in low wage employment sectors with low union density (Narro, 2008), CLEAN relies on

lawsuits based on evidence of wage and hour violations and unfair labor practices at the target car washes. In the Westside campaigns, as CLEAN could not exact economic damage through boycott picketing alone due to the large size of the targets and the lack of community support by car wash customers, CLEAN sought to sue the targets for wage and hour violations in order to constitute additional economic damage to the target. In the Sikder campaign, the California Attorney General was receptive to taking on a major lawsuit, and thus was successfully engaged by CLEAN to assist in its efforts to inflict economic damage on the Sikders. Through careful coordinated action with coalition CBOs the Wage Justice Center (WJC) and The Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF), CLEAN was able to prompt the Attorney General Jerry Brown to file the \$6.6 million lawsuit against the Sikders, which compelled the target to settle with CLEAN. In the Sikders' case, this political opportunity ultimately facilitated CLEAN's victory. However, as CLEAN's Executive Director Justin has described the state, as "an ally that cannot be controlled," CLEAN had not been able to seize similar opportunities in the Damavandi campaign when it was also highly needed. In the Damanvandi case, when CLEAN needed to file a similar wage and hour lawsuit, misalignment with the Attorney General's timeline along with the interest of coalition partner organizations MALDEF and WJC in jointly litigating led CLEAN to elect for a MALDEF-WJC class action lawsuit. In this case, no movements of the lawsuit, much less settlement, took place in the duration of the Damanvandi campaign. When CLEAN lobbied the Santa Monica City Council to withdraw contracts to wash its fleet at the Damavandis on bases of wage and hour violations, the mayor of the city abstained from voting, resulting in no regulatory action that coordinated with CLEAN's campaign efforts. In the case of the Damavandi campaign, consumers—the car wash clients—did not care, and the lack of state actions did not convey to the target that it must change its behaviors. While the City of Santa

Monica eventually withdrew business from the Damavandi car washes, it did so on its own much later for “environmental concerns”—giving the perception to the target and community that labor abuses of *carwasheros* were not of concern by the city. Also, as the timing was delayed, inaction of the City of Santa Monica only delivered a blow to CLEAN’s legitimacy and organizing efforts.

In the South LA cases, as community support could be enrolled to enact economic damage through boycott picketing alone, the receptivity of state actors was not always critical. While there was presence of wage and hour violations at Vermont Car Wash, CLEAN’s advantages in enacting economic and reputation damage and enrolling community support deemed enlisting the state unnecessary. However, in the Thee Spot campaign, CLEAN sought to mount additional pressures on the target by filing Unfair Labor Practices (ULP) claims after the firing of key activists by Rodriguez. In the course of the Thee Spot campaign, the ULPs filed by CLEAN were thrown out by the federal agency, the National Labor Relations Board, on the basis that the car washes were too small to be within its jurisdiction. In terms of dealing with a target that experienced high economic damage but appeared to be unconcerned and unwilling to settle with CLEAN, the ULPS were a last resort—and even had they been filed, may be too late after Eric Rodriguez’s aggressive countermobilization that wiped out the workers’ willingness to continue organizing.

## **Conclusion**

Comparing and contrasting the four campaigns illustrates how CLEAN’s interactions with others—targets, workers, community and coalition organizations, and state actors—shape strategy and outcomes. In all four of CLEAN’s campaigns, CLEAN’s strategies were continually

updated as CLEAN considered its own positionality within the strategic action fields that it engages with. CLEAN's actions and campaign outcomes were highly influenced by its linkages to the funders and coalition organizations in labor, CBO, and low wage organizing strategic action fields, and interactions with the targets, *carwasheros*, and customers in the car wash field. Although not always successful, when political opportunities arise, CLEAN also attempts to invoke state actors to help regulate targets in the car wash field.

Trajectories of the Sikder, Damavandi, Vermont, and Thee Spot car wash campaigns point to the importance of targeting and the roles that funders and coalition organizations play in shaping initial campaign strategies. The comprehensive campaign strategies used at the Sikder and Damavandi campaigns and small operator strategies used at Vermont and Thee Spot campaigns were conceived by the CLEAN team based on what organizers have learned, then subject to influence by Steering Committee's demands and coalition partners' wishes and capabilities. In other words, strategies were developed as CLEAN deliberated on what is instrumentally effective for campaign needs; at the same time, strategies were also developed in compromise with consideration to maintaining CLEAN's own resources and managing members of its coalition. However, once campaigns are underway, CLEAN's continual engagement with the target, workers, community and coalition organizations, and the broader environmental context determines what types of strategic action makes sense.

Ganz (2000) found that skilled leadership is important in perceiving, managing, and capitalizing conditions; developing strategies requires making the right decision at the right moment. CLEAN's strategic choices reflect the long-term thinking of organizers to manage CLEAN's coalition partners and resource flow, foresight to find how who the target is and what can make it capitulate, acumen to know what tactics works at what time, perceptiveness in

reading the environment and its changes, and dedication to develop indigenous leadership among the workers. Through these campaigns, especially in the victorious cases, CLEAN's organizers demonstrated considerable social skills that enabled them to interpret CLEAN's own positionality with regards to targets, organize the *carwasheros* in a worksite toward a common goal, and bring the targets to the bargaining table through interactions with community sympathizers, coalition organizations, and others in the field.

This comparative analysis demonstrates how key interactions help determine strategy and how strategy relate to outcomes. CLEAN's victories and setbacks point to not only the importance of skilled leadership, but also attend to the persistent influence of environment in influencing strategies and outcomes. CLEAN's campaigns illustrate how strategies are shaped by interactions with key actors in multiple strategic action fields, and the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving desired outcomes is ultimately enabled or constrained by target characteristics, worker organizing, community and coalition support, and political opportunities—all of which are subsumed under characteristics of LA's regional geography.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

Low wage immigrant workers endure poverty wages and daily hard work. Kallenberg (2008) noted that as the nature of work changes in the U.S. economy, so must the response to challenge poverty and inequality. At a time when precarious conditions of low wage immigrant workers present obstacles to traditional forms of labor protection, unions and community based organizations in Los Angeles responded by experimenting with new partnerships and coalitions (Milkman, 2011). The CLEAN Carwash Campaign represents an innovative labor-community coalition to improve conditions for low wage immigrant car wash workers through challenging unjust employer practice and making concrete gains for workers through worksite and community organizing. In contending with the poor conditions endured by LA's *carwasheros*, CLEAN has managed to surprise skeptics by successfully unionizing not only two, but over 30 carwashes throughout California by the time of this writing.

This dissertation draws on field theory as conceptual framework to explain the CLEAN's coalition campaign to achieve collective bargaining agreements for *carwasheros*. The metaphor of strategic action fields is used to describe the environment within which CLEAN resides and key interactions among actors that shaped local campaigns: how unions and CBOs collaborate, how tactics capitalize on target car wash owners' vulnerabilities, and how individuals and groups are mobilized to help create leverage for the *carwasheros*' cause. In addition to proposing a framework to illustrate CLEAN's engagements with key actors in the labor, CBO, low wage immigrant worker organizing, and car wash fields, this dissertation also investigates how CLEAN's strategy setting is influenced by complex interactions with targets, workers,

community members and coalition organizations, and state actors. By comparing the evolution of four local campaigns undertaken by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to secure collective bargaining agreements for *carwasheros*, this study details how CLEAN strategizes and how key variables contributed to campaign victory or loss.

Although the CLEAN Carwash campaign has been formalized since 2008, to date, only a handful of cases studies and policy reports detail CLEAN's early legal tactics (see Avendaño & Fanning, 2014; Barry et. al., 2009; Garea & Stern, 2010; Narro, 2007). In addition to providing systematic empirical research on a prominent labor-community coalition that has captured national attention, the goal of this dissertation is also to add to the understanding of social movement coalition strategies. Given the ongoing importance of coalitions in social movement organizing efforts in the U.S, this dissertation aims to extend scholarly insights of recent low wage immigrant worker organizing to impart lessons for organizers, advocates, social workers, and other practitioners of social and economic justice organizing.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

Case studies of the Sikder, Damavandi, Vermont, and Thee Spot car washes illustrate how CLEAN's organizers sought to pursue strategic choices that best capitalize on target vulnerabilities, balance multiple stakeholder demands, strengthen the coalition, and ultimately achieve the goal winning collective bargaining agreements for *carwasheros*. Interactions with various actors in strategic action fields that CLEAN engages in—namely labor, CBO, immigrant organizing, and car wash fields—shaped available strategic options for CLEAN and subsequent campaign strategy development and outcomes.

One of the key findings of this dissertation is the identification of variables that are most consequential to CLEAN's campaigns. The comparative analysis points to target characteristics, worker organizing, coalition and community support, and political opportunities as factors that interact and jointly determine the degree of success or failure in CLEAN's campaigns.

First, target characteristics in terms of a target's vulnerability to economic and reputation damage and its ability and propensity for countermobilization were a major factor in determining campaign outcomes. Second, the quality of worker organizing—whether worker “heat” or enthusiasm was present, and whether CLEAN's organizers exercised leadership that cultivated rank-and-file leadership, contributed to the campaign's ability to weather target countermobilization. Next, support by CLEAN's coalition partner organizations and community members, comprised of customers and local residents, strengthened or diminished CLEAN's ability to inflict economic or reputational damage on the targets. Finally, on some occasions, CLEAN's ability to trigger state action assisted its ability to alter the targets' behaviors.

Findings from this dissertation offer insights into how target characteristics interact with internal mobilization efforts—a product of worker willingness and organizational leadership—to gain public recognition of causes to pressure target and produce outcomes. Along the way, the organizers' social skills in recognizing and recruiting community and coalition support accelerates campaign victories. In all four cases, leadership skills of CLEAN's organizers, in part, determined the campaign's ability to effectively perceive and rally coalition and community support and seize political opportunities. As recent efforts to examine the relationship of movement strategy to consequences open new questions related to the role of leadership in strategizing (Ganz 2000; Martin 2008), my comparative case studies of CLEAN point to the importance of leadership in understanding target vulnerabilities and strengths, developing strong



worksite organizing plans, rallying coalition and community support, and perceiving political opportunities to produce desired campaign results.

### **Lessons for Organizing**

Knowing that strategy can help to determine success and failure, knowledge of variables that affect outcomes of CLEAN's organizing campaign can be generalizable to other organizing campaigns and offer insights to unions, community-based organizations, and their coalitions on how they might better strategize to advance rights for low wage immigrant workers.

#### ***Boycott Works...on the Right Target in the Right Neighborhood***

King's (2011) research on boycotts delineated the boycott's effects and how they can link a social movement, the target, and the public. Case studies of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign affirm King's (2011) characterization that when targets are financially vulnerable, boycotts that produce economic damage can push the target to settle—and this was certainly the case with the Vermont and Thee Spot campaigns under the boycott-intensive small operator campaign model. On the other hand, when targets are larger and more cushioned from economic damage, the biggest challenge that boycotts can deliver to the target is to generate negative attention, for targets that seek to maintain reputation and good standing within the community wish to avoid sustained negative attention (King, 2011). In its campaigns against the large Westside employers, CLEAN effectively delivered reputation damage to the Sikders, yet was unable to do the same to the Damavandis. CLEAN's victories and setbacks add additional insights on boycotts; LA's geography resulted in different types of customers and community bases between the Westside and South LA, and hence affected the campaigns' ability to enroll boycott supporters. Before any social movement contemplates the boycott picket as a tactic, one must assess the goal of the

boycott, and how community characteristics might contribute to community members' willingness or indifference to support the boycott. In addition, as demonstrated in the Damavandi and Thee Spot campaigns, non-corporate targets not beholden to public shareholder pressures could also exhibit "irrational" ideological behaviors that render them unresponsive to boycotts and other public tactics. In the cases where CLEAN was victorious, the target was sensitive to both economic and reputation damage. In both cases where CLEAN lost, the targets were ideologically driven to not give into CLEAN's pressures, even if these exerted damages to their businesses. These patterns seem to have contributed to CLEAN's ability to engage community and rally to pressure the Sikders and Mrs. Kim, and their inability to do the same with the Damavandis and Rodriguez.

On the subject of choosing the "right" target, through engagement with the various car wash owners who belong to different networks of ethnic entrepreneurship, CLEAN realizes that more needs to be done to better understand LA's geographically bound and frequently fraught ethnic relations. In LA, employers of low wage immigrant workers, such as in the case of CLEAN's target car wash owners, are often immigrants themselves. In order for organizers to engage in dialogue with targets and transform egregious behaviors in LA's low wage industries, additional research into networks of immigrant ethnic entrepreneurs, their business logics, and their patterns of interacting with co-ethnic and non-coethnic immigrant labor is also a much needed field research project.

### ***No Shortcuts: Worker Organizing is the Foundation to Win***

Regardless of how organizing efforts begin, ultimately both top-down strategic outreach and planning and bottom-up organizing efforts from the workers must be present in order to

neutralize employer power and extract union victory (Milkman, 2006). Whether CLEAN opted for the comprehensive strategy utilizing elaborate tactics or the small operator strategy that drew primarily on boycotts, grassroots worker organizing remains the foundation for workers to achieve a lasting collective bargaining agreement. In other words, no matter how sophisticated a campaign strategy may be, without indigenous leadership at a worksite that truly seeks to alter power relations between the target and workers, no lasting gains could be made for workers. This might be a particularly challenging lesson for organizers who often, in the midst of difficult and fast-paced campaigns, opt to take on organizing tasks instead of delegating them to workers as opportunities to build their leadership.

CLEAN's campaign trajectories demonstrate the enduring importance of solid worker organizing. In the cases that failed to achieve lasting collective bargaining agreements, Damavandi and Thee Spot car washes, worker organizing efforts ceased due to employer retaliation. While this is somewhat the function of the target characteristics in terms of resources, capability, and predisposition for anti-union countermobilization, as shown in the victorious Sikder and Vermont car washes, solid worker organizing, rank and file leadership, and trust between organizer and *carwasheros* can also mitigate the effect of retaliation by preparing the workers. Through the comprehensive campaigns, CLEAN's organizers also learned that no legal tactics could substitute for worker organizing. Legal process is fraught with delays and risks to the worker, with limited penalties for the employer. In addition, many comprehensive campaign tactics require the participation of individual workers to be the public faces. In the case of Damavandi campaigns, workers had become so disinterested and fearful that no one came forward to testify in lawsuits, effectively closing that strategic option to CLEAN. Without

worker organizing, no unionization was possible at all, much less settling a collective bargaining agreement.

### ***Organizing Immigrants as Way Forward Revitalize the Labor Movement***

The 2017 U.S. Presidential election underscores a crisis for the American labor movement, especially as many union members opt for inward, protectionist and anti-immigrant rhetoric in favor of preserving jobs in diminishing sectors rather than showing solidarity with low wage immigrant workers. On the contrary, in Los Angeles, through grappling with the challenges of immigrant worker organizing, coalitions such as CLEAN involving unions, community based organizations, and immigrant advocates demonstrate how advocacy for labor and immigrant rights should not be separate discussions, but rather one conversation where bolstering immigrant rights strengthens workers' rights.

The CLEAN Carwash Campaign involves multiple organizations of various types across social movement boundaries in a formalized labor-community coalition located in Los Angeles—a city recognized as an important site for the revival of the labor movement (Milkman, 2006, 2011). In Los Angeles, CLEAN is emblematic of how unions are engaged in highly relevant work of organizing immigrant workers and transforming industries through collaboration with community partners. CLEAN has organized the “unorganizable” low wage immigrant car wash workers: consequently, there is attention on how CLEAN can become a model for organizing low wage industries that rely on immigrant labor. On a hopeful note, efforts to organize low wage immigrant workers such as the CLEAN Carwash Campaign has helped build broad labor-community coalitions in Los Angeles and other parts of California. Through CLEAN's work, LA's unions and CBOs had to learn to gain trust and work with one

another as institutional partners. As example, in the immigration crisis of early 2017, LA's unions and immigrant right CBOs—many of which came to know one another through CLEAN's work—leaped into action and have since consistently been collaborating on coordinating know-your-rights trainings and rapid response teams and to mitigate the latest assault on immigrant workers.

In the end, the daunting task of organizing low wage immigrant workers through coalitions might be the challenge that forces the rebuilding of the American labor movement.

### **Social Welfare Implications**

#### ***Policies to Increase Immigrant Worker Protection***

At a final staff meeting I attended in December 2014, CLEAN's organizers shared the sheer challenges of organizing a largely immigrant workforce:

*“When you are organizing workers in California, you are organizing immigrant workers. As soon as you start organizing, you see bosses starting to retaliate—as you have seen in our campaigns, bosses invoke immigration status as a way to fire activists and crush any organizing efforts altogether.”*

As I write this conclusion in 2017, the political climate in the U.S. remains hostile toward immigrants, particularly low wage immigrant workers. As workers seek to advance workplace rights, once again, they are faced with intimidation and the possible consequence of deportation. In 2017, during a wage claims hearing in Van Nuys, CA, an employer retaliated against the immigrant low wage worker by calling ICE—and ICE agents showed up at a California Labor Commissioner's office as the workers were about to testify.

Social worker, as policy advocates, are thus tasked with the challenge to explore advocacy avenues to increase protections for immigrant workers—such as a ban on federal immigration agents appearing at state enforcement agencies, and penalties for employers who release workers’ personal information to immigration authorities without the presence of a warrant. The urgent call for policy reform and advocacy is timely, as the current climate of immigration enforcement might undo the gains immigrant worker advocates have made by intimidating workers into not organizing against workplace abuses that not only harm immigrant workers, but undercut all law-abiding employers who fairly compensate employees.

### ***Opportunities for Social Workers in Organizing for Immigrant Worker Rights***

As low wage immigrant workers, *carwasheros* labor in harsh conditions and frequently experience wage theft and other abuses at work. Besides economic exploitation, low wage immigrant workers frequently experience poor health and psychological distress (Fink, 1998; Quandt, et. al., 2006). As work is intimately related to other social, economic, and political issues (Kallenburg, 2008), inequality, insecurity, and instability on the job have widespread effects on low wage immigrant workers and their families. At the community level, poor work conditions contribute to health disparities, political disenfranchisement, isolation, and further vulnerability to social problems among low wage immigrant workers (Flores et al., 2011).

As unions and community-based organizations across American cities are adding programs for new immigrants (Cordero-Guzman, 2005; Marwell, 2007; Milkman, 2012) while immigrant-serving nonprofits are modifying services to deal with consequences of precarious employment, such as occupational injuries and wage theft (Martin, 2010), CLEAN and its coalition work exemplify how civil society can respond to low wage immigrant workers’ needs.

Since social workers have long been practitioners of organizing to deal with consequences of economic exploitation (Garvin and Cox, 2001), they are well positioned to coordinate resources to intervene and respond to low wage immigrant workers' needs.

In the social work tradition, community organizing emphasizes building communities, identifying common problems and goals, mobilize resources, and developing and implementing strategies to achieve change (Minkler et.al, 2008; Staples, 2004). The CLEAN Carwash Campaign serves as a model of collaboration; its campaigns impart important lessons for social workers who contend with effects of low wage work as direct service providers, nonprofit managers, policy advocates, and community organizers. CLEAN's work in organizing *carwasheros* at the workplace exemplifies the community organizing ethos in social work that emphasizes collective action, participatory processes, and indigenous leadership (Staples, 2004). CLEAN's campaign engages *carwasheros* at the workplace and beyond to redress the structures of inequality through increasing problem solving ability of *carwasheros* themselves. The way CLEAN strategized and the persistent importance of target research, worker organizing, community and coalition engagement, and political opportunities in affecting campaign outcomes serve to remind social workers that power analysis, leveraging connections and resources, and building ownership and capacity of low wage immigrant workers to respond to individual and community problems is at the root of challenging structural inequality (Christens, 2010; Kretzman, 1993).

### **Epilogue & Concluding Thoughts**

Since 2012, the unionized car washes of Bonus and Vermont car washes have experienced the challenges of operating as union businesses in a field dominated by low wages

and unfair competition by “low road” employers. CLEAN had worked on advertising to its coalition partners and the general public on patronizing its union carwashes. However, these operations were hanging by a thread, with narrow profit margins.

Since my exit from fieldwork in December 2014, many more car washes throughout Southern California have organized to become unionized car washes. However, CLEAN’s organizers estimate that for every three car washes that gains a collective bargaining agreement, one would go out of business. As mentioned, it is often cheaper for carwash owners to engage in wage theft and then be fined than to pay *carwasheros* as they should. As result, it is widespread and commonplace that employers engage in abusive practices as they operate at thin profit margins. Through raising standards, unionized car wash owners have difficulty competing with their nonunion counterparts. As an example, in the middle of 2015, CLEAN’s second signatory, Vermont Car Wash, closed down, as Mrs. Kim quit the business altogether. After a series of emergency fundraisers held at the UCLA Downtown Labor Center, many *carwasheros* found work elsewhere in other car washes in South LA.

A member of CLEAN’s Steering Committee questioned whether it would be possible to fully organize an industry where the business logics rely on paying workers below minimum wage. Union rely on membership for existence; however, by raising standards, CLEAN is actually “organizing itself out.” As CLEAN seeks to eliminate the social conditions of poor wages and labor abuse in the LA car wash field, it brings changes to the field and often push owners to close—whether by picketing bad players such as Thee Spot Hand Wash out of business, or by raising standards where owners could no longer compete with the nearby “pirate” operations such as in the case of Vermont Car Wash. Perhaps the Southern California hand car wash industry, if it were to exist, must rely on low wage immigrant labor and labor abuses. By



reshaping the car wash field, CLEAN might lose the very members that it gains through unionization.

Perhaps CLEAN's wider contribution is being part of the force that transform the way low wage immigrant workers relate to their work, community, and society. Through popular education and worksite organizing, CLEAN empowers *carwasheros* to change their understanding of their own position. In 2017, two years after the closing of the unionized Vermont Car Wash, a handful of former Vermont activists managed to muster the funds to reopen a car wash at the same site, now as a union worker-owned cooperative named Vermont Gage Car Wash. While the *carwasheros* are optimistic about their future, time will tell the success of their endeavors. In the meantime, the *carwasheros* have demonstrated that they have become empowered to be able to become their own employers.

In transforming the low wage immigrant organizing and car wash fields, CLEAN has also gradually transformed. In late 2013, CLEAN opened up a worker center offering food pantry for *carwashero* families whose family incomes plunge during winter, and auto detailing lessons for *carwasheros* seeking to upgrade their skills. As work in previous campaigns facilitated its engagements with various LA unions and CBOs, CLEAN continued to hold up its end of the bargain in collaborating and supporting others in LA's union, CBO, and low wage immigrant worker organizing fields. CLEAN's organizers and *carwasheros* have walked picket lines for striking roofers and garment workers, attended rallies in support of LA's minimum wage ordinance, and offered its South LA warehouse office space as site for wage and hour workshops and immigration legal clinics. For CLEAN's 10-year anniversary celebration in April 2017, the South LA warehouse temporarily transformed into a gala space for the evening. At the event, organizers and staff of unions, CBOs, and other individuals who participated in some aspect of

CLEAN campaigns over the last decade had a chance to catch up on their current whereabouts. There were former college interns who are now community organizers recruiting one another for upcoming actions, labor and immigration attorneys discussing litigation strategy of impact cases, and researchers exchanging intel on new corporate campaigns. If anything, CLEAN has contributed inspiration and a network of alumni to the LA labor, immigrant, and social justice movements.

How low wage immigrant workers can continue to advance workplace justice continues to be worthy of exploration. This dissertation identifies elements of winning and losing campaigns, informing strategies to continue to build worker power and transform the dynamics between low wage employers and the immigrant workers they rely on. Although CLEAN is relatively new on the scene, its victories in the last few years have inspired similar campaigns to emerge across the nation as it signals that broadening support, building alliances across various types of organizations, and pursuing effective coalitional strategies might just be an answer in improving the lives for not just low wage immigrant workers, but everyone who aspires for dignity at the workplace.

## APPENDIX

### List of CLEAN's Steering Committee Organizations (as of December 2014)

AFL-CIO

Koreatown Immigrant Worker Alliance (KIWA)

Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund (MCTF)

UCLA Downtown Labor Center

United Steel Workers (USW) International

United Steel Workers (USW) Local 675

The Wage Justice Center

### List of CLEAN's Advisory Board Member Organizations (as of December 2014)

American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California (ACLU)

Bet Tzedek Legal Services

Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE-LA)

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)

Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (COSH)

Enlace

Instituto de Educacion Popular del Sur the California (IDEPSCA)

Jewish Labor Committee

Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)

National Immigration Law Center (NILC)

Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)

St. John's Well Child and Family Center

### List of Individuals Involved in CLEAN's Four Campaigns from 2011-2014

Art: Executive for CLEAN from 2008-2010.

Betsy: Community organizer for CLEAN during the Sikder campaign who left for graduate school in 2011.

Chloe: Strategic Action Coordinator for CLEAN from 2008-2011 and acting director of CLEAN from 2011-2012.

Damavandis: Persian Jewish family that own Santa Monica, Millennium, and Bubblebee car washes. Wife Edna is registered owner of the corporate entity; husband Ben (Bijan) and son Shawn operate and manage the car washes.

Flor: Turf organizer of Bubblebee Car Wash in the Damavandi campaign.

Henry: Executive Director of CLEAN from 2010-2011.

Jose: Turf organizer assigned to other South LA campaigns.

Juliet: Lead Organizer for CLEAN from 2011-present; turf organizer of Vermont Car Wash and BJ/Navas/Thee Spot Handwash. A graduate of UCLA Labor and Workplace Studies Minor.

Justin: Executive Director of CLEAN in from 2011-2016; previously, Lead Organizer and turf organizer in the Sikder campaign.

Kevin: Senior researcher from the AFL-CIO Center for Strategic Research assigned to assist CLEAN with target research.

Kim, Mi Sook (Mrs. Kim): Korean American owner of Vermont Car Wash located at Vermont and Gage in South LA; also president of the Korean American Car Wash Association; eventually signed CBA with CLEAN.

Rabbi Jonathan Klein: Executive Director of CLUE-LA and a member of CLEAN's Community Advisory Board.

Luis: Turf organizers of Marina and Bonus Car Washes from 2008-2011; self-identified more as a USW organizer instead of a member of CLEAN's organizing team.

Maria: Turf organizer of the Santa Monica and Millennium car washes in the Damavandi campaign; former *carwashera* activist of Oaxacan heritage; left CLEAN in 2013.

Navas, Luis: Latino manager of BJ Carwash who became owner of Navas Carwash that eventually signed CBA with CLEAN; later left LA due to debt.

Neidi: Strategic Action Coordinator for CLEAN from 2012-2015. Formerly Legal Organizer of the Wage Justice Center who was assigned to CLEAN during the Sikder campaign in 2011.

Pirians: Persian Jewish brothers who own and operate the Vermont Hand Wash in north central LA (not to be confused with Vermont Car Wash) who were imprisoned for egregious wage theft and worker abuse.

Rodriguez, Eric: former *carwashero* from Vermont Car Wash who took over Navas Carwash and turned it into Thee Spot Handwash. Was put out of business by CLEAN's picketing.

Rose: CLEAN's Community Organizer who came on board in 2011. A graduate of UCLA's Labor and Workplace Studies Minor.

Sikders: billionaire family whose patriarch resides in Bangladesh and is well connected to the Prime Minister as an infrastructure developer; sons Nick manages the high end Koi Restaurants and Dipu manages a chain of car washes in California including Marian and Bonus Car Washes—the first unionized carwashes in the country.

Reverend Tamayo: clergy organizer from CLUE-LA assigned to work with CLEAN in the Westside campaigns. Left CLUE-LA in 2014.

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