

Inequality, Violence, and Gender Relations in a Global City: New York, 1986–1996

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In the 1980s and 1990s, the transformation of the United States toward a global and information-oriented economy has precipitated changing expectations and opportunities for working class men and women. Men have lost work, poor women have lost welfare benefits and many working class people no longer have access to adequate housing. The overall impact of these changes, including the uneven destruction of poor communities and the shifting, unstable gender hierarchies they have produced, has been to generate intense conflict reflected in increased violence in the community and in the household. The research described below, based on fieldwork in New York City in the 1990s among women and their families who have been relocated from family shelters into permanent housing, begins to outline some of the intervening processes that foster violence towards poor women. For many women violence is the immediate event that precipitates them into homelessness. But, when women leave the shelter system and have to create their lives anew, they are often alone and in need of help. Their isolation puts them, once again, at risk of finding men who help in some ways but also abuse them. The analysis examines the areas, such as child care, that social services are able to address and other areas in which such services fail. Overall, the paper suggests that the global city which New York has become in the 1990s has generated an increase in inequality, which in turn increases violence in shifting poor communities and relocated households.

Key Words: Violence, Poverty, Urban, United States, Gender

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In the 1980s and 1990s, the transformation of the United States toward a global and information-oriented economy has precipitated shifting expectations and opportunities for men and women (Castells 1996; Susser 1997). Men have lost unionized, stable jobs, poor women have more access to low-paid, non-union service work but have lost welfare benefits, and many working class people no longer have access to adequate housing (Wilson 1996; Smith 1996; Susser 1996). In New York City, in particular, the transformation of the city into a center for global finance has led to a rapid increase in the costs of real estate accompanied by a struggle over the dismantlement of many of the social services characteristic of the welfare state. Since the fiscal crisis of 1975, high income professionals have moved into the city, following the processes of gentrification. In the same period, as rents have risen and public assistance has been reduced or terminated, many poor people have been forced out of previously working class districts and sometimes out of housing altogether (Smith 1996; Susser 1991, 1993, 1996). Thus, since the early 1980s, as a result of shifts both in real estate investment and public policy, many families in New York City have found themselves homeless.

As New York City investments are re-oriented toward the new global economy, the changing gendered and racially differentiated employment opportunities for working class people combined with the disappearance of low- or middle income housing and the increasingly inadequate and gender-specific public assistance policies have produced uneven and unstable hierarchical relations between men and women within households. As women and men struggle to survive the assault on working class people instituted by the new global city, the different gendered strategies they can use generate intense conflict, which is reflected in increased violence in the community and in the household. In the United States, women have historically received preference in public assistance and housing when they have young children, while poor men have had little access to these resources. Thus, men and women at a low income level need each other for survival at the same time as they may have conflicts over many other issues. The research described below among working class families and single men and women in New York City begins to outline some of the intervening processes, in particular, the new experience of housing relocation, that have led to violence in the household.

Overall, the experience of poverty in 1990s New York City appears to incorporate violence against both men and women. A major contributor to violence in the global city is the policing of the increases in inequality, which involves increased cases of police brutality against residents of poor neighborhoods (Smith 1996). Homicide rates, which rose dramatically in poor neighborhoods from the 1970s to the 1990s, clearly demonstrate that poor men die at young ages (McCord and Freeman 1990). Most of the people murdered were men and they were murdered by other men. However, perhaps partly as a consequence of the increasing brutality to which men are submitted, poor women are being battered and injured at an accelerated rate (Grisso *et al.* 1996). In addition, although fewer women are murdered than men, more than half of the women murdered in New York City are killed by their partners or some other person familiar to them, and most of the murdered women are poor (Wilt 1997).

Many women and children who have been or are homeless, have been physically abused, as documented by psychologists and sociologists (Fantuzzo *et al.* 1991). From 1987 to 1994, I and my research assistants worked with people living in city-funded shelters where a single small room was allotted to each family in dilapidated hotels rented by the city and administered by voluntary agencies or private businessmen (Susser 1993). We also interviewed poor women living in their own apartments. Nearly every woman we consulted had had some experience of violence.

Violence is generated in the current conditions of poverty in New York City, and for many women violence is the immediate event that leads them to seek assistance from city shelters, (Weitzman, Knickman, and Shinn 1990). Many of the families we worked with and the women we spoke with in the shelters had experienced domestic violence in their childhood, and in addition, violence was the primary reason they gave for leaving their husbands and homes. As the following descriptions suggest, when women depart from the shelter system and have to create their lives anew, they are often alone and in need of help. They may cooperate and live with men who help in some ways but are also violent toward them. The lives of the women we came to know reflect the complexity of relations between men and women, the interaction of economic and emotional needs in newly created households, and the ways in which women's strategies may lead them to remain in or return

to a violent relationship, which they may try to leave at a later point.

From 1992 to 1994, I worked with two research assistants, Denise Oliver and Maritza Williams, to follow women who had been relocated from family shelters into permanent housing. While the construction of race and ethnicity was not a primary focus of the research, the perceptions of the predominantly African American and Latina women with whom we worked, the perceptions of the case workers, and our relations to both were clearly threaded through with expectations of gender, race, and class. Throughout the paper, I have adopted the constructed categories of African American, Latina, and white to describe ourselves and the people we met—not to oversimplify identity issues, but to recognize their social significance. While such categories are used by social service providers to label and possibly stereotype clients in institutional interactions, people also employ these categories to describe themselves and visualize their place in the world in which they live, (for a discussion of the problematic categories of ethnicity, race, and gender in the United States and among ethnographers, see: Brodtkin 1994; Frankenberg 1994; Harrison 1995; Zavella 1994).

The researchers who assisted with this project spoke fluent Spanish and were CUNY doctoral anthropology students and women of color with African American, Afro-Caribbean and Latina backgrounds. I, myself, am a woman of Jewish descent. Born in South Africa, reared in Britain, I have lived as an immigrant in New York City for many years. Since conducting fieldwork in Puerto Rico, I have acquired some ability to converse in Spanish. In recognition of the social construction of race and gender, to combat and contradict the barriers and hierarchy of white privilege in the United States, and to indicate respect for the families interviewed, I believed it was important to find doctoral student researchers who reflected the racialized identities of the women with whom we worked. African American women ethnographers might more easily negotiate boundaries of color and national identity although they still differed significantly from the women we met in terms of life options and class. The caseworkers themselves were selected by the agencies to reflect the identities of the women with whom they worked and, in many cases, were closer in education and income to the newly relocated women than the ethnographers. This similar social background may have led to better communication between the caseworkers and the women

they were assisting, although respect for poor families was not always evident in the behavior of social service providers of any identity. It was also significant that the one male caseworker seemed as effective as the women caseworkers in implementing social service objectives. Nor, as will become evident from the descriptions below, could the common social background of caseworkers with their clients overcome the institutional problems in the provision of services, or make it possible to protect the relocated women from violent situations.

The detailed descriptions of poor women living in apartments draws largely on a study of relocated households. We contacted the women in new apartments as part of the ethnographic component of the evaluation of the Intensive Case Management Program (ICM), which was funded and developed by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in cooperation with the Hunter College Center on Family Policy. The women had been referred to social service agencies to assist in the transition to new housing. The ICM program allotted each woman three months of intensive assistance, during which caseworkers were working with many fewer cases than usual and were able to devote extra time to facilitate the family's transition into permanent housing. The fieldwork involved observations of the case managers as well as the women in the new apartments. The households were all observed over a period of four months. We were introduced to the women through local community organizations and social service agencies who were arranging the new housing. We visited the women in their homes, both when the case workers were present and when they were not.

The agencies were asked to choose eligible families for participant observation purposes. We asked the agency directors to select caseworkers they regarded as skilled and experienced and families who were willing to assist the researcher. Since we were particularly concerned to document institutional services available to the families we scheduled visits to the households as frequently as possible at times when we had the opportunity to observe caseworkers in action. We observed numerous intake interviews, a termination interview, many interactions in the middle of the process between relocated women and caseworkers, and two occasions on which caseworkers actually visited women after termination of their official program. On several occasions, ethnographers accompanied families to choose furniture or walk their children through the neighborhood. We also visited families when no

caseworkers were present and met family members such as mothers, sisters, and grandchildren who were not residing in the apartments with relocated women. We discussed interactions with family members, friends, and partners with the women whenever possible.

Our methodology may have contributed to our impression that the women in the relocated apartments lived isolated lives. We entered the neighborhoods through the relocated families and the research focused on individual experiences of relocated families in different geographic locations. In concentrating our research on the relocation process and the interaction with caseworkers, the ethnography sacrificed the rich data of community life. Although the women themselves frequently commented on their separation from their kin and previous neighbors in their new apartments, further ethnographic research in each community might well have documented continuing social networks (Susser 1988). Nevertheless, I believe there has been a significant qualitative shift in the longterm stability of neighborhood life in New York City since the 1970s, precipitated by gentrification processes, homelessness, and other changes associated with the global economy, and that the isolation expressed by relocated homeless women is one indicator of the effects of such shifts.

The women in the relocation study were not necessarily representative of all poor or homeless women. In order to be included in the study, they had to fit certain risk criteria for future homelessness. These risks included previous substance abuse in the household, children under six years of age, mental illness, domestic violence, and various other criteria. Households with any ONE of these conditions qualified for the study. In the course of the research, we met people from many households who would qualify to be in the study by these criteria but who did not keep in contact with case managers and were not recruited to the program. We visited a number of poor women with children who had been referred to the social service agencies for transitional assistance but did not wish to maintain any institutional connections or who accepted initial assistance and then moved away and lost contact with social service providers. In fact, for about six months before we met the four women whose lives are described here, researchers met with more than ten newly relocated families who qualified for the research in terms of family risk situation but who refused assistance from the social service providers. In some such cases, on the little information available, it seemed that the women believed

that they could cope better without assistance and resented the invasion of privacy the social service provider represented. In other cases, it appeared that women or their partners might still be involved to some degree in the use or distribution of drugs and refused intervention because of the legal dangers involved in exposure. Such experiences suggest that the households we worked with, while qualifying as high risk according to the criteria of the program, did not necessarily evidence the most violence or the most problematic households in the relocated community. However, even if the lives of the women we came to know were more problematic than many others, an analysis of the experience of poor women must still take their experience of violence into account.

VIOLENCE AND ETHNOGRAPHY

It is difficult to write about violence against women without addressing a number of problematic boundaries. Many poor women make decisions that place them in situations involving the possibility of violent conflict, or that move them from one such situation to another. To describe poor women and their lives without reporting that women take such actions would leave a false impression. However, reporting their role in placing themselves in violent situations runs the danger of representing poor women as "self-destructive victims." To the contrary, most of the women we worked with were resourceful, committed mothers with major concerns for their children and households. In fact, as researchers of domestic violence have noted, women who have suffered battering have to be even stronger and more resourceful than other women in order to maintain their households through chronic threats and periodic crises (Richie 1996). The overall finding that emerges from the lives documented here suggests that in New York City in the 1990s, as poor women struggle with homelessness, housing relocation, and child care responsibilities in the context of transient and inadequate institutional assistance, they may look for support from men who have their own conflicting needs and thereby risk the danger of escalating violence.

VIOLENCE AND HOMELESSNESS

The experience of homelessness and dependence upon the shelter system may lead women directly into violent situations.

In Manhattan, for example, women without homes who spent time at a drop-in center (an assembly room with chairs, tables, and a television, available for homeless people during the day but without sleeping facilities) claimed that they looked for a man for protection. If they were not part of a heterosexual couple, they thought they were vulnerable to assault on the streets. Women were explicit about their need for men's protection and saw themselves as open to attack because of their lack of a home. Separated from their original communities, women cannot rely on kin and friendship networks, which might protect them from such situations. They had few institutional safeguards from police or other agencies, who tend to view them as criminals rather than people in need of protection. The women believed that if they found a partner, he would protect them from the other people, even if he beat them or treated them badly from time to time.

In other instances, as noted above, women enter shelters expressly to escape conflict. However, as this study documents, such temporary relocation does not always solve the problem of harassment and violence. Jane, for example, was forced into homelessness in order to escape abuse. She was living with her two children in a family shelter in Manhattan. Her grandmother in Trinidad had reared her. As a teenager she had come to the United States, where her mother was living, but never established contact with her. She married a man in the US and had two children. He beat her and she ran away with the two children, taking a bus from New Haven to New York City. When her husband promised not to repeat the violence, she returned to him, hoping to preserve a stable, economically viable household for her children. However, eventually, she left and again took a bus to New York City, requesting assistance from the Emergency Assistance Bureau of the New York State Social Services Department. After several months waiting with her children in a large warehouse situation with several hundred other women and children and no separate rooms, she was finally placed in a family shelter, in one room with her children, and was waiting to find an apartment. Her only acceptable alternative was to support her children alone in a strange city. She said that she would not return to her husband. In such a vulnerable situation, it was not clear her decision would bring personal safety or security for her children or herself.

RECONSTRUCTING HOMES: VIOLENCE IN A NEW SETTING

In the following pages, I focus on the experiences of four women who have found their way through violence, street living, substance use and detoxification, the removal of their children, and a miserable passage through a variety of warehouse dormitories and homeless shelters, to emerge with their own rental apartments, free of drugs, and ready to build a new life for themselves and their children. Their living expenses and rent were temporarily subsidized by public assistance at the time the research was conducted. However, from 1996, due to changes in public assistance policies and "welfare reform," they would no longer be entitled to the same assistance and would be required to work for the funds they received (Susser 1997). The consequences of such reductions in public assistance entitlements and whether the women were able to stay in their homes following these changes would need to be documented in further research. Nevertheless, even under the more extensive public assistance regulations of the early 1990's, each woman's story represents a dramatic struggle for the achievement of a home. When a woman finally makes her way out of the shelter system, where families may be forced to stay for several years, finding an apartment represents far more than simply gaining a roof over her head. Once she has a home, a woman can begin to process legal claims for the return of her children. She can cook for her family and friends and create the warmth of social relations based on a stable home life. She can look for a partner to share her new home and make plans for the future. Each of the women described here was creating new social relations and strengthening emotional ties around the fundamental attainment of her own home. However, each woman's steps toward the creation of home and family were also shadowed by the violence that she had tried for years to avoid.

Rosa was a thirty-one year old African American woman with three children: a girl, aged 12, and two boys, aged 9 and 4. Rosa had been forced into homelessness several times by violence from her husband and her boyfriend. After Rosa moved out of a shelter for battered women, Dawn, an African American caseworker from the social service agency that managed the shelter, was assigned to visit Rosa to assist in her family's transition to her apartment in a new neighborhood.

Rosa's History

Rosa grew up in Brooklyn with her mother and her stepfather, an older sister, and a younger brother. At the age of seven, while Rosa was sitting on her mother's lap, her stepfather shot and killed her mother. Rosa was later cared for by her maternal grandmother. Rosa believed her grandmother treated her badly, including sometimes beating her, because she blamed her for her mother's death. At 16, Rosa ran away from her grandmother and went to live with her older sister. Later, she married a construction worker with a reasonable income and they had two children.

After many years of a difficult and oppressive marriage, in which she was frequently confined in her apartment and battered by her husband, Rosa finally left home with her children to enter a shelter for battered women. By the time we met her, Rosa had been in several shelters and group homes. During that period she had found a new partner and had had a third child, but the new partner also beat her, so she once again sought help at a home for battered women run by the agency through which we worked. After six months, with the assistance of the shelter agency, she found an apartment. The social work agency provided Rosa with a temporary internship sorting agency mail; the internship paid less than minimum wage but allowed her to enter the job market. She was working regularly and she hoped that this would provide a basis for future employment. With Dawn's assistance, she also found schools and summer programs for her three children. However, her wages could not possibly cover the household expenses for a family of four, even with a subsidized rent.

Although Rosa had entered the shelter to get away from her boyfriend, they were still in touch. Perhaps to protect herself from further social service intervention in her relationship, she said to us, "He don't beat me, just slaps me in the head sometimes." She also explained that when he had money, "he was O.K." However, she had received a telephone call from a friend telling her that this boyfriend was HIV positive. She was worried and enraged, stating that if her youngest child had AIDS she "would kill him [the boyfriend]." Although Rosa knew that she herself was now also at risk for HIV infection, it was the possible infection of her child that concerned her in our discussions. Nevertheless, she was still seeing this "ex-boyfriend", she said, because she "was going to get money out of him." Despite Rosa's anger concerning the possible

transmission of HIV infection to herself and her child, and her fear of future violence, she needed the money in order to hold onto her hard-won apartment, job, and education for her children.

Rosa also was dating someone else about whom she said, "He's a bus driver and he's healthy, and a clean looking person, so I don't have to worry." Once again, this man's economic viability, symbolized by his steady work, is the first aspect mentioned in her description. At the same time, Rosa's fear of AIDS is reflected in her denial of risk, as she explained, "I don't have to worry." She was hoping to avoid the problems of poverty in the 1990s by finding a man with a good, unionized, stable job and, in her view, no risk of HIV infection. As she negotiates her relationships, Rosa has to weigh the exigencies of her economic situation and her need for emotional support against the possibilities of violent conflict as well as the particularly high risk of transmission of HIV infection in this milieu.

Within a few months of moving into her new apartment, Rosa had to cope with violence from a different quarter. On one occasion when Dawn and the ethnographer visited Rosa by appointment, Rosa's sister was there. Rosa was not welcoming, and Dawn soon decided it would be better to leave and return at another time. During a later visit, Rosa told us that her sister had been threatened and battered by a man and had come to Rosa for help. Rosa had called the police to have the man removed from her apartment. The neighbors in the building complained about the disturbance and the fact that the police were called to her apartment. Rosa was upset by the complaints and was afraid they might constitute grounds for her eviction from the apartment. In this instance, violent conflict was once again threatening the home she was building for her family. However, the incident also demonstrated the significance of kin support for both women as well as the ways in which strong kin networks may generate conflict even as they sometimes protect women from violence.

If her own social networks brought risk as well as support, the institutional support of a social service worker also failed to protect Rosa from threats to the new life she was creating. Rosa was able to make use of Dawn's help to arrange schools and summer programs for her children, which was a crucial intervention for the children's current stability and future possibilities. However, Dawn made little contribution in helping Rosa to avoid the violence in her relationships or to work out a way to protect herself from HIV infection.

She seemed unable, if not unwilling, to explain the issues of HIV infection to Rosa during the interviews we observed.

FLEEING VIOLENCE IN THE ATTEMPT TO BUILD A NEW LIFE

The experiences of the next two women described pointedly demonstrate the futility of measures such as fleeing into the shelter system and even relocating to a new borough (one of the five districts of New York City), which are advocated by social service agencies to protect women from partners with a history of violence. In each of these instances, women found themselves isolated in new neighborhoods, far from friends and kin, but not far enough to be safe from the men who had been their partners. In such a situation, women may have less support available than in their original community and may become more dependent on sometimes ineffective social services or on problematic relationships.

Shana, a young African American woman, had been living in a homeless shelter until, with the help of the shelter staff, she found a new apartment. She was 22 years old and was living with her two daughters, a three-year-old and one-year-old. She had been referred to a social service agency by the shelter after she moved into an apartment. At our first meeting, Shana told Julia, the Latina caseworker assigned to her for the transition period, that she wanted to complete high school and look for vocational training. She also asked for help to free herself from her conflicted and violent relationship with her husband. Shana seemed to be a caring and effective mother who hoped to find a way to finish high school and look for work, but was effectively trapped by her husband's violence.

Shana had moved into the upstairs apartment of a two-story wood-frame house in the Bronx. The front door was locked and the stairs leading up to Shana's apartment were carpeted as was the apartment itself. The sparsely furnished two-bedroom apartment was newly painted, light, and clean. The windows had guard rails for the children's safety. The city rented the apartment from the homeowner and, in return, the landlord was obligated to maintain the lease agreement for six months. During this period the homeowner was unable to evict the renters whatever happened.

Shana had originally lived in Brooklyn with her husband. At that time her apartment was close to where her mother lived together with her sisters, who ranged in age from four years to young

women in their twenties. Her husband's mother and family also lived in Brooklyn. In Brooklyn Shana had lived in a tight-knit community where she received some assistance with babysitting, but also, as she saw it, had to endure family interference and to assist in family responsibilities for a widespread network of kin, most significantly her younger siblings.

Shana's husband had worked as a manager for McDonalds, a fast-food chain, and then for a moving company. He became angry and violent with Shana, and she had asked him to leave several times and then let him back. Finally, after he hit her with a baseball bat, she had called the police who took her to hospital. After that Shana refused to return to the apartment with her husband. Instead she first went to stay with her sisters and then, when that became too crowded and conflicted, she entered the shelter system. Her husband moved in with his mother, became involved in selling crack/cocaine, and was later arrested and convicted on drug charges.

While her husband was in prison, Shana found her current apartment in the Bronx, about two hours by public transportation from her previous home. She said that this had been very difficult; finally a friend wrote a letter to Mayor David Dinkins (a Democrat and the first African American mayor of New York City, 1990–1994), explaining her situation, and that this was how she had located an apartment. Shana knew how to cope in the City, as evidenced by her strategies to find an apartment and services for her children in the new neighborhood. Before Julia visited her, Shana had already located the Women and Infant Children program and found a clinic that would accept her daughters. In spite of her domestic and financial difficulties, she was beginning to construct a healthy and safe environment for her children.

After Shana's husband was released from prison, Shana's friend in the shelter told him where to find her. He moved into her new apartment with her almost immediately. They both tried to rebuild their family life with the children in their new home. Shana's husband had been living with her for little over a month before Shana realized that he was becoming violent toward her again. She said she felt like a prisoner in her own apartment. At this point she called the police. According to Shana, the police told her they could do nothing as her husband had shared the new apartment for more than 30 days and therefore he now had a right to stay there.

Although Shana might have requested a court hearing to obtain a legal Order of Protection, which would forbid her husband to

come near her, the police did not suggest this or assist her in any other way. In cases such as this, partly from sexism and partly from previous experience with the contradictions of family life, police often assume that the woman will drop the charges or return to her husband, and therefore they do not pursue criminal investigations. Many times, in fact, the complexities of a woman's life lead her to fulfill these expectations, as Shana did, on several occasions. Such reversals confirm the prejudices of the police and other state agencies. However, as a result, when a woman finally strikes out on her own, she receives little assistance in criminal procedures and is frequently ignored or treated with disrespect when she requests judicial action. New York City funds Victim Services to address precisely this problem, but as will be clear below, this organization, too, may sometimes fail to help women in meaningful ways.

During Julia's first visit, Shana repeated several times that she wanted her husband to move out of the apartment. She asked Julia to help her to arrange this. Julia told Shana that she would contact the child welfare bureaucracy that had been involved in Shana's previous move in order to enlist their assistance in this process. She also offered to contact the police to begin eviction proceedings. Julia explained to Shana that she might need to find temporary shelter and protection. She also warned Shana that her husband might come back and try to break the windows or break the door down, and that Shana should be prepared for these possibilities. Julia then gave Shana a list of human resource agencies where she might call to find shelter when the process began.

Although she was not dismissive of Julia's help, and may have been inspired by the sense of support and encouragement, Shana finally convinced her husband to leave by herself. She did not move out of her apartment or rely on any of the list of resources Julia had provided.

On at least one occasion, Shana's husband found his way back into the apartment. Shana's sisters were visiting and she believed that they let him in. Her husband came into the kitchen and cut her face with a razor. Shana's younger sister called the police. The police came, but her husband was not arrested. Later, Shana said that she still had problems convincing her landlord to keep the downstairs door locked and not to allow her husband or his family into the building. Every time the bell rang, Shana was afraid that it was her husband coming to harass her. Although she lived in fear of her husband's return, she was happy with her new apartment and new

neighborhood and was not prepared to relocate in line with the expectations of social service agencies in cases of domestic violence.

Julia attempted to connect Shana with Victim Services. Shana did not keep the appointments, indicating through her actions an ambivalence that she voiced later, although she continued to agree reluctantly to reschedule. On one occasion, Shana mentioned that an outreach worker from Victim Services had recently visited her in her new apartment. Shana regarded the Victim Services representative, an African American woman, as cold and bureaucratic and said she did not trust her. Describing vividly how the outreach worker's "coffee cup shook and spilled in her hands," Shana said she could feel the visitor's fear while she was in the apartment. Shana said that she would rather work with Julia. Julia reminded Shana that she was only assigned to work with her for three months and, unlike Victim Services, could not provide continuing help with the issues of domestic violence.

Shana articulated a number of reasons for her reluctance to contact Victim Services. When she missed her first appointment, after her husband had moved out, Shana said that she did not understand why she had to go to Victim Services since she was not in need of help. Later, Shana explained that the agency allowed her husband to participate and she was adamant that she did not want to see him. She believed that if her husband participated in the program he would be allowed to meet with her and the children. Shana said that her husband needed to find a program of his own and not be allowed to see the children "as he never did anything for them." This demonstrated one way in which the perspectives of battered women may conflict with psychologists' assumptions about the importance of fathers in the emotional lives of children.

In the course of a subsequent conversation, Shana added that she did not want to work with Victim Services as they would require her to move to another apartment. She said she refused to move again and that she did not believe that it was necessary for her to move or that it would be effective. She pointed out that she had just moved through the shelter system and to a different borough and that her husband had found her immediately. In addition, she was now comfortable in her new apartment, had found furniture and resources in the neighborhood, and did not wish to move again. She said that the woman who had come to visit her from Victim Services had offered to help her move and that she believed that was what the agency would make her do.

As a 22-year-old single mother coping with problems of violence and a new environment in which she was somewhat isolated, Shana was a resourceful and responsible parent. She had found her way around her new neighborhood and located a new clinic for her children even before meeting Julia. From Shana's perspective, in the face of her imminent loss of emotional support and encouragement from Julia and her previous loss of her community ties, the services were not presenting useful alternatives. As a woman with broad competence in practical matters, less in need of behavioral suggestions than money, encouragement, and empathy, Shana was repelled by the lack of humanity or situation-appropriate practical help on the part of the outreach workers when confronted with her reasonable fears for her own and her children's safety.

Although violence frequently leads women to flee their homes, such flight, commonly advocated by social service agencies, does not always protect them from violence. The structural isolation created by such relocation and the lack of ongoing support undermine the purposes of the move, as men need housing or women look to men for economic assistance and gender affirmation. In Shana's case, it was not the relocation but the temporary emotional support she received from Julia that helped her to separate herself from a problematic husband.

Amelia's Description of Her Life

After extensive childhood experiences of violence and misery, and already the mother of three children, Amelia married a violent man who introduced her to crack/cocaine. After many years of marriage and the birth of six more children, she escaped from her husband, with the assistance of the police.

Amelia and her children then made their way through a series of "homeless hotels." These were rundown hotels where the management made large sums of money renting rooms to New York City as temporary housing for homeless families. In the early 1980s, as homeless families began to proliferate and to become a political embarrassment to the New York City mayors, such hotels became notorious for their rats, collapsing stairrails, poor maintenance, and security problems.

During this period of homelessness, between 1984 and 1987, acquaintances of Amelia apparently reported her use of crack and her child-rearing problems to the New York City child welfare bureau. Two of the younger girls, found to have sexually transmitted

diseases, were placed in foster care. Another daughter (aged 13 in 1986) was removed from Amelia's care after Amelia hit her. By the time Amelia left the shelter system, all her children had been removed from her care. She describes the next few years in terms of the drugs she used to drown the misery of losing the children and her efforts to get them back through finding housing and trying to enter a detoxification program.

In 1993, Amelia was living with Jeff, whom she had met in a detoxification program. With the assistance of shelter staff, they had found themselves an apartment in which to try to start a new life. Two of her children had been legally adopted by new families and two were still in foster care. The others were beyond the legal age for foster care and were living in their own apartments.

In the first six weeks everything appeared to be working well. After their relocation from the homeless shelter, where Jeff and Amelia had lived for six months, an African American case-worker, Susan, was assigned to visit them for the transitional three months. In the early meetings, Jeff did most of the talking and said that they had both been free of drugs for two years. Amelia said that she still attended her out-patient drug prevention program, while Jeff did not. Living in adequate housing and being free of drugs were essential preconditions for Amelia to reclaim her children.

Jeff and Amelia said that they both very much wanted to reclaim Amelia's children. Her older children, accompanied by her grandchildren, visited frequently. Amelia's teenage daughters, who officially lived with other families, cooked meals in the kitchen while their toddlers played on the living room floor. Jeff and Amelia were clearly the center of a large extended family. Susan helped Amelia compose letters and contact lawyers who could assist in legal proceedings to bring her younger children to live with her.

Susan also listed health care resources, scheduled times to collect furniture for the apartment, and offered to find clothes for Amelia and help with budgeting suggestions. Although such suggestions were politely welcomed by Amelia and Jeff, they were, themselves, fully aware of how to access resources. As Amelia explained about their entry into the shelter system:

"So I knew where to go. So I took him down to EAU [Emergency Assistance Unit], Emergency Welfare, and he got in the system that way, and we're still clean, going into the shelter ..." Jeff explained:

"There was this dude that was working there, and he got us into a shelter that was couples only, and it was like three rooms ... and

he just pushed us right through, and what happened was, the people that was there, they said, 'How'd you get out of here that quick?' and we went to see three apartments, and this was the third one and we took it."

Jeff and Amelia were also adept at intricate budget calculations. In fact, from the ethnographers' observations, they were in no need of Susan's budgetting suggestions. However, as in most cases we observed, budget planning was a priority for the caseworker. The implication was that it was individual budget management rather than fundamental lack of funds that was the problem.

During the second month after they had met, Susan arranged with Amelia and Jeff to meet the family (including several of the children still legally in foster care and the grandchildren) in the newly opened Riverbank State Park for a picnic. Several days before the picnic was to take place, Amelia came to Susan to explain that Jeff had left. He had taken their household money and bought drugs. Thus, we were confronted with a radically different picture of the situation. Amelia said that she had known that Jeff was using drugs and unreliable, but that she could not explain this in the interviews when he was always present. In fact, Jeff had nearly always done most of the talking.

Susan helped Amelia through this financial crisis and continued to help her to bring her children to live in the apartment. Amelia discussed getting an Order of Protection against Jeff, in case he came back to take more money. At her termination interview with Susan, Amelia asked the caseworker to continue helping her since "things were just starting up." Amelia suggested that, now that Jeff had left and she was beginning to recreate her family, she needed Susan to help her complete the work. But Susan was not funded to continue her visits. The program offered intensive case management, much more holistic attention and more hours per week than most social services, but for only three months.

With Susan's help, Amelia had written letters to request the return of the foster children, but no official results had yet been achieved. On an unofficial level, matters were different. The two teenage daughters and their babies were virtually living with their mother. One younger daughter who had been officially adopted by another family was abandoned on Amelia's doorstep by her adoptive parents. They had decided to move out of New York City and leave the child with her birthmother. Legal decisions to the contrary, Amelia had become an essential figure in her children's

existence and the stability of her life and apartment was helping to maintain three generations on a precarious economic footing. Her legal efforts, household strategies, and sophisticated budget calculations consolidated her central position in her family.

Sadly, a few months later, Amelia was arrested and jailed for physically assaulting a neighbor with a lead pipe. She said he had been molesting her daughter. The explosive situation undermined Amelia's efforts to rebuild her family and maintain a safe household for her children and grandchildren. The new household was, once again, devastated by violence, a situation exacerbated by temporary or inadequate social service assistance.

Jeni's History

When Jeni moved into her new apartment in Central Harlem she was 32 years old, had five children, and was receiving public assistance. Four children lived with her: two boys, 11 and 10 years old, and two girls, 8 years old and 3 months old. Her five-year-old daughter was living with foster parents; Jeni said that the child was happy with her foster parents and that she was not requesting her return. All of Jeni's children had been removed from her care when she was taking crack/cocaine, which she had started at the age of 26.

After Jeni had spent years of misery, drug using, and begging in the subways, Jeni's sister, who lived across the river in New Jersey, had literally dragged Jeni off the streets to live with her. With the help of her sisters, Jeni had entered a detoxification program and, after finding an apartment, had been able to reclaim the three older children. The baby was born later. At the start of her new life, Jeni focused primarily on finding schools and afterschool programs for her children. She also joined a tenants' group in her building to voice her concerns about building maintenance and security, specifically with respect to her children's safety.

Jeni wanted to keep her children off the streets in her neighborhood, as she felt that some of the children in the neighborhood were getting into trouble. She told us about one neighborhood youth and one of her young nephews who had been arrested for homicide. She had asked Tom, an African American and the only man whom we met assigned as a transitional caseworker, to help.

Jeni enrolled her 10-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter in a public school twenty blocks from her residence, as she doubted that the local school was a good learning environment. Jeni was informed and resourceful in terms of school issues and, with Tom's

assistance, the children were admitted to the more distant school, although they were not officially in the catchment area. When Tom provided her with information, Jeni followed through in arranging programs for the children.

Tom and one of Jeni's aunts, who worked for a city agency, helped her to locate afterschool programs for her children. The three older children were now being picked up after school and taken to a community college in another borough. There they reviewed school subjects and were required to do their homework. Jeni was somewhat anxious because the children took a long subway trip home alone in the evening, but she believed it was important for them to attend.

Jeni was particularly worried about her 11-year-old son, who had problems in school. With Tom's help, she enrolled him in a school program designed for such children. She and Tom discussed her discipline problems with the eldest son. She was concerned that her son lied to her and could not be trusted. He got good grades in school, but she felt that if she was kind to him he took advantage of her. Tom suggested the child enroll in karate classes. He suggested that such a program would give him a sense of accomplishment, provide discipline, and build self-esteem. Jeni seemed to appreciate this suggestion and planned to enroll him for the summer. Tom gave Jeni a list of guidelines to work with her oldest son. Four months later, Jeni told Tom and the ethnographer that her son had much improved.

After one semester, Jeni was considering taking her children out of the school that Tom had helped her to enroll them in and enrolling them in the neighborhood school. She was finding the distance to the first school problematic. Clearly, when free of substance use, Jeni was an energetic and resourceful woman and her interactions with Tom helped her to put some of her ideas into practice. In a variety of situations, Jeni acted constructively and effectively to improve conditions for her children.

Jeni also asked Tom for help in sorting out her relationships. She asked Tom to talk to the man she was living with about his use of drugs. Tom said that her partner had to recognize the problem himself and that Jeni could not force him into a program when he was not ready. However, when Jeni's boyfriend walked into the room, Tom did discuss possible detoxification programs with him, as Jeni had requested. Jeni was grateful for this and it might have represented one particular instance where a man as case-worker

could be more effective than a woman. A month later, when the man had not changed his habits, Jeni evicted him, without requesting or needing direct assistance of any institutions or relatives.

Tom and Jeni's sister voiced concern that she had been previously involved in violent relationships. When Jeni next started to spend time with a man who had battered his former wife, both Tom and Jeni's sister said to Jeni that they were concerned for the safety of the children. Jeni did not seem to be worried and said that she would go out with whomever she chose and that he was not bothering her. She asserted her own sense of control and, quite possibly, she was in a strong situation, as evidenced by her ability to evict her former boyfriend from her apartment.

Jeni was in a much less isolated situation than any of the other women whom we have described in their new apartments. She knew people in her building through the tenants' association. Although she had recently lost her mother, who had died from AIDS contracted from a drug-using partner, Jeni was, nevertheless, able to rely heavily on her sisters for support. From her new apartment, she could walk to one of her sisters' home and to her previous residences. When Jeni was hospitalized with a tubal pregnancy, Jeni's sisters and cousin looked after Jeni and the children. Although one of her most supportive sisters had to commute from New Jersey, the others lived nearby.

Jeni had an extremely supportive kin network, long-term community connections, a tenants' association (albeit weak) in her building, and a transitional case worker with understanding and resources to offer. These factors may explain why Jeni was able to plan well for her children and to evict the initial drug-using boyfriend without enduring the abuse suffered by Amelia and Shana, in the previous examples. Jeni had social resources to rely on to help her to carry through decisions that benefited her and her children. Her kin supports gave her the base from which to take advantage of available social services, such as the detoxification program and the temporary assistance from Tom. Such support may in the long run protect Jeni and her children from further violence.

THE ISOLATION OF VIOLENCE

A fifth household that we observed for only a brief period illustrates the increasing isolation of battered women, who sometimes even forfeit assistance from social services because of abusive men.

Betsy, a 40-year-old Latina woman with a son aged 14 and a daughter aged 15, had found a new apartment after living in a shelter for battered women. Maria, a Latina case worker, had been assigned to visit her, to help in the transition. Maria and the ethnographer visited Betsy once and discussed financial issues and problems with the children's schooling. Her teenage daughter was home when she should have been in school. When Maria asked why, the daughter said that she could not afford to buy a coat to go to school. In response, Maria focused on budgetary issues. She did not begin to discuss Betsy's previous problems with violence. Maria may have chosen budget management as a less threatening preliminary topic to discuss at a first meeting. However, she followed the pattern of other caseworkers, for whom budget management discussions often took the place of discussion of other important problems.

Later, when the case manager returned to visit Betsy, her ex-husband was in the apartment. When Maria reported to her supervisor that she was insulted and harassed by this man, she was told not to go back to the apartment. To insure the safety of caseworkers, the policy of the social service agency was to forbid workers to visit apartments where they were harassed. From then on, Maria talked to Betsy only by telephone. Thus, Betsy was prevented from taking advantage of available services, which would at least have been helpful for her children's schooling and summer programs, by her abusive ex-husband. As the field-worker's access to the apartment was through the social service agencies, we were not able to pursue this case. However, it should be noted that Betsy had already taken her two children and left home to stay for six and a half months in a shelter for battered women before she found a theoretically safe apartment in a new neighborhood, far from kin, friends, neighbors, and previous abusers. These events highlight the way in which violence isolates women and the inability of current services, with their lack of flexibility or adequate resources to assist women effectively in such circumstances. In point of fact, on some occasions, the services that rerouted women into new and still precarious economic situations, were only setting women up for new conditions of abuse.

CONCLUSIONS

The women described in this paper had all struggled through a long route of economic hardship, emotional losses, and destructive

conditions to emerge in charge of their own apartments and able to provide the fundamentals of a home for their children. Through the temporary help of shelters, homes for battered women, and the strategic manipulation of the bureaucracies of New York City, they were beginning to create or recreate the semblances and emotional rewards of family life. Each woman was intent on establishing a new life for herself and her children. Through her behavior and her aspirations, each of the women, in her own way, expressed a view of herself as an active and responsible agent of her future. Rosa was already working part-time and hoping to find better paid work. Shana was eager to take courses to complete high school and find employment, although a single mother, responsible for two children under four. Jeni joined the tenants' association in her building as soon as she moved into her new apartment and began to contribute to the organization of her local environment. While Amelia concentrated on legal proceedings to win back her children, she already functioned as the hub of a large network of kin responsibilities.

As part of their newly created homes, each of the women also had to confront violence in their households. Clearly, the structure of households under capitalism has generated conflict between men and women over responsibility for the rearing of children. However, previous research conducted by Gonzalez and myself among people who live in homeless shelters (Susser and Gonzalez 1992), suggested that, in general, hostilities between men and women are exacerbated by the experiences of homelessness. The separation of men and women in the facilities provided for people who lack shelter may contribute to men's view of women as evil and in some ways as non-persons (Susser and Gonzalez 1992). In the video produced by men in one shelter we studied, women are portrayed as leading men into sexual relationships in exchange for drugs or other resources, spreading AIDS in the process. As in the lives of women such as Rosa and Jeni, AIDS was a constant source of tension and conflict among and between the poor men and women whom we met (Susser and Gonzalez 1992). Women in the family shelters described the stress put on their relationships by the regulations which excluded men from their households (Susser 1993).

As the lives of the women described here illustrate, the institutional policies designed to protect these women may lead them into further danger. Even after women find new apartments, they live isolated in neighborhoods that are new to them, lack adequate funds, companionship, and the assistance of social and financial

support from kin and friends. Although men appear to develop hostility towards women, at least in the shelter system, they find that households organized by women present one option for getting out of the shelters. Thus, as is often the case, men and women have strong emotional and economic reasons for cooperation. Nonetheless, both women and men also have cause for hostility and anger and vent these emotions in the relocated households.

Perhaps a central feature in the links between gender, violence, and homelessness is the simple fact of poverty. No matter how many times budgets are calculated, an income below the poverty level in New York City cannot provide the basic needs of a family. The agencies' focus on separating women from their violent relationships, in the absence of addressing the women's economic and emotional needs, mean that women must have recourse to even the erratic and tension-fraught emotional and economic support provided by these women's husbands or male partners.

Households of single women rearing children alone with the multiple stresses of inadequate child care and financial support are a common product of contemporary society. The difficulties women face in trying to sustain a household are made even worse by the experience of relocation. The women whom we interviewed cling to their hopes for stable families and independent households. However, in spite of detailed budget calculations by the women and their caseworkers, these mothers were in desperate need of economic assistance. They sought partners who also needed housing and financial and emotional support. As the women struggled to establish their lives through housing, education, and work, the men assisted them with money when they had a source of income. In New York City the ability of men to find work or provide for a home had been undermined drastically by the changing structure of industrial employment. The drug trade, a major source of alternate work that was more available to men than to women, carried with it the costs of addiction, diseases such as AIDS which can then be transmitted to women and children, and irregular and violent behavior (Sharff 1998; Bourgois 1995).

Consequently, the men who provided assistance also engaged in violent outbursts of rage that disrupted and sometimes destroyed the women's precarious accomplishments of independence and familial stability. Faced with a lack of money for the expenses of daily life and child rearing, the emotional and physical strain of coping with disease, and both unmet and changing gender

expectations, family efforts at cooperation foundered and households became crucibles of violence.

Kin seem to provide the most powerful assistance in helping people to cope with substance use, protecting children, and sometimes protecting women from domestic violence. In spite of the movement of women and children through a variety of shelter situations and finally into apartments distant from their previous communities, many families maintain strong ties. However, kin ties can be simultaneously protective and destructive. These very strong connections are frequently the route for reconnection with violent partners and abusive relatives. Long-term kin and friendship networks allow men to track down women who have found new apartments or new partners in new locations.

In addition, women's efforts to hide from violence generates new problems. Women find themselves far from previous friends but easy for their previous partners to locate. If our observations indicated that it was easier to run than to hide, they also revealed that staying in the old neighborhood did not necessarily mean a violent relationship would continue. For example, Jeni, the woman who found an apartment in her old neighborhood, was the least threatened by her former batterer. As we were walking down the street, she pointed her abusive ex-husband out to me as they greeted one another casually. She showed no fear of him, and old hostilities seemed no longer material to her current life context. The support she received from her sisters in the neighborhood in addition to the transitional social service assistance seemed to be important in allowing Jeni to evict men who might otherwise have become violent.

Overall, moving homes is not a long-term solution to domestic violence, which seems to be intricately tied to the levels of conflict generated between poor men and women in the 1990s. Social isolation, economic and emotional need, as well as the practical protection of association lead women into relationships that frequently involve high levels of violence. Social service agencies appear most effective in protecting children through providing access to schools, afterschool and summer programs that give the children their own essential institutional supports. In fact, the policies of social service agencies, which constantly encourage women to flee from the neighborhood as well as the household, may sometimes actually contribute to a new cycle of homelessness and violence, and the attempt to excise the past can be seen as a further form of violence. Women are caught between abuse by men

and the erasure of their own relationships and way of life. The gendered experiences of poverty, the gendered expectations of family responsibility, and gender-specific patterns of unemployment continue to produce tensions that precipitate domestic violence. All of this is being exacerbated by the increasing destruction of poor communities through public policies that evict the poor and transform the global city into expensive real estate.

The context for the high levels of violence we found was the flight of industry and the destruction of working-class communities that has been taking place over the past 20 years. Gentrification and reorientation of urban life toward high income residents of the new global city have been accompanied by drastic reductions in the provision of social services. Although the full impact of the recent social services reductions promoted as welfare reform have yet to be evaluated, these new policies are clearly one more vast decrease in resources for poor women trying to rear children in progressively devastated neighborhoods. As we have seen, the first requirement for a woman to rebuild her family and provide a safe home for her children is adequate housing. Next, she needs adequate daycare, schools, and afterschool programs for her children so that she can continue her education or obtain work that pays a living wage. As New York City administrations have strived to attract global capital and its professional elite, they have gutted their financial commitment to provide for any of these basic population needs. The future of the working-class men, women, and children of New York City is clearly in question.

The women in this study were part of a displaced population who are described frequently as the "homeless". Since the transformation in New York's economy following the 1975 fiscal crisis and the reorientation in investment this precipitated, New York City has shifted its housing priorities toward providing for the professional and housing needs of the global capitalist class. Major funding for the building of public housing in New York City was stopped in 1975, reducing the ability of the city administration to provide affordable, decent housing for the poor. Men, women, and families are being relocated to distant poor neighborhoods through a series of institutions, such as shelters, prisons, substance abuse programs, and mental hospitals, where they are out of the pathways of gentrification. Each of these public institutions provides temporary shelter and contributes to the changing experiences of the poor population (Conover *et al.* 1997).

While institutions, especially prisons and shelters, have expanded, access to public housing has diminished greatly. Yet our research indicates that public housing is a significant resource for women attempting to reestablish households after abuse and homelessness. The relocated homeless women we studied who were assigned public housing found it to be in better condition than housing rented from private landlords. The condition of this housing and the rents linked to low income may account for the finding that the women in public housing were the most likely to keep their new housing for more than one year (Weitzman *et al.* 1994).

To be sure, even without the restructuring of the New York City economy, the burden of child rearing has long fallen on women, and the image of the white picket fence and the good life has proven unattainable even for two-parent families among the poor. Social service intervention has never been able to replace the economic deficits of a low wage job or insufficient public assistance. The current renewed emphasis on individual responsibility coupled with the withdrawal of always inadequate social services is exacerbating an already untenable situation. Focusing on the possibilities for success through such limited strategies as careful budgeting only increases the stress on individual actors and the rage generated in households where success is virtually beyond reach. Thus, violence must be considered within the context of the increased emphasis on poor women assuming total responsibility for their children; the decreasing commitment since 1975 on the part of city and state administrations to support public housing, education, and child care; the ever-shrinking possibilities of men and women of modest educational attainment finding jobs that pay an adequate wage at the same time as gender ideologies persist in portraying successful manhood as including a father-provider role; the consequent exclusion of underemployed men from households and social services; and patterns of police brutality associated with the revanchist global city (Smith 1996; Susser 1993, 1996; Wilson 1996).

In the 1990s more people are poor and poor people are poorer. They find themselves alienated across generation and gender lines, vulnerable to new diseases directly related to new forms of criminal employment required for economic survival, and assaulted by police, public institutions, and the people upon whom they most depend. As evidenced in the lives of the women we met, the poor base their kin and community ties on shifting grounds, as they are

forced to move from place to place by the changing geography and economy of the city. Children change schools and adults have to learn about new communities, social services, and neighborhoods. It is under these conditions that we find the resort to substance abuse, battering of women and children, the destruction of families and communities, and the increasing violence so widely documented.

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