

Still Struggling for Recognition: The Unionization of (un-)documented Migrant Domestic Workers in The Netherlands

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Introduction

Processes and institutions of industrial relations in The Netherlands, as in many other countries, have evolved along national lines. The focus of unions has been on national workers and often on rather male-dominated industries. This had already undergone changes with the coming of postcolonial migrants, guestworkers, and the growing labor participation of women (Roosblad 2002). However, the unionization of migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in 2006, who are informally working and partially residing illegally, arguably marks a new step in trade union history in the Netherlands.

Just as in many other countries, domestic work is not fully integrated into Dutch labor and social security law (van Walsum 2011). In consequence, this type of work is often performed informally and recent governmental attempts to formalise it have failed (SOER 2004: 14). Furthermore, although never explicitly excluded, informally working and illegally residing migrant workers have also not been actively targeted by Dutch unions. But in June 2006, documented and undocumented MDWs succeeded in joining the care sector of the public service union Abvakabo of the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) and in January 2009, in response to discontent, these workers transferred to the cleaning sector of the private sector union FNV Bondgenoten. This time, a clear agreement of expectations was signed.

In the background of the adoption of the Convention on Domestic Work by the International Labor Organization in 2011 (C 189), this paper will scrutinize how the MDWs in The Netherlands were and are able to circumvent various mechanisms of exclusion, but are still struggling for recognition. I will use own ethnographic data to analyze in comparative perspective influential factors of their process of unionization in first AbvaKabo and then Bondgenoten. Drawing on social movement theory, I will argue that MDWs become subjects to the unions and have labor rights applied to them as well (FNV AbvaKabo 2008a: 16) through a two-folded reframing of 'undocumented migrants' as workers on the one hand, and domestic work as regular work on the other. Additionally, the new union strategy of '*organizing*' imported from the United States facilitated the unionization of MDWs and thereby puts further into question the national focus of unions. In order to possibly meet the challenges a contemporary globalizing labor force poses, this case study provides important lessons to the understanding of modern-day employment relations. .

Background: Domestic Work and Domestic Workers

Without rehearsing the in-depth feminist literature on reproductive labor and its commodification as domestic work (see Notz 2004: 420f.), it is important to understand that the non-regulation, or partial exclusion, of domestic work from labor law, in for example The Netherlands, is due to its link with reproductive work in the private sphere. Domestic work is performed in private households, and is associated with unpaid work, thereby it is less recognized as employment. For instance, an employer is exempted from paying social premiums and may terminate contracts without permission from Dutch labor authorities thereby reducing employee's rights, if the employee works less than three days a week for the same employer (van Walsum, 2011).

Although, conventional wisdom expected domestic work to decline in advanced capitalist societies as a product of modernization, it is currently increasing again (Milkman et al. 1998: 486). Causes for the new rise are manifold, ranging from (middle class) women's access to paid work in the formal labor market, the ageing population (SOER 2004: vi, ETUC 2005: 120), to the inability of men to make the 'second shift' to an egalitarian share of household tasks (Anderson 2000: 17), and insufficient (Dutch) public care services, which have been privatized for the aged and disabled (Van Walsum 2011).

In The Netherlands, three kinds of domestic service workers can be distinguished. First, those who work for a homecare institution [Thuiszorg], second, those who work for cleaning companies

[Schoonmaak], and third, domestic workers who provide customized services for individual private employers. The first two cases fall under collective labor agreements [CAO], due to the fact that the employees have a labor contract with a care or cleaning agency (Pabon 2009: 48f.). The care workers are subject to AbvaKabo, whereas the cleaners are subject to Bondgenoten. The MDWs of this case study fall under the third type. Among them, it is very common to have several employers a week where they work a few hours a day, thereby falling under the exceptional regime of less labor rights. Sassen (1991) has pointed to the crucial role immigrants play in global cities where job growth takes place both at the top and at the bottom end of the labor market, and informal economy is increasing. In 2004, 1,2 Million Dutch households indicated in a survey that they made use of household assistance averaging 3,4 hours per week (Social Economic Research Institute, SOER: 24). This report, however, assumes in its advices a documented female labor force and, regardless of the high demand in domestic work, there is so far no legal entry category as worker. The only legal ways to enter The Netherlands as a third country national for the purpose of performing domestic work is in the capacity of a (quasi) family member (e.g. spouse, servant of a diplomat or au pair). Those channels have in common that they are modeled on family relations with resulting interdependency, which exempts them from Dutch labor and security law (van Walsum, 2011).

Regarding unionization, domestic workers have often been argued to be 'unorganizable' due to the characteristics of their work: (a) not recognized as work, (b) often done for several employers, (c) performed singly in a private household, and (d) informally. Additionally, the group performing this kind of work inherits attributes, which were often argued to make them less organizable: they are predominantly women, migrants and increasingly undocumented (Ally 2005). Stricter labor controls in known labor sectors of undocumented migrants in The Netherlands have led to an increase of undocumented migrants seeing domestic work as a safer alternative to earn a living, which may account for the growing amount of men in this sector as well (van Walsum, 2011). Feminist scholars, like Shireen Ally (2005) have been challenging arguments of 'unorganizability'. She showed in a historical overview that there have been plenty of organizing and unionizing activities of domestic workers. Consequently, the construction of domestic workers as 'unorganizable', she argues, casts them unjustifiably as passive and powerless victims of the structural features of their work (ibid 2005). One needs to go beyond conventional strategies of organizing. The culture and procedures of the trade union movement have often focused on organized sectors thereby creating a male-bias over time. According to the International Labor Organization contemporary cross-national unionization rates in the domestic sector are barely 1 per cent (ILO 2008). In the following, I will investigate in comparative perspective the ways MDWs in The Netherlands managed to (a) enter first Abvakabo and then Bondgenoten, (b) become incorporated into these unions and (c) opportunities that facilitated to stay in the union circumventing mechanisms of exclusion in their ongoing struggle for recognition.

Membership experiences – an Ethnography

Trade unions in The Netherlands are ordered into labor sectors and the different sectoral unions are affiliated to the biggest Dutch Trade Union Federation (FNV). Placing the MDWs into one of the Dutch unions, however, is not that unequivocal keeping in mind the three kinds of domestic service workers that can be distinguished (see former paragraph). In June 2006, the MDWs joined first AbvaKabo FNV, which is the biggest Dutch union for the public sector. It incorporates interests of employees from diverse professions working in hospitals, universities, public transportation and more specifically including the sectors called 'Care' [Zorg] and 'Social Services' [Welzijn en Maatschappelijke Dienstverlening]. In January 2009, the MDWs switched to FNV Bondgenoten, which is the biggest Dutch union and includes private sectors like agriculture, industry, trade and also services like 'Cleaning' [Schoonmaak].

In my paper, I will draw on ethnographic insights gathered during my fieldwork for my masterthesis from International Women's Day 2009 to International Women's Day 2010 mainly in Amsterdam, as well as recent insights from my work as country coordinator in The Netherlands on a participatory research project on 'social security needs of domestic workers' by the International Center of Development and Decent Work (ICDD) from August 2012 until now. During my master's I joined meetings of the migrant domestic workers, of the union and related events. My role as student was an open one as researcher and supporter of their campaign. Along the way, I decided

upon a panel of key informants that were closely involved during the process of unionization into AbvaKabo as well as later Bondgenoten, upon others: (a) the leaders of three migrant domestic workers self-organizations: Lori, Coring and James, (b) an active unionist closely involved: Lot, (c) active leaders from NGOs: Marijke Bijl OKIA and Fé Jusay from the Commission of Filipino Migrant Workers (CFMW) and from the union, I interviewed: (d) the General Secretary of FNV Bondgenoten: Ellen Dekkers, the administrator of the sector Well-being in AbvaKabo FNV Meindert van den Berg as well as the administrator of the sector Care of this union: Jenneke van Pijpen, and last but not least the two organizers: first Katrien Depuydt and second Rebeca Pabon.

As country coordinator I worked closely with some of the main leaders of the MDWs and joined a few union meetings getting an overall impression of the state of the art at the moment. It is important to keep in mind that my fieldwork was done during the membership with FNV Bondgenoten, whereas the statements on AbvaKabo FNV are mainly retrospective reflections leading possibly to a negative bias for the latter. Additionally, I focused on the unionization process, people that did not join the union yet were not part of the panel, which definitely inherits a pro-union bias.

Although both unions can be characterized as corporatist, due to their strong institutionalization and closeness to the Dutch government, the MDWs made very divergent experiences in either union. The aim of this chapter is to come-up with a sophisticated comparison of both memberships taking into account their path-dependency, one case following the other. Using the lens of social movement theories, I will analyze first, the framing efforts of the MDWs to open-up either union. Second, the MDWs integration as members, and third, I will outline some important factors that facilitated or slowed the process of unionization.

Entering the union

In this part, I will analyze the framings that opened-up the union for the group of documented and undocumented MDWs. Framing deals with reality construction and the interaction between movements and opportunities (Gamson/ Meyer 1996: 276). The term frame is borrowed from Goffman (1974: 21) to denote “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large”. Snow et al. (1986: 464) defined frame alignment between different groups as

“the linkage of (...) interpretative orientations, such that some set of (...) interests, values and beliefs and (...) activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary (...) by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experiences and guide action”.

The theory assumes that one has to choose the correct words and strategy in order to successfully bring one’s interests into the public sphere and gain support. Helen Schwenken (2003, 2006) clearly showed in her analysis the reframing initiatives of the European Domestic Workers network, RESPECT. One of her central outcomes was the analytical and empirical distinction of two competing frames of mobilization. RESPECT consciously departed from the central frame of ‘Combating Domestic Slavery and Trafficking of Women’ to using a ‘More Rights for MDWs’ frame. Thus, they moved from female MDWs constructed as victims of trafficking towards a ‘workers frame’ of women with subjectivity, voice, and agency. For the ‘rights-frame’, three sub-frames were identified: worker’s rights, human rights, and women’s rights. Corresponding active actors were employers, employees, and social partners. Schwenken argues that which of the sub-frames will be the most successful depends on the political priorities of the actor approached, whom are crucial for determining the type of advocacy strategy and (self-) representation followed (ibid 2003: 45f.). In the case of The Netherlands, NGOs and MDWs targeted AbvaKabo by emphasizing not only the sub-frame ‘worker’s rights’, but in order to reach congruency a frame extension (Snow et al 1986) has taken place to ‘women’s workers rights’ through a union’s women group.

Already for several years, the Commission of Filipino Migrant Workers [CFMW], which is also part of RESPECT, has been a driving force to arrange contact with Dutch unions, but experienced severe difficulties. The initiative started to take form at the women’s empowering Festival, *Women Inc*, in September 2005 (MDW representatives, active unionist, see also Hacbang/ Jusay: 131). The ‘active unionist’ explained that her Rotterdam union women’s group “was looking for a new theme to put their teeth into” and went to a workshop on domestic work organized by an old trade union

colleague and the domestic worker working for her. The director of the women's program of CFMW and several MDWs were also present, seeing the workshop as a chance to put their demands forward. All participants felt eager to do something and for the AbvaKabo women's group it was unquestionably a theme to be dealt with by the union: "It's about work and employment relationships; it's not about having the right papers!" (active unionist) A few weeks later the differing actors met again and on the 10th February 2006 organized a thematic day in Rotterdam titled: 'Domestic Work: Motor of the Dutch economy'. Special efforts were made to make the date match the agenda of the General Secretary of AbvaKabo to do the opening speech knowing that she would have an open ear for issues on the position of women (active unionist). This had success as the reaction on her weblog indicated:

"I [...] got feelings of shame that we still treat people like that in 2006. [...]. I've been very much impressed what I heard this day and on the way back [...] I've been already thinking about what we as FNV got to do with it." (Snoeij weblog 15th Feb. 2006)

Very soon after these first contacts with women of the trade union, the four-yearly trade union congress [Bondscongres] of AbvaKabo FNV took place in May 2006. The 'active unionist' took this as an opportunity to make the MDW's claims heard. She prepared a speech elaborating on the position of domestic workers and the exceptional regime of domestic work in The Netherlands and arranged a presentation of a representative of CFMW on this theme. At the end of the day, the project received two prizes (AbvaKabo FNV 2007) resulting in the theme of MDWs being on the podium three times this day. Thereby, "the congress can be seen as an important event to give legitimacy to the fact that the MDWs must be able to just become members of our union [...] It had not yet been real written down policy, but nobody on the congress protested against it" (active unionist). A few weeks later, on the 27th June 2006, documented and undocumented MDWs officially joined the union AbvaKabo celebrating it as a big success.

Looking back, for several MDWs, the process of unionization went too quick. Without much explanation and negotiation with the MDWs, the meeting with the trade union was arranged to sign the membership form. To one representative of the MDW's organizations "it's like we jumped into something that we didn't understand". Within a month about 250 MDWs joined the union. However, due to dissatisfaction many MDWs did not pay their monthly fees and within a year only about 30 members remained in the union. In May 2008, the management of the union, without investigating the deeper reasons for this decrease, decided to stop the project based on a negative financial cost-benefit analysis. The MDW's administrator and the organizer were angry and ashamed about this top-down decision and started to search for another union within the Federation that would take over their interests.

In January 2009, after two and a half years of membership with AbvaKabo, the MDWs officially switched to FNV Bondgenoten. The organizer of the MDWs worked together with MDWs to actively lobby the top of Bondgenoten by approaching the General Secretary and the administrator of 'Cleaning'. The MDWs also simultaneously built-up solidarity from the bottom by joining the cleaners in campaigning for better working conditions under a new labor agreement in 2009/2010. The organizer stressed that it was important to arrange that MDWs have direct contact with staff, rank and file of the new union and the Federation. The MDWs

"showed-up in actions and training [...] so that [the union] could get a picture [...] and most people [...] were impressed. Just really strong, mature people, who are in an awful situation [...] but are really fantastic unionists [...] how they've spent their weekends to organize other MDWs [...]. Like this they got a lot of sympathy. And then AbvaKabo gave also a bit of money [...] to Bondgenoten, which eased the decision a bit and [Bondgenoten] decided to put them into the cleaning team." (organizer)

Becoming part of the cleaning team had the advantage that they were with a similar rank and file. The union organizer pointed at their migrant background explaining that "very often if a domestic worker becomes legal, he or she is going to become a cleaner. [...] Thus, it is often the same networks, same churches, same mosques, the people go to" (1st organizer). Additionally, the administrator of Cleaning emphasized a second reason to take the MDWs on-board: they are "very strong people, which have their own organization and know how to handle the difficulties in this country. People that I want to have in the union". Their undocumented status came to play a secondary role and the similarities between the MDWs and the cleaners were stressed. To the administrator of cleaning, the union "only know[s] two kinds of employees: members and non-members of the union. [...] So, for us they are employees like anyone else". This combination of framing, to be 'active unionist' and 'migrant workers', corresponded well with the MDWs' self-

representation. They viewed themselves far more as migrants than solely women, as there are also quite some male MDWs unionized and organized (representative of MDWs). Finally, in December 2008, a party was held by FNV Bondgenoten to officially welcome the MDWs in their new union. Several MDWs joined the union, the organizer was transferred and from January 2009 onwards Bondgenoten officially took over responsibility for the MDWs.

In sum, a top-down approach opened-up the union AbvaKabo for the MDWs interests, which was combined with first a 'female worker's rights frame' due to the congruence with the trade unions women's group. Second, it was expanded and partly replaced by a 'unionized migrant worker's rights frame', which corresponded very well with the self-definition of the MDWs and cleaners in Bondgenoten, this time combining top-down and bottom-up strategies to built-up solidarity. Both frames departed from the undocumented MDW as 'victim' by stressing their status as workers and the importance of domestic work. The new '(unionized) workers frame' presented the MDWs as valuable contributing members of (Dutch) society, whom thereby have a right to be represented by a union. Now incorporation into the union had to follow, where disadvantages from the solely top-down strategy arose in AbvaKabo, whereas in contrast, advantages of combining bottom-up and top-down approach in Bondgenoten become obvious.

Incorporation into either Union

This section analyzes the divergent experiences of incorporation by highlighting the strategies that did or did not facilitate the unionization by contrasting the dichotomies of 'care versus cleaning', 'professional versus unprofessional', 'separate versus integrated' and 'different versus equal'.

When joining AbvaKabo, the MDWs against expectations, did not become an integrated part of the care sector. The 'active unionist' of AbvaKabo noted that although she had often discussed with the Secretary General and the administrator of Care that there should be links between the formal Dutch care workers, she felt as if the MDWs were dealt with as her 'hobby'. The administrator of Care reasoned that the private care givers [thuiszorg] are professionals in contrast to the MDWs and therefore different. In this light, it is maybe not surprising that the Dutch term for domestic worker is still a domestic helper [huishoudelijke hulp], thus an unprofessional assistant. It must be noted, that with the introduction of the 'alphahulp', an unprofessional cheap help in the care sector, both sectors are more and more dealing with the same problems of precarity and in the last Expert meeting in October 2013 both union were sitting on the same table to discuss new strategies.

In the end, the MDWs were put into the sector Social Services, without even informing the administrator of this sector, who first thought "they must have made a mistake." It was however, a conscious choice, or at least the only option. The question was less where they fit best, but rather which sector accepts them. After all, the administrator of Social Services found quite some practical and personal arguments ranging from being a "Third World problem, a bit what social work is about" to "I speak a lot of languages and have been working in other countries". So he accepted the, as unusual seen, MDWs as new union members in his portfolio. All this, resulted in MDWs being mainly treated as a separate group in the Social Services sector of AbvaKabo. Efforts to join or ally with similar groups, such as the care workers were not taken.

The difficulties and disagreements in integrating the MDWs into the structures of the union also had consequences for their representation inside the union. No permanent representation existed. Furthermore, there were quite some difficulties concerning administrative incorporation into the system of AbvaKabo FNV. The administration of such a big union was not able to adjust to members who prefer to give no address and cannot pay their fees through Dutch bank accounts. The administrator could solve some of the problems, but overall the administrative systems asked for equal treatment, which stays in sharp contrast with the rather disintegration of this group in the union structure of AbvaKabo.

Inside the second union, FNV Bondgenoten, MDWs were more integrated from the beginning on. The union already had experiences in the 2000s with Polish workers, who were without working permits and faced similar problems. Therefore, Bondgenoten was more open to creative solutions for the administrative system. For the administrator of Cleaning it was clear that the MDWs needed to get a unique system in place where they could pay their contribution in cash once per year, and no address was requested. He elaborated that "you should not even want to have an address of them in your system" to secure them from possible governmental detection. For the rest, the MDWS became equal members of the cleaning sector. Looking back, the

Secretary General of Bondgenoten as well as the administrator of Social Services both argued that although there is a relation with care tasks, the MDWs main tasks is cleaning. After an internal discussion in Bondgenoten, the MDWs were put into the cleaning sector, because like that “they [now] have a bugger around them and it is not all about their status”. Further advantage was, that they could be put under the new labor agreement of the cleaners, so that ‘they are not alone anymore, but really belong to the cleaners” (General Secretary of Bondgenoten).

Consequently, the MDWs became an integrated part of the Cleaning sector and participated in their activities. For instance, they joined the national cleaner’s strike in Utrecht on the 23rd February 2010. In the morning, some 200 cleaners met at the building of Bondgenoten in Amsterdam to drink a cup of coffee, fill-in their strike forms before leaving by bus to Utrecht. Among them 23 MDWs, who received the same forms as the cleaners to receive strike money, but were initially unsure whether they should fill them in. They were advised to put ‘MDW’ on top and, in case they were undocumented, to leave the address line blank. The cleaners and MDWs were getting on the bus, most MDWs on a separate one, and joined the cleaners at Utrecht station with the same T-shirts and banners. This episode points to a fluid shifting between equal and different treatment. The MDWs could participate in the cleaner’s strike in 2009 and also again in 2013 as equal members, but did face some special considerations concerning forms to fill-in.

As for representation, a similar effect of ‘equal versus different’ occurred. In May 2009, an undocumented MDW has been elected into the Board of Cleaners. This Board of representatives checks on the union staff and discusses labor agreements. The elected MDW has the same rights and responsibility as other cleaners in the Board. “There is also no fixed seat for a MDW”, so the administrator of Cleaning stressed that “they were strong enough to make it”. On the other hand, from the informal meetings arranged already during the period with AbvaKabo a more institutionalized still existing monthly leadership meeting arose, where the representatives of MDWs’ organizations and their union organizer discuss their special demands and steps to be taken within the union.

In sum, In AbvaKabo, the MDWs were dealt with as a separate, thus special group concerning their working tasks and legal status, but had to conform to the present administrative system. In Bondgenoten, they became an integrated, thus equal part of the cleaning sector concerning activities and representation, but special treatment was given by the union as well as demanded from the MDWs concerning administrative and institutions of negotiation. However, it is questionable in how far the MDWs campaign is really congruent with the one of the cleaners. It stays a struggle to have their special demands be taken into account. Lobbying for the the ILO Convention on domestic work, for example, does only concern them. There have been several extraordinary meetings by union staff and rank and file of the MDWs, no cleaners, to work on a draft with their demands and go to Geneva in June 2011. Thus, a constant shifting between equal and special treatment facilitates the integration of MDWs into the union. Equal treatment has the advantage of really being part of a sector, thereby sharing financial and personal resources, but special treatment is needed to not neglect special demands and circumstances of the MDWs. The next chapter will highlight one of the main opportunities and facilitators to have MDWs stay inside the union and have their demands be heard.

Staying Inside the Union

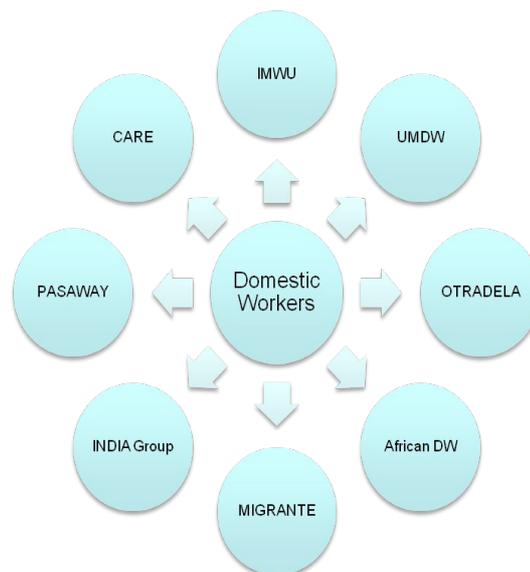
In the following chapter, I will argue that the new union strategy of *organizing* is one of the most important facilitating factors sustaining the unionization of documented and undocumented MDWs in The Netherlands. In the light of declining membership, the Federation of Dutch Unions (FNV) imported this strategy from the US-American Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to enable growth and renewal. Since 2006, Dutch unions have run several pilot projects in different sectors with the financial and personal help of American colleagues (AbvaKabo FNV 2008b). In this section, I will analyze the impact of *organizing* on opportunity structures of the MDWs in general and I will draw specifically upon the divergent implementation in AbvaKabo and Bondgenoten to point to challenges and possibilities.

A study by Ruth Milkman (2006) on the American City, Los Angeles, revealed that *organizing* has been especially useful to unionize predominantly migrant workers. *Organizing* in this context is characterized by closely working together with social movements and using pre-existing organizations in migrant communities (e.g. churches and community organizations) (ibid: 61f, see

also Milkman/Wong 2001). The unionized MDWs in The Netherlands had two union organizers so far. The first organizer defined *organizing* as

“you teach and support people to come-up for their rights collectively, [...] you talk with them to get to know what they think is important for their work and if that are shared problems then they can do collective actions. Thus, that means to build-up trade union power from the bottom.”

Both union organizers stress next to building-up networks and alliances with Dutch NGOs and churches, especially the relations with the community organizations of the MDWs themselves. In the case of The Netherlands, the migrant domestic workers have formed self-organizations, which function as community organizations to provide support to each other (e.g. when dealing with labor issues). The landscape of organizations is changing constantly and the number of organizations has increased, as I would argue, also due to their unionization. During my master thesis fieldwork there were three (mainly) Filipino organizations (a) TRUSTED Migrants, (b) Migrante NL and (c) United Migrant Domestic Workers as well as a (d) Ghanaian Domestic Workers Union, (e) the mainly Latin Americans including organization OTRADELA. When I presented the results of my thesis at the founding conference of the International Domestic Workers Research Network (IDW-RN) in December 2010 in Amsterdam, for example, the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU) was about to be formed asking advice from me, whether to form an own group based on their ethnic background or to join an already existing organization. These associations, although they sometimes call themselves 'unions', exist parallel to the formal Dutch union and not all members of these organizations are union members. It can be argued that on the one hand the unionization seems to stimulate the founding of own organizations and on the other hand the union organizer welcomes the formation of these self-organization due to the fact that the leaders of these organizations are the main actors to put forward the campaign for recognition. Since my fieldwork of my masterthesis in 2010 and now, 2013, the amount of organizations has doubled as can be seen in the graphic from a presentation of the IMWU leader, Yasmine on 1st of Februari 2013.



The leaders of these organizations organize new members and put forward their demands in the monthly leadership meeting of the union. Thus, relations with NGO-like migrant organizations can be very beneficial for unions and MDWs. Unions can use these community organizations for new membership outreach and to spread information. MDWs can, at first, negotiate their position on issues within their own organizations, and afterwards can speak collectively and with a stronger voice to the union. According to the first organizer the new strategy of *organizing* was crucial to prevent the unionization of MDWs to “die a silent death”. Based on this, I argue that *organizing* has been a major facilitating factor in the unionization of MDWs in The Netherlands. This strategy partially circumvents the characteristics that make domestic workers more difficult to unionize (as outlined earlier) by using preexisting social networks of migrants, which then created opportunity structures to negotiate special demands. However, both unions differ in implementation and it still stays a challenge to unionize the MDWs.

When the MDWs joined AbvaKabo in June 2006, there was no union organizer in this sector. It was the administrator of Social Services, who saw the MDWs as an ideal pilot for *organizing*. At

first, his request was rejected, but in May 2007, when more than 300 MDWs had joined the union, a Flemish-Belgium (thus Dutch speaking) woman became the first organizer of the MDWs. She was not yet experienced in organizing, so she learned through training (offered by the union) and field-work visits for example to community organizers from the London Citizen Campaign). In AbvaKabo, the organizer felt rather lonely. Although she could share strategic questions and experiences with the team of organizers from different sectors, she could not share the difficulties faced in organizing MDWs. Furthermore, being faced with the special demands of the MDWs, this organizer felt a lack of support from the union. The MDWs were neither well embedded nor united with the sector, but rather viewed as a separate group inside AbvaKabo. In order to discuss the steps to take, informal meetings took place. These meetings later transformed into the already mentioned monthly leadership meetings of MDWs' community organizations.

The experiences in AbvaKabo can be characterized as the transformation from Ally's (2005) associational model to the union model, which does not go without problems. Several areas of conflict that complicated the unionization process within Abvakabo can be identified. First, the Commission of Filipino Workers (CFMW), who had initiated the unionization, strived for a strong role in the decision making process within the union. These initiatives collided with the newly instated union organizer, who wanted to talk directly with rank and file. A CFMW representative criticized the claim that the union organizer claimed to be "THE organizer of these migrants". She argued that "they are already organized in their own organizations", and that it was important to her that migrants are empowered to organize themselves, and not be told from the top-down to organize. In contrast, some of the MDWs criticized that "with AbvaKabo, we were there, but the persons who were talking were from CFMW, not really us". In result the MDWs blamed CFMW for the lack of progress in the union, and criticized how no prior agreements were signed with the union when they joined. Additionally conflicts arose between the self-organizations, what interviewees referred to as 'power dynamics'. Instead of working together, organizations partially competed with each other. The 'active unionist' remembers "[i]t's been very difficult. But it had to work; [...] they had to be part of the whole network (meaning the unionization process)!"

All in all the unionized MDWs were mainly satisfied to finally have a person, the union organizer, to directly contact inside the union. The first organizer had also been the driving force to lobby for the switch to FNV Bondgenoten. In July 2009, half a year after the union switch, she resigned from her work. In October 2009, a Puerto Rican woman filled the vacancy. She is a non-western migrant, who had shortly been doing domestic work in The Netherlands, and had contact with the RESPECT network. Consequently, she identified more closely with the MDWs than the first organizer. On the other hand, as all organizers of the union, she has a university degree. She studied the unionization of MDWs in NL (Pabon 2009) and had gained organizing experiences in New York. Thus, she can be characterized as a hybrid closer to the MDWs by referring to them by 'we' rather than the distanced 'they' of the first organizer.

In contrast to *organizing* being treated as a separate project in AbvaKabo, in Bondgenoten the organizer became an integrated part of the team of organizers in the cleaning sector, directly connected to the administrator of Cleaning. Also within Bondgenoten this new union strategy still has to win support. Both organizers pointed to the struggle to make *organizing* a recognized strategy within the rather hierarchically structured and institutionalized Dutch union. A fact that parallels the clash of worker's centers and unions in the U.S. context (Fine 2006: 121). However, in Bondgenoten *organizing* was implemented on a larger scale, with first four then eight organizers and due to successful campaigning and strikes for better working conditions in Winter 2009, there are at the end of 2010 16 union organizers in the cleaning sector. Nevertheless, also the 2nd organizer for MDWs still faces different challenges than the organizers for cleaners. Through common languages (e.g. English and Spanish), she could partially connect to the Filipino, Latino and English-speaking African community, but to reach out to the often Dutch speaking domestic workers with Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese background is still problematic. The leaders, the union members as well as the organizer get Dutch classes by the union, but still it took until April 2013 that the first monthly leadership meeting was held in Dutch. Fine (2006) has pointed to these challenges of multicultural organizing, wherein different cultures, languages and traditions require tremendous patience and sensitivity (ibid: 61). Further, a lack of resources slows the process of unionization. It seems reasonable that one organizer for MDWs is hardly enough to really develop a strategy for new member out-reach. One of the cleaning organizers helps out ones in a while, but still it did not come as a surprise to me that this spring the 2nd organizer had to take

weeks off from work to re-cover. Additionally, given the increasing criminalization of undocumented migrants, they are more likely to fear visibility through union membership. The leaders of the self-organizations are often visible in the Dutch media, but after all, the challenge remains to convince fellow domestic workers of the necessity to organize in a union. Often, they do not even see themselves as workers (MDW representatives) and it stays arbitrary what they gain by joining the union. In consequence, union members are mainly those, who can afford it financially and time-wise, leading to a bias in who speaks on the issues. After all, dissatisfaction of the MDWs and the withdrawal of support by CFMW led to decline in membership from almost 300 to a low of 30 members in summer 2008. The membership-rate fluctuates greatly with only few members .from 2006. In the end of 2010 membership increased to around 150 stabilizing at around 100 members in 2013.

Conclusion and Outlook

In conclusion, the unionization as well as the recognition of migrant domestic workers stays a struggle in The Netherlands .However, the comparison of their unionization process in first AbvaKabo and then Bondgenoten provides many lessons for modernday employment relationships. It underlines the importance of *framing and frame-alignment* in order to enter and stay within a union and gain support from union staff as well as rank and file. Further it illustrates the importance of proper integration into the union by still staying flexible towards special demands of these kind of workers, challenging formal often bureaucratic union structures. Afterall, the newly imported strategy from the US called *organizing* created opportunity structures. The organizer having close contact to the rank and file re-connects back to the roots of unionization, thereby providing incentives for people to organize in organizations and to undertake collective actions inside and outside the union. New alliances between (Dutch) trade unions and social movement actors such as the MDWs self-organizations, are built-up and are given form to mutually help each other. The unionized migrant domestic workers have converted their set of disadvantages concerning gender, race and immigrant status into power to unite and stand-up. In The Netherlands, the mdws were the main actors behind the process of the drafting and lobbying of the ILO Convention 189. Domestic work is not the only sector in which tensions regarding gender, migration and class remain paramount, thus the empirical analysis of the dynamic process of unionization is hopefully contributing to rethink the workers movement in order to meet contemporary challenges.

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