



# Secretly Serving Society

*...and how to bring out the secret*

Creating a social space in Dutch society for migrant domestic workers through unionization

Bachelor Thesis Cultural Anthropology

Words:11.165

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Amsterdam 16 June 2011



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## Introduction

“What do we want? Respect! When do we want it? Now!” A big group of around six hundred people has gathered in the middle of the Central Station in Utrecht. Loud drums and a Turkish flute give the gathering a festive atmosphere. People clap, yell and laugh. They are celebrating and they have all the reason too. About a year ago cleaners from all over the Netherlands stood in the same place fighting for respect and better working conditions with garbage as their main weapon. The workers union FNV Bondgenoten organised a strike and cleaners all over the Netherlands stopped cleaning for nine weeks. The strike turned out to be the biggest Dutch strike since 1933 and in the end they got some of their conditions met.<sup>1</sup> They are, however, not finished. Today, “The Day of the Cleaners” on Saturday the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, it is the first birthday of the strike and people have gathered to celebrate their last victory but also to prepare for the next battle. Their goal: More respect for cleaners! They want better working conditions, higher pay-checks, better treatment and more appreciation for their work. To achieve this, the FNV wants to improve the collective employment agreement with the employers of the cleaners and set better rules that show the necessity of cleaners in our society.

Among the cleaners attending the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, is a group of people that want to show their necessity to society but cannot be helped by better collective employment agreements and other formal contracts with employers because they have none. A lot of what is being said today, therefore, does not count for them at all. This group of people consists of migrant domestic workers that work informally and often have no legal Dutch citizenship. Next to the fact that the nature of domestic work is different from a job as a cleaner, their informal and illegal position puts them in a different situation than the other cleaners. Today, however, I see no sign of the difference as they show their support enthusiastically and without hesitation. Furthermore, when the chairman of the FNV Bondgenoten formally opens the “Garbage Museum”, at the Central Station in Utrecht, the main event of that day, it is one of the leaders of the group of domestic workers that cuts the red cord. The cooperation between the FNV and illegal domestic workers seems to be an unquestioned and celebrated fact.

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<sup>1</sup> Bron:

[http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/mijnbranche/branches/schoonmaak/nieuws/326778\\_dag\\_vd\\_schoonmakers\\_190311/](http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/mijnbranche/branches/schoonmaak/nieuws/326778_dag_vd_schoonmakers_190311/)



“The Day of the Cleaners”, Utrecht, 19 May 2011

At the same time, however, formal and informal statements of our current government show a growing concern towards illegal residents. In fact, in the last thirty years the Dutch policy towards illegal immigrants has become stricter and more ‘associated with “the abuse of public provisions”, “disruptions of the labour market”, and particularly with “crime”.’ (Tinnemans [1994] in Engbersen and Van der Leun 2001: 55) In 2009, a Dutch politician from the currently leading liberal party in our government, VVD, posted on his web blog that most criminals in Amsterdam are, in fact, also illegal. This is unacceptable to him. He states:

‘Criminal strangers and criminal illegal citizens, have to be registered as unwanted and deported...For the VVD it is simple: give them [the illegal criminals] no rest, take their money, chase them down, get them off the streets, register them as unwanted and deport them immediately out of the country.’  
Paul de Kom, VVD <sup>2</sup>

Despite the growing evidence suggesting that illegality and criminality are not directly linked (Ibid.), the ideal policy of the VVD is still that illegal residents after

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.pauldekrom.vvd.nl/nieuws\\_9861/17566/](http://www.pauldekrom.vvd.nl/nieuws_9861/17566/)

committing a crime, have to be deported. A rather new idea of the VVD and of other parties in the current government, however, is to make illegality a criminal act on itself. What our current government does not mention, however, is the position of the employers that hire illegal residents. Hiring an illegal resident is also illegal but never criminalised in the same way. Illegal residents are 'unwanted', 'chased down' and preferably 'deported'. Employers, consciously using illegal residents, are merely reprimanded.

The created dichotomy between illegal employees and legal employers excludes illegal residents further from the legal society and drives them into secrecy. As a reaction to exclusion, the secret of illegality becomes a source of unification for many illegal residents. (Engbersen en Broeders 2009) A lot of the domestic workers that have joined the FNV are illegal residents and are performing an informal job. This has never made them criminals before but it might make them criminals in the future. Cooperating with a formal institution like FNV seems illogical and unprofitable. In the light of the current environment in the Netherlands, the wish for a formal institution like the FNV to work with illegal domestic workers seems just as unlikely.

It is because of the growing negative discourse around illegality in the Netherlands that this paper does not want to celebrate the cooperation between the FNV and the migrant domestic workers unquestioned. It wants to acknowledge the differences between the formal cleaners attending the Day of the Cleaners and the migrant domestic workers that cope with a 'double illegality', (Cyrus [2008] in Günther 2011: 2) namely that that of the informal nature of domestic work, which makes that it is often performed illegally, *and* that of the illegal residency that a lot of the domestic workers have. It aims to see where the 'double illegality' comes from and how it influences the cooperation between the FNV and the illegal domestic workers. The main question it will, therefore, be addressing is; *Why and in what way do the FNV and the group of Migrant Domestic Workers cooperate?* To explore the first part of this question, namely the *why*, this thesis will first focus on the nature and perception of domestic work. It will then elaborate on the globalisation of domestic work and the way in which this has resulted in the existence of illegal domestic workers in the Netherlands today. The second part of the thesis will be dedicated to the cooperation between an informal workforce and a formal structure. It will first deal with the secret of illegality and the reasons for illegal domestic workers to make

their secret known and secondly explain *how* the cooperation between illegal domestic workers and FNV Bondgenoten has taken place before and still takes place now.

To be able to answer these questions I will be working with a theoretical framework on domestic work and illegality. I will use the theory of Bridget Anderson from her book, *Doing the Dirty Work*, to show the difficulty of defining domestic work and how the difficulty typifies the job as being in betwixed and between different categories. The categorisation, or attempt to categorise, will then be placed in its historical and social context by theories of social scientists like Anderson, Helma Lutz, Barbara Henken and Sjoukje Botman, who wrote about domestic workers in the last fifty years. To extend my theory I will also make use of the more symbolic framework on classification of Mary Douglas in her book, *Purity and Danger*. The classification of domestic work as dirty work can be linked to the classification of domestic workers as dirty workers. (Douglas 1966, Simmel 1971) This will connect my theoretical framework to illegality and to George Simmel's theory on 'The Stranger' (1971), which explains the dynamics of migrant domestic workers both as strangers and intimate parts of a household.

To understand where the cooperation between the FNV Bondgenoten and the illegal domestic workers is based on, I will use another one of Simmel's ideas on how secrecy can create bonds between groups. Engbersen and Broeders interpreted his argument in their article, *The State versus the Alien: Immigration Control and Strategies of Irregular immigrants* (2009), about the secret of illegal residents in the Netherlands. I will use both theories and question whether the secret of illegality is bonding for illegal domestic workers that join the FNV. It seems paradoxical that they want to destroy their secrecy in order to organize themselves as a group, yet when I saw them on the demonstration they looked stronger and more unified than any of the cleaners there. Something must have had a positive effect on the unification of the group. This thesis will display what that *something* could be.

## Part I - The Domestic Worker and Domestic work

### The Domestic Workers

‘Today, half of all the world’s migrants are women...Of these female workers, a great many migrate to fill domestic jobs.’ (Hochschild 2003: 188) According to Saskia Sassen, processes of globalization are never gender neutral despite the fact that much of the economic literature makes it seem that way. (2003: 3) A growing global process, that is not gender neutral and is still quite invisible, is that of the commercialization of care. (Hochschild 2003) The most obvious sector in which care has been commercialized over the years is the sector of domestic work. A movement, that is often referred to as the ‘care chain’ (Lutz 2002: 99), consists of mostly women that migrate from poor to rich countries to do domestic work to provide for their family. It is a worldwide phenomenon and the nationalities of the women vary, ranging ‘from working class German women, through Turkish migrant women, ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe, to Poles, Czechs and Russians, as well as women from Asia and Latin America.’ (Lutz 2002: 91).

A lot of migrant domestic workers come to the Netherlands because they know somebody else that works there. They use a network of friends and relatives to pick the country and often to find a house and a job. Information is passed on from one domestic worker to the next by means of social networks. (Hochschild 2003: 187, 188) These networks are mainly based on nationality and background. The groups of domestic workers that have organized themselves in the Netherlands, therefore, always shared the same nationality. Most of these organizations, that still exist today, are Filipino Organizations like TRUSTED migrants, Migrant NL and United Migrant Domestic Workers. Filipino domestic workers, all through Europe, have had a history of organising and standing for themselves and are still very present in organizing domestic workers in the Netherlands today. (Günther 2011: 12) Other organizations with a different background are; Ghanaian Domestic Workers Union and OTRADELA, which holds mostly Latin American migrant domestic workers. (Günther 2011: 6)

The cooperation between domestic workers with a different background and the FNV is a different and new sort of cooperation. It aims to unite migrant domestic

workers on the basis of their profession and their position as domestic workers in the Dutch society. A group of domestic workers joined the FNV (De Federatie Nederlandse Vakbewegingen), The Federation of Dutch Workers Unions, in 2006. The FNV federation consists of different workers unions and the union that the domestic workers joined in 2006 was the AbvaKabo. In 2009, the group of domestic workers changed from AbvaKabo to another workers union under the FNV, namely the FNV Bondgenoten. From 2009 until now, the group of domestic workers in the FNV Bondgenoten consists of approximately 150 members,<sup>3</sup> (Günther 2011: 21) that mostly work informally and of whom some are illegal residents in the Netherlands. As Rebecca Pabon, the organizer of the FNV Bondgenoten, says in an interview, ‘Basically, domestic workers who are undocumented, and also the ones that are documented, can be part of the Trade Union—so their proposal of coming to the Trade Union is to have a campaign in which they can fight for their demands: respect for the work, recognition of the work, and the work permit, as most people doing this work are undocumented.’

This thesis will be about all migrant domestic workers that cooperate with the FNV Bondgenoten but focuses mainly on the illegal domestic workers that are part of the existing group and part of the target group that the FNV Bondgenoten and the migrant domestic workers are trying to reach with the campaign.

## Defining Domestic Work

The international labor organization describes domestic work as ‘ [h]ousehold tasks performed as an economic activity in the household of a third person by adults and children over the minimum working age’ (ILO 2007, in Güther 2011: 3). A domestic worker is further described as, ‘a wage earner in a private household, under whatever method and period of remuneration, who may be employed by one or several employers who receive no pecuniary gain from this work.’ (ILO, in Botman 2011: 57). Both definitions are carefully chosen but remain to be very vague because working time and method are still unclear. Furthermore, the number of tasks and employers can differ for every domestic worker. Bridget Anderson, a social scientist who researched domestic work in six European countries and in the United States, did

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<sup>3</sup> [http://stil-utrecht.nl/documentatie/domestic\\_workers.pdf](http://stil-utrecht.nl/documentatie/domestic_workers.pdf)

not depart from these institutionalized definitions. Instead, she starts by asking the domestic workers about their prescription. To the question of, ‘what tasks do you perform?’ most domestic workers answered with; ‘everything’. (Anderson 2000: 15) They would do a certain task one week and a different task the next. Some of the workers would take care of children, some workers would take care of dogs and when the employers would hold a party they would also do the cooking and the catering. In this way the tasks of a domestic worker, thus, differ for person to person, from employer to employer and from time to time. (ibid.)

Anderson’s research, therefore, shows that instead of looking at it from the top-down description, a bottom up approach can be more accurate. Defining domestic work is difficult and information from practice is more reliable and useful. A thorough definition, however, can also set rules and limits to work hours, work assignments and other work related issues like holiday arrangements, and can therefore be seen as a necessary tool to combat the exploitation of domestic workers.

For the group of domestic workers that joined the FNV Bondgenoten, it has, therefore, been very important to define themselves. They consciously call themselves by the English term Migrant Domestic Workers. Even those that speak Dutch use the English, international, expression in their Dutch speeches and conversations. To describe this specific group the FNV Bondgenoten uses the term on their flyers and website as well. In addition, they also use the Dutch term, *huishoudelijke hulp*, which literally means domestic help or assistance. In 2008 the AbvaKabo FNV, the first branch of the FNV that the domestic workers joined, tried to clarify this term and distinguished different sorts of domestic “help”, namely; cleaning, gardening, care of children, pets, elderly and handicapped members of the household and reparations in and around the house. (Botman 2011: 57)

Despite the further description the term domestic *help* instead of worker remained the same. It is the common terminology in Dutch for domestic worker and not meant in a condescending way. It can, however, be seen as *typical* for the way in which domestic work and workers are perceived in Dutch society as helpers instead of workers. Although many families cannot live without a paid cleaner, nanny or au-pair, these jobs are never discussed or perceived as real full-time work. Illustrating for this marginal position is the fact that domestic work has not been integrated in the Dutch labor law and that any form of recognition and attempt of formalization of this sector have failed. (Günther 2011, Botman 2011) Sjoukje Botman, in her research on

domestic workers, and especially cleaners, in the Netherlands, presents a thorough historical description of domestic work in the Netherlands. In line with Anderson, Botman states that defining domestic work has always been difficult. This became especially clear in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women from wealthy families would also argue about the tasks that paid domestic work should or should not entail. Discussions about the subject were typically found in magazines from housewife-associations that were very popular amongst wealthy women. Like the FNV is trying to do now, they too tried to make lists of the tasks a maid should perform and the way in which she should be treated. These lists remained to be very informal and although the women made the lists, the man of the family remained to be the official guardian of the maid, who was officially seen as a member of the household. Domestic work was thus not recognized as work by neither the government nor the employers. (Botman 2011: 36) ‘By law, there was no minimum wage, set working hours, no right to holidays or set wages’ (Ibid.: 36) In time, however, more laws were passed that protected domestic workers. Tax related laws were passed to acknowledge domestic work, child labor was forbidden and assured that there was a minimum age for domestic workers and in 1909 domestic workers got some basic rights like the right to resign. Domestic work, however, never got the full status of work. According to the government domestic work cannot be a full source of income and will therefore not be acknowledged as a real job (Ibid.:37)

Thus, although domestic work has been known and present in the Netherlands for a long time, it has always fallen under the category of help, instead of work. According to different researches this has something to do with the nature of domestic work. (E.g. Botman 2011, Günther 2011, Anderson 2002, Lutz 2008) Sylvia Günter, who researched organizing strategies of the FNV for domestic workers, summarizes this:

‘...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 the private households, and is associated with unpaid work, thereby it is less recognized as employment.’ (2011: 4)

In her statement *reproductive work* and *private sphere* are keywords in understanding the perception of domestic work. Both these concepts are commonly used in feminist literature and critique the role of women in society. Even though domestic work is now, sometimes, also done by men, it is important to remember where the perception of the work comes from and how we can apply it to the current situation.

Paid domestic work has been known for centuries. In the Netherlands, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, paid domestic work became very visible as an active part of everyday life. In the time of industrialization, the demand for maids in the growing cities grew rapidly and created a flow of young girls from the country side to the cities. Interesting here, are the reasons for urban families to prefer girls from the country side. The most important reason was that girls from the country side were more obedient, neater and more loyal because they were far away from home and lacked the social networks to change employers. Barbara Henken in her book, *Heimat in Holland*, shows that German girls became popular at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the same reasons. Her research paints a detailed picture of the lives of the German maids and gives an insight in the social processes of in and exclusion that the maids had to deal with. The girls often left Germany in search for better life opportunities and while the Dutch society wanted and needed the girls to do the domestic work, the maids often struggled to find their place in Dutch society. (1995)

After the Second World War, the idea about domestic work changed and a new model of the perfect 'housewife' came into existence. Because of the welfare and sufficient amount of men, women did not need to work outdoor in order to provide for the family anymore. Women stayed at home to take care of the domestic work. Different rules of perfect housework came into existence and created the environment in which domestic work was rather done by the woman of the house herself. Because of this model, domestic work was now measured by a higher standard. (Botman 2011: 36-57)

The image of the perfect 'housewife' changed again from 1970 onwards because of the emancipation wave in which women collectively joined the labor market. This apparent emancipation of women gave a lot of women the chance to get out of the private and informal sphere. Housework, however, never left it. Housework or domestic work, was and is still associated with work that is done out of love, care or necessity by the 'natural female role'. (Bock and Duden 1977, in Lutz 2002: 90) When the woman then leaves this role, the first automatism is not to divide the

domestic work evenly among male or female family members, but to find - and often buy - another female caretaker to replace the first. (Ibid.: 90) This is where the emancipation cycle takes a funny turn, because in order to emancipate a lot of women in Europe, other women have to take over the domestic work which still remains to be informal. When looking at the concept of women-emancipation it is therefore very important to remember that there is not one homogeneous group of women all around the world. There are always women that hold power over other women and exercise it. (Anderson 2000: 6)

The replacement of care could have been accepted as a new field of work on the Dutch labor market. What we see in practice, however, is that this has not been the case. Because domestic work is never accepted a work it has never been institutionalized as such. Governments have never acknowledged it. There is a growing shortage of child and elderly care and this is often expensive. (Anderson 2000B: 19) With an aging population and the economic crisis of the past years the need for cheap and flexible care becomes even more pressing.

### What's In a Name?

Despite the resistance towards regarding domestic work as genuine work, the migrant domestic workers that joined the FNV, consciously decided to use the term workers instead of helpers.<sup>4</sup> This way they aspire to make themselves seen in a different light; that of a worker rather than a help. Helen Schenken, a social scientist, wrote an article called *Respect for ALL: the Political Self organization of Female Domestic Workers in the European Union* (2003). In this article she argues that there are two ways of looking at migrant domestic workers: 'some refer to migrant domestic workers as victims of slavery-like practices or trafficking in women and do not even mention questions of empowerment; others call them migrant workers and encourage them to organize.' (2003: 47) The dichotomy between voluntary and forced migration is problematic because the terms are socially constructed and thus create a fictitious division between the innocent refugee that was forced to leave his or her country and the guilty illegal migrant that choose to leave. (Ibid. 47)

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cascoprojects.org/gdr/Affinity/FNV>

The discourse of trafficking and slavery is a very dominant discourse, by which migrant domestic women are often approached in Europe, for example by the Council in Europe. In this discourse the migrant domestic worker appears as an innocent refugee that was trafficked and moved against his or her own will to work as a slave in the private household. Although the trafficking of people should not be ignored, many migrant domestic workers consciously choose to leave their countries to work as a domestic worker elsewhere. While the focus on slavery makes victims out of the illegal migrants, the focus on workers creates room for agency and organization. The latter focus is coherent with the contemporary demographic developments, like the aging of the population, the lack of good childcare and the growth of double-income couples that create a need for domestic workers in a lot of European countries. It shows that, like in all other sectors of the economy, there are employers in need of work and employees willing to fulfill this need. (Ibid.: 66 – 49)

By calling themselves *Migrant Domestic Workers*, the group of workers that joined the FNV emphasize first and foremost that they are workers that fight for workers' rights. Although they might identify themselves as illegal residents, women or even victims, they choose not to focus on these identities. As Rebecca Pabon says in an interview,

'We need people who understand why we are doing this and who have respect for these people, instead of looking at it as a 'victim's situation'. It's not about inviting people to listen to issues about motherhood, of someone who leaves her kid behind to take care of someone else's kid, that's not the immediate issue! That's the newspaper story that presents the domestic worker as a victim. We need to put forward these stories of women who are conscious of their situation and who are proposing their own ideas and who are in power. The most important is to bring these discussions to another level, to empower the workers to a level that creates the conditions to put forward their stories.'

Rebecca Pabon - 27 September 2010<sup>5</sup>

Rebecca's argument shows that the migrant domestic workers choose to emphasize their position as workers to make them 'agents with a voice articulating their

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cascoprojects.org/gdr/Affinity/FNV>

demands', (Schenken 2003: 50) changing their image from a burden to society to the image of a necessary need and profit-making resource to the economy. (Sassen 2002: 2) Moreover, this is not only a message to the public; it is also a way of perceiving themselves and stimulating self-organization of the group.

### Dirty Strangers

Closely related to the definition and position of domestic work in society, is the position of dirt in society. Mary Douglas, in her book *Purity and Danger*, investigates the role of dirt and purity in society. She argues that people universally dislike, fear or question dirt because it is 'matter out of place'. (Douglas 1966) It is considered dangerous until the identity is clear and possible to categorise. Once dirt is piled up and stored away under the common pile of rubbish, there is no need to fear it any more because the identity is simply absent. Poking around in a pile of neatly stored away rubbish is unpleasant because it reminds the pocker of the 'half- identities' of the dirt that are impossible to categorise. (Douglas 1966: 160) Dirt on itself, she argues, is, therefore, not dangerous. The dangerous position of dirt in society is created by the marginal position it has in society.

Although Mary Douglas does not mention the role of cleaners, in society, it seems likely that their position in society is influenced by the dangerous position of dirt. Their work is ambivalent because, while society needs them to turn the dangerous dirt into safe piles of rubbish, they are so closely connected to the dirt that they almost become related to it. As dirt, they too can become marginal and dangerous. The fact that the work of cleaners is often low paid and disrespected can be explained as a reaction to the marginal position of dirt and cleaners in society. Mary Douglas, in her book, considers people in a marginal state; 'These are people who are somehow left out in the patterning of society, who are placeless. They may be doing nothing morally wrong but their status is indefinable.' (ibid.: 95)

Illegal residents share the same marginal position in society. They have no place in society and while they might be doing nothing morally wrong, their status remains indefinable and therefore, like dirt, dangerous. The lack of formal figures about domestic work shows that most of the work is done semi-illegally or illegally. (Lutz 2002: 91) Illegal domestic workers do therefore not only share the 'double

illegality', they also share a double "marginality", making their place in society extremely unclear and vulnerable. Different social studies show that in this semi-illegal or illegal sphere the need for domestic workers in the private household, in Europe, is growing and that this need is mostly met by illegal migrant women. (E.g. Anderson 2002, Lutz, 2002. Schenken 2003, Sassen 2001, Heyzer and Wee 1995).

Dutch history, however, shows that it is not a new tendency for domestic workers to be migrants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, domestic work was done by girls from the country side that traveled to the city. Later in time, German girls were preferred and in today's globalizing world it is mostly women, and some men, from even further away. Some scientists like Saskia Sassen have argued that migrants often end up doing informal work because they are excluded from the formal sphere. Especially illegal, female migrants have difficulties finding a job and are often forced to make a choice between prostitution and domestic work. Domestic work, according to Sassen, is often preferred and therefore chosen out of necessity. (Sassen 2002) Opposing Sassen's argument are other scientist like Anderson, Botman and Lutz that argue that, although the vulnerable position of illegal female migrants should never be underestimated, domestic work can also offer other benefits for (illegal) migrants that could lead to a more conscious and free choice.

In Botman's historical description one very important highlight is, in fact, the notion that most maids that traveled from the country side to the city chose to do the work they did. Despite the informal nature, bad working conditions and obedient character of the job, most girls benefited from the situation. They used the job as a steppingstone to come to the city, move out of their parents' house, be present in a higher class, search for a husband or simply find freedom. Doing domestic work, in this way, was more often a conscious choice than a dramatic necessity. (Botman 2011: 27-51)

Bridged Anderson acknowledges the benefits for domestic workers as well and shows different reasons for (illegal) migrant domestic workers to choose domestic work today;

'Although live-in domestic work is for reasons of hours, pay and privacy, extremely unpopular among the population in general, migrants, particularly new arrivals, can find it advantageous: problems of accommodation and employment are solved in one; the worker, often in debt because of migrating

costs minimizes expenses and can acclimatize herself to a new language and culture. Moreover, accommodation is more than a place to live; it is a shelter from the police.’ (Anderson 2000B: 22)

Even though both scientists point to the benefits and show that in history and still today, migrants chose to work as domestic workers, the benefits they bring up are somewhat different. Where Botman speaks of a conscious choice to leave a village, travel for three hours and work for a rich family in the city, Anderson speaks of a conscious choice that is made by people that choose to live in another country illegally. The globalization of domestic work, even just the aspects of distance and citizenship, have changed the position of domestic work and therefore also the benefits and aspect of free choice. Although the benefits of domestic work for illegal migrants are present, other job options remain to be rare. The fact that they are illegal makes them even more dependent of their employer and does create a vulnerability that cannot be denied.

Reasons for employers to prefer migrant domestic workers seem to be more obviously the cost and the flexibility. (Anderson 2000: 21) Migrant informal labor is often cheap labor because it avoids taxes and because migrant labor is often cheaper than Dutch labor; that is, migrants often ask of a lower hourly wage. Furthermore, illegal domestic workers are flexible because of two important reasons. First of all they lack a social network that can support them, stand up for them, and provide them with a place to stay or help them with anything whatsoever. Although they often know some people with the same nationality, these people often share their position and cannot be of much help. The second reason for them to be flexible is because of their illegal status and fear of exposure to the police. This vulnerability makes illegal migrant domestic workers extremely dependent upon their employers and dependency creates a lot of flexibility and devotion. Finally, the migrant domestic workers is often a live in domestic workers which in practice makes them available more than a domestic worker that lives somewhere else. (Anderson 2000: 15)

Cost and flexibility seem obvious reasons to hire a migrant domestic worker. There remains to be something strange, however, about a complete stranger that enters into the most intimate part of the employer’s life. This thesis, therefore wants to take Anderson’s theory on employing illegal migrants a step further. To let a stranger clean dirty underwear, an expensive couch, the toilet, the bed, prepare food or raise

children, is extremely intimate. When this stranger comes from a little village two hours away from the city, when the neighbor heard some good things about her, when she looks familiar and clean, when she can talk and get along easily, then, maybe, this strangeness can be overcome. When the stranger looks different, speaks different, smells different and comes from a completely different continent, like many of the migrant domestic workers today, is it, then, still possible to overcome this strangeness?

Maybe it is not possible. Maybe the most important reason to hire a migrant domestic worker, more important even than cost and flexibility, is that people want the domestic worker to be a stranger that they cannot relate to all that much. Simmel, in his book, *On individuality and social forms* (1971), speaks about the stranger. He argues that people need the stranger in our society and that the stranger has to be close and remote to us at the same time. He is part of the society and society can relate to him, he is, however, also fundamentally different because he initially does not belong in it. It is a dual relationship that shows society what is strange and more importantly, what is not. (Simmel 1971) In the case of migrant domestic workers we see an apparently weird relationship between domestic workers and their employer(s). The domestic worker is extremely close, yet at the same time, extremely remote. The distance within the relationship can be described very clearly by Simmel's words as an indication; 'the distance within this relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near.' (Simmel 1971: 143)

The relationship between the migrant domestic worker and the employer(s) holds a distance that indicates that the cleaner is different, strange. Following Simmel's argument, one could say that the employer, who is often female, needs this differentiation between 'herself and the type of woman who does the dirty work and [that] racial/ethnic identities are a means of so doing.' (Anderson 2000B: 24). The domestic worker therefore *needs* to be different in order to come close. The employer needs the alienation from his or her domestic worker to feel the authority and to give orders to let the domestic worker do what we consider "dirty" work. What can be seen in practice is that racial or ethnic identities are often used as a means for this alienation.

Thus, the domestic worker needs to be different, needs to be alienated, in order to be close to her employers. Simmel, however, also turns this around. He says that

people do not only need a worker that is this close to them to be different. They also need someone different, to be near to them, in order to know themselves. They, in fact, need the alienation from the stranger to form their own national or personal identity. (Simmel 1971) To have the strange domestic worker this close, reaffirms their own identity and status. Anderson therefore calls domestic work ‘an expression and reproduction of social relations’. (2000 (article): 21) Who does what work, in what way says a lot about personal and national social relations and reaffirms them. The racial differences between a domestic worker and the employer clarify that they have a different the position in society and that the employer has a higher status. It does not only show this to the employer or to his or her direct family, but also to all their neighbours and guests, reaffirming the position and status in society.

## Part II

### Cooperation Between an Informal Workforce and a Formal Structure

So far domestic work and its globalization have been discussed. The previous paragraphs have tried to show the (inter)connexions between the two illegalities and the ways in which they can be separated. The next section of this thesis will draw on this theoretical perspective to show why illegal domestic workers want to join an official workers union and why the union wants the illegal domestic workers to join them.

#### The Secret of Illegality

Cooperation between formal and informal structures is quite common. (e.g. Sassen 2002, Penninx and Roosblad 2000, Engbersen and Leun 2002) The open cooperation between a formal institution like the FNV Bondgenoten and an informal group of migrant domestic workers, however, is rare. In his article *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Society* (1906), George Simmel focuses on the role that secrets and secret societies play in the formal society. The informal side of a society can be seen as a secret of society and groups of informal or illegal residents can be seen as a part of secret society. Simmel argues that there is always an interconnection between the secret society and the formal society. While the secrecy of a society can create a

marginal position for this society, which in many ways excludes them from the formal society, it will also cause more cohesion within the secret society itself. Secrecy as such will create bonds and unify a group that shares the same secret. ‘...secrecy and pretence of secrecy (Geheimnistnerei) are means of building higher the wall of separation, and therein a reinforcement of the aristocratic nature of the group.’ (Simmel 1906: 486)

Engbersen and Broeders have taken Simmel’s concept of secrecy to explain the relationships between the formal and informal institutions and the way in which these relationships influence the social connections of illegal citizens in the Netherlands. They emphasise that legality and illegality are not that easily separated and that the way in which the formal society deals with informality influences it. The authors speak of secret societies that enable illegal migrants to move about their daily lives unnoticed. These societies are not isolated from the formal society, they are embedded by what they call ‘foggy social structures’ (Bommes and Kolb [2002] in Engbersen and Broeder 2009: 3) Foggy social structures can be all sorts of legal, economic or social acts that make illegal citizens, organizations and patterns difficult to find. Employing or housing an illegal citizen or the cooperation between formal and informal institutions can be examples of foggy social structures. (Ibid.: 3, 4) In this way these structures are products of the legal society that uses illegal citizens and thus create a means for secret societies to be part of the legal society.

Governments have different ways of dealing with foggy social structures. In the last thirty years benefits for immigrants have shrunken to minimal proportions (Freeman 1992 in Light 2004: 288) and the policy towards illegal residents has become more repressive over the years. (Engbersen and Van der Leun 2001: 55) The main strategy towards foggy social structures and secret societies has therefore been, evenly repressive, to break them open. (Engbergen and Broeder 2009: 869) As a rejection towards the strategies of the government, illegal residents find their own strategies to protect their secret societies. Three important strategies that Engbersen and Broeder have found, are ‘(1) the shift from formal to informal work; (2) the shift from legitimate to criminal activities; and (3) the shift from being identifiable to being unidentifiable. (Ibid.: 875) The three strategies show an overall shift towards more fog and more secrecy. With the growing secrecy the group becomes further excluded from society and more dependent upon each other. The secret of illegality increasingly

stands at the core of the secret societies and is crucial in the formation of social connections and social organization.

Illegal domestic workers, like other illegal citizens, share the same secret of illegality and yet what they seem to do in order to unify themselves as a group, is joining a formal institution, screaming for visibility and recognition. This is paradoxical to Simmel's theory and the way in which Engbersen and Broeders have interpreted it. It seems that illegal domestic workers do not form a group or society based on their secret but that the emergence of their secret does play a very big role in uniting the group. The role of secrecy is important but in a different way than Simmel has argued. The case of illegal domestic workers that have joined the FNV therefore does not challenge the theory but develops it. The analysis of this paper shows that there are certain aspects about the work of a domestic worker that create a difference between the illegal domestic workers and other illegal residents in the Netherlands.

Other than on the basis of the social networks of nationality, organizing domestic workers is perceived to be difficult. According to Sylvia Günther, who studied the group of migrant domestic workers that cooperate with the FNV Bondgenoten, this is due to the nature of their work. Characteristics of domestic work that make it difficult to organize, according to her, are; that domestic work is '(a) not recognized as work, (b) often done for several employers, (c) performed singly in a private household, and (d) informally.' (2011: 5) Of course in the theory of Simmel, the fourth aspect, namely that of informality, could also form the basis of a group formation. Groups of informal workers can form loyal unities because they share the secret of informality. Illegal domestic workers, however, do not. The first three aspects that Günther names in her article make it very difficult to form a group of domestic workers based on the shared secret of illegality. The fact that the work is unknown and not acknowledged as work makes it hard for domestic workers to find each other. The same goes for the fact that one domestic often does several jobs. Furthermore, domestic workers work individually in private households making it very hard for them to meet other people than their employers. Rebecca Pabon, the organizer of the FNV confirms this notion about domestic workers; 'Domestic workers are not in a factory, they are in individual houses so we have to reach out in the places where they gather.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cascoprojects.org/gdr/Affinity/FNV>

The secret of illegality, for migrant domestic workers, takes place in isolation and denial and will therefore never form the basis of a community or, in Simmel's words, society. Foggy social structures embed illegal domestic workers in the formal society but can never make them a complete part of it. The migrant domestic worker that wants to socialize with other migrant domestic workers outside of his or her small social network in the Netherlands must actively seek it. The migrant domestic worker that wants to change something about his or her position in the Netherlands must first find the means to do so. The FNV offers a platform that can be used by migrant domestic workers to reach out to other workers and make a difference together. The campaign aims for domestic workers with the same secret of informality and illegality but also aims at giving the secret up. Only by spilling the secret, are the domestic workers able to define themselves, find other domestic workers and organize themselves as a strong group of different individuals. Whether the official organization of the FNV Bondgenoten offers the right platform to target a group of people that work in secrecy and isolation is still a very valid question. The next paragraph will cover the actual cooperation and the benefits and difficulties that come with it.

#### Cooperation Between FNV Bondgenoten and Migrant Domestic Workers:

##### *A product of society or a product of change?*

The FNV, is 'an organization of workers unions that promotes the rights of employees, people with a government entitlement and retired employers.'<sup>7</sup> It is a formal institution whose biggest goal is to improve the working conditions of the employee and create an environment of 'decent work'.<sup>8</sup> In total, the FNV consists of sixteen different workers unions, three of which are the Abvakabo, FNV Bondgenoten and the Women's Union. A group of Filipino migrant domestic workers, called the Commission of Filipino Migrant Workers, first joined the AvbvaKabo, in 2006, through their participation at the festival Women Inc, organized by FNV and the FNV Women's union in 2005, emphasizing their identity as women and workers. Like other women and workers in the Netherlands, these migrant domestic workers felt that

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<sup>7</sup> [www.fnv.nl](http://www.fnv.nl)

<sup>8</sup> [www.fnv.nl](http://www.fnv.nl)

they deserved a platform where they could complain about bad working conditions, gender related issues and get the necessary back up when they felt the need to stand up for themselves. (Günther 2011: 12-13) They had tried to get into the FNV Bondgenoten for seven years but never succeeded because of the informal nature of their work and the illegal residency of many members. After intense lobbying they got their message across; 'It's about work and employment relationships; it's not about having the right papers! (active unionist)' (Ibid.: 13)

At the start of the unionization 250 migrant domestic workers joined the AbvaKabo FNV, a union that specialises in work in the public sector and is thus directly linked to the government. A year later only 30 migrant domestic workers were left due to the difficult cooperation and dissatisfaction of many domestic workers. (ibid.: 15) Both, the AbvaKabo FNV and the migrant domestic workers wanted the cooperation to succeed. Unfortunately, the position of the migrant domestic workers as *informal workers* and *illegal residents* in a formal institution proved to be difficult. From the start, it was unclear under what sector the domestic workers would fall. The sector of Care seemed a good option but because this sector was meant for *formal* care workers, the migrant domestic worker were refused and put under the sector Social Services. They were put here, not because it was a good fit but rather because this sector accepted them and here too the domestic workers remained to be a separate group. Cooperation with other, similar groups was not accepted because of the informal nature of their work, emphasizing the differences instead of the similarities (ibid.: 16)

Where the distinction between formal and informal work was a reason for unequal treatment, the distinction between documented and undocumented residents could not be made. The administrative system required equal treatment of the migrant domestic workers and the rest of its members. It thus needed all their personal information. Due to their illegal residency, this was not always possible and created a problem for many of the migrant domestic workers that could not be overcome.

From the start migrant domestic workers had fallen between all categories that the AbvaKabo FNV had and instead of adjusting the categories, the categories and differences between the groups were only emphasised. As Sylvia Günther literally says in her research on the cooperation between AbvaKabo and migrant domestic workers, 'The administrator of Care reasoned that the private care givers (thuiszorg) are professionals in contrast to the MDW's [migrant domestic workers] and therefore

different.’ (2011: 15) The opposition between formal and informal and the link to professionalism that was made here, is an illustration for the problems that have been discussed earlier in this thesis; the problems that migrant domestic workers face in the rest of society as well. As they are betwixed and between categories in society, they were also in betwixed and between categories in the union. The constant focus on difference created an environment that was in complete contrast to the intentions of the cooperation. While the objective was to make domestic work accepted as real work, and domestic workers visible as real workers, the cooperation between the AbvaKabo FNV and the workers, unintentionally, only emphasised the exact opposite.

Due to the difficult cooperation with the AbvaKabo FNV, the migrant domestic workers changed to a different union under the FNV, namely the FNV Bondgenoten. ‘According to the Secretary General of Bongenoten “ AbvaKabo has made an analysis [...] concluding that the migrant domestic workers were not really fitting in, [b]ecause [...] you can point to the relation with care, but they are mainly busy with domestic tasks that are closer to Cleaning than to Care”.’ (ibid: 17) This statement is again illustrative for the way in which migrant domestic workers are perceived by society and also for the way in which they are searching for a place to fit in the right category of society.

Although domestic works is often more than cleaning, according to Günther, the domestic workers are more integrated in the FNV Bondgenoten because it was clear from the beginning that they belonged to the sector of Cleaning and were treated the same as all the other cleaners. At the same time, the administration of the sector Cleaning created a unique system where migrant domestic workers could pay their contribution without being demanded for a name or address. (2011: 16) In this way the FNV Bondgenoten has created a social space for the domestic workers to move through. They are acknowledged as a group of migrant domestic workers and at the same time embraced as Cleaners.

Different from the AbvaKabo, the FNV Bondgenoten, together with the workers, set five basis goals that ‘exemplifie[d] the broadening of union tasks towards a twofold demand for demand for recognition of (a) domestic work as regular work and, (b) undocumented MDWs [migrant domestic workers] with rights.’ (ibid.: 24) The goals reassured the domestic workers that the FNV Bondgenoten will support them as a union in their fight for recognition and rights but also clarified that that they cannot

make them legal residents or help them in their fight for legal residency. Rebecca Pabon, makes this very clear in an interview saying;

‘Documentation and migration isn't the role of the trade union, this is the role of the migration office, it's an important distinction. Our role is to organize workers. It is in our best interest that the sector of the cleaning industry is regularized, that workers have decent working conditions, in which the employers and the workers can have good relations. It is in the best interest of the workers and of the employers as well. My priority here is that these people get organized and we have a sector for decent conditions.’ Rebecca Pabon – 27 September 2010<sup>9</sup>

The distinction that Pabon makes between the union and the migration office is indeed an important distinction. It shows the limitations of the cooperation that will always have to function within the leading political climate. Pabon, however, also emphasises strength of the union. The FNV Bongenoten, being a union, has to provide good work relations between the employers and the employees. With that argument the FNV Bongenoten can, and presumable will, highlight the role of the employer that is often forgotten or ignored in the public discourse on informal workers and stress the existing need for migrant domestic workers in Dutch society.

Stressing the need for migrant domestic workers and fighting for recognition is something that the FNV is not only trying to do in the Netherlands but on a European level as well. Catelene Passchier, committee member of the FNV, stresses the importance of the international recognition and believes that this is the first step towards better workers rights for domestic workers.<sup>10</sup> The FNV therefore attends international conferences about domestic work in Europe. *Out of the Shadow, Organising Domestic Workers Towards a protective regulatory framework for domestic work*, is a publication of a conference held in 2005 in Brussels. The booklet calls domestic workers an ‘invisible workforce in Europe’ (Monks in ETUC 2005: 4) and shows ways for unions to help organize migrant domestic workers, in order for them to be come more visible. John Monks, the general secretary of the European

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cascopejects.org/gdr/Affinity/FNV>

<sup>10</sup> Statement made by Passchier in interview with author on the National Women's Day of the FNV 2011

Trade Union Confederation, argues that ‘Unions should not just look after the workers who are in the usual places, but seek out the isolated and dispersed, help them organise, and see that they are offered protection.’ (ibid: 4) The publication, in this way, shows a new and powerful discourse based on the practical experiences of migrant domestic workers, combined with scientific research from scientists like Anderson. It highlights the invisibility of domestic workers and the active role that unions can have in changing this invisibly. Different stories about the cooperation between migrant domestic workers and trade unions in other European countries remind the reader that it is a European and global problem that should be discussed on a European or global level. At the same time, it is striking that the position of domestic workers in the Netherlands is worse than in a few other European countries like Denmark and Italy and that Dutch workers unions will have to work on the organization of migrant domestic workers nationally as well. (ETUC 2005: 17)

From 2005 up till 2011, a lot has happened, though, and on the eighth of June 2011 a new agreement about domestic work has been signed on a European conference of the International Labour Organisation. This agreement acknowledges domestic workers as workers and allows them access to the basic labour laws. A small delegation of the FNV and of the domestic workers part of the FNV, joined the conference and was extremely pleased with the result. Yasmine Soraya, a domestic worker in the Netherlands, in an interview for the FNV website, said: ‘We are so happy with this agreement, it gives us the rights and acknowledgment that we deserve.’<sup>11</sup>

The recent developments in the union, the official European agreement and the optimistic reactions of the domestic workers all show a very positive and promising view on the cooperation between migrant domestic workers and the union. Although the agreement is just a beginning and the FNV still needs to attract more domestic workers, they are a step further towards more recognition, better organization and hopefully a stronger place in society for migrant domestic workers. The cooperation between domestic workers and FNV might have started off as a product of society but it seems to be growing more towards a product of change.

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[http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/nieuwsarchief/2011/juni/367164\\_ILOverdrag\\_huishoudelijk\\_werk\\_080611/](http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/nieuwsarchief/2011/juni/367164_ILOverdrag_huishoudelijk_werk_080611/)

## Conclusion

‘There are certain principles here: we are a union; and if you are a worker, you have the right to be in the union.’ Rebecca Pabon - 27 September 2010<sup>12</sup>

In 2006 a group of migrant domestic workers joined the organization of workers unions, FNV, with the idea, ‘if you are a worker, you have the right to be in the union.’ This idea, however powerful and true, is difficult to rime with the current negative discourse, from the media and politicians, in the Netherlands, around informality and illegality. The open cooperation between a formal cooperation like the FNV and an informal workforce like the migrant domestic workers is uncommon. The cooperation between a formal workers union and *informal, migrant* domestic work, a field of work that is still not recognized as work, seems almost paradoxical. This thesis has therefore not accepted the cooperation as an unquestioned fact, but tried to examine it critically by asking the question; *Why and in what way do the FNV and the group of Migrant Domestic Workers cooperate?* The first part of the thesis focussed on the perception of domestic work and its place in society on a national and international level. The second part of the thesis focuses on the cooperation between formal and informal structures and the actual cooperation between FNV and migrant domestic workers.

An understanding of the history and perception of domestic work helps to comprehend the current grow of mostly women that migrate to wealthier countries to work as domestic workers to provide for their families. This flow is often referred to as the ‘care chain’, for the migrant domestic workers take care of other families while asking or paying other people to take care of theirs. While the amount of women (and sometimes also men) that migrate for this reason, is growing, the knowledge about this group is lacking because a lot of the work is done informally and often by illegal migrants. The lack of knowledge is, however, also typical for the perception of domestic work through (Dutch) history.

Defining domestic work is difficult because the work can be very different for every domestic worker. To look down at domestic work through a forced or vague definition can thus be an ineffective way to understand domestic work. A bottom up

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.cascoprojects.org/gdr/Affinity/FNV>

approach that commences with the experiences and practises of everyday life, of the domestic workers themselves can be a more useful way. The lack of a thorough definition can at the same time enhance exploitation because it means that there are no rules for employers. A definition can set rules and limits to the work hours, work assignments and other work related issues like holiday arrangements.

Moreover, the definition of domestic work is crucial in understanding the perception of domestic work. For the group of migrant domestic workers that joined the FNV, defining themselves has been extremely important. Instead of the Dutch term “*huishoudelijke hulp*”, which means, domestic *help*, they consciously use the English term domestic worker to emphasise their identity as real workers that are used and needed by the Dutch society. The Dutch term “*huishoudelijke hulp*” reflects the way in which domestic work is perceived in the Netherlands as *reproductive work* that is naturally done by the women out of love for the family, and perceived to take place in *private sphere* of the household. It is not seen as a real, *public*, work field and not recognized as work. Migrant domestic workers are therefore not recognized as workers and when they sometimes are seen and recognized they are portrayed as victims of globalization that ideally should not be doing the work that they do. The definition of Migrant Domestic Workers, combats this perception and stresses their identity as workers that have agency and power and consciously fill a gap in the Dutch labour market.

That the gap in the Dutch society needs to be filled and that the demand for domestic workers is growing is closely connected to perception of domestic work as reproductive work. Although the need for domestic workers is not new in Dutch or in global society, in the modern western economy the model of the double-income couple is becoming more accepted and requested. Due to the perception of domestic work as reproductive work, the domestic tasks are, in this new model, not evenly distributed between man and women. Consequently a different woman has to be brought in, and paid for, to do the domestic tasks. Moreover, due to the assumption that domestic work belongs to the private sphere governments have failed to see domestic work as a priority that they should invest in. Public childcare, elderly care or cleaning facilities are therefore, for a lot of people still not available. The unavailability and demographic aspects like the aging population and the economic crisis of 2007/2008 make the demand for cheap domestic workers a very present and pressing need.

Cheap labour is often done by migrants, and especially illegal migrants. The reason that a lot of employers, therefore, use migrant workers is understandable. As illegal domestic workers are also more dependable, and therefore more loyal and flexible to their employers, they are often preferred. Although this seems logical there remains to be something illogical about hiring a complete stranger to do intimate work like cleaning the house, washing clothes and raising children. According to Simmel, however, this strangeness is often preferred because it is a way for employers to differentiate themselves from the domestic worker and at the same time, be reassured of their own identity and status as individuals and in society.

The demand for migrant, and often illegal, domestic workers is hereby maintained whereas the discourse around informality and illegality is growing more negative and repressive. While this discourse makes it seem as though illegality and informality are separate sectors of society, Engbersen and Broeders, show that the secret societies of illegal migrants are embedded in the formal society by foggy social structures, that create fog in order for illegal migrants to move through the legal system, thereby combining legal practices and illegal practises unnoticed. The more repressive the discourse towards illegal migrants thus becomes, the harsher become the measures from the government to break open the foggy social structures. Illegal migrants are thus pushed further into secrecy. The secret of being illegal, distances the illegal residents further from legal residents but also creates a stronger bond between the illegal residents themselves, forming a means for strong group bonding and organization.

Migrant domestic workers also share the secret of illegality but due to the fact that domestic work, is not recognized as work, often done for several employers and performed singly in a private household, (Günther 2011: 5) the secret has not created the same means of organization. To organize themselves, the migrant domestic workers, in fact, had to give up the secret of illegality in order to form a strong group. Only by spilling the secret, can domestic workers find each other and fight for the recognition of their work. Joining a workers union, is a way in which they try to do so.

The cooperation of migrant domestic workers and the FNV is thus an attempt to change the social position of the domestic workers. At the same time, the internal processes between the FNV and migrant domestic workers are a reflection of the social position as well. When the workers joined the AbvaKabo FNV in 2006, the

union could not give them an equal position with respect to the other workers because there was no social category for them. When they changed to the FNV Bondgenoten in 2009, they were placed under the sector of cleaners. Although domestic work is more than cleaning, the workers felt more welcome and in place here. They can be part of the cleaners, without losing their own identity as migrant domestic workers. The struggle for recognition in the union, is the same struggle for recognition that they have to fight in the rest of society. Although the union cannot help illegal domestic workers, to become legal, they can recognise them as workers and campaign for possible work permits in the Netherlands and also on a European level. This lobby has to create a social space for domestic workers in the Netherlands and ensure that their work is no longer betwixed and between different categories.

This case study has shown how informal domestic work is embedded in society but remains to be ignored by authority. It wants to remind the reader that not only domestic workers but that more circuits of documented and undocumented cross border migration are embedded in the dynamics of globalization (Sassen 2002: 3) and that there is a gap between the rhetoric rejection of authorities and the pragmatic existence of these circuits. Whereas this study has focussed on one specific group of rejected workers illustrating the gap, it urges other scientists to study the gap more thoroughly to create more understanding about illegal and informal workers.

Migrant workers are not just a burden on our society and they do not just serve themselves or the employer they work for, they serve the entire Dutch society and they serve it in secret. To understand domestic work and show the true role that it plays in our society, the secret has to break. The cooperation between migrant domestic workers and the FNV Bondgenoten creates a platform where migrant domestic workers can bring out their secret to create a stronger social space for domestic work and for themselves as migrants, as women and most of all, as workers serving the Dutch society.

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