

Authentic Activism

Domestic Workers as Global Development Agents

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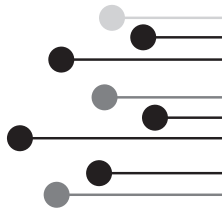
If they could pay us what they owe us from our girlhood, the entire economy would be in debt.

—Juana Flores, International Domestic Workers Federation

Domestic Development: Anchoring a Movement Through the International Labour Organization

Domestic workers have most often featured in development discourse as the iconic oppressed—poor women from the Global South whose lives are largely determined by a transnational economy that forces life migration trajectories. Relegated to household labor outside of the protections of the state, development has dealt with domestic work through the lens of globalization's failures. Among the least paid and most severely exploited, domestic workers present one of the largest obstacles to gender and development theories and practice. The particular struggles of this sector took center stage at the 2010–2011 International Labour Organization (ILO) meetings at the United Nations, when governments, workers, and employers debated a proposed global convention on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers.” In this first consideration of policy protections for paid household work, the terms of representation turned, as domestic workers themselves gained access to the ILO through international nongovernmental organizations, global unions, and policy institutes. Bolstered by new strategies of activism and a transnational public presence, the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) embodied this sector as “decent,” worthy of human rights, and deserving of global policy protections.

This chapter centers on domestic workers as activists, policymakers, and protagonists in UN rights making, rather than the “victims” of development's failures. The achievement of this global policy came about through an unprecedented presence of domestic workers themselves, advocating for their own economic rights and social protections within the United Nations. When representatives of this global sector literally and symbolically demanded that the global elite power structures and policymakers “think of their mothers” when voting on the world's first set of international standards for household labor, new forms of activism emerged within the iconic international governance system. As embodiments of the social,



economic, and political injustices of the existing world order, domestic workers brought a new possibility to the larger production of development discourse as actors within the UN policymaking system.

We explore these new avenues of international policy change through the persuasive influence of those who suffer most directly from globalization's sharp divides. Our reflections draw from ethnographic data collected from within the ILO policy process and fieldwork alongside the world's only international domestic workers' organization for the past 8 years. This chapter explores how women domestic workers reframed their own representation, thereby contesting their former place as the victims of globalization in development discourse. Our analyses introduce a theory of *authenticity as activism* that emerges directly from this original policymaking process and is transferable to related human rights struggles worldwide. From this symbolic policy victory, we examine implications for gender and development and the economies of influence that structure domestic workers' lives and access to global protections.

Domestic work grounds the global economy. As a central source of informal labor, the private household space has become an emblematic site of globalization. The ILO estimates about 100 million domestic workers worldwide, 75% to 90% of whom are women and girls. Migrant women leave their own children to care for the families of their employers, often in countries far from their communities and languages of origin. As a global gendered commodity, paid household labor has become the largest occupation for young women worldwide (International Labour Office 2013). Dependence on this form of transnational exchange has fueled geopolitical relations around the trade of care work between sending and receiving countries.¹ Scholar Cinzia Solari asserts, "Nothing signals 'Third World' in the international arena like the mass emigration of women to do domestic labor abroad."² Yet human rights and labor protections have not traveled with domestic workers.

The complexities of setting standards for household work stem from core ideological assumptions about the devalued nature of domestic labor, which takes place in the private household sphere and is quintessentially feminized, racialized, and rooted in deep histories of slavery and colonialism.³ Women of color, 90% of whom are from the developing world, compose this sector, making it a conduit for the reproduction of sharp divides between "maids and madams."⁴ In many senses, domestic workers present one of the greatest challenges to development's reach. Isolated in private households, often without citizenship benefits, domestic workers have struggled to access education, economic empowerment, and basic human rights protections. These structural barriers have virtually cemented domestic work as an icon of migrant labor exploitation and the failures of globalization. While local governments often overlook and afford domestic workers minimal rights and protections, the UN governing body sets standards with aspirations of a global reach in both policy and practice. Subsequently, the domestic workers who took center stage in these global policy debates enabled a rethinking of the role of activists, "actual workers" and "grass-roots women" as policy change makers themselves. With the interlocking systems of exploitation solidly entrenched across national histories, the symbolic and empirical macro scale of the UN international governance

institution provided the first crack in the pavement for changes in protections, recognition, and rights.

“Movements matter.”⁵ Domestic workers’ transnational activism around ILO Convention 189 became the largest coordinated social–political movement to address the global economic gender disparity contained in paid household labor. With “one foot in the labor movement and one foot in the women’s movement,”⁶ the “decent work for domestic workers” campaign mobilized dual concerns for economic and gender equity through the prominence of UN-level attention (Chen 2011). The ILO served as a meeting ground to bring national domestic worker movements together around a common plight for global human rights and decent work. This international governance institution played a community house role, to a certain extent, as the tangible gathering space, and common purpose galvanized activists’ cause at a particularly ripe moment in UN development discourse. Just as the IDWN set up its structure and solidified its cause, the ILO announced that the negotiations for Convention 189 would take place in the 2010–2011 International Labor Conferences. The possibility of gaining global rights centered the mission of the IDWN on a very tangible common claim to rights. By putting their voices on the table, in an organized activist form, the IDWN infiltrated the world’s largest labor institution and demanded a space for the experiences of those most directly impacted by the existing migrant informal economy.

Over the course of 2 years, this international network of domestic workers joined the tripartite negotiations, officially as observers yet in practice as active policy change agents. They gained access through two ally organizations—Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), a global policy-research institute, and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Association (IUF), the only global union to take on the cause of domestic work as part of its own mission.⁷ These organizations got domestic worker representatives “into” the International Labour Conference. While tripartite negotiations are reserved for government delegates and one representative of the worker and employer group, the presence of so many women who literally and symbolically represented the cause of those most seriously marginalized by the global economy made voluminous statements throughout the negotiations. Domestic workers fed their experiences into government delegates and the chair of the worker group to humanize policymaking and ensure that those most directly impacted by the discussions carried a tangible and prominent place in the negotiation room. With the backing of several international nongovernmental organizations and the WIEGO–IUF bookends, domestic workers succeeded in ensuring that the “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” negotiations carved new spaces for activists within global policymaking while setting in place a revolutionary moment in the making of human rights. On June 16, 2011, government, employer, and labor delegates to the International Labor Conference (ILC) of the ILO voted nearly unanimously to adopt Convention 189, “Decent Work for Domestic Workers.” The UN-level negotiations on these formative policy protections connected national domestic workers’ organizations to a global campaign, with a common appeal for the “same rights to ‘decent work’ as any other workers” (International Domestic Workers’ Network 2010:3). For development, the lessons of this acclaimed moment for women in the informal

migrant economy stem from the shaking up of a very traditional global power center by the first coordinated international movement of domestic workers. As president of the IDWN, Myrtle Witbooi proclaimed, “This is something that the ILO has *never* seen before.”⁸ From this encounter of forces, the terms of domestic workers’ activism and the ILO institution changed while the negotiation process became a symbol for larger gender and development struggles worldwide.

Drawing From Development Discourse: Decency and Human Rights Appeals

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They [domestic workers] are challenging the tripartite sectors in the ILO, who are considered instruments of change, to prove our value for freedom and human rights.

—Florencia P. Cabatingan, executive board member of the
Trade Union Congress of the Philippines

The notion of deeming domestic work worthy of international policy protections reflected an attempt to install “floor” protections for this sector, so often constructed as women workers who represent the “poorest of the poor” in the global economy. Just as “Black Lives Matter” reflects a “minimal kind of plea,”⁹ the notion of “decent work for domestic workers” echoed less of an aspirational and more of a baseline request for recognition in the sphere of UN protections. To be *seen*, indeed, composed much of domestic workers’ demands. Yet without any formal recognition in international protections, a policy that would bring domestic workers under an umbrella of rights “just like any other worker” represented a symbolic victory in the struggle for recognition among domestic workers themselves. The achievement of Convention 189 on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” brought this formerly invisible and excluded category of workers and so many migrants into the mix of international protections.

The IDWN leaders saw strategic opportunities to leverage the ILO policy debates as a means to build a movement from the public relations and global recognition such a forum provided. Their capacity to use the “tools of the house” through the discourse of UN development speak became a central strategic maneuver in how domestic workers showed up and embodied their claim for basic rights and protections. Even though the resistance and revolutionary foundations of the national movements that composed this international network held more radical notions of labor justice, socialist feminist struggles, and Marxist underpinnings, in UN speak, domestic workers asked for “decent human rights” as a fore into a global system that would legitimize their existence as central contributors to the international global economy. From here, once recognized, domestic workers could revisit their radical movement origins in the context of international coalition building. Thus, drawing on development speak served as one of the most persuasive strategies for the IDWN to claim a transnational state social contract where recognition materialized through tangible rights.

Domestic workers' claim to decent work and rights drew strength from their simultaneous capacity to point to the ethical obligations of the ILO as a global standard-setting entity ~~that held~~ the widest capacity to develop policy ~~that would address~~ the transnational flow of human beings. They used moral considerations, personal stories, emotional content, and historical conditions of injustice as compelling evidence to build central frameworks that linked domestic labor to three larger values: human rights, gender equity, and economic justice. By placing domestic work in a much wider context of shared priorities and ethical commitments within the international community, domestic work became a conduit for the ILO to demonstrate its emphasis on human rights, as well as the promises of gender equity and economic opportunities central to development discourse.

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Domestic workers staked their claim as human beings with “universal and inalienable rights” to social and legal protections.¹⁰ According to the UN doctrine, adopted in 2003, human rights must be indivisible, interrelated, equality-based, inclusive, and accountable to the rule of law. The domestic worker front pierced these principles by showing the existing divisibility of rights to social and labor protections because of the distinct nature of work within the private household, as well as the complexities of migrant, gender, and class-based location. Marcelina Bautista, IDWN's Latin American regional coordinator, contended, “As domestic workers, human rights in the workplace are particularly important, as they are the least respected.”¹¹ While they spoke of the discrimination they faced in their everyday work contexts, domestic workers called the ILO to uphold its commitment to the UN Common Understanding of Rights. Just as the ILO Conventions require states to uphold labor policy agreements, within the negotiations domestic workers held the ILO itself accountable to aspirational UN standards, where human rights are esteemed in the highest light. Their statements interrogated the ILO on its inability to ensure human rights for all. Again and again, domestic workers, who carried the visible and symbolic bodies of struggle, proclaimed that in the ever-increasing exploitation of the economic terms of globalization, their own human rights were “right, just and long-overdue.” When asked about the purpose of domestic workers' participation in the negotiations, Mexican leader Bautista surmised, “Like all people, we're reclaiming our human rights.”¹²

By using the very human rights and decency-centered discourse of the ILO in a framework in their activist appeals, domestic workers held a trump card in their ability to demand that the ILO honor UN standards and ensure congruency between such lauded aspirations and actual practice. This capacity bolstered domestic workers' credibility while rendering the denial of their rights unethical through the use of UN values as a litmus test of allegiance to international standards.

Affective Authenticity: Speaking to the Heart

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In addition to the activist strategy of learning UN development language, domestic workers occupy the rare position of being able to, in a way, “embody affect,” through speaking on their personal experiences in the field.

Being able to simultaneously code switch between the rhetorical strategies of policymakers while maintaining an air of “authenticity” in the deployment of their own personal narratives, domestic workers have crafted a rare position in which they are both experts in the subject *and* symbols of the struggle for basic human rights. When these embodied “actual workers” entered the discourse of policy debate, their narrative positions carried legacies of struggle, social justice movements across the world, and the lived experiences of women in this invisible economy—making Convention 189 unlike any other policy process. By centralizing authenticity, affect, and emotion as vehicles for analysis, the discursive power of domestic workers speaking from their own lived experiences brings a new lens into the crafting of UN development policies. We engage with an affective framework that positions standpoint as the center of both rhetorical and organizational power for domestic workers and the organizations representing them.

While this study is specifically examining the narrative power of domestic workers, it should be noted that domestic workers’ rights organizations are not *entirely* facilitated and headed by domestic workers themselves. Professional advocates are critical components of these organizations as well. In fact, of the original network at the 2010 ILC, only 28% worked full-time as domestic workers. The others had made their careers advocating for this underrepresented sector. In the case of the IDWN, for example, while the organizational message and mission spoke as a united front of domestic workers at the ILO policy debates, its actual leaders varied according to the level of their direct dependence on the field for survival, as well as their levels of education.

Likewise, it cannot be ignored that while organizations like the IDWN are fundamentally invested in the human rights of *all* domestic workers globally, the composition of an organization such as the IDWN is also lacking in regional diversity. No domestic workers from the Middle East were able to join the organization; in some cases, workers could not physically get to the ILO, and very importantly, the state political landscape in some places prohibited the movement of domestic workers into this highly politicized space. In some instances, Switzerland denied the visas of domestic workers, and at the most pragmatic level, the actual costs of travel were too burdensome for some. On a different note, for those that were there, language barriers and the lack of translators also created major issues of representation on the debate floor, burdening the ability for a *truly* global representation of domestic workers in the physical space. These realities complicated the ability of the IDWN to physically embody a truly transnational standpoint, despite having one in mission and construction. Some of these constraints also showed themselves in the organizational process, where certain hierarchies between professional domestic worker advocates had privileged positions due to their abilities to maintain a full-time investment in this cause. Given the unfortunate reality of attaining truly diverse representation in all forms of organization, it is always wise to be wary of essentializing the goals of any organization as adequately representing every constituent it acts on behalf of; however, as our investments are in the rhetorical strategies and ability of organizations like the IDWN to craft a narrative of *authenticity* on behalf of all domestic workers for the purpose of justice and liberation, we are invested in the potential global impacts of these political strategies.

Nonetheless, the message of this united front prioritized the individual narratives of domestic workers themselves to enable these experiences to become beacons for conscious organization and advocacy. Despite internally recognizing the potential pitfalls of using “one voice” to address all the unique issues that domestic workers in different regions and political climates face, the core epistemological standpoint of organizations like the IDWN is to put the voices of domestic workers first, and within that structure, a theory of authenticity *as* activism emerges. Thus, while the numbers indicate that not all advocates were domestic workers themselves, the employment of affect and authenticity *by* the domestic workers in these organizations was positioned in critical spaces to most effectively create change. Much like a professional degree held by an organizational advocate, authenticity becomes another factor that is critical for the members who were/are domestic workers and for the larger organizations themselves to embody.

In his 2010 ILC opening remarks, chair of the overarching ILO workers’ group Sir Leroy Trotman stated that because domestic workers were “present in the room” the deliberations would assuredly reflect a certain “reality on the ground.” The underlying message here is one recognizing that in many instances, policymaking decisions are often carried out in scenarios *on behalf* of the constituents they most affect. Domestic workers being present in policy deliberations has palpable impacts not just on the decision-making process but on the dynamics of the negotiations themselves. More than just spectral murmurs on the UN floor, power exists in physical presence. Thus, the domestic workers themselves act as a kind of “boundary objects” (i.e., objects that are meant to maintain certain meanings in different spaces, places, or times) between the lived experiences of women in this global profession and the institutions that determine the laws and protections they receive. In this case, domestic workers enable a form of translation to occur, where their lived experiences become credible and critical forms of evidence and data to support the development of self-protective legislation. More than simply being employed as passive symbols to tug at heartstrings, these women become active agents in the process of building policy to promote the promise of liberation.

The “authenticity” of their narratives becomes a speaker box for the diverse standpoints of domestic workers worldwide. While each experience with the domestic service sector is unique, and in many ways determined by a number of extenuating local factors depending on who and where the labor takes place, the narratives of those heard at the global stage become markers for the conditions that the women have endured and continue to endure. Authenticity as a defining characteristic cannot be learned or earned, which is a critical factor in the power these narratives possess on the negotiation floor. Traditionally, authenticity as a theory has been one attributed to the modern convention of individualism, where one articulates a sense of originality for self-fulfillment (Taylor 1992:29). Interestingly, in the case of domestic workers and the IDWN, their narratives are all unique and informed by their social locations and the circumstances of their employment; however, authenticity moves from these traditional modes into ones where authentic individual experiences are employable to speak on behalf of a very large and diverse community of women. By aligning affective appeals with the persuasive capacity of grounded evidence, the IDWN crafted new strategies that build a social movement around these authentic activist voices.

Hence, it is important to narrate certain *trends* that become indicators of an “authentic” experience despite individual nuances—at least an experience that is authentic enough to be useful on the negotiation floor. Authenticity becomes an interesting space where individuality and community meet to enact positive change. Be it in the kind of work, feelings of subjugation, issues of housing, or even violence, there exist narrative threads of synchronicity that link the experiences of domestic workers together in ways that are intentional and multipronged, contributing to a larger, “authentic,” and *global* narrative of the conditions that domestic workers face. What are the elements of these narratives that imply a kind of “collective identity”? While the experiences of domestic workers are inevitably individual in nature and determined by local conditions, there is a *political* attempt to link the narratives together in a way that discusses a similar “origin,” or in the case of domestic workers, similar working conditions, linked invariably through dominant concepts of gender and labor. Likewise, with a similar political *destination*, which is to generate legislative protections with a shared goal of liberation, a homologous social identity is scripted, creating parameters of an authentic and cogent community despite unique individual living conditions (Ferrara 1998:111). Linking data about the material conditions of domestic work, along with narrative heartbeats that span continents, domestic workers themselves, and organizations like the IDWN can create complex and nuanced arguments for legal protections that actively engage policymakers and domestic workers alike, in equitable ways.

The continual injection of “real-life” experiences of domestic workers infused a repeated human connection to the formation of global labor policy. When delegates heard of the story of Shirley Pryce, for example, who was forced to sleep in a doghouse for years while caring for her employer’s home, the need for global standards sharpened in scope, application, and urgency. Furthermore, the presence of workers who had lived through the struggles of unregulated household labor rendered opposition to the convention a cold denial of human rights. In essence, domestic workers like Shirley became living symbolic representations of the costs accrued in the historical failure to provide standards for this group of workers. While her situation may not have been the norm, by presenting her experience through the lens of collective struggle or as an enunciation of general working *conditions*, Shirley’s narrative contributes to the larger structure of collective authenticity. Interestingly, while unique experiences have traditionally been theorized as a threat to collective identity and collective authenticity (Ferrara 1998:117), in the case of the narratives of domestic workers and the larger function of the IDWN as a unifying body for women in this occupation worldwide, the uniqueness of their experiences actually serves as a binding agent in the collective identity. By sharing distinct *experiences* but similar *sentiments*, the efficacy of these narratives in the realm of advocacy and policymaking is strengthened, rather than weakened. All the while, the experiences of the domestic workers themselves are not subject to flattening for a collective voice; rather, the individual experiences create a (disparate) community that is fundamentally rendered genuine by nature of the “authentic” voices that are used in public forums, echoing through the collective sentiments of domestic workers everywhere.

Recognizing the political efficacy of domestic workers having agency in speaking on their own behalf, ILO Director-General Juan Somavía endorsed domestic workers' inclusion in the convention negotiations by stating, "I'm also happy that in different ways, domestic workers' activities are in fact present here in the room, which I think gives it an important capacity to come down to the reality of what you are discussing today."¹³ This notion of "reality" or "realness" is a powerful political tool, and it is something that cannot be bought or traded, offering organizations like the IDWN, and the domestic workers that speak out individually, a great amount of social and political influence. An experience being rendered as authentic, then, also implies recognition by outsiders. Authenticity is as much a concept that is self-invested as it is one that is read onto bodies. Its definition and the parameters of such change depend on who is articulating it, how many people agree on that definition, the relationships that people have to an object or place, and even the time period or region in which a particular object or idea exists. In all cases, in a given object, authenticity is assumed to be inherently objective and measurable (Jones 2010:182). People are also objects of authenticity, boundary objects of sorts, that fluctuate between read as authentic in the physical state and as symbols of authenticity in the ideological state. Rendering people as authentic operates on two different levels. Authenticity implies a form of honesty, or *truth*. This directly influences the second form of authenticity we read onto people. It is read on the bodies themselves. Authentic people are "real."

The injection of lived experience into the political debates of domestic workers implies an understanding that not only are these women very much "real" but their experiences with gendered and oppressive labor conditions is in some capacity universally understood. The nuances in experiences, like Shirley Pryce's, for example, work to humanize the conditions of an international labor trade that a diverse and globally reaching network of women are experiencing in some form or another. Thus, by asserting that global gendered labor inequality and oppression are indeed "real" (as backed by legitimate data and via organizations like the IDWN), the individual narratives of domestic workers on the debate floor become that much more powerful. "Authenticity," then, is a tool for political advocacy. This tool takes a particularly persuasive form in international policymaking spaces, where identities vary by location and language, yet congeal around shared authenticity of representation.

In a telling example, Ernestina Ochoa, IDWN vice chair from Peru, expressed in her report to the media immediately following the Convention 189 vote:

I am a domestic worker. I *work*. Up to this day, I have worked. I am here because I want to be re-vindicated of all of the mistreatment of our ancestors. We are asking you governments. We do not want nice speeches; we want *actions*. We want you to hear us. We need your support. . . . We don't want you to say, "this is what we have done for women." We want you to open the doors, sit down with us and listen to our voices. (Fish, Crockett, and Ormiston, 2012)

In her conviction, Ochoa references historical suffering to gain universal rights that go beyond gender-sensitive rhetoric alone. As she later proclaimed

in her reflections on the convention victory, “it is not free, it is what society owed to us.” Just as domestic workers asked for democratic relations of respect with employers, on a larger scale, the IDWN demanded that the ILO recognize domestic workers through global rights. Ochoa’s call to action at once referenced her individual position and experiences while also using inclusive language that further solidifies domestic workers globally, as a community. She embraces the political efficacy of individualism for inspiring sentiments of empathy and compassion in her personal narrative while also engaging in the political strategy of collective effort that many social justice-oriented political movements have employed historically.

The physical embodiment of struggle brought centuries of suffering to the contemporary debates. When domestic workers referred to both their ancestors and the hundreds of thousands of “poor migrant women” who have been excluded from protections, they drew on an imagined body of workers to strengthen their demands for institutional reparations. In her opening public statement at the 2010 ILC, IDWN president Myrtle Witbooi professed:

We want to say to you the ILO delegates: We have been waiting for 65 years for this to happen and we cannot lose this opportunity to appeal to you to please secure the minimum labor standards for the millions of domestic workers that are still unprotected in their respective countries, in order to create an international instrument that will not only protect domestic workers, but will also give us back our dignity and allow us to walk tall as workers, just as any other worker in the world!¹⁴

The repeated use of historical struggles to attain “dignity” and “respect” in the household became an extremely effective tool of moral and collective persuasion. At the same time, by asking the ILO to “set right a historic record of injustice” at the 100th meeting of the ILO, activists placed a great deal of confidence in the potential for international policy to set right centuries of historical marginalization. For domestic workers, this use of story was one of the most important tactics to ensure that the lives of their sisters earned a central stage in the debates around the terms of their very protections.

Affect as Power: Employing Emotion

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We ask you to bear with us when we became emotional the first day of the conference. But, as you all say, this was a historical moment for the ILO as well as for domestic workers worldwide.

—Myrtle Witbooi, 2010 opening speech

The IDWN repeatedly posed direct emotional appeals to advocate for policy protections. As they brought affect into their claims, domestic workers asked delegates to see the women who “face abuse every day” and “are left alone in the backyards of their employers.” Their representative voice,

Halimah Yacob, now the first woman president of Singapore, encouraged delegates to listen to the stories of domestic workers and look “deep in your heart and your conscience” when voting on the convention. This strategy of affect continually asked the tripartite body to integrate empathy when hearing the stories of domestic workers and considering their daily experiences. More than simply a rhetorical strategy, what this evocation offered was a narrative of expertise facilitated through an emotional appeal. Affect becomes a space of agency. These stories were more than simply a peppering of emotion in an otherwise policy-driven debate, but more an act of employing narrative as a means of establishing urgency and credibility. As emotion entered the negotiations, like Witbooi’s opening speech above, domestic worker representatives often acknowledged their bending of the usual protocol of the ILO tripartite procedure, thereby making this convention-setting process “a bit special.” An organized body such as the IDWN employing this affective strategy was a way of legitimizing the use of *experience* on the debate floor. This use of emotion as a lobbying tool contributed to the distinct nature of Convention 189’s negotiations; however, it would be myopic to view the use of emotion as a flash in the pan. Domestic workers simultaneously offered a rhetorical strategy for debate as key organizers and influencers within these organizations. Thus, their strategically integrated emotional appeal in their arguments built legitimacy for the long-term role of domestic workers in organized bodies like the IDWN.

Domestic workers’ use of emotion is critical to the analysis of this distinct development in policy formation for myriad reasons. Our examination of emotion is twofold. First, emotion is employed as a means of establishing authenticity. ~~Authenticity is not~~ a static entity that is immediately afforded outright ~~but~~ a dynamic formation of a combination of expertise and ethos. Simply being a domestic worker is enough to establish credibility in one’s ability to talk about domestic work; however, it is not necessarily an iteration of authenticity. By focusing a collection of narratives that have common themes, ~~an organized~~ entity like the IDWN can refocus the entire organization as an exercise of collective authenticity. There is power in numbers, sure, but in an organization where one of the pillars of foundation is advocacy, a sense of collective legitimacy is afforded to its members as experts able to speak on behalf of *all* domestic workers globally. Thus, as an organization, emotion is employed in policy debates as a means of establishing authenticity. One domestic worker’s story can pluck emotional heartstrings on the debate floor, but her appeal to emotion also serves the dual purpose of authenticating the larger goals of activist organizations. The use of narrative and experience acts as a way to buttress one’s existence as a domestic worker but also to link domestic workers as a group, together. As described in the section above, authenticity is prescribed to individuals *through* synchronicity as a group.

Emotion should not be confused with affect outright, however. The second way we examine emotion is to correlate emotion as a *vehicle* for affective power. It is critical to engage with the understanding that “affect is not a personal feeling. Feelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *prepersonal*” (Shouse 2005:2). Emotion and affect work in tandem. Where the rhetorical move of employing emotion is used to inspire empathy and understanding of the struggles and injustices often encountered

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in domestic work, using emotions to recall and incite physical reactions is key in recognizing the actual power of emotional appeal. Affect becomes an abstract symptom of the empathy evoked from an appeal to emotions. In essence, “affect plays an important role in determining the relationship between our bodies, our environment, and others, and the subjective experience that we feel/think as affect dissolves into experience” (11). Emotion is used to manipulate the air in the room in a way that inspires empathy but, more ~~important~~, necessitates *action*. Take, for instance, Myrtle Witbooi’s ILC closing statement in 2011. She appeals:

importantly

If somebody would have said to me 45 years ago that I would have sat here today and really get to the end of slavery, I would not have believed them. But 45 years ago, I was sitting in my employer’s garage and I was organizing domestic workers. Today I’m here. And I’m here because of the cause of so many domestic workers. And if you did not believe in us, if you were not so passionate, we would not have been able to win this fight. But because all of you believe, you believe there’s a better life for domestic workers, you believe that the time of repayment has come now for all of us. We want to be free. We don’t want to be called slaves anymore. We want to get what every other worker has in this world.

Witbooi is not simply recalling her experience organizing domestic workers. By evoking physical reactions and historical trauma through her use of the metaphor of slavery, Myrtle is appealing to emotions as a means of *creating* affect. She is directly appealing to one’s (individual) understanding of the concept of slavery while suturing it into a narrative about her role as a key organizer of domestic workers. Similarly, she directly engages the audience by indirectly indicting their actions as being supportive. She is establishing a relationship between the various “bodies” at the convention, domestic worker and otherwise, into a collective struggle by employing emotion as a rhetorical vehicle and by having been established beforehand as authentic, and therefore credible.

Throughout the debates, domestic workers’ strong affective claims took form by emphasizing three key dimensions of domestic work. First, by centering the historic exclusion of domestic workers, a legacy of human suffering heightened the onus of responsibility for the ILO to redress past circumstances that separated families, normalized servitude, and enslaved people of color throughout the world. Second, domestic workers emphasized their high vulnerability to abuse, using extreme cases to highlight the potential for severe exploitation and all forms of trauma. By drawing on the sharp power imbalances between employers and domestic workers, IDWN representatives often referenced cases of extreme abuse central to the nature of unregulated labor in the private household. In their statements and input in the process, they demonstrated how such abuse takes physical, emotional, and sexual forms. By highlighting the bodily and emotional layers of oppression in their own experience, domestic workers repeatedly evidenced the painful realities of abuse to sensitize delegates’ understandings of the impact of protections.

Affect in these instances is a means of capitalizing on the tension between trauma, storytelling, and its effects in a debate space. For instance, domestic worker statements often referenced severe psychological suffering as a result of the frequent familial separation required to perform domestic work, sharpened by the demands for migration embedded in the work. As one domestic worker activist from Guatemala asserted, “Our children are left at our grandmothers’ houses.” As they drew on the power differentials between employers and domestic workers, representatives highlighted the emotional hardship of facing the sharp inequalities between their own lives and those of the families they served. For instance, daily tasks like walking employers’ dogs—while leaving their own children to the care of aunts and grandmothers who often reside far away in the most basic living standards—caused extreme psychological hardship for women. As president of the South African domestic workers’ union Hester Stephens recollected, “There is a gap between you and your children.” Thus, affective claims making took form through compelling stories and examples of extreme suffering that placed exclamation points on domestic workers’ rhetorical stances. Their *cris de coeur* created a social dialogue process that demanded a certain level of respect and empathy for the workers in the room, who had lived through experiences of severe suffering and emerged as activist leaders. This affective rhetoric ultimately played a central role in tipping the favor to convention support for domestic workers.

Employing affect is not without its drawbacks, however. Employing emotion as a means of facilitating affective power is a method of creating visibility. Recalling harrowing and triggering instances of trauma is a project in ethos building, and domestic workers are becoming hypervisible; for a population that has historically been rendered all but invisible and silent, the process of *being seen* is incredibly powerful and politically advantageous. Hypervisibility, however, can lead to the undesirable effect of surveillance, which is critical to acknowledge (Ahmed and Stacey 2000:16). For domestic workers who are still actively in the profession, there runs the possibility that their words or their recounting of experiences, particularly triggering or traumatic experiences, on the debate floor could have potentially harmful impacts on them in their respective spaces of employment. That said, from a feminist standpoint, the benefits of visibility outweigh the possible disadvantages, given that it is domestic workers themselves who are the gatekeepers of the narrative. As they are spokespeople for all domestic workers (at least within the confines of the ILO debate floor), their agency and expertise on the matter is of utmost importance. Therefore, the projects of authenticity and affect serve as a means of differentiating domestic workers from other politicians and advocates by positioning the domestic worker (in a plural sense) as the only entity truly capable of appealing to emotion and using the power of affect, as they are the only actual “authentic” agents in the larger debate about human and domestic workers’ rights.

By using emotional appeals, domestic workers developed a very particular policy-activist strategy. In their arguments and public statements, IDWN leaders aspired to “reach the hearts of employers.” The technical training sessions that prepared domestic workers for their public delivery emphasized that speeches should “leave the audience in tears.” In doing so, to a certain extent, leaders of the IDWN drew on traditional constructions of gender by

The use of

enacting an emotional “women’s story” within the predominantly masculine space of the ILO. This approach feminized the wider appeal for domestic worker rights, which held a particular moral power within the heavily masculinized organization. In many ways, the quest for authenticity contributes to this gendered dichotomy. By positioning authenticity as a means of establishing credibility, affective arguments become ensconced in reproducing the notion of “emotion” as oppositional to “reason.” By making the image of domestic work concrete through strong affective appeals, domestic workers notably increased the legitimacy and impact of their claims. As domestic workers asked for the “hearts” and “tears” of delegates, they positioned the predominantly male representatives of employer and government bodies as their protectors—able to ensure rights through their power locations. Their plea to bring emotion into the negotiations recognized the normalized value of the rational, male-centered global governance institution. IDWN leaders often represented delegates’ own use of domestic workers, and at times played on this in their interpersonal encounters with governments and employer representatives. “How would you feel if your domestic worker were not protected?” they would ask. Through these exchanges, delegates in each of the tripartite bodies had to look at their own lives when confronted with the affective appeals of domestic workers. In many ways, the IDWN’s affective strategy served to use guilt as persuasion by making it look as if policymakers were heartless (as well as immoral) if they ignored domestic workers.

Ultimately, affective strategies have deeply subversive potential. From a feminist standpoint, the use of affect through the vehicle of authenticity and emotion normalizes and validates the shared struggles of being a domestic worker, and its presence on a debate floor is inherently transgressive. Where masculinized spaces like the UN debate floor are supposed to be the arena of ration and reason, by injecting the “outlaw” of emotion in a manner that creates power (affect), the space is “feminized” through an act of rhetorical subversion (Jaggar 1989). Forcibly engaging affect in a space where emotion and affect are rendered suspect, and doing so in a way that lends credibility and legitimacy to larger claims about human rights, domestic workers’ narratives are simultaneously empowering their right to literally occupy said space and to metaphorically challenge hegemonic masculinity. To recall Myrtle Witbooi’s ILC statement, strategically employing her “authentic” experience through an emotional appeal to human rights and the historical correlation with slavery, opposing her position indirectly suggests an acceptance of slavery. Therefore, while potentially upholding historically nefarious gendered dichotomies, it is within the application of these very dichotomies that domestic workers are able to exercise a “right” over their occupancy in this masculine space of debate, or “reason.”

Nowhere is this more palpable than in the direct indictment of ILO delegates for their direct roles in systems of oppression by the domestic workers in attendance. By directly exposing the intimate labor of the private worlds of those seated in the negotiations, their subsequent responses and actions in the debate become deeply personal. The IDWN’s approach refused to allow the debate to dissolve into esoteric or impersonal terms. Therefore, delegates became directly accountable for their position within this global system of labor. In her 2010 address to the entire ILC, Vicky Kanyoka exemplified this embedded accountability when she asked delegates to look at the core

contributions of domestic workers, and the women in that very chamber who performed that work each day. “It is us who take care of your precious children and your sick and elderly; we cook your food to keep you healthy and we look after your property when you are away.” Through her use of the second-person *you*, Kanyoka made delegates’ own lives material for the negotiations. Similarly, Myrtle Witbooi, in an assertion to government officials, plainly states, “You would not be here today if it were not for the domestic worker in your household.” She went on to ask, “Who ironed your shirt?” to point to the inherent contradiction in delegates who opposed standard setting yet benefited extensively from domestic service in their everyday lives. By directly engaging with the delegates and the participants themselves, domestic worker leaders forced those in the room to take the issue seriously, making decent work protections not just a policy issue but a moral and ethical one. The indictments paired with the physical presence of domestic workers in the room put pressure on delegates to take their votes as ones steeped in personal accountability. Support for Convention 189, particularly among employers, became a means of showing how “compassionate capitalism” may operate to protect the world’s caretakers. In essence, colonial notions of employers’ benevolence merged with the transnational informal economy realities to carve new spaces for development policies to protect those deemed “most vulnerable.”

Likewise, this integration of domestic workers’ stories, and the emphasis on the moral obligation of those in power to redress the experiences of suffering on the floor, functioned in two ironic ways. On the one hand, it ensured that domestic workers’ narratives remained central considerations in policymaking—a maneuver that played a key role in the overall negotiations. At the same time, this collapsing of women’s emotional stories with domestic work reproduced vulnerable gendered subjects—placed in visual and narrative forms as poor migrant women of color from the Global South, dependent on the state and transnational institutions to protect their rights. In essence, the IDWN played with this dialectic of dependency as a pragmatic feminist activist maneuver through the use of emotion. This affective rhetoric became a vital strength in domestic workers’ strategy; however, it also rendered a benevolent state that holds the power to protect disempowered women. To a certain extent, domestic workers recognized and played on this evident mutual dependency. In doing so, they both reinforced the power of traditional male institutions and subverted it by performing as *well-behaved activists*.

To further exemplify their operation in this liminal space between upholding gendered conventions and challenging them, the domestic workers’ narratives often unapologetically problematized the very gender roles they were upholding in their political strategy of appealing to emotion. Hester Stephens brought memories of her childhood experience to the public forum to show how women and girls suffer in the gendered family constructions that send them into domestic work at a very early age:

While we are here, it just runs through my mind, where did I come from and where am I today. I mean if you really think about the domestic workers as a whole, because we don’t have proper education, there was no time for us to go to school, because we had to leave school and to try to provide and help our fathers put bread on the table.

This positioning of emotion through shared historical suffering across diverse geographic divides widened the legitimacy that domestic workers brought to the negotiations. Their shared suffering recalls our earlier investments in establishing authenticity as a collective effort as much as an individual one, and subsequently allows for the individual narrations of experience as credible evidence for the larger argument of domestic workers' rights. As other social movements for justice reveal, the demonstration of bodily harm and collective pain strengthens the use of story as a symbolic political tactic for transnational activist networks. Within the ILO policymaking landscape, no other group could offer the depth and rhetorical influence of real-life stories as domestic workers themselves can. Their testimonials of prolonged hardship imposed serious challenges to decision makers' abilities to ignore these public statements of private trauma.

These narratives of domestic workers interwove emotional, psychological, and economic hardships to embody suffering in policymaking. Marissa Begonia, a Filipina domestic worker activist in the United Kingdom, exemplified this use of persuasion tactic when she wove her experience of mothering into her public ILO speech:

Years ago I took a decision to leave my children behind. It is my responsibility to keep my children alive. Through domestic work, that is how my children grew up, it is how I educated my children. This has made me strong. It has given me the courage to continue.

~~Marissa's~~ experience locates her as both a victim of the harsh requirements of physical separation central to domestic work and a strong advocate who became a labor activist as a result of her circumstances. This dual positioning of domestic workers as both victims of suffering and resourceful international activist survivors set up a persuasive standpoint throughout the policy negotiations. As they called on emotional appeals to recognize their history of suffering, domestic workers simultaneously demanded that they be taken seriously as central stakeholders in the policy process. U.S. activist Juana Flores captures this sufferer-survivor stance in an interview with the Latin news agency Agencia Efe during the 2011 conference:

Begonia's

Honestly, there are those of us who have gone through those types of abuses, and we've remained silent. Or if we've talked, we've had the experience of what happens at those times when we say: "That's enough for me. No. Enough already. Today, today, it's enough. I'm going to risk it."

Flores's capacity to "risk it" placed her on the official U.S. labor delegation as one of the most prominent experts on domestic labor in the country.

This technique brought power and legitimacy to domestic workers as they took the public ILO stage. Yet this use of affective capital also links women to the emotional domain while reconstructing domestic labor as feminized through the "heartstrings" these stories intended to pull. Even though this technique worked as a distinct strategy in the case of this policy, these narratives of struggle also fed into a subtext of domestic workers in

need of charity, which allows the ILO to come in as a paternalistic rescuer to the “millions of abused women out there in this field.” Thus, this strategy teaches us that the trade-offs between “selling suffering” for a greater good and risking further essentialized constructions of “vulnerable” domestic workers is constantly negotiated in the larger purpose of a movement and its immediate goals. In this case, constructing vulnerability and suffering more often won over the risks of reconstructing traditional associations to race, national status, gender, class/caste, sexuality, and religion in the process of presenting a collective transnational domestic worker story.

By suturing the concept of authenticity and emotion into the political strategies of affective employment, it is possible to see that while engaging in acts that reproduce this notion of gendered pain as a method for seeking liberation, the very women who are being strategically employed as symbols of oppression are very much *active* agents in the formation of public policy. It is myopic to assume that the domestic workers’ use of their experiences renders them different than “experts” in any other field. Authenticity as a theoretical framework is a useful tool for recognizing the critical importance that these personal narratives have in engaging and contributing to a larger social movement dedicated to the ending of prohibitive and oppressive working conditions for domestic workers worldwide. Emotion and affect, then, serve as the evidence to the ethos established by authenticity. Authenticity implies realness, a realness that is understood both by the individual and those outside a given community, and simply by acknowledging these very real experiences (whether they wish to or not), policymakers are validating the gravity of the situation of domestic work globally. They are forced to react. They are reached at an emotional level, and physically and psychologically compelled to act from an affective level. Despite the gendered nature of emotion, domestic workers and their accompanying advocacy organizations are using affect as a way to promote their visibility in traditionally male-dominated and masculine-oriented spaces. Regardless of the outcome, there is no denying that the approach is inherently transgressive and subversive. Affect is power.

This process

Conclusions

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This policy victory marks a new form of economic and political agency for domestic workers. Formerly coded as the “failures” of development’s reach, domestic work centered ILO dialogue as a symbolic recognition of the informal economy and migrant workers. At the heart of this historic moment, the transnational organization of domestic workers carved a new space for activists to take part in the formation of policy. Through the use of affective narratives, domestic workers became key agents in creating changes in global policy to protect the interests of their own group. By using a framework of “authenticity,” domestic workers strategically held this global governance house accountable to the workers who would be most impacted by its policies. In fact, the use of affective claims held new ground within the UN policymaking system by challenging the power structure to listen to the voices of “actual workers” within the policymaking process. These narratives of

“authenticity” operate as a framework of evidence and a key argument in liberation strategies at the policy level. We suggest that this strategy broke new ground through its particular persuasion. When those who are the sources of development discourse speak out, within the international institutions responsible for development policy, collective agency takes form in both altering the system and gaining ground in the realm of policy protections.

As a slogan that carried this global movement, “women won’t be free until domestic workers are free.” The Convention 189 policy victory gave domestic worker activists to contend, “Now we are on the map!” As a public relations tool, the recognition this movement gained through the ILO was unprecedented. Yet the “real work” of development is in the application of these protective policies at the state level. To date, 26 countries have ratified Convention 189, ensuring that its protections are mirrored in national laws. Domestic worker organizations continue to advocate for change at the national level through the use of affective strategies as a means to insist on empathy in policymaking. In the larger development scheme, we suggest that this embodied use of authenticity paints new landscapes of possibility to empower those impacted most directly by policy change. Juan Somavía, then director general of the ILO, proclaimed that unlike any other moment, when “domestic workers and diplomats” sat together to construct policy, the UN systems shifted to respond to “grassroots organizations.” We suggest that the integration of grassroots representation in global governance inscribed a new language of affective authenticity. Beyond imagery of women in development—picture a pair of girls in rural Africa adorned with water buckets on their path walk—domestic workers embodied the *actual recipients* of the labor policies that would directly impact their sector. Rather than the affect of association to such essentialized images, as an organized transnational movement, domestic workers spoke to policymakers directly, claiming, “We know you have a heart.” The real test of empowerment will be seen as these affective strategies influence the daily practices of private households, where women continue to face exploitation, abuse, and economic injustice. In the eyes of the domestic worker representatives with the transnational movement, now is the time to translate affect to economic action. As policy becomes practice, these “heart votes” will hold meaning only in the translation to economic empowerment and everyday agency—as domestic workers’ compensation recognizes their place as “cogs in the wheel” of the global economy.

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NOTES

1. For a comprehensive analysis of the state’s participation in the export of domestic workers, see Christine Chin’s (1998) account of the relationship between the Philippines and Malaysia in her formative book *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian “Modernity” Project*.
2. Drawn from the Fourth Conference of the Sociology of Development Section in reference to earlier work. See Solari (2010).
3. For in-depth analyses of the institution of domestic labor and its embedded race, class, gender, and geographic divides, see Rollins (1985); Chaney, Garcia Castro, and

- Smith (1989); Romero (1992); Gill (1994); Heyzer, Lycklama à Nijehold, and Weerakoon (1994); Bakan and Stasiulis (1997); Chin (1998); Anderson (2000); Gumburd (2000); Chang (2001); Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001); Parreñas (2001); Fish (2006); and Ally (2010).
4. See Cock (1989) for a full analysis of these terms under apartheid South Africa.
 5. This insight is drawn from a personal conversation with Ai-Jen Poo at the 2011 ILC meetings in Geneva.
 6. Marty Chen, founder of WIEGO, originally made this statement at the 2010 ILC meetings among domestic worker representatives.
 7. Dan Gallin spearheaded this movement as the leader of the IUF. For a more comprehensive history of these leaders' roles, see Fish (2017).
 8. Public speech at the ILC, 2010.
 9. Cornelius Edy, Association of Writers and Professionals Conference, Tampa, Florida, March 2017.
 10. For further reference, see "The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation: Towards a Common Understanding Among UN Agencies," HRBA Portal, <http://hrbaportal.org/the-human-rights-based-approach-to-development-cooperation-towards-a-common-understanding-among-un-agencies>.
 11. CONLACTRAHO (Confederación Latinamericana y del Caribe Trabajadoras del Hogar) interview conducted by WIEGO.
 12. Marcelina Bautista, personal interview conducted by Sofia Trevino, WIEGO.
 13. Juan Somavía, statement to the ILC Committee on Domestic Workers, June 3, 2010.
 14. ILC field notes, 2011.