

Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers

Edited by

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Decent Work for Domestic Workers: Feminist Organizing, Worker Empowerment, and the ILO

Eileen Boris and Jennifer N. Fish

"A baby was born, the baby is starting to crawl, but the baby is going to walk," announced South African Myrtle Witbooi, the newly elected President of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF).¹ This birth took place on 28 October 2013 in Uruguay, nearly eighteen months after domestic workers worldwide won the first international set of standards to acknowledge their right to decent work. They would be "slaves no more," no longer the invisible workers whose care and household labors long proved essential to the world economy. "Now, for the first time, we can speak on our own terms," declared Juana Flores from the National Domestic Workers' Alliance, who became a United States Worker delegate to the International Labor Organization (ILO) during the final debate over passing a convention for domestic workers in June 2011.² After years of strategic activism and negotiations with governments and employers, the ILO approved Convention 189, a treaty-like document that now extends wage, hour, working conditions, and other labor protections to domestic work.³ Some two decades of organizing at the national level, a distinct history of feminist and labor advocacy within the ILO and an overarching climate to expand protections to the informal economy facilitated this symbolic birth of the first global policy on household labor.

Deliberating on global standards for domestic workers was not entirely a new issue for the ILO. As early as the 1930s, the ILO studied conditions of domestic work; it was particularly concerned that low pay and the practice of living-in posed moral dangers, leading women to prostitution.⁴ Following

1 Election Statement made by President Myrtle Witbooi, International Domestic Workers Federation Founding Congress, Montevideo, Uruguay, 24–26 October 2013; see also, International Domestic Workers Network. "A Message from Myrtle Witbooi, IDWN Chair," *IDWN News*, October 2011.

2 Flores in Celia Mather, "'Yes, We Did It!' How the World's Domestic Workers Won Their International Rights and Recognition" Report published by WIEGO (Cambridge, MA, 2013), iii.

3 Helen Schwenken, "From Maid to Worker," *Queries* 7 (2012), 14–21.

4 "Prevention of Prostitution: A study of preventive measures, especially those which affect minors," Draft Report, League of Nations, Advisory Committee on Social Questions, Geneva, 15 May 1939, 45–70, C.Q.S./A./19 (a), League of Nations Archive, Geneva.

WWII, when sociologists and policy makers alike predicted the end of domestic service, the ILO surveyed member nations on the plight of household workers. It understood domestic work as part of the problem of an expanded movement of women into employment, and sought solutions to what loomed as a crisis of care and household maintenance.⁵ This initiative fizzled in the early 1950s; neither did study of the occupation in subsequent decades lead to action. It would take over sixty years for this international body to include household workers under basic labor protections.

What accounts for the designation as “decent work” of a prototypical form of feminized labor, hidden in the household and involving familiarity and intimacy – prime reasons that domestic work long stood outside of public scrutiny and legal regulation? This chapter considers the initial framing of domestic service by the ILO in the interwar period and then compares two moments in which the ILO discussed domestic worker protections: the early post-WWII period, when labor feminists raised the question, and the last half-decade, when the first transnational network of domestic workers won a convention. In reflecting on the factors that made possible the passage of Convention 189, it illuminates the specificity and contingency of historical change even for work that too often appears as timeless. Where women experts and international women’s associations pushed for domestic workers during the interwar and early postwar years, domestic workers themselves, supported by labor and feminist NGOs, were central to the making of Convention 189.

Understanding this transformation first requires awareness of its institutional setting. As the premier agency devoted to the conditions of work within the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations (UN) systems, the ILO sets codes of conduct and offers governments, unions, and other groups technical assistance on a range of labor market and employment issues. Founded in the aftermath of WWI, reflecting the geopolitics of that era, it sought to reconstruct the European industrial workforce, overwhelmingly male, through improved labor standards. It would eliminate inhumane working conditions, counter the economic injustice believed to be behind political instability and revolutionary upsurges, and remove disincentives to reform by setting worldwide practices. Dependence on nation states, for funding as well

5 Lewis Coser, “Servants: The Obsolescence of an Occupation Role,” *Social Forces* 52 (1973), 31–40; International Labour Organization, “30th Session Conference Proceedings,” 1947, 592. All proceedings of ILO available on line from ILO Archives, Geneva, unless otherwise noted <<http://labordoc.ilo.org/>>, last accessed 16 March 2014.

as operations, limited its ability to reach into the non-metropolitan or colonialized territories controlled by European powers in countervailing ways.⁶

The bureaucratic structure of the ILO offered policy entrepreneurs room for maneuverability, but also curtailed its ability to act quickly. That is, it more often responded to requests from the League or the UN, member states, and international labor federations or employer associations than initiated its own programs. Compromise was built into its very structure due to the tripartism – national delegations of government, trade union, and employer representatives – that continues to set it apart from other specialized international agencies. Worker and employer delegates came from male-dominated national “peak” organizations; representatives from politically dominant groups filled the categories of “worker” or “employer.” Additionally, the organization consisted of three branches: the Office, a secretariat staffed with global civil servants under an elected Director-General; a Governing Body elected from the delegations; and an annual International Labor Conference (ILC), a decision-making assembly where country delegates make recommendations and pass conventions drafted by the Office in consultation with committees of experts, themselves tripartite. Nations then would ratify these conventions, using them as guidelines for labor standards legislation. The impact of the ILO, then, has come not from enforcing conventions, for most have only nominal ratification, but rather from its setting of global norms. Through the convention process, what counts as achievement is the articulation of aspiration.⁷

The Interwar Legacy

Post WWII discussions of domestic work represented unfinished business from the interwar years. From time to time, delegates raised the status of domestic servants, as they were called, but national governments typically omitted these workers from labor laws.⁸ For example, a Danish Workers’ delegate thought that “workers boarded by employers, especially domestic servants,” ought to be part of an inquiry into “the nutrition of the working classes.” More typical was

6 Jasmien Van Daele et al., *ILO Histories. Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World during the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2010).

7 Gerry Rodgers et al., *The ILO and The Quest for Social Justice, 1919–2009* (Ithaca, 2009); Carol Riegelman Lubin and Anne Winslow, *Social Justice for Women: The International Labor Organization and Women* (Durham, 1990).

8 For example, ILO archives, Geneva [hereafter ILO], “Note on Tokyo Office Report,” 12/1930/05 in WN 104/1/35 Jacket 1.

the exclusion of domestic workers from investigations and discussions of workplace safeguards.⁹ After all, the focus of the ILO initially laid with industrial and maritime employment, with bolstering working conditions that would lead to a male family wage. The woman worker, usually reduced to the woman in industry, represented difference, those who needed special protections because of their responsibility for biological and social reproduction and generally unorganized status.¹⁰ In this context, domestic work entered ILO deliberations obliquely: included in a few conventions and recommendations that addressed women and child laborers, such as the minimum age for children in non-industrial occupations, and discussed as a cause of prostitution and in relation to forms of coerced or bonded labor.¹¹

The unemployment crisis of the Great Depression nevertheless brought some attention to domestic work, then the largest occupation for women, while the creation of a Section on Conditions of Employment of Women and Children within the Office under French socialist Marguerite Thibert facilitated research. Sometime after the urging of the Chilean Worker's delegate at the 1931 ILC, Thibert contracted a study of "The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants."¹² Published in 1934, this report concluded that the stigmatized social status of the labor trumped the idea of self-regulating labor markets as unemployed women refused to enter household service. It called for including domestic workers, with the hedge "as far as possible," in general standards developed to improve living and laboring conditions, with the goal of eliminating the "social difference between" servants and other workers. It recommended legislation to extend social insurance and vocational training to household workers, permit their organizing, and encourage living out rather than living in their place of employment.¹³

9 ILO *Proceedings*, 15th Session, 1931, 444; *Proceedings*, 20th Session, 1936, 403, 604.

10 Sandra Whitworth, "Gender, International Relations and the Case of the ILO," *Review of International Studies* 20 (1994), 389–405.

11 Magaly Rodríguez García, "Child Slavery, Sex Trafficking or Domestic Work? The League of Nations and its Analysis of the Mui Tsai System," in this volume; Magaly Rodríguez García, "The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women," *International Review of Social History* 57 (2012), 125–126.

12 Françoise Thébaud, "Les femmes au BIT: L'exemple de Marguerite Thibert," in Jean-Marc Delaunay and Yves Denéchère, (eds), *Femmes et relations internationales au XXe siècle* (Paris: 2006), 177–187; ILO *Proceedings*, 15th Session, 1931, 216.

13 Erna Magnus, "The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants: I," *International Labour Review* 30 (1934), 190, 195; Erna Magnus, "The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants: II," *International Labour Review* 30 (1934), 363–364.

The home location of the job turned domestic service into an exceptional form of work, one subjected to cultures of protection focused on the consequences of its perceived difference as intimate labor in private spaces done for low wages, but outside of the purview of public interference.¹⁴ Jobs supplying housing, like live-in service, were deemed inherently dangerous, subjecting women to sexual assault. In 1933, as its contribution to the fight against “white slavery,” the ILO adopted a convention abolishing fee-charging employment agencies, justified as a measure to stamp out abuse of women in domestic service who presumably found themselves placed in environments of sexual danger. Another convention raised the minimum age for jobs deemed “dangerous to morals,” which included household employment. Low wages, experts believed, made prostitution an attractive alternative to domestic work.¹⁵

In discussing “holidays with pay,” ILC delegates revealed a general ambivalence about such labor. They initially voted to discuss domestic servants along with agricultural and industrial home workers as part of a proposed convention on vacation pay, agreeing with the Swiss Worker delegate who held “that domestic servants...are wage-earners, and therefore entitled to protection in the same way as other wage-earners.” Yet only a handful of countries – Chile, Finland, France, Latvia, Peru, Spain, and one Swiss canton – actually extended paid vacations to them.¹⁶ During the debate, in contrast, the Swiss Employer advisor insisted that the employer group only represented those in industry and commerce and was not concerned with domestic work. Ultimately, the ILC voted to postpone consideration of holidays with pay for field and home workers to a session in the near future. Research, Director-General Harold Butler advised, “was not very advanced” and thus consideration of standards for such workers would be “premature.”¹⁷

Even within the category of the “excluded,” domestic workers appeared different: in deciding to postpone discussion, the ILO agreed to consider whether domestic workers, “could form the subject of international regulation.”¹⁸ At the same time, the Governing Body opportunistically thought that inclusion of domestic workers in holidays with pay would speak well of the ILO. It hoped to

14 Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parreñas (eds), *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care* (Stanford, 2010).

15 ILO, League of Nations Archives, CQS/A/19(a), “The Moral Protection of Young Women Workers,” in Advisory Committee on Social Questions, Prevention of Prostitution, “Draft Report submitted by the Rapporteur,” 15 May 1939, 45–77, quote at 60.

16 ILO *Minutes*, Seventy-Seventh Session of the Governing Body, 12–14 November 1936, 129.

17 ILO *Minutes*, 77th Session, 82.

18 ILO *Proceedings*, 20th Session, 1936, 440, 465, 630–631, 636.

curry support with some women's organizations at a time when the Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker and other gender-first, known as legal equality, feminists were campaigning against the ILO for restricting women's rights through conventions that treated women differently than men.¹⁹

Chief among the more favorable international women's organizations was the World's Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), which mobilized other social welfarist groups to urge regulation of domestic service.²⁰ Formed in 1898 to enhance the evangelizing mission of national branches, the World's YWCA came to direct the moral authority of Christian women toward the taming of unfettered industrialization. It followed the agenda of British and U.S. members, who during the first decade of the twentieth century sought not only to uplift but also to ameliorate the living and working conditions of wage-earning women through legislation, social contact with factory girls, and employer voluntarism. After WWI, the World's YWCA devoted one of its sections to "Industry" and another to "Emigration and Immigration." It further sought to foster worker organization, making it one of the most progressive of women's associations.²¹

Industrial work was new to the YWCAs in the early 20th century, but not so domestic labor. Since the mid-19th century, local branches had sought to alleviate what middle-class members called, "the servant problem." In cities like Boston, New York, and London, they established training centers to prepare the rural migrant and immigrant to tend the middle-class home. The contradictions within a sisterhood that would seek to cross class and race lines never went away, though the YWCA attempted to reconcile the interests of employer and employee members. Thus it would encourage household workers to unionize, equip them to meet the specifications of the women whose homes they cared for, and educate employers to abide by labor standards. About the same

19 ILO *Minutes*, 77th Session, 129. On controversy with "equal rights" feminists, Carol Miller, "'Geneva – the Key to Equality': Inter-war Feminists and the League of Nations," *Women's History Review* 3 (1994), 219–245.

20 These included the abolitionist (anti-prostitution) *Fédération internationale des amies de la jeune fille*. See, "Resolution of the World's Y.W.C.A. Executive Committee concerning Domestic Servants," ILO *Minutes*, 81st Session of the Governing Body, 6–9 October 1937, 144; "Communications intended for the Governing Body," ILO *Minutes*, 85th Session of the Governing Body, 25–27 October 1938, 164.

21 Anna Rice, *A History of the World's Young Women's Christian Association* (New York, 1947), 53, 106–107, 126, 173; Johanna M. Selles, "The Role of Women in the Formation of the World Student Christian Federation," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30 (2006), 189–194.

time that the YWCA in the United States began to grapple with the condition of black women, who dominated domestic work, its National Board appointed a Commission on Household Employment in 1915. Over the next decades, it coordinated efforts by reformers, academic experts, and housewives to develop best practices.²²

After moving its headquarters to Geneva in 1930, the World's YWCA intensified its collaboration with the League (through the Liaison Committee of Women's Organizations), as well as its involvement with the ILO.²³ It spearheaded international agitation over improved conditions. In characteristic moral tones, it committed "to make household employment a more fair, just, and satisfying occupation for women." It disseminated ILO reports; the ILO's Marguerite Thibert, in turn, relied on YWCA investigations and networks. But she also offered the association technical assistance in the construction of surveys and political advice on building up public support for legislative actions and reaching out to "progressive" employers, counsel consistent with ILO tripartism. Under her tutelage, the YWCA affirmed support "by continuing and increasing the efforts to prepare public opinion in different countries" for labor standards.²⁴

The YWCA generally was one of the few organizations in a country concerned with regulating domestic work. National efforts paralleled the strength of local women's movements, but progress was slow. A few YWCA sections, such as Syria and Mexico, offered employees training and education courses. Other sections pushed governments for legislation and concentrated on employer education. In Australia, a delegation approached the labor minister in 1939 to allow for a domestic employee union to be registered as an industrial union and thus eligible for wages, hours, and other determinations under the Arbitration Act. He was "surprised" that "so many countries were beginning to take an active interest in this subject" and pledged to consider the request. British and U.S. YWCA industrial commissions encouraged trade union formation, with limited success. There were scattered and small domestic worker unions in Canada, some part of the YWCA and others judged "rather radical and not really representative," as one YWCA official described a Toronto

22 Elizabeth Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work among Young Women, 1866–1916* (New York, 1916), 41–42, 75–76; Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920–1945* (Philadelphia, 1989), 112–118.

23 Rice, *A History of the World's Young Women's Christian Association*, 209–214.

24 Mrs. C. Beresford Fox to M. Thibert, 14 December 1936; Social and Industrial Section, World's YWCA, "Household Employment," Occasional Paper No 9, February 1936, 3; M. Thibert to Mademoiselle Rossi, 13 March 1937; ILO WN104/1/01, Jacket 1, Fox to Dear Friends, "Household Employment in the East," 20 October 1938.

union.²⁵ On the local level, YWCAs could not press much beyond voluntary codes, standards that its own Domestic Worker League of Calgary, Canada judged “will have no real effect in improving our working conditions of long hours and low pay,” despite the best of intentions. Only minimum wage inclusion could remedy their situation, a treatment equal to that of hotel and restaurant workers doing similar tasks but outside the home.²⁶

Generally, the YWCAs encountered resistance to its promotion of domestic worker rights. Employers rejected the method of gathering information through surveys as “prying into their private affairs.” Orientalist assumptions about the impossibility of action in places like India framed its discussions. Conflicting class interests weakened conference resolutions, so that meetings sometimes endorsed “steps” towards better conditions rather than specific legislation.²⁷ Nonetheless, the World’s YWCA developed a broadly conceived strategy of including domestic work as part of the study of women’s overall status. It offered model contracts, aided with worker organization, and urged legislation. Its position fit well into the ILO’s embrace of protective labor legislation and its own mission to uplift and improve the lives of female wage earners. But a new war short-circuited these efforts, hollowing out Geneva as the ILO temporarily moved itself to Montreal and organizations like the World’s YWCA found their networks disrupted.

The Post-WWII Years

In the years following WWII, advocates for domestic workers were unable to overcome the obstacles inherent in the organization of the ILO. The ILO’s tripartite structure served as a major barrier to introducing policy recommendations centered on household labor. With the notable exception of British Worker delegates Florence Hancock and Alfred Roberts, labor was disinterested. Employers found the whole subject laughable. Nations excluded household

25 ILO WN104/1/01, Jacket 1, “The Growth of an Idea No. 9,” August 1936.

26 ILO WN104/1/01, Jacket 1, President, Secretary to Houseworkers’ Union of Toronto, 10 March 1936.

27 ILO WN104/1/01, Jacket 1, “Extract from a letter to Mrs. Fox from Miss Hutchison,” 29 April 1936; Mrs. C. Beresford Fox to Miss M. Hage, 17 November 1939; World YWCA Council, “Meeting of Sub-Committee on Household Employment in the East,” 12 September 1938, 2–6; “Programme of Conference on Household Employment as an Occupation for Women,” 11 and 13 August 1936, 2. For an overview, Social and Industrial Section, World’s YWCA Executive Committee, *Household Employment*, Occasional Paper No. 9, February 1936. Here the YWCA notes the efforts of Thibert, 7.

labor in their laws. A majority of the delegates never recognized domestic labor as work and its workforce as fitting into accepted structures of employment.

Thus, advocates battled major discursive and ideological constructs about domestic labor. Government delegates regarded these jobs as apart from the real world of work, that is, industry, commerce, and agriculture.²⁸ Not only were there no organized employers to bargain with, employer delegates long claimed that international regulation did not apply because domestic work just wasn't "a matter in which international competition is likely to arise."²⁹ For Western Europeans, the personal relationship between servant and employer allowed for individual settlement of conditions, making labor standards unnecessary.³⁰ Delegates from Asia and Latin America similarly insisted that domestic workers were "part of the family system."³¹ As the Belgian Government representative explained in 1950:

It was true that the problem of domestic workers arose in an acute form in every country in the world, but owing to the dispersal of these workers the problem was so complicated that it did not seem appropriate at present to treat it in a draft Convention or even in a Recommendation.³²

Moreover, the timing of the initial proposal was inauspicious. The issue of domestic worker standards appeared with the dawn of the Cold War, which turned the ILO into an ideological battleground between capitalist and communist states over the meaning of worker rights. Communist nations, touting equality, found "the question of the status of domestic workers was of no practical importance." Other issues were more important: collective bargaining, equal pay, unemployment, and higher standards of living.³³ The emergence of newly independent and decolonizing nations led the entire UN system to questions of development – and domestic labor appeared as evidence of underdevelopment, as residual, non-modern labor. European nations remained reluctant to extend identical labor standards to "non-metropolitan" regions, as the ILO was apt to refer to colonial areas. In this context, advocates from Western Europe and the United States framed domestic work more in terms of conditions facing

28 ILO *Proceedings*, 29th Session, 1946, 180; ILO *Minutes*, Governing Body, 110th Session, 1950, 29.

29 ILO *Proceedings*, 20th Session, 1936, 465.

30 ILO *Proceedings*, 37th Session, 1954, 564–565.

31 ILO *Minutes*, Governing Body, 117th Session, 1951, 32.

32 ILO *Minutes*, Governing Body, 110th Session 1950, 29.

33 ILO *Minutes*, Governing Body, 110th Session, 30.

urban, industrial nations in the Global North. When it came to Asia, Africa, and Latin America, they condemned practices classified as “life servitude,” including “quasi-adoption.”³⁴ Until the 1970s, the Eurocentric posture of the ILO combined with racial and national hierarchies to generate conventions that reinforced racial categories and privileges generated by colonialism and its legacy.³⁵

A perception further existed that modern household appliances and a greater participation of men were replacing the domestic worker, making action unnecessary. In early 1952, the *Washington Post* highlighted the work of the ILO and efforts toward improving domestic labor. But it ended with a declension narrative:

Faithful retainers, an age-old institution, may become as legendary as Uncle Tom and the slow-witted hired girl have become in this country. Still, a lot of high-flown folk everywhere are going to have to learn to boil water and sweep floors.³⁶

Indeed, the recently concluded ILO Meeting of Experts of Women’s Work saw domestic work as a job women were fleeing from; instead of discussing its conditions, the experts considered “practical steps which would lighten the household tasks of women workers.”³⁷ The assumption was that not only the “high-flown folk” would do their own domestic labors, but also that women workers needed social services to meet family responsibilities.

The very abjection of domestic workers constituted another reason why no recommendation emerged after WWII. Domestic work represented “the most exploited” and unorganized form of labor, “through no fault of their own but because of the character of their work” that led to the postponement of discussion of their conditions, the Italian Government delegate stressed in 1950.³⁸

34 Frieda Miller, “ILO Meeting of Experts on Employment of Domestic Workers,” 1951, 2, 7, typescript, Box 68, Office of the Director, General Correspondence of the Women’s Bureau, 1948–1953, 1948–1953, folder “Domestic Work,” RG 86, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

35 We are indebted to Susan Zimmermann for first laying out this point. See, “Night Work for White Women, Bonded Labour for Women of Color? Contentious Traditions and the Globalization of Gender-Specific Labour Protection and Legal Equality Protection, 1926 to 1939,” in Sara Kimble and Marion Röwekamp (eds) *New Perspectives on European Women’s Legal History* (London, 2015).

36 Malvina Lindsay, “Global Kitchen Revolution; Who Will Do the Work?” *Washington Post*, 23 January 1952.

37 ILO, “Meeting of Experts on Women’s Work,” Geneva, 11–15 December 1951, ILO 8, WN 1002, 01/1951 to 12/1955.

38 ILO *Minutes*, Governing Body, 110th Session, 35.

But despite some understanding that such workers deserved protection, delegates went on to pass standards that either excluded domestic workers or made it easy for national governments to do so.³⁹ That few nations covered domestic work in their labor laws made it a low priority for ILO action.

Finally, the social movement behind such action had narrowed to the efforts of women “experts.” The World’s YWCA remained a powerful advocate, supported by other international middle class women’s associations with observer status at the UN and its agencies. But Western-oriented labor feminists in government bureaus, universities, and trade unions dominated the discourse on domestic work.⁴⁰ The ILO’s own Section on Women Workers lacked institutional power; competing agendas kept pushing domestic workers off the ILO calendar. Indeed, the Governing Body turned to equal remuneration instead to fulfill a request by the UN’s Social and Economic Council. By 1953, the labor feminists had failed. Mildred Fairchild, the former Bryn Mawr professor of social investigation who then headed the women’s section, reported:

Because of the attitude of the Governing Body, I think the Director-General is inclined to believe that we probably cannot and should not attempt to press this subject before the conference.

Latin American countries and India stood in the way, believing “that any attention to this question was absurd.” European nations were not on board either. Though Frieda Miller of the U.S. Women’s Bureau led the Expert Committee on Domestic Work, neither could the U.S. government be counted on. Some members of the State Department felt that the subject was outside of ILO concerns, and Miller was unable to convince her own government to act.⁴¹ Under budgetary limits, the Director-General was not willing to push domestic work without fuller backing. The ILO could prod but it could not move too far ahead

39 For example, ILO *Proceedings*, 29th Session, 1946, 179, 181, 458; 32nd Session, 1949, 501, 515; 36th Session, 1953, 170, 405; ILO *Minutes*, Governing Body, 110th Session, 38.

40 “Draft Resolution Concerning Domestic Servants,” ILO *Proceedings*, 20th Session, 1936, 639, 740; Ulla Wikander, “Demands on the ILO by Internationally Organized Women in 1919,” in Van Daele et al., (eds), ILO *Histories*, 67–89; Nora Natchkova and Céline Schoeni, “The ILO, Feminists and Expert Networks: The Challenges of a Protective Policy (1919–1934),” in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond* (London, 2013), 49–64.

41 Frieda Miller to Florence Hancock, 9 November 1951; Laura Dale to Miss Miller, 6 November 1951; Cross Reference Sheet from Edward Persons, 24 October 1952; all in Box 68, folder “Domestic Workers.”

of member states.⁴² Even after the Second African Regional Conference in 1964 and the 1965 ILC request that the Office investigate the occupation, other areas held precedence, like relieving the double burden of women workers with family responsibilities and moving women from the Global South into “development.” It took until 1970 for the Office to even issue a report that merely called for improved conditions but not for an international instrument.⁴³

During the last third of the century, the ILO itself went through a number of changes. It attempted to adapt to the twists and turns of global politics, including Cold War posturing and human rights battles over apartheid and Palestinian rights; restricted institutional capacity when the United States briefly withdrew in the 1970s; declines in industrial unions, the emergence of the service sector, and relocation of industries; and the rise of neoliberalism through market ideology, financialization, and structural adjustment; and the unraveling of social democratic welfare solutions to capitalist globalization. It investigated domestic work in specific locales: in 1993, for example, the ILC recommended placing domestic workers under the labor law in post-apartheid South Africa.⁴⁴ In approving Convention 177 on Home Work in 1996, however, it set a precedent that home-based employment deserved coverage under labor standards. It took a coalition of feminist advocates, researchers, ILO staff, unionists, and industrial homeworkers led most notably by the Self-Employment Women's Association of India to win Convention 177, and it would require a similar transnational network to consider household labor as employment.⁴⁵

Toward a Convention

The 2011 victory of domestic workers illustrates the significance of transnational networks and activist practices forged in more localized struggles but

42 ILO WN 1001–07, Fairchild to Miller, 25 April 1953.

43 “Resolution Concerning Conditions of Employment of Domestic Workers,” 511–512, and “Fifth Item on the Agenda: The Employment of Women with Family Responsibilities,” 638–649, both in ILO *Proceedings*, 49th Session, 1965. “The Employment and Conditions of Domestic Workers in Private Households: an ILO Survey,” *International Labour Review* 102 (1970), 391–392, 399, 401.

44 Rodgers, et al. (eds), *The ILO and the Quest for Social Justice*, 30–36, 205–241; International Labour Conference, 99th Session, 2010, “Decent Work for Domestic Workers,” Report IV(1) (Geneva, 2010), 87.

45 Elisabeth Prügl, *The Global Construction of Gender: Home-Based Work in the Political Economy of the 20th Century* (New York, 1999); Eileen Boris and Elisabeth Prügl (eds), *Homeworkers in Global Perspective: Invisible No More* (New York, 1996).

applied to an international campaign.⁴⁶ By drawing upon national movements as a means of developing a collective voice, the International Domestic Worker Network (IDWN), the first transnational organization of domestic workers, established a tangible presence that challenged the formal boundaries of the ILO, absent from previous considerations of domestic work. The participation of national domestic worker activists in the 2010 and 2011 International Labour Conferences clearly influenced the outcome of the nearly unanimous vote in favor of the convention. Their struggles were key but not sufficient: the domestic worker cause required support from professional advocates from allied organizations outside the ILO and from within the ILO bureaucracy itself.⁴⁷

Success depended on the willingness of the ILO to take up this cause. With the Director General setting the overall program of the organization, the tenure of Chilean diplomat Juan Somavía beginning in 1999 led the ILO to foster “decent work and fair globalization” and encouraged an emphasis on women’s labor, the informal economy, and transnational migration. Under the leadership of feminist Manuela Tomei, director of the Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, the Office compiled a 2010 report that located “care work in the home [as] part of the ILO’s mandate to promote decent work for all” and offered a rights-based approach to revalue domestic labor.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the quantification of domestic work conditions through an extensive member state survey translated the larger cause of women workers in the informal economy to the language most relevant and meaningful to the ILO as a macro transnational policy-making institution. This institutional investment in this most comprehensive global survey on domestic work comprised a vital precondition to substantiate the need for global protections within the 2010 and 2011 formal deliberations of the ILC.

The legal and political climate in various countries was also undergoing change. There was some inclusion in local labor standards, but still half of all workers remained uncovered and migrants faced precarious standing. Over the previous quarter century, national and regional worker organization expanded, facilitated by feminist and human rights NGOs. 1988 marked the formation of the thirteen nation Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of

46 Jennifer Fish, ILC, fieldnotes, 2010.

47 Helen Schwenken and Elisabeth Prügl, “An ILO Convention for Domestic Workers: Contextualizing the Debate,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13 (2011), 437–461; Jo Becker, *Campaigning for Justice: Human Rights and Advocacy in Practice* (Stanford, 2013), 32–55; Mather, “Yes, We Did It!” provides an overview crafted by WIEGO, a chief supporter of the organizing.

48 Fish ILC fieldnotes; *Decent Work for Domestic Workers*, Report IV(1), 11–14.

Household Workers (CONLACTRAHO), with a branch in Europe, and in 1989, the Hong Kong-based Asian Domestic Workers' Union, with members mostly from the Philippines and Thailand. These groups reached out to rural migrants in major cities, many of them undocumented and most from ethnic minority groups. They hung around parks and metros and joined community coalitions. They not only offered "workshops and capacity building," but also addressed the needs of the worker as a whole person.⁴⁹ By 2010, the number of nations with domestic worker organizations grew to forty-four.⁵⁰ These national formations preceded the global mobilization of domestic workers and would persist as key advocates for state ratification of Convention 189. Indeed, all of the early states to ratify (i.e., Uruguay, Philippines, and South Africa) had a prior history of engagement with domestic worker organizations. Thus, while the convention adoption proved a major victory for domestic workers at the global level, the successes and capacities of national domestic worker organizations made this historic moment possible.

We have discussed the road to an ILO convention in more detail elsewhere.⁵¹ Here we want to highlight historical changes. First and foremost comes the linking of domestic worker groups to feminist transnational NGOs and international labor unions. A transnational network took shape four years prior to the inclusion of domestic labor on the ILC agenda. In 2006, 60 leaders from trade unions and support organizations gathered in Amsterdam for the first global meeting of domestic workers.⁵² The meeting set the stage to create a united front for domestic worker rights within the ILO. To advance the concrete goal of building a global movement, advocates formed the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) in 2008. That same year, urged by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the Governing Body announced that it would schedule "Decent Work for Domestic Workers" as an agenda item for the 2010 ILC. If the delegates decided to move forward, final action would occur in 2011.⁵³

49 Quoted in Schwenken and Prügl, "An ILO Convention for Domestic Workers," 444–445; Merike Blofield, *Care Work and Class: Domestic Workers' Struggle for Equal Rights in Latin America* (State College, 2012).

50 Becker, *Campaigning for Justice*, 52.

51 We draw upon Eileen Boris and Jennifer N. Fish, "'Slaves No More': Making Global Standards for Domestic Workers," *Feminist Studies* 40:2 (Summer, 2014), 411–443. We thank *Feminist Studies* for permission to include material from this piece.

52 *International Domestic Workers NetWork*, "Respect and Rights: Protection for Domestic/Household Workers!" <<http://www.idwn.info/publications>>, last accessed 23 August 2012.

53 Becker, *Campaigning for Justice*, 52–53.

During the Amsterdam conference, representatives of national movements and organizations shared their own particular histories of domestic service, discovering common struggles. They wove together demands for “respect,” “rights” and “protection.” Geeta Menon, leader of the Karnataka Domestic Workers Union in India, emphasized the need to reframe domestic work from an institution embedded in servitude to one that considers “domestic workers as workers,” eligible for equivalent legal protections as other sectors of the formal economy. She recalled:

In our union, we felt that, unless domestic workers are given a legal identity as workers, their work and relentless toil will go unrecognized. Society must go beyond the gendered notion of housework, lift this work from patriarchal definitions, and look at its economic value, changing the attitude of looking at these women as servants or slaves and start perceiving them as workers.⁵⁴

This appeal became a strategic argument in the organization’s continued lobbying for international standards. Out of this conversation emerged larger concerns for gender, labor and migrant rights, which activists then translated into tangible policy points in hopes of eventually reaching the ILO.

From its formation, the IDWN forged an intersectional praxis. It maintained critical relations with a range of ally organizations, including global unions, NGOs, and research institutes. The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF) and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) served as complementary pillars of support. The combination of a service sector global union and a policy research institute on women in the informal economy strengthened the placement of the domestic worker movement within both arenas. These organizations sustained the network in its formative years through funding and technical resources that strengthened the ability to organize internationally. They crucially provided entrée to obtaining NGO observer status within the ILO’s conferences. A larger network of allies, defined as NGOs in the ILO structure, organized in distinct ways to assure that those most impacted would be present at the deliberations – even without formal voting rights and the authorization to speak – thus opening every aspect of ILC policy formation to IDWN members.

⁵⁴ Quoted in IRENE. *Respect and Rights: Protection for Domestic/Household Workers!* (Geneva, 2008), 59.

By providing in-depth training on the ILO process, and space for worker education, self-reflection, public relations and planning, these organizations ensured that IDWN leaders acquired the knowledge base and capacity to fight for a convention within the ILO system, confessed Fish Ip Pui Yu from Hong Kong:

It is very complicated to understand...even if we got a Standard, if governments don't respond, what could we do? But, in learning about the process, I had a change of thinking: that negotiation involves different parties and at least gives us a platform. And our technical support people would help us.⁵⁵

Extended discussions led the IDWN to identify several effective lobbying strategies. It, in turn, applied activist knowledge, drawn from experiences within both labor and women movements, to infuse the campaign with social justice "struggle credentials."

With access to ILO structures, domestic workers could draw from their own repertoire of activist strategies. Ever pragmatic, IDWN leaders convened with their allies throughout the conference in order to find spaces to assert their collective expression and deploy mobilization tools that had strengthened their own capacities as activists and leaders. As a condition of participation, IDWN members had to abide by ILO procedures, such as the use of formal names and statements of gratitude for being given "the floor" during comment periods. Based on trainings, they conscientiously followed the rules of order at each meeting. Such participation forced all members of the tripartite bodies to recognize their presence. The IDWN displayed domestic workers' realities in ways that made denying their rights seem immoral. In provoking shame through their very embodiment, as poor unprotected migrants, often mothers, they balanced a politics of affect with demands for rights. As proof of their organizing success, by the 2011 meeting, some IDWN members also obtained voting seats on national delegations, thereby giving domestic workers a formal voice within the ILO power structure.

In preparatory workshops, the IDWN had strategized on how to represent collectively the face of domestic labor in order to influence the system and strengthen the case for global standards. During the entire extended process – opening statements, workers meetings, gender section meetings, and closing statements – domestic workers echoed four main points: the historical nature of domestic work; the contemporary centrality of domestic labor in the global

55 Quoted in Mather, "Yes, We Did It!" 38.

economy, the moral obligation to redress the continued exclusion of this sector from national laws; and the demand to adopt a convention that would be ratified by all member states. Crucial was the decision to demonstrate that domestic workers experience similar oppression from their daily labor regardless of the diversity of work across regions.

Through consistent messaging, domestic worker representatives drew upon the rhetorical appeal and effectiveness of personal testimony to increase the likelihood of passing the convention. Leaders of the IDWN took advantage of traditional constructions of gender by enacting an emotional “women’s story” within the traditionally masculine space of the ILO. The continuing significance of women and gender in development discourses since the 1970s enhanced the legibility of their appeals. Individual narratives, stories of struggle, and highly personalized appeals that drew upon discourses of love and care – missing from the earlier 1950 effort – provided rationale for the institutional demands each representative included in public statements. As network leaders explained, “we want to reach the hearts of employers” and “leave the audience in tears.”⁵⁶

Members of the IDWN also displayed a collective voice within the ILC beyond the limitations of the prescribed formal channels for (often pre-approved) public statements. The holding back of emotions in order to conform to existing procedures remained difficult for most of the members of the network. However, the constraints of the ILO inhibited but did not stop them from adapting social movement strategies to motivate change. They drew upon expressive forms embedded in the organizational cultures of unions and women’s movements. They broke into song immediately upon the end of formal meetings, singing, “Domestic workers, *need a Convention*, domestic workers, *need a Convention*, domestic workers *in the ILO*.” They deployed visual rhetorical statements of solidarity through shared dress, t-shirt messages, buttons, and campaign colors. The bodies of domestic workers served as a rhetorical tool to strengthen the position of labor within formal institutional spaces. The infusion of song, dance, and physical gestures of solidarity into the proceedings made it difficult for employers and governments to ignore the existence of domestic workers, while fortifying the strength of the network.

These strategies of affect, made present by the IDWN’s direct participation, capture a distinct difference in the institutional dialogue between the 1950s and recent conventions. The Convention 189 process not only validated the experiences of domestic workers, but also suggested the power of feminist

56 Fish, ILC, fieldnotes 2010.

understandings of the personal for the transnational. Recalled Ida Le Blanc from Trinidad and Tobago:

We met others from around the world and shared our experiences too, which helped us get stronger, knowing that we are trying for the same goals. We heard about strategies that work in other countries. It built our confidence.⁵⁷

Though discourses of exploitation and victimhood persisted in the presentation of domestic work within the ILO, the presence of domestic workers themselves in 2010 and 2011 embodied a politics of both collective activism and affect missing from earlier efforts, suspending objectification and enhancing rights. More groups embraced the effort to align, hold the ILO accountable and insist on global standards for this long-overlooked sector of women workers. In 1950, there was, as the U.S.'s Frieda Miller explained, "no effective organization of either workers or employers..."⁵⁸ By the first ILC meetings in 2010, academics, labor feminists, and government researchers from a wide array of nations constituted a persuasive group of experts on domestic work, unlike earlier periods when labor representatives to the ILO Committee of Experts on Women's Work came from other sectors, like railways or textiles.⁵⁹ In the 1950s, the women's groups with consultative status had carried over from the League of Nations; they were European and urban organizations like the International Federation of University Women, the World's YWCA and Business and Professional Women International. Sixty years later, a range of NGOs sought to participate in the ILO domestic worker deliberations. Human rights, trade union, and religious groups dominated, including Anti-Slavery International, Migrants Forum in Asia, and World Movement of Christian Workers. WIEGO and IUF knit together these allies.

This difference in players is not the only factor distinguishing our times. In the early post-WWII years, labor feminists sought better working conditions so to increase the supply of servants within Western industrialized nations and to eliminate servitude in the rest of the world, the latter as much a "civilizing" as a modernizing project. In the 2000s, domestic labor represented a prototype for the non-standard employment characteristic of an ever-expanding

57 Quoted in Mather, "Yes, We Did It!", 39.

58 Frieda Miller to Mr. Zempel, 11 May 1950, Box 10, folder 210, Frieda S. Miller Papers, A-37, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe.

59 ILO WN 1002, Jacket 1, "List of Persons Attending the Meeting of Experts on Women's Work," Geneva 11–15 December 1951.

worldwide informal economy. Concern over the impact of maternal employment on family labor persisted, but moved from a national to a global issue with the prominence of migrant domestic workers. More legal coverage and worker organization within nations joined to new priorities within the ILO to make international action more probable. Though employers “took a pragmatic view and focused on ensuring that the eventual Convention would be practical, useful and capable of adoption by a majority of countries,” they still equated fairness with “the rights of householders to conduct their family affairs.”⁶⁰

Rather than the end of a struggle, Convention 189 marks one step toward decent work and fair globalization. Now it is up to individual nations to make decent work for domestics a lived experience. With the passing of the convention, domestic labor organizations, global unions, human rights groups and faith-based movements turned their attention to advocating for ratification, whereby domestic workers’ organizations and unions used an international convention to strengthen demands and heighten the moral ground for labor protections at the national level.

To date, seventeen countries have ratified C189.⁶¹ But given how few states abide by any international convention, the real significance of Convention 189 might very well come from its use as an organizing device, as seen in the state-level “Bill of Rights” campaigns by the National Domestic Worker Alliance in the United States, and as a prod to governments to enhance national standards, as happened in Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Spain, India, Thailand, and elsewhere.⁶² At the same time, domestic workers’ organization increased in formalization: 2013 marked the shift from a global network of domestic workers to a formal labor federation. WIEGO, the IUF, and the ILO remained midwives to this birth as they supplied financial, technical, and organizational capacity to put on a truly global founding congress in Montevideo. Delegates adopted a five-year action plan with the goal to “increase domestic workers’ participation in collective actions that will help effect changes in the social, economic,

60 Quoted in Mather, “Yes, We Did It!”, 65.

61 These countries are Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Guyana, Ireland, Italy, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Philippines, South Africa, Switzerland and Uruguay. See, “Campaign Update,” <<http://www.idwfed.org/en/campaigns/ratify-c189/which-country-already-ratified-c189>>, accessed 22 March 2015. See also, IDWN, ITU, and Human Rights Watch, *Claiming Rights: Domestic Workers’ Movements and Global Advances for Labor Reform* (USA, 2013), 16–22.

62 UC Humanities Forum, “The Work that Makes All Other Work Possible: A Dialogue with Ai-Jen Poo and Premilla Nadasen,” Webinar, 28 May 2012, <<http://www.idwfed.org/en/campaigns/ratify-c189/which-country-already-ratified-c189>>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1C4_NmFGrY>, accessed 22 March 2015.

political and cultural landscape, and will allow for the growth and strengthening of organized domestic workers and the advancement of domestic workers' rights and interests." Among the strategic campaigns and actions agreed upon were collaborations with trade unions, NGOs, and appropriate political allies to ratify ILO conventions, fight "abusive" employment agencies and labor recruiters, eliminate exploitation of children in this workforce, and win "basic labour rights and social protection," that is, the "right to organize, minimum wage, rest days, health insurance, occupational health and safety," and establish collective bargaining. To that end, the new international labor federation – the first for and by women – planned to engage in extensive education, research, and communication, touching on such issues as forms of collective bargaining, the aging society and growth of home care as a form of domestic service, and the situation of migrant workers.⁶³

Conclusion

By the second decade of the 21st century, domestic work had moved from an invisible form of labor to the celebrated subject of global deliberations because of social, cultural, institutional, legal, and economic transformations within and between states and in relation to international and transnational labor and feminist organizations over the preceding half-century. Institutional barriers, ideological blinders, and representational limits overdetermined the mid-20th century failure to bring forth a worldwide instrument on the rights of domestic workers. So did the disinterest of governments, indifference of unions, and ridicule of employers. Few nations included domestic work in labor law and the sector remained mostly unorganized. Moving away from protective labor legislation, Western feminists were less interested in improving a low-waged occupation dominated by women of color and ethnic minorities than in seeking equal rights on the job. In the 1950s, they focused on obtaining ILO conventions on equal pay and non-discrimination rather than on procuring standards for domestic workers. When it came to domestic work, they were most interested in modernizing the occupation, making it more efficient, and relieving predicted shortages of "help." They saw themselves setting the pre-conditions for organization among workers who were too isolated and victimized to act on their own.

63 Documents from Founding Congress, IDWN, 2013, in authors' possession; quotes from, "Item 6: IDWF 5-Year Action Plan."

In the decades leading up to the 2011 convention, substantive shifts in the global political economy transformed the context in which domestic workers and their labor and feminist allies operated. The most important of these were the reorganization of the global economy itself, the influence of Global South nations through the UN system, the intensification of transnational feminism, and the expansion of informal economies.⁶⁴ Significantly, domestic work did not wither away, though migrant women came to dominate this ever-growing sector. In 2013, the ILO estimates up to a million workers, mostly women and children, undertake this labor, composing a quarter of the female labor force in Latin America and the Caribbean and a third in the Middle East. Asia has the most domestic workers, many of whom work outside of their own countries.⁶⁵ Since the 1970s, neoliberal economic policies created exchange relations that hinge upon the migration and “trade” of women workers to provide emotional labor and household reproduction for a global care chain, part of a distinct rise in feminized service economies.⁶⁶ With both families and nations drawing upon women’s labor force participation, migrants had become “the oil in the wheels,” as Tanzanian trade unionist Vicky Kanyoka reminded the ILO’s International Labor Conference (ILC) in 2010.⁶⁷ That is, the contributions domestic workers make to social reproduction, as well as the global economy, justified the ideological and ethical rationale for what advocates touted as a “long-overdue” need for international labor standards.

In the 2000s, a convention for domestic workers gained traction because of organizing among national groups, and their ability to form a transnational

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- 64 V. Spike Peterson, “Rethinking Theory: Inequalities, Informalization, and Feminist Quandaries,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14 (2012), 5–35; Valentine M. Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore, 2005); Millie Thayer, *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural Women, NGO Activists, and Northern Donors in Brazil* (New York, 2010).
- 65 ILO, *Domestic Workers across the World: Global and Regional Statistics and the Extent of Legal Protections* (Geneva, 2013), 19–39, available at <http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_173363.pdf>, last accessed 22 March 2015.
- 66 Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York, 1998).
- 67 Diane Perrons, “Gendered Division in the New Economy: Risks and Opportunities,” *Geojournal*, 56 (2002), 271, 273; Barbara Ehrenreich, “Maid to Order,” in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (eds), *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York, 2002), 85–103; Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadow of Affluence* (Berkeley, 2001); Statement of Ms. Vicky Kanyoka, International Labour Conference Proceedings, 99th Session, 2010, 8/41.

movement, facilitated by human rights and feminist NGOs and international labor federations. The resulting coalition drew upon the ILO's ideological emphasis on "fair globalization" and "decent work" to place domestic work on the agenda of the ILC. The commitment of key players within the ILO, with political capital and knowledge of its bureaucracy, proved vital to advancing a domestic workers convention. Over the preceding decades, employer representatives had become increasingly hostile to any labor regulation; however, convention supporters overwhelmed this opposition through a politics of affect linked to human rights claims.⁶⁸

The same globalization undergirding the mounting demand for domestic labor also spread new avenues for networking and activism, often enhanced by digital communication.⁶⁹ Thus, forty-five years after the last major conversation on domestic labor within the ILC, a worldwide network of domestic workers – developed through a new transnational feminism that included NGOs and labor union women – joined global union leaders and gender and labor rights advocates to take an active role in ILO deliberations, indeed to shape them through an unprecedented intervention in the convention-making process.⁷⁰ This world-wide dialogue on women's paid labor within the private household developed from and further fueled a transnational activism not possible earlier, when women's organizations in the 1930s and a handful of labor feminists in the 1950s pushed for international standards without much support from trade unionists or governments. Belonging to both a renewed internationalism among trade unions and a broader transnational feminism, today's domestic worker movement illuminates the promise and difficulties of advocacy across borders when the struggles of the "poorest of the poor" move from the periphery to the center of international debates.⁷¹

The future of domestic workers will emerge as transnational organizations mediate the dialectic of state power and grassroots movements. Throughout

68 For the politics of affect, we draw inspiration from Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 79 (2004), 117–139.

69 Nancy Naples and Manisha Desai (eds), *Women's Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics* (New York, 2002).

70 Suzanne Franzway and Mary Margaret Fonow, *Making Feminist Politics: Transnational Alliances between Women and Labor* (Urbana, 2011); Valentine M. Moghadam, Suzanne Franzway, and Mary Margaret Fonow, *Making Globalization Work for Women: The Role of Social Rights and Trade Union Leadership* (Albany, 2011).

71 Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, 1998); Becker, *Campaigning for Justice*; Mary Hawkesworth, *Political Worlds of Women: Activism, Advocacy, and Governance in the Twenty-First Century* (Boulder, 2012).

this process, as a symbolic shift from the earliest considerations of domestic work within the ILO, this “movement of women” now proclaims a victory in formal recognition.⁷² We cannot discount the transformation in domestic worker consciousness that already has taken place through the ILO process where “as workers and the most oppressed workforce in all countries” they sat “with the big bosses and the technical people of the ILO.” As Peruvian Ernestina Ochoa, the Vice-President of IDWF, emphasized on its passage, the convention was “what society owed to us...for all the injustices that were committed during decades.” Or, as South African domestic worker leader Hester Stephens explained, “freedom is at last come for domestic workers around the world.”⁷³ Maids no more, they had become workers.

72 Field Notes, Boris and Fish, Founding Convention of IDWF, October 25–28, Montevideo, Uruguay.

73 Quoted in Mather, “Yes, We Did It!”, 69.