

Making Room:
On inventions within organizing of undocumented migrant domestic workers in
The Netherlands

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Abstract

Domestic work has long sat outside hegemonic economic relations; not recognized as labor, and relying on the exploitation of feminized and racialized people. This has kept it outside of preoccupation, although never out of sight, of traditional union struggles. This paper explores the ways in which a group of undocumented migrant domestic workers organized under the FNV, one of the largest labor unions in The Netherlands, confront the lack of capacities that the labor union is able to provide for their struggle. As such, it sets out to think through the research question: how does the inventive organizing of undocumented migrant domestic workers in The Netherlands challenge and expand the capacities of traditional understandings of labor struggles? To do this, I have been involved as a participant-researcher throughout the creation of the Community Theater Collective of Undocumented Migrant Domestic Workers (CTC). This group has been imagining possibilities of organizing beyond traditional union struggles. Following the call of Rodrigo Nunes (2022) to explore political organizing through ecological thinking, the research reflects on the ways in which through imagining alternative ways of doing and coming together, the CTC is rehearsing new forms of unionizing that attune to the feminist and antiracist struggles that entangle the relations to their labor. Furthermore, by posing questions on what this entails, I argue that to set up these inventions, imagination plays a vital role. In order to be able to put this into practice, the first thing that must happen is that we have to come together in a room.

Keywords: organizing, labor unions, migration, bio-syndicalism, ecological thinking

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Prologue

This research is not about migration, or borders, per se. *Whatever those two terms might mean; which we will move through.* It is also not about art, theater, or the role of performance in the interconnection of aesthetics and politics. *However one might want to understand those concepts; which we will think through.* In a way, it could be intended to be about struggle over governance, surveillance, racism; State citizenship.

. and how these can be contested

-or replicated,

it might eventually

~~be about how destabilizing systems of control allow us to speak about the State from its entanglements in how political organizations revolve~~

~~an engagement with an attempt at moving around~~

~~the interstices exigencies of capitalist accumulation, which blend power and capital in an endless odyssey of a quest for epistemic governance and frontiers that make struggle as a practice of~~

~~transcendence within a dialectical journey of agency and structure over a sovereign terrain of thought out action as a~~

living——.

Although without any intention to disappoint the acute, academic and thorough reader, I can simply say that this text

is about a *room*,

and a group of people that have lived within it;

organized around it.

To be about a *room*, is to be about memories, creativity, learning, mourning, healing, loving. It is to be through the echoes that make walls vibrate, weakening their materiality. It

is to be the stories we tell from there. It is to mess and clean things up. But to be about a *room*, also means that this text is solely about a fragment, a question, a specific section of a much bigger structure. If we depart from here, we must acknowledge that to build the space from which we talk, a lot has been left out. A lot has come and has been done before these words.

Introduction; or from where we are writing

The moment the doors opened, the room was packed with greetings and chatters. We were at the top floor of Pakhuis de Zwijger, a cultural center in Amsterdam. Throughout this week, the building had been the base of different encounters aimed at strengthening anti-racist resistance and alliances in the city. This evening was the last one of that program, and the Community Theater Collective of Undocumented Migrant Domestic Workers (CTC) had been invited to close it off.

This theater group was created by members of the domestic work sector of the FNV labor union (FNVMDW). Most workers within this sector are migrants, and a big majority of these are undocumented. The FNV is one of the few European unions that allows people that do not have a legal citizenship and working status to be affiliated members. Nonetheless, the support that the organization can offer to these workers is very limited. This is partly the case because the needs of their struggle extend far beyond what the traditional labor union is accustomed, or prepared, to tackle. In their conception of labor struggles as merely the attempt to cut down the relations of exploitation between employer and employee, protection from violences that arise beyond - or prior - to this relation seem to be out of reach. Therefore, if the case is that an undocumented person is harassed at their workplace or is not getting paid, the FNV can intervene. However, the FNV will not enter into what they call ‘divisive’ topics of political questioning (Eveld and van Hooren, 2018). These ‘divisive’ topics, refer to all that which moves beyond the wage relation; “as soon as it becomes controversial, as is the case with illegal persons, FNV is inclined to hide in order not to become open to critique” (Eveld and van Hooren, 2018, p.578).

As such, the FNVMDW has always been aware that its struggle is very different to that of other working sectors. There is not a big company, a boss or the possibility of establishing collective bargaining agreements; the traditional syndicalist machinery cannot

offer efficient tactics to the needs that these workers require (Vallejos & de Bruijne, 2018). In response to this, moving in between the line of what the union is willing to provide and what they believe they require in their fight, FNVMDW has been seeking creative forms of action. Inventions from which to start doing and imagining ways that can build new relations to their labor and their conditions as racialized migrants.

It was within this search that the theater collective (CTC) came to be. The intention has been to experiment what can happen when they come together to share stories and use theater as a tool to build upon them. What sort of political organizing, mobilization and questions about labor has this brought forward? Throughout this text, I will more specifically think with the research question: how does the inventive organizing of undocumented migrant domestic workers in the Netherlands challenge and expand the capacities of traditional understandings of labor struggles? In order to do this, I engage with findings drawn from personal and collective reflections that have risen throughout my own involvement within the theater collective from January to June of 2024.

Before elaborating further on this, I wish to share what happened the evening of the first performance of the group at Pakhuis de Zwijger. This is important not only to introduce you to the CTC and the struggles of undocumented migrant domestic workers, but also to understand from where I pose this research question.

The performance started once everyone finished their conversations. At that point, the lights of the room dim, and Dan, one of the group members, stood in front of the stage. He began talking about migration, the increasing securitization of European borders, and the vulnerable situation of undocumented workers. Halfway through this speech, Mia, Lita, Indra, Monching and Jo-ann, the actors of the play, started to walk around the space, slowly approaching the stage. As they moved through the room, they crouched down to mop the chairs of the audience, brush the dust from the surfaces of the podium, and organize things

that were misplaced. The audience, still attempting to listen to the information coming from the stage, became part of a dance; lifting their legs off the ground and figuring out ways to allow people to pass around them, to clean for them. The message: we cannot create a space in which we talk about migration, without acknowledging that we are not talking about numbers, but about people; and the exploitation of their bodies for the benefits of some.

When Monching reached the stage, he entered with a chair and a book titled ‘The subtle art of not giving a fuck.’ He then sat down, sideways to the audience, and started to read. A few moments later, Lita, with her baby daughter Felicia wrapped around her body, plugged in a vacuum cleaner. The noise cut off Dan’s speech, who proceeded to leave the stage. As Lita cleaned, her knees eventually gave in and she fell to the floor with a loud bang. The vacuum unplugged. Monching got scared and threw the book into the air as he stood up and screamed: “Godverdomme! You scared me!” At that point, a jingle started playing. The music made Lita and Monching freeze, and we saw Jo-ann entering the stage in the form of a fashion-show walk, holding a banner over her head. Once Jo-ann was next to Monching, she read out loud the words written on the banner: ‘The employer.’ She exited the stage. Lita and Monching continue the scene, where we see the ways in which the employer attempted to help Lita, who’s knee was in a lot of pain. Nonetheless, he made it clear that if she was not able to work the following days, he would not pay her. So she better recover soon. However, he also reminded her that if she went to the doctor, she should be careful, and she must not tell them she got injured during work; it could get them both in a lot of trouble.

Throughout the rest of the play, we follow Lita’s journey attempting to get to the hospital. A journey in which she encounters many difficulties because of her status as undocumented. In the metro, she has an incident with the ticket-checker. She had to enter without paying because the ticket machine did not accept cash, and she is not able to open a bank account in The Netherlands. Within this interaction, she is asked for an identification

card. She gives him a tourist VISA. Upon showing this, the ticket-checker commented that this VISA had expired. She had overstayed and she should not be here. Nevertheless, the man allows her to go, out of ‘good-will’, because he loves Indonesia, and she has a very cute baby. Before leaving, he warns her, however, to be careful. As Lita is left alone again on the stage, we hear her whisper to her daughter's ears: “I overstayed three months? they overstayed in my country for three centuries. I think that is more than overstay.”

As she continues her travels in the metro, she receives a call from her daughter in Indonesia. She needs money to pay her tuition fee for university. Lita gets stressed, but she hides the problems from her daughter, to whom she says that she will send the money as soon as she has it. We then see the daughter seeing her sister Felicia over the phone. She misses her mother and she hopes that one day she can meet her baby sister. As other things develop along her day, Lita finally arrives at the doctor's office. She does not have insurance so she will have to pay a lot of money for the check-up. A check-up, in which she is told that for her knee to recover all that she can do is to take a lot of paracetamol, and to rest for six weeks. But Lita cannot rest. The doctor does not understand this, as she offers to write a note for her employer so she can take a medical leave. However, for Lita, no work equals no pay.

The doctor leaves, and Lita remains seated alone on the stage. She looks at the audience and stands up from the chair. As she walks closer to the edge of the stage, she lifts up her right fist, and says:

“I do not need rest. I need to work to take care of my daughters. I do not need rest, I need health insurance.” Then come the other actors, one by one, now wearing a yellow cleaning glove on their right fist, the symbol of the domestic workers.

Monching, who played the employer, enters

“I do not need to rest, I need domestic work to be regularized;”

Indra, who played the ticket-checker, enters

“I do not need to rest, I need papers;”

Mia, who played the daughter, enters

“I do not need to rest, I need to be with my family;”

Jo-ann, who played the banner holder and the doctor, enters

“I do not need to rest, I need respect.”

Once everyone is standing next to her, Lita takes another step to the front, and loudly says:

“I do not need rest. I need the Dutch public and politics to care about me.”

The lights diffused down.

Everyone in the room stood up, and the actors were warmly celebrated through claps and whistles. Some of the people that were watching the play were also migrant domestic workers themselves, and they were asked to come on the stage to receive applause. This was also their story.

THE THEATER PERFORMANCE





Once everyone had settled down, Dan took the microphone again and introduced the next part of the programme. Jo-ann and Lita shared their personal struggles, which were part of the stories that made up the theater performance we had just seen. Ultimately, the audience began to interact, and we started to talk among each other. We talked more about the needs of undocumented workers in the country. About the specific struggles of those working in the domestic sector. And about how to put pressure so that the needs of these workers are met. Going back and forth through different stories and experiences from people present in the room, the conversation became a thinking ground about the ways of organizing of the CTC, of the union, and of other migrant and antiracist organizations that were present at the event. We shared ideas, questions, experiences, and speculated about future possibilities. Eventually, we built common understanding around having to keep constantly trying things out, and that coming together in a room like this, to experiment and share stories in creative forms, was definitely a way forward.

This research is in a way an extension of that conversation. Within this, I draw from Rodrigo Nunes's call to think of political organizing ecologically, and as such, as a continuum that is in constant making. From there, I explore the CTC as an invention that expands the capacities of action from migration and labor struggle. To do this, I begin by explaining my relation to the theater group and from there my approach to this research. Throughout the first section, I propose that organizing entails a constant effort of imagining how to do otherwise, despite never truly knowing what is the best way to do so. Thinking in this way, I take on an ecological approach through the rest of the text to understand the context in which the CTC came to be, moving through three different questions: (1) what the ecology has, (2) what the ecology needs, and (3) what directions is the ecology moving towards. It is through the entanglements that this analysis brings forward, that I conclude by

arguing that organizing is a form of rehearsal; and the more we rehearse - the more inventions we bring forward - the more organized we will be.

Research Design;

or on the Community Theater Collective of Undocumented Migrant Domestic Workers

The first time I came in contact with FNVMDW was in November of 2021, after I met Dan Borjal, one of the union members. We had a short interaction in which I shared some of my research on organizational strategies of university workers, and he told me about the FNVMDW and their current campaign plans. Soon after, I was invited to one of their union meetings. A lawyer was coming over to inform the undocumented workers of their rights. By the end of the meeting, I got to hear about how there were many people that would have liked to be present but could not because of their work schedules, or because they were sick. As such, I proposed to make a pamphlet with the information that was shared so that it could be printed and distributed among those people. From there, I began to get invited to most of the meetings of the union and got to know and build close relationships with its members, whom I started to spend time with also outside of these meetings. I helped with whatever I could, from making visuals to thinking of creative projects for banners and other tools that could be used during protests. Always being encouraged by some of the members to come up with new things.

At the end of last year, Dan approached Myrthe van der Staay, a good friend of mine and a visual artist that I had introduced to the union, and me, with the suggestion of making a short documentary about the experiences of FNVMDW members. Yet, given her experience in the film industry, Myrthe quickly pushed us to think of something else. Film is expensive, and with no budget for materials and personnel, we would not be able to achieve what we wanted. After some research, inspired by a collective of migrant domestic workers in Spain

called Territorio Doméstico, we decided that instead, we would propose experimenting with what could happen if instead of sharing stories through a screen, the workers were to tell their stories from their own bodies and voices through the form of theater.

The idea was proposed to the group, and a good number of people showed a lot of interest. The intention soon became that of making the struggles, fights and demands of the people and workers visible; without having others speak for them. The project started with the specific aim of creating a performance for a single event. However, as part of a bigger campaign and fight towards the rights of undocumented workers and the improvement of working conditions within the domestic work sector, the theater group has become an important - although not the only - experimental tool to imagine and invent different forms of action within the FNVMDW.

What I have found to be a significant learning from the theater production, is the ability of organizing spaces in which to encounter one another, build relationships through which to listen, enact care and find ground from which to reject the privatization of pain and the idea that issues are individual struggles. This text is in a way a record of the creation of one such space; a record of what happened in the *room* where the theater collective gathered. The ways we came together, moved, created, shared and rehearsed as a collective; thinking through how this can allow us to keep asking further questions about organizing around struggles of labor and migration.

or on how to transcribe a *room*

The main ethnographic field of the research took place throughout the months of January and June of 2024. Nonetheless, my thinking and reflections started before, when I got involved with the FNVMDW in 2021. Within these encounters I have been a participant-researcher; aside from being involved as a participant of the CTC, I have been observing the different interactions, ideas and actions that have taken place. Within this, I

have recorded what has happened when we have come together. Something that has been important for my research, has been to consider that whenever I observed, I came with preconceived ideas of what was relevant and what was not. Therefore, I attempted to stay vigilant to that which could demolish my preconceptions at any moment; understanding that the places from which I depart might not be useful, and let my deepest convictions be shaken up by the realities that I have engaged with.

As such, throughout my field work, I have paid attention to that which appears to occur in the ordinary; in all that which is realized mechanically because it occurs on our day to day. I attended a practice of tuning in to curiosity to question everything that I tend to not question. This has required a constant effort from my part, one that has been entangled in acts of patience, care and sensitivity; but also one from which I am sure a lot has escaped. So be aware of my position, as a white European woman, while reading through this text. Stay vigilant and critical of where my reflections depart from. Use this text as a place from which to ask your own questions.

On this matter, the research has also involved many moments of reflection. Within these, I have been constantly questioning why it is that I have recorded certain things, and why it is that I have left others out. Here, I wish to make a specific note about privacy concerns. Within the field, it has often been the case that specific forms of resistance to control in everyday encounters to surveillance have been shared. I have explicitly left these moments out of this text: translating and recording them through a research vocabulary, would be a form of policing the knowledges.

I refer to my research through what Halberstam (1998) has termed a scavenger methodology. A mode of research that does not move shyly through chaos, inconsistencies and confusions. In this sense, I refused to attune to needs of purification through order and categorization, remaining flexible to engage with whatever I stumbled upon. The aim was to

move away from the academic researcher's obsession of applying tools that attempt to artificially organize that which exists as fractured and contradictory.

This is relevant because it is through my involvement in the field, that I have become aware of the importance of moving beyond attempts of ordering when engaging with practices that aim to be transformative. It is from here, that throughout the writing, my findings are not necessarily exposed as descriptions, but as reflections that constantly bring forward new questions. Furthermore, having through my research experienced the importance of pleasure and humor in order to be able to sustain ourselves and others; I have decided to include playfulness and collaboration in the writing. This I have done through the chosen form of presenting the visuals of my ethnographic findings, which my dear friend carlota garcia has helped me with.

In this way, the text attempts to follow what according to Halberstam is a queering of our relation to composition: to ask "more of the world than linear, normative functions allow (...) to make seemingly disconnected worlds collide" (Waite, 2015, p.52). This is queer, because it is precisely a binary logic that allows for ordering that which exists as disorder. It dictates that we must either talk about ourselves or about others, that one writes through imaginative literature or scientific scholarship, that we must choose between theory or practice. It is queer because if you do not choose the right binary between this, that which is written is rapidly bladed through notions of scientific rigor and validity (Waite, 2015). Alright, let it be that way. And let's rejoice in what unfolds from there.

Within these entanglements, I understand this paper as corresponding with Haraway's (2016) call to stay with the trouble: taking on response-ability in order to be able to think with and from the struggle. To not only account for how things work, but also how we inhabit them. To take seriously that this placement from within will constantly interact with the

questions we form; bringing forward not new answers, but evermore provocations on how to think through and from these questions (Ahmed, 2012).

What we do when we talk about organizing

Foregoing delving in more depth into the inquiries that this text attempts to bring forward, I wish to draw on a few reflections that have come to me from the field throughout the research process. I find this relevant to do because my engagement with the theater collective did not begin with a research intention. It was from moments of being already entangled in an active participation, both with the union and the theater group, that the questions that meet this research were brought forward. Therefore, it is from here that I believe it is important to take a moment to share where this text is situated; or in other words, what it is that it could do and what it attempts to move away from doing.

The author Rodrigo Nunes (2022), reminds us that organizing entails acting in favor of increasing the probabilities to have certain outcomes over others, but doing so by always moving in directions towards a future that is unknown. As such, all organizing entails a limited capacity to act because all agents involved move without ever being certain about what is the best way to do so. Nonetheless, this uncertainty should not be understood as limiting organizing, but as that which makes it possible in the first place (Gokmenoglu, 2022, p.4). What does this entail, then, for research that writes on the experiences and learnings of social movements, how they came to be, how they structured and how they mobilized? That is, what do we do when we think about strategies of political organizing?

If following Nunes (2022) we come to understand that there is no organization if there is certainty, what we should clearly not do from research that centers around political organizing, is to search for a strategy that can become the be all of organization. To create a single model that could get rid of the uncertainties. A plagued quest to find a universalizing

how-to tool that can bring together all forms of action into a single, overarching movement. If we do so, what we could create is a certainty that would yield not the be all, but the end all of organization. And what does this do? How can this enhance the potential we have of creative forms of action and of ways of coming together? Are we not then falling into a form of rhetoric, that in its attempt to resist certain forms of power, becomes instead a policing hand that determines a taming of our imagination and the possibilities we have of thinking beyond the current world-order?

This might be a scary realization, but we should not shy away from it. We should let it humble us, and departing from the acceptance of the little we know, understand that the moment we stop moving, it is the moment we stop being organized. We need as many moving pieces as possible. So that we can keep coming together to resist the forces that prevent us from doing so. So that we can do, despite never truly knowing how to do. So that we can always keep inventing. If we do not do this, if we keep departing from the unspoken assumption that there is, or at least that there should be, a collective power captured in a model ‘through which we will finally win,’ we will be bounded to a communal individualism that will prevent us from engaging with the constant struggle of what it means to live together in plurality.

And don't we already have, in the understanding of political organizing as ‘movements’, a simple debunkment to this possibility? Doesn't being in movement mean that we are in constant doing, change and adaptation? What other ways of knowing can come from thinking of organization as something that is always in movement? And therefore, that exists always in plurality? If the assumption that what we need is to find a be all of political organization is unspoken, it is because it articulates itself from a place where it does not make any sense to not think in this way. That is, it is announced from a reading of organizing as something that is always in entanglement with the political: with an understanding of

relations, and through this, of organization, as a process of bargaining. Participating in this, is compromising with the fact that our movements can be negotiated; it is accepting that there is always something that Power will gain in return. Well, let's try to not interact with that relation, with the intention of compromise, and see what happens. Maybe then, we will be able to move away from a paradigm that is finite, and that in its finiteness, it cannot extend beyond itself; beyond that which already is. Perhaps from there we can begin a different relating and language from which to do, and think about, plurality in organizing.

This being said, I do want to emphasize that of course we can theorize about strategies of how to organize, and we can learn from the things that have already been attempted and inventions that have already been made. In fact, we should constantly be engaging in that. My point is, that what we should *never* do, is to stop doing so. There, what this text sets out to do, is to highlight that what we also need, what we could also do from the work of theorizing about organizing, is to keep bringing up evermore new questions. Because it is by consistently asking questions, that we embrace organization as a continuous and evolving process of invention, rather than a finite process in creation. What happens to our understanding of what we do when we think about political organization when we do so from the acknowledgement that there is very little we know, and that there are many questions to ask from that lack?

First, we move.

When the CTC was established, none of those involved had any idea of what could come out of organizing in this way. We did not even speak about the fact that we were organizing. Territorio Domestico, a collective of migrant domestic workers in Spain, had been creating performances and it seemed that they were able to get a lot done from there. So we decided to try it out here too. To just see what happened along the way. To simply start

moving. To invent, mobilize and act once we were already a movement. Once we had come together in a *room*.

To begin posing questions about what this involved, we must first understand the context in which all this took place. What I mean with “context” here, follows something Nunes (2022) pays particular attention to: an ecological thinking of organizing. This approach suggests that movements are composed of diverse elements that do not necessarily have to interact directly to influence each other’s potential, and as such, that all organizing takes place within an ecology. From here, the creation of the CTC cannot be seen in isolation. It must be understood within the shared environment that it both responds to and shapes.

Therefore, I will explore how the CTC, and more broadly the FNVMDW, exist within a greater movement of inventions happening from within migration and labor struggles. To do so, I will follow three critical questions that Nunes (2022) proposes for thinking through movements ecologically. First, we must ask about the environment in which a political organization arises. What are the potentials and resources already in motion? What questions have been raised, and what actions have been taken to address them? From there, we need to understand the political actions that arise within this ecology in terms of the contributions they bring to that which is already taking place. What does the ecology need? What is missing, and how can we build on existing capacities and resources to fill those gaps? Finally, we must consider the impact of our actions on the broader environment, ensuring that the movements that arise strengthen common resources. What is the invention that is being introduced to this ecology, and what direction does it steer towards?

On the question of organizing beyond labor; or on what does this ecology have

Domestic work has long sat outside hegemonic economic relations; not recognized as labor, and relying on the exploitation of feminized and racialized people. This has kept it outside of preoccupation, although never out of sight, of traditional union struggles. Despite

this, contestation to the violence of this sector draws from a long experience of organizing that have departed from different fields and angles; charged with multitude of forms of clandestine militarism and commoning (Guitérrez-Rodríguez, 2010). As such, domestic workers have for long been adapting and reshaping traditional forms of organizing within labor issues. For FNVMDW, the need of doing this has come out of the lack of possibilities of action that the FNV, as a labor union, has been able to offer. The relations to work of this sector are not upheld within the pathways that the traditional syndicalist machinery is accustomed to move through: there is not a big company, a boss or a specific regulation that can be tackled. With the entrance of the migrant domestic workers to the FNV, the capacities of the union were being overflowed because the demands and needs from these workers were complexifying labor too much: taking workers' struggles outside the comfortable understanding of labor as a wage relation. If this is the case, it is because the violences that the people that make up this sector are up against, cannot be reduced to those experienced in the workplace, they also unfold in the home, in the bed, in the street, at the border control, in the unpaid care tasks that double working hours.

This makes unionizing within this sector require an effort of imagination. Something needs to be done differently. To do things differently, to try things out, to move beyond the pathways that we are told or we are accustomed to go through - to invent - requires effort. Here, imagining how to do otherwise is important because it “is connected to necessary forms of action for the sake of our lives, for the sake of a different set of material conditions” (Olufemi, 2024, p.242). For the FNVMDW, this is something that has come as a learning. Not because they did not know beforehand, but because of the ways in which stumbling upon the closed doors and endless institutional pathways of the union, has forced them, in a way by necessity, to question why it is that those doors are closed, and why the paths offered make moving so difficult. It is not by chance that in all union meetings that I attended, we had to

talk about the fact that it was being very complicated to get the union to process and print the FNV ID's of the new members. For some, it took over a year to get their domestic worker membership card. Every month, the excuse from the union came in a different form. The last one: they have just changed their computers, and they need to create a new system before they are able to process the new ID's. 'Oh, but we have donated the old computers to Indonesia! Many of your members come from there, no? How grateful should they feel!' That was three months ago. Still no cards for the new members. I joined the union as a student last month, I got the membership card delivered to my house in a week.

It might seem like something small, it is just a membership card. However, that card is extremely relevant for the undocumented workers, who could show it to the police if they are asked for identification. It serves as a form of protection, of recognition. So what does it mean that something so simple, and that is not a problem for workers in other sectors of the FNV, suddenly turns into such a burden? 'We are simply not strategic for the union,' has been repeated often. 'How do we make ourselves heard within the union?' is usually asked in return. What I have been able to see here, is that it is only once one enters into the task of trying to get things done, that one stumbles upon these procedures, and begins to question them. To think about this, I borrow Ahmed's (2021) term of non-performativity.

Non-performativity refers to the ways in which we are made to believe that the paths offered by institutions are there for a reason, and if they are not working, it must be because we are not doing enough, and not because those paths are wrong. In order to not end up clustered within this, in order to be able to keep moving, we must be able to imagine that things could be otherwise. Not in a fantastical or mystical form, but through a material and practical act of imagination in which we *start* doing things otherwise. And to start doing, we must first be in the *room* together. If we do not, that which we are up against can become too much; it can be the reason one decides to stop organizing (Ahmed, 2021). It was through listening repeatedly

and complaining together in a room about the issue of membership cards, that creative ways to dodge the processes of the union arised: ‘You cannot provide membership cards? We will write up our own document and have it signed by a union official ourselves; so that we can get from the union what we need from it’.

Stumbling upon these issues with labor unions is not something new, nor specific for the FNVMDW. If comprehending movements ecologically entails taking into account what the resources within the ecology are, and make the best use of the capacities that exist within this to redirect our movements towards the direction we want them to go, we must also ask how it is that we imagine the use of those resources. It is in this analysis, where I look at the FNVMDW within the broader ecology of intersectional feminists movements of the past decade, especially those coming from the Global South. It is important to mention that the ecology in which the group exists is much broader than this. However, I believe that placing a focus on this specific context is significant because they have come across similar struggles. That is; the unveiling that there is a labor movement that can provide insights and support, but that this is limited because it exists within a fragmented comprehension of what labor is. By involving concerns on how unpaid, precarious, informal, migrant and domestic labor are sustained through institutional violence, the intersectional feminist movement, especially that coming from racialized people, has amplified not only the political capacity of labor struggles, but also its languages and its ways of organizing (Filigrana, 2022).

The questions that are brought forward from here, ask who do we disobey, who do we contest, when the figure of the employer does not speak to our realities. Who and what are we disrupting, when the labor struggle does not impact solely the factory, but rather disorders itself in the streets, the community and the house. How do we organize and what means do we use to mobilize, when the union falls too small and leaves too many behind. Cavallero and Gago (2022), writing from Argentina, depart from their experience organizing within this

movement to explore these questions as possible openings towards imagining a new form of unionism. They argue that with their suits of social agents, the traditional labor unions shiver in their peace-making efforts as mediators between class and capital interests. When did they become so tamed? So entangled in the workings of capital?

From these questions, Cavallero and Gago (2022) claim that despite the inability of unions to incorporate the needs that have been brought forward by the feminist and antiracist movement, “creating something new from a void is extremely difficult when the monster we face is so immense and the balance of power is so uneven (...) what we need is a renewed unionizing. A feminist and antiracist syndicalism” (Cavallero & Gago, 2022, p.78). We would forget too much if we were to do without the valuable accumulated experience of union struggles. But we would lose too much if we were to simply attune our practices to their ways of doing. It is because of this, that constantly inventing and imagining ways in which to use the resources available is crucial.

These resources might be as simple, but as necessary, as financial support (Cavallero & Gago, 2022). The CTC, for example, was able to push the union to provide some financial support; it was possible to get everyone compensated for their travel costs, as well as to make sure that we could always eat together after the rehearsals. Getting this compensation back, however, did not come without having to send at least three email reminders and make a couple of phone calls. Nonetheless, these loopholes in the bureaucratic organizing of the FNV did not lead towards non-performativity. Instead, it brought forward the questions that FNVMDW should be asking in order to keep creating room from which to organize. What crawls up when there is a deliberate decision to not separate workers' labor struggles - and the violences that arise from there - with people's every-day encounters with all forms of social and institutional brutality? How does this allow us to think about how we do organizing?

On feminist bio-syndicalism; or on what does this ecology need

Within Nunes's (2022) thinking of organizing, we must consider "a broader context of struggles and agents in order to find what works for the whole (...) looking for ways to exploit available potentials and opportunities so as to transform existing constraints as much as possible" (p.242). We have by now seen some of the ways in which the FNVMDW is able to work with and against the union; a struggle that is shared within broader feminist and antiracist movements.

During the theater performed at Pakhuis - which I briefly described in the introduction - it is possible to unpack some other important elements in which the CTC in particular, is an invention that offers questions towards broader struggles entangled within the movement, and how to potentialize them according to what the needs of domestic workers are. Lita, the protagonist, finds herself working alone in a private household. Without any other protection, she relies fully on the 'good will' of her employer. Health issues, even if they are caused at the workplace, are her own responsibility. These vulnerabilities unfold within other systems of governance and surveillance. Through the play we also see that she needs to send money home. This makes her more exploitable as fear can make her more inclined to uphold abusive conditions.

To the ways in which these forms of violence can be contested through a renewed form of interaction with labor struggles, Territorio Domestico (2022) terms feminist biosyndicalism. An approach to doing unionism that, in their words, encompasses

The struggle for working conditions, but also for other rights that we consider equally fundamental: the right to decent housing, to basic material conditions for a dignified life, the right to migrate, the right to health and care, the right to pleasure, (...); ultimately, the right of every human being to live lives that, within their complexity - as we are also not naive - deserve the joy of being lived. We firmly believe this is possible, but it requires radical changes in the ways the system we live in is

organized: a patriarchal, capitalist, racist, homophobic system, a system that consumes lives (...), instead of sustaining them (p.15).

The focus of the term 'feminist' within this, is important in the ways that it allows for understanding a collective labor fight that cannot be untangled from the sustaining of life, which supposes a revolt of order to classical syndicalism. As such, it includes a focus taken on the how - on the doing - taking care of the process, of one another; experimenting and imagining how this can pose challenges to the systems that attempt to keep us isolated and in fear. Here, I also see a connection to the final scene of the theater that the CTC performed, and thus, the questions and issues that the group brought forward: the moment Lita declares her need for health insurance, not rest, followed by the other actors voicing their demands, rejects the privatization of pain, declaring the strength of fighting collectively while supporting each other.

This is significantly evident when considering labor rights as one of the existing capacities within the ecology. Said very simply, labor rights attempt to balance the relation of exploitation between employers and workers, or at least tries to cut down the disadvantages of such a relation. Therefore, thinking of labor deregulation commonly considers a decreasing capacity of institutional mechanisms to protect workers against employers and business owners; to balance this relation (Filigrana, 2022). As such, it assumes the existence of a jurisdiction that guarantees the preservation of the worker, who, protected under the law, stands and interacts with the employer in a relation of equality. Nevertheless, it is exactly within their juridical position, that labor rights are not in any way enacted as an attempt to free the worker from the exploitative relationship. A relation that creates the possibility of capital accumulation, and therefore of jurisdiction, in the first place.

In particular, paying attention to migrant labor, it is important to consider the ways in which border politics interplay with labor policies to establish mechanisms through which the

owners of capital can obtain evermore cheapened workforce. Legislation of migrant labor functions as a way to govern foreign working hands towards the needs of the market. A lot can be analyzed about these dynamics, however, for our interest here, I wish to draw attention to the way in which this ordering is not by casualty leaving many outside of any form of regulation (Filigrana, 2022). Despite working and paying taxes, domestic workers cannot regularize their status and working rights in the Netherlands because the work that they do is not recognized as labor, and it is instead placed in a category of ‘informal help’ (Eleveld & van Hooren, 2018). After all, fear of deportation and clandestineness of people residing without citizenship and work status is very profitable for employers, as it converges into a lack of complaining and to the acceptance of lower wages and abusive conditions.

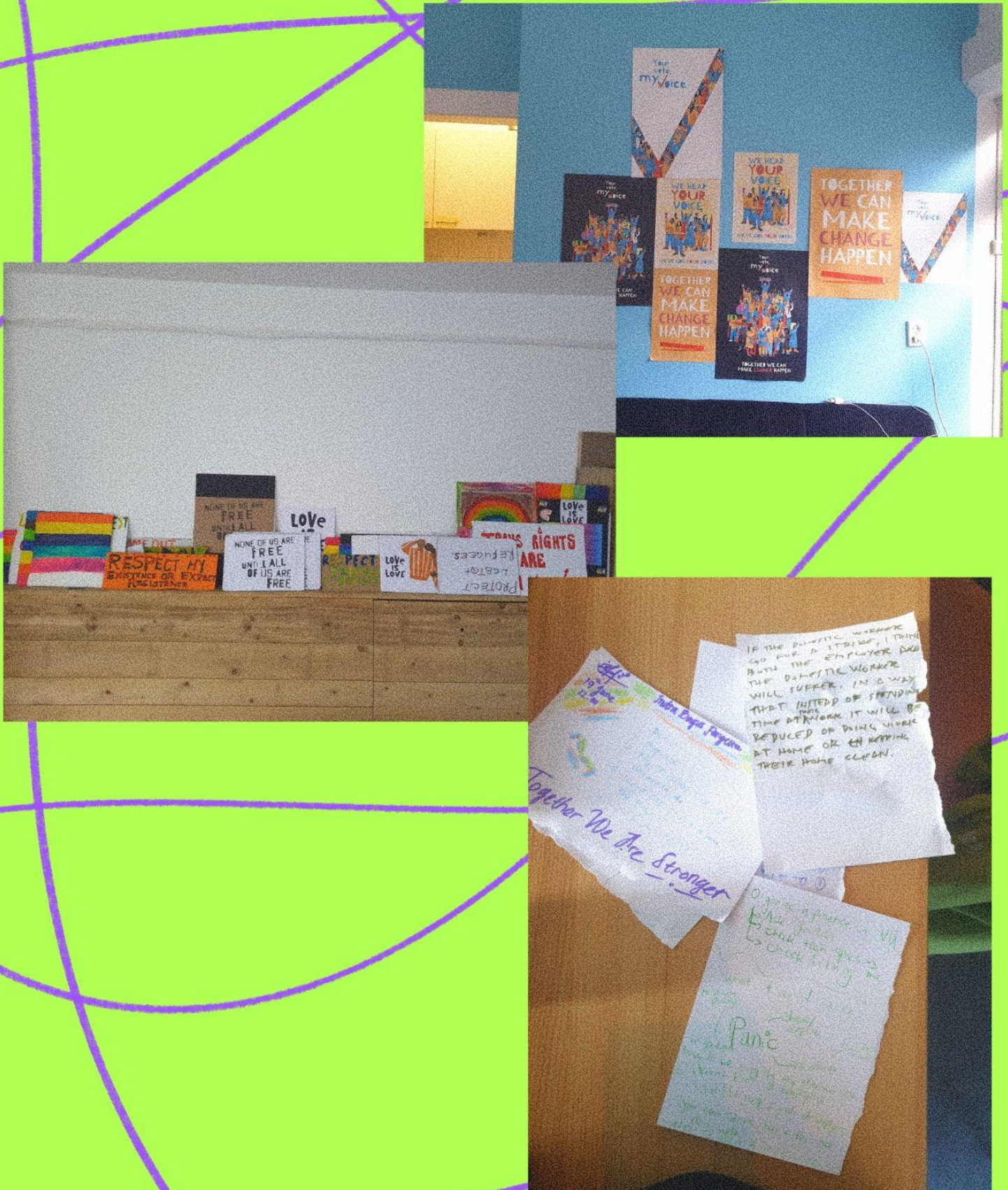
Because of this, regardless of the existence of legal systems that are meant to protect undocumented migrants, what I have observed is that it is often the case that people residing ‘illegally’ in the country, tend to conceive themselves as subjects of no rights. The fear of being deported after making an allegation, makes the legal systems at play incapable of offering the protection they intend to provide. This is not to say that labor rights and legal protection are not important, they are crucial, and we should fight for them. However, their enactment and legislation should not take up the entire space from which to do labor struggles. This is so, as to use legal systems in the first place, having strong support systems is crucial. Not solely to learn from there how to use them and what options are available, but also to be encouraged and supported through the long, and often extremely scary processes that they entail. Therefore, within the fight for labor rights, there is a need to create, along the movement of organizing, strong systems through which to sustain one another; a feminist bio syndicalism that takes care of the process, placing life - instead of solidified political demands - at the center. What directions does this guide organizing towards?

On being together in a room; or in which directions do we want this ecology to move

While we sit around the big table that shapes the space of the main *room*, we sip coffee and tea as we wait for everyone to arrive. We have been coming together in this *room* almost every Sunday, attempting to create a theater performance. It is difficult to meet at the FNV because of their opening hours. They usually close their doors at 18.00. Domestic workers can only meet later in the evenings because it is when they get out of work. Some at 19.00, some at 17.00, others at 21.00. I wonder about the importance of the opening hours of a space that is intended for meeting, and what this says about itself considering who it gives access to. If those that are important are the union officials and their office hours, or those workers that the union is supposedly providing a space for.

As such, we are not in any union building. We are at the community space of Amsterdam City Rights, a coalition of initiatives for and by undocumented immigrants in the city. As stated in one of the walls of the *room*: “we are the local ‘basic rights team,’ and we go for more than basic rights.” Some of their projects include a radio station, a printing project and a mobile app in which information on rights, work, health care possibilities, housing and other issues can become easily and broadly accessible. They also offer their space for gatherings by other migrant organizations; and so, we were welcomed to use it for our weekly rehearsals. Another resource within this ecology.

THE ROOM



To be together in this *room* has made it possible to start *making room*; filling up that which was lacking. This happened quite literally by the way in which physical space was taken up. But also in the ways that being together allowed us to begin doing otherwise. The ways in which we have practiced togetherness have been in constant change and adaptation. At the beginning, Myrthe and I were seen by the group as 'the artists.' As white Europeans, as young students, we were of course in a completely different position than the rest of the group. This is not something that we ignored, and we had a lot of conversations about it. But our voices and doings counted more. Just like they do outside of this *room*. How do you get rid of the power dynamics that are at play here in order to relate to each other equally as we organize? That is a question that I do want to leave answered: you do not. Or rather: you acknowledge what is at stake and you sit with the discomfort. You cannot move beyond this relating because it cuts too deep. What you can do, is to acknowledge that the work of organizing is also the work of rehearsing how to be - and imagine - togetherness otherwise.

From that answer many other questions arise. I follow here a thinking with the writer and activist Gloria Anzaldúa, who explores 'borderlands' as the physical, cultural and psychological spaces that exist between border regions (1987). On this matter, when Anzaldúa discusses struggles for liberation, she advocates for a decolonial resistance against the oppressive forces that seek to enforce rigid boundaries and homogenize identities. What I find relevant here, is to think about the ways in which the colonial order in which we exist, was transcribed to the ways in which we came together within the CTC. But, especially, how by coming together, by strengthening our relationships - making them more intimate, friendly and loving along the way - we have done something to the fragmenting and individualizing logics that are capitalized through 'borderlands' in order to break up communities and movements. We have not gotten rid of the powers which are at play, but we have done something to Power by refusing to attune to its logics. If this was possible, it was in part

because of the lack of structure we had in our organizing. Perhaps it was because we were not even thinking about structure, and instead we were just doing, and moving, experimenting with what could come out of being together in a *room*. Of getting to know each other.

What sorts of openings and imaginations does this bring?

I do want to acknowledge that organizing in this way, without necessarily creating solid structures, but remaining flexible and in constant molding, does create complications that at times make it difficult to get things done. Especially when this has to happen fast. Nonetheless, it also creates a different dynamic within the group, where those that are more demanding with themselves and with the group have to adapt and respect the times of the others, which also implies respecting them in their capacity of action.

Within the CTC, there was a lot of pressure coming from some members that saw a lot of importance on what we were doing and wanted to get things done steadily and fast. However, there were others that took longer to find their position in the dynamic of the group and to think about how relevant it was to be doing what we were doing. Being able to know along the way where everyone stands within this, is also something that is possible due to not fully knowing where we wanted the group to move towards. Three weeks after the performance at Pakhuis, we came together to celebrate everything that had been accomplished, but also to reflect on what it is that we wanted to continue doing. Personally, I thought that most people would want to take a break. We had been meeting almost every week for three months. I had seen how tired people arrived at the rehearsals after work, how it was often difficult to make it to the *room* in which we rehearsed because it was too far, or because people felt too sick. However, I was surprised to hear that everyone wanted to continue; that the CTC is something that they valued and that they wanted to keep putting time into.

From these conversations, and also from my personal experience, I have noticed the importance of the bonds that we have created for it to become something that we want to keep doing. In this regard, Indra shared the following with us when asked if he wanted to continue:

Yeah of course, because I feel like the people here right now is like my own family. You know? I really know you guys, I mean very personally, so I feel that we are family. So I think that we connect each other, we have a chemistry. So why not?

In this sense, I have been able to see how ‘informality’ in organizing, also can be the way to make things more pleasurable. Still something to take seriously, something that is serious, but that at the same time is something to enjoy, to crave and to rejoice in. If this is not the case, and it becomes another burden in our lives, we would be entangling organizing in dynamics that are too stressful, unsustainable, and that end up pushing many people away. Organizing must survive over time. Precarious lives are unstable and they entail having to confront constant changes. To stay together and organized while confronting vital and political swayings, disagreements or failures, requires energy. From my experience, I have seen that people remain when they see their presence is useful, but they remain especially when they are comfortable. Forming affective and social bonds as we are organizing does not solely feel good, it is also a form of stabilizing political struggles (Filigrana, 2022). Meeting up for social activities, eating together after meetings, and having a warm drink with everyone the moment you arrive to the *room*, are settings where emotional bonds are forged, which in turn, sustains political efforts. Celebrating birthdays, supporting one another during illness, complaining together about struggles... help to build lasting movements.

Here, there is something crucial about doing the common, or being in common, that differs from the rusted idea of numbers and memberships within labor organizing. I do acknowledge that there is a real and practical difference in showing up to a protest as a group

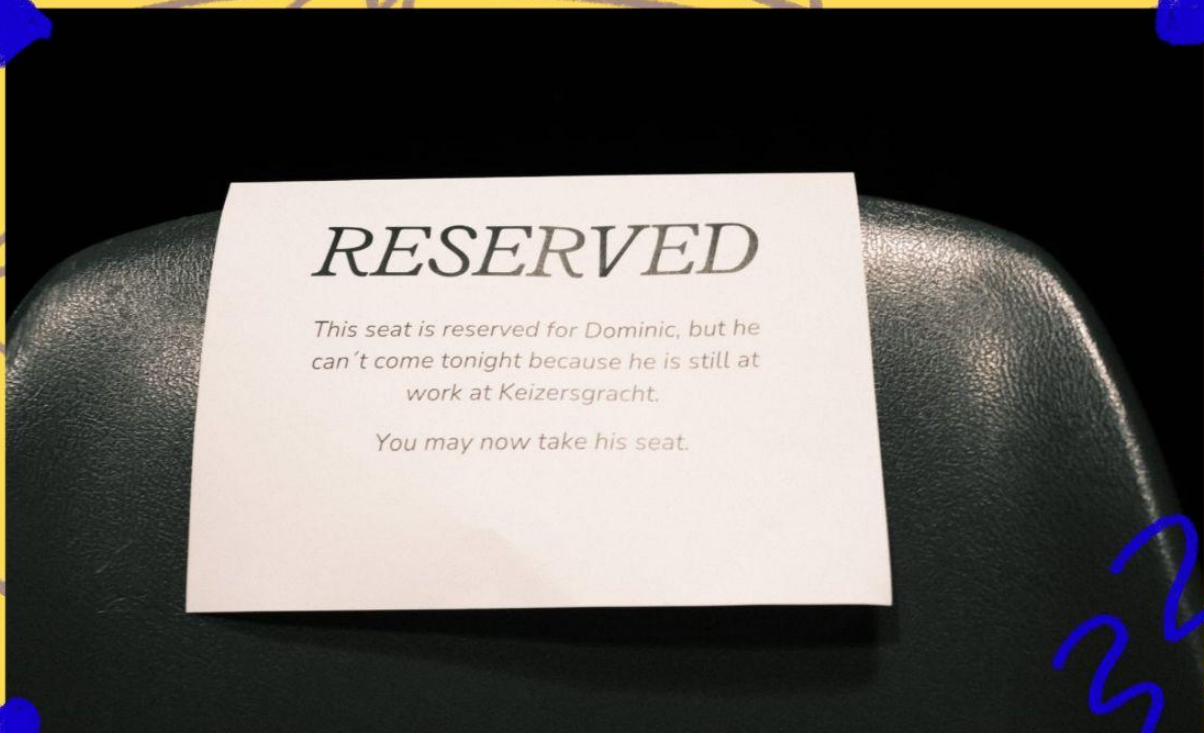
of one-hundred people rather than twenty. But relying on showing up as a mass, could too often stop us from trying things out. I think here especially on movements that are going to have to be stretched in time, that are going to have to face constant changes that require the creation of new imaginaries of doing. There will always be people that will not be able to be present. Sometimes there might be five people, others twenty, and others ninety. But having built these affective relations, makes it that numbers do not make one meeting stronger or weaker than another. It is not about the quantity of bodies that brings strength, but about asking how we can enable practices that carry the impulses, rage and joy of everyone that ‘could not make it that day.’

Throughout the different meetings that the CTC has had, there have been people that have come to only a few rehearsals, as personal circumstances did not make it possible for them to commit to coming every time. Their stories and their presence remained with all of us, and spoke through the theater performance that was created. We need to carry the bodies that ‘could not make it that day,’ along with us. That is, we must keep *making room*.

In this regard, when the date of the performance at Pakhuis was getting close, we started receiving messages from members of the FNVMDW that wanted to join, but that sadly could not come. With the intention of acknowledging their presence and their importance in the entire event, we came up with a way of making their non-presence a performative act. As such, we included in some of the chairs in which the audience was going to sit, papers with messages that shared the reason why there were some people that could not ‘make it that day.’

What other ways of being together could allow us to keep filling up the *room*?

MAKING ROOM



And from there, we rehearse

Coming together in a room as a form of organizing, requires understanding moving within the ecology as a power of adhesion - a dynamic process of connections, maneuvers and articulations that are inherently relational. One that yields and exists because of that relationality. As I have attempted to show in the previous sections, the creation of the CTC did not happen in isolation, and the ways in which the group does, are entangled within a broader environment of feminist and antiracist struggles.

As a final reflection, I propose embracing an ecological approach to organizing through the following statement: the more inventions take place, the more organized we will be. This may seem paradoxical, okay. But bear with me for a second. To remove this paradox, let's go back to the ways in which the CTC acted as a necessary invention within the FNVMDW, due to the ways in which their struggle demands the need of engaging with a praxis of imagination. If we take that praxis of imagination seriously, it becomes not possible to think about organization as a structured entity that works collectively towards a common objective. Instead, what we encounter is the ability of conceiving organizing as the occurrence of imagining collectively a common. This is because imagination requires experimentation, creativity and play. It requires trying things out. It is here, where I find relevant to bring forward the call of Maynard and Simpson (2022) to think of a praxis of liberation as the rehearsal of different modes of being together. 'Rehearsal' signifies changes in world order not through the absence of what is yet to come, but through that which is already present; through dissonant presence. When we rehearse, there is always possibility. Mistakes are only chances to try evermore things out (Maynard, Simpson, Voegelé & Griffin, 2022). If then, organizing is a continuum that moves through a power of adhesion, the more rehearsals, the more inventions, the more organized.

The CTC is one of the many rehearsals that are currently in motion, setting out new destinations towards feminist and antiracist struggles for liberation; challenging and expanding the capacities of traditional understandings of organizing within labor movements. On its own, it might seem small in capacity, but thinking ecologically, allows us to perceive its necessity; its ability of posing to us the question of how we can be together otherwise. This practice extends and mutates ecologically to other movements. Last week, a group of workers from Colombia came to visit the people from FNVMDW. They are at the beginning steps of forming a union for street vendors in Bogota, and they are looking for inspiration from sectors that, as theirs, in their irregularity and precarity, extend beyond traditional labor demands. In their process of imagining possible forms of action, they are starting by taking a moment of slowing down in order to get to know the ecology of movements that are already in place, and build from there. That is, as we have seen throughout this text, already an act of invention.

What is rehearsed through the willingness of coming together and beginning imagining from there, is the opening of a leakage in the systems of control that make one a governable subject. As we *make room*, as we *come together in rooms* - as we rehearse - we craft collective practices for “finding, seeing and creating opportunities to escape the violent normalities that currently order the world.” (Maynard, et al., 2022).

REHEARSING



Conclusion

Throughout this text, drawing from the experience of organizing of the CTC, and analyzing it from an ecological approach to political organizing, I have engaged with the research question: how does the inventive organizing of undocumented migrant domestic workers in The Netherlands challenge and expand the capacities of traditional understandings of labor struggles?

I have departed from the idea of ecological thinking that I have borrowed from Rodrigo Nunes. From here, understanding organizing as a continuum that is in constant making, I have shared the ways in which the CTC, and more broadly the FNVMDW, challenge the capacities of the FNV, while putting to use the resources that the union is able to offer. Through imagining alternative ways of doing and coming together, they are teaching the unions that labor is more than what they think it is; that their ways of doing must change.

So yes, the traditional syndicalist machinery is fading because the realities that brought it into being have shifted. But also because there are people that are, in their everyday struggles, refusing to accommodate to the ways of doing and the paths that these offer. People that refuse to negotiate their movement. Doing this, however, is not a simple task. As we have seen, falling over and over into obstacles that prevent you from moving is tiring, and it can be what ends up pushing you out of organizing. Because of this, inventions on how to do otherwise take place once we have come together. And from that support, begin to imagine; to rehearse.

An invitation

One final thing, before we keep moving. Before you rush towards doing something else. Let me offer an invitation. An evocation to take a moment to slow down.

To slow down should not be taken as an act of passivity. It is an attempt to find places from which to tune in differently; from which to experiment with what we can learn, understand and create, from deliberately taking the time to feel how we move. To slow down while refusing to stand still; while lingering in the midst of creating ways of moving differently. To slow down to find ways to silence the belligerent rhythms of knowledge production. To slow down so we can find time to come together, and to understand what happens when we do not. To slow down because there is a need to take care of what we do, of how we move, of why we share. To slow down because from there is where we can keep imagining.

Slowness as an opening rather than a closing; a borrowing, stretching and performing.

If slowing down is the closing invitation to this text, it is because it is the greatest learning that I have gotten out of my engagement with the research. This finding has not sparked as an independent grounded conclusion. It has entangled itself in the process of getting to know the field that I have been involved with, or more accurately, in getting to know the people that make up this field. People engaged in political struggle as a practice of living; as an integral part of their everyday actions. People that enact resistance as evermore than a reaction to an event, but as an ongoing part of communal efforts and solidarity. It is by moving slowly, that I have attempted to share with you what I mean from this; and how we can together appreciate the knowledges which I have borrowed to write this text.

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Appendix: Ethics and Privacy

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Making Room: On inventions within organizing of undocumented migrant domestic workers in The Netherlands

Name, email of student: Elena Mataix Caballero, 523683em@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Rogier van Reekum

Start date and duration: January 2024 - June 2024

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES - NO**

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?

(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants.

YES - NO

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?

YES - NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act

(WMO) must first be submitted to an accredited medical research ethics committee or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants.

YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else).

YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them?

YES - NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study?

YES - NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants?

YES - NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?

YES - NO

Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try

to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose

of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

- Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants?

YES - NO

- Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

YES - NO

- Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent?

YES - NO

- Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study?

YES - NO

- Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured?

YES - NO

- Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study?

YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

1. The case study involves field observations of a theater collective. Within this, there is a baby.
2. The safety of the participants is at risk during the study because they risk being detained due to not having work or residence permits in The Netherlands
3. The participants can be identified because there will be visual images from them.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

1. The mother of the minor involved in the study will be asked for consent.
2. The structure of the study is not what creates the safety risks. These are structural and the possible adverses cannot be relieved from within this research.
3. The participants can be identified, but this will only be the case if they willfully wish for that to be the case.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Field observations will be hand-written. Images of these notes will be taken and stored in an external USB drive as back up.

Other notes/images will be stored in the external USB drive as well.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Me, the researcher.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Weekly.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

This will not be necessary.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly

speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Elena Mataix Caballero

Name (EUR) supervisor: Rogier van Reekum

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rogier van Reekum', written on a light-colored background.

Date: 24/03/2024

Date: 15-04-2024