INVISIBLE DOMÉSTICAS

Undocumented Migrant Domestic Workers from Latin America in Amsterdam

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1. Introduction
Initially I came into contact with Humanitas and their subgroup BLinN (Bonded Labour in the Netherlands) which focuses on helping abused undocumented immigrants. After meeting with the president of the latter organisation I discovered that BLinN largely focuses on individuals, meaning that it handles individual problems and does not represent groups. I therefore came to the conclusion that collaboration with BLinN would not be adequate for my thesis ambitions. The president did advise me to contact several other interest groups of domestic workers. These groups of women help each other emotionally and try to improve the labour position of the domestic worker in general. After phoning them I finally found an organization which helps undocumented immigrants called ‘Het Wereldhuis’. This translates to ‘The World House’ and is an initiative of the Protestant Church. This organisation offers physical space and guidance in matters like Dutch language courses, medical care and mental support for undocumented immigrants in specific. Within ‘Het Wereldhuis’ there is a group of Latin American women who call themselves ‘Otro Dela’. The secretary of this group is a woman named Angela who arranges the activities and maintains contact with the Latin American women and the administration of ‘Het Wereldhuis’. Due to her unique position she became my designated contact and upon my appeal to meet more women for my research about MDWs, she suggested I come to her church on Sunday, and so I did.

### 1.1 Moving Towards the Field

After studying the notes that I received at my home, I discovered that most of the women where Latin American: usually they mentioned their nationality while introducing themselves. I expect that they mention their nationality for a number of reasons. First of all, it makes the introduction more personal: the employer may have a certain degree of affinity with the mentioned nationality. In addition I believe the women mention their nationality because of the personal nature of the work: domestic work is performed in the most intimate spaces of a family. While the majority of all notes were sent by Latin American women, some notes were sent by men from that same continent looking for work as a handyman. People from Asia used a similar approach seeking work. I decided to focus my master research on undocumented migrant domestic workers (MDWs) from Latin America as these women literally presented themselves at my door. Another reason for focussing my attention this way was that there was no abundance of literature on this group. Despite the widespread use of domestic workers by many households in the Netherlands, little official figures have been published on this subject. The apparent lack of knowledge on this subject made me especially curious about MDWs who live and work in Amsterdam.

The easiest way to get in touch with them seemed to be phoning the numbers on the notes and ask them if they would allow me to do an interview with them. This was not as easy as it seemed. After calling around ten different telephone numbers on the notes, none of the people wished to be interviewed. Some asked me to send them an email, which was unfortunately not met with a reply. This was not working at all. I needed to find another way to get in touch with them.

Using the Internet I tried to find common interest groups or NGOs concerned with undocumented migrant domestic workers in The Netherlands, preferably in Amsterdam. After finding several on the Internet, I was hopeful that these contacts would be more interested and open to me and my research than the migrant workers who sent me the notes.

### 1.2 The Church Service

Angela mentioned that many MDWs are active members of the Church and that this would make a good site for me to meet and observe MDWs in an open and natural setting. This seemed to be the ideal solution as meeting my target group seemed to be the most difficult part of my research. MDWs are a vulnerable group in Dutch society which makes them rather difficult to detect and approach. Angela estimates about 70% of all Church members to be undocumented, of which most do domestic work for private people. Meeting such a large group of women in the Church proved to be a great opportunity to perform an ethnographic study. Below is a description of my first encounter with the Pentecostal Church I had back in January 2010.

The church service itself was an extraordinary experience for me. Although I have always been enrolled in Christian schools and have even spent Sundays in church, this was a novelty for me. The church itself is a rather ugly office-like building located next to the A10 highway which cuts as a ring around Amsterdam, between Diemen and Duintrecht. Upon entering the church several Churchgoers welcomed me at the entrance by shaking my hand and giving me God’s blessing. I then tried to find Angela, as I was due to meet her in the church. The space was crowded with predominantly Latin Americans, obviously due to the fact that the service from 12.00 until 14.00 was held in Spanish. I was scanning the large hall hoping to find Angela quickly. I was starting to feel quite uncomfortable with many people staring at me. After me God’s blessing. I then tried to find Angela, as I was due to meet her in the church. The space was crowded with predominantly Latin Americans, obviously due to the fact that the service from 12.00 until 14.00 was held in Spanish. I was scanning the large hall hoping to find Angela quickly. I was starting to feel quite uncomfortable with many people staring at me.
me. Luckily I was able to spot her and I proceeded to join Angela and her family. She greeted me as if I were a family member, hugging me and making space for me next to her. The minister, who along with his wife is Dominican, stood at the front of the large stage. He was accompanied in the back by a live band which had already started playing as a prelude to the religious service.

From my field notes:

The church service itself is a group happening, a real event. The minister speaks in the microphone. Towards the back of the hall a woman is translating everything the minister says, from Spanish to Dutch, and does so on-the-fly. Although the theatre chairs in the church seem comfortable, we are standing most of the time, listening to the minister, all the time praying and singing. We hold each other’s hands and welcome each other. Two large screens behind the minister beam the bible texts, lyrics and show pictures. A lot of effort has gone into incorporating everyone into the service. It gives me a special feeling to stand here with all these people. The music is especially loud and the rhythm is strong, everybody starts to sing and jump. During prayers people stretch out their arms as if they are reaching out to God. At the end of the service everybody starts clapping and starts to hug each other. Then we eat.

1.3 Eating Together

After attending the church service we all had to queue. While it was unclear initially why everyone was standing in line, it appeared to be for the food. After buying a meal voucher, we proceeded towards the kitchen counter. There was a selection of about three different meals, all Latin American style food made by the hermanas of the church. We ate our meal in a humble space along with about half of the people attending the Church service. This was the time for talking to and meeting people. It was during this first dinner that Angela introduced me to Luna and her family from Ecuador.

Luna agreed to do an interview with me and so we met up at my home in the following week. The Sunday afterwards, she and her husband introduced me to other women and men I ended up interviewing later on in the research stage. In addition, I met several people who translated the conversations for me, which made it possible for me to interview and talk to Spanish speaking women.

Through the Church I managed to find a perfect site to meet undocumented domestic workers. While I was only able to observe during the Church services, I was able to conduct my interviews and talk to people afterwards during dinner. Having the church as a research site also made it possible for me to observe their members and activities as a participant.
Because they treated me like any other new member, I could be one of them.

During the church services on every Wednesday and Sunday, the minister does not only speak about the bible and religious affairs. In his sermon he pays a great deal of attention to other relevant spiritual matters: he regularly speaks of opportunity, capacity and talent. These are values especially coveted by the audience given their undocumented state, which has great consequences for daily life. Undocumented workers are limited to certain kind of work, usually tough work with a poor salary. Angela told me that domestic work is a common job that undocumented workers do, because the work is widely available and they do not need to speak the Dutch language for the work or need any specific diplomas. Undocumented workers told me that they are afraid to run the risk of being deported once asked for identification papers by the police or other officials and must therefore be wary of every situation. Between the walls of the church however they are safe and can seek help and advice from other Church members. They receive mental and practical support from the Church and the people who make up the Church community. Among the Churchgoers there are also legally documented Dutch residents, as well as people residing in the Netherlands in the extent of ten years, both documented and undocumented. Due to the rather broad composition of the community, it has gained a great deal of experience and knowledge about handling specific situations for undocumented residents. The community assists, advises and supports others and is able to do so because of this strong position.

I have tried to talk with José, who is undocumented and who I met in the Church, about his undocumented status and he told me that undocumented people need to be careful and camouflage their status out on the street: they cannot openly speak about it or come into contact with the authorities. They must utilize the neutral physical appearance of a human being and become “invisible” in order to hide their undocumented status.

Undocumented workers are no longer “invisible” once inside the church. Most people are or have been in the same situation, creating a unique sense of equality. They are able to participate in everything the Church has to offer. The Church is a very active organisation: besides the regular services on Wednesdays and Sundays, it offers activities on each day of the week. Language courses, music lessons, coaching and bible classes are held as well which gives Churchgoers the opportunity to participate in and organize activities.

1.4 Relevance

This master thesis is an ethnographic research into Migrant Domestic workers from Latin America who work on the informal labour market in Amsterdam. It is an attempt to find out more about the life circumstances of MDWs from Latin America. The church was my
research site and this is where I met and spoke with most of the MDWs. I have tried to find out why they have decided to come to Amsterdam, and upon arriving, how they experience their life and work.

As nearly all MDWs reside and work with an undocumented status, I was curious to see how this would have an effect on their lives and the social structure this significant group of people has now become. As all people I met are Churchgoers, I was interested in their personal relationship with the Church and the different roles this community fulfills in their lives.

In 2004, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment performed a survey among Dutch households to find out more about their behaviour concerning domestic work and childcare.

The conclusion of this research was that many households arrange domestic help themselves. Workers are generally recruited from the informal and hence illicit market. Most of these workers do not pay – nor are compensated for – taxes or social benefits on top of their salary. According to the survey, 1.2 million households have employed a domestic worker, meaning somebody who cleans the house. Of that number, a whopping 72% works informally which implies that 864,000 households are using the service of an informal domestic worker nationwide. I expect the relative percentage of this number to be higher in the higher densities of the city of Amsterdam for a number of reasons. First and foremost, families with a higher gross income are generally more likely to employ a domestic worker. Additionally as in many cities, Amsterdam has a higher percentage of dual earners compared to more rural areas. According to the research, the number of households using the service of a domestic worker will continue to grow, mainly due to the increasing participation of families with a higher gross income are generally more likely to employ a domestic worker.

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The research performed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is a quantitative analysis solely based upon Dutch respondents and the demand side of this large service industry. While respecting the practical limitations of a governmental institution performing such a survey amongst the population, it seems risky basing conclusions on such a limited respondent group. To achieve an accurate perspective on the situation of domestic work in the Netherlands, the supply side of the industry – the domestic workers themselves – must be included as well.

Even if the research is to be performed with the supply side of the industry included in its analysis, it is still an analysis of only numbers. It does not give us information about the motivation of the respondents, or deeper understanding of their choices and activities. It is precisely here where I think that my research is relevant. It has been performed from the perspective of the informal domestic worker. It attempts to give us insight into the informal labour market of domestic work and about the labour circumstances from the point of view of the domestic workers themselves. As the methodological opposite to the quantitative research of the Ministry of Social Affairs, this research is qualitative. The resultant of this approach leads me to a better understanding of the domestic workers. It allows me to get to know their lives, their choices, their activities, and their social coherence in a much better way.

Other research that has been done about domestic workers is mainly focused on Asian women, especially on Filipinos. Filipinos have a good reputation as domestic workers around the World. They generally speak good English and they are known for their hard work. The Filipino migrant community is well organized throughout the entire world. In the Netherlands for example, there is the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers: "...In the Netherlands CFMW cooperates with the RESPECT network in putting MDWs on the political and social agenda. Work is done on empowerment training, mobilizing migrant women, forming political lobbies, advocacy, networking, performing research and facilitating publications. [...] Three specific demands have been put forward in the charter for the rights of migrant domestic workers: the recognition of [...] work in the private household as proper work, [...] to protect the rights of MDWs as workers and [...] to put in place an immigration status related to their work as migrant domestic workers" (CFMW 2008).

The reason there is such a great deal of focus on Filipinos has mostly to do with the fact they organize themselves in both a semi-official and official way. Organisations were started by the Filipinos themselves to inform their peers about their rights, to organize language courses and other events to support each other. One of these examples is the CFMW and effectively makes it easier to locate and approach this group of Migrant Domestic Workers.

I visited the Philippines myself during Christmas 2008 and it was especially interesting to see how the community organized celebrations to welcome the workers from overseas. With banners lining the streets, they were greeted as heroes. Migration offices are abundant and

2 http://home.swz.nl/index.cfm?fuseaction=app.document&link_id=58167
can be found in every city. The overseas workers are mostly women working as domestic workers. Several women even approached me for my contact information as they wanted to come to The Netherlands to work for me. Migration was literally everywhere in and around the people, on the streets and in the entrepreneurial atmosphere. In 2009, 17,348 billion USD was sent to the Philippines by overseas Filipinos, the highest figure in years. The Filipino government therefore, has an economic interest in the overseas workers and the remittances they send homewards.

For decades, Mexican and Latin American immigrants have crossed the border into the United States to do the dirty work\(^4\) for the Americans. Social scientists conducted research\(^5\) about their lives and working conditions. (Ehrenreich, Hochschild et al. 2002.)

In the Netherlands, Latin Americans are a relatively new group which is one of the reasons why there is not a lot of research about this group. In any case, they have not been in the Netherlands as long as Eastern European or Asian women for example. Nevertheless, the Latin American MDWs represent a substantial group of people. This is especially evident when one considers the significant amount of notes scattered throughout the city centre and the amount of people who participate in the Church. It is therefore both relevant and necessary to conduct research into this group of people in our society. Another reason why it is relevant to do conduct this research is because they seem to be organized in a different way compared to any other group of MDWs. Several researchers have been pointing out the correlation between the Church and domestic workers (Botman, forthcoming, Schrijver. 2008); however this relationship has never been explored in detail by researchers. That is why I will attempt to find out what the role of the Church is in the lives of MDWs.

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In this chapter I will introduce my research questions.

I became interested in doing research about MDWs after receiving the notes. I became especially curious when I started reading articles concerning Domestic workers around the globe. These determined women are migrating around the globe hoping for a better life and future for their children. Globalisation offers many possibilities for people to migrate to different continents. I think that these global migration processes of domestic workers are very especially interesting as it is a globalisation phenomenon. This is especially the case with Migrant Domestic Workers, where people generally migrate towards more prosperous countries. A factor for why this group receives attention is because these MDWs usually reside around the world without a documented status, also in the Netherlands. The obvious consequence of these people not being registered in their country of residence is that not much is known about them. That makes them mysterious and attractive for social researchers to find out more about them. Very little is known about these MDWs as they do not make use of official governmental institutions. I received many notes on a weekly basis. In addition, I noticed the increasing number of people in my surroundings that have a domestic worker at their home. I presumed is therefore that MDWs must be present in substantial quantities in Amsterdam.

Undocumented MDWs are here and there is a need for them on the labour market. There exists a juxtaposition of an apparent official ignorance while the demand for them in our society is real. This made me particularly interested to find out more about them and get to know more about their life and identity.

When I started my research I did not know anything about the MDWs in the Netherlands. I developed my research questions during my fieldwork and literature research. Only after meeting NGOs and talking with some MDWs, I obtained more information about domestic workers. I noticed a discourse being manifested in the Netherlands among both individuals meeting NGOs and talking with some MDWs, I obtained more information about domestic workers' lives, because they deal with individual cases experiencing problems. I felt I needed to be critical of this approach. I did not only want to find out about the hardships about being and MDW but I also wanted to focus on the positive sides. Do they truly experience their life as being that difficult? I expected there must be something positive about working in the Netherlands. After all, they have come here voluntarily and many eventually stay longer than initially planned. During my research process I discovered that most of the manifested discourse about MWDs is spawned by the white middle- and upper class and people from the NGOs. Hence my central research questions:

9  Tuominen, Mary Jo. 2001. The Chicago School of Ethnography. In The Handbook of Ethnography.Regulating the Unregulated?: Domestic Workers’ Social Networks.

How do undocumented immigrants from Latin America themselves experience both their undocumented status and their work in the Netherlands?

To help understand how they experience their life in the Netherlands, it is important to know why they have decided to come to the Netherlands. When one decides to migrate on a voluntary basis, the stakes will be very different from someone who is forced to migrate to a distant country. It is relevant therefore to find out more about their motivation to venture to the Netherlands. That is why I formulated the following research question:

Why do Latin American MDW’s come to Amsterdam to work here?

Every human being is involved with networks: ‘No man is an island’ and this counts for MDWs as well. Through what kind of networks do MDWs arrive into the Netherlands? Once in the Netherlands in what kind of networks do they participate and how do they create them? What kind of meaning and function do these networks have for the MDWs? Many questions come in mind concerning the networks that MDWs are involved with, especially once their undocumented status is considered. Hence the following research question:

How do MDW’s form networks and what kind of function do they have?

Most MDWs are forced to reside with an undocumented status in the Netherlands. Due to the fact that they are not able to deal with things in an official manner, they are forced to find alternative means to an end.

Complicated matters include: how to enter the Netherlands, what to do in case you have health problems or what to do if one has legal problems? These questions drove me to the
following research question:

*What is the relationship between undocumented Latinos and the state?*

As I described in the introduction, both several researchers and the first women I spoke to mentioned the Church as being something significant in the life of an MDW. Does the Church have any influence on their mental wellbeing or their experience on life in general? The Church is something interesting to explore in relation to MDWs in Amsterdam. Hence my final research question:

*What role does the Church play in the life of MDWs?*

3. Methodology
The methodology I employed and the field site I selected proved to be important assets in my research as they allowed me to collect a valuable amount of information about MDWs. I decided to make use of several methodological tools, such as participant observation and several different interviewing methods. I used the Church as my field site and I was gradually incorporated in the Church community. Although I was eventually accepted as a new member of the Church, I would always remain an outsider, if only for my physical appearance. This unique position nevertheless allowed me to perform participant observation. As a result I was able to meet many subjects during my visits to the Church and perform structured interviews with fifteen different people. I had many informal conversations with different churchgoers. Of these I documented eight conversations, as these pertain to life as an MDW or life as a member of the Church.

3.1 Methodological Tools

3.1.1 The Field

In my introduction I described how I received notes from MDWs searching for work. The people who sent me the notes did not want to be interviewed about any subject, in any way. I needed to find a different way to get in contact with the MDWs. Soon people in my own network started offering to set up a meeting with their domestic worker for me. I was afraid that meeting MDWs this way would compromise the truthfulness of the answers as the MDWs might feel threatened by me because of my relationship with their respective employers. I therefore felt it was important to approach the subjects from within their own networks.

"Then there is the affiliation issue. You can't move down a social system. You can only move up a social system. So, if you've got to be with a range of people, be with the lowest people first. The higher people will "understand", later on, that you were "really" just studying them. But you can't start at the top and move down because then the people at the bottom will know that all along you really were a flank - which is what you are." (Goffman, 1989, P. 130)

Many of my friends and neighbours employ a domestic worker from Latin America. It is crucial though, while doing fieldwork, to approach a group from below and not from above the traditional hierarchy. This is because of the social pressure and resulting apprehension the subjects might feel with respect to their employer. I can imagine that they will not say anything negative to me concerning their employer in fear of losing their job. That is why I needed to get access through any relevant social networks. This tactic would also allow me to connect with them on a more egalitarian level.

Although we share the same space in the form of the city of Amsterdam, Migrant Domestic Workers and I live in contrasting worlds. To be able to understand this group of people it was imperative for me to become intimately familiar with their world and their space. As the church seemed to be a very central space in their life, this would be a perfect field to do participant observation. I decided to become involved in ‘El Encuentro Con Dios’, the church located in Amsterdam-Duivendrecht. This church was my only site of research; I therefore made use of single site fieldwork. Although I chose one concrete place for my fieldwork, there were several levels of research to be done within the site. For example, my contacts among the churchgoers allowed me to visit the different suburbs where some of my respondents reside. In addition I was incorporated into their online Facebook network. Through these new sites my view expanded which gave me a new perspective upon their lives.

I came to this church through Angela, whom I met at the ‘Wereldhuis’, an NGO which assists undocumented immigrants. From conversations with domestic workers at the ‘Wereldhuis’, I understood that the Church played a central role in their life. When I asked Angela more about the Church, she invited me to come to the service on a certain Sunday at 12:00, and so I did. Through Angela I came into contact with many other women. The first contact was Luna; after I did my first interview with her I started attending the religious service every Sunday. In the beginning I felt distinctly uncomfortable: I did not speak Spanish and I was the only fair-haired woman in the group. Although there were some Caucasian Dutch men accompanying their Latino partners, I did very much stand out in the crowd. After several weeks I became acquainted with more people and the community in general made me feel very welcome. I started to look forward to the weekly service because I knew I would meet and speak to new friends. During the fieldwork I met two people who have the Dutch nationality as well nationality from a Latin American country. These two people with a double passport are people from Latin American countries who came here through family. They came to the Netherlands looking for work, only spoke Spanish and were not familiar with Dutch society or its culture. These half ethnic-Dutch, half Latinos have Latin American roots. One or both of their parents could be Latino; in any case they grew up in the Netherlands. The valuable quality that these people have is that they are familiar with both Latin American and Dutch culture and makes their position especially unique for me. Being both bilingual and familiar with both cultures, they were able to give me valuable information. In addition they could give meaning to the information that I received from other Latinos. They often provided much needed background information to situations or lines of thought. The half Dutch half Latin Americans proved to be like a
bridge between the Dutch and South American cultures.

I met Chantal in the church through the family of Luna, as she is married to Luna’s little brother. Chantal’s father is from Aruba and her mother is Dominican. Her father gave her the Dutch nationality because Aruban citizens were entitled to get a Dutch passport. She moved with her parents to the Netherlands when she was eight years old. She attended Dutch schools and had many Dutch friends. She met her husband José at the church, who is Ecuadorian. He is still, in contrast to Chantal, undocumented until he will receive his Spanish European residents permit. With the Spanish resident permit, and under the European Union Citizenship Convention, he was able to reside legally in the Netherlands.

Most of the women did not speak Dutch, therefore translation was necessary. Chantal helped me tremendously by translating conversations and interviews with women in the community. This often led to us sitting down at a table in the church canteen with the three of us. This was beneficial for the quality of the interviews, as Goffman has pointed out:

“Two person situations are not good because people can lie to you while they’re with you. But with three people there, then they have to maintain their ties across those two other persons (other than yourself), and there’s a limit to how they can do that. So that if you’re in a multi-person situation, you’ve got a better chance of seeing things the way they ordinarily are”. (Goffman. 1989. 131)

Chantal and I got along well, and we started to see other also outside the church. She understood my special interest in MDWs from her own academic background. Because Chantal has a Dutch passport she has enrolled in the University for Applied Sciences in Amsterdam where she studies social and juridical services. Her curriculum also covered undocumented residents in the Netherlands and she is familiar with legal matters concerning MDWs. In addition, her husband resides in the Netherlands with an undocumented status which makes her familiar with the subject on a deeply personal level. Because of her unique position Chantal was able to explain unclear or new situations to me. As Chantal was able to make a clear distinction between my world and the world of undocumented domestic workers, she became one of my key informants in the field.

3.1.2 Participant Observation

The people that I followed for my master thesis are from Latin America. They are undocumented residents in Amsterdam and work on the informal labour market as domestic workers. My own position in society as a researcher is quite the opposite in comparison to these women. I am a native Dutch, therefore I have a legal status and can move freely.
throughout society. I have all the rights of citizenship such as healthcare, education and social benefits. Besides this stark difference we also move in totally different networks and fields. Considering subject and researcher seem to live in parallel societies, how does the researcher meet them from within the subjects’ own network? The Church offered the solution. I was able to meet and participate in this community of which many MDWs where a part of. I participated in the twice-weekly church service, different activities such as birthday parties and the annual picnic at the Gaastraplats.

To become fully acquainted with my subjects I need to immerse myself into their world. The best way to do this is through participant observation which is the main research method I used. During and after these activities I tried to make as much recordings and notes as possible.

Initially my greatest apprehension for using this approach was the language. As I am not able to speak Spanish, I thought it would be difficult to communicate with my subjects and to understand them. The majority of the women luckily spoke Dutch or English and were happy to translate. As a consequence though, the greatest number of my contacts spoke either one of these two languages.

3.1.3 Interviews

Before and after each Church service there was always time to meet people. Luna and her husband José and Chantal brought me into contact with new people, whom I could then interview. It was crucial that they made this connection for me because it would be very difficult for me to reach them myself. Practical reasons inhibited my doing so, but also the integrity of these women in such a precarious situation in our society was at stake. Being an outside person there is a natural tendency to be suspicious about my intentions. I needed an entrance to get into contact with these women. I needed someone that they know and can trust who could give them the confidence to talk with me and answer my intrusive questions.

In the beginning of my fieldwork I performed structured interviews with fifteen women of the Church. I choose to do structured interviews because I believed it would be a good way as an introduction to get to know these women. These structured interviews are also an efficient method to obtain a great deal of general information in a relatively short time. I was thus able to note information such as the national identity, income, time of residence in the Netherlands etc., etc. During this time I interviewed fifteen women working as domestic workers in Amsterdam. After these interviews I became acquainted with an increasing number of people of the Church and I was subsequently able to switch from a structured interview technique towards an open means of interviewing. Besides these open interviews I had eight informal conversations with different people that I met in the church. Socializing was very important to get to know people; during these informal conversations I received the most interesting information. Without inquiries by me, I was told random stories with any importance to them. This is how I managed to find out what was on their mind and how they experience the Church community and their life in general.

I recorded all the structured interviews and some of the informal conversations and the eight open interviews I did. Afterwards I transcribed all the recorded material. Besides that I also made photos at the church and during the picnic and birthday parties. During the services I wrote field notes, especially during the first visits. Two tables have been included in the appendix of this thesis, providing a brief overview of information concerning my respondents.

I became increasingly involved with the Church and the subsequent Church community. After becoming acquainted with my target group, I started to participate on the Internet community of Facebook and started to be friends with them through this online network. People can create a profile on this Internet based platform, and post messages for each other, as well as photos, events and other interests. This makes it a very interesting source of research. The photos placed on Facebook provide interesting insights into their lives. Interesting photos and snapshots were uploaded concerning birthplaces, themselves, family and a diverse range of events.

3.2 Dealing with Rhetoric: The Ethnographer’s View

I was an outsider from the start: I am not a domestic worker, nor do I reside in the Netherlands with an undocumented status. By joining the Church I hoped I could become an insider because this meant I would share something with my target group. Loïc Wacquant describes a similar field in the form of a boxingschool, which he calls ‘Body & Soul’ (2004). As an apprentice member of the boxingschool, he tries to blend in with its members, habits and culture. Despite my efforts to blend in, I would forever remain an outsider if only for my Western appearance and my inability to speak the Spanish language. During the Church services, interviews and conversations, I was under the impression that I was perceived as such an outsider: a White Dutch woman similar to the subjects’ employers. This might have been the reason why the subjects spoke in a very positive manner about their employers. Out of respect of me being one of them, they were positive about ‘the Dutch’. Although

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8 Cindy Horst (2006) and the uses of Internet in research and displaced populations as a new methodology.
their opinion was usually accompanied with clear facts and credible stories, I was very aware of the subjective relationship between me and them. As with any human being, they wanted to give a certain impression about themselves. Nevertheless it cannot be true that the relationship between the domestic workers and their Dutch employers is always one without annoyance or irritation. This is why I repeated my question about possible negative experiences during the interviews: do you really never have any bad experiences? They repeatedly answered me with a steadfast no.

No one is a tabula rasa, my own view on matters are subjective as well. I also ask questions with a motive, I express my thoughts and provide answers from my own personal perspective. The typical aspects of human interaction aside, I also carry with me a certain degree of prejudice caused by the literature I have read about MDWs. By being an outsider, I would never have the same degree of access compared to an insider. I fostered true friendship with some and they told me about negative experiences and aspects of their life as an MDW in the Netherlands. With others I was, unfortunately yet very justifiable, not able to achieve such a relationship based on trust. I realised there would always be certain information which would remain inaccessible to me. Despite and because my status as an outsider, I believe that ethnography is the appropriate research method. It allows one to discover and understand the view of one’s informants by reflecting on one’s own research while realising the differences between one’s own truth and the truth of the other. In my view, ethnography thus seems to be the research method that allows me to most closely approach the objective truth. As the researcher becomes involved in a situation in different ways, ethnography gives the researcher a wide perspective on a phenomenon.

“It’s one of getting data, it seems to me, by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation, or whatever.” (Goffman. 1989 p.125)

As an ethnographer you are able to observe people while interacting, to see their living space, social life, habits, schedules, food habits etc., etc. This makes the ethnographer very able to understand the actions and reactions of a subject in a better way.

3.3 Photography

Before embarking on my studies on sociology I enjoyed extensive training as a photographer at different art schools in the Netherlands and Finland. I believe photography is a great medium and I valued the opportunity to use it in my research. Taking photos during...
different activities allowed me to illustrate special moments and the social interaction between people. Many photos I have taken were posted on Facebook. This helped me to stay in touch with existing contacts and meet new ones. People exchanged the photos and asked me to take pictures during events or to take portraits of their children and family. These photos have been included in this thesis as illustrations to the research and are an attempt to shed more light onto the Invisible Doméstica.

4. Theoretical Framework
After some consideration I decided to write my theoretical chapters in line with my fieldwork analyses. The main motive for this was that my research questions were a derivative of my fieldwork. It therefore seemed fairly logical to intertwine the fieldwork data with all relevant theory.

My theoretical framework has been divided into four clusters. The main research question provides a micro view towards MDWs. How do undocumented immigrants from Latin America experience both their undocumented status and their work in the Netherlands themselves?

This question is answered from the point of view of the MDWs. To provide a wider perspective on the situation MDWs find themselves in, I needed to answer several sub-questions. This would also allow me to point out several other interesting and related matters, such as the relationship with the Church and the importance of informal networks and social network MDWs make use of. This is why I will start with a macro issue towards the migration of MDWs. Why do MDWs come to Amsterdam to work here? The question is answered with the help of a global theoretical perspective on the situation of MDWs from Latin America in relation to the Netherlands. It tells us about the domestic workers’ motives for migrating to a different continent on a global scale. To explain the global migration phenomenon, I have used several different theories such as the World System Theory of Wallerstein (1976) & Saskia Sassen who wrote the book 'The Global City' (2001). Parallel to this theoretical framework I have used my own research data to see why MDWs residing in Amsterdam had decided to come to the Netherlands. This parallel approach allows me to investigate if theory and practice connect in this issue.

In chapter six – ‘Being a domestic worker in Amsterdam’ – I have investigated the MDWs of Amsterdam in relation to the research done at different times and places. I have attempted to answer questions such as “under what kind of labour circumstances do MDWs work in the Netherlands?” and “What kind of legal and organisational questions do the MDWs face in the Netherlands?” To answer these questions I have made use of governmental policy and judicial information in addition to the extensive theory and literature I have collected pertaining to MDWs. At the same time I have made use of the data I gathered during my fieldwork to find out about their experiences in life. With the data I collected I was able to verify different theories about MDWs in the Netherlands.

In chapter seven on religion entitled ‘The Church as economic capital’, I have dived into the role of the Pentecostal Church and in specific the Pentecostal Church where I conducted my fieldwork during 2009 and 2010. I needed to know what the social role of the Church is in the lives of MDWs.

The sociologist Abel Ugha9 performed research in Ireland on the Pentecostal Church and its social relevance. I will make use of his findings and compare them with the findings of my own fieldwork in Amsterdam, in chapter seven. The final part of my thesis, chapter eight, I have focused on ‘Networks as social capital’. I have looked at the importance of network formations for MDWs. With MDWs being undocumented, residing and working in the Netherlands, what kind of consequences does this status have for their network? To further investigate this I have made use of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory on the relationship between social and economic capital.

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5. Global Doméstica
5.1 Global Migration

In this chapter I want to find out what makes Latin American women decide to come to the Netherlands. The decision to come to the Netherlands is the first step in becoming an MDW and therefore it is important to know their motives why they have decided to come. Their motives will help us understand how they experience their life in the Netherlands.

What expectations did they have initially, and have these expectations been met after residing in the Netherlands for several years? With the help of different theories about global MDWs and with help of my own data, I will answer the following research question: Why do MDWs come to Amsterdam to work here?

5.2 The Modern World-System

Immanuel Wallerstein is a sociologist who developed the World System Theory (1976) where he divided the world into different areas: core-states, semi-periphery and the periphery.

People from peripheral areas are migrating towards the core areas to do low skilled work. As is evident today, there is a large migratory flow from peripheral countries towards the countries located in the core. For example, people from South-East Asia migrate to Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong to perform low skilled work. Another flow originates in Central American countries like Mexico and El Salvador and proceeds to the United States of America. As a consequence of this large migratory flow, the border between Mexico and the United States of America is among the most heavily guarded in the world.

Immigrants from the so-called Third World are often forced to work on the so-called First World’s informal labour market. As it is difficult to obtain a work permit or a residence permit, people are forced to reside and work in First World countries with an undocumented status. Despite the considerable risks of being undocumented, they still decide to migrate. While there is not much work for them in their country of origin, fairly decent wages are paid in core countries. One of my undocumented MDW respondents said to me: “The work is hard but the money is good”. MDWs are attracted to Amsterdam in much the same way: wages are high in the Netherlands and paid in Euros. Back home those earned euros represent a significantly larger purchasing power. Most of their earnings are spent at home: they finance relatives who stayed behind or they purchase property and other valuable assets.

5.3 The Global City

There exists a great economical divide in the world between prosperous and less prosperous countries. One of these rifts of inequality can be seen between South America and Western Europe. “Multinational corporations are the ‘muscles and brains’ behind a new global system with growing inequality. As William Greider points out, the 500 largest corporations (168 in Europe, 157 in the United States, and 119 in Japan) have increased their sales sevenfold in the past twenty years.”

These large multinational corporations are located in the business capitals of the world in Western Europe, the United States and Asia. Saskia Sassen (2001) refers to these urban economic exchanges as ‘Global Cities’, and example of such include New York, London, Tokyo, Paris and Amsterdam. Applying Wallerstein’s theory to Sassen, Global Cities represent the core as they possess power and present a great attraction to the periphery, to the so-called Third World countries.

According to Saskia Sassen (2002), Global Cities are generally socially polarised. On one end of the social spectrum, there is the elite working for large financially powerful corporations. On the other side there is a demand for a low skilled workforce to serve the highly skilled workforce. The low-skilled workforce amounts to a large group of people, of which more than half are women who often reside in the Netherlands with an undocumented status.

“In fact it is striking how invisible the globalization of women’s work remains, how little it is noted or discussed in the first world”.(Ehrenreich, Hochschild, 2002 p.12.)

Amsterdam is a global city with many large international corporations. Attractive tax incentives lure these large enterprises to the Netherlands. In addition, Dutch migration policy has recently been adapted to the Global City norm by providing an income tax deduction of 30%, exclusively for highly skilled immigrants. The other side of a Global City is that there is a significant demand for a low skilled workforce to serve the highly skilled workforce. While a city may obviously fledge on such economic power, this development simultaneously creates an increasing demand for low skilled jobs in restaurants, laundries, shops, the entertainment industry, and domestic and health care services. The latter includes babysitters and au pairs for youngsters, and nurses for the elderly.

Saskia Sassen (2002) describes the central role of women in global cities and the concomitant migration process they undertake. Women are filling up a substantive part of the low skilled jobs that arises out of the centralisation of global cities.

“Survival circuits are complex interconnections of locations and actors where countries are dependent on women to survive the debt and poverty they are in. Global cities and survival circuits are sites where women take up a central position in economic growth and innovation. Globalisation is connecting sending and receiving countries and pulling ‘local and regional practices’ to a global scale”. (Sassen. 2002. P. 255-256).

In its present employment, the native population is simply not sufficient to fill up the low skilled jobs. Either a different societal organisation is required or an additional alien workforce must be imported.

The previous paragraphs provide some theoretical explanation on why MDWs migrate from Latin America to the Netherlands. As a conclusion it may be stated that the economic driver is the main motivation for MDWs to come to the Netherlands. The economic prosperity of Amsterdam creates ample low skilled jobs that cannot be filled by native workers alone. At the same time there is a lack of work in Latin America and the wages are low. The Latin American workers who form the heart of this research have responded to both these push- and pull factors, and have come to the Netherlands to fill up the low skilled job vacancies. During my fieldwork and interviews I have tried to find out how they came and what motivated them to come to the Netherlands.

5.4 Money

The theories I described earlier on in this chapter about global migration and the Global City point out that economics forms the main motivation for migrating. What and through which means did the women earn in their native countries, and what do they earn in Amsterdam by doing domestic work?

As mentioned previously, wages in Latin America are low compare to those in Amsterdam. Latin Americans I met at the Church working in Amsterdam as domestic workers told me that they were barely able to pay the rent and food back home. There was not much prospect of improving their living conditions, let alone those of their children. It would not be possible for example, to send their children to university with the prevailing Latin American wages. I asked fifteen women about their earnings in Latin America and how much they now earn in Amsterdam by doing domestic work. In the following paragraphs some of the results have been laid out.

Guadalupe used to earn around 400 Euros per month in Ecuador, by working six day weeks as a clerk. In Amsterdam she works three days a week as a babysitter and she cleans 3 to 4 houses a week. Her total income sums up to around 1100 Euros a month.

Maria from Venezuela earned 400 Euros in San Antonio selling electronics and food to Colombia on the black market. In Amsterdam she earns 1000 Euros a month doing domestic work. She only cleans one house a day for 3 to 4 hours a day.

While the incurred wages differ greatly from person to person, all women nevertheless earn significantly more in Amsterdam by doing domestic work compared to what they earned in their country of origin. Although daily costs are higher in the Netherlands compared to their country of origin, they still make relatively more here. This rather obvious financial conclusion has also been backed up by most of the women, indicating they came to the Netherlands with economic motives. Besides the attractive wages, most women also said that they came to become reunited with their parents or siblings. Extrapolating economic and family related motives brings us to the third motivation, which is that MDWs come to the Netherlands to give their children a more favourable perspective. Children can go to a Dutch school, which they consider to be of high quality. In addition there is more money to provide the children with food and other necessities. Generally, most children joined their parents on their migration to the Netherlands while some stayed behind in their country of origin. Many women explained me that they are saving up to buy a house or to start a business once back at home. The decision to come to the Netherlands is driven by a combination of economic motives, family related motives and the fight for a better future in general. With the money earned they are able to make a change in both their own life and the lives of their children.

5.5 Family Ties

Almost all the domestic workers that I spoke during my fieldwork in Amsterdam arrived because of family ties. Having brothers or sisters, aunts or cousins in the Netherlands formed a major motivation for migrating. This practice has been conceptualised as ‘chain migration’ in international literature (see MacDonald and MacDonald, 1964). The MDWs I met who migrated from Latin America to the Netherlands all agreed that migration requires acquaintances already in the country of destination. Formalities form the reason for this as tourist visas are usually required to enter the country legally. Another reason why family members and acquaintances are important is because they can help a new migrant in the search for work and housing, a process which is potentially very laborious. Some family
members even finance flight tickets which also makes this a financially attractive option compared to solitary adventures in a different continent.

Almost all my 20 respondents arrived through a family member in the Netherlands. Practical advantages aside, moving to the Netherlands felt like a family reunification to some. Some also had a different story. I spoke to some who were divorced and were looking to start a new life by migrating to the Netherlands. After numerous conversations the general impression was that these mostly women – but naturally also some men – wanted to improve the lives of their children. Most were able to bring their children with them to live together in Amsterdam. This is in stark contrast to the situation of many other domestic workers around the world. In most of the international literature11 concerning MDWs, there is a great deal of attention for the ‘holes’ that migrated women leave behind. Other people must take care of one’s children which potentially has negative consequences. In some cases children go without seeing their own mother in extent of ten years.

In the Netherlands, children of undocumented MDWs are entitled to publicly funded schools until the age of 16. However this is not a unique situation in Western Europe, so why do MDWs decide to come to the Netherlands? The answer lies in the fact that the women mostly work in a live-out situation, giving them the opportunity to have their own home and have a family life. This combination makes the Netherlands particularly attractive as a migratory destination. Because this makes it easier to live with your family and children in the Netherlands. Living standards in general are higher in the Netherlands, mainly due to the widespread access to affordable education and health care. Above all, most respondents mention an overall financial improvement and their ability to provide their children with more goods like clothes and toys.

11 Global woman, 2003
6. Being a Domestic Worker in Amsterdam
In this chapter I will go deeper into the life of an MDW in Amsterdam. I will attempt to find an answer to my central research question:

*How do undocumented immigrants from Latin America themselves experience both their undocumented status and their work in the Netherlands?*

I will try to find an answer to this question with the help of my fieldwork results and I will substantiate these with different theories from researchers concerning MDWs around the world. One of these researchers is Bridget Anderson. She is particularly interested in precarious labour, migration and the state. She has worked closely with migrant organizations, trade unions and legal practitioners on local, national and European levels. She studied the global politics of domestic labour in her book “Doing the Dirty Work?” (2000). She created a model to illustrate the labour situation of domestic workers on a global scale. In the model, she makes a distinction between the live-in and live-out situation. This has to do with the fact that some employers require the MDW to live with them while others may only require services for a few hours a week. The latter are referred to as day workers. This distinction between live-in and live-out has consequences in practice: for the employer but even more so for the domestic worker.

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo describes the resulting problems as a consequence of the live-in work situation in her book ‘Doméstica’ entitled “blowups and other unhappy endings” (2001). She performed fieldwork by interviewing both employers and employees in Los Angeles, USA. Hondagneu-Sotelo met the domestic workers for example at bus stops and at English language courses while she found the employers through her own social network. In this way she was able to see the work relations and labour conditions from different points of view.

After numerous interviews she concluded that the tensions between the employer and employee are stronger in the live-in situation. The live-ins live and work at the employer’s home, therefore they are virtually always at the workplace and working. There is no real difference between home, leisure or work. In addition, when a domestic worker lives with – and works for – the employer, they are too dependent on a single employer for their livelihood. If they lose their job they lose both their entire income as well as a place to live. It is difficult to have a genuine social life and impossible to have a family life. It is also more common that domestic workers are psychologically abused in the live-in situation, albeit without the employer's deliberation. The live-in situation is therefore notorious the tense relationship between employer and employee compared to the live-out situation. In chapter 5 of the book ‘Doméstica’ entitled “blowups and other unhappy endings”, Hondagneu-Sotelo describes ‘blowups’ between employers and employees using actual accounts to illustrate these blowups. Blowups are a lot more common in the live-in situation than in the live out situation, even though they seem to appear in both situations. In the live-out situation the employee has an own home, and will come to work at a previously and mutually agreed time. So when the employee closes the door, they are free and off duty. This gives them the chance to have their own home as well as their own social and family life. The live-out situation also allows the worker to have several different employers. This makes them less dependent on any single employer and allows them to quit easily should they have a serious disagreement. In short, the domestic worker has more agency in the live-out situation.

6.1 Domestic Workers in The Netherlands

What are the labour circumstances like for MDWs in the Netherlands? In order to be able to understand the situation in this particular country, it is useful to explain something about the historical domestic situation of Dutch families.

Dutch women – not unlike women elsewhere around the world – have become more active on the paid labour market, and there has been a concomitant increase in the outsourcing of household services and home-based care. Although this development has most definitely also taken place in the Netherlands, the ideal of the housewife as a caregiver and homemaker is still strong. Dutch women themselves still feel responsible for the home and the care for the children despite their own job. As a result, the percentage of women working part-time is higher than in any other country in the EU. This is one of the factor which explains why Dutch families typically still only hire a domestic worker for a few hours a week, and not on a live-in basis. Most MDWs in the Netherlands are thus more independent since they have several employers. This is backed up by my fieldwork as most of the women I met and interviewed mentioned that they have around ten employers.

The women I spoke to in Amsterdam told me that they have a good relationship with their employers. Some even describe their bond with their employer as a family tie. The employer in turn considers them to be a family member, which truly seals the bond between worker and family. During my interviews and conversations, I tried to find out how long the MDWs were planning to stay in the Netherlands. Most did not really have a deliberate plan while others were planning to stay for ‘a few years’. Meanwhile, some of my respondents have lived and worked in the Netherlands for over ten years, in many cases even for the same

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14. In 2010, 76% compared to an EU average of 54% (Burri 2006). More recent figures indicate that almost ninety percent of the mothers with more than one child still work less than twenty-four hours a week (SCP 2007).
employers during this extensive period. This considerable duration of the cooperation tells us something about the amount of tension, or lack thereof, between employer and employee. Because both parties are less dependent on one another, the collaboration seems to be more durable and pleasant compared to the live-in situation. It confirms the theory about the traditionally ‘good’ relationship in the live-out situation.

In practice the employer generally tries to be absent while the domestic worker is performing his or her duties. Most employers are at work during the day when the work is done. The MDWs I spoke to explained me that they get the impression that employers feel uncomfortable with the idea that somebody is cleaning up their mess. They do not know how to act or what to do while the domestic worker is actually doing the cleaning. “The best care workers, according to some consumers and attendants, are those whose presence is barely felt”. (Ehrenreich, Hochschild et al. 2002, p.75)

The domestic workers I spoke to prefer to be alone in the house to do the job. This way they can decide the work pace and sequence themselves. It does not give much chance for tensions between the employer and employee because the two do not meet regularly.

One of my respondents told me this:

“When I know I am alone in the house, and I know this because these people are always away when I arrive, I take Matthias, my two year old son with me to work. The work takes me more time when he is around but that is ok for me. Childcare is too expensive.”

Usually the MDWs get paid per house or per hour. If they are paid per hour, arrangements have been made that they for example work for three hours and do a certain amount of work in the allocated time. The compensation already lies on the table when they arrive.

In Amsterdam the MDWs generally work on a live-out basis. This means that they have several addresses about the city where they clean. In each house they work an average of three hours: this appears to be the average time one needs to clean an average house. Six of the women I spoke to are satisfied with the relationship with their employer. Despite the fact that they like their life here.

In the Netherlands presently has a strict immigration policy: immigrants cannot enter and reside in the Netherlands for the purpose of working here as a domestic worker. They can, but only in the capacity of (quasi) family members. Hence people who are legally admitted into the country as the spouse, adolescent child or (in exceptional cases) extended family member of a Dutch citizen or legally resident migrant can and very often are subsequently involved in cleaning, cooking, looking after children and/or other relatives. Alternatively, third country migrants may acquire legal status as a diplomat’s house servant, admitted on the same basis and under the same conditions as that diplomat’s family members” (van Walsum p.2)

When any Dutch citizen wants to employ a non-European employee, they need to prove that there is no Dutch, EU or legally resident third country candidate available for the job. The other requirement is that the employer should pay the foreign employee a monthly salary equivalent to or above the Dutch minimum wage, and pay taxes and social premiums. This is precisely why undocumented domestic workers are able to offer their services at a low price: they do not pay for these public benefits. Doing so would make the costs of

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15 See appendix B for more information regarding the respondents of this thesis.


17 While on the face of it, migrant domestic workers employed by the diplomatic corps have a highly protected status, they arguably form the most vulnerable category since they have no recourse to civil or criminal action against their employers in the event of abuse or exploitation. Moreover, following international agreements to that effect, they can never acquire independent status and actually lose their right to reside after seven years of service. For more on the position of these workers see Van den Berg Keuning 2007.

18 Dutch law on labour migration (Wet Arbeid Vreemdelingen) article 8, paragraph 1, under a.
having a domestic worker unattractively high for most Dutch families. Especially since most Dutch families only employ a domestic worker for a few hours a week, the combination of complicated legal obligations and higher costs does not make this alternative an option.

There are several options to be able to reside legally in the Netherlands for MDWs, all of which are accompanied with considerable undesirable circumstances and conditions. Plainly applying for a residence permit has little chance for success as the Netherlands maintains a very strict policy. Only if you are personally under threat in your country of origin due to war or political danger, it is nearly impossible to obtain such a residence permit. My respondents residing in Amsterdam thankfully do not fall into this category, nor do their peers. Some of my respondents explained to me that it is possible for them to acquire a Spanish residence permit. With the help of European law this can be transferred to a Dutch residence permit. While this particular path is most certainly an option, one needs to travel to Spain and during their stay in Spain, they are usually devoid of work and income. The procedure in Spain is as follows: one pursues an employment contract with someone who has a Spanish nationality. Once the employment contract has been finalised, it is possible to apply for a Spanish residence permit. The chances of actually obtaining such a permit are dim, especially if one considers the current unemployment rate in Spain. In short, residing in the Netherlands with an undocumented status is to most domestic workers the easiest and only way to work and live and work here.

Being undocumented has consequences for one's daily life. The people I met told me they live in fear and insecurity. While they are relatively independent with their employment, they are very dependent on others in all other aspects of their lives, making them more vulnerable. For example: one cannot open a bank account in the Netherlands without a documented status, one cannot have a legal job, live in a house legally, have insurance and everything must be paid in cash. Despite these hardships, undocumented people manage to get by through finding different routes for achieving the same goal. These routes are usually invisible to officials.

As it is very difficult to obtain a residence and work permit, most choose the most obvious route and live and work under the radar. It is a viable option, especially since the Dutch immigration police do not actively 'hunt' MDWs. My undocumented respondents told me they are afraid to be deported. The following account of an MDW illustrates this:

José was with two friends smoking cigarettes in front of the house of his friend Bobby in the Bijlmer district in Amsterdam. All of a sudden a police car stopped and asked them to show their papers. Obviously José could not show them because we do not have them. They brought him to the police office. José explained his situation that he lives here with me already for 6 years and that we have a 2 year old son. The police explained that there just had been a robbery close to where they picked him up and that José fitted the description of the perpetrators perfectly, which is why they asked for identification papers. Because José did not do anything wrong they let him go. One year later, José was drunk and drinking beer in front of the police station and the police once again asked him for his papers. Once again he had the same problem: the police took him in and held him in a cell for the night. The following day José explained the situation. We were all very afraid that he would be deported. The police decided again to let him go. You see, even in this situation they do not deport us!

When the police or labour inspection discovers that a domestic worker is undocumented and that the employer does not pay taxes over this work, it will have consequences for both sides. An undocumented worker needs to watch out for police, labour inspection and other officials in order to prevent being apprehended, incarcerated and deported. This counts for all undocumented workers and residents. Although the risk of actually being deported is rather small, the consequences of deportation are significant. For a period of five years no admittance into the Netherlands is allowed and in some cases access is completely and forever denied. Employers face a fine of € 4000 when illegally employing someone and businesses face a € 8000 fine for the same offence. However, employing someone with an undocumented status for a few hours a week is legal. This is the case for domestic workers who clean houses for private people. Here they usually only work for 3 to 4 hours a week or even less. The government eased the labour policy on having unregistered employees at one's home to perform domestic labour to counter illicit workers on the labour market. Employers are allowed to have a domestic worker at one's home for a few hours a week, making it more attractive for private people to hire a domestic worker. Although the government pursued this policy, there were not enough 'white workers' to answer the need for domestic workers. The labour market is therefore still ruled by undocumented migrant domestic workers. Altogether, it seems fairly attractive for an MDW to perform informal work in private households due to the decent wages and the relatively small risk of being caught. In addition there is little or no language barrier for these services so non-Dutch speaking people have access to this labour market. English is in some cases an option and otherwise not much is spoken between the employer and employee.

6.3 Doing it Legal

In this chapter I want to take a closer look at the legal position of MDWs. Are their any possibilities for MDWs to reside and work with a legally documented status? Can they be registered at the tax office and can they become registered residents of Amsterdam?

When an MDW works in a live-in situation, it offers more possibilities to create an official work agreement and other required legal papers for the migrant domestic worker. This is...
often beneficial for both employer and the employee. An employer can make an official invitation for the domestic worker to come to the Netherlands. With the invitation, the migrant domestic worker able to get a temporary work and residence permit. Both parties fully abide by the law if these actions are performed. (van Walsum.)

This invitation method is employed rarely considering the fact that most MDWs work in the live-out situation. The employer does not have much interest in arranging expensive and laborious visas for someone who only works at their home for a few hours a week. They will only want to do so if the benefits outweigh the costs and effort. Employers will only want to invest their resources if they already have a close personal relationship with the MDW. I met a few girls who have this kind of temporary work visa, usually in an au pair construction.

Mary has this kind of visa she told me this:

I am from the Dominican Republic; my sister is married to a Dutch man, and they live in Hoofddorp near Amsterdam. My sister’s husband arranged my visa. It is valid for one year and I hope we are able to extend it as I would like stay in the Netherlands somewhat longer. During the day I need to take care of my nephew, the son of my sister and her husband. I also do some odd cleaning jobs. I am paid € 300 a month and I live and eat with their family. In the evening I take English lessons. I am very happy here, also because I fell in love with a guy that I met at the church.

While some arrive on a work visa, my findings indicate that the tourist visa is the most common and easiest way to enter the Netherlands for Migrant Domestic Workers. After such a visa is granted, it is valid for a period of three months, with multiple entries possible. In practice, people enter the Netherlands legally through immigration with a tourist visa but do not leave after the visa expires. After leaving their country of origin they have become unregistered there, if there is a registration system in country of origin, and now they are unregistered in the Netherlands as well. Unregistered family members are unable to help potential MDWs through the official path as they themselves are usually unregistered as well.

6.4 The Invisible and Visible Domestic Worker

Having found out that most MDWs are unregistered residents of the Netherlands I would like to discover the following:

What is the relationship between undocumented Latinos and the state?

Domestic workers work undocumented and invisibly as they carry out the labour in private households, in informal settings. Their work activity takes place inside the private domain, behind the front doors where no one can see them.

"Unlike factory workers, who congregate in large numbers, or taxi drivers, who are visible on the street, nannies and maids are often hidden away, one or two at the time behind closed doors in private homes". (Ehrenreich, Hochschild et al. 2002. p. 3-4)

The work is undocumented, there is usually no written contract, no tax is being paid, and remuneration does not involve bank transfers as the employees are paid in cash. The cash flow is therefore not traceable which makes the income of domestic workers invisible as well. Because the domestic workers are not registered in the Dutch system, they have obstacles to wholly join society. For example, it is not easy for undocumented residents of the Netherlands to open a bank account, rent or buy a house through formal means. They do not have health insurance or any insurance for that matter. They are unable to call on the police because of the risk of being deported.

Despite these hardships, the MDWs in the Netherlands have proven it is possible to arrange several public institutions and benefits in their own parallel system. Around 70% of the members of the Pentecostal Church where I conducted my fieldwork reside in the Netherlands with an undocumented status. For them, the church is a place to meet their undocumented peers. These people face the same problems and difficulties, and together they find solutions.

One of the problems is opening a bank account; together they created their own saving system. Ten people joined a saving program by donating a certain amount to a single money keeper. One simply places a request and the money keeper decides when someone will have the money, by giving out numbers or when one has a special reason the get the money faster. One simply places a request and the money keeper will decide if the money will be paid. This way they have created an alternative to the official banking system. Dutch society itself also offers special services for undocumented residents. Luna, one of my respondents, told me the following story:

My third son was born two years ago in the Netherlands. He was born at the hospital, something that we needed to pay ourselves since we don’t have a health insurance. At the hospital they discovered that he was deaf and that he was in need of an operation. Since we did not feel we had a choice, we decided to go ahead with the operation. The costs for these kinds of medical operations are enormous and so the hospital gave us the option to pay the bill in terms. A little while later he received a phone call from the hospital saying we did not have to pay the hospital bill from the operation of our son. They explained us that every year they have a special budget for people like us. After a meeting where they went through different cases, they decided that we were one of those special cases that they wanted to help. The story does not end there. After the operation, our son was in need of an expensive hearing aid and so we went to the store to find one. We explained our situation and then they offered us as a second-hand hearing aid, which saved us a lot of money. When
we came back to the shop to pick up the hearing aid, they told us we did not need to pay anything for the hearing aid. You see that? People can be so kind and friendly in the Netherlands. They are really open to helping us!

This account shows us that it is possible to live in the Netherlands with an undocumented status: people will find alternatives for their needs. Official institutions even adapt to undocumented clients, as in the case of the deaf son in the hospital.

6.5 Visible

MDWs are invisible for most governmental institutions, as they cannot register anywhere due the risk of being deported. When I met the MDWs in the church and started to get more involved in their lives and ambitions, I started realising that their lives are very similar to my own. Even though they cannot become involved or registered with official institutions, there are many other parts of society that they can participate in. They are able to visit cinemas, use public transportation, do their shopping anywhere they want, rent a house, have an internet connection, hang out in parks; they can participate in basically everything. Due to their undocumented status they live invisible lives on one hand, but are very visible and joining the documented society on the other. For those parts of society from which they are excluded, these resourceful people find alternatives; making their undocumented status liveable.

6.6 Trade Unions

ABVAKABO/ FNV\(^{19}\) created a workgroup for MDWs in The Netherlands as they realised that this group of people, although undocumented and working on the informal labour market, should have rights in the Netherlands: rights such as holiday money or financial compensations when MDWs are ill or have given birth. The reason this trade union has exerted a considerable amount of effort in this field is because informal agreements, such as those between employers and MDWs, is considered a regular labour contract by Dutch law.

All children who live in the Netherlands have the right to go to school. Despite their unregistered status, they have the right to pursue diplomas until the age of sixteen. Once they have reached this age, access to publicly funded education is denied and the children are forced to follow their parents in an underground life.

Without being a registered resident of the Netherlands, it is impossible to get insurance. Should medical care be needed, the entire bill must be paid by themselves, save for exceptional situations as was the case with Luna’s son. Houses cannot be bought, so renting on the illegal housing market is the only option. Since most of the rental houses in Amsterdam are illegal, finding a house is not a problem: many people in Amsterdam rent a residence in this way. Illegal rents are generally much higher than legal ones but unfortunately little choice is left on this particular area. Another problem undocumented citizens face is that they cannot fall back on institutions like the police or the rental commission. This makes MDWs especially vulnerable in our society, especially when injustice occurs.

Naturally there are also some benefits: being undocumented one does not need to pay taxes. This makes their wages relatively higher; most women earn around 1600 Euros a month. Not having to pay taxes makes MDWs more affordable for the potential employer. On the informal labour market, a domestic worker receives – and the employer pays – around € 10 our hour. Should both parties decide to do business on the formal labour market, the worker might still receive € 10, but in the meanwhile the employer needs to pay around € 23 to compensate for social benefits. (Source: ABVAKABO/ FNV). Obviously this makes hiring a domestic worker on the formal labour market very financially unattractive.

The Dutch government tried to change its policy towards domestic works by introducing the ‘witte werksters’ (white workers) pitch. It introduced a lower tax rate for domestic workers but this measure did not work as there are not enough registered people who are willing to do this kind of work. Even on the informal market – without the financial constraints of taxes and social benefits – finding a domestic worker is difficult enough.

6.7 Family

Most MDWs indicated that they came to the Netherlands through family members. During my conversations with the MDWs I asked them how they felt in the Netherlands; all said they feel happy. I proceeded to ask them if they could change anything in their life, and if so, what they would like to change. Some said that they dream of having a residence permit, and the ones that do not live together with their children said that they would like to be reunited with their children or family members. The majority nevertheless said that they are happy with their life and that they do not want to change anything. They regard being together with their family as the most important thing in life. Like Maria said during the interview: “I have my husband and my daughters here and that is all I need and want in my life”

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\(^{19}\) ABVAKABO/ FNV is a trade union and organization for employees which, among others, makes sure contracts and labour conditions are in line with the law.
Living with one’s family is the most important measure for happiness for the women I spoke to. Because they do not live with their employers but with their own family, it is possible for them to achieve this degree of happiness. I have met people who have nearly their entire family here in Amsterdam. Many favourable conditions allow them to live here with their children.

To sum up the life situation of undocumented MDWs in the Netherlands, one may say that they rate their lives as good. The main reason for this happiness is that they can live here with their children who can go to school. Women explained me they do not feel the urge to return to their home country as they are here with their family which seems to be all that counts: “home is where my family is”. They have found good alternatives to overcome the drawbacks of being undocumented, such as the self-initiated banking system or the hospital payment arrangements. Their biggest concern is being caught by the police and being deported to their home country. While MDWs always run the risk of this happening, I have not met anyone to whom this has happened. According to my findings it is rare that MDWs are deported.

Women seem satisfied with their work and the wages they earn. Many have stayed with the same employer since their arrival in the Netherlands which is an indicator that both employer and employee are satisfied with each other. All women have stayed longer than they initially had planned, usually because they are that satisfied with their life here in the Netherlands that they do not want to go back to their home country. Altogether, I can conclude that the women that I spoke to are positive about their life in the Netherlands as positive.
7. The Church as an Economic Tool
Several sociologists who have conducted research about MDWs (Schrijver, Botman forthcoming, Hondagneu-Sotelo) have mentioned the Church as something fundamental in the lives of MDWs. They suggest a possible interesting relationship exists between MDWs and the Church. Being curious about this relationship, I visited the Pentecostal Church during 4 months on Sundays where I listened to sermons and observed the churchgoers and their rituals. I was offered a chance to meet the latter during communal dinners which gave me great insight into the role of the Church in the lives of MDWs.

### 7.1 Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1985) expanded the notion of capital beyond its economic meaning and he introduced a series of terms for different forms: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Social capital is the aggregate of contacts in social networks and memberships of groups that an individual can draw upon and mobilise. Cultural capital exists in various forms and it can be in an objectified state (cultural goods), an institutionalised state (official diplomas, degrees) or in an embodied state (internalised knowledge). Embodied state is the kind of knowledge which is transferred to individuals through their habitus. Habitus refers to the process of one’s internalisation of culture, pattern of thoughts, tastes and behaviour. It is shaped by, and in relation to, our social and cultural environment. One’s social and cultural capital are thus very much related to the contexts from childhood to the present day, from school friends to present day labour related contacts and networks. Symbolic capital is the status of a person within a society and economic capital are represented by money and property rights. (Andrikopoulos, 2009. P.17)

All these forms of capital are objectified and embodied, which means that these can be acquired knowledge or in material form. These forms of capital are transferable from person to person or from one group of people to another. An additional characteristic of these forms of capital is their convertibility to other forms of capital. For instance, when family members donate money to a potential migrant to fund his trip, it can be considered a conversion of social capital into economic capital (van Liempt, 2007. p95).

Social capital is something very crucial and valuable for undocumented domestic workers: not only for landing a job, but also for the immigration process. Social capital is also important for the exchange of information and ‘know how’ about undocumented life in the Netherlands. The migration procedure is all about details and timing. If José would have known more about marriage in combination with a residence permit, that knowledge he could have gained from his social capital he would not have made this mistake. The following account illustrates this quite clearly:

Chantal and José met each other at church: she has a Dutch residence permit while he resides with an undocumented status in the Netherlands. They eventually wanted to get married, and because of José’s undocumented status they got married in Ecuador, where he was born. This marriage was however not acknowledged by the Dutch government. They wanted to get married for the Dutch law as well, but because José already had a marital registration in Ecuador, it was impossible for him to get married with Chantal here in the Netherlands. Besides the mental hardships this has caused both of them, José still resides in the Netherlands with an undocumented status, for the large part due to these bureaucratic matters.

This account emphasises the importance of social capital in providing access to accurate knowledge. In this case, social capital means knowing people and to use their knowledge or other valuable assets, which is crucial in this kind of situation. Imagine the outcome if Chantal and José had been married in the Netherlands before doing so in Ecuador. The marriage would have obviously been recognised by the Dutch government, José would have been able to live here legally, and he would have been able to commence his much coveted education.

Besides being a place for worship, the Church also is also a place for coaching, social networks, and the assembly of information. The Church is oriented towards Latin Americans through the language used and the members of the community. Church members find themselves in the same situation and thus understand one another. They exchange practical information about work, food products or housing alternatives. As such they forge friendships and care for each other and each other’s children. They help each other with common problems related to their being undocumented, start friendships and help each other with problems most people have because of the shared undocumented situation.

The Church is a source of social capital that may be converted into economic capital. The following account of Theresa and Diego illustrates how they were able to convert social capital into symbolic and economic capital.

Theresa: My mother had already lived here for a while cleaning houses. When I came to the Netherlands I started doing the same. There was a very friendly particular family I worked for who were especially nice to me and we became friends. The mother gave me clothes and paid me extra money for the holidays. One day she asked me about my residence permit and I had to tell her that I do not have one. She asked me why I did not start studying here in the Netherlands. She mentioned that as long as a person is an official student, he or she has a residence permit. I told her that I would very much like to do so but that it would be too expensive to arrange all the paperwork. In addition the tuition fee presented a problem as foreigners must pay much more to study in the Netherlands than native Dutchmen. She then started collecting money amongst her friends to help me to study. I was so impressed by this: she really wanted to help me! She was eventually able to raise...
the entire sum, after which she turned to an organization which helps foreign people both financially and practically with their academic ambitions in the Netherlands. This institution is very much like a fund and they helped me tremendously as well. I then went back to Colombia, where I studied English as a preparation for my studies here. It was a difficult time because my mother was in the Netherlands and I was not able to leave Colombia. Finally all the paperwork was in order and I came back to the Netherlands, this time with a student resident permit. I now study international business and in my spare time I clean houses.

At the church I met Diego. Also from Colombia, he told me a similar story:

I came to the Netherlands to live with my aunt. My mother died giving birth to me and my father was a drug dealer who got shot. I became an orphan and decided to move to the Netherlands to live with my aunt. My aunt was a member of the Church and so I joined her. At the church I was given the opportunity to take drum lessons. I was so much fond of music that I wanted to study music at the conservatory. Since both my aunt and I were unregistered residents in the Netherlands, my ambitions were not really a real option. At church, I met Theresa who told me about her studies and all the help she was fortunate enough to receive. I asked her if she could give me advice about studying in the Netherlands. She hooked me up with the same organization and I am now a student at the Conservatory of Amsterdam.

The accounts of Theresa and Diego illustrate very well how social capital can be converted into symbolic capital and economic capital. Both the church and their employers’ social network play a central role. It is where contacts were shared, links were made and information was exchanged.

7.2 Spiritual Capital

The Church community does not only provide its members with social capital, but also with religious and spiritual capital.

Bourdieu has used the term religious capital and Verter (2003) introduced the term spiritual capital. Verter suggested using spiritual instead of religious capital, as spiritual capital implies a wider context and is more contemporary. “Spirituality” is notoriously ill-defined, especially when used in opposition to “religion”, it generally connotes an extra institutional, resolutely individualistic, and often highly eclectic personal theology, self consciously resistant to dogma (Bellah et al. 1985; Roof 1993, 1999, Wuthnow 1998). I prefer to use the term spiritual capital in relationship with my research in the Pentecostal Church because the messages proclaimed during the minister’s sermons are not only religious but also extensively spiritual. I agree that the concept of spirituality connotes a wider meaning of religion
As I described previously, both social capital and spiritual capital can be converted into economic capital, and symbolic capital is something they receive in life.

In the embodied state, spiritual capital becomes evident:

> In these following quotes from several different sermons during different services, this spiritual capital becomes evident:

> We need to fully use our possibilities and talents develop ourselves; we can achieve this by education. Study and you will learn and be able to improve your life. It is possible, also for you! Everybody has gifts and talents; we need to help each other grow. We can advise you on your path. Let us and God show you the way to a happy and good life.

> A child is a piece of blank white paper; we have the responsibility to inscribe it with the right things. Their character will be shaped and their parents must be aware that they need to do it right. It is not easy; behavior is developed at home but also at school or on the street. The results can be positive or negative. Children also do things on the internet: the girls have beautiful pictures of themselves on the internet. Why did I not know what she was doing? They need their parents to guide them to live the life of a good citizen. What does it mean to be a good citizen? A good citizen is someone who lives together with God and lives according to the Bible.

> Spiritual knowledge, competencies, and preferences may be understood as valuable assets in the economy of symbolic goods. Spiritual coaching may motivate and push people to start studying or to land a better job, to help them deal with their children or problems they face in life.

As I described previously, both social capital and spiritual capital can be converted into other forms of capital. When strategically invested, it might even bring social and economic advancement of capital. This process is referred to by Bourdieu as the reconversion of capital (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1978).

During my conversations and interviews with MDWs, I mentioned these additional assets of the Church. I suggested there were indications that the Church had more to offer than a sole religious interest. All respondents replied that their primary interest was in God. They came here to be with God and to improve their relationship with Him. One of my respondents told me this:

> I know some people come here for other interests besides God, but I am not like that. I made a promise to God to first be with Him. Everything will be all right because He will help me and guide me.

My respondent meant to say that some people come to the church for the social contacts and other benefits such as the food and the available courses. Most churchgoers do not readily acknowledge to which extent the Church influences social and spiritual capital in their lives. There lies a taboo on mentioning these extra benefits the church does actually offer.

The general idea is that MDWs visit the church for God and do not benefit from the Church in any other way. Although they do benefit from the Church and its spiritual capital, they do not recognize it as something the church community has generated. They believe spiritual capital is converted into economic capital, and symbolic capital is something they receive from God.

### 7.3 The Pentecostal Church and Capital

I conducted my fieldwork at a Pentecostal Church. The Church communities belonging to this particular form of Christianity are known for the strong ties between members of the Church. Emphasizing a strong bond and social cohesion, members refer to each other as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’. These characteristics are especially interesting in the context of undocumented migrant workers from Latin America.

The fact that Latin American MDWs are active in the Pentecostal Church community is a striking phenomenon as Catholicism is by far the dominant religion in Central and South America. The substantial amount of Latin American undocumented migrant members of the Pentecostal Church raises questions about their relationship with, or inaccessibility to, certain state funded institutions. Does the Church fill a gap between the MDW’s and the state? Abel Ugba (2008) conducted fieldwork in Ireland at a Pentecostal Church mainly visited by Nigerians.
“The church is a Pentecostal style Church. In precarious exilic conditions, specific Pentecostal beliefs provide African immigrants with a unique understanding of self and of the ‘other’ and foster a sense of groupness as well as difference’. (Ugba. 2008)

“The boundaries between Pentecostal African immigrants and the larger society allow for some connections and interrelationships however which, some Pentecostals say, would facilitate their eventual integration into and more active participation in the larger Irish society. An official of the Christ Apostolic Church for example believes that:

The church is about inclusion and oneness. The church is open. The church’s door is open to everybody…these same people who are in the church belong to the society, to an ethnic organisation or society, they derive some benefits there…

People who come here also socialise in other places, they socialise at work. Some of them have other ways of meeting and knowing people, they throw parties, the so-called African parties. Places of education are other avenues for socialisation. ‘They meet a lot of people’ (Ugba. 2008)

In the case of the Pentecostal Church Iglesia El Encuentro Con Dios, my own findings have led to a similar conclusion. The Church is an open place, accessible to anyone. Members understand one another and try to both give and find support for mental and practical issues. The workings of such a community are comparable to a large family, where one justifiably refers to one another as ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’.

In contrast to Abel Ugba’s findings however, I cannot conclude that the Church community will lead to more and total integration into Dutch society. It is a Latin American community where one speaks Spanish and meets other Latin Americans. They eat Latin American food and participate in Latin American oriented activities such as dancing. The church community seems to have more of a function to conserve their Latin American identity than to integrate them in the Dutch society. They do meet other MDWs here and learn about each other’s experiences on Dutch employers and customs. While the Church does offer Dutch and English language courses, members mention that one of the reasons they come to Church is because they want to experience that Latin American feeling again.

According to some churchgoers, roughly 70 percent of the church members reside in the Netherlands with an undocumented status. That leaves 30 percent with a documented status: usually formerly undocumented people who received their preferred status through marriage or by receiving a Spanish residence permit. People meet each other in and through the Church. They form a network where people find mental and practical support for each other. The following account is of Luna, an undocumented domestic worker from Ecuador,
which she told me when I visited her home in the Gein district of Amsterdam.

In 2008 our house burned down. I was away for only one hour when my daughter Gaby, who was eleven years old at the time, phoned me to tell that there was smoke coming out of a window. I panicked and ran straight home. My husband Jose and I arrived at the scene around the same time. Although the fire was very large, we were able to save some things such as the computer and the television, some clothes and furniture. We had lost our home, a difficult situation for anyone. But because we did not have insurance, it was especially difficult for us. Luckily a woman from the Church helped us by offering her own home to our family. It is a two-storey house in Gein, and it is perfect for the five of us.

While I was performing my fieldwork Haiti was hit by the epic 2010 earthquake. Several Church members have family in Haiti and had difficulty finding out about the specific situation of their relatives. Besides regular prayers, we prayed for Haiti and in specific for the Church members' relatives in the ensuing weeks. A Church member may request a prayer for oneself or for someone else, and the prayer will then be performed together during the service. Church members believe that when they pray, God will answer their prayers by helping them. Praying is therefore very important to members of the Church. All personal and social matters are covered in prayers: from obtaining official documents to praying for a good health and prosperity. Praying is a form of religious or spiritual capital that can be converted into economic and symbolic capital.

Each Church member donates a so-called tithe to the Church as the Pentecostal Church believes this practice is described in the Bible. A tithe literally means one-tenth and implies that 10 percent of their monthly salary is donated to the Church as economic capital. After the service, envelopes printed with Bible phrases are passed around to everyone present. Some members fill these envelopes with cash while others use their credit or bank cards to make payments using mobile pay machines.

It is believed that a tithe is an offer to God, who will reward you generously for your gift. Plainly said, the donated tithe will multiply upon behaving generously. Economic capital has been converted into spiritual capital, and spiritual capital is believed to generate even more economic capital. This belief aside, the tithe also allows Church members to show their gratitude for all that the Church brings into one's life. Church members are involved, so when the minister requested additional money to be able to pay the electricity bill, the community paid and took responsibility as a group. It shows the social commitment and social cohesion this Church community has. Praying in a group and showing concern of one another intensifies the 'groupness' of the Church community.

The Church is considered by all to be a large family: one literally refers to each other as Hermana and Herman, brother and sister. Although it was a bit confusing for me in the beginning, naming each other brother and sister shows the degree of kinship amongst the Church community. The minister is referred to as Padre he is the spiritual leader and main character. The minister works 7 days a week and is paid a full salary by the Church.

7.4 Isolation

Michael is a man from Colombia that I met through other members of the Church. We soon became Facebook ‘friends’ and started to talk to each other about our shared interest photography. Chantal told me that Michael is an avid photographer besides his daily routine as an MDW. I became curious about his life story and I set up a meeting with him.

I am from Colombia and I came to the Netherlands about ten years ago. I had just divorced my wife and my company had gone bankrupt. I needed a new start and so I came to the Netherlands. Once in the Netherlands, I became a member of the church and I started work as a domestic worker. At one point, all the people I knew were either employers or members of the Church. I was starting to feel rather limited because the Church network seemed too small for me. I decided to turn my back to the Church in favour of Dutch friends and Dutch culture and society. The people I work for say I am like a family member to them, but once at a party, I was suddenly introduced as “the cleaner”. That really hurt me because I did not experience the relationship in that way. I was confused and disappointed.

I did become friends with other people I know through my cleaning work. The daughter of one of my employers became my friend and I worked for her as a photographer. I did some photography courses back in Colombia, and I have two professional cameras which I bought with a loan. I am currently working hard to be able to get my children here. It is a difficult thing to achieve because of the expensive ticket, and my being an illegal resident. I haven’t seen my children for more than two years which is the hardest thing about living here. The positive side about the situation is that I will be able to send them to university with the money I earn here. Their future will be better because they will have enjoyed a good education.

In the previous account, Michael explains that he felt isolated only having friends in the Church community. He wanted to become friends with Dutch people as well and become acquainted with Dutch culture and society. He wanted to increase his social capital by entering a network of Dutch people which would generate more work for him. Michael is a very social person and his Dutch is good. He told me that he has a lot of work as a domestic worker and he gets paid around €15 an hour. That is more than average: most people I spoke to earn around €10 an hour. Sometimes he has so much work that he lets somebody else do it for him. He then pays the second MDW €10 and keeps the rest for himself. Michael
was able to convert his social capital into economic capital. He was able to do so not only
because of his network of clients, but also because of his network of domestic workers that
he met in church. Although he does not visit the church actively he still believes in God. He
believes the Bible when it says everything you give will come back to you in tenfold.

The Church is a source of religious, spiritual and social capital. If strategically employed,
these forms of capital can be converted into economic capital. The relationship between
undocumented MDWs and the Pentecostal Church, is for the MDWs one of social capital,
religious and spiritual capital. The sermons of the minister are aimed at undocumented
migrants from Latin America because of their specific needs. The Church coaches its
members and the strong sense of community makes the Church an attractive community
for undocumented MDWs to be a part of. The churchgoers were trying to convince me of
their religious motives. However, knowing that most members used to be either Catholic or
atheist makes me convinced that the church is more than a place of worship. Undocumented
members of the Church are facing such specific problems which are not being treated by the
state or other institutions (the FNV forms an exception to the rule). The Church has thus
claimed a unique role in Dutch society for undocumented MDWs.
8. Networks as Social Capital
The previous chapters described the kinds of issues MDWs face in their lives. They must migrate to a different continent and find work in their new home. We know that MDWs are active on the informal labour market. For most MDWs, migrating to and working in the Netherlands as a domestic worker form radical changes in their lives. In addition, they do not receive assistance from the government institutions of their newly adopted homeland due to their undocumented status. One is more dependent on social contacts and networks to get by in life. In this chapter I will attempt to find out about the importance of social contacts and networks for MDWs. How do they create their networks around them and what do they need to do to maintain these networks? To answer these questions I will recall several accounts from my fieldwork.

In chapter 5, entitled ‘Family Ties’, I described that nearly all MDWs arrive through family ties. International literature refers to this process as ‘chain migration’ (see MacDonald and MacDonalds, 1964). Most MDWs already have a family network upon arriving; some MDWs even appeared to have many family members here in the Netherlands.

Flights from Latin America to Amsterdam cost around 1000 Euros, needless to say a large sum an average Latin American person. I discovered that most people borrow the money, or receive the money as a gift, from someone who already resides in the Netherlands. People who do this for each other are usually close relatives: besides assisting in the financial aspect, they offer assistance in the entire migration process, including arranging work opportunities. Upon arriving in the Netherlands, the MDWs will already have a small social network as well a work-network they may call on. This allows them to start working straight away and if necessary repay the flight sponsors. Some people mentioned that they received funding for the ticket as a gift. According to my respondents, “That is something you just do for family”. This network is very important to start your career as an MDW. At any rate it should make things a lot easier.

8.1 Landing the Job

A large gap exists between the employer and the employee. This gap does not only manifest itself socially and culturally, but also in space. Both operate in entirely different worlds, speak different languages and live in different parts of town. Still, the two protagonists need each other: one needs their house to be cleaned and the other needs work and payment. How do these two meet each other?

There are several ways to land a job as a domestic worker. One of the most employed methods is by sending notes similar to the ones I received by regular mail to potential new employers. Others post the notes on notification boards at supermarkets. These methods allow MDWs to seek work without a network; at best it is a way to create a new network from scratch. Once the MDW has an employer who is satisfied with the performed domestic work, a reference network is started up which will potentially woo other prospective employers.

Domestic work takes places in one’s most private space: the home. Most domestic workers have the keys to the houses they clean and so the relationship between employer and employee is one of trust. The employer must be able to trust the domestic worker, and so good references are important in getting a job. The best way to get work is through the social network of a satisfied employer. Both parties need each other and because it is an informal network, knowing the right people is crucial for being a successful domestic worker.

8.2 When White meets Black

Many of the domestic workers I met during my fieldwork told me that occasionally the employer is at home right before the MDW arrives and then leaves the house. This gives the employer and employee some time to have small talk. These moments are important for the acquisition of new work as it usually occurs through the networks of the employers the MDW is already in business with. Friends, family, acquaintances, colleagues and neighbours who are in the need of a domestic worker usually find one through somebody they know and trust. When the employer knows someone who is in the need of a domestic worker, they will ask the MDW if he or she would have time to work somewhere else as well. These moments for small talk are thus very important for the domestic worker as it offers an opportunity to expand the clientele. Even if a specific MDW is overloaded with work, these opportunities are passed on to other MDWs. Either the work is delegated to a friend already residing in the Netherlands, or it might be the reason to have a family member back home to come over to the Netherlands. Once an MDW is in this position, he or she will rise in social status as the MDW is able to help others. This position also comes with power as the MDW will be able to decide who gets work and who does not.

This way MDWs have a relationship with the white middle- and upper class of their migratory destination. The connection between them is crucial in finding jobs for domestic workers. Having an expansive clientele translates to more work and more money. It also allows them to pass work to other people, which lead to a rise in status and power. This way one is able to convert social capital into symbolic capital and economic capital.
9. Conclusion
Why do Latin American MDWs come to Amsterdam to work here? My conclusion is that they came to the Netherlands primarily because of economic and family related reasons. Why then did they choose to come to the Netherlands? Most MDWs decided to come to the Netherlands because of their family. Usually a family member was already in the Netherlands and brought the other in. Generally speaking, it was not therefore a deliberate decision to come to the Netherlands, but a mere coincidence that the MDW had family here. Other motives include the fact that their children will have a better future in the Netherlands as they will be able to enjoy a Dutch education. MDWs are able to spend more money on their children which motivates them strongly to come here. This form of global labour migration is possible due to globalisation and it is concentrated at economic nodes such as Amsterdam.

How do MDWs form social networks and what function do these networks have? MDWs form networks like anyone else: their primary network is filled with family members. In the case of MDWs, the well developed family network usually causes them to come to the Netherlands. Once here, all my respondents became a member of the Pentecostal Church. The Church community became another social network in which the MDWs could participate. Here they found cultural recognition, peers in being undocumented residents of a foreign land, and peers in being a domestic worker in Amsterdam's private homes. Due to the great number of similar issues the MDWs are faced with each day, the Church community has proven itself as a very useful network. These networks transfer knowledge amongst their members and offer mental support during difficult times. In addition, the Church community allows the MDWs to obtain work. Once women are asked by their clients about additional working hours and addresses, the women may pass the work on to family and friends if they can no longer cope. Nevertheless, increasing an MDW's clientele is best done through increasing the circle of clients through the network of the existing clients. The conclusion is that social networks are very important for an MDW to survive and achieve economic success. It shows how social capital may be transformed into economic capital.

What is the relationship between undocumented MDWs from Latin America with the state? They do not have a relationship with most of the state's institutions as they are not registered. The FNV trade union forms an exception to the rule by being available to undocumented MDWs. All forms of contact are avoided with governmental institutions such as the police or the immigration service, in fear of being deported. MDWs most definitely have a relationship with general public life as they regularly use facilities such as parks, public transportation and shops. Up to a certain age, their children are even allowed to enjoy publicly funded education and have access to healthcare facilities.

I conducted my fieldwork in a Pentecostal Church, of which all my respondents were to some degree a member. The Church plays a significant role in their lives due to the religious
rituals during the services, and because of the social aspect between the members. The Church organises many activities and people spend a lot of time in the church. I discovered that the church is more than a place of worship: it is a community with values similar to those of a family. It is a place where they find understanding, mental support and cultural recognition. The social network or social capital that they find at the Church is valuable. I discovered that the church is more than a place of worship: it is a community with values similar to those of a family. It is a place where they find understanding, mental support and cultural recognition. The social network or social capital that they find at the Church is valuable. I found some examples where my respondents were able to convert this social capital into symbolic and economic capital. Social capital aside, the Church also offers religious and spiritual capital for its members. These forms of capital were in some cases converted into symbolic and economic capital. In short, it may be concluded that the Church plays a pivotal role in the lives of undocumented MDWs.

Answering the previous question allows me to give a more specific answer to my main research question concerning the general experience of life as an MDW. As I have covered, most women have come to the Netherlands through family members. They came here voluntarily: this is important as it was their own decision to come. Usually the MDWs came here in the prospect of improving the current living standards and financial situation of themselves and often for an entire family. The average income an MDW receives is fairly decent: they can earn between €1000 and €1500 a month. Once in the Netherlands, the women find work, they become a member of the Church, and the majority is able to have a regular family life. Although some difficulties remain with respect to being unregistered, they have come up with alternatives and solutions for official bank accounts and housing. All these assets make their lives very liveable despite residing and working in the Netherlands with an undocumented status. All MDWs included in this master thesis research experience their lives as very positive and they say they are happy. The most important factor remains the fact that they are able to live together with their family: “Home is where my family is”, and they are able to provide them with a higher standard of living than they could back in their home country.

9.1 Recommendations

What is the best way to handle undocumented MDWs in the Netherlands? If the MDWs would start working legally, they would no longer be affordable for most Dutch families. The main reason undocumented MDWs are attractive is because they can perform domestic work at lower hourly rates. They can do so because they do not pay for taxes, social benefits or insurance. It is relatively easy to spot them in our society as they assemble in certain commonly known places like the church, yet they are not apprehended. The police do not actively hunt for undocumented MDWs and therefore I suspect that the Dutch government is applying the “gedoog”20 policy in the case of domestic workers who are thus rarely deported.

It is expected that many households make use of illicit domestic workers in Amsterdam and other large cities in the Netherlands. If these MDWs would all leave the country, it would be more difficult to serve the highly skilled labour force. A solution could be to provide MDWs with a temporary work and residence permit. This would allow them to apply for health insurance and search for rental homes through official channels. They would not need to live in constant fear anymore. The least that should happen is that the government should acknowledge this substantial group of migrants and the ‘dirty work’ they do for our society.

Studies commissioned by the Dutch government indicate Dutch households make widespread use of undocumented MDWs. The government is thus aware of the situation, yet the women who are at the heart of this thesis are being systematically ignored. Results in the government’s own research have not led to action or a change of policy towards MDWs. My hope for the future is that these MDWs become acknowledged as necessary, contributory and real workers in our society and that they are provided with a visa.

20 Gedogen is a typically Dutch way of handling illicit matters. The government is aware of a certain offenses being committed, but it deliberately does not act.
Appendix A: Field Work Activity

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<td>number of open interviews</td>
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Appendix B: Overview of Respondents

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<th>years in NL</th>
<th>no. of children</th>
<th>nationality</th>
<th>civil status</th>
<th>arrived</th>
<th>expected stay in NL</th>
<th>no. of clients</th>
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