

On Becoming

An Ethnographic Account on the Importance of Social Relationships for Undocumented Migrants in the Netherlands

September 2015:

MSc Programme:
Master of International Development

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Thesis code:
SCD-80433

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*Geschreven vanuit onze overtuiging dat het verhaal achter het gezicht een stem verdient,
de vrijheid om te kunnen bewegen, om gehoord en gezien te worden,
zodat menselijkheid naar de voorgrond mag komen.*

Dit verhaal is voor jou lieve Sas.

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic and descriptive account argues for the importance of personal relationships for the ‘integration’ of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands from the perspective of those who ‘live it’. Following three personal stories we can see that social networks are crucial as they provide access to necessary resources and enable undocumented migrants to practically arrange their existence. But in addition, because these interactions are built on *personal* connections and allow for intimacy they enable a deeper *sense* of belonging. This indicates that, although undocumented migrants are formally excluded from any state services, they may in fact participate economically and socially due to their personal social network. As such, they enable a different perspective on the meaning and methods of integration. Because in a domain highly controlled by the state these three personal stories show that integration may also be seen as a *trajectory of becoming*; as a constant social process based on affective and personal relationships that take place in the *social* domain. Integration as such should not be seen as a procedural process as only described by the state but instead as an *affective* process in which people assemble socially. This enables a reconceptualization of integration and a re-envisioning of the role of the state in social life.

Keywords: Undocumented Migrants, Integration, Autonomy, Personal relationships.

PROLOGUE

As I set out on this academic journey I was determined, like many of my peers, to do research *that matters*; research that contributes beyond just the academic world. During the past eight years I studied big themes in small contexts, like the ‘mechanisms’ of integration, the complexities of protracted conflicts, or the problems with modernity and development. Many of the topics we discussed concerned *the other*, exotic peoples from faraway places that did not resemble my own life much. Although studying this *distant other* intrigued me, I was often more interested in phenomena in my own society. Also, during the travels that I undertook over the years I increasingly realised how many injustices I saw in my own environment. *Othering* is not a distant phenomenon but often shakes up many minds and relationships in the Netherlands as well. Coupled with issues of legitimacy that come with developmental interventions in other societies I realised that I am much more passionate about problems that relate to my own life-world.

The distrust that *othering* produces deeply worries and affects me. Firstly because I believe it feeds into generalizations that shape an incomplete and simplistic image of certain groups of people. And secondly, because I feel it denies the human potential and the value that different people bring. Although at times presented as such I want to show that *the other* is not fixed and not ‘one’. Therefore, for this final project, I wanted to study my *proximate other*, the people that live right here and yet are at times so poorly understood. I wanted to re-humanize an incomplete picture of *the other* within my own society.

Migrants are often portrayed negatively and become the victim of *othering*. Especially undocumented migration is a hot topic in the Netherlands and in Europe more broadly, with heated political and public discussion that concern illegal migration, the supply of basic services and the rights of the ‘unrightful’¹. Thus, I set out to discover the realities of life as an undocumented migrant and to reveal their experiences in the context of the Netherlands.

My initial goal was to describe a story. I wanted to show the stories behind the faces that I saw on the news. I wanted to understand why so many people long for a life in Europe. Was it because of the bad circumstances or the big dreams? And once they lived in the Netherlands, how did they experience life here? Did they feel welcome or not, see opportunities for themselves or not? During the process I constantly aimed to find their experience, their ideas and their beliefs. As such, this thesis became an ethnographic account on integration from the perspective of those who ‘live it’. It is a reflection on the nature of belonging, on the role of the state in social life, on the extraordinary opportunities that the ordinary relationships between people may produce. Looking deeper into the interfaces that make up social life exemplifies the power of *affect* and its effect on the social world beyond just individual experiences. It shows how perceptions of self shape our relationships with others and influence the collective that society in its essence is.

However, this thesis has given me more than just academic insights concerning my research topic; it has provided me with the inspiration to go beyond my own thoughts and ideas into ‘unprecedented territories’. I discovered during the writing of this thesis that *if* I believe that we should allow for different modes of being, or different ideas and thoughts that go beyond the usual already experienced or thought-out lines, then I should

1. See the activist group ‘We Are Here’ that increasingly claims their rights and space.

try to do so during the writing of this thesis as well. Making this research and its writing personal celebrates my belief that, if aiming to make the world a little better, you must do so by taking little steps. The relevance of this thesis thus also lies in those little steps. My academic journey and the things that I have learned not only personally enrich me, but enable me to contribute what I learn to others around me. They enable me to *affect* lives and stories. As such, this thesis and its research are as much academic as personal.

This thesis is an ode to complexity, and to making an effort to understand, without trying to simplify. As I progressed through the years of my studies, instead of gaining knowledge I felt like everything became more complex. I learned many theories, ways, new ways, and again new ways to understand and critically reflect on the world around me. I was inspired many times, and just as many times disillusioned. And yet, along the way, I eventually started to enjoy this increasing complexity. Now, near the end of my studies, and without being cynical or demotivated, I feel I do understand the social world a bit better. I have ceased to try to explain everything, as I understand that the world is, and must be, this complex. I celebrate it even.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is fully based on the lives of three extraordinary people. I want to thank Zou, Maria and Majid for their openness and trust as they took the time to recount their lives to me. I learned a lot and they inspired me with their vitality and courage. Without them this research would not have been possible. In addition, I want to thank Annelies, Martin, Leo, Manik and Rene for their time. I enjoyed our conversations and their additional views explained and clarified the information I gained and helped me make sense of stories.

I want to thank Joost Jongerden and Alberto Arce for their inspirational and personal supervision. Although I was, at times, lost in my own material, they supported me with brainstorming in person, over Skype and even through email contact until the very last moment, providing me critical notes, and helping me to dig deeper to find hidden meanings and connections. They helped me during every stage of the process and I could not have wished for better guidance.

In addition, I want to thank Martin Southwold for his critical comments during the last stages of the writing process. Our conversations helped me to remember the value of Anthropology and the contribution of my research. I want to thank Daniel Hedley for his critical comments. He made me laugh out loud with some of the grammatical errors I made and gave me the feeling that I was on the right track. And I want to thank Inte Gloorich for helping me with the layout of my document; because of her my thesis looks beautiful.

To conclude I want to thank my friends. Thanks Ruubs for all the support and for making me see that I needed some fun at times. Thanks Sanne, Siet and Rein for the brainstorming, because of you I was able to see opportunities and fill some of the gaps that I overlooked. Thank you to the *Superheroes*, the *Parels*, the *Maiden*, the *Meidoornmeisjes* the *Wijfies* and the *Waifies* for making these last two years of my study fun. And lastly, I want to thank my family for their support and for being patient with me all this time; they helped me discover what I value (and why).

1 | INTRODUCTION

“Continually adjusting itself to the reality of contemporary lives and worlds, the anthropological venture has the potential of art: to invoke neglected human potentials and to expand the limits of understanding and imagination”

(Biehl 2010: 317)

1.1 An Introduction to the Research

This thesis is about the importance of relationships for the lives of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands. By documenting the stories of three undocumented migrants I reveal some of the difficulties of life in illegality and provide a personal perspective on what it means to ‘integrate’ in the Netherlands. The stories in this thesis represent a different image of integration as they enable a reflection on integration from the perspective on those who ‘live it’. They provide a peek into the micro-social where the politics of in- and exclusion are substituted by a narrative of belonging. Because although the state aims to draw the (legal) boundaries of its territory, and shapes various conditions of exclusion and marginality, the personal stories of undocumented migrants illustrate a struggle for existence that exceeds marginality. These stories carry the potential to change our perception of integration as they contribute to an understanding of how exclusion may be experienced; how its ‘texture’ may be *‘felt, used, practiced and lived’* (Wright 2014: 2). Thus, although this thesis considers integration, it is not about integration as a formal procedure. Seeing integration as a social process goes beyond these pre-set lines. It enables the imagination of a different kind of *becoming* by providing a different trajectory of integration (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Based on three personal stories I will show how integration is a social process. I will show that for undocumented migrants their relationships are steppingstones by providing access to arrangements and help them to arrange their livelihood. But in addition, their social networks also enable them to feel *at home* as these relationships are based on intimacy. The sense of belonging that they regain through these intimate relationships does not by definition manifest itself through a physical space, nor is it necessarily territorial or geographical. These personal stories show how a sense of belonging may also be constituted in the anonymity of public life, in the most private spheres of the mind, or in a feeling of emplacement within a social context.

In addition, although these stories indicate the importance of legal recognition, it seems that their search for a permit concerns more than gaining legal status. They display a longing to be free. Although this longing to be free in some instances indicates a desire for independence, when inquiring deeper into the meaning of freedom it seems that their longing exceeds the functional aspects of independence; their search for freedom seems to indicate a longing that exceeds the materiality of needs. This immaterial aspect, intangible but nevertheless crucial, is what I focus on in this thesis, for it is in this intangibility that we can see the importance of relationships.

Seeing integration in light of these personal stories it will become clear that it concerns more than legal recognition or services to arrange their livelihood; they show that integration is a social process based on an affective trajectory instead of a juridical procedure. This highlights that the management of boundaries is not the exclusive domain

of the state; the state is not the only institution capable of distinguishing who is included and thus belongs, and who is excluded (and invisible). Evaluating integration from the personal perspective of undocumented migrants thus shows how the social domain is not exclusively directed by the state.

1.2 Outline of the Chapters

As you have seen above, *chapter one* introduced the research. From here on I will proceed to explain the context of the research in *chapter two*. I will describe the current political milieu concerning migration and integration and highlight some recent policy changes that have complicated life for undocumented migrants in the Netherlands. I will elaborate on some of the tensions that arise from the positions of undocumented migrants, as they are living in the Netherlands yet remain invisible in the bureaucratic system. Here, I will also state my research questions and explain the relevance of this research. In *chapter three* I elaborate on my specific methodological orientation and explain some of the methods that I used for this research. In addition, I will shortly introduce my three informants. *Chapter four* contains all the data that I gained from my interviews. I will present the personal stories of my three informants and describe their experiences in depth. In *chapter five and six* I will elaborate on the data by going deeper into the importance of relationships (chapter five) and how these relationships are important in enabling a sense of belonging (chapter six). These two chapters also go deeper into the stories, as I use various citations in order to support my analysis. *Chapter seven* represents my analysis, for which I at times turn to theory as I discuss the implications of the insights that their stories provide. In *chapter eight* I conclude this thesis and provide a summary of the findings and implications of this research. In addition, I provide some recommendations for further research and reflect on the research process, the methodology, the findings and my own role as a researcher.

2.1 Integration in the Netherlands

In the last 10 years a tightening of Dutch immigration policy showed a shift towards *'policing immigration and promoting integration'*, aiming to discourage and control immigration while stimulating processes of integration through a variety of procedures (European Commission 2009; Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid 2013; Vink 2007). One of these policy reforms concerns the Linkage Act, implemented in 2002, which regulates arrangements concerning employment, education, healthcare and other social provisions (European Commission 2009). Access to state benefits, services and the (national) community is attributed according to one's rights, which is regulated through bureaucratised identities and formalised through individualised documents (Isin 2008). Thus, social welfare, healthcare services or other provisions are not a 'free' service; they are distributed only when one is part of the nation. This means that various institutionalised networks of support are made unavailable to undocumented migrants, and life in illegality is increasingly complicated (Van der Leun 2006).

Highlighting integration as an essential part of migration shows that the Dutch government aims to control migration flows, which indicates that integration is often seen as a process manageable by the state. Integration is seen as a process of 'adjustment' accomplished by the mutual commitment of both migrant and host society. Integration literally means 'to be taken in' as well as 'to see oneself as part of', and in this respect both physical integration (as opposed to segregation) as well as socio-cultural integration is important; it requires and aims to stimulate both physical proximity and emotional closeness. The aim of these policies is to facilitate a process by which a migrant may become self-sufficient and independent, may participate economically as well as socially, ascribe him- or herself with generally supported norms and values, and feel part of the larger community (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid 2013). It is also a complex and politically loaded term as it contains various arrangements and procedures meant to both support migrants as well as stimulate their engagement with- and participation in society through various (obligatory) procedures. Thus, by actively promoting integration, the influence that the state has on the lives of migrants extends beyond the provision of access to resources; it also aims to regulate access to the public domain, as well as more symbolic access to imagined Dutch community (Anderson 2006).

However, research by the European Union shows that these measures fail to address integration issues, nor do they seem to lessen migration (European Commission 2009). As it complicates the process of legalization it seems that, instead of discouraging migration, people are pushed into illegality. In addition, academics have argued that integration is not a linear process that starts with legal status (Strang and Ager 2010). Rather, *"integration (whatever form it takes) starts from the very first moment of arrival in a new country. It is a process shaped considerably by intentions and aspirations of refugees themselves, whatever their formal status in the country in which they seek refuge"* (Strang and Ager 2010: 595). Integration, as an integral part of migration policies, does not start after gaining legal recognition, but instead starts from the moment of interaction. As such, a paradox arises.

2.2 Legal Recognition versus Physical Existence

Access to resources like food, housing and healthcare is for the majority of people important in order to organize their livelihoods, and for many this is arranged through

their legal identity. In the case of undocumented migrants, the implementation of these far-reaching policies restricts the organisation of their livelihood and disables public participation. These policies indicate that the Dutch government increases its control over the social domain, as it facilitates in some cases- and restricts in others, the access to services and public participation. As such, these policy reforms seem to show an increasing influence of the state² in social life. When organising the social domain this way society increasingly resembles a *striated space*. *Striated space*, as put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), refers to space that is carefully and consciously timed and placed; it is the space of systems, regulated by mechanisms and defined by structural relationships. If we look at the lives of undocumented migrants, these policies seem to create a coded space, bound and limited, a space in which all movement has been defined in advance. These striations are meant to exclude these unwanted migrants and thereby discourage immigration.

However, although their lives are considerably influenced by their legal exclusion, undocumented migrants are able to live their lives, make friends, love, eat, drink, sleep and work. Where inclusion and participation is made impossible in the formal system, the existence of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands indicates that life is actually possible outside of these state controlled realms. And as such, undocumented migrant provide an interesting position. As they are denied legal recognition and the benefits that belong to this political identity, they nevertheless live in the Netherlands, interact with people and participate economically as well as socially. Illegality, in this sense, seems to be just “*a juridical status that entails a social relation to the state* (De Genova 2002: 422). Although their lives seem restricted by rules and policies, it seems that there are opportunities for movement. As the state increases its control over social life through the implementation of an obligatory *legal identity*, executed through bureaucratic documents like passports and other forms of formal identification, it seems that another space is working parallel to this administrative space; a space in which social interactions dictate the boundaries of in- and exclusion, participation and belonging. Their physical presence within the state boundaries indicates that “*migrant ‘illegality’ is a preeminently political identity*” (De Genova 2002: 422). Because although looking at migrant illegality in the context of a relationship between the self and the state indicates the importance of a political identity, informal interactions seem to indicate that in- and exclusion are not solely confined to formal processes and procedures (Wright 2014).

By taking experiences as central we can ask the question what it means to be excluded. Undocumented migrants provide a unique insight into the tension that arises when people are physically living within a specific territory and yet are rendered invisible through legal processes; they show the complexity of marginalization through their ambiguous positions. Whereas, in the case of *documented* migrants, the state aims to support those in need through social security and facilitate a broader process of inclusion through formal integration processes, these arrangements are unavailable to undocumented migrants. Where citizenship as a form of ‘civic identity’ or ‘national belonging’ originates in a static and impersonal relationship between the self and the state (Duranti 2010) the experiences of these undocumented migrants show a different *line of flight* (Deleuze and

2. In this sense I see the state as a bureaucratic institution that determines, regulates and polices the public domain, although I am aware that the state (as an entity) lacks agency in itself and is, in its ‘actions’, enacted and conducted by its human representation.

Guattari 1987), as their inclusion is based on relationships between the (individual) self and the (collective) other. As asserted by Winslade, *lines of flight* are not about resistance to power or to the status quo. They are, rather, ‘*shifts in trajectory of a narrative that escapes the line of force or power*’ (Winslade 2009), thereby exposing an alternative, as a ‘mutation’ to another, at times more accepted path or process.

Thus, looking at the lives and interactions of undocumented migrants shows how we can see processes of integration not through the eyes of the status quo but from a different viewpoint, with different factors of influence. Through the experiences of undocumented migrants we can see that, in practice, processes of inclusion are much more intimate. Their experiences show how other arrangements, and interactions enable access and belonging, and how inclusion takes place beyond – or below – the reach of the state.

2.3 Under the Umbrella of the State; Integration as a Social Process

Strang and Ager indicate the complexity of integration as they explain that: “[r]ights and citizenship are signalled as a ‘foundation’; language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability as ‘facilitators’; various forms of social capital as providing ‘social connection’; and finally, reinforcing bi-directionality, factors such as employment, housing, education and health are noted as both ‘markers and means’ of integration. The nature of such dynamics is, however, poorly understood” (Strang and Ager 2010: 603). This research is meant to provide an account of a situation, a life, in which such dynamics are at work. Questions considering the importance of ‘foundations’, ‘facilitators’, ‘social connections’ or markers and means’ for integration are explored ethnographically in a situation in which legal recognition denies functional as well as symbolic access to the public domain. The starting point, however, will not be these dynamics, but the lives in which these dynamics are at play.

To reconsider integration according to these social interactions means to view socialization as a process not determined by one form of social organisation (the state), but as a multi-dimensional process that extends beyond human hierarchical ordering. Indicating a multitude of dynamics at play also shows that integration is not a linear process, and that it is not a process solely governed by the state. Because, where the state reifies the social as *striated space*, human interaction also seems to extend beyond these striations and *smoothens* the social space in its doing (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). In other words, where the state shapes the ‘in-between’ of illegality, people fill this gap through their interactions with others.

This points to the idea that, although one might lack the right documentation to gain official Dutch citizenship, in other words, the ‘legal identity’ of a Dutch citizen, and thus is not able to claim any rights or services that accompany this status, one does live in the Netherlands, interacts on a personal, social and cultural level with Dutch society and is thus *affected* by it (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). In order to make sense of the importance of relationships I use the term *affect* as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari to indicate the affective, or in other words, the social, emotional and moving impact that these relationships have. Interactions as such *affect* and might spring other forms of relationships, interactions or *affects* in turn, and shape lives along the way.

Therefore, for this thesis, I look to Deleuze and Guattari in order to make sense of integration not as a procedure, or a ‘static’ process of change, inflicted or organized by the state, but instead as a complex and moving social trajectory. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) see processes of change as imperceptible *trajectories of becoming*. *Becoming* in this sense lacks a start or end; it is always moving, which creates room to see *becoming* as (social)

movement, and opens up space for other influences besides those of the self in relation to the state. Seeing integration as *becoming* enables me to look at integration as a trajectory of transition, as a movement that need not be confined to one static ‘being’, one identity, but instead honors the multiple processes of *becoming* that emerge from the interactions of social life (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

2.4 Making the In/visible

Undocumented migrants provide an interesting example as their illegality produces a state of being in which they are invisible in official records, statistics and the anonymity of public space, and yet physically inhabit this space. They are present and yet not represented (Rancière 1998). They are able to move around, unrecognised and unseen, and yet their encounters do not go unnoticed as they are exposed through police records, academic articles and specific formal reports (Engbersen, et al. 2006; European Commission 2009; Leerkes, et al. 2012). While their legal exclusion renders them invisible, undeserving of any recognition or provisions, their constant presence is at the same time a reminder of the boundaries of the state; they represent a condition of *included exclusion* (Bauman 2013).

The positions and invisibility of undocumented migrants are the starting point for this thesis because, as Tara Polzer rightly maintains: “*a critical look at invisibility begs a series of questions. It asks not only who or what is invisible, but invisible to whom, in what ways, and why*” (Polzer and Hammond 2008: 417). Asking these questions in the light of this research means reconsidering the relationships between the undocumented migrant and the other (the ‘us’ and the ‘them’). For where invisibility means to ‘*avert our eyes*’, visibility is about ‘*directing our gaze*’ and about seeing the other. And in this sense invisibility is ‘*fundamentally relational: its impacts depend on the power relations and interests connecting those who see and those who are to be seen (or not)*’ (Polzer and Hammond 2008: 417).

To illuminate how this in/visibility is determined or enacted seems relevant, and mechanisms of in- and exclusion imply practices of boundary management to determine who belongs. In this respect I agree with Sarah Wright when she argues that the “*the formal structures of citizenship can be, and often are, a life and death matter. For this reason, some theorists maintain that the network of entitlements and rights associated with state citizenship (or its absence) is one of the most important contemporary political projects of belonging*” (Wright 2014: 4).

However, I do not elaborate on the importance of citizenship because I employ a different focus. Considering the experiences of undocumented migrants ethnographically means we can look beyond their presence in numbers, articles or newspapers but instead consider their *existence*. Although the lives of many undocumented migrants are heavily determined by their formal exclusion, which means that their stories may illustrate how these ‘formal structures of citizenship’ are actually ‘a life and death matter’, the stories of my informants Zou, Majid and Maria enable a different perspective. They embody the ambiguous position of being visible and invisible as a result of their simultaneous in- and exclusion. Their stories illuminate how formal exclusion from the public domain works, and yet is not all encompassing.

2.5 Research Question

When diving into the tension that the *positions* of in/visibility and legal exclusion of undocumented migrants induces I posed the following research question:

How do undocumented migrants 'integrate' in the Netherlands?

To be able to make sense of the stories that I documented I tried to answer the following sub-questions:

What experiences shape the life of an undocumented migrant in the Netherlands?

How do relationships contribute to the lives of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands?

What is the importance of relationships in enabling a sense of belonging?

Thus, although this research sets off from a context marked by state exclusion and invisibility its focus is on the particularity of *a* life. My main research question considers the experiences of *a* migrant. As such these questions set out to discover personal experiences and from there try to make sense of how these experiences can enlighten a broader debate around migration – and specifically integration.

2.6 Relevance

A heated public discussion about immigration roams the Netherlands, often inflamed by emotionally laden and factually incorrect arguments. This discussion is often held *about-* and not *with* people. This creates a debate in which problems are magnified, yet experiences are made invisible. With this thesis I aspire to contribute to a discussion that is first and foremost humane- that understands that matters of integration affect *people*. I believe that identification through imagination and feeling is the only way to change an inhumane debate. I believe that knowledge that *affects* and knowledge that *moves* is essential in this sense, as statistics will not show a personal story. When studying migration abstractly or statistically I believe this disconnects the subjects of study from the actual people that make up these subjects. It will not enable identification and stimulate the imagination of what a life in illegality *feels* like. By re-connecting research with reality, which I do by providing concrete experiences of actual people and theorizing from these perspectives, I hope to bring the subject(s) of my research to life.

Secondly, I aim to contribute to an understanding of the complex puzzle of migration, integration, citizenship, identity and belonging by diving into the tension that arises when you consider policy not as a static mechanism of rules and regulations, but as a *moving* mechanism enacted and interpreted by people in ever-changing positions. This means that I look at the effects that immigration policy has on the everyday lives of people 'at the margin'. I do so from the perspective of the undocumented migrant. This means that people, and not policy, determine my context, my focus and (as will be shown) my outcome. I focus on the social interactions that so significantly influence how one might experience his or her life. The body of research on integration from this social perspective remains underdeveloped. Therefore, I hope this research can present academically refreshing results concerning the 'integration' of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands.

I will not focus on citizenship, or integration policy directly, but instead focus on the social world of undocumented migrants and inquire into how belonging is *fostered and*

felt. In doing so I follow Isin as she states that: “*a focus on the social in citizenship challenges the notion that citizenship comprises a static and universalistic legal status of abstract individuals in nations-states. To interrogate what is social in social citizenship means drawing attention to the process-oriented and contested character of citizenship, in terms of both the criteria regarding who are defined as ‘fit’ candidates for citizenship and the particular historical and place-bound set of rights, entitlements, obligations, performative dimensions, and identities to which it refers*” (Isin 2008: 2). Although Isin specifically discusses the value of ‘The Social’ for citizenship, I aim to go beyond citizenship and extend this challenge into the domains that lie ‘beneath’, to the microcosms of personal experience. As citizenship still carries a connotation of state-control, I will argue beyond this reach of the state to enlighten a condition of being ‘under its radar’. For, although boundaries are drawn and exclusion materializes, people may also redefine, reposition or reinterpret these boundaries and constitute new forms of ‘*being, doing, having and interacting*’ that exclude the state (Reid-Cunningham 2008: 71).

However, this thesis is not an argument against the value or importance of the state. In fact, I believe that the state still plays an important role in our everyday lives and experiences, as well as on a more global scale, especially in the case of (undocumented) migrants. And whether or not we see it as a problem, migration remains a reality that must be dealt with. As migration is seen and handled nowadays, it is still considered as a problem that must be ‘moved’ or ‘made to disappear’. As such, the state still plays a crucial role. Much of how migration is managed, and migrants are accepted or not accepted, depends on the decisions of governments. Migration in this sense is an actualised and pervasive issue, manifested through our own life experiences and through the media.

Furthermore, studying processes of identification and belonging, I believe, are very relevant. As much social theory still theorises and acts upon a worldview in which identity is central, significant and determining, I aim to contribute an account that shows the multiplicity, complexity and often inexplicable nature of humans. As such, I hope to show that integration is not a process of ‘becoming Dutch’, but instead a process of learning and discovering social skills and senses, of feelings and affects; a *development* of the self and the other into something new, something shared.

The anthropology of experiences allows for a different perspective on the meaning of individual experiences and subsequently on its meaning for social reality. I believe that this may have an immense impact on our understanding of the social world as contingent, moving and immensely complex as it may enable seeing cosmopolitanism not only as something global but instead as a liberation of the subject and the social from *within*. Studying the interactions that take place allows the recognition of multiple identifications and the incalculable amount of ways people are connected. The kind of actor that emerges cannot be defined as either ‘citizen’ or ‘illegal’; it has moved beyond any narrow definition. Allowing for the anthropology of experience to envision an alternative *line of flight* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) means to be able to allow for the emergence of a new actor; one that is not a static ‘being’ but instead takes the ‘shape’ of a constellation of *positionings* – as an *assemblage* of that specific time and place. As these assemblages form dynamically they are constantly changing shape according to the social context and therefore so does this fluid being.

Looking at the micro-level of individual and collective experiences and seeing its value for describing the globalizing effects of modernity is crucial for our understanding of the social world. Experience in this sense is both individual and collective at the same time. By looking at the actors, activities and interactions we are enabled to see alternative

forms of social organization and are permitted to envision other subjectivities. A focus on the *particular* celebrates individual experiences as well as the importance of the *collectivity* of its relationships in it. Studying the *particular* in this case means looking at experiences, listening to stories and considering the practices of people as constitutive of the social world. As such, the anthropology of experiences enables micro-sociology as well as macro-sociology, as it connects the global, grand and abstract, to the smallest details of human existence.

3.1 Introduction

The research I conducted for this master thesis means to provide an ethnographic account of the lives and experiences of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands. As I set out to do this research I was guided by a strong belief that research should be an enquiry into something unknown. I will explain what that means in the following chapter, after a short general notice concerning the structure of this thesis. I have written this thesis in a chronological form and fully based on the stories that I documented. This means that I do not present a theoretical framework; I theorise along the way, based on the data that I gained. In addition, and importantly for this chapter, I present my methodology and methods chronologically. This means that I will explain the planning and progress of my research in this section, and that my reflections will appear in the last section of the document. Put differently, the ‘before’ and the ‘during’ of my research make up the following chapter, and the ‘after’ will provide a reflection on the total process. It is my intention with a chronological form, to throughout the thesis, create a dialogue of academic discussion and analysis set against the research as an ethnographic journey.

This ethnographic account is not about facts; I did not set out to discover truth. I believe that stories that aren’t true nevertheless create their own reality³ (Jackson 2002; Nordstrom 2004); people think, act and connect according to what they *believe* is true. Through a level of informality the research can uncover information normally restricted by a group of people who, by necessity, are at times forced to hide what society considers to be truths. Looking at experiences in this thesis means to make room for ideas, feelings and perceptions. This may include, as we will see, past, present or future events, or simply reflections and ideas. As such, these stories are powerful because they show us what people value.

Looking at a specific phenomenon from within asks for a specific methodology. It seems inherent to social scientists to try to uncover the unknown as “... *much of the work going on within the discipline is set on clarifying, illuminating, and making visible the invisible: on uncovering natural and social laws, facts, and formations; and on thereby moving them from the shadows into the light*” (Vigh 2011). But how to make visible the invisible? Initially I focus on *a* life. I try to see how expectations and interactions shape and give meaning to lives. Expectations indicate people’s perspectives on the future, and interactions highlight the *inter-play* between people (Jackson 2002). From then on, and without aiming to generalize its particularity, I move on to show the insights it provides us with more generally.

3.2 Undocumented Migrants, or rather: Zou, Maria and Majid

During 4 months I regularly met with my three informants Zou, Maria and Majid. We chatted, drank coffee or tea and at times undertook other day to day activities. I aimed to be attentive to the experiences, emotions and relationships that colour their lives. By asking them to tell me their stories I simultaneously asked them to present themselves to me. As I *heard* their words and *saw* their emotions I *felt* the effect; their experiences also affected me. I became part of their lives and of their network. As such, I also became a part of their story, and they became part of mine. This is our story.

3. Personal communication Martin Southwold, 26.06.2015.

This research concerns the experiences of undocumented migrants. Undocumented migrants constitute a unusual collective; they may often be seen as a distinct group by others and in some cases they may appear to form a collective, for example in the case of the activist group We Are Here⁴. But in practice they are not a distinct group. Undocumented migrants are not a distinct group because they do not identify themselves as one. And, as Becker (2008: 2) explains, in order to be a group, one must see oneself- and be recognised as a group. In practice many of these migrants are individuals with different situations, motivations for migration, legal statuses and so on. To attach a singular label to this ad-hoc group does not serve to recognise their individual diversity. However, for this research, and with the understanding that this group does not actually exist as such, I do at times refer to them as one. Without losing sight of their individuality or the aim to generalize their experiences, I use their stories to generate a conceptual understanding of what illegal life is like in the Netherlands. As I *assemble* their experiences, or compare their stories, I thus conceptually refer to them as a group.

For this research I interviewed three individuals about their lives and their experiences in illegality. All of them live in a large city in the Netherlands⁵ and it is in this city that I met them. Up to 2012 Zou had never applied for a permit of residency. He lived in the Netherlands illegally for 4 years and in Germany for 8 months. I had met Zou a year earlier through a common friend. It was with him in mind that I started this research. Maria and her three children lived in the Netherlands illegally for 13 years. I had known Maria and her children for a few years already, and we saw each other sporadically. Although they did apply for asylum before, their application had always been rejected, until they received asylum based on an amnesty in 2014. Majid still lives in the Netherlands illegally, as he has for the last 32 years. I found Majid through my personal network; a mutual friend introduced us and arranged for us to meet. All the data that I present, the conceptualisations that I create and the conclusions that I draw are primarily based on their experiences.

3.3 'Before': On Methodology

Instead of starting with asking what meaning we could derive from experiences, this ethnographic research set off to uncover what experiences shape the life of undocumented migrants (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Through long engagement ethnography enables a different outlook on specific issues as it enables inspiration and imagination (Biehl 2010: 318). Ethnography does not entail a 'quick scientific fix'. Rather, ethnographic fieldwork provides data from the field which can be used as an illustration to a theory; ethnographic data gives insight into "*concrete social fields at specific moments*" and allows for different ways of knowing (Biehl 2010: 319).

When looking at the lives and experiences of undocumented migrants, ethnographic fieldwork provides the opportunity to look at some of the issues concerning integration 'from within'. Ethnography and its methods of 'thick description' allowed me to dive into the details of human life (Wright 2014: 2). As such, "*ethnography - understood as the amalgam*

4. <http://wijzijnhier.org/who-we-are/>

5. As I have explained in the preface, all names are fictional and I leave specific places unspecified due to vulnerability of the research group. In addition, all revealing characteristics have been changed in order to secure the privacy of my respondents.

constituted from observation, interviews and life stories- tells a story that is new” (Geertz 1994; Skinner 2013). To tell this story I wanted to commence my research ‘with an open mind’, by which I mean that I did not want to define a hypothesis pre-emptively. Determined not to be restricted by theory I aimed to *follow the flows* (Biehl 2010: 319). To follow the *flows* refers to the idea that, instead of looking at a phenomenon through a conceptual lens, one can trace a specific flow of goods, money, ideas or in my case a story. As such, *following a flow* allowed me to move *beyond the boundaries* of a certain concept, idea or theory.

This practically entails that I started my research without a conceptual framework; I put their experiences central and left the theoretical and conceptual lines open. To support this methodological decision I turn to weak theory. As Sarah Wright argues, weak theory “*sees things as open (...). Rather than closing down, categorising, judging, modelling and getting things ‘right’, weak theory is open to possibilities, to surprise. It ponders trajectories, and wonders what ways of knowing, of heeding and caring about things, are possible*” (Appadurai 2011; Nordstrom 2004). But, if there is no conceptual framework to lead the way, what do you ask, and how do you listen?

3.4 ‘During’: The Research Process

The autobiographical interview creates space to allow for the personal details of emotional remembering, self-performance and reflection to come forward. Interviewing people about their lives and participating in their daily activities enabled me to see how other people reacted to their presence and it allowed me to compare what people say to what they do (Della Porta and Keating 2008; Geertz 1994)⁶. Furthermore, as I discovered the importance of relationships, I asked for permission to interview one person from their personal network, one person that had been crucial in their lives. In addition, I interviewed two professionals: a psychiatrist and a professional from a semi-governmental organisation. Besides providing me with a different perspective on their stories it also showed me how their personal networks and experiences shape their relationships.

All the interviews were used in order to provide an entrance to the following interview. In addition, I kept a fieldwork journal in which I described what I encountered. This journal consist of quotes, description of events, behaviour and personal impressions, and functioned as secondary data to the interviews. It helped me to recapture the *when, where, and how* of our meetings. But more importantly, it also helped me to remember the conditions, the smells, feelings and the atmosphere. Especially these interactions and activities made our meetings a sensory adventure.

I structured the interviews according to a three-phased system, as proposed by Jonathan Skinner (2013). Although structurally presented, in practice these phases were never rigidly defined but only helped me to focus on the particular elements of their stories. Phase one concerned the general events in their lives; the people they met, the places they visited. These interviews were like open conversations, unstructured and personal; I left the narrative with them. In phase two I delved deeper into their stories. I asked them about the key events in their lives in more detail. Because these interviews were largely based on questions derived from our previous interviews, these interviews had a semi-structured character. But I still left the initiative with my respondents. Finally, during

6. I conducted open-ended unstructured and semi-structured interviews primarily, which were taped and transcribed. This amounts to 65 hours of (primary and secondary) data.

the last interviews, I focussed in detail on their experiences from a personal perspective. I asked them about their feelings, how they experienced certain events or relationships. As such, I tried to discover the more emotional aspects of their lives.

In order to analyse their stories I first transcribed the interviews, which I then coded according to the concepts they discussed. I elaborated on these concepts in further interviews and also structured the interviews with the other informants in order to cross-check them. In addition, to triangulate my own findings one of my peers coded my data using ATLAS (Creswell J W 2003). Although much of the analysis of the data and initial conceptualisation happened during the interviewing phase, it took me a considerable amount of time before I was able to form a definite theoretical framework. Conceptualisation was a dynamic process of applying data to lines of inquiry as I kept in mind: to what question do these data answer (Becker 2008)? As I listened, and listened again to what they told me, various experiences, events and ideas seemed to surface. I linked these experiences, ideas and events to theoretical concepts. These concepts helped me to find similarities in the stories and at times functioned as input for the following interviews. Flexibility proved crucial as their stories did not always make sense, or connect at first. But eventually, because I followed the *flows* of their stories, a collective story emerged. As I shifted from the personal, to the interpersonal, and from the macro-sociological to the micro-sociological I was able to structure their stories into a narrowed down version by elaborating on the themes and concepts that they had in common. Re-conceptualisation and flexibility was essential for this.

Additionally, writing up their stories proved to be crucial for this process; as the writing progressed, so did the line of the story. In order to write their stories I used two different styles, a discursive and a narrative style. In addition, I left all the citations as 'pure' as possible⁷. This deserves some explanation. Where I use many large citations I leave the narrative with my respondents; using the narrative style allows them to tell their own story in some way. But to be able to connect their stories I used a discursive writing style. Using these two different styles I also aim to distinguish my words from theirs. This way I aim to provide the opportunity for the reader to interpret these words and meanings themselves. This way, I hope to minimize my own bias and open up my findings to the critical reader.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, this methodology chapter does not include the reflections of my research. Instead, I will proceed by presenting the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid.

7. I have translated all the citations (see notes). I chose to focus on the message as I understood it to be. This means that I have at times translated the citations literally, but at other times chose to translate them so that they would carry a similar meaning. Moreover, at times I included a word between brackets to clarify the sentence.

4.1 Introduction

When evaluating [what experiences shape the life of an undocumented migrant in the Netherlands](#) I have found that life unfolds differently for all of them. Zou, Maria and Majid talk about freedom extensively, but they understand- and make use of their freedoms – in their own ways. As the following chapter will show, freedom and the longing for freedom may surface in various ways. Majid seeks freedom through his lifestyle choices striving to be independent and free from the expectations of others. Zou wants to be free which to him means to be self-reliant. And for Maria freedom means to be independent of other people and to take care of oneself. However diverse these perceptions are, sociality matters for all of them. A social network enables access to public life, which helps them to find ways to sustain themselves and become independent. And besides providing access functionally it will appear that a social network provides an opening to the public domain in more profound ways, as relationships also characterize their lives by providing meaning, care and some sense of belonging.

Their stories show how they do not consider one single time or space. Different times and spaces appear to be important for their sense of self and their understanding of being in the world. In addition, im/materiality plays an important role in fostering their relationships as their longing for freedom manifests itself materially and immaterially. Zou, Maria and Majid create these social networks differently, according to their own situations, expectations and hopes. How they are able to make use of the public space or use their appearance to enable contact with others, how they embody their way of life or their specific roles, and how they envision their futures or remember their pasts all influence their expectations, actions and experiences. This chapter will provide an account of their particular experiences, and these will form the basis for wider analysis in the following chapters.

4.2 Zou

In the course of this research Zou (39) quit his job. He needed time for himself, for when he is always working there is no time left to develop himself; he needs mental space to ponder on life and to allow for creativity. After a short vacation Zou plans to start looking for work. His former job, washing dishes and at a local up-market restaurant, did not allow him much time to himself as he worked between 40 and 60 hours a week. The decision to quit is, according to him, a decision he is happy with every day. Quitting his job was possible because he saved money to get by for a few months, which allowed him to pay in advance the rent of the apartment that he shares with his girlfriend Marijne. Finally, after living in the Netherlands illegally for the first 4 years, Zou received a permit of residency. This is his story.

I met Zou for the first time at a mutual friend's birthday (who for the sake of the story, is called Annelies). I knew who he was but we had never met before. When he enters the room I noticed him immediately. He is a tall and handsome man with long dreadlocks tied to his back. I remember how his appearance really struck me; he was wearing nice clothes and he had an impressive air of calmness that surrounding him. I knew then, that he was, or had been, living in the Netherlands illegally. As Zou told me later during our first interview, he never really consciously made the decision to stay in the Netherlands; he never chose a life of illegality. He grew up in Senegal as one of the youngest of eleven

siblings and was working as a manager in the music industry until the company went bankrupt. While searching for another job he worked as a (music) teacher for a while and played in a band. When the band was invited to play in the Netherlands he joined them. As he recounts, he never actually decided to stay but just ‘missed his flight’. Not being able to pay for another ticket he decided that his migration had become definite.

During the first months he lived with his brother, helped his sister-in-law with the housekeeping and slowly tried to get to know the city. They lived in a small house with 3 adults and 2 children, he had no form of identification nor the documents necessary to find a job or a house, he had no money or friends and he did not understand how ‘the system’ worked.

“Weet je mijn eerste dag in Nederland was echt, ik dacht, wat the fuck is dit land. En weet je waarom? Alle huizen zijn hetzelfde. Ik zeg, in Afrika is niet zo. Als jij bent rijk, jij hebt niet hetzelfde huis als iemand die is arm”⁸.

Although the seeming equality struck him, he did not feel comfortable or free in these first months. As he slowly familiarised himself with the city he observed how things unfold and gradually began to find his way. At times he was invited to play at African dance classes or parties. However, Zou did not rely much on the Senegalese community. Party because:

“...als ik ben met de Afrikaanse mensen, en zij weten jij bent illegaal, zij geven geen respect. Want eh, ja. (...) Niemand vertrouwt jou, niemand geeft jou respect, niemand wil worden vriend met jou”⁹.

He also explains that:

“Senegalese mensen gaan jou niet helpen, nee. (...) Mijn ervaring is dat zij jou niet willen helpen, misschien ze zijn beetje bang als de politie komt ofzo. Ik vind het normaal ook, weet je. Maar verwacht geen hulp van andere mensen, nee”¹⁰.

Zou believed that self-reliance was crucial for him to survive in the Netherlands. And in order to be self-reliant, he needed to earn money. As he describes it:

8. “You know my first day in the Netherlands was really, I thought, what the fuck is this country. And you know why? All the houses are the same. I say, in Africa this is not. If you are rich you do not have the same house as someone who is poor”.

9. “And yeah, when I am with African people and they know you are illegal, they don’t give you respect. ‘Cause eh yeah, (...) nobody trusts you, nobody gives you respect and nobody wants to be friends with you”.

10. “Senegalese people won’t help you, no. My experience is that they won’t help you, maybe because they are scared if the police comes or something. I think it’s normal, you know. But don’t expect help from others, no”.

“Werk was de enige manier ik kan krijgen geld. En met geld ik kan zorgen voor mijzelf. En soms bijvoorbeeld met de folder was echt moeilijk. Want ik heb 20 kilo op mijn rug, moet lopen. En is koud, en is regen. En ik moet. Omdat ik geld moet verdienen. Ik moet gewoon elke dag. Van maandag tot vrijdag. En vrijdag avond ik krijg mijn geld. Maar ik was blij. Was moeilijk, maar moet wel, ja”.¹¹

Although he did not rely on the Senegalese community he succeeded in creating a social network that enabled him to earn money as well as provide himself with a wider range of new opportunities. Zou’s first job was at the local bar. He went there occasionally as a customer on Friday or Saturday nights, and after a few weeks he asked the owner for help. From then on he would help out on weekend nights. The first time he worked he received 10 euros for 6 hours of work. And he was happy.

“Vroeger ik heb niks, weet je. Ik weet het wel, die 10 euro was helemaal niks maar Ik was blij. (...) Door geld ik kan sturen geld naar mijn dochter en ook een beetje leven hier, weet je.”¹²

Although not much, these 10 euros represented his freedom, as he could spend it on whatever he found important. As he tells me later on, earning money enabled him to take care of himself and others around him. He was able to live independently and send some of it home to Senegal. Taking care of others had always been important to him. And especially now, not living in Senegal, he felt the need to contribute:

“Ik ben de, de enige die heeft de opportuniteit om te helpen mijn moeder. En ik heb echt veel dingen in mij, eh, op mijn schouders. Later ik moet sturen geld. Ik stuur elke maand geld, weet je. En eh, ja.. Soms het is moeilijk omdat ja, mensen denken jij hebt alles hier. Is niet moeilijk, maar is niet makkelijk ja, is niet het paradijs. Maar mensen denken niet aan jon, alleen aan geld geld geld”.¹³

His responsibilities in Senegal and his longing to be self-reliant generated the conditions for his subsequent life. In the first few years Zou worked on an informal basis in various

11. “Work was the only way for me to get money. And with money I can take care of myself. And sometimes, for example, with the flyers it was really hard. ‘Cause I have 20 kilos on my back, have to walk. And its cold, and its raining. And I must. Because I have to earn money. I just must, every day. From Monday to Friday. And Friday night I get my money. But I was happy, its was tough, but have to yeah”.

12. “Before I had nothing, you know. I know, these ten euros are nothing but I was happy. So after, she got me a job with a friend of hers, to clean her house in the morning. With this money I could send some to my daughter at home, and also live a little myself”.

13. “I am the only one with the opportunity to help my mother. And I have many things, eh.. on my shoulders. Later, I have to send money. I send money every month, you know. And eh, yeah. Sometimes its hard because yeah, people think that you have everything here. It’s not hard, but its not easy either. It’s not paradise. But people don’t think of you, they only think of money, money, money”.

fields. Although the African music scene was a relatively accessible industry to work in, he mostly tried to find other jobs.

“Ik werkte in de bar, als bediening. Ik werkte ook in de bouw. Met een goeie vriend van mij, hij heeft mij veel geholpen. Ik ging opstaan om 7 uur. En dan werkte ik vier maanden en dan stopte ik drie maanden en zo... Ik begin om 9 tot 4 uur. En elke uur hij betaalde 10 euro. Ja, dat is goed. Maar het is echt zwaar werk. Maar ik was blij. Maakt niet uit, ik wil graag werken en een beetje geld verdienen. En daarna de folder. De folder was de laatste. En soms ook ik ga spelen Afrikaanse dans. En elk spektakel, dan 1 uur is 50 euro. Meer dan 1 uur is 100 euro. En het is leuk ja! Alleen het slechte is, alle vrouwen die komen daar, komen kijken naar de man hahahaha”¹⁴

Due to his illegal status he was unable to apply for a formal job. His situation forced him to be creative, since:

“...het systeem komt niet bij jou, jij moet gaan naar de systeem. En voor dat jij moet, weet je, integratie, met mensen die wonen hier. Als jij blijft in jouw huis, niemand weet wat is in jouw leven. Dus jij moet actief zijn”¹⁵

Zou indicates that if you do not take action, if you are not assertive, then nobody will know of your existence. Therefore, he specifically highlights, you must integrate with the people. Already at this time Zou explored the social domain for opportunities to enhance his situation. His main strategy was to search for people who could help him to earn some money. This active strategy reduced his relative invisibility as he actively used the public sphere to create a social network. Zou specifically highlights the essentiality of assertiveness for “...als ik niet vraag, ik krijg niks”¹⁶. As the Dutch labour system is relatively bureaucratic and finding a job is difficult if you are unable to use employment agencies or other formalized systems. Due to his inability to register, a wide social network was essential for finding a job. As he states:

14. “I worked in the bar, as a waiter. I also worked in construction. With a friend of mine, he helped me a lot. I would get up at 7 o’clock. And then I worked for four months and then I quit for three and so on. I would start at nine until four. And for every hour he paid me 10 euros. Yes, that’s good. But it’s really tough work. But I was happy. It doesn’t matter, I really want to work and earn some money. And then I did the flyers. The flyers was the last. And also sometimes I would play at the African dance. And every gig, then 1 hour is 50 euros. More than one hour is 100 euros. And its fun yes! Only the last is, all the women that come there come to watch the man hahahaha”.

15. “...the system will not come to you, you must go to the system. And for this you must, you know, integrate, with people that live here. If you remain in your house, nobody knows of your life. So you must be active”.

16. “If I don’t ask, I get nothing”.

“Hier mag je niet naar een kantoor voor werk. Als jij bent hier [illegaal], dan heb je contacten nodig. Het kan alleen via contacten. Het kan alleen via via. Via iemand die jij goed kent. Door het werk ik krijg die via via. En daarna konden mensen mij geloven en leerden ze mij kennen.”¹⁷

Being creative and assertive enabled him to generate a social network, which also functioned as his gateway to work. Zou moved from one job to another as his social network grew. In time he was able to build a steady network, which even enabled him to help others around him.

Besides helping him to create an extensive social network in order to organize a job, Zou's existence was organized around trying to find a partner willing to help him with a permit. He told me many times how:

“... in het begin is het echt, als je buitenlander bent en je wil papieren krijgen, je moet iemand hebben, een partner, een vrouw of man, die jou kan helpen. De regering zegt als jouw partner zegt die hebt dat, dan is het geen probleem”¹⁸.

The first few years Zou puts his effort into finding a partner. In many ways the African scene is easily accessible to him, but he dislikes how relationships are established there.

“Kijk het probleem is, jij bent wie jij bent. En als er mensen zien jou, zij kennen niet jou, maar ze hebben een idee wie jij misschien bent. Als jij bent positief, vrolijk, weet je... En eh, ik kwam vaak bij [dit cafe] en ik deed helemaal niks. Alleen dansen enzo. De mensen komen naar jou, jij bent mooi. Ik was niet de enige Afrikaan die kwam daar, maar ze kwamen naar mij toe”¹⁹.

As he recounts, he is not the only African man going out at night in search of women, a relationship and a permit. As he gets to know the scene better he understands that in order to succeed you need to stand out. He adopts an attitude of passivity because it works out for him; it enables him to meet women. Because he dislikes how power imbalance and inequality play out in some of these relationships.

According to Zou, the African scene, which is mostly centred around African music and dance, is characterized by women looking for a relationship. Zou experiences that all the women “... in het Afrikaanse milieu hebben hetzelfde idee. Als bijvoorbeeld iemand die is nieuw

17. “But here, you cannot go to an office for work. If you are here [illegally], you need contacts. It only works with contact. It only works via others. Via someone you know well. Because of work I got these contacts. And from then on people could believe me and get to know me”.

18. “In the beginning it is really, of you are a foreigner and you want papers, you need someone, a partner, a woman or man, that can help you. The government says, if your partner has that, than it is not a problem”.

19. “Look the problem is, you are who you are. And if the people see you, they don't know you, but they have an idea of who you might be. And if you are positive, cheerful you know... And eh, I often came here [this cafe] and I didn't do anything. Just dancing. People come to you, you are beautiful. I wasn't the only African that came there, but they came to me”.

hier en is illegaal, ja! Mensen spelen met je. Maar als jij hebt ervaring dan daarna, jij weet het”..²⁰ He experiences this scene and the women in it as manipulative for which he develops a certain caution.

“Voordat iemand gaat zeggen ik vind jou leuk, ik zeg ik wil niets hebben met jou, omdat het is niet waar. Omdat ja, waar de papieren komen, jij weet het niet. Wie gaat jou helpen, jij weet het niet.”²¹

So instead he submersed himself in the cities nightlife, for you never know who might help you. He carefully considers many elements, ranging from his physical appearance to his behaviour. Because how he presents himself in public determines his interaction with others.

“...ik vind kleding belangrijk, ik vind kleding goed. Nu bijvoorbeeld ik heb gezien de schoenen, en ik vind ze leuk. En ik kan het kopen (...) Door deze geld, ik heb kunnen kopen mooie dingen, mooie kleren, schoenen. Omdat, weet je, ik wil altijd eh, als ik ga naar buiten, ik wil goed dragen.(...) Ik weet, ik geloof mijzelf en met mij alleen ik kan meer contact opnemen dan met anderen. Ik drink niet, ik rook niet ik ben perfect”²².

Zou uses his looks and his attitude of passivity to try to shape his appearance; his self-presentation is a constant negotiation between wanting to stand out and wanting to blend in. Constantly torn between trying to find a partner willing to help him with a residence permit and building an intimate relationship with a woman he has to compromise between what he can offer a woman and his own needs. As appears from his dislike of the African scene, Zou does not want to settle for just any relationship. He is looking for companionship and closeness. This intricate web of expectations makes relationships and love difficult.

“Ok, de reden hier is, je kan niet krijgen verblijfsvergunning zonder vrouw. En weet je die is moeilijk, is moeilijk”. [Bedoel je een Nederlandse vrouw?] Ja, een vrouw kan jou helpen. Een man of vrouw kan niet hebben papieren zonder partner. Partner kan helpen. Dat is echt lastig, omdat eh... weet je. Jij wil niet blijven illegaal. Maar jij wil ook niet spelen met iemand. Want wat jij

20. “... in the African milieu have the same idea. If for example someone is new here, and he is illegal... yeah! People play with you. But when you are experienced, then you know”.

21. “There’s once, twice, after that I am done. Because I know. Before someone says I like you, I tell them that I don’t want anything with them, because it’s not true. Because, yes, where the papers come, you don’t know. Who is gonna help you, you don’t know”.

22. “I find clothing important. I like clothing. Now, for example, I have seen the shoes, and I like them. And I can buy them. (...) Because of this money I have been able to buy nice things, nice clothes, shoes. Because, you know, I always want to, if I go out, I want to wear nice [things]. (...) I know, I believe in myself and only with me only I can make contact with others. I don’t drink, I don’t smoke, I am perfect”.

*doet voor de papieren is niet met iemand die jij niet leuk vindt. (...) Maar is niet alleen de papieren. Jij vindt iemand leuk en zij vindt jou leuk. Is ook het gevoel dat je elkaar geeft. En door het gevoel, misschien, hij of zij hebben een toekomst met iemand. En zij zien jij bent in de situatie en gaan jou helpen om te krijgen. Dat is het begin van de papieren*²³.

Here, Zou does not only indicate the importance of feelings, and a personal connection in his search for a permit. He also indicates that this personal contact makes it possible to envision a future with someone by building a connection.

Although sex is also an important element in his own relations he dislikes how relationships around him tend to be based on sex. Zou emphasizes that, for him, this was different as he states that:

*“...het ging om de relatie. Jij vind mij leuk, ik vind jou leuk. Wij hebben een relatie. En als jij hebt iets nodig, ik ga jou helpen. Dat is de bedoeling. Maar als was alleen met papieren, jullie hebben geen relatie. Het begin is relatie. Maar het hangt ervan af welke relatie. (...) Maar ik ben niet alleen met jou voor de papieren, ik heb een relatie. Misschien, ja. Jij bent blij met mij, en jij bent niet blij met weet ik veel. Dus ja, ik denk niet over de papieren, over niks. Misschien kan het wel zo zijn bij sommige mensen, maar dat was niet mijn positie. Ik hoor wel bij sommige mensen dat is zo*²⁴.

Though Zou is looking for someone to help him gain legal status, finding a relationship based on honesty, companionship and love seems even more important. This points to the significance of *affect* and emotions and as such his search for a relationship is rather ambiguous. This ambiguity is illustrated by the following story.

Zou meets Annabel, a German woman on holidays in the Netherlands, and after they spend the weekend together she asked him to move with her to Germany. He was doubtful if he should and wanted to leave. This could be a great opportunity for him, because she was willing to help him with a permit. But his insecurity about their relationship made him hesitate whether he wanted to move to Germany. The arrangements

23. “Ok the reason here is, you cannot get a permit without a woman. And you know this is difficult, it’s difficult. [Do you mean a Dutch woman?] Yes, a woman can help you. A man or woman cannot have papers without a partner. A partner can help. That is really tough, because eh... you know. You don’t want to remain illegal. But you also don’t want to play with someone. Because what you do for the papers is not with someone you don’t like. (...) But it is not only the papers. You like someone and she likes you. It is also the feeling that you give each other. And because of the feeling, maybe, he or she has a future with someone. And they see you are in the situation and they will help you to get [a permit]. That is the start of the papers”.

24. “... it was about the relationship. You like me, I like you. We have a relationship. And if you need something, I will help you. That is the intention. But if it was only with the paper, you wouldn’t have a relationship. (...) But I am not only with you for the papers, I have a relationship. Maybe, yes you are not happy with me, and you aren’t happy with I don’t know what. So yes, I don’t think about papers, about nothing. Maybe this is the case with some people, but that was not my position. But I hear that is the case with some people”.

concerning legal status as well as life in illegality are different in Germany. Plus, his family lives here. In the end Zou did move to Germany, but he returned after eight months. His desire to live a quiet life proved impossible, as she wanted something different. When he came back to the Netherlands for Christmas he ended their relationship. He was unable to live the quiet life he desired and recalls how he had to be constantly alert, which tired him. But most importantly he missed love and intimacy in their relationship. He dedicates himself completely to a relationship but only when he can love the woman he is with.

“Als jij bent met iemand alleen voor eh.. voor een een verblijfsvergunning dan is er een slecht gevoel. Dat gaat niet goed. Wat ik doe ik doe altijd met gevoel”²⁵.

Whatever his situation, he follows his heart.

“Echt leuk is dat jij praat met je hart of je doet iets met je hart en het hart neemt en geeft van het hart. En het hart pakt. Het is hart tegen hart. Wat jij doet maakt niet uit, als het maar vanuit het hart is”²⁶.

When we speak of intimacy, he is surprised when I ask him if he always had feelings of love for the women he was with. For him, sex is intimate by default; he is unable to separate sex from love. For Zou intimacy is the most important element of the relationship; an unquestionable attribute. This intimacy is what he firstly looked for when sleeping with a woman. It characterizes the beginning of a relationship. In this intimate space of physical closeness, sharing and emotions he would get to know them, and he would open up.

“Ja als jij slaapt bij mensen, 1 keer 2 keer, ja. Soms ja moeten we ja, jullie moeten praten en eh, weet je. Zij weet wie je bent en wat je doet ja. Soms moet jij zeggen. Is moeilijk om te zeggen maar ja, jij moet”.²⁷

Trust and respect are important additional elements because “... als jij hebt vertrouwen, dan is het persoonlijker. Persoonlijker dan respect. Je kent elkaars leven”. He explained to me how this would work, how he would get to know a woman. At first, he would not tell her about his life in detail, he would keep his illegal status to himself. But as the relationship developed, sharing and openness would become indispensable. Zou explains to me how for him this was about trust.

25. “If you are with someone only for a permit of residency then there is a bad feeling. That does not work. What I do I always do with feelings”.

26. “Really nice is that you speak with your heart or you do something with your heart, and the heart takes and gives of the heart. It is heart to heart. What you do does not matter, as long as it is from the heart”

27. “Yeah if you sleep with people, once, twice. Yeah, sometimes we must yeah, you must talk you know. She knows who you are and what you do. Sometimes you must tell. It’s hard, yes, but you must”.

“De mensen die jij vertrouwt. Soms jij bent met iemand, en je bent vrij met haar. Dus je moet zeggen, zij wil weten wie jij bent. Voor mij is het duidelijk, jij moet ook zeggen wat is jouw leven. Ja, maar is niet alleen met papieren”²⁸.

In a way these relationships are the materialization of longing. As a delicately woven web of expectations and needs, these relationships are not merely about personal gain, although there is something to gain for both involved. For some it is love, attention or sex, and for the other, belonging and registered partnership as a base for a permit. Trust, openness and respect are crucial elements in Zou’s relationships with women because of his status of illegality. As he is living in the Netherlands illegally his life revolves around making space for himself in a society that is bureaucratically excluding him from participating. The insecurity that he experiences stems from an uncertainty in what the future holds for him. Hope is intricately connected to this uncertainty. As he recounts:

“Jij bent altijd onzeker. Het is moeilijk misschien maar het komt goed, op een dag. Jij hebt hoop, weet je. En eh, voor mij is als jij geloof sommige dingen, wat jij gelooft dat gebeurt. (...) Wat ik zeg hoop is wat jij kan doen. En de eerste stap om iets te kunnen doen is jij moet hebben papieren. Dus dat is echt jouw hoop”²⁹.

Because of his illegal status, nourishing hope is difficult. Zou is not totally in control of his own future but depends on the grace of others. He depends on a social network to find a job and suitable housing, on the state for a permit, and on the willingness of a woman to help him. Although Zou could live a relatively normal life, a certain fear still captured him.

“Was goed in de ene kant maar niet goed in de andere kant, want jij bent niet vrij. Jij denkt altijd over... de slechte dingen. Bijvoorbeeld als de politie ziet jou en vraagt naar de papieren en jij hebt niks. Dat is lastig. Wat ga jij doen dan? Wat ga jij zeggen, je mag hier niet blijven. En dat is lastig, echt lastig.”³⁰

28. “The people that you trust. Sometimes you are with someone, and you are free with her. So you must say, she wants to know who you are. For me it is clear, you must also say what your life is [like]. Yes, but that is not only with papers”.

29. “You’re always insecure. It’s tough maybe but it will be alright, one day. You have hope, you know. And eh, for me if you believe some things, what you believe will happen. (...) What I say hope is what you can do. And the first step to be able to do something you must have papers. So that is really your hope”.

30. I think I had three women for cleaning, every two weeks. So every two weeks I had something with working at the bar, every Friday and Saturday (...) so that was good. In one way it was good but in another it wasn’t because you aren’t free. You always think of... the bad things. For example, if the police sees you and asks for your papers and you have none. That’s hard, what are you gonna do then? What are you gonna say, you can’t stay. And that’s tough, that’s really tough.

The police stopped Zou twice, both times while at work. And both times he used the identification of his cousin, who did have a permit. He is lucky that they look alike, and the police released him without any consequences. His second arrest, however, did change his outlook on the future. Although he was able to talk himself out of detention, he realized that this second arrest needed to be his last.

“Vanaf weg van het politie bureau ik zeg ik ga niet meer deze dingen doen. Ik wil graag werken, maar ik ga niet meer deze dingen doen. Wat ik ga doen ik ga regelen. Met de papieren enzø. Ja, ja gelukkig ik heb mijn papieren. En eh.. ja.. Nu begrijp ik met de papieren, ja... Jij hebt alles.”³¹

These events illustrate the possibility of encountering the state in daily life. Although Zou was able to organize his livelihood properly, the risk of being detected or detained was ever present. In a way gaining legal status through a residence permit extends beyond the ability to become legalised. Gaining legal status also stands for the hope of freeing oneself from the fear of exposure, detainment or deportation. As such, these formal documents are a materialization of liberty as they symbolize freedom in a more profound way.

Due to these encounters with the police Zou realized that he needed to change his situation and he tells me about the two people that helped him with this. Firstly, a few months after he moved back from Germany he met Annelies at a cafe. At first, they liked each other and started dating. But soon their relationship evolved into a platonic friendship. His friendship with Annelies proved to be very important as their contact enabled of a deeper sense of belonging. They used to talk a lot, go out and do fun things together. Because of his friendship with Annelies he felt better. And instead of only fleetingly using the public space, he now felt more at ease. Zou tells me that: *“.. zij helpt mij, zij helpt mij echt. Jij moet jezelf vertrouwen en dingen gaan doen, leren fietsen. Was echt een heel goed moment, was echt fantastisch”³²*

Secondly, his relationship with Marijne signified another turning point in his life. Although at first he was rather wary about her intentions he soon realized that she honestly liked him. He remembers how:

“Vroeger ik dacht hetzelfde als de andere vrouw. Ik ken haar van [een cafe]. Ik was met mijn neefje en zij was met een vriendin van haar. Hij kende haar, omdat zij was met een Gambiaanse jongen. Maar ik kende haar niet, ik kijk niet naar haar. Omdat ik eh, ja.. (...) En daarna, mijn neefje roept mij. En, daarna ik zeg: kom! Ik dans, ik heb, als ik dans, ik weet het, ik ja. Ik ben niet goed, maar ja, weet je.. Misschien zij vindt mij interessant en begint met praten. En eh.. Ik geef haar mijn nummer en zij geeft mij. Maar ik was bang want ik zeg, misschien is zij ook hetzelfde als de andere meisjes. Ik heb twee

31. When I left the police station I said I won't do this anymore. I want to work, but I won't do this anymore. What I do I will arrange [properly].

32. And she helped me, she really helped me. You have to have faith in yourself, and do things. Learn to ride a bicycle. Really was a good time, was really great.

weken niks gedaan, want ik wilde kijken hoe zij is, weet je. En eh, daarna ik zeg ok. Ik stuur, hallo alles goed. Ik wil een afspraak met jou. En zij antwoordt: nee ik kan niet. Maar volgende week. Ik zeg als jij wil wel maken een afspraak, prima. Ja. Dus wij praten en ik zeg tegen haar wat is mijn leven. Dus ja, en nu begint onze contact. Ja, Marijne heeft het voor mij echt beter gemaakt. (...) Als ik nu kijk wat Marijne heeft gedaan voor mij. Door haar nu ik heb leven hier”³³.

Annelies also recalls that Zou met Marijne and that it really changed him. He recollects how much this relationship changed him and his situation in effect because before “... *bij durfde nooit, ik zag hem nooit op de fiets totdat hij verkering kreeg met Marijne. Ik weet nog dat hij op een dag opeens aan kwam fietsen toen we koffie gingen drinken!*”³⁴ Although his friendship with Annelies had already helped Zou significantly, his relationship with Marijne really meant a new start for him. Although he was able to speak some Dutch before he met Marijne, he now actively worked for it. It gave him a sense of pride to be able to speak Dutch properly. And besides the companionship and love that their relationship gave him, it also made him feel more at home in the city; it opened up a whole new world for him. His relationship with Marijne evolved over the years and they became registered partners. After years of illegality Zou returned to Senegal in 2012 to apply for a visa. This permit represents both positive and negative freedom for Zou. It signifies a freedom from the fear of deportation, but also a freedom from dependency. These developments meant that he was able to determine his own life’s course.

A constant search for opportunities characterizes Zou’s life in the Netherlands. His family housed him during his first few months, but his longing for freedom made him search for new opportunities. In order to become free he must be self-reliant and for this he needs money. Although the Senegalese community seems an obvious connection, he avoids this scene. Few people are willing to help him and he dislikes how arrangements are made. By being assertive and simply asking for help he is able to build a steady social network that provides him with various relatively well-paid jobs. This enables him to sustain himself and allows him to consider other things.

Zou is determined to stay in the Netherlands legally. During the years that he lives in the Netherlands illegally he is constantly searching for new opportunities and he puts his social skills to the test. Through his social network and his various jobs he slowly gets to know ‘the system’; a necessity to survive as he sees it. Zou explicitly refers to the ‘system’ many times, which to him consists of ways of being and doing, cultural traditions, social

33. “Before I thought the same as de other women. I know her from [a café]. I was with my cousin and she was with a friend of hers. He knew her, because she was with a Gambian guy. But I didn’t know her, I didn’t look at her. Because I eh, yes... (...) And then, my cousin calls me. And, then I say: come! I dance, I have, when I dance, I know, I yes, I am not good, but yeah, you know. Maybe she thinks I am interesting and start to talk. And eh, I give her my number and she gives me [hers]. But I was afraid because I say, maybe she is the same as the other girls. For two weeks I did nothing, because I wanted to see how she is you know. And eh, then I said ok. I sent, hello hoe are you. I want an appointment with you, And she answers: no I can’t. But next week. I say if you do want to make an appointment, fine. Yes. So we talk and I tell her what is my life. So yeah, and now our contact starts. Yes, Marijne really made things better for me. (...) If I now look at what Marijne did for me. Because of her I have a life here”.

34. “He never dared, I never saw him riding a bike. Until he started dating Marijne. I recall that one day he came up to me riding his bike when we were going for a coffee”! *Personal communication.*

codes but also (bureaucratic) rules and regulations. Besides getting to know this ‘system’ Zou heavily invests in his own personal network in order to find a partner willing to help him with a permit. He sees finding a Dutch partner as his only chance to accomplish this.

As these relationships unfold a mutual longing constantly surfaces, and this in turn shapes the conditions for these relationships. Whether the relationship is ‘successful’ is highly dependent on the expectations they have, the trust and respect that is nourished. Zou has had many relationships, varying in timespan and intensity, which have all contributed in some way to his life. But his friendship with Annelies and his relationship with Marijne have been most important to him as they have helped him with two crucial things: trust and self-confidence; and a permit of residency.

Over the years Zou became independent. He was able to organize his own housing and earn his own money. He was even able to send money home and contribute to the household in Senegal. But most importantly Zou managed to find friendship and love. His self-reliance and his relationships have given him the freedom he longed for and shaped the conditions of his life to come.

4.3 Maria

My conversations with Maria started long before the interviews. I got to know Maria about 10 years ago through friends of my family. She had arrived a few years earlier with her three children Anna, Louisa and Elias, and was not (financially) secure in the Netherlands. As we saw each other sporadically, I got to know elements of her story over time. I knew about her arrival in the Netherlands and about some of the conditions under which she lived. But she only disclosed the details of her life to me recently. This is her story³⁵.

Although family has been one of the most important things in Maria’s life, she grew up without having one in Azerbaijan. After her parents died she lived in an orphanage, leaving behind a beautiful house. They used to have a good life, Her father was a talented carpenter and they made vodka and olive oil, grew vegetables in a greenhouse and shared the fruits from the orchard with friends and family. Maria speaks lovingly of these times, when Azerbaijan was still part of the Soviet Union because, for poor people, communism was a good thing. Everyone had the same clothes, the same shoes, the same stuff. And food, sports and the hospital were available to everyone. The few inequalities that did remain became invisible, as you could see no differences between people.

Maria married an Azeri man and they had two daughters, Anna and Louisa. But then the war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan and things started changing. Maria remembers how the war changed relationships between people. Where before under communism people shared many things, now, relationships became tense and inequalities led to conflicts. Armenians were unable to live safe and equal lives in Azerbaijan and as an Armenian, Maria went into hiding. It was in hiding that she had her son, Elias.

During these years a relationship of dependency and abuse began between Maria and her husband, and this had a great effect on her experience of life as dependent and unsafe. Still, self-reliance and respect are what Maria longs for most. She never considered

35. Due to the vulnerability of my research group I asked for permission during all stages of the research. Unfortunately Maria declined my request to audiotape our interviews. Therefore, there are no citations to support Maria’s stories. I aim to tell Maria’s story in two different styles: firstly through a narrative in which I have considered my wording carefully, aiming to represent her words through mine. Secondly I reflect on our conversations and interactions, thereby aiming to show my own interpretation along the way.

leaving Azerbaijan, for she used to love the country. But when her husband died there was no other option: there was no possibility to sustain herself and her family in Azerbaijan. After great efforts to arrange the necessary (false) documents, Maria and her children fled by car from Azerbaijan to the Netherlands.

Most of our interviews are lively. We laugh at times, and sometimes cry. But talking with Maria about her journey is difficult. When she becomes emotional her way of talking changes. She loses her voice and is unable to find her words. Although she explicitly tells me she does not want to talk of her journey to the Netherlands, it is in our conversations as the elephant in the room; unspoken of- but present all the more.

Upon leaving the car when she had just arrived, she was warned not to speak of anything bad regarding Azerbaijan because ‘people would know’. Since she had no family or relatives and no knowledge of the system, she had no support. So, ignorant of any rules or rights, she explained her story, fearfully keeping some information back. Maria and her children were taken to a refugee asylum where their life in the Netherlands began. During the 13 days that they were at the asylum she had time to rest and gain strength, and she was questioned, accompanied by a translator³⁶. The interview was shaky, as for her at that time everything was shaky. Her asylum request was rejected and after 13 days they had to leave the asylum. Maria tells me, that is when the worst part of her life began.

Maria ended up in a big city and spent 25 days living in the park. Looking for a solution, a place to sleep, money and food she roamed the city and found food at a daily market. At night she and her children returned to the park. She still recalls the extreme hopelessness she felt and has felt ever since. She was unable to return to Azerbaijan but could not see any solution either. She tells me the desperation she feels, as an all-encompassing seemingly endless black hole of insecurity. Maria highlights again and again how she felt their fate rested on her own shoulders. She never meant to burden anyone with her problems and constantly tried to figure out a way to survive on her own. But she could not see how to change her situation. She needed help.

During this first period that she spent on the streets she tried to approach various people for help. The first person to help her was a shop-owner near the park. When she entered his shop he told them to return after dark. That night the man took them in, gave them food and let them stay for the night. Maria tells me about the gratitude she feels for this man and how she still wants to thank him today. Many people had ignored and shunned her before and while this man only sheltered them for one night it gave her a spark of hope. Then after 25 days Maria finds another man willing to help her. This man offered them his attic to sleep in and a thermos with tea, some bread and jam a day. In return, Maria had to take care of him and the house³⁷. Constantly making up excuses to her children why she slept downstairs while they slept upstairs, she tried to think of solutions. But she felt stuck. This is why she thinks being illegal in the Netherlands is even harder

36. It is unclear from the interviews who performs these interviews but depending on the context I suspect this is done by the IND (Immigratie en Naturalisatie Dienst) and/or the COA (Centraal Orgaan Asiel).

37. Maria does not tell me what ‘taking care of him’ means. Although I believe I understand what she tries to imply here, I purposely leave this part vague (as she did) in order to enable the reader to make up their own mind.

for women; there is no choice. You lose your pride, your rights, your humanity.³⁸

Thinking about this place evokes tears in her eyes and the conversation often falls silent. She feels sick when she thinks of this period in her life and says she does not want to talk about it, that it is too hard. She experienced the first two years in the Netherlands as very lonely and isolated. The desperation of not having anyone to trust or ask for advice taints this period of her life in the Netherlands. Maria describes how the inability to change her situation made the feeling of dependency unbearable; she had no control over her life and was left to the mercy of others. Although, in Azerbaijan, she had depended on her husband for years, the first few years in the Netherlands were different. She had no idea where to find any information because she did not speak the language or understand how the system worked, nor did she have any knowledge of the services she may be entitled to. Establishing a social network was therefore crucial for her. But having to start from scratch, her first worries are finding a house and earning money.

Eventually, this man is the first in a chain of people sheltering Maria in the Netherlands. Although far from ideal, this situation enabled her to organize her survival from then on. He tells her about a community house nearby that she could visit since they might be able to help her. From her first contact with the community centre she slowly gained information about life in the Netherlands, using the fragments of English and Turkish that she spoke. They informed her about the legal rights that she did have, and helped her find schooling for her children. As children of an Armenian Anna and Louisa had never been able to go to school safely, so Maria had home-schooled them in Azerbaijan. But in the Netherlands, even undocumented children are obliged to attend school.

With the help of the community centre Maria is able to enrol her children in school within a few months. Elias attends a primary school, and Anna and Louisa have intensive language classes for 2 years before attending a vocational high school. Being able to attend school for the first time in their lives exhilarated them. Anna, Louisa and Elias would wake up at 5 o'clock every morning, and in the afternoon they would refuse to come home. Going to school meant that their journey to the Netherlands had given them a prospect; they had something to look forward to every day. Even though life was, and still is, challenging, being able to go to school brought some light and enjoyment into their lives.

Another important improvement came through Maria's contact with people from the local church community. At first Maria always visited the church at quiet times. If she avoided the mass she could enjoy the silence and security the church provided and pray by herself. But after some time she got to know some people, which unlocked a chain of events. She found various people to help her apply for asylum, aiding her with mental support as well as legal advice. In addition, the social network that she created through this community provided her with financial support through a variety of arrangements. She found some steady jobs in cleaning and was hired several times to do the catering for parties. In addition, a special trust was established through which people supported her for extra financial costs.

38. Initially Maria was helped by various men. While only implicitly referred to in her story, the fact that she is a woman seems to influence the relationships she has. Secondly, Maria is responsible for her children and therefore needs to consider her own as well as the safety of her children. It would prove interesting to discover how this influenced her position vis-à-vis other people. Although it would be interesting to elaborate on the role of gender in homelessness and illegality, my focus for this research is different and I therefore leave this open for a possible future research.

Besides supplying her with a reasonably steady income, these jobs gave her the opportunity to earn some money in a safe environment. She would simply enter people's homes and lock the door behind her, which enabled her to create a safe environment for herself within other people's homes and allowed her some form of mobility albeit within the private sphere. Furthermore, she would gain some fulfilment from the catering jobs she did. She always made traditional food from Azerbaijan, ranging from complicated savoury dishes to cakes and cookies. Maria was proud to be able to show something of herself and her culture to the people around her, it gave her the feeling she had something to offer, something that was really hers. So although she relied on other people to help her access the places and networks she moved and made money in, they also provided her with safety, (financial stability) and fulfilment. The friendships that grew from this social network are still profoundly important to Maria. Thus, even though it took time, the engaged community that she met at this church offered her a broad social network, which supported her in various ways over the years.

Understanding the language was crucial in developing her social network. After 13 years in The Netherlands Maria has difficulties speaking Dutch. Although she is strikingly able to maintain herself, the fact that her daughters were learning Dutch in school was nevertheless important. Her daughter Louisa is her right hand and always accompanies Maria at important appointments. Besides being able to translate this gives Maria a certain feeling of comfort.

For over 12 years Maria and her children move all over the city, living in sub-rented apartments and with acquaintances. Her work provides a safe and somewhat steady income. The children attend school, and Anna and Louisa graduate. All the while, Maria and her children fight for a residence permit. Working on country reports nourishes their hope. If they could prove they cannot return this might change their future. But hope proves a difficult thing when in a position of dependency with very few possibilities for success. When living in illegality there is no set date to look forward to, no prospect of change. Her situation remains the same, no matter what they do. For some time Maria seeks to shut herself off even further. The telephone and computer, media that may be used to connect to people in other circumstances, remind them of the constant daunting possibility of having their asylum rejected, sub-rent contracts terminated or another (financial) setbacks; all bad news travels digitally. They are so used to bad news that even the comforting words of others become unbearable. In effect, they stopped going to church after some years because they could no longer deal with the comments. Being reminded of their status and of the insolvability of the problems was just too much for them. In addition Maria tells me how so many places are full of her tears. They remind her of the worries she dealt with so that she can no longer there. Whole parts of the city are off-limits as they remind her of her unhappiness. Whenever it seemed to become less hopeless, she would encounter new obstacles. Real progress proved slow.

As I have experienced over the years and noticed still more so during our conversations, Maria has a way of drawing someone in with her eyes. As she talks about her friendships, she smiles exuberantly, as she does when she talks about worry-free things in her life, like playing with her grandchild. Her eyes light up and she is able to talk freely, easily. You can see the weight of her life disappear for a moment. But it seems that her ability to converse in Dutch is highly influenced by her mental state. Whenever we talk about difficult things the emotions seem to surface through her body. She seems to live her status in such a way that it shapes her body and determines her physical appearance. Her undocumented life in the Neth-

erlands has had an immense impact on her body language and her ability to function mentally as well as physically. This embodiment of her status is also apparent when we talk about her fears and her health.

According to Maria, people from the third world have a different view on life. Often having lived in fear these feelings are not easily left behind. She cannot remember being anything else than fearful. In her first few years Maria found a GP and a lawyer willing to help. But she was often unable to visit them. She did not want to walk because she was uncomfortable outside, and public transport cost money. Moving in public space meant exposure and Maria was constantly afraid of being discovered. Fortunately she lives in a big city and was able to use the public space rather anonymously. But nonetheless she could not calm her fears. She was afraid of the police and of being recognised. Over the years Maria had some experience with ethnically tinted bullying so even in the Netherlands she is unable to calm her fear of Azeri people. Therefore she tried to avoid going out as much as she could, and she avoided (public and private) places where many Azeri people came. But it is not only fear that stalks her daily. Everywhere around them they see people living carefree lives. In summer others go outside to enjoy the sun from a street-side terrace. But Maria and her children spend their summers being sad, masking their inability to take leave or enjoy life, while their friends go abroad for their holidays. She sees the summers as especially hard because inequality becomes so visible: she sees others and yet they do not seem to see her.

Hence, although the people she meets were willing to help her, her situation nevertheless felt imprisoning. Maria experienced life in illegality as hard. Nightmares filled the night and in the morning the daily fears returned. This constant state of vigilance denied her mental peace and quiet; you must always be alert. Furthermore, the constant fear of exposure determined her daily movements as she tried to remain invisible. This constant presence of fear has manifested itself in her body. Her whole body still locks with stress, incapacitating her day and night. Her left arm hurts chronically and she has digestive problems. In addition Maria tells me she is often struck by migraines. At times she started her day feeling fine. But then the headache would hit. She would be unable to see anything and Louisa would need to collect her from wherever she was. Doctors are unable to find anything and none of the medical treatments have helped. She knows why medicine will not help. Her problems have a psychosomatic cause, but she is able to neither change her situation nor her physical problems.

During many of our conversations, Maria highlighted the importance of family for her. She grew up without any family and her children are, as she says, all she has. Because of her children she gets up in the morning and works; they motivate her to proceed and stay positive, and provide her with a feeling of belonging. Her children are her first network of care, they are both physically and emotionally closest to her. They rely on each other as she takes care of them and they take care of her. Her children are also her closest social network because they enable her to get things done. And although they are growing up and increasingly capable of taking care of themselves, their bond still seems very strong.

Although she desperately longs to be independent, Maria needs people in order to survive. Her contacts provide her with some (financial) security and in addition enable her to move. But besides this rather functional aspect, her social network is also important for advice, support and consolation. Although they do not represent her closest ties, they do provide some meaning, support and care, and in this way, they are like a second family

for her. She had- and still has people around her that are understanding and helpful. They had kind words for her during her struggles. She is happy with these people and worries sometimes that she might lose them when she is offered a house in a different city.

During one of our final conversations she confided to me that she is tired of fighting. If they had gotten a permit earlier, they would still have had the energy to work, study and contribute. Once she would always plan great things for herself in the future, like owning a small bakery or a catering business. She used to talk about her dreams and plan them through. But the protracted illegality has exhausted her; she feels as if all her energy is wasted. This is clearly visible in her physique, her expression and her way of talking. Asking Maria to tell me her story has noticeably been rough. She cancelled our meetings often. And during our conversations she was sometimes wary and drifted off. When we discussed difficult times in the Netherlands she noticeably shrank, as if the burden of her memories weighed her down. Contrarily, when we talk about Azerbaijan, she would vividly tell me how life was back then: what things would look, smell and feel like. She would be able to express in such detail what she used to experience. It seemed as if she was reliving these times in some way and she would seemingly become a different person. As such she seems to embody her ambiguous position, as if she is living both in the past and in the present. The future, however, seems to be out of her reach.

Although Maria received a permit eight months ago, her future is still insecure. Although she has gained some sort of visibility (she ‘counts’ and is formally recognised) her situation continues; practically not much has changed. They still do not have a house or a sufficient income. In effect her physical state has not changed much either; she still has regular migraine attacks and suffers kidney failure. On top of that, a new situation complicated their lives. Her daughter Anna was excluded from the general amnesty the rest of the family received in 2014. Anna lives with her boyfriend and is considered a ‘different household’. As such, these new circumstances create a situation of internal division. It internalizes their experience of inequality as it creates a division between Anna and the rest of the family. In addition, although her permit does provide access to a formal care network, which she expects will enhance her living conditions, eventually this will not change her position of dependency. Whereas before she depended on her own social network, she will now increasingly rely on the social provisions of the state. She still has not gained the independence that she longed for all these years. One thing, however, has changed significantly during the course of this research. Maria speaks more hopefully of the future. She smiles when we talk about how she wants to decorate her house (‘no garden because someone might try to break in, she prefers a top floor apartment’). Gaining legal status has given her some prospect on the future.

4.4 Majid

An acquaintance hears of my research and tells me ‘he might know someone who could help me’. I call Majid to make an appointment and we decide to meet at one of the city’s shelters, where he helps out. He is a welcoming host as he introduces me to everyone, while he explains his responsibilities. People cheerfully greet him and he jokingly replies; he is clearly at home at the shelter. Although (as my acquaintance had already explained) he is an eccentric person, Majid breathes an air of calmness, making me feel instantly at ease. Over the next few weeks I meet with Majid regularly as he invites me come along to many of his weekly activities. This is his story.

Already in Algeria Majid was rather wilfully seeking his own path. He did not finish

his secondary education. He did not care about anything they tried to teach him in school. As he recalls, he was more interested in the world around him. The city drew him in and he used to roam the city during school hours and visit different places, like the hospital or the cemetery. He liked to study everyday life, the world that he lived in, and social inequality instead. Unfortunately, due to a technical error, he was unable to re-enrol the next year. So instead his father wanted him to apply for military school and later on medical school, but Majid also quit both of these studies as he felt they did not fit him. Instead, he worked to earn some money and went travelling.

Already on his first holiday to Spain he decided to plan his definite departure to Europe. This first journey and the freedom it gave him enabled him to live without any responsibilities, neither social nor material. As he recounts:

“... zij denken dat ik ga alleen op vakantie zoals de eerste keer en ik kom terug maar ze weten niet dat ik ga nooit meer terug, dat was mijn gedachte. En dat is de reden dat ik ben hier in Europa, de enige reden, want de reden uit Algerije is alleen eigenlijk om vrij te zijn, niet om materiaal, wherever wat mensen.. dat is mijn echte reden, om vrij te zijn, vrij te zijn om echt mijzelf te zijn. (...) Papieren en paspoort was helemaal niet in mijn hoofd, ik was alleen echt vrij”³⁹.

Majid explains that the most important reason for leaving Algeria was to be free. He wanted to live freely, to determine his own life and not feel any social or material restrictions. He did not want to be responsible, be accountable or depend on anyone else. So Majid planned a trip to France. In those days, you did not need a visa, and because of the old colonial linkages he could pre-plan his journey to- and in France from Algeria. Only his mother and sister knew of his plans to leave, but no one knew he also intended to stay.

When he initially arrived in the Netherland, he did not apply for a permit or look for a job. He found the freedom he longed for whilst living on the street. Alcohol and marijuana became an important part of his life, and soon:

“...ik word verslaafd, onbewust zeg maar, ik voelde niet ik was verslaafd ik voelde alleen ik moet drinken, moet ik blowen, en dat is ja... Je weet door alcohol het kost veel geld. Waar is het geld, natuurlijk je moet dingen doen”⁴⁰.

Although conscious of the fact that he needed money to sustain himself, instead of fol-

39. “They think I only went on a holiday like the first time and I will return but they don’t know I will never return, that [that] was my thought. And that is the reason I am here in Europe, the only reason, because the the reason to [leave] Algeria is actually only to be free, not for material, wherever, what people... That is my real reason, to be free, free to really be myself. (...) Papers and passports was not in my mind at all, I was just really free”.

40. “I became addicted, unconsciously so to say. I didn’t feel I was addicted I only felt I must drink, I must smoke [marijuana] and that is, yeah... You know because of alcohol costs a lot of money. Where is the money, of course you must do things”.

lowing ‘the ordinary path’ he found alternative ways to sustain himself. At first:

“...je gaat stelen of bedelen en heb ik gedaan. Heb ik gedaan omdat ik dacht dat is mijn enige manier om aan geld te komen. (...) Stelen, heb ik gedaan, maar hou ik niet van, maar heb ik gedaan”⁴¹.

Stealing enabled him to pay for the few costs that he had, but he does not like stealing for a living. After a few years a new opportunity arose when he sees people playing music for money on the streets. At this time, a special skill that he learned in Algeria appeared highly beneficial.

“... ik zie mensen op straat spelen muziek en ik zie de mensen geven geld. Toevallig heb ik geleerd blokfluit spelen in Algerije en ja. (...) Heb ik blokfluit gekocht en meteen heb ik niet meer gestolen. En ik speelde jaren blokfluit op straat voor het dagelijkse brood. Zo verdiende ik geld. Soms duurt het, je krijgt niet meteen geld. Maar ik verdiende altijd. Dan wachtte ik even, een andere deur opent. Als jij wacht dan komt er altijd iets”⁴².

Although he did not need much because he is homeless at the time, he did need money to buy some food, alcohol and marijuana. His ability to play music gave him the opportunity to sustain himself; in a preferable way he was now able to live without having to account to anyone.

An important turning point arose when Majid was admitted to the hospital for alcohol poisoning. He spent 10 days in the hospital and when he was able to leave the doctors advised him to quit drinking instantly.

“Toen de dokter dat zei voor mij was echt een schok, niet meer alcohol, en ik ja, ik dacht dat de alcohol is mijn leven, door de alcohol ik dans en ik praat en.. Hoe ga ik doen. Maar uiteindelijk heb ik gekozen om niet meer te drinken, en waarom, ja, door het leiden. Door de alcohol ik heb leiden, pijn, en toevallig ik was ook die nachten op de alcohol afdeling dus heb ik gezien wat alcohol doet met mensen. En wat is de reden, ja ik zeg ik wil niet dood, ik wil niet dezelfde pijn en ik wil niet meer hier terug hier dus ik moet gewoon met alcohol stoppen. Dus ja, ik ga naar buiten van ziekenhuis en ik heb gezegd ik ga stoppen met alcohol maar ik heb niet alleen gezegd ik ga stoppen met alcohol. Ik heb

41. “You start stealing or begging and I did. I did this because I thought that this is my only way to get money. (...) Stealing, I did it, but I don’t like it, but I did it”.

42. “I see people playing in the street and I see people give money. By chance I learned to play the flute in Algeria and yes (...) I bought a flute and immediately I stopped stealing. And I played the flute for years in the streets for the daily bread. This is how I made money. Sometimes it takes [time], you don’t always get money immediately. But I always made money. Then I would wait, and another door opens. If you wait something always comes”.

*een heel plan in mijn hoofd. [Stoppen met] alcohol, met ruzie, met vechten, ook de collega's, met vrienden met alcohol, met leugens met brutaliteit. Met al deze dingen heb ik allemaal gestopt, ik zeg niet alleen met alcohol maar met alle dingen. Met alles*⁴³.

As Majid explains, his 10-day hospital admittance changed more than just his alcohol and drug use. Having to quit drinking inspired him to quit all bad influences. Majid broke with his old friends and confined himself to a solitary life. He only returned to the city to earn some money with his music. Where once he would spend his money on alcohol and drugs, he now used it to buy a tent, which he put up in the park, and buys supplies for writing and painting. These were the first material things that Majid really valued because they enabled him to express what he experienced and learned.

During this first period Majid is alone most of the time. He prefers to be alone. He tells me how he experienced that:

*"...ik had onzichtbare mensen met mij, diep in mijn geest. Ik ga met de natuur. (...) En voor mij was paradijs. (...) Maar door de eenzaamheid, of alleen zijn, is niet meer de eenzaamheid. Is een hele mooi moment om terug te komen, te corrigeren jezelf, kijken naar jezelf, wat was er goed. (...) En op die manier ga ik elke dag diep met mijzelf en ga ik denken, ik moet veel geschreven, alles van diep in mijn hoofd en heb ik veel geschilderd, ja. Alles wat ik doe en alles wat ik krijg in mijn hoofd ik ga denken en alles wat ik heb meegemaakt ik ga ongeveer schilderijen maken. En ik teken alleen mijn eigen leven, niet andere dingen"*⁴⁴.

Silence intrigues him and his quest for the meaning of silence materializes in his paintings. This spiritual journey enables Majid to give new meaning to his life. It is at this time that the church first comes into his life.

"Was ik altijd verliefd op de kerk, maar zonder mensen. De kerk leeg, die was ik echt verslaafd. En ik ga naar binnen, alleen en voel ik echt andere wereld. En dan ik ga diep in meditatie, stilte. En ik ga, ja.. En elke keer komt weer inspiratie. En

43. "When the doctor said [it] for me it was really a shock, no alcohol anymore, and I yes, I thought alcohol is my life, because of the alcohol I dance and I talk and... How should I do [it]. But eventually I have chosen to stop drinking, and why, yes, because of the suffering. Because of the alcohol I suffered, pain, and actually I was also those nights on the alcohol ward so I have seen what alcohol can do to people. And what is the reason, yes I say I don't want to die, I don't want the same pain and I don't want to come back here so I must just stop drinking alcohol. I have a whole plan in my mind. [To stop with] alcohol, with fits, with fights, also the colleagues, with friends with alcohol, with lies, with cheekiness. With all these things I have stopped, I say not only with alcohol, but with all these things. With everything".

44. "... I had invisible people with me, deep in my mind. I went with nature (...). And for me, this was paradise. (...) But because of the loneliness, or the being alone, is not loneliness. Is a really nice moment to come back, to correct yourself, to look at yourself, what was good. (...) And this way I went deep into myself and I started thinking and all that I had endured and started making paintings. And I draw only my own life, not other things".

daarna heb ik zelf onderzoek gemaakt naar de stilte. Wat is de stilte, wat is binnen deze stilte, wat is binnen. Wat is de bron van deze stilte eigenlijk, en wat is de kerk, verschillende stiltes, van de kerk, van de bar, van het ziekenhuis, de begraafplaats. Alleen om echt in de stilte, om te weten wat is de stilte”⁴⁵.

Over the years Majid participated in many activities organized by the church. He participated in the church choir and the philosophy group, and he was part of various social projects initiated by the local protestant church. As a ‘*Daklozen Ambassadeur*’⁴⁶ (ambassador for the homeless) he regularly met with the municipality. His role in this project was to inform administrators concerning homelessness, to signal problems for the municipality and to function as a guide for other homeless people. During one of our interviews he explained to me how they would meet with the city council and give the advice:

“...over de straat, en dit en dat. We vertelden over hoe op straat, wat was er aan de hand, wat speelde. We gaven advies. Ook deden we uitwisselingen met andere steden, met de ambassadeurs. Andere gemeente en steden, zij kwamen hier en wij gingen daar, dan praatten we. Maar wat, uiteindelijk, als je kijkt, wat ging er anders. Niet veel werd anders, veel bleef. Het bleef een beetje hetzelfde”⁴⁷.

‘*Straatvogels*’⁴⁸ was a similar project in which the protestant church asked various homeless people to twitter about their experiences. In addition, Majid was among the first to start selling the city’s street newspaper. Through his personal network he had gathered 10 people to sell the paper. But after a year Majid quit. He did not like to sell bad news and was uncomfortable representing other people’s views.

During all of these projects Majid used his expertise of life on the street to help others with similar experiences. In a way, Majid had already been a public figure for quite some time. He used to spend his days playing music and talking to people. As he recalls about his early days in the Netherlands:

“Ik stond bij de supermarkt en dan praatte ik ook met mensen. Ik heb veel gezien en en de mensen praatte graag met mij. Zo, ja, zo heb ik veel mensen ontmoet, heb ik kinderen op zien groeien.

45. “Was I always in love with the church, but without people. The church empty, to that I was really addicted. And I went inside, alone and I really feel another world. And then I go deep into meditation, silence. And I go, yes. And every time inspiration comes again. And after that I have made a research about the silence. What is silence actually, and what is the church, different kinds of silence, of the church, of the bar, of the hospital, of the cemetery. Only to really [go] into the silence, to know what is silence”.

46. <http://www.mdhg.nl/publicaties/daklozenkaart.pdf>

47. “...about the street, and this and that. We told [explained] about how in the streets, what was going on, what was happening. We gave advice. Also we did exchanges with other cities, with the ambassadors. Other municipalities and cities, they came here and we went there, and then we talked. But what, eventually, if you look, what went differently. Not much changed, much stayed [the same]. It stayed the same a bit”.

48. <http://www.straatvogels.nl>

*Van de mensen om mij heen zeg ik veel. Soms ken ik mensen en dan weet ik dat ik ken hun ouders nog van vroeger. Mensen praten graag met mij*⁴⁹.

Majid already lived a considerably public life, but by using his position he was able to bridge a gap between various marginalised subgroups in society and corresponding institutions like the municipality and the church. Interacting on various levels in the public domain, this new public role extended beyond just sociability; he wanted to pass on the lessons he learned to others. In a way, this corresponds to a firmly grounded belief that:

*“... mensen gaan ontwikkelen. De mens heeft niet nodig docenten en scholen, die en dat.. Wij zijn zelf, wij gaan vanzelf ontwikkelen onszelf en ontdekken onszelf, wie wij zijn, waarom wij zijn hier, waarom wij leven, waarom wij gaan dood”*⁵⁰.

Whereas his former public role was mostly impersonal and concerned talking to people when he was earning his money, his new role concerned a deeper devotion to personal development, based on a belief that his own spiritual lessons had provided him with the opportunity to help and inspire others.

Majid gave up playing music and now helps out at one of the shelters he formerly used to visit. It is at one of these shelters that I first meet Majid. After two decades this shelter is where Majid seems most at home, it is where he feels he can fulfil his role best. As I watch him work it is as if he *is* his role. What he tells me is what I see happening here. He embodies what he aims to be: a guide to his fellows. His kindness and authority seem to fill the room as he greets everyone that comes, leaves, eats and rests. Many people come up to him for a chat, to ask him something, or because they require his help.

Being able to pass on this knowledge greatly satisfies Majid; it gives him a sense of pride. He sees the knowledge that he gained as a chain in which he is the crucial link. As he tells me:

“Ik ben erg trots dat ik mensen kan helpen, dat maakt mij heel trots en blij. Ik haal daar heel veel voldoening en geluk uit. Ik heb ook een vriend van mij geholpen, hij kwam uit Duitsland, zijn familie had hem opgegeven, hij was verslaafd. Ik heb hem geholpen, stapje voor stapje. Hij liet ook zijn haar weer groeien. En we hebben een film gemaakt van hem, van zijn leven. En die naar zijn ouders opgestuurd. Ze geloofden niet dat het hem was. Ze zijn uiteindelijk naar Nederland gekomen, meerdere keren zelfs. Toen hebben we allemaal leuke dingen gedaan, mensen die

49. “I stood by the supermarket and then I would also talk to people. I have seen many things and people liked to talk to me. So, yes, this way I met many people, I have seen kids grow up. From the people around me I saw a lot. Sometimes I know people and then I know that I know their parents from before. People like to talk to me”.

50. “People will develop. The man doesn’t need teachers and schools, this and that. We are able to, we will develop ourselves naturally and discover ourselves naturally, who we are, why we are here, why we live, why we die”.

we kennen hielpen ons, dan mochten we ergens langskomen of ergens gaan [uit]eten. Het zijn lieve mensen. Ik ben echt trots dat ik hem heb kunnen helpen, hij is ook op het rechte pad nu. Hij is een van mijn beste vrienden”⁵¹.

Majid fundamentally believes that (this) life is only meaningful when able to help others. After 32 years in the Netherlands he still does not value any material things or wish for legal status. He has organized his life in such a way that he can live without needing the necessities of ordinary life like a house or a job. He organized his survival differently.

Before Majid lived on the streets. This is where he felt at home, and it enabled him to live a life of little material possessions. This specific lifestyle choice was therefore functional. But the streets nevertheless became his home; this is where he felt he belonged. But Majid currently gave up his homeless existence and now lives with a friend. He spends his days between working at the various shelters and assisting with various happenings organized by the church. For all of these activities he receives a small allowance, which allows him to buy some food. These alternative arrangements enable him to fill his days with activities that he is devoted to and loves doing. At the same time they enable him to (physically) survive as it provides him with a network of care. In effect, Majid is not interested in a permit of residency or any social security provided by the Dutch government. He does not aim for any form security, neither provided by a government nor by anyone else because he does not experience life as insecure. His spirituality and his devotion to God are important in this respect. As he explains to me:

“Ik snap dat er zijn papieren, voor staten de papieren zijn er. Ze zijn handig, voor registratie en bijstand, dat ik snap. Maar voor het hiernamaals, dat werkt niet. Wat ga je doen voor de poorten [van de hemel]? Voor mij, in mijn leven, papieren hebben geen nut, geen waarde. (...) het heeft geen hogere functie. Het heeft geen hoger doel, papieren betekent niet dat je bent een goed mens. (...) Mijn leven is goed, ik zie geen verschil tussen jou en mij, tussen mij en jou als jij hebt een groot huis. Ik slaap lekker 's nachts, jij slaap lekker. We zijn hetzelfde, zo zie ik het, want ook zonder papieren ik leef hoe ik wil. (...) Ik begrijp, je hebt die mensen (...) die zegt, oh man je moet verblijfsvergunning (...) je wordt oud en zo, je moet verzekering, je hebt geen dit, geen dat, je moet. Die begrijp ik, maar de probleem is die mensen begrijpen niet,

51. “I am really proud that I can help people, that makes me proud and happy. I get a lot of satisfaction and happiness from it. I also helped a friend of mine, he came from Germany, his family had given him up, he was addicted. I have helped him, step by step. He also allowed his hair to grow again. And we made a film of him, of his life. And we sent it to his parents. They didn't believe it was him. Eventually they came to the Netherlands, multiple times actually. Then we did all these nice things, people we knew helped us, we could come by somewhere or go (out) for dinner. They are nice people. I am really proud that I could help him. He is one of my best friends”.

*mijn leven heb ik al vertrouwd aan God, in de handen van God, dat is immers zo*⁵².

He led a life of little possessions as he cherished his freedom as most valuable. And it seems as if his devotion to God and his believe in the afterlife enable him to already, partly, inhabit the future. Majid does not value materiality nor does he need the state or other people to feel secure. Majid clearly indicates that he does not experience insecurity nor inequality. He explains by saying that,

*“...de woorden integratie en immigratie, voor mij zijn nieuwe woorden die de mensen hebben gemaakt. (...) Daarom nu heb ik nooit over de papieren, deze was niet in mijn hoofd. Want ik was zelf tegen papier, paspoorten, identiteit. Want ik was echt diep in de geestelijke leven, dat was voor mij echt identiteit, maar de paspoort en die en dat. (...) En mensen zeggen ‘oh jij bent heel goed geïntegreerd’, met mijn leven, oh je bent heel goed geïntegreerd. Ik ben altijd zo geweest. En dat begrijp ik niet met de politiek, wat zij bedoelen. Ik begrijp wat zij bedoelen, als zij zeggen jij bent heel goed geïntegreerd, maar dat vind ik een beetje zoals jij zegt eerst jij bent niks, en nu opeens jij bent eh...”*⁵³.

It seems that his spiritual development has even contributed to this lack of value for materiality. As he confines to me during our last conversation:

“Ik kijk echt nooit aan materiaal, wie de mensen zijn, wie hun verleden, hun geschiedenis, alleen aan de hart van de persoon. Dat interesseert mij alleen maar de rest interesseert mij echt niet. Weet ik veel wat, waar hij komt vandaan. (...) Ik kijk daar nooit naar. Ik kijk gewoon naar de mensheid in het algemeen, maar de rest, je hebt huis of vliegtuig of boot of villa. (...) Maar naast

52. “I understand that there are papers, for states the papers are there. They are useful, for registration and welfare, that I understand. But for the afterlife, it doesn’t work. What will you do at the gates [of heaven]? For me, in my life, papers do not have any purpose, no value. (...) It doesn’t have a higher function. It doesn’t have a higher purpose, papers don’t mean that you are a good person. (...) My life is good, I don’t see a difference between you and me, between me and you if you have a big house. I sleep well at night, you sleep well. We are the same, that’s how I see it, because also without papers I live the way I want to. (...) I understand, you have these people (...) that say, oh man, you don’t have this, you don’t have that, you must. I understand them, but the problem is, these people don’t understand, my life I have already entrusted to God, in the hands of God, that is already the case”.

53. “... the words integration and immigration, for me are new words that people made. (...) That is why now I never talk about papers, these were never in my mind. Because I myself was against papers, passports, identity. Because I was really deep in the spiritual life, that was for me true identity, but the passports and this and that. (...) And people say ‘oh you are really well integrated’, with my life, oh you are really well integrated. I have always been like this. And this I don’t understand with politics, what they mean. I understand what they mean, when they say you are really well integrated, but I think this is a bit like you say first you are nothing, and now all of a sudden you are...”

*mij ik zie hem helemaal gelijk, ik ga altijd precies naar zijn hart kijken. De rest, materiaal en de buitenkant, die, nooit, nooit*⁵⁴.

It seems that because Majid does not value materiality he is able to live this unrestricted life. Where many people experience illegality as restricting and dehumanising, Majid exemplifies the ability to move around freely in a society that is highly dependent on money. For Majid freedom remains his ultimate goal. Living his life this way enables him to do whatever he wants: he does not need to justify any of his actions. Majid is able to eat, sleep and lead a meaningful life helping other people because for him, freedom is not a piece of paper nor a salary that allows him free time in the weekend. For Majid, freedom and spirituality are inseparably connected. As such, a sense of freedom is his only daily necessity.

Majid's sense of security derives from his spirituality; he clearly explains how he already entrusted his life to God. Therefore, he does not value the future in this life. His understanding of time is rather ambiguous, as he inhabits both the now and the (far) future. His past is in some way important to him as still considers his family at home at times, but they do not play an essential role in his current life. Interestingly however, it seems as if he 'skips' his own future life. When I ask him about his ideas or plans for the future he shrugs and says:

*"... ik denk niet aan morgen, ik denk alleen aan vandaag, dat vandaag ik moet een mooie dag [hebben] met de mensen om mij heen. Moet ik geen pijn aan niemand doen, moet ik verpesten de dag van niemand, moet ik eh.. Moet ik lief [zijn] met de mensen, dat is het belangrijkste van mijn dag"*⁵⁵.

His disinterest in his own earthly future greatly determines his understanding of the present and has shaped his life significantly. As such, his mental state has deeply influenced his (physical) existence. His addictions and the inability of his body to cope with the drugs and alcohol signified a turning point in his life. From then on his spirituality and his devotion to lead a good life and help others has greatly influenced how he sees, experiences and acts in the world. It enables him to strictly live in the present and partly inhabit his own future life simultaneously.

4.5 On Experiences

Zou, Maria and Majid all lived in the Netherlands illegally for a substantial amount of time. From their stories it appears that they were each, in their own way, in search of freedom. If we trace the meaning of freedom etymologically it pertains to 'love' and simi-

54. "I really never look at material, who the people are, who is their past, their history, only to the heart of the person. That only interests me, but the rest really doesn't interest me. Whatever, I don't know where he is from. (...) I never look at that. I just look at humanity in general, but the rest, you have a house or a plane or boat or mansion. (...) But next to him I see him totally equal, I will always look at his heart. The rest, material and the outside, that never, never!"

55. "I don't think about tomorrow, I only think about today, that today I must have a nice day with the people around me. Must I not hurt anyone, must I not spoil anyone's day, must I eh... Must I be nice [to] the people, that is the most important thing of my day".

lar words like *'beloved,' 'help,' 'peace'* and *'affection'*⁵⁶. Only later on in history these meanings evolved into the ability to move, act, speak or think unrestrictedly, in the absence of any form of domination and in the ability to determine one's own life course⁵⁷. Interestingly, although they each see freedom differently, their understanding and experience of freedom does refer to this early etymological meaning of what it means to be free.

For Majid freedom means to live independently and free from the expectations of others, which manifests itself in his livelihood choices. His devotion to personal development – both his own and of others – characterizes his current life. Majid never really valued owning money, possessions or even a life beyond today, and his increased spirituality only enhances this viewpoint. He aims to live in the moment. But even though he wants to live free from all expectations, Majid does feel highly responsible for the welfare of others. Whereas he used to live for alcohol and drugs, spirituality now shapes his life. Being able to share his insights with others gives him pride and a sense of fulfilment. Over the years Majid clearly personified his public role and as such it gives meaning to his life beyond just sociability. His desire to help others through the lessons he has learned enables him to connect with people around him. His spirituality enables him to create a social network that shapes his life both functionally and emotionally; it provides him with the means to survive and gives him a sense of belonging.

For Maria, her future and the future of her children is all that matters. Maria's life is characterised by a constant fear of exposure and a never-ceasing state of dependency. She lived with the hope to someday become legalised as saw a permit of residency as her way out of ignorance and illegality. Maria is highly dependent on her social network as she is only able to survive through the support that they provide her. Her social network enabled her to arrange housing, schooling for her children and a possibility to earn some money. Thus, ambiguously, although these networks supply support, enable her to survive and therefore provide her with some independency, she must nevertheless embrace this dependency simultaneously in order to survive.

Beyond the importance of a social network for her (physical) survival the relationships that she forges provide her with emotional support and friendship. The friendships that she built over time are important to her as they provide her with kind words, meaning and care. Her children, however, remain to be her closest social ties. Caring for them gives meaning to her life and in turn they help her to get around.

Over the years her illegal status has manifested itself in her body. Fear determines her physical and mental health as it surfaces through her body. It seems as if Maria embodied her status at times, as fear controls her internally as well as externally. Because besides regulating her physical state fear also determines her movements. She is uncomfortable outside and avoids public contact whenever she can. This fear of exposure restricts her movement and confines her to the privacy of private spaces.

Although having family in the Netherlands provides him with a certain safety net, Zou aimed to find freedom independently. Freedom and self-reliance are inseparable for Zou. Being self-sufficient through his work and finding a partner to help him apply for a permit were important goals for him, goals he constantly strived for. As both goals were inherently social speaking Dutch was important in order to attain them.

56. <http://etymologynow.blogspot.nl/2011/09/etymology-of-powerful-terms-like-free.html>

57. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/freedom>

Finding a partner that he loves and cares for shaped his search for freedom and ultimately gave meaning to his life. As he was always in search of a woman to help him apply for a permit, Zou lived a very public life. He actively used the public space in his advantage. Although the African or the Senegalese communities provided him with an easily accessible scene, Zou did not want look for a relationship there but instead searched for a partner in the cities nightlife. How he presented himself was crucial because this self-presentation was his way to distinguish himself. But although becoming legal was an important goal for Zou, he only aimed to have a relationship that is based on trust, respect and intimacy. Thus, his search for a permit was ultimately coloured by his longing for contact with people, which he tried to establish through the interactions with people in which a sense of closeness was elementary.

Their stories are rich in their diversity but nevertheless exemplify much resemblance. To begin with: their experiences show the significance of relationships. The following chapter will elaborate further on this importance of relationships for Zou, Maria and Majid. They show how crucial these relationships are as they help them to bridge the seemingly binary divisions of inside/outside, internal/external, active/passive, visible/invisible, possible/impossible and so on. Their stories show that these divisions are not actually a matter of duality but instead may be enacted in uncountable ways. As their positions are characterized by marginality they also exemplify how various events, interactions and especially their relationships enable them to claim some sort of space for themselves. They clearly exemplify the ambiguity of living in the Netherlands illegally.

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss how [relationships contribute to the lives of undocumented migrants in the Netherlands](#). The stories in chapter 4 indicate the importance of social relations for undocumented migrants in The Netherlands. The Linkage Act indicates an increasing influence of the state in social life and this heightened surveillance of the state restricts the movement of undocumented migrants. Municipal registration strictly regulates the access to formal services or social benefits (Van der Leun 2006). As they are denied access to formal organizations and services undocumented migrants need alternative support to organize their livelihood.

This chapter will show how the importance of a social network lies in its ability to function as an alternative to the state-organized social security system. Where formal organizations and institutional arrangements regulate the access to employment, education, healthcare and housing, it seems that similar informal, semi-formal or even formal arrangements may also supply access to some of these basic necessities. Interestingly a crucial difference concerning the *types* of relationships seems to appear. Where the formal system is characterized by *impersonal* social contact (Jamieson 2005), contrarily, these social networks can only exist through *personal* relationships. Whether they are based on friendship or initiated through more functional or formal roles these networks are built on face-to-face contact and intimacy. These relationships *affect* them and their lives more fundamentally (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). As they go beyond just functionality by allowing for intimacy they stimulate socio-cultural learning and enable a deeper sense of belonging. However, these personal networks are not so easily accessed. Strategically making use of the social space Zou, Maria and Majid illustrate how finding and maintaining these relationships demands a certain assertiveness and creativity.

What becomes clear when evaluating the importance of these relationships and networks is that they are of (functional) necessity for Zou, Maria and Majid as these relationships help them to organise their lives and livelihoods. Their personal networks help them to make ends meet as they provide information and connections. Additionally, they stimulate interaction and engagement, thereby enabling participation and a feeling of collectivity, as they bridge a divide between public and private life. As such, these interactions may allow for a sense of social belonging to emerge.

5.2 On Access

The stories of Zou, Majid and Maria indicate that they rely on their personal relations in order to organize their livelihood. These networks provide access to appropriate housing and healthcare, supply financial arrangements and/or jobs, and organize education and language classes. As Martin rightly explains:

“Als je illegaal bent moet je hier op een gegeven moment een voedingsbodem vinden zodat je je, zonder dat je er mentaal aan onderdoor gaat, je kunt staande houden. En dat kan op tientallen manieren, maar er is in ieder geval geld voor nodig, en een baantje, je moet iets zien te verzinnen als je ziek wordt, etc. Kortom je moet je weg kunnen vinden. En het leuke is, dat kan in Nederland. Je kan in Nederland ontzettend veel, er zijn ontzettend veel

kanalen waardoor je toch kunt leven, terwijl dat bureaucratisch gezien niet kan. Als je ziek bent dan wordt je opgenomen in het ziekenhuis. En als je illegaal bent dan kun je in onderhuur een woning krijgen. En je kunt zwart geld bijverdienen. Dat kan allemaal”⁵⁸.

Interestingly it appears is that these networks are not only comprised of informal contacts. What Martin indicates is that there are a variety of informal, semi-formal and even formal arrangements designed to help undocumented migrants. Concerning healthcare there are various (semi-) governmental organizations that supply (nearly free) services to undocumented migrants⁵⁹. This was illustrated for example by Majids hospitalization and Maria’s GP consultations. Comparably, the allowance that Majid receives for his activities at the religious communities and his work at the shelter show how there are alternative ways of earning money that occupy a ‘grey’ area, balancing between the ‘white’ and ‘black’ labour market. Likewise, Zou exemplifies a tension within the formal system itself by showing that, although registration usually enables or restricts interaction in the public domain, loopholes in the system may implicitly permit participation. When he explains to me how he enrolled for Dutch language classes at the local community house he tells me that:

“... als jij bent op de school kan alleen geven de huis en de adres waar jij woont. En voor dat kan je altijd krijgen de brief van de school. Maar die is via de post en kijkt niet jij bent illegaal of niet. Voor dat je hebt geen contact met de gemeente of met de Die is officieel”⁶⁰.

Because personal contact and formal registration are separated in practice, the community house can implicitly allow undocumented migrants to take part in the activities they provide, which include language classes and various other cultural activities. These examples indicate arrangements that implicitly or explicitly permit participation in the public domain or designate an institutionalised service to support undocumented migrants. They show how formal policies and its implementation on a local level may contradict each other and create an alternative to national policies. As such, these interactions between

58. “ If you are illegal you have to, at one point, find a way to, without suffering too much mentally, find your way. And this is possible in many different ways, but the least you need is money, and a job, you have to find something for when you are ill and so on. In other words, you must be able to find your way. And the fun thing is, this is possible in the Netherlands. A lot is possible in the Netherlands, there are many ways to be able to live, while this is impossible bureaucratically. If you are ill, you are admitted to the hospital. And if you are illegal you can get a house in sub-rent. And you can earn money through the black market. All of this is possible”.

59. <http://www.basisrechten.nl/amsterdam/medische-zorg.html>;
<http://psychotraumanet.org/nl/equator-poli-stad-psychiatrische-hulpverlening-aan-ongedocumenteerde-vreemdelingen-amsterdam>;
<http://www.huisarts-migrant.nl/mensen-die-illegaal-ongedocumenteerd-nederland-zijn/>

60. “... If you are in the school you can just give the house and the address where you live. And for this you can always receive the letter from the school. But this is via the post and they don’t look if you are illegal or not. For this you don’t need contact with the municipality or with the... That is official”.

undocumented migrants and formal or semi-formal arrangements illuminate a tension within the system itself, as they show that access to these services is not exclusively the domain of the state. Through various loopholes in the system and a variety of alternative arrangements undocumented migrants may be able to apply for basic social services or participate in activities they would official be restrained to participate in. Thus, whereas principally the bureaucratic system is designed to exclude these migrants from the public domain, this alternative network of informal, semi-formal and even formal relationships and arrangements enable people to organize their livelihoods and participate in public life. As such, these relationships are highly functional for they fill a (functional) gap created by the absence of the state.

These alternatives are only accessible through knowledge of the system and the possibilities it provides. Zou, Maria and Majid all indicated their ignorance of ‘the system’ upon arrival. They were well aware that, order to find their way in this new country, they needed information. Over time it became clear that the more people they got to know, the more knowledge they gained. Time in this respect proved important, as they had to start from scratch. Maria highlighted many times how she felt lost without any knowledge, and Zou clearly indicates that he needed to get to know ‘the system’ first. For example, Maria learned that her children were able to go to school and that she had legal rights, even as an undocumented migrant. Majid learned about the various social activities that he could partake in, which considerably shaped his life in effect. And Zou discovered how he could get by without having to identify himself in public. Their social relations gave them the opportunity to discover what possibilities they had and which opportunities they could make use of. For each of them, social relations proved to be the crucial factor in providing information, and although their personal situations and expectations vary greatly, their contacts seem to be important steppingstones in organizing the necessities of their sustenance.

5.3 On Intimacy

As stated above, social networks are an essential resource for undocumented migrants. Whilst they provide the necessary information concerning housing options, healthcare services, language classes and job opportunities these relationships also play an important role in stimulating a wider participation in public life. Enabling people to arrange housing and employment already stimulates interaction beyond the most intimate spheres. But through these interactions they also stimulate access to the community and enable people to develop themselves. They provide them with wider knowledge by introducing them to cultural traditions and social behavioural codes. As such, they enable people to gain important knowledge to help them to function in society. Interestingly, these relationships are characterized by personal contact. The following examples indicate the importance of engagement and closeness for these interactions.

Martin has been an important person for Maria’s life in the Netherlands. They met at a religious organization and over the years he used his personal network to help her find various cleaning and catering jobs, medical care (a dentist), appropriate housing and arranged on-going education for her children. But his involvement goes beyond helping them arrange the material necessities of their existence. Their relationship developed into a friendship:

“... omdat zij mensen zijn die ook op een leuke en hartelijke manier kunnen reageren. Nou en dat schept een band. Dat kan een band scheppen, als je daarvoor openstaat, als ik daarvoor opensta. Dan kan er een wederzijds gevoel van emotionele verbinding ontstaan”⁶¹.

Martin tells me that their meetings mostly had a functional character. Although their relationship is not based on reciprocity (Martin mostly supports Maria) a certain bond grew between them and commitment and trust emerged from their continuous contact. He explains how he gradually became involved in their lives, which he exemplifies with a few stories that highlight an increasing emotional connection. Their interaction is an example of a relationship that initially started off functionally, as Martin arranged various basic necessities for Maria, but over time evolved into a deeper and more engaged relationship characterized by trust.

The friendship between Leo and Majid displays a similar functionality with a concordant deepening over time. They met at a local church community and according to Leo, Majid is ‘*een sleutelfiguur*’⁶², as he already visited the church and its activities long before Leo was appointed. His presence and contribution is of great importance for the activities and the atmosphere within the group. As Leo is responsible for the activities he values this contribution dearly. It enables Leo to maintain the openness that this religious organization aims to stand for. Leo tells me that they usually meet for weekly group events, but that they also initiate various trips and even starred in a movie recently. But their relationship does not revolve around this functional aspect only. In addition to his more general contribution to the group Leo also feels connected to Majid on a more personal level, and he experiences his relationship with Majid as a dear friendship. They share their opinions and their discussions are ‘*real*’ discussions. While their relationship takes place within a specific and pre-determined (group) setting, it is nevertheless characterized by a certain intimacy through their mutual sharing. As their contact allowed for openness, respect and inspiration it enabled a deeper connection and over time evolved into an esteemed companionship. Thus, while a certain formality still characterises their interactions, over the years their contact developed into a deeper relationship.

In a similar manner, the relationship between Zou and Annelies also shows how their friendship grew deeper over time. Zou and Annelies met at a local café. She noticed him because of his appearance and he noticed her because she was one of the few Dutch girls dancing. They talked all night and in met up a few times in the following weeks. She remembers that, from their first contact on, she was aware that he was living in the Netherlands illegally; they had talked about it and it appeared from his living conditions as well. Over time they developed a friendship based on their mutual interests. Reflecting on their friendship Annelies tells me that she liked talking to Zou because their conversations were different from those with other friends. They often talked about Africa, where she had travelled and lived previously. This provided a base for mutual understanding

61. “... Because they are people that can also respond in a warm way. Well, and that creates a bond. That can create a bond, if you are open to it, if I am open to it. Then a mutual feeling of emotional attachment can grow”.

62. ‘a key figure’

and interest and it appears that openness and intimacy were important for them both. This openness characterized their relationship from the beginning and instantly created a feeling of closeness. Where they were initially interested in each other romantically, which meant that their contact had always been on a personal level, their relationship evolved from being based on mutual interest to being grounded in intimacy. Concerning the importance of sharing as a base for intimacy in a relationship Annelies stresses “*het is wel eng, en er rust een stigma op, maar als je verder wil, dan kan je er niet omheen mensen te vertellen over je illegale status*”⁶³. Although they are currently living on different continents both Zou and Annelies speak lovingly of each other and still see each other as good friends. Even though they do not see each other often these days, they still feel emotionally close.

In different ways, these relationships are all built on personal contact and closeness. Although closeness can be perceived and experienced differently, each story indicates the importance of sharing, openness and building a genuine connection. The personal nature of their relationship allows for a certain intimacy to grow. Intimacy, in these cases, refers to “*the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality*” (Jamieson 2012: 1). It is important to acknowledge that intimacy does not necessarily refer to romantic love or a ‘deep knowing’ of the other. Instead, intimacy should be seen as a subjective experience of closeness, which could be either bodily or in any other form, and signifies a positive emotional attachment as a result of a process of self-disclosure, honesty and the sharing of ideas and experiences (Giddens 2013; Jamieson 2005; Jamieson 2012). As such, intimacy is “*above all a matter of emotional communication, with others and with the self, in a context of interpersonal equality*” (Giddens 2013: 130).

When analysing these stories I agree with Giddens as he states that: “*intimacy implies a wholesale democratizing of the interpersonal domain, in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere*” (Giddens 2013: 13). The stories of Zou, Maria and Majid illustrate how they are able to organize their livelihoods and concurrently create meaningful relationships. Because where their relationships are crucial in providing access to employment, housing, health and education these interactions also enable a socialisation process. These contacts seem to gradually supply an undocumented migrant with the necessary (cultural and bureaucratic) knowledge and skills. Thus, remarkably, where official integration processes oblige migrants to learn about cultural traditions, social behaviour and the language, these relationships fashion a similar trajectory through personal contact.

As we can see, a crucial difference seems to distinguish the formal arrangements from its informal counterpart. As experienced by Zou “*... de gemeente kent niet jou. Voor hij kent jou je moet BSN nummer en adres*”⁶⁴. As Zou explains, municipal registration is exclusively possible through a social security number (BSN), as a bureaucratic proof of their belonging. But by focusing more profoundly on these personal networks it is clear that they are not comprised of either formal or informal relationships. Instead these networks are a unique composition of various *kinds* of relationships and they represent a mix of interactions that exceed static roles or identities. Because, where formal roles are designed to make people detach, and bureaucratic relationships are designed for indiscriminate interaction, loopholes in the system create space for alternative action. As these relationships

63. “It is scary, and stigmatised, but if you want to move further, then you cannot bypass telling people about your illegal status”.

64. “The municipality doesn’t know you. Before it knows you, you must have a BSN number and address”.

are based on personal contact and closeness they allow for a certain intimacy, and as such these relationships also enable a process of socio-cultural learning. Thus they indicate how their relations enable an important process of socio-cultural development as they provide access to- and stimulate participation in the public domain. They help them gain knowledge of ‘the system’ and enable people to develop themselves, which in turn allows for a deeper social connection to emerge. This social connection signifies an opening up of the public domain and a *smoothing* of the social space (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). For where the state aims to regulate movement and access in the public domain, these relationships enable inter-actions that go beyond the reach of the state. These relationships *affect* both individual lives and collectives as they transform the social space.

5.4 On Self-Presentation and Social Navigation

When we consider how Zou, Maria and Majid organize their lives we can see that, although their movements are inordinately restricted by their social exclusion, they may still be able to influence their situation. Their experiences show how they are able to use their agency to strategically make use of the opportunities that arise. The ways that they present themselves illustrates how they use their own resources and their social contacts strategically.

For Zou, his biggest assets are his charms and his looks. He tells me a few times that he is always aware of his appearance. People like the way he looks and dances, and thus his self-presentation provides him with a window of opportunity. Because women are attracted to him, he can use his (physical) appearance to relate to them. His body thus functions as medium to connect to others. As his situation is coloured by interactions in nightlife Zou finds a way to use his appearance in his advantage.

Majid, contrarily, is not interested in physically presenting himself in a specific way. His biggest asset is his spirituality and the lessons he may provide to others. His main asset is his experience and his (spiritual) state of mind, which he deploys in order to foster and maintain a social network. His self-presentation is thus centred on his ability to help others with similar life problems and he identifies intensively with this role. As such, although he does not actively employ his body in order to connect to others, he does seem to embody his role.

Most ambiguously, Maria’s story exemplifies how her suffering may be her biggest asset. The fear she feels surfaces through her body and determines her ability to connect to others, as it influences her health and disables her to move freely in public. Maria illustrates how, in a situation that seems to be uncertain and hopeless, exactly this hopelessness is what enables her to relate to others. Her life is characterized by dependency and it seems that she can ‘use’⁶⁵ this dependency in order to appropriate a social network. Her relationships are needed in order to provide her with functional support and as such, she must maintain them by employing this aspect.

Zou, Maria and Majid show how they ‘use’ their situations and the resources that they have at their disposal strategically. Zou does so very publicly, as he actively seeks visibility in his search for a relationship. Similarly, Majid also seeks a certain visibility, albeit within the confined spheres of his own public world. Contrarily, Maria seeks to remain

65. I put the word ‘use’ between brackets to indicate that usage in this case refers to both active and passive use.

invisible to the public eye and tries to hide within the safety of her own social domain. How they make use of relationships, spaces and their own bodies exemplifies that they are able to influence their situation in their advantage. As they do not have many resources, their bodily appearance is highly important to this; it regulates their in/visibility and their self-presentation enables them to bridge a gap between their private and public worlds (Goffman 2012).

Living in the Netherlands illegally creates a situation of uncertainty; their current position is unstable and their future prospects insecure. Nevertheless, Zou, Maria and Majid are able to influence their personal circumstances. When taking a closer look at how they are able to foster and maintain relationships in such difficult situations it seems that there is nevertheless an element of agency in all of them. Without downplaying the difficulties of individual lives Vigh illustrates how every situation may present opportunities for agency. Concerning the lives of Guineans, both in Bissau and in Portugal, Henrik Vigh interestingly notes:

“Their everyday lives are set between an immediate struggle to secure themselves the next meal, find the next job and survive the present, and an unceasing attempt to figure out a way of gaining viable life chances, social worth and recognition. Yet both endeavours are related to situations in which emergent networks, contacts and events may provide people with ways out of the difficulties of their present positions, which is why, in the midst of the certain uncertainty and predictable instability, social life is surveyed, assumptions critically assessed and action tactile and tentative” (Vigh 2009: 421, 422).

When comparing their social situation to those of a people at war we can discern some striking comparisons. Looking at the restricted ability to exercise control over their positions, social navigation honors the agency of people in dire situations. As their lives in illegality are characterized by instability and insecurity, Zou, Maria and Majid illustrate such difficult situations. But however hopeless their illegal status may sometimes feel or seem, they are, in fact, navigating themselves through a *moving* social world (Vigh 2009), making the best of the opportunities they see and the possibilities their situations endow. Moving in this respect refers to the social world as an ever-changing social field in which both people and groups are constantly on the move, as well as the social environment itself. Thus, it does not see social interaction as movement *in* a social field but instead as movement within movement; as *“the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled”* (Vigh 2009: 420) Similarly, social navigation does pertain to the navigation *out of* a social space but instead to move *in* a *moving* social space. As such, it allows us to envision interaction with- and within the social environment (Vigh 2009: 420, 426, 433).

What distinguished social navigation from Michael Jacksons comparable notion of *manoeuvring* (Jackson 1998: 26) is that social navigation *“encompasses a denser temporality”* (Vigh 2009: 425) as it comprises both the present and the future. As such, Vigh intriguingly argues that their strategic ‘use’ of- and movement in the social domain beholds *“both the socially immediate and the socially imagined. It designates the complex actions and interpretations that enable one to act in the here and now, gain an idea of possible routes and courses that emerge from the present and direct one’s movement expediently toward possible futures”* (Vigh 2009). Raising the

importance of temporality, Vigh also highlights how social navigation considers multiple times. As he explains: “ *Though it may, at first encounter, seem like a practice related to the immediate, it is in fact equally directed towards both the near and the distant future as the practice of moving along an envisioned, yet frail and tentative, trajectory in an unstable environment*” (Vigh 2009: 424).

5.5 On Relations

In this chapter I discussed the importance of relationships. I have explained how these relationships are constituted along the lines of access and intimacy and forged through a creative employment of their agency, which enables them to navigate the social space. I have explained this by showing that for undocumented migrants their relationships are steppingstones; they constitute a personal network that enables them to find their way in the Netherlands. Considering how undocumented migrants are able to meet their needs is essential when exploring how these relationships comprise a social network and as such provide a different network of care. Due to their inability to register they are excluded from state services that documented migrants have access to (ranging from welfare benefits to social services and the ability to register at formally recognized job agencies). Their social networks substitute this formally organized system. They enable them to organize their (physical) existence and as such are a necessity for their material existence.

An interesting element to these relationships is that while formal roles are designed to make people detach, and bureaucratic relationships are designed for indiscriminate interaction, loopholes in the system create space for alternative action. By focusing more profoundly on these networks it is clear that they are not comprised of either formal or informal relationships. As these networks are a unique composition of various kinds of relationships they represent a complex mix of interactions that exceed static roles or identities. In addition, in order to break this dichotomist thinking it is important to understand that as people fulfil these roles, they will inevitably interact on a human level. Thus, where a formal integration process relies on impersonality through the bureaucratic system, these alternative networks of care are characterized by personal contact and intimacy. Therefore, while the formal system functions through relationships of detachment, the relationships of attachment include and enable them to participate.

Furthermore, their stories exemplify how they are able to strategically use the possibilities at their disposal as they, passively or actively, navigate the social space. Their self-presentation functions as an asset to deploy in order to influence their positions and make the best of their difficult situations. But being able to foster and maintain relationships also shows that, although in many ways their situation is a restricting one, they are still able influence or shape some elements in their lives. I do not aim to claim that using these networks as a resource, and their self-presentation as an important asset, illustrates how they always manipulate their environments actively. I simply aim to touch upon the fact that, although their situations might seem insecure, unstable and at times hopeless, they are still able to creatively make use of their positions and assets, and as such influence their situations. The following chapter(s) will show how, being able to strategically make use of their relationships enables them to *envision* a different future for themselves. As such, they illustrate the importance of considering temporality, as their realities are an ambiguous constellation of different times and places.

6.1 Introduction

In chapter 4 the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid illustrate a longing for freedom. This longing for freedom appears to indicate a desire to be independent, self-reliant and determine the course of their own life. But, when diving deeper into the meaning of freedom, their stories reveal how they are in search of freedom *in relation* to the other. In the following chapter I will elaborate on their longing for freedom and argue that it does not only indicate a desire to be independent but instead should be seen as a desire to be autonomous. Seeing freedom as autonomy highlights the relationality of their struggles.

The following chapter will show that, although their lives are characterized by a relative restriction to public life and goods, their personal relationships function as a steppingstone to arrange their livelihoods and enable a sense of belonging. Building on the experiences of Zou, Maria and Majid I will argue that these relationships have the capacity to provide a sense of collectivity through social recognition. Especially in a situation that lacks state recognition, this form of social recognition stimulates a feeling of being *in place*. The following chapter will exemplify how (unique) configurations of time and place are essential in fostering- or restricting- a sense of belonging. As such I follow Philip Mar (2005) as he sees place as something more than a geographical location. Instead he conceives places as *'a structure comprising spatiality and temporality, subjectivity and objectivity, self and other* (Mar 2005: 396).

In addition, when examining how these relationships are sustained it becomes clear that *personal* contact, physical and emotional closeness, honesty and sharing are crucial. I will show how these networks have the potential to exceed functionality as they supply more than just access to objects and places. Fundamentally built on *personal* interactions and intimacy these relationships enable them to envision themselves as part of something bigger, as part of a collectivity. Thus, looking at how personal relationships contribute to the intangible aspects of their lives shows how these relationships enable undocumented migrants to imagine a future and give *immaterial* meaning to their lives. As such, these relationships do not only contribute functionally, but as well can be seen as a materialization of a sense of belonging.

6.2 On a Sense of Belonging

Zou roams the cities nightlife in order to try to meet women. Although his search is partly functional, as he is looking for a partner to help him get a permit, he longs for companionship and intimacy. As shown before, Zou highlights how he does not like to interact with people in the African scene because he does not feel accepted or respected. As he said:

*"...als ik ben met de Afrikaanse mensen, en zij weten jij bent illegaal, zij geven geen respect. Want eh, ja. (...) Niemand vertrouwt jou, niemand geeft jou respect, niemand wil worden vriend met jou"*⁶⁶.

66. And yeah, when I am with African people and they know you are illegal, they don't give you respect. 'Cause eh yeah, (...) nobody trusts you, nobody gives you respect and nobody want to be friends with you.

His search for a relationship is complicated because he finds that expectations often differ. His expectation of a 'real' relationship is one of mutual trust and respect, a relationship in which you share your life, past, ideas and dreams. One of the first people he finds this with is Annelies. They met at a time when he felt down, as he had just returned from Germany and was trying to settle back into life in the Netherlands. Their interactions and the things that they undertook gave Zou the opportunity to participate and to experience a kind of freedom, as he was able to move freely in public space.

Interestingly, both Zou and Annelies explain to me that riding a bicycle gives them a feeling of freedom and belonging. Annelies strongly believes that freedom in the Netherlands means to ride your bike everywhere and for this reason she pushed Zou to learn how to cycle. Annelies strongly believes that: “*zonder te fietsen kan je je niet echt thuis voelen (...), of misschien kan dit wel, maar het is wel een heel belangrijk onderdeel*”⁶⁷. Although she starts off by indicating that riding a bicycle can give you a sense of freedom, she also highlights how it provides a feeling of being at home. She continues by explaining how this feeling of being at home is about:

“... de vrijheid en de praktische kant die fietsen je geeft. Maar het heeft ook wel echt iets cultureels, net als (...) de taal spreken. In een land kan je pas echt met mensen praten als je de taal spreekt. En ook al spreek je perfect Engels, dat maakt niet uit. Pas als je de taal van het land spreekt dan kan je je ook lokaal gaan voelen. Dat heeft ook te maken met je eigen identiteit, niet alleen met de ander. In Nederland spreekt iedereen Engels, maar je gaat je pas echt [thuis] voelen als je Nederlands praat. En dat is hetzelfde met fietsen. Dat is een soort 'cultureel Nederlands praten’”⁶⁸.

Being able to cycle through the city gave Zou a sense of pride. Practically the bicycle enables him to move independently of other people, public transport or the money for petrol. But riding his bicycle also gave him the opportunity to claim a little piece of public space, which indicates that this specific object also carries a deeper, more intangible meaning (Willen 2007: 20). His friendship with Annelies opened a new door as he got a taste of 'normal life'. Being able to go out, talk and have fun lightened him up. It offered him something to look forward to and enabled him to claim his space within the public domain. Therefore, the bicycle represents more than just a practical freedom; it enables a feeling of being 'emplaced', of 'being in the world'. As such, riding a bicycle represents freedom materially as well as the immaterially, as it represents a *feeling* of freedom and gives him a sense of belonging.

67. “Without riding a bicycle you cannot really feel at home (...), or maybe this is possible, but it is a really important part”.

68. “... The freedom and the practical side that riding a bicycle gives you. But it also has something cultural, like (...) speaking the language. In a country you can only really start talking to people if you speak the language. And even if you speak English perfectly, that doesn't matter. Only if you speak the language of the country can you start feeling local. That is also connected to your own identity, not only that of the other. In the Netherlands everyone speaks English, but you will only start feeling [at home] if you speak Dutch. And this is the same with riding a bicycle. That is sort of like speaking 'Dutch culturally'”.

Maria does not feel she belongs. She feels uncomfortable in public and therefore avoids public spaces as much as she can; as a result she confines herself to the private domain. Over the years her social network enabled her to create a grid of (semi) private spaces, like private houses and the church that allow her to move (rather) freely. At these places she feels safe. This way, she is able to avoid public space but still gather the necessary contacts. But there is no physical space that is hers to claim; unable to settle anywhere for long she must constantly move from one place to another. She explains how she misses a place for herself. Her inability to *ground* herself, to physically settle in a specific place, results in a feeling of displacement. This indicates that Maria needs the help of others in order to feel safe. However, in order to feel at home, Maria longs for an actual place for herself.

When I ask Maria where she feels at home she tells me that the only place she ever felt at home was during communism in Azerbaijan. Although she realizes it is unlikely that she can ever return in the future, she actively longs for the past. She wants to find her parent's graves and see the places that she remembers one more time. Maria realizes Azerbaijan has changed and that what she remembers no longer exists. Nevertheless, she still cherishes the hope to one-day return to show her children where she grew up. Her relationship with her past seems very vivid, and as she remember how life was it seems like she extends the past into the present as her memories allow her to partly relive those times. As such, her sense of 'being in the world' is constituted through her memories.

Maria's story exemplifies the importance of place through her ambiguous relationship with both imaginary - and geographical place. For Maria place literally means having a place for herself, as an actual geographical location. But at the same time it also designates the more symbolical meaning of claiming space through recognition. She lacks legal recognition which surfaces as the inability to claim space as well as the inability to envision a future. Maria feels she belongs in the past. Only when we talk about events in her memories her eyes light up. She smiles, our conversation instantly lightens up and she becomes a different woman. For whereas our conversations are heavy and slow when we discuss the moments in her past, the good memories seem to evoke a positive feeling which as well manifests itself physically. She seems to partly live in these memories, which becomes visible as it surfaces through her body language. Her inability to physically access the place of her memories, and her inability to claim space for herself in the Netherlands creates a feeling of displacement. These feelings of displacement signify the lack of a sense of belonging as a result of her inability to ground herself. Because she cannot return, it is if is she is stuck in between the past and the future, and between Azerbaijan and the Netherlands.

Majids story also illuminates the importance of place and time for belonging. He is clear about his indifference for material objects, whether in the form of a house, money or a permit. He was homeless for years and even currently does not have an actual place for himself. His life is solely devoted to his spirituality and centred on helping people. When I ask him if he can return to Algeria he tells me he cannot. He explains that his life is about the people here, as he says that "... *hier ken ik al mijn mensen, ik hoor hier*"⁶⁹. The connection he feels with the people around him is what grounds him here. His sense of 'being in the world' materializes socially, through his personal relationships and the grati-

69. "... this is where I know all my people. I belong here".

fication and fulfilment it gives him. His personal relationships provide him with a feeling of fulfilment and give meaning to his life. The connection he feels with the people around him is what grounds him here.

Besides the fact that his social network grounds him in the Netherlands, Majid attains an additional sense of belonging from his relationship with God, which affects how he experiences his current life and influences his perspective on the future. When I ask Majid about the future he tells me "... *mijn leven heb ik al vertrouwd aan God, in de handen van God, dat is immers zo*"⁷⁰. He gains a sense of pride and satisfaction from this spiritual relationship and he indicates that for him, afterlife is as important or even more important as his current life. Majid's connection with The Netherlands runs deep and is highly social. Through his social network Majid is able to claim space for himself and he feels like he belongs with them. The importance of place in this example does refer to the importance of a specific geographical location: his relationships are *here*, in the Netherlands. As such, his sense of belonging is geographically grounded; his sense of belonging is grounded in his social network and place in this instance is about the specific context of his relationships. But at the same time his sense of belonging extends beyond a specific time and place, as it seems that he simultaneously inhabits a mental space to which his spirituality grants him access.

As we can see in the examples above, access to these spaces is constituted through interactions with others, which provides both the ability to claim space and enables social recognition. Or, when lacking this recognition, one may approach the virtual spaces of the imagination instead. Maria's story indicates that alternative spaces may arise in which belonging can materialize, which shows the importance of the imagination in fostering a sense of belonging. As such, space does not need to indicate an actual physical territory but may just as well indicate a social or virtual space. In addition, the importance of time appears ambiguously as it indicates the ability to escape their present positions. Maria feels like she belongs in the past and relives her memories vividly. Similarly, Majid seems to inhabit his future afterlife as he obtains a sense of belonging from his spiritual relationship with God. Being able to escape present life shows how their marginality only represents a relative position of liminality as the force of their imaginations enables them to partially escape this present life (Turner 1987). As such, belonging does not need to solely refer to a sense of feeling at home in the now, but can also provide possibilities in the past and future.

However, in whatever time or space a sense of belonging may surface, it seems that it is inseparably connected to the ability to claim space, and that personal relationships are a crucial element in this. Seen through the more intangible elements of their existence, like longing for freedom, pride, and hope, we can see that the ability to imagine oneself as part of a collective is crucial for a sense of belonging. These examples show how memories, spirituality, relationships and many more intangible things play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging. Therefore, I will use the following paragraph to elaborate on the importance of personal relationships for the ability to imagine. I will explain how the ability to imagine a future is crucial in order to feel a sense of belonging.

70. "I have entrusted my life to God, in the hands of God. That is already the case".

6.3 On Hope

The stories of Zou, Maria and Majid illustrate how their lives have been considerably shaped by a search for freedom. As shown in the previous chapters, this search for freedom indicates a longing to be self-reliant and well as self-determinate. Freedom in this case indicates a desire to be independent. Additionally it is shown how freedom also pertains to more intangible aspects of life as they also display a search for a deeper sense of belonging. Their desire to belong demonstrates a certain hope for the future – or, in the case of Maria, the lack of belonging might result in feelings of hopelessness. Hope designates the “*capacities to wait, to defer, discipline and even transform oneself in anticipation of some object that cannot be obtained in the present*” (Mar 2005: 365). Interestingly though, Mar explains how “*people in motion rarely articulate ‘ultimate’ hopes. Engaged in the practical pathways of transnational migration, they tend to index hopeful or less hopeful states in terms of imaginings of place. (...) Hopeful states are linked to modalities of temporal and spatial inhabitance*” (Mar 2005: 369). As such, Mar connects both hope and hopelessness to time and space and it carries both open-ended and readily defined perspectives. As such, the concept of hope highlights the importance as well as the ambiguous role of time and place, and as such underlines the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid.

In addition, this conceptualisation of hope also indicates that hope encompasses a desire for change in the future. Concerning the connection between hope and desire Vincent Crapanzano (2003: 6) elaborates by stating that hope is the “*passive counterpart*” of desire, for whereas hope pertains to “*dreams, anticipation, expectation and possibility (...) desire is active*”. Hence, although hope and desire both indicate a yearning for change, and carry a notion of temporality, they do differ from each other in a significant way. Where hope indicates a longing which may be defined or constituted outside of the self and thus may not always be actively managed, desire indicates the ability to act upon one’s yearning. As such, desire inherently carries a notion of agency whereas hope constitutes a more passive yearning. This element of agency, although not of primary significance, does indicate the importance of (a sense of) power over one’s position. As has been shown in previous chapters, although their lives are relatively restrained according to their illegal status, I also argue that Zou, Maria and Majid are able to use their agency in order to make use of the possibilities that they do have (see previous chapter for an elaborate explanation). In the following paragraph I will elaborate further on the importance of hope, as hope seems crucial in order to allow someone to imagine a future. Imagination in this sense functions as a means to enable a perspective on the future. The ability to nourish hope opens up a pathway into the future, which seems highly important for their ability to imagine themselves as part of a collective (to be ‘part of’). The possibility to imagine in this sense constitutes a possibility *to become*.

6.4 On the Importance of Imagination

The experiences of Zou, Maria and Majid display how their sense of belonging is ambiguously constituted through different times and spaces. Time and space are, in this sense, not univocal but instead shape and reshape their sense of self as they imagine, or cannot imagine, themselves in the future. This seems enlightening as Philip Mar rightly states that: “*hope accesses a temporalised sense of potential, of having a future*” (Mar 2005: 365). However, as the story of Maria also shows, the impossibility to imagine a future seems to lead to hopelessness and a lack of belonging. Although not all-encompassing, their lives are characterized by an evasive feeling of uncertainty. Looking at the intangible elements

of their existence, thus for example looking at how they foster hope, is in this respect enlightening as “*the dynamics of hope are necessarily conditioned by situational doubt, and the impossibility of certainty in predicting outcomes*” (Mar 2005: 365).

Concerning ‘im/possibility’ Carolyn Nordstrom (2004: 59) raises an interesting point. Although she discusses im/possibility in the context of violence and how people understand its meaning, her emphasis on what violence *feels* like applies to these cases as well. Nordstrom argues that violence is meaningful not because of its power to physically damage. Instead, she shows that violence is so powerful because it *feels* like “*existential crisis*”; because, as she ponders, “*if our cultural foundations are undermined, what happens to our sense of humanity*” (Nordstrom 2004: 60)? She goes on to stress that this *feeling* does not indicate a rational consideration of the meaning of violence, but instead indicates an ability to influence actions, ideas, senses of selves and futures. The power of violence, as she sees it, lies in its ability to take away the ability to imagine a future (Nordstrom 2004: 58-68). And it is this importance of *feelings* and the ability- or restriction- to imagine a future that also houses the power of relationships. The reason why it is so important to be able to imagine a future is because the present has meaning as it “*is embedded in a matrix of past realities and future possibilities. Our sense of self comes from memories (history) projected onto the (future) horizons of our lives. To choose one action (over another) is to choose a goal (over another); and that is to craft a future*”(Nordstrom 2004: 65). Nordstrom thus delicately explains the importance of our understanding of time for our experience of life, and shows how the ability to imagine the future is intimately connected to both past and present realities. As such, Nordstrom intricately explains how ones ability to control the present and the possibility to imagine a future are both equally constitutive for a sense of belonging. Existence in this world only means something if one is able to imagine ones existence in the future. When one is able to envision a future, hopefulness and belonging seem to go hand in hand. Thus, hope seems to be constitutive for belonging and intricately connected by the ability to imagine.

Focussing on the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid a desire for freedom designates something crucial. If a desire for freedom is restricted, this leads to a longing, or hoping, for change in the future. A residence permit indicates an opportunity in this sense. But in a situation in which legal recognition is denied, and thus the potential to envision oneself as part of the future is restrained, personal relationships allow for the possibility to *become*. In this sense, *becoming legal* is intricately connected to the longing for independence (‘to exist’) but as well to the desire to be ‘*part of*’ as their social networks are crucial in their *becoming*. The possibility to *become* in this sense does not necessitate this *becoming* to actualise (Agamben 1999); its power lies in its *potential* to become. Potentiality in this sense designates the “*the possible actualization of a hidden capacity*” and as such the “*future is thus experienced not as an undifferentiated plane of virtuality but as a very specific configuration of potentiality*” (Vigh 2011: 94). However, when even the ability to hope, or the potential of becoming seems impossible, or in these cases the ability to *imagine* change in the future is restricted, this affects the understanding and experiences of life more existentially, which can be seen in the story of Maria.

Thus, when we look at the lives of Zou, Maria and Majid we can see that a sense of belonging is interwoven with perceptions of time and space, with personal preferences and individual circumstances, and with the interactions with others. If and how they are able to feel at home indicates their feelings and understandings of *being in the world*. This *being in the world* may be situated in a virtual or an actual place, may be influenced by material objects like a house, or immaterial aspects like pride or fulfilment. A sense of

belonging cannot be pinned down in one way but is highly dependent on each person's feelings, which arise from the particular lives of each individual. However, it becomes clear that relationships prove to be important in fostering a sense of belonging as they provide support both materially as well as immaterially. They are highly important because they enable both material possibilities as well as the possibility to imagine a future (Nordstrom 2004).

If we consider what freedom then means, we must look further than functionality and beyond the rational practicalities of life. Initially, they talk about freedom as being able to follow your own path; to control your own life and determine your own situation. Freedom in this sense means the ability to exist, or *to be*. But their desire for independence seems to go deeper than just the material aspects of their existence. It is essential and small at the same time, as it penetrates even the smallest aspects of someone's existence. Because whereas their longing for freedom as independence considers an individual state of being, their desire for respect, pride and recognition is highly dependent on a relationship between the self and the other; this relation with the other, whether an individual or a group, greatly affects their sense of belonging.

As such, their longing for freedom is better understood as a desire for autonomy, as autonomy captures both the material and relational aspect of freedom. Autonomy can be seen as "*the self-regulation of the social body in its independence and in its interaction with the disciplinary norm*" (Berardi 2003: 2). Seeing their longing for freedom as a desire to be autonomous allows for the opportunity to accommodate the ambiguity of their struggles for independence, self-reliance and self-determination as a search for freedom *from-* as well as a freedom *with* others. Their longing to belong as such indicates that they do not only long to *exist*, but also long to become *part of* a collective. They want to feel at home and this sense of belonging surfaces in their desire for social connection. And as their *becoming* cannot be realised through state recognition, their personal relationships enable them to feel like they belong. Where freedom surfaces in their stories as the ability to escape bureaucratic subordination, they attain this sense of freedom through their relationships.

6.5 On Belonging

Chapter 4 indicates how Zou, Maria and Majid initially strived for different things. But by looking deeper into the tension that arises from their ambiguous perceptions of belonging it seems that relationships are highly important in creating a sense of unity and a sense of self. Their relationships are not only crucial because they provide access and a personal network of care. When looking beyond this functional element it seems that freedom is about being part of something bigger. It concerns the ability to imagine oneself as being part of a collective. It seems that recognition, 'being seen' and having a feeling of being *at home* functions as a bridge toward a more collective understanding of self.

The stories of Zou, Maria and Majid show how a sense of belonging depends strongly on their ability to access place and time. These examples display how a sense of belonging is unique and personal, depending on one's situation, expectations and relationships, as a complex web of various tangible as well as intangible elements. These social networks represent the possibility to imagine their lives beyond physical existence (*being*) as they enable them to imagine a future. As such, marginality and liminality, although considered, becomes less restrictive as they represent their ability to *become*. Thus, "*the imagination is no longer a matter of individual genius, escapism from ordinary life, or just a dimension of aesthetics. It is a faculty that informs the daily lives of ordinary people in myriad ways*" (Appadurai

2011: 6) Essentially, thus, the meaning of freedom does not solely lie in *becoming independent*. By providing trust, respect, pride and a sense of belonging relationship are at the base of their more immaterial needs. This immateriality of social life can only be captured through the intangible elements in life. These *immaterialities* may materialize through tangible objects. A house or a bicycle may symbolize these immaterial needs. In addition, past experiences and future imaginaries can provide a similar sense of emplacement or belonging as present imaginaries or localities. But the importance of relationships does not reside in its material form solely. Besides providing access to the spaces and objects crucial for their existence they provide access to the future. As such, their longing for freedom seems to indicate an ambiguous longing to be free from others, through the support of- and interactions with others.

In various ways these stories exemplify the complex associations between visibility and invisibility, individuality and collectivity, public and private space and past and future perspectives. The ambiguous associations between belonging, relationships, place and time show how the internal world of personal experience connects to the external world of collective experiences and relationships. This surfaces as we consider how Zou, Maria and Majid imagine themselves in the world. Their experiences show how their embodied and imagined realities exceed binary divisions. As it connects the most intimate spheres of memories and future imaginaries with the more public or collective spheres of a social network it transcends these binary divisions like past/future or individual/collective. Hence, being able to envision yourself as part of a collective is not about current day necessities, but instead extends their desire for freedom into the future. As such, their desire for freedom and their longing for belonging signify the hope that the future carries the *potential to become*.

7.1 Introduction

I set out on this research to discover *how undocumented migrants integrate in the Netherlands*. In the preceding chapters the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid illustrated how personal relationships provide them with *access*, which enables them to arrange their livelihood, but as well how these relationships enable them to feel at home, to provide them with a *sense of belonging* and to allow them to imagine a future. This sense of belonging can be emplaced in different places and even surface in different times, but it nevertheless seems that in order to actually feel at home someone needs to be able to envision themselves as part of a collective in order to be able to see a future perspective. This imagination of a future appears elementary for their more emotional needs like fulfilment, pride, intimacy and hope. Thus, although their relationships are of functional importance, their biggest value thus lies in the fact that they enable a feeling of emplacement, of being at home. As such, the experiences of Zou, Maria and Majid indicate issues of (physical) existence, *inter-activity* (Vigh 2009), sociality and belonging.

In the coming sections I will discuss the importance of relationships. I will elaborate on the conclusions that I draw from these three personal stories and address the broader indications that these conclusions may bring forward. However, I do not aim- or claim- to provide clear-cut answers, but instead look at what their specific cases tell us and how we might understand the lives of undocumented migrants better through the details that their stories provide (Becker 2014).

7.2 On Social Recognition and Belonging

Zou, Maria and Majid exhibit a longing for freedom, which initially seems to indicate a desire to be independent as it concerns the ability to arrange their physical existence. But when looking deeper into this longing for freedom it seems to extend beyond just a desire for independence. When inquiring deeper into the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid it seems that they are in search of *recognition*. Because although these personal relationships initially supply access and as such fulfil a basic material need, the intimate nature of the relationships provides more than just access. As these interactions are based on personal contact and emotional closeness they provide the additional potential to feel part of a collective. This possibility to be seen, to have your presence recognised by others, appears distinctive. It is in this distinction that the importance of a social network and personal relationships truly surfaces. When analysing their constant search for legal documents from this perspective it becomes clear that, although a residency permit would provide them with access to resources, which is fundamental in order to survive, acquiring a residency permit also seems to signify the acknowledgement of their *presence*. A residency permit implies the proof that they are recognised, that they are *seen*. As such, in a situation in which any bureaucratic recognition is denied, a social network provides other possibilities for recognition. What seems to appear from their stories is that their social network seems to fulfil a desire for recognition *socially* in a situation in which they lack legal recognition.

Hence, when inquiring deeper into their longing for freedom, which surfaces in their search for a residency permit, it seems that this search is just as essentially about recognition and belonging. The correlation between recognition and belonging relates beautifully to the words of Sarah Wright as she argues that belonging is “*a concept of fundamental importance to people’s lives. Feeling a sense of belonging (or not), being legally, morally or*

socially recognized as belonging (or not), truly has the power to change lives, or make communities and collectives, to bring together and to separate in the most intimate, loving, accepting, exclusionary or violent ways” (Wright 2014: 1). It is this fundamental importance of belonging that we see in the experiences of Zou, Maria and Majid. Their stories exemplify that a sense of belonging is in fact an emotional need, which in their case, is fulfilled socially. Their stories show that the social recognition that their relationships provide may stimulate and enable a sense of belonging. As such, this deeper meaning that is present in their constant search for legal documents highlights the difference between the functional aspects of integration and integration seen as belonging. Following their stories beyond their initial search for freedom and independence shows that the value of relationships lies both in providing access to resources and to the social domain *functionally* as well as more *intangibly* by providing social recognition and enabling someone to *imagine* themselves as part of a collective. This indicates that, although fulfilling their basic physical needs is crucial in order to survive, feeling part of a collective and the ability to imagine a future are just as fundamental.

When extending this reflection on the importance of belonging Yuval-Davis highlights an interesting difference between the politics of belonging and the narratives of belonging. Where narratives of belonging are about a mutual relationship of identification, the politics of belonging function by actively directing and enforcing the boundaries of distinction. As she sees it, the politics of belonging are about the management of inclusion and exclusion as practices of distinction. It is about determining where the boundaries lie between who is ‘one of us’, who deserves or is entitled to support as opposed to who does not. This means that “...*the politics of belonging is all about potentially meeting other people and deciding whether they stand inside or outside the imaginary boundary line of the nation and/or other communities of belonging, whether they are ‘us’ or ‘them’*” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 205). Differently, narratives of belonging are mostly about identification and recognition; it does point to categorizations that determine similarity and difference, but does not necessarily concern the active management of these boundaries.

This distinction between the politics and narratives of belonging allows us to look at belonging as an active and directive process versus belonging as a passively induced social process. This distinction is crucial when we consider how undocumented migrants may develop a sense of belonging. Belonging can encompass different places and times. It can be evoked through memories or material objects and it pertains to the grandness of structures as well as the smallest of senses. Seeing the importance of a sense of belonging, and how it manifests itself in the social domain, shows that it is not a cognitive process but instead represent a myriad of connections and desires. It shows that “*belonging relates people with their social and material worlds in dynamic and multiple ways*” (Wright 2014: 5).

7.3 Intimacy as the Liberating Force?

It is due to the *nature* of these relationships that they gain a sense of collectivity and social recognition, as it is the intimacy of these personal relations that enables a sense of belonging. Intimacy in this sense is not just a matter of being close, of physical proximity; it does not only refrain itself to a certain locality. Intimacy can be experienced through physical proximity *and* emotional closeness. These personal relationships facilitate feelings of being emplaced and enable a sense of fulfilment, pride and hope, which opens up the (ability to imagine a) future. Interestingly, Anthony Giddens also makes a case for the liberating force of intimacy. He argues that intimacy empowers processes of democratisation by creating “*circumstances in which people can develop their potentialities and express their diverse*

qualities” (Giddens 2013: 185). Concerning this democratising power he mentions the “*opportunities to develop available resources*”, as well as the ability to be “*self-determining: to deliberate, judge, choose and act upon different possible courses of action*”, which also means that they are able to “*determine the conditions of their association*” (Giddens 2013: 185). Giddens thus perfectly voices how intimacy has the power to affect the social world in a more profound way.

By illustrating the fundamental importance of belonging, fostered through intimate personal relations, these stories show how integration is not a pre-defined political procedure but actually a social process intricately connected to individual perceptions of being in the world (time and place) and the nature of the social connections that they are able to enjoy. It is in this respect that “*the possibility of intimacy means the promise of democracy*” (Giddens 2013: 188). The promise of democracy should not be read as the possibility for active political action, but instead should be seen as the possibility for autonomy. Seeing their independency and the sense of belonging that they gain through their intimate relationships as autonomy highlights both the *functionality* as well as the *relationality* of their longing for freedom. The promise of democracy as such should be seen as the potentiality of freedom *from* and freedom *with* others.

“Private lives, experiences and decisions are increasingly represented and articulated in new public spaces, conjoined with public institutions, and lived in public relationships. This challenges modern social and cultural structures, institutions and discursive milieu that subjugate intimacy within the private realm and facilitates moments of transgression that signpost possibilities for the emergence into being of “public intimacies.”
(Reynolds 2010).

8.1 Introduction

Zou, Maria and Majid narrated their stories to me and I listened as they told me of their histories, their friendships, their motivations and their difficulties. Along the way I noticed how each of them experienced life in illegality in their own way as they recounted different configurations of interactions and events characteristic of their past and present lives. But, although their experiences diverged, it soon appeared that they had something important in common; they all longed to be free. Looking at what they understood as freedom and from then on looking deeper into the value of a social network proved essential. Although undocumented migrants might be excluded from the official procedures that aim to facilitate and stimulate integration, it nevertheless seems that they can integrate. If integration is seen as a process of adjustment and mutual commitment of both migrant and host society, a process in which a migrant can become independent, participate economically and socially, and feel part of a larger community, then the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid seem to indicate that it does not matter whether or not one is formally recognised (see chapter two for an elaborate definition). It seems that although the nature of the relationships differs profoundly, the outcomes seem to be similar. Therefore, based on the conclusions drawn from their stories, I will argue that integration could be seen as an relation of people based on affective connections. Seeing integration this way differentiates between ‘procedural integration’ as the formal process of settlement, and ‘affective integration’ as the fluid fusion and social assemblage of people connected through personal bonds.

8.2 Reflections on Integration

The specific context of undocumented migrants, as they are physically living in the Netherlands but are legally unrecognised as such, presents an interesting point from which to address questions of integration. The term integration commonly points to a complex process and a delicate political debate. When seeing integration as a process of adjustment that necessitates a mutual commitment from both a host society as well as a migrant, a process which is directed at supporting a migrant in their material needs as well as regulating and stimulating their economic and social independency, this conceptualisation already brings about some tricky issues. The concept integration assumes the incorporation of a person *into* another society and culture and as such suggests that there is a definable society or culture to integrate into. Seeing either societies or individuals as static, as entities that can be defined according to, in this case, their national identity, proposes an image of integration as a process towards a defined final stage. It assumes that someone at first is not integrated, but after following specific steps in fact could be. These steps are what integration as seen from a state perspective seems to propose.

However, the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid indicate that (a national) identity

does not actually matter, as these ‘processes of adjustment’ may also take place outside of the reach of the state. Their stories show that these ‘processes of adjustment’ are actually processes of *connection*. They are not predefined or fixed but instead seem to represent a fluid fusion of connections between people. They show how people relate and attach to others based on personal affiliation. Seeing integration as a process of social assemblage shows how the collectives that these connections make up are not based on identities, but instead represent a multitude of relations characterised by personal contact. And this multitude of relations can assemble and re-assemble in various ways. Looking at integration this way presents an image of a process that seems much more fluid, complex and dynamic.

8.3 How do Undocumented Migrants in the Netherlands Integrate?

Leaving the conceptual difficulties behind for now, when addressing the question *how undocumented migrants integrate in the Netherlands* it seems that, although for undocumented migrants their initial concern is not to ‘integrate’ as such, we can see that the relationships that they maintain and build, and the personal networks that they gain do seem to produce a comparable effect. If integration means a process of adjustment through the mutual commitment of both a host society and a migrant, by which a migrant may become self-sufficient and participate socially as well as economically, then what has become clear from these stories is that a similar process may shape the lives of undocumented migrants. Whereas integration is focused on a *process of adjustment*, these personal stories exhibit a comparable process. Although the fluid *trajectories of becoming* that these migrants experience are not based on prescribed procedures they do exhibit a process of change. These trajectories of becoming indicate a process of change *in relation with* others, and not in comparison to. They are *affective* processes that follow the lines of personal and intimate social contact. As such, the mutual commitment and identification that a procedural process of integration aims to stimulate is, in these cases, already embedded in the relationship. Closeness, intimacy and reciprocity make up the condition on which these relationships are built.

Furthermore, due to their social networks undocumented migrants may be able to live independent of- while at the same time in close relation to others. It is the *access* that their relationships provide that enables them to participate economically, while the relationships at the same time show how they participate socially. The simultaneous freedom *from* and freedom *with* others that their personal relationships generate enables their social and economic participation and stimulates their ability to organize their lives self-sufficiently and independently. These relationships stimulate and facilitate their *autonomy*. Thus, although lacking a formal relationship with the state, following the lives of Zou, Maria and Majid shows that they are able to organize their lives practically as well as participate, engage and connect with others.

Seeing integration as a *trajectory of becoming autonomous* honours the multiple ways in which people may forge connections; connections that are intimate and personal and that allow them to organize their lives and feel at home. It highlights both the functionality and relationality of this *continuous process* in which their personal relations provide *access* as well as the *social recognition* that enables a *sense of belonging*. It is especially this *intimate nature* of their relationships that distinguishes them from the bureaucratic relations of a more procedural process of integration. Thus, to look beyond integration as characterised by citizenship and identity as a static and stratified set of attributions or claims, to instead

consider integration as the dynamic set of contingent identifications that take *affects*, temporalities and contextualities into consideration proves important, especially for a 'group' that is formally excluded by the state.

8.4 What can we learn from these cases?

Trying to understand processes of integration from the perspective of those *who live it* sheds light on how these processes might work *from within*. In a domain in which the state seems to regulate access by default, looking at personal experiences enables us to see how people organize themselves differently and in doing so re-define the perception of integration. Because whereas the state draws boundaries by effectuating policies to exclude these migrants, these examples show how individuals organize themselves independently of the state. By focusing more profoundly on these networks we have seen that they seem to substitute a variety of state functions as they provide undocumented migrants with the means to arrange their existence.

Looking at the tension between legal versus social recognition from the perspective of these three undocumented migrants thus reveals a parallel movement. Where a formal integration process relies on impersonal relationships through the bureaucratic system, these alternative social networks depend on physical proximity and emotional closeness. And while the bureaucratic relationships of detachment are meant to execute a policy of exclusion aiming to restrict and disable undocumented migrants, these relationships of attachment include and enable them to participate. The forms of self-organization that emerge reveal new ways of interaction that transgress boundaries of the state and create opportunities to consider mobility. What emerges from these intimate interactions is an alternative form of organization, as the logics that they confer to are neither pre-determined nor fixed. Instead they represent fluid *positionings* based on the *interplay* between people (Jackson 1998). It shows that, although one could encounter the state bureaucratically, which in some case may result in exclusion, social recognition potentially substitutes a lack of legal recognition and enables inclusion.

In this respect the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid are enlightening as they show that being able to integrate is not about a formal procedure, but actually depends on their ability to forge relationships. Although their status disables a formal relationship to the state, their relationships provide them with *social* recognition through personal, intimate contact. This means that these relations reconstitute a relationship that is formally between the self and the state into a relationship between the self and the closer, more personal other. As such, focusing on personal experiences shows how integration can also be seen as a social process of *becoming*, which makes room to look at the importance and impact of interaction.

This sheds light on how focusing on the *particular* and putting individual experiences central may enable us to re-imagine the role of the state in social life, as seeing integration from this personal perspective reveals loopholes in the system that creates space for alternative action. The evaluation of their personal experiences contributes to a reconceptualization of the importance and workings of the state. As such, considering the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid and the alternative forms of organization that emerge are important beyond just these individual cases. They enable a different look on the power and meaning of the state for the organization of social reality. Their stories show how integration does not belong to the state only. Whereas legal documents are the materialisation of a relationship between the self and the state, with the additional supply

of (social) benefits and so on, life in illegality takes place in a social domain existing outside of state rule. It becomes clear that although the state affects the *context* of their lives, relationships are crucial as they determine its *content*.

Seeing integration this way may shed light on how individual experiences affect, shape and create a collectivity. Evaluating the lives of undocumented migrants may show how they themselves experience their lives, but in addition how they connect with others. These connections and the collectivities that it produces enable a different image of integration, of relationships between self and other, of perceptions of society, and of inclusion and exclusion. It carries the potential to affect how we perceive human relations, situations, policies, organizations, ideologies and the collective social space (Nordstrom 2004). Seeing integration as an affective trajectory of becoming shows how things connect, rather than how they are (Parr 2010).

8.5 Contributions and Implications

The insights that these stories provide concerning the importance of personal relationships and belonging reveals a different perception of integration, as a different trajectory of *becoming*, as it “*breaks the monopoly exercised by the state over conceptions and practices of citizenship, and add or substitute alternative forms of belonging and allegiance*” (Parr 2010: 184). What this implies is that their marginal status of illegality and exclusion is not all encompassing. Using their agency undocumented migrants may find (social) spaces where the formal rules and procedures of the state do not define their lives in an all-encompassing manner. In these cases, agency refers to their ability to manoeuvre and to influence their situations. Their stories indicate how they are not ‘stuck’ in a position of marginality but show how they are able to creatively navigate their way through life. This negotiability indicates a certain space for creativity and signifies an opportunity to use whatever room for manoeuvre or space for agency they encounter in order to influence their situations. Agency in this sense is not about active manipulation of ones environment. Rather, agency in their cases surfaces as they *manage* their presence and navigate the social space. As such, these cases show how inclusion and exclusion are not dichotomist states of being, controlled by the state, but that other relationships substitute the state as they stimulate processes of inclusion and enable social recognition and belonging.

In addition, revealing the ambiguity of belonging as exhibited in their stories enables us to see that the connections between past/future, active/passive, inside/outside, individual/collective or private/public are not as easily distinguishable. These stories show that these seeming dualities are not dichotomist: in every aspect of a person’s life you can see that they are intimately connected. This also applies to the prominent position that (national) identity takes up in the debate over integration. In this case, this research highlights the multiplicity of interactions and connections that shape a life and affect a process of change.

This research contributes by taking practices of people as constitutive for social reality. It shows a social reality that is diverse and it shows that the state is not the *only* player in the integration of immigrants in the Netherlands. I do not argue against the importance of the state or claim to falsify its workings. My research does not address the state. What it does is touch on issues that connect to the reach of the state and to its regulations and procedures. Seeing these processes from a social perspective shows how the reach of the state is limited. It shows that in practice people do not just follow the rules and procedures that a state prescribes. Connections can be made between *people* within

the social domain. As such it highlights other possibilities and shows that it is valuable to look at processes from a different perspective, that it makes sense to consider other ways of being, connecting and interacting the lie outside of common or prescribed ways.

Methodologically, this research contributes by producing knowledge based on experiences, knowledge that affects and moves. As such this type of research connects social reality as it comes from from personal experiences, but also grounds its abstracted findings in the details it was based on. By *following the flows* of their stories and trying to find shared elements, common variables can be discerned. In this sense my specific methodology, the fact that I followed their stories, searched for the depth in their experiences, stuck to the informality of our encounters and opened myself up to what they told me enabled me to uncover usually restricted territories. Especially when studying a complex group or phenomenon, doing research this way can change the character of the research by changing the interactions with respondents and the expectations one enters the field with. The lack of a framework and the restrictions it may generate proves useful especially in cases like these. As such, this type of research can be useful in other instances in which a different narrative or view could add a new perspective on seeing or dealing with a certain phenomenon of social reality.

Furthermore, with this research I present a different narrative from the common narrative concerning both integration as well as the lives of undocumented migrants. Following the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid leads to a picture of integration in which the social domain is more present and hence more important than the state. As I asked about their feelings and captured their emotions my narrative connects to their experiences in a simple and human way. I have tried to present their stories as pure as I could while at the same time aiming to find commonalities or shared elements in their experiences. As such, my role here, the role of the ethnographer, has been to go beyond their individual experiences and search for collective connections between them. Through my narrative you may see the collectivity of their individual experiences as they connect on various levels. And although my narrative abstracts the stories in order to search for shared variables, the focus and centrality of experiences is kept due to the ethnographic methodology; this way the stories are still central.

‘After’: Reflections on the Research

My specific methodology and its concomitant methods enabled me to produce a narrative of the *particular*. As I have shown, the *particular* in this case means to notice detail and to focus on specific conditions, situations and experiences. I must admit that the research process was, at times, messy. Starting off with a focus as wide as the world, their stories soon narrowed this down. The further the stories progressed, the clearer my vision became. Purposely aiming to find the particular in their stories I encountered many things that indicated an overlap. Although their stories are particular (they are unique constellations of their persona in specific times and places), they also share a certain collective nature. Therefore, using ethnographic methods and *following the flows* of their particular stories helped me to notice details and allowed me to create space for emotions, to study the “*texture*” of what the world feels like, to look at *affect* and to examine the processes of “*attunement and attachment*” that constituted their lives (Wright 2014: 109).

Analysing their experiences I encountered instances where they showed how they were able to influence their situations creatively; it showed how they were able to navigate the social space by making use of the specific assets at their disposal (Vigh 2009). As such, I agree with Vigh as he states that “*acknowledging that, for a great number of people around the world, the social environment is not experienced as stable or static but as an unfolding process requires that we analyse practice in a manner that is sensitive to the fact that tactics and strategies are constructed and actualized in, and constantly attuned to, a shifting terrain and its imagined and anticipated configurations*” (Vigh 2009) p. 424-425. Ethnography proposed such a manner.

When I started my fieldwork I purposely tried to enter the field with an open-mind, wishing to get rid of any preconceived ideas. I wanted to silence my own expectations in order to be able to hear what they wanted to say. Although this can occur in many ways, I tried to open myself up to what they wanted to tell me; I wanted to submerge myself into *their* experiences. And as they conveyed their stories to me I discovered more than just the ‘events’ that were characteristic for their lives. As their stories progressed their emotions surfaced through their bodies. They *told* as well as *showed* me what their lives had been- and still were like. Their honesty was touching as we spent days talking about the difficulties of their lives. Looking at what they valued or remembered was to allow me to forget my (analytical) purpose and presumptions for a while.

In trying to uncover their story, I became part of it. By entering ‘the field’ I changed its course; I interrupted its motion. Although I believe that this cannot be undone, I also firmly believe that one must be careful not to push, predict or judge. Not too quick, too much or too persistently. This thesis challenged me to ask the difficult things, to listen with critical empathy, and to proceed although I was unsure of my own process. But as we *relived* their stories together I felt that there was still a hidden world that I could not access. As I entered their lives I became part of their ‘backstage’ (Della Porta and Keating 2008; Geertz 1994). And yet I also realise that they only showed a particular part of themselves to me. As such, although I moved into their more intimate spheres, another more intimate self remained untouchable. My role in this research is therefore critical as I am the other that they encounter. How they present themselves to me appeared to be part of a larger constellation of self-presentations that constitute their ability to, in some minor way, influence their situations. As such this ethnographic research also carried dimensions of performance, as the stories are part of their self-presentations, they are ‘at least in part

consciously staged and directed' (Skinner 2013: 110).

The fact that I already knew Zou and Maria before I started this research proved to be very important. Firstly, I believe it made them willing to participate in my research. In addition, it made it easier to establish contact, build rapport and create a basic level of trust (Becker and Geer 1957). My contact with Majid was somewhat shallower; it took him some time to open himself up to me, and it took me some time to dare to ask certain questions. As I was not familiar with Majid before, I believe that a longer engagement with him might have enabled us to personalize the conversation, which may lead to a diversification or deepening of the information.

In addition, it seemed that the places we met also highly influenced their openness to talk. Strikingly, their preferences for places to meet and talk with me corresponded to their wider preferences in relation to public and private places (see chapter 6). Zou did not necessarily prefer any specific place for our meetings. He always talked openly and freely, which meant that we met at a different place for each of our interviews. Contrarily, Maria and I always met in the privacy of my home. She indicated that she would feel most comfortable coming to my house for the interviews, as she still did not have a house to herself. As mentioned before, becoming familiar and sharing more intimately remained difficult with Majid. Nevertheless, we always met in public places and he was very open with me as he enclosed many intimate details of his life.

This research has taught me the importance of allowing for silence (Skinner 2013: 145). Allowing for silences during our conversations and interviews proved crucial in understanding what they tried to tell me- or not tell me as it was often their silence that conveyed the true meaning of their words. Also, trust proved to be important during this research. As I chose for a fluid and rather 'open' methodology I needed to trust myself. I needed to trust my ability to sustain the relationships with my informants, to conduct the interviews and to ask the right questions, to see the right connections and link these to the right concepts, and to find the right theoretical connections to make sense of it all.

But, although trust opened up doors, it also entailed some ethical issues. A lack of trust in the relationship between Majid and myself resulted in some difficulties. After only three interviews he declared that he was ready to finalise our contact. Although he never said as much, I sensed that he felt restricted or trapped by our meetings. Contrarily, I still speak to Zou and Maria sporadically. As a friendship grew from our intimate conversations, so did an expectation of (reciprocity) and on-going contact. Although I am not sure what 'the right way' might be to deal with the finalisation of a research process, I am aware that these examples indicate how the boundaries between 'appropriate' and inappropriate involvement with your respondents is never static.

Restrictions of the Research

By using a specific methodology and writing style I aimed to narrate 'liveable stories', or in other words stories that my interviewees can live with (Skinner p.114), which at time proved difficult. As I documented the experiences of Zou, Maria and Majid, and questioned them about their lives, I felt I had to maintain a delicate balance between inquiring and respecting their privacy. This resulted in some topics left unspoken, especially with Maria, as I did not push her to elaborate on certain issues. Therefore, her story at times displays some gaps, and I am unsure if I reached total saturation. Although I encountered much of the information twice or more, I also believe that there are some instances,

events or relationships that she, consciously or unconsciously, did not want to share with me.

Another restriction concerns the disclosure of certain types of information. In order to safeguard their privacy I was obliged to refrain from using any identifiable characteristics. In the case of Maria, she even requested me to refrain from audiotaping her, which meant that I could not use any citations or provide any transcriptions of our interviews. At times, this restricted me to disclose the full story.

In addition, one of the interviews was barely audible and I lost two audio documents during the process. Although I was able to recapture parts of them, losing these documents meant that I was unable to transcribe them properly and thus that I lost some of the information they told me.

Another possible restriction of this research resides in my specific methodology. As ethnographic methods focus on gaining in-depth – as opposed to a high quantity of information, this research cannot contribute any quantifiable nor any generalizable results. As such, this research cannot be used to make any claims about undocumented migrants in general. Instead of testing a method or a phenomenon, I have looked at these cases as ‘producing’ variables; I looked at the details that they represented and tried to see the ‘larger possibilities in the smallest observations’ (Becker 2014). Therefore, its contribution lies in the fact that it may discern variables that could indicate a possibility for something larger, something that may contribute to a new or different insight.

Finally, conducting ethnographic research in ones own society includes some dangers. The routine and habituation of ones own society may generate a lack of critical evaluation; one might simply ‘overlook’ certain aspects due to a familiarity to a specific cultural belief or practice. The taken for granted is often left unnoticed. Although I cannot claim with certainty that this has not happened in this research, I do believe that, because I placed the stories of Zou, Maria and Majid centrally, I evaded some of this danger. And, to add a positive note, studying one’s own society also contains a great opportunity. Not only does it sharpen one’s vision by critically evaluating cultural norms or social behaviour in a very familiar context, it also shakes up some of the traditional foundations of anthropology. Studying one’s own society in a way acknowledges that it is not only the distant or exotic other that provides interesting cases; in a way we are all others.

Recommendations for further research

My recommendations for further research concern a variation of topic that either appeared from the data. This concerns topic that my informants indicated but that I could not elaborate on due to time restrictions. Additionally, I highlight interesting areas for further research that sprung from my conclusions.

Firstly, discovering the importance of personal relationships for the lives of undocumented migrants enabled an interesting reflection on integration. What these experiences seem to indicate is that a sense of belonging cannot be organized through a procedure as it is highly dependent on *affect*. As it seems that creating a sense of belonging is an *emotional process* and depends on the ability to imagine oneself as *part of* something bigger than the self, this could create possibilities for further research. As such, I would recommend extending this research. As I only had 4 months to do this research, and could therefore only interview three people, it would be interesting to do the same research with more participants.

Secondly, it would be interesting to go into the importance of *materialities*. An exam-

ple in this case could be to do research on the meaning of matter in the form of material objects like a bicycle, a photograph or another specific object. Matter in this case does not refer only to material objects but extends to all that is tangible. Looking into the importance of *materialities* could shed an interesting light on the relationships between object and subject in a context in which property and possessions are often scarce.

During my research it became clear that gender is an important element in the case of homelessness. The position of homeless women and their vulnerability while living on the street came up various times. It seems that facilities and services are better tuned to sheltering homeless women. Due to a comparable situation of uncertainty and vulnerability, it would be interesting to look into the importance of extra provisions for undocumented migrants women.

Furthermore, further research could be directed at the importance of religion for undocumented migrants. The importance of the church as an institution arose multiple times, as the church provides an important safety net. It would be interesting to discover the importance of the church for undocumented migrants functionally, but as well to look into the importance of religion for undocumented migrants personally.

Lastly, I would recommend further research into the position that the state takes in the lives of undocumented migrants. I indicate a strong element of control of the state over social life. It would be interesting to look into possibilities for a loosening of state control over some of the issues raised above. For example, it would be interesting to look into creative and innovative opportunities to make use of the potential that undocumented migrants might have in the area of employment.

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