"I am not just a domestic worker"
A phenomenological study of organized Nicaraguan domestic workers in Costa Rica

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### Abstract
In this study, I use semi-structured interviews in an intersectional and phenomenological theoretical framework, elaborating on analytical concepts such as belonging and translocational positionality, to investigate the lived experiences of Nicaraguan migrant domestic workers in Costa Rica who are organized in the association Astradomes. I explore if and how their experiences are connected to intersections mainly between nationality, class and gender, and examine in which spaces and contexts agency and resistance can be located. I show that the intersections between nationality, class and gender - as well as age - have shaped the respondents experiences of working as domestic workers in Costa Rica, resulting in disorientation and hierarchical employer-employee relationships. I also demonstrate that Astradomes is a social place where the social categories of the respondents, such as class, gender and nationality, produce solidarity, agency and resistance. Moreover, it is a space where the respondents have been able to relocate - and to feel at home.

### Keywords
Domestic work, Intersectionality, Migration, Costa Rica, Organization, Phenomenology, Agency, Nicaragua, Embodiment, Resistance
Abstract

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Keywords: Domestic work, Intersectionality, Migration, Costa Rica, Organization, Queer Phenomenology, Agency, Nicaragua, Embodiment, Resistance
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Introduction

"Domestic work is a profession with low status, even though domestic workers care for the most valuable we have: our children" (Kanyoka 2014). Vicky Kanyoka, Regional Coordinator for the South African Domestic, Service and Allied Workers' Union, looks at the audience with a steady gaze. It is late and the crowd is small, but Vicky Kanyoka speaks with passion."The majority of the domestic workers are women and migrants, and therefore especially vulnerable" (Kanyoka 2014). It is 2014 and I have just moved back to Sweden after having lived and worked in Nicaragua for almost three years. It is my first week working at Union to Union and I am now in Malmö, standing on a stage at the Nordiskt Forum - a conference about women's rights - moderating a seminar about domestic workers' rights and their demands for recognition.¹ Vicky Kanyoka has been invited by Union to Union to share her knowledge.² "More countries need to ratify the ILO Convention No. 189 which protects domestic workers' rights!" she concludes when the seminar comes to an end (Kanyoka: 2014).

According to the International Domestic Workers Federation, a domestic worker is "any person engaged in domestic/household work within an employment relationship" (IDWF 2014: 5). At least 53 million men and women in the world are employed as domestic workers and the majority, 83 percent, are women.⁴ Domestic work is henceforth one of the largest female dominated occupations (ILO 2013: 23; ILO 2014: 1) and in Latin America and the Caribbean the percentage of female domestic workers is even higher than the average: 92 percent (ILO 2013: 19 and 20). Domestic work is mostly informal and strongly connected to international migration. Low wages (or non-payment of wages) as well as abusive living and working conditions is a frequent problem in many countries (ILO 2013: 44 and 95). But domestic workers have been able to organize themselves all over the world. In 2006, the International Domestic Workers Network was born, and in 2013 it became a federation - IDWF (IDWF 2014: 4). As of April 2015, IDWF has 56 affiliates from 45 countries (IDWF 2015). Through consistent advocacy work, governments, employers and workers adopted the

¹ Nordiskt Forum Malmö 2014 – New Action on Women’s Rights was arranged by 200 women's organizations from the Nordic region (among them, the umbrella organization The Swedish Women’s Lobby), to promote girls’ and women’s empowerment.
² A Swedish Non-Governmental Organization that supports democratic trade unions in the world.
³ The ILO Convention no. 189, that Vicky Kanyoa is referring to, establishes global standards for domestic workers and was adopted at the International Labor Conference of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2011.
⁴ Although ILO states that the number could actually be close to 100 million domestic workers, since there's reason to believe that the hidden statistics are high.
ILO convention 189 - which sets labor standards for domestic workers - in 2011. The convention entered into force in 2013 and as of July 2015, 21 countries had ratified it. It wasn't until I started to work at Union to Union that I learned about the ILO Convention no. 189. Nor had I reflected before on how significant the organization of the professional group had been. Meeting Vicky Kanyoka, and hearing her speak, had a great impact on me. It was my first encounter with the domestic worker's movement and it got my feminist heart beating heavily. I now knew what the subject of my forthcoming master thesis would be.

**Why Costa Rica?**

Since domestic work often is connected to migration, I became interested in conducting a case study about migrant domestic workers. Due to the global organizing of domestic workers, and my interest in trade union rights, I moreover wanted to explore notions of resistance and agency and interview organized women. I decided to conduct this study in Costa Rica because they had just ratified the ILO Convention no. 189 and also because it involved organized female and migrant workers from Nicaragua, a country where I lived for almost three years and from where my extended family comes from.

In Latin America, it is most common that domestic workers migrate within the region, normally from poorer countries to more wealthy ones (ILO 2013: 21). The migration is often done to neighboring countries, and one example is how women from Nicaragua and El Salvador often migrate to Costa Rica (ILO 2013: 26). The majority of the female migrants from Nicaragua work within the domestic sector in Costa Rica, while male migrants work in security or construction, hence the domestic sector is a gendered area (Gindling 2008: 116). But is it also a question of nationality? Of class? And does these intra-sections have any impact on the lived experiences of organized domestic workers?

**Aims and research questions**

Corina Courtis and María Inés Pacecca, both doctors in Anthropology, stress the necessity to bring the gender perspective into migration studies since the numbers of women in migration trends are increasing (Courtis and Pacecca 2014: 24). I agree, but also argue that intersectionality, as well as the body, should be called into question when it comes to female migration in general - and domestic work in particular. According to Hans-Joachim Bürkner, professor in Urban/Rural Sociology, there's still a wide research gap when it comes to an intersectional approach towards embodiment in migration studies, an area that is crucial to
take into consideration (Bürkner 2011: 188). This thesis intends to address this gap, focusing on the lived experience of migrant, organized domestic workers in Costa Rica whilst locating agency and resistance.⁵

The aim of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of organized migrant domestic workers in Costa Rica and explore if and how their experiences are connected to intersections mainly between nationality, class, gender but also other unforeseen and relevant categories. A sub-aim is to examine in which spaces and contexts agency and resistance can be located. My material consists of semi-structured interviews with eight Nicaraguan women living in Costa Rica who have all worked as domestic workers and are members of the domestic worker's organization Astradomes. The majority have residency, one lives illegally in the country, and they have all lived in Costa Rica for more than ten years. In order to succeed with my aims, I will ask the following questions to my material:

1. Has intersections of nationality, class and gender shaped the respondents experiences of working as domestic workers in Costa Rica? If so – how?

2. Can agency and resistance be found in the respondent's narratives?

   When responding to these questions, I will address notions regarding disorientation, relocation and feeling at home, using Sara Ahmed's, professor in Race and Cultural Studies, queer phenomenology as one of my theoretical frameworks and approach my material with a phenomenological point of view. I will furthermore use intersectionality as an analytical tool and elaborate on Floya Anthias's, professor of Sociology, ideas regarding belonging translocational positionality.

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⁵ It is, already in this stage, important to note that the result of this study might have been different if I would have interviewed migrant domestic workers that are not organized. I will return to, and address this, in the concluding discussion.
Method and material

Method
Since I was little, I have always liked to listen to other people’s stories. To hear people express their experiences, with their own words, is not just to be given a brief insight in a person's life, it also gives you an idea of their situatedness. As I grew older, I educated myself to be a journalist and it became my job to collect and write about people's narratives. Because of this, it seemed natural for me to choose semi-structured interviews as method for this thesis - specially considering the phenomenological approach of my study. A semi-structured interview inspired by phenomenology seeks to understand the lived everyday experience of the respondent and is guided by a set of questions, whilst being open ended (Kvale 2014: 45). Steinar Kvale, former professor of educational psychology, argued that interviews are a useful tool when wanting to conduct investigations that seek to highlight human experiences, as well as when the research questions include a "how?" (Kvale 2014: 143).

Gayle Letherby, professor of sociology, states that interviews can be beneficial when wanting to "produce work which can be used by women to challenge stereotypes, oppression and exploitation", because it allows women to use their own voices and own words when speaking about their experiences (Letherby 2003: 85). Moreover, it can allow us to focus on narratives from women who are usually not heard and to explore parts of their history (Letherby 2003: 89). With this said, there are yet disadvantages with this method, and I would additionally argue that the outcome of its benefits is contextual. When interviewing the respondents, I am the researcher. I set the agenda, I ask the questions, and I am responsible for collecting and analyzing the data (Letherby 2003: 85; Kvale 2014: 113).

In an interview situation there's always a risk of the respondents exposing too private details about their lives, not knowing where to draw the line for ones personal boundary and space. The method might therefore be exploitative, and it is important to acknowledge the power position one as interviewer holds throughout the entire research process (Kvale 2014: 110). Nevertheless, the fact that the respondents have the power to refuse to answer or to say no should not be neglected, and we should neither victimize respondents beforehand (Letherby 2003: 116). The advantage of interviewing someone is that the respondent has the possibility to choose how to respond, even when it comes to leading questions (Kvale 2014: 321).

See Appendix 1
The relationship between researcher and respondent is affected by how researchers identify themselves and how others identify them - and this has an impact on the execution of the investigation (Letherby 2003: 124). I share the concept of Nina Lykke, professor of Gender Studies, that situatedness is fluid, and believe it is crucial to reflect upon one's own self-position in a specific time frame and context when conducting intersectional research (Lykke 2010: 51). I identify myself as a woman, and I have interviewed other women. However, I am also a Westerner, middle class academic. I have a white, able, young body, a Swedish citizenship, a European passport. Social categories such as age, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability etc. affect and construct one another and produce power differentials (Davis 2008: 68; Hill Collins 1998: 63). Needless to say, I do not share the experiences of my respondents just because we all identify ourselves as females, and I will elaborate more on this theme in the section Ethics.

Material and selection of respondents

When I decided the theme for this study, I contacted Barbro Budin, who is a Gender Equality and Projects Officer at the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). I know Barbro Budin through my work at Union to Union, and since the IUF supports the International Domestic Workers Federation, IDWF, Barbro has comprehensive knowledge of the topic. Since I hope that this thesis will be of use for the domestic workers movement, it was important to me to ask her about her opinion. She suggested Hong Kong as a possible destination for a case study, since migrant domestic workers have been able to organize in the country. She pointed out that Costa Rica, Chile and Paraguay could be interesting countries to investigate in Latin America, as well as Kenya, Uganda and Malawi in Africa. Due to my Spanish language skills, and having lived and worked in Nicaragua - Costa Rica’s neighboring country - the choice was easy. Barbro Budin recommended me to contact Carmen Cruz, who has been the General Secretary of the Confederation of Domestic Workers from Latin America and the Caribbean (CONLACTRAHO) since 2012, and a member of the association Astradomes in Costa Rica since 2005.

Carmen Cruz helped me to find respondents at Astradomes, and I also asked her to participate in the study. I perceived her election of the respondents as based on availability (I was only in Costa Rica for two weeks), and could also see that all of the selected respondents were, more or less, active members of the organization. It cannot be excluded that the result could have been different if I would have interviewed domestic workers that are not active
members of Astradomes. To conclude, I have not affected the whole chain of the selection process. Certain respondents have been elected by Carmen Cruz, and Barbro Budin have been a "gatekeeper", in a positive sense, giving me valuable input before I took the final decision on where to conduct this study.

The interviews

Before I arrived to Costa Rica, I had informed my contact in the country, Carmen Cruz, what the subject of my thesis would be. In turn, she prepared the respondents by informing them about the research topic and about the purpose of my interviews. I also requested the respondents' permission to record the conversations and gave a brief summary of the aim of my study. Moreover, I informed them that they could withdraw their participation if they wanted to.

I performed semi-structured interviews with eight Nicaraguan women living in San José, the capital of Costa Rica, who have all been employed, or are currently employed, as domestic workers, and members of the organization Astradomes. As previously mentioned, I interviewed Carmen Cruz, who is currently the General Secretary of CONLACTRAHO. She is the only one who will appear in this thesis with her real name, since she have stated that she wanted to do so. She is a front figure of the organized domestic workers in Costa Rica, and frequently appearing in public debates with her name. The other respondents have been given pseudonyms. Both because it was requested by members being interviewed and also because of research ethics: the informants all reveal details regarding their work places and personal lives, and anonymizing them has been a strategy to protect the informant's privacy (Kvale 2014: 323). Besides Carmen Cruz, 46 years old, I also interviewed "Laura", 33 years old, "María", 45 years old, "Sofía", 49 years old, "Cinthia", 62 years old, "Adriana", 38 years old, "Carla", 36 years old and "Martha", 50 years old.

The interviews - which were all conducted on Sundays when domestic workers normally have their day off - lasted between 30 minutes to one and a half hour and the majority of the meetings took place at the office of the association Astradomes in San José, Costa Rica, where they all have been active at least for more than two years. Kvale states that it is of great importance to conduct the interviews in a place where the respondents feel comfortable - in order to encourage them to share experiences of their lives (Kvale 2014: 170). Three of the interviews were conducted at a hotel in San José, where Astradomes celebrated their 25th anniversary. Needless to say, it was not an ideal place to conduct
interviews due to the noisy environment and not being a familiar place for the respondents. However, as the informants just had been around other domestic workers and friends, there still was - to some extent - an intimate atmosphere.

The interviews were all conducted in Spanish, and I have translated extracts from Spanish to English. Even though I speak Spanish fluently, it is important to remember that there is always a risk of being lost in translation considering Spanish not being my mother tongue. As stated by Kvale, language is intertwined with culture, and not only certain words, but also gestures, can be interpreted differently (Kvale 2014: 184). I have not transcribed the interviews since it would have been too time consuming. Instead I have listened to the interviews several times, whilst writing summaries of the respondents’ answers, transcribing sections of particular importance. In the result and analysis section, I have selected quotes from the interviews that exemplify results. In the citations, /.../ marks movement in time, and three dots marks a break and/or hesitation. When there has been a need to clarify what the respondents are referring to, I have put explanatory words within square brackets.

Ethics and reflexivity

What does political and emotional luggage do to one's research? That is a question Ramazonoglu and Holland raise and I believe they have a point when they state that we have to confront this luggage, explore it and find a strategy for how to deal with it (Ramazonoglu and Holland 2002:148). Our research will always have our fingerprints on it - it will be marked by our values, ontology and epistemology (Ramazonoglu and Holland 2002: 149). Western white feminists have a long history of "othering" women by speaking and writing for "them", reproducing the otherness. Therefore it is particularly important to reflect upon one's positionality through an intersectional lens when doing research (Lykke 2010: 54). As feminist researcher Chandra Mohanty states, feminist scholarship is not free from politics or relations of power. It is marked by Western discourses and colonization, and "the west" has been, and continues to be, "the primary referent in theory and praxis" (Mohanty 1991: 334).

Mohanty critiques the notion of a global sisterhood, since it traditionally has been based on the interests of Western feminists. The so-called global sisterhood is thereby a hegemonic construction that ignores intersections between ethnicity, geopolitical positioning, class, race etc. This "we", which has been defined as progressive, has in turn been reflected against "them" - women who are not sharing these so called "universal" feminist goals. (Lykke 2010: 53). Western feminists have participated in the production of the image of the "third world
woman" as being a victim, without agency, an image that has been contrasted with the representation of the Western woman as empowered and in control. (Mohanty 1991: 337)

Intersectionality questions white middle-class feminism and challenges research colored by colonialism. I will therefore not only use intersectionality in one of my research questions, and as tool for the analysis of the material, but also as an instrument to problematize my own involvement in this study while writing it. Focusing on agency and resistance has also been a strategy to avoid victimization. I did however not involve Astradomes when I formulated the aims and the research questions, an approach I could have used in order to more including when deciding the focus of this thesis. Maybe the design of this study would have been different if I had beforehand taken their opinions regarding the theme into account. What is important to make clear is that I, as the writer of this study, will never be able to fully understand the experiences of my respondents because of my own situatedness. However, what I can do, is to listen to, and present, the narratives of the respondents - whilst seeking to reach a wider comprehension of the theme. Hopefully, this study could also be useful for the domestic workers movement, as well as serve to raise awareness in different contexts. For example Sweden, my home country, has not yet ratified the ILO Convention No. 189, something that I hope will change in the near future. Different kinds of studies might contribute to a larger understanding about the situation of the domestic workers, their organization, and the significance of the ILO convention No. 189. Knowledge can lead to engagement - which in the best of scenarios emerges into action.

It is important to note that some of my questions have been biased. After having reflected more deeply about my questions, I realized that they could, and should have, been more open, and not as defined as they were. For example I asked when and how the respondent's learned about the ILO Convention No. 189, making the assumption that they already had knowledge about it. Hence, it was a leading question that to some extent was shaped by my political baggage. I posed them from my privileged point of view, having knowledge myself about the convention. Nevertheless, as Kvale points out, leading questions do not necessary decrease a study's validity. Rather, he states, these questions can be useful when wanting to clarify certain aspects of the interview (Kvale 2014: 214). Yet, in this case

7 The position of the three Swedish central organizations, LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation), Saco (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations) and TCO (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees), is that Sweden should ratify the ILO Convention No. 189. The Swedish Ministry of Labor is processing the question, stating that there are ambiguities that need to be analyzed further before a ratification could be considered. This has been critiqued by representatives from LO, who claim that the process is taking too long, and that technicalities could be resolved after the convention has been ratified.
the question was posed from a clear power position. It is however important to highlight the
fact the I conducted semi-structured interviews, and therefore always gave the respondents
the opportunity to - to some extent - steer the conversation. Some of them, for instance,
started to talk about certain topics that I had planned to address before I had even asked about
them.

Last, but not least, if I would have interviewed domestic workers that are not organized,
my findings might have been different. All of my respondents have lived and worked in
Costa Rica for several years, and many of them have moreover been able to obtain residency
after a couple of years. Domestic workers who have recently arrived to Costa Rica might not
share the same experiences, as well as domestic workers in general that are not organized.

**Theoretical framework**

**Intersectionality**

Joachim Bürkner stresses that intersectionality is an important tool when it comes to
migration studies since it offers a broader vision of humanity, not longer seeing migrants as
"victims of exclusions", but as people with agency (Bürkner, 2011: 192). I agree to this
thought, and since this thesis explores how and if intersections between nationality, class and
gender have shaped the respondents experiences of working as domestic workers, as well as
investigates the location of agency in their narratives, I will use intersectionality as one of my
theoretical frameworks.

There are several definitions of intersectionality within feminist studies and whilst
some see it as a strategy, others use it as a concept, a theory, or an empirical method (Davis,
2008: 68). I will first and foremost use intersectionality as an analytical tool in order to
investigate how categorical intra-actions produces power differentials and oppression, as well
as political resistance and resignification (Lykke, 2010: 51). Intersectionality allows us to
explore how different categories of oppression, such as age, nationality, sexuality, ethnicity,
gender etc. *intra-acts*, constructs one another and produce power differentials (Collins 1998:
63). That I use the expression "intra-acts", means that I see these categories as non separable:
they merge as they intra-act and thereby transform one another in an ongoing process (Lykke
2010: 51). This view also permits us to see power as a relation, and intersectionality does
thereby not only serve to investigate discrimination and oppression, but also the contestation
to these power relations (Bernardino-Costa 2014: 74).

**Phenomenology**

As stated in the introduction, I would like to call the body into question in this intersectional study, focusing on the lived experience. I will therefore approach my material with a phenomenological point of view. Phenomenology emphases how the body and subjectivity are entangled, and how our embodiment is connected to space and time (Simonsen 2005: 9-10). This view attracts me since it aims to move beyond dualistic notions of body/mind, providing a more comprehensive approach to the embodied experience. According to the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who is seen as the founder of phenomenology,"subjectivity and agency arise out of the experience of embodiment located and engaged in a specific material and historical situation." (Parkins 2001: 62).Repeated everyday actions shape embodiment and subjectivity derive from the lived experience (Parkins 2001: 60 and 62). It is the body and the self, unified in a certain moment and context, that creates meaning (Parkins 2001: 60, 62). Knowledge is therefore not universal; it is embodied in specific settings and we know the world by how we engage with it (Parkins 2001: 60). That I have chosen to focus on the embodied experience in this thesis does not mean that I embrace an essentialist point of view with a notion of the corporeality as fixed (Lykke 2010: 150). I do not deny the meaning of socio-cultural aspects when it comes to embodiment, and I share gender professor Margrit Shildrick's notion of the embodied self as involved in a constant, fluid process - a continuous negotiation in order to avoid being ultimately defined (Shildrick 2005: 327).

Due to my interest in addressing notions of disorientation, feeling at home, and relocation in this thesis, I find Sara Ahmed's theories regarding orientation particularly useful. Sara Ahmed queers phenomenology by calling the lived experience of orientation itself into question, directing her focus at so-called “distance bodies” that are seen as the "Other" (Ahmed 2006: 2, 3 and 4). According to Sara Ahmed, the notion of belonging and feeling at home is entangled with the orientation of one's body, whereas the body and space is intertwined. Ahmed stresses that how, and which, bodies that have the possibility to take place and expand into different rooms tell us something about which bodies that are allowed to be familiarized (Ahmed 2006: 8). In the analytical section of this thesis, I will also elaborate on some of Ahmed's thoughts on cultural politics of emotions (2004).
Finally, in certain sections, I will draw on the ideas regarding belonging and translocational positionality, presented by Floya Anthias, because of its close connection to notions of feeling at home and how this is related to gender, class and nationality (Anthias 2008). I also see her thoughts as correlated to phenomenology, since she, in relation to embodiment, underlines the meaning of social, as well as physical, locations and contexts.

**Previous research**

The research field of domestic work is wide and comprehensive, and consists of publications from the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the global network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), the International Domestic Worker's Federation (IDWF), as well as books and academic studies within different disciplines. In this section I will mention a selection of these publications, focusing on those significant for my thesis.

**Statistical reports**

ILO has written several reports and factsheets about domestic work and regularly updates their global web-portal on domestic work with news and materials. One of their publications from 2013 - *Domestic workers across the world: Global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection* - is based on statistical data of domestic workers and working conditions legislation from different countries and presents a broad overview of the domestic sector as well as its legal protection. The results show, among other things, that domestic work plays an important role when it comes to employment wage of women, particularly in Latin America and Asia, and that there is still considerable shortcomings in the protection of the profession in national laws. This report has provided me with statistics and background, with the chapter on Latin America and the Caribbean being particularly useful.

Another statistical source of information is the study *Sector Doméstico - El día a día y condiciones laborales del trabajo doméstico y su invisibilidad en la sociedad* [Domestic Sector - Everyday life and occupational conditions of domestic work and its invisibility in society], conducted by the domestic workers organizations Las Melidas (El Salvador), Astradomes (Costa Rica) and Atrahdom (Guatemala) in collaboration with the Solidarity Center in the United States. The report consists of the results of 504 questionnaires completed.

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8 For more information, see [www.ilo.org/domesticworkers](http://www.ilo.org/domesticworkers)
by domestic workers in Costa Rica. For example, the study demonstrates that the vast majority - 83,7 percent - of the domestic workers in Costa Rica work without written contracts (2011: 25).

The statistics on salaries, working conditions, migratory status and labor harassment found in this study have both provided me with valuable data on the situation of domestic workers in Costa Rica and served me as a reference for verification purposes. Both the above-mentioned studies are based on statistical data and questionnaires and also presented in this form. The data is not analyzed through an intersectional or phenomenological lens, and the reports thereby differ noticeably from the thesis I am conducting. My work might therefore serve as a complement to these studies.

**Academic research**

Corina Courtis and María Inés Pacecca, both anthropologists, have studied migrant domestic workers in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, using a socio-anthropological approach whilst highlighting gender as an organizing principle (Courtis and Pacecca 2014). Courtis and Pacecca take gender, class and nationality into consideration in their study, but do not examine how these categorizations intra-sect. However, even though they approach their material differently than I do, and we reach different conclusions in certain aspects, the content is to some extent correlated to the study I am conducting. Especially, I find their conclusions regarding gender as organizing principle useful, and I will return to, and elaborate more on this in the Result section.

Romina C. Lerussi, PhD in social science, has conducted a study about Nicaraguan domestic workers in Costa Rica, a study which is partially based on her master thesis and includes a feminist and critical reading of already existing material about Nicaraguan domestic workers living in Costa Rica. The article is comprehensive and presents a broad overview of the situation of Nicaraguan migrant domestic workers. For example, Lerussi states that Nicaraguan migrant women working as domestic workers in Costa Rica, are exposed to "a national labor market that knows how to take advantage of them" (Lerussi 2008: 195 - my translation). However, Lerussi has only based her analysis on secondary sources, and thereby she also underlines the need of taking Nicaraguan migrant domestic workers lived experiences into account in order to deepen the understanding of their situation (Lerussi 2008: 196). My thesis seeks to address this gap, focusing on the lived experience of the interviewed respondents, whilst addressing notions of agency and intersectionality.
Alexandra Bonnie, currently a project specialist at the International Organization for Migration, has conducted another study regarding Nicaraguan migrant domestic workers in Costa Rica. Bonnie investigates how the working conditions of migrant domestic workers from Nicaragua in Costa Rica have been affected by the 2009 reform of the Labor Code regarding paid domestic work, and the General Law of Immigration, which entered into force in 2010 (Bonnie 2010: 76). The study is based on analysis on both secondary academic and juridical sources, and complemented by semi-structured interviews with key informants, such as leaders of the domestic workers association Astradomes. Amongst other things, Bonnie argues that the reform at the time had its shortcomings (especially for migrant domestic workers), but has been both symbolically and legally important to the domestic workers movement in Costa Rica, since they fought hard for its realization. Despite that Bonnie and I have different entrance points, parallels can be drawn between some of her findings and my research, and I will cover this in the Result section of this thesis. Nonetheless, important to note is that both the aforementioned studies from Costa Rica were conducted before the ILO Convention No. 189 was ratified.

Whereas intersectional studies about domestic work seem to grow in number, it has been difficult to locate academic articles about domestic work from a phenomenological point of view, calling embodiment into question. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, senior lecturer in Transcultural Studies, has however written a very interesting article where she, from a feminist point of view, investigates affective labor within the domestic sector, exploring the sensory corporeality of racialized affect as well as the relation between domestic work and migration norms. Her notions of how migration policies come to be sensed in the encounters between the domestic worker and the employer have been particularly thought triggering. Even though the focus of my thesis differs significantly from the questions posed in the article of Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, I will draw on some of her ideas in the Result and analysis section.

Because of my interest in agency and resistance - especially in connection to organizational dynamics and intersectionality - I will also elaborate on research related to unionized domestic workers. For example, I will make use of ideas from the article *Intersectionality and female domestic workers' unions in Brazil* (Bernardino-Costa 2014) in the Results section.
Background

Gaining recognition: global mobilization and the ILO Convention No. 189

Since I have interviewed organized domestic workers in this thesis, I will present a brief backdrop of the political mobilization of the profession on a global level - and what it has led to. Moreover, I see it is vital to give an insight in the context of domestic work, which the difficulties and challenges are, as it gives an understanding of why it has been important to organize.

To cook, clean, do laundry and care for children are tasks that traditionally have been performed by women - without pay - and are examples of activities that are grouped under "domestic work". For this reason, claims the ILO, domestic work has been identified as low status labor, since it has been seen as "women's work", and this is also reflected on its working conditions (ILO 2013: 69). As previously stated, domestic work is in addition connected to female migration, a factor which also affects the salaries of the profession because of their vulnerable position (ILO 2013: 44). Another explanation, according to the ILO, is the low wages within the domestic sector is the domestic workers' "weak bargain position" (ILO 2013: 44). Since it is an isolated work, it is difficult to meet other domestic workers and get organized. There can also exist legal barriers which prevent domestic workers, especially migrants, from organizing or forming trade unions (ILO 2013: 70). Furthermore, it has been argued that male dominated trade unions traditionally have not prioritized domestic workers (Robinson, Dryden and Gomez 2012: 183).

However, in 2006, the International Domestic Workers Network (which in 2013 became a federation: IDWF) was founded and established two main objectives: to work for an international ILO Convention for domestic workers, and to use this as a tool to empower domestic workers. The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), as well as the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) network, supported (and still supports) IDWF. In 2011, IDWF and its collaborators achieved one of their goals when employers, workers and representatives of the world's governments agreed to the ILO convention No. 189 - Decent Work for Domestic Workers - at the International Labor Conference of the International Labor Organization (IDWF 2013: 5).

The ILO Convention No. 189 establishes basic rights for domestic workers, such as protection of their human rights, protection against abuse and violence and fair terms of both
employment and living condition. Moreover, the basic rights include the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (ILO 2015). As of June 2015, 21 countries have ratified convention 189 (ILO 2015). In Costa Rica, as well as in other parts of the world, domestic workers have organized themselves demanding better working conditions. In 2009, the Labor code that dated back to 1946 was amended with the implementation of law 8726, which provides a framework to secure the protection of the domestic worker's rights (Bonnie 2010: 79). Costa Rica moreover ratified the ILO convention No.189 in the beginning of 2014 (ILO 2015).

**Astradomes**

For this thesis, I have interviewed women organized within The Household Workers Association (Astradomes). Astradomes gathers around 2500 domestic workers in Costa Rica and has their office in the capital San José. It is affiliated to the Confederation of Domestic Workers from Latin America and the Caribbean (CONLACTRAHO), which in turn form part of the IDWF. Astradomes consists of migrants from several Central American countries like El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua, but also have Costa Rican members (Cruz 2015). The majority of the members, however, come from Nicaragua. The political constitution in Costa Rica establishes in article 60 that it is forbidden for foreigners to form part of the board of the unions, and since Astradomes have migrants in the board it is an association instead (Bonnie 2010: 85).

**Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica**

In 2010, around 130 000 people were working as domestic workers in Costa Rica, whereas about half of them are migrants - first and foremost from Nicaragua (Bonnier 2010: 76). The domestic workers that I have interviewed for this thesis are part of these figures, and I'll therefore present a brief overview of Nicaraguan migratory movements to Costa Rica. About 10 percent of the Nicaraguan population is living abroad, and close to 50 percent of them have migrated to a Central American country, mainly to Costa Rica (the International Organization for Migration - IOM- Nicaragua 2015). The main reason behind the migration is the search for better economic opportunities (IOM 2013: 17). The level of poverty in Nicaragua is high: it’s the second poorest country in Latin America, whilst Costa Rica is an upper middle-income country (The World Bank 2015). Another motive behind the migration flow to Costa Rica is the historical and cultural relationship between the neighboring
countries (IOM 2013: 26). Additionally, only a short bus ride separates the nations, and many Nicaraguan migrants already have social networks in Costa Rica (IOM 2013: 26-27).

Results and analysis

As previously outlined, the aim of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of organized migrant domestic workers in Costa Rica and explore if and how their experiences are connected to intersections mainly between nationality, class, gender, but also other unforeseen and relevant categories. Moreover, a sub-aim is to explore in which spaces and contexts agency can be found. To reach these aims, I have posed two research questions to my material:

1. Has intersections of nationality, class and gender shaped the respondents experiences of working as domestic workers in Costa Rica? If so – how?

2. Can agency and resistance be found in the respondent's narratives?

When answering these research questions, I will address notions regarding disorientation, relocation and feeling at home and how this is intertwined with the intersections of gender, class and nationality. The presentation of the results is structured by the three-abovementioned themes. Notions of agency and resistance will be interwoven in all of these sections, as well as highlighted in the summaries of each part.9 I will analyze my material through an intersectional lens, and use queer phenomenology as theoretical framework as well as elaborate on Anthias' notions of belonging and translocational positionality. In certain sections, I will also draw on Ahmed's ideas regarding cultural politics of emotions. The reason why I call disorientation, as well as belonging, into question is because it serves as a tool to detect notions of exclusion and inclusion. This tells us who is able to orient, to have embodied agency, and where. Moreover, and therefore, it also reveals notions of in which spaces and contexts this orientation fails.

9 Parts of the result would have been suitable in several sections, however, and even if it has its disadvantages, I have placed them under the subheadings most appropriate in order to be able to structure the material. As stated in the theory chapter, categories such as gender, class and nationality intra-acts, and can therefore not be seperated from one another. Even so, I have chosen to sort the results in sub-headings based on these categories. I am aware that this separation is problematic.
Disorientation

In this part I will analyze the results connected to disorientation, while examining notions of agency as well as explore how if and how the respondent’s experiences of working as domestic workers are connected to intersections between nationality, class and gender, but also other unexpected categories.

Gender

According to Sara Ahmed, migration itself calls orientation into question, since bodies that migrate goes through the process of disorientation to relocation. They leave places behind, and arrive to new locations when they re-inhabit novel spaces in different contexts and time (Ahmed 2006: 9). Some of the respondent’s have gone through this process, leaving Nicaragua in order to migrate to the neighboring country of Costa Rica. In the following quote Sofia, who migrated 20 years ago, recalls how she felt at the time of her arrival.

I was alone and I cried, because I had left my people at home and I did not know anything... but now I am accustomed (Sofía 2015).

Cinthia, 62 years old, has lived in Costa Rica since 2002, and before she migrated she used to sell traditional Nicaraguan food in her house. When the demand dropped, she did not earn enough money to maintain her family and had to make a decision, even though she knew that it was going to be tough since she did not have any legal documents.

I wanted them [her children] to be able to fulfill their dreams to study /.... / In Nicaragua you work for nothing, the pay is poor (Cinthia, 2015).

In their study regarding migrant women in the domestic sector in Argentina, Courtis and Pacecca - both Doctors in Anthropology - found that their respondent's mainly decided to migrate because of economic reasons - in order to be able to pay for their children’s studies (Courtis and Pacecca 2014: 28, 30). Additionally, many of their respondents left their children in their home countries with (mostly female) relatives, and migrated alone, knowing that they might have to work long hours as domestic workers (Ibid). Similar narratives can be found in my study as well: Cinthias' quote is representative for the respondents motives for migrating. Economic reasons, or searching for better income and helping family members, have been the primary motivation for the respondents migration to Costa Rica. As earlier
mentioned, the South-South migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica is also significant.\textsuperscript{10} Almost all of the respondents moreover state that they had Nicaraguan relatives and/or friends in Costa Rica at the time of their migration. Some of the respondents did not have children at the time of migration, others brought their children with them, and a number of the respondents left their children in Nicaragua with female relatives. For example, when Sofia, 49 years old, left Nicaragua 20 years ago her four children stayed in Nicaragua with her mother.

I have four children there [in Nicaragua] and for economic reasons I decided to leave to be able to help my family and to carry on, because what I earned there was not enough to maintain them and my mother who was still alive at the time (Sofia 2015).

Courtis and Pacecca see gender as crucial when it comes to the organization of international migration, since it is often a network of women who "support migrant women before, during and after migration: taking care of their children in the source country, helping out with the journey, aiding with accommodation and employment at destination, and providing jobs" (Courtis and Pacecca 2014: 30). Lerussi, who have conducted a study of Nicaraguan domestic workers in Costa Rica, also states that female relatives are vital when it comes to their migration (Lerussi 2008: 194). As stated above, I can draw parallels from both of their conclusions to the narratives of the respondents interviewed for this study. Female networks have enabled some of the respondents migration to Costa Rica - they have had female relatives in Nicaragua taking care of their children, as well as family and/or friends in Costa Rica who have received them, helping them to get oriented.

However, I would additionally argue that gender is one category - out of several - that have made the respondents becoming oriented towards Costa Rica in the first place. According to Juliana Martinez Franzoni, doctor in sociology, and Koen Voorend, doctoral researcher in social studies, there has been a large increase of households in Nicaragua that are female-headed. Furthermore, they state that single women run about 40 percent of the households in Nicaragua (Voorend and Martinez Franzoni 2011: 996). A correlated aspect is also highlighted by Lerussi, who claims that the majority of the migrant Nicaraguan domestic workers in Costa Rica are financially supporting their families, as well as striving to provide education for their children (Lerussi 2008: 194). I did never ask the respondents whether they saw themselves as, or if they were, the head of the family when they migrated to Costa

\textsuperscript{10} I use the concept south-south migration to refer to the migration between developing countries.
Rica. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the majority claims that they left because of economic reasons, with the aim to be able to provide for their families, assuming the responsibility of income bringers as well as providing mothers. This act could therefore, in this context, be seen as gendered. In addition, I would likewise, and despite these circumstances, interpret their choices as acts of agency. Carla, 36 years old, was only 18 years old when she decided to migrate to Costa Rica. She does not have any children, and migrated alone without legal documents, because she wanted to help her family.

We had low incomes and we couldn’t go on with our studies and I wanted for me and my siblings to be able to do that. /.../ My siblings are studying now because I have helped them...one is going to graduate from University this year (Carla 2015).

Tania Bastia, Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Development Policy and Management in the School of Environment, Education and Development, states that female migrants do not only generate new opportunities for themselves, but also for the people they leave, "as well as those they encounter on the way to and at their destinations" (Bastia 2014: 238). This is also highlighted by Anthias, who stresses that migration flows do not only affect the migrants themselves, but also the places of arrival. Migration could thereby be seen as a process that challenges politics, culture and commodities, she claims (Anthias 2008: 6). I see this in my material as well, and Carla's quote tells us that the outcome of this act - migration - opens up several possibilities not only for the respondents, but also for their families, even in the context of disorientation.

Class

When I asked the respondents about how they have perceived, or perceive, their working conditions as domestic workers, some of them said that they've been lucky, that they have always had good working conditions. Maria, who currently cleans for a company working 10 hours a day, stresses she was always treated well when she worked at people's homes. However, she also emphasizes that the working conditions haven't been bad for her. That some respondents refer to their positive experiences as being "lucky" tells us something about how they think about the situation for migrant domestic workers in Costa Rica. To have decent working conditions, such as being paid at least the minimum wage and being respected by the employer, is seen as an exception from the norm. Far from all of the respondents have had good experiences.

Laura, 33, who migrated to Costa Rica when she was 15 years old, is currently working in a household where her tasks include cleaning, cooking and taking care of children. She
also lives at her employer's house. She has worked with her current employer during one year and three months and always works six days a week - from Monday to Saturday. She earns a bit more than the minimum wage but works about 13 hours a day and only have 15 minutes of lunch break everyday. Although Laura spends the most part of the day at the employer's house, and has her own room, she does however not feel that it is her space.

It is not my home, it's not my place, it's not my space. ...So you live with that pressure except on Sundays (Laura 2015).

According to Sara Ahmed, becoming oriented is "about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space", and when one does not succeed with this the following sensation is disorientation (Ahmed 2006: 11). Laura has worked and stayed at her employers home for over a year, but has yet not been able to become familiarized in this context. On the contrary, her quote tells us that she does not feel at home, even though she is referring to a space where she spends most of her time - where she works, eats and sleeps.

Within this place and context, Laura's embodiment is rather restricted since she has to keep within certain boundaries. There is a clear distinction between employer/employee, and even though I, in line with Floya Anthias, see boundaries as fluid and changeable depending on meaning and context, they do however contain hierarchical relationships that establish what, and which, bodies have the liberty to do (Anthias 2008: 9). Laura can cook, clean and take care of children - perform daily and repeated acts - nonetheless, these everyday actions are all done for those who she is working for. Not only until late in the evening can Laura close the door to her own room, a room which still is located in a setting where she has to relate to, and follow, regulations and norms stipulated by her employer. As Ahmed stresses, I consider mobility and the liberty to claim space to be a question "of who gets to move with ease across the lines that divide spaces" (Ahmed 2004: 142). Laura cannot cross these established lines, nor extend her body beyond them, hence the space of her employer is thereby inhabitable.

What does it do to one's embodiment and agency to live in a place, which is not one's own? Where you work, but where it is not possible to extend one's body, saturating the room with agency? Laura physically and mentally experiences these limitations and boundaries, and describes them as feeling pressured, a pressure she is only relieved of on Sundays when she has her day off and can leave her employers home. This sensation of estrangement is not
only felt by Laura, but also by another respondent, Martha. Martha is now 50 years old, and also has a live-in contract with her employer since she wants to reduce her living costs.

I earn a little bit more than the minimum wage but I work more than eight hours a day. I start working at six in the morning and work until eight in the evening. I do not have permission to close my door until 8 pm /.../ It is stressful...it's depressing. But one does it to have a bit more money left, because everything here is so expensive (Martha 2015).

What Martha is describing is also a sense of pressure, of feeling stressed and depressed. According to Ahmed, who sees emotions as social and cultural practices rather than psychological states of mind, emotions shape the orientations of our bodies (Ahmed 2004: 4 and 9), and it is how "we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the I and the we are shaped, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (2004: 10).

Where Martha and Laura work and live, there is a clear distinction between the I and the We, between the employers and the employee, and this has an impact on their orientation within this space. The feelings of the respondents - pressure, stress and sadness - reveal that this division also contains boundaries: their emotions are responses of their everyday experiences and encounters with others.

According to the ILO, many domestic workers - especially migrants - worldwide live in their employer’s home and are expected to always be available, frequently working overtime (ILO 2013: 58). This is the case for both Laura and Martha, whom state that they always work more than eight hours, even though this is stipulated as a normal workday in national legislation (Bonnie 2010:79). They both live with their employer since they cannot afford to do otherwise. Martha does not have any children, but Laura has a 17-year old son that she had to leave in the care of her sister when he was five to be able to work as a domestic worker in San José.

This work doesn't permit that [to have children living with you]. It is slave work and it is not possible. The ones that can bring their children have someone to share their costs with and I do not have that (Laura 2015).

According to Nanneke Winters, PhD in Development studies, who has researched care work negotiations of Nicaraguan families in the backdrop of migration, family becomes especially important in contexts "where state support is limited and poverty levels are high" (Winters 2014: 422). Adriana, 38 years old, also highlights that family has significance in this context in the following quote:
Without my husband I would not be able to maintain myself [on her salary working as a domestic worker]. I admire those single mothers who are able to survive on the minimum wage (Adriana 2015)

The wages for domestic workers are in general already low and, as previously stated, domestic work is also a gendered area for Nicaraguan migrants (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez 2014: 47; Gindling 2008: 116). Gender, class and nationality thereby shape Martha's and Laura's experiences of working as domestic workers, as well as on how they feel, which in turn have an effect on their abilities to orient in this context. Several respondents also mention age when talking about domestic work, stating that working within the domestic sector has an expiration date. Cinthia, 62 years old, is one of those who is currently unemployed.

At a certain age they do not give you work...They say that you are slow, that you easily get sick. And if you do get you a job they offer you less than they should (Cinthia, 2015).

This quote is an example of discriminatory notions connected to age: you have to be young to be seen as efficient and you have to be productive to be valued. According to Linn Sandberg, gender researcher, the discourse of the ageing body consists of notions of non-productivity, passivity and dependence, descriptions that marks a clear connection to how female bodies often are described (Sandberg 2013: 14). When age is inscribed in one's body it can thereby signalize incapacity and inefficiency. A body read as old in this context faces another boundary, a boundary which reduces one's access to the labor market. Working as a domestic worker is no longer a profession within reach for Cinthia, and she has thereby become disoriented within this space. Since Cinthia also has worked illegally, she does not have the right to pension, and is maintained by her adult children.

**Nationality**

Floya Anthias claims that the boundaries that are connected to one's ability to belong - or feeling at home - are not static, but rather "forms of political practice" and underlines that their nature thereby is constructive. To belong, she claims, is however not only about boundaries, but also "about hierarchies which exist both within and across boundaries" (Anthias 2008: 9). Following this reasoning, it becomes clear that the hierarchical relationship between the employer and the employee is, or has been, stronger for some respondents than for others. Martha and Laura have residency, which means that even though
they are migrants, they are not illegal and both of them have social insurance, and if Laura has to work on Sundays she's paid double salary. This is not case for all the respondents. Cinthia came to Costa Rica in 2002 and still lives illegally in the country.

At the beginning people are good to you. But when you start to notice what the minimum wage is and that your employer doesn't pay you enough and you start to reclaim your rights it changes ...then they give you subtle threats, say that you do not have legal documents and you notice that they are not good people /..../ I have never had the minimum wage, social insurance or been paid severance pay (Cinthia 2015).

According to Anthias, translocational positionality connects social, as well as physical, locations to identity processes. The concept does thereby not only refer to the changeability of social hierarchies, but also the shifting of physical ones. Movement, for example migration, thereby becomes a question of how locales are shifting in people's lives (Anthias 2008: 17). When Cinthia migrated to Costa Rica, changed her physical location, she suddenly was read as "illegal". Cinthia's experience has been that employers have taken advantage of her illegal status, using it as a leverage to pay her less. When she has claimed her rights they have fired her without paying severance or giving her recommendations letters, she says.

Here we can detect another strongly defined boundary, one which does not only have an impact on the experiences of working as a domestic worker, but also stretches into other rooms and contexts. As stressed by Gutierrez-Rodriguez, chair of Sociology at the University of Giessen, I would say that not having legal residency could imply "falling through the cracks of official protection schemes" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014: 50).

Gutiérrez-Rodríguez argues that migration policies establish differences between nationals and migrants, and thereby contribute to migrants being seen as the "Other". Furthermore, she claims, migration policies are not only experienced, but also sensed in "the everyday encounters between domestic workers and employers, as well as in the places they inhabit" (2014: 48). By this, according to my interpretation, she means that migration policies enters the employer's home when a migrant domestic worker is hired, since a "cultural realm of imagining the nation's Other is reactivated" in this encounter (Ibid).

When Cinthia have been discriminated, seen as the Other, she has claimed her rights, even though she doesn't have residency. When bodies do not succeed to claim space, stresses Ahmed, they also sense where they do or do not belong, and in turn, these feelings orient the body towards other spaces (Ahmed 2006: 12). Cinthia has tried to expand her body, push through the boundaries and decrease the distance between the body of her own and others.
However, when doing so, walls of threat have arisen: her migratory status has been sensed in the encounter with the employer.

In 2010, Costa Rica's General Law of Migration and Alien Affairs (No. 8764) was approved, which, amongst other regulations, establishes different costs for prolongation of visas and residency. For example, if you are categorized as a tourist you must pay 100 US dollars to extend the stay, and to change the migratory status you have to pay 200 US dollars - and be able to meet all of its corresponding requirements (Sandoval-García 2014: 354; Bonnie 2010: 83). Hence, it is now expensive to change one's migratory status, and not everyone has the possibility to do so. All of the respondents have lived more than ten years in Costa Rica, and several did not have residency when they first arrived to the country. Even though the majority now has legal residency, in the past they have also been in Cinthia's situation. Gutiérrez-Rodríguez stresses that being without legal residency directs migrant women towards the possibility to work as domestic workers in the first place, since "employment in a private household as a domestic worker represents one of the few options for making a living" if you need to avoid places where you can be detected by the police (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014: 50). This was also the case for Cinthia:

I knew that it was going to be very tough in Costa Rica since we came here undocumented. The only thing I could do was to cook so I decided to start working as a domestic worker (Cinthia 2015).

In 2011, Astradomes completed 504 questionnaires with domestic workers in Costa Rica, posing 32 questions regarding working conditions, salaries, migratory status, labor harassment etc. (2011: 12). One of the questions was about whether they thought it was difficult to report the employer in case of discrimination, and 50.2 percent answered yes. The respondents who said yes were asked why, and 53.7 percent said that it was because of fear - fear which, for a large amount, was connected to their migratory status (2011: 29). Ahmed states that fear creates distance between bodies, distance from those bodies that are marked as different (Ahmed 2004: 63). Fear sprung from the encounters with others thereby has an impression of one's embodiment, which in turn, affects how and where bodies are able to orient.

Some of the respondents additionally state there is xenophobia against Nicaraguans. When one of the respondents needed to take some time off to go to see her family since a family member had died, her employer told her that "Nicas come up with anything to get permission" (Adriana 2015). She went anyway, and when she came back her employer
insulted her, she claims. Laura has also had personal experiences of xenophobia at one of her former workplaces.

Being a migrant can be humiliating. Or rather being from Nicaragua.../ It is the way they say it. “Oh, you are a Nica!” /.../ One employer told me “You're a Nica, you do not understand that you have to respect the Ticas” (Laura 2015)

The person Laura refers to in this quote makes a clear distinction between being a Costa Rican and a Nicaraguan, degrading the latter. In this situation and context, Laura was pointed out as the 'Other' because of her nationality. According to Carlos Sandoval-García, professor of communication studies, Nicaraguan immigrants are commonly seen as the 'Other' in Costa Rica, a threat to the nation, and narratives about the Nicaraguan community often contains hostile notions (Sandoval-García 2014: 353). At the same time, and paradoxically, he claims, the Nicaraguans are crucial to the economy and welfare of Costa Rica: Nicaraguans produce new as well as traditional agricultural products, they are a vital work force in the construction sector, are often hired as security guards, and Nicaraguan women take care of the children and elders of the Costa Rican middle-class. "In short, those who are considered violent are also the ones responsible for maintaining Costa Rica’s sense of security and economic growth", Sandoval-García summarizes (2014: 354).

Bridget Anderson, Professor of Migration and Citizenship, also highlights contradictory notions of nation and boundaries, and the production of "us" and "them" (Anderson 2014: 6). According to her, homes are crucial spaces in the development of nationhood and families are a key actor in constructing national life (2014: 7). This area is however not closed to non-citizens, such as migrant domestic workers, even though citizenship is fundamental in the construction of the nation (2014: 6-7). To be seen as the Other, and even as a threat to the nation, is to stand outside of the constructed we-ness of Costa Rica (Anthias 2008: 8). In turn, this has consequences for the working conditions, as well as the working environment, for Nicaraguan domestic workers. It means not being able to being oriented in a national we-ness, to be pushed towards estrangement and disorientation, although one is contributing to the economy of the nation, whilst enabling Costa Rican middle-class families to work, forming part of the "heart of the nation" (Anderson 2014: 5).

In this section I have analyzed the results connected to disorientation, while exploring if and how the respondents experiences of working as domestic workers are connected to intersections between nationality, class and gender. I have also sought to locate agency. As I have demonstrated, nationality, gender, class as well as age have shaped some of the
respondents' experiences of working as domestic workers. Some of the respondents have suffered xenophobia at their workplaces, others live at their employer's house because of restricted economy and thereby frequently work overtime, and some can no longer find an employment within the sector because of their age. One of the respondents has also been discriminated because of working undocumented. These intersections have had an impact on their abilities to orient within their work places - as well as in society itself. The respondents also have to relate to several boundaries, which affects their possibilities to become familiarized and to have embodied agency in certain spaces. In turn, this leads to disorientation. The boundaries do however vary: they are fluid and contextual. Whereas Costa Rican domestic workers, and migrant domestic workers with residency, might suffer from poor working conditions, the system enables them to demand their rights without fear of being deported. Thus there's also a difference between migrant domestic workers having residency, and those who do not.

The intersections between gender, class and nationality have also played a part when it comes to the respondent’s decision to migrate to Costa Rica: in order to search for better economic opportunities (class), with the aim to provide for their families (gender), they have migrated to Costa Rica, a country where they already had social networks of fellow citizens (nationality). This act has however created new opportunities, affecting not only the respondents, but also their families. Since the respondents work as domestic workers, they additionally enable families in Costa Rica to be able to work, since they take care of their homes and children (Bonnie 2010: 76; Lerussi 2008: 197; Sandoval-Garcia 2014: 354). To migrate could therefore be seen as an act of agency.

Relocation and feeling at home

In this part, I will address results connected to relocation and feeling at home, whilst exploring in which spaces and contexts agency can be found. I will also examine how and if the respondents' lived experiences are intertwined with gender, class and nationality.

Gender

According to the ILO, domestic work often serves as an entrance point for women to the labor market in Latin America (ILO 2013: 26). This has been the case for some of the respondents as well. Adriana has worked three years at the same place, and earns the minimum wage. However, she leaves one hour earlier each day so she can be able to study during the evenings. She says the she is OK with her wage for the moment, since it allows her
to follow her dream of studying. Her goal is to work in accounting, having her own business in the future.

Thank God that I have had this work [domestic work] all this time, I like what I do, I love to cook and clean. At the same time I do not see myself doing this when I am older, I have other expectations in life (Adriana 2015).

María expresses similar notions. She has a bachelor's degree in philosophy, and states that she in the future would like to have a professional career, a goal she hopes her daughter will achieve as well. She says that working as a domestic worker has been a valuable experience since it has allowed her to contribute financially to her daughter's studies. However, she also sees it as transitory work.

To be disoriented can change when we found ourselves having a direction, a future destination that suddenly unfolds - and we orient ourselves towards it, Ahmed states (2006: 27). María and Adriana, as well as some of the other respondents, have reoriented and have their gaze directed at future dreams. Working as domestic workers is, or has not been, their end destination; it is a transitory mean to reach their goals, a profession that enables them to orient themselves towards future possibilities. It has also helped them to maintain themselves and enabled them to send money to their families. Working as a domestic worker could therefore, in certain contexts and for some of the respondents, be interpreted as the key to relocate in Costa Rica. It is also an act of agency.

However, even if domestic work can function as a gateway to the labor market, and is a profession of great value, it can also - as demonstrated in the former chapter - imply poor working conditions and low wages. In turn, this reinforces gender inequalities (ILO 2013: 21). Striving for better working conditions, recognition and improved protection for the profession is thereby crucial, since it will "make a considerable contribution to gender equality in the labor market" (Ibid). According to the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), one important tool in this striving is the ILO Convention No. 189, which establishes basic rights for domestic workers (IDWF 2013: 5). The convention has been ratified by Costa Rica, and entered into force recently (ILO 2015). All of the respondents gained knowledge about the convention through Astradomes, participating in workshops regarding the theme. Even though they all claim that it is not yet being implemented, they also point out that the ratification of it has been important to them.
Now we are not alone, we at least have that power [the ILO Convention No. 189], even though it has been difficult with the implementation, to make people fulfill what corresponds to them (Martha 2015).

Bonnie, who have investigated how the working conditions of migrant domestic workers from Nicaragua in Costa Rica have been affected by the 2009 reform to the Labor Code regarding paid domestic work, states the importance of this reform goes beyond the legal aspects. It has helped to strengthen the self-esteem of the domestic workers as well as to shape a common identity. The fact that the domestic worker's movement played a significant role in its approbation meant that they also broke with the stereotypical representation of domestic workers as invisible and powerless (Bonnie 2010: 80). Following this line of thought, the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 could also be seen as a tool of empowerment for the respondents, a tool that stretches beyond the legal notion of the convention. Many of the respondents are referring to the approval of the ILO Convention No. 189 as a victory, and stress the importance of working for its implementation.

The convention also provides a more comprehensive protection for migrant domestic workers, since it, for example, “oblige ratifying countries to establish effective and accessible complaints mechanisms” (ILO 2013: 53). This becomes especially important considering Bonnie’s reasoning regarding the shortcomings of the 2009 reform to the new Migration Law from 2010, and its effects on migrant domestic workers. Even though the reform includes everyone, regardless of country of origin or residency, the Migration Law from 2010 stipulates that, in order to have the right to social insurance, one has to have a regulated migration status. This Bonnie sees as a difficulty, partly because it is expensive to change one's migratory status (Bonnie 2010: 83).

With Costa Rica having ratified the ILO convention No. 189, migrant female domestic workers have an even more powerful tool when striving for acknowledgment and decent work. Even if the respondents claim that the convention is yet not being implemented, it has been important to them, and it is seen as a big, step forward, since it considers the provision of extended legal protection.

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11 For example, it establishes that a normal workday for domestic workers is eight hours per day, that you have the right to get paid minimum wage in cash and the right to social insurance.
In 2007, Laura arrived to Astradomes for the first time. A friend of hers, a girl from her home village in Nicaragua, took her when she wanted to know about labor rights. She liked it and kept going there. Joining the association has been a positive experience for her.

I was very thin and had low self-esteem. /.../ When I said I wanted to gain weight they [other members at the association] told me that I was beautiful the way I was and I started to get better self-esteem (Laura 2015).

Laura, who lives at her employer's house, also says that joining Astradomes helped her to start to relate to people again, that her life at the time was very sad and that she only worked. Martha, who also lives at her employer's house, says she also began to feel better when she started going to Astradomes, since it helped her to stay in contact with people like her. Both Martha and Laura have a live-in arrangement because of restricted economy, (see chapter Disorientation – class). However, joining Astradomes, getting to know other domestic workers in similar situations, has helped them to relocate, to share experiences and to break isolation. Similar results can be found in Bernardino-Costa's study about unionized domestic workers in Brazil. In his investigation, Bernardino-Costa could see that the union served as a space where his respondents could leave hierarchical relations behind. In narratives regarding the union, stories of empowerment could be detected, whilst narratives of the workplace showed that the respondents experienced relations of power based on race, class and gender, which resulted in disempowerment and humiliation (Bernardino-Costa 2014: 76). In the context of the trade unions, these axes of power "are subjectively experienced as factors of empowerment and the achievement of autonomy." (2014: 79).

According to Michel Foucault, power relations are constantly changing, producing resistance and political mobilization (Bernardino-Costa 2014: 74). Several of the respondents state that they started to demand their rights, as well as challenge their employers, after they joined Astradomes and organized politically. When Carla became a member of the association, and learned that she was entitled to social insurance, she decided to talk to her employer - and succeeded in being heard. "I have learned to not be afraid, and to always demand my rights", she states (Carla 2015). Carmen Cruz, who is now the General Secretary of CONLACTRAHO came to Astradomes first and foremost to get to know other migrant domestic workers, and did not have much knowledge about her rights, she says. After joining the association and taking some of their courses she, as was the case with Laura and Martha, recognized an improvement not only in the understanding of her rights but also in her self-
esteem. Later on, she also studied Labor Rights at the University for three years and in 2010, she was invited to Geneva to work with the ILO Convention No. 189. In 2012, she was elected General Secretary for CONLACTRAHO.

I have empowered myself, even without a lawyer I know that I can defend myself because I know about my rights (Carmen 2015).

According to Ahmed, being familiar in a space is to already be oriented in it, to be able to take place, to speak out, knowing where to turn. The familiar is to "reach out toward objects that are already within reach" (Ahmed 2006: 8). Carmen stresses that she can defend herself even without a lawyer - she has become familiar in the rooms of labor rights and know how to orient these spaces. To have expanded one's body into the rooms of decision-making, isn't that what it is to feel at home? As Ahmed poetically puts it: "Loving one's home is not about being fixed into a place, but rather it is about becoming part of a space where one has expanded one's body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as overflowing and flowing over." (Ahmed 2006: 11).

Nationality

Cinthia first arrived to Astradomes in 2009 since she wanted to know more about migration rights. Astradomes offered a lecture about the theme, and since then she has continued to be active within the association. She states that she used to be afraid, because of not having residency, but joining the association has taught her that she is a person with rights. She furthermore likes to help other domestic workers, especially Nicaraguans, she states.

I feel that I can use my experiences of working as a domestic worker to help others. Especially Nicaraguans, I am more concerned with my own people. A lot of them do not know where to go with their documents, or how to defend themselves/..../ I feel that I am doing something more, that I am not just a domestic worker (Cinthia 2015).

Cinthia is currently unemployed and does not have residency, and therefore she has to relate to certain boundaries within the Costa Rican society (see chapter about Disorientation). However, in line with Anthias, I consider belonging not only being about having formal memberships, such as citizenship. It is also connected to feeling identified with groups or other people, as well as having a notion of being part of something bigger, and to form
emotional and social bonds to these locations (Anthias 2008: 8). It is clear that the association has been meaningful to Cinthia and given her a sense of belonging. Anthias does not see identity as fixed but fluid and stresses that "people have multiple locations, positions and belongings, in a situated and contextual way". One's embodiment and agency, ability to act, is thereby dependent on meaning, context and time as well as intertwined with gender, nationality and class (Anthias 2008: 5, 6, 15 and 17). Henceforth, the boundaries of identities are constructed rather than essential (Anthias 2008: 9). Astradomes represents a space where Cinthia is "not just a domestic worker", but also a person who contributes with her experiences in order to improve the working conditions for other migrant domestic workers. Being a member of the association has also led to her no longer being afraid, decreasing the distance between herself and others (Ahmed 2006: 12). According to Ahmed, "disorientation is a way of describing the feelings that gather when we lose our sense of who it is that we are", or to lose our aims and purposes (Ahmed 2006: 21). At Astradomes, Cinthia has a place where she belongs, where she has significance and a purpose. She reaches out to other migrant women in order to help them orient, using her own experiences as a domestic worker - which are shaped by nationality, age, gender and class - and becomes relocated herself in the process.

In this section I have analyzed the results connected to relocation and feeling at home, and investigated in which spaces and contexts agency can be found. I have also explored how and if the respondents lived experiences are intertwined with gender, class and nationality. As I have uncovered, the respondents notions of agency and resistance are heavily intertwined with their engagement at Astradomes. Astradomes is a social place, a location, at a certain time, where the social categories of the respondents, such as class, gender and nationality, produce solidarity, agency and resistance instead of hierarchical relations such as in certain employer-employee relationships. In turn, becoming organized, has in some cases affected the respondents working conditions since it has lead them to learn about, and demand, their rights. Astradomes also serves as a solidarity network, where it is possible for the members to use their own experiences to help others or to gain new knowledge, as well as meet friends. It is a space where the respondents are allowed to unfold, take place, relocate and feel at home. All of the respondents have learned about their rights and the ILO Convention No. 189 at the association - and thereby felt empowered. Finally, working as a domestic worker is also connected to agency. For some of the respondents, the profession has helped them to relocate in Costa Rica, and to strive for future goals and dreams.
Concluding discussion

In this study I have investigated the lived experiences of organized migrant domestic workers in Costa Rica and examined if and how their experiences are connected to intersections mainly between nationality, class and gender but also other unforeseen and relevant categories. Moreover, I have explored in which spaces and contexts agency can be found. When analyzing my material, I have addressed notions regarding disorientation, relocation and feeling at home.

As I have revealed, the intersections between nationality, class and gender - as well as age - are intertwined with the respondents lived experiences of working as domestic workers in Costa Rica. One example of how all these categories of power intersect can be found in the experiences of Cinthia. Cinthia is undocumented in Costa Rica, considered to be too old for the profession and is currently unemployed. Since she has worked illegally in Costa Rica, she does not have the right to pension. Because of her lack of residency, and because of her nationality and gender, she has been discriminated by employers, fired without notice and not paid enough in an already vulnerable position where the wages are generally low and the working conditions poor. In turn, this has lead to notions of disorientation. However, the boundaries for the respondents embodiment vary, and their experiences are not homogeneous. Laura, for instance, who lives at her employer's house because of restricted economy, frequently works overtime feeling stressed and depressed at her workplace. At the same time, she has residency, and thereby holds access to certain spaces in the Costa Rican society.

All of the respondents migrated to Costa Rica because of financial reasons, striving for better economic opportunities, with the desire to send money to their families, for the payment of utility services and education. The migrants have in some cases relatives already living in Costa Rica and also their family in Nicaragua who helped them to relocate in the new country or to look after their children, respectively. Migrating has implied notions of disorientation, however it also leads to the respondents being able to help their siblings and/or children to study, to provide for their families, and to create new opportunities for themselves. Working as domestic workers in Costa Rica, also imply caring for someone else's home and/or children, enabling middle- class families in Costa Rica to work (Sandoval-García 2014: 354). Thus, even though the respondents decisions to migrate has been intertwined with intersections between gender, class and nationality, they have also been acts of agency that have generated new possibilities.
In this study, I have also demonstrated that Astradomes is a location where the respondents feel that they belong, where gender, class and nationality generate identification, agency and resistance. It is a place where isolation has been broken, where knowledge can be shared and relocation occurs. Being part of Astradomes is also to be part of the global domestic workers' movement, which continues to gain recognition and visibility all over the world. Becoming organized, and learn about rights, have had an impact on the respondents ability to orient, to claim space as well as to demand recognition and improve their working conditions. Being a member of Astradomes has additionally "opened up" other spaces for the respondents embodied agency. To become familiar, to belong, is also about being able to be oriented in the world of legal rights, of conventions and norms, knowing where to turn with complaints, and to have this possibility within reach. All of the respondents have learned about the ILO Convention No. 189 at the association, a convention that has not only been important in a legal sense, but also symbolically. In both cases, it is a tool of empowerment that also provides an extended legal protection for migrant domestic workers.

I have connected my results to previous research within the field, however, this study also addresses a research gap, and serves as a complement. Nor Bonnie (2010) or Lerussi (2008), who earlier have studied the working conditions for migrant Nicaraguan domestic workers in Costa Rica, called intersectionality into question, or focused on embodied experience. Both of these investigations were furthermore conducted before Costa Rica had ratified the ILO Convention No. 189. Even though there are certain similarities between these studies and mine, and correlated notions are presented, my thesis contributes with updated knowledge to the field. It gives an insight in how the ILO Convention No. 189 has come to matter in the lives of migrant Nicaraguan domestic workers in Costa Rica and shows how important organizing has been in relation to the respondents embodied agency. Moreover, it demonstrates that the experience of working as domestic workers is shaped by intersections between class, gender, nationality and age and thereby points at the necessity of taking heterogeneous experiences into account. By focusing on individual narratives, this study can also be seen as a complement to previous statistical studies, such as the one conducted by Astradomes et al (2011).

During the interviews, I did not ask questions specifically connected to class, gender and nationality, but these were the themes that appeared recurrently throughout the conversations with the respondents. Age was another, and slightly unexpected, category that came up in the testimonies. With this said, I have sought to allow the material - to some extent - steer the structure of this thesis. As a strategy to avoid victimization, I have moreover
focused on locating agency. Nevertheless, as stated in the chapter Ethics and reflexivity, I did not include the respondents when designing the outline of this study, and the research is thereby heavily intertwined with my own situatedness. As a feminist scholar and political subject, I am caught up *in medias res*, and cannot separate myself from the world I live in, the study I am conducting, or the material I am analyzing (Lykke 2010: 33). I have also analyzed the material from my privileged point of view, and the results might therefore bare its traces.

**Directions for future research**

One of the problems that Bonnie, who have investigated how the working conditions of Nicaraguan migrant domestic workers have been affected by the 2009 reform of the Labor Code regarding paid domestic work, highlights in her study, is the lack of disclosure - not all domestic workers or employers having knowledge about the content of the reform (Bonnie 2010: 82). I cannot answer whether or not this is also a problem when it comes to the ILO Convention No. 189. However, what I do know is that, as previously mentioned, all of the respondents in this study learned about the ILO Convention No. 189 at Astradomes. As stressed by Carmen in the following quote, not all migrant domestic workers have the possibility to participate in the work associations like Astradomes carry out.

> There are many who might want to be here [at Astradomes] full time to learn and take courses but they have children, or have to send money home to their families, so they can't. We have to work for those who can't be here and be their voice (Carmen 2015).

One could thereby ask if the result of this study would have been different if I would have interviewed Nicaraguan migrant domestic workers that are not organized. Moreover, the selection of respondents for this thesis was based on the respondents’ availability - they were all *active* members of Astradomes. All of the respondents have also lived in Costa Rica for more than ten years and are over 30 years old. Some of the respondents did not have residency at the time of their arrival, but have been able to change their migratory status after a couple of years. They have also many years of experience in the domestic sector, and have worked for several employers. The results might therefore be different if I had interviewed respondents that are younger or have lived in Costa Rica for a shorter period of time.

In order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of this theme, it would thereby be recommendable to interview migrant Nicaraguan domestic workers that are *not* organized,
as well as young domestic workers and Costa Rican domestic workers. For example, it would be interesting to perform a comparative analysis, seeking to analyze if and how the experiences of Costa Rican domestic workers differ from Nicaraguans within the domestic sector. Moreover one could also include domestic workers when designing the outline of the study, asking them about which themes they consider important to investigate.
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Appendix 1

Question guide

Name:
Age:
Place of origin:

Background:
Why and when did you leave Nicaragua to go to Costa Rica?
How long have you lived in Costa Rica?
Do you have a residence permit?
Do you have family in Costa Rica and/or Nicaragua?

Working as a domestic worker:
When and where did you start to work as a domestic worker?
What has been your experience working as a domestic worker?
How would you describe your current working conditions?
Do you feel that your work is being recognized?
How do you see your future?

Becoming and being organized:
Why did you decide to join the domestic workers' association Astradomes?
In which way are you involved in the association?
How would you describe your engagement within Astradomes?
In your opinion, which issues do you think are the most important when it comes to the rights of domestic workers?

ILO Convention No. 189:
When did you first learn about the ILO Convention No. 189?
Has the working conditions for domestic workers changed since Costa Rica ratified the convention? If so, how?