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*Erasmus*

**Theorizing the value of work through the eyes of Latin  
American domestic workers in the Netherlands**

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***Angélica Morán-Castañeda***

Colombia

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Members of the Examining Committee:

Karin Astrid Siegmann

Lee Pegler

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***Inquiries:***

International Institute of Social Studies  
P.O. Box 29776  
2502 LT The Hague  
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460  
e: [info@iss.nl](mailto:info@iss.nl)  
w: [www.iss.nl](http://www.iss.nl)  
fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>  
twitter: [@issnl](https://twitter.com/issnl)

***Location:***

Kortenaerkade 12  
2518 AX The Hague  
The Netherlands

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## List of Acronyms

FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FPE	Feminist Political Economy
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISS	International Institute of Social Studies

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## **Abstract**

This study explores a rupturing way of understanding the value of domestic work from a feminist economics perspective based on the voices of Latin American migrant domestic workers in the Netherlands. Using a feminist standpoint view epistemology and qualitative methods of research, this document presents what is the value of domestic work according to their experiences and thoughts. The value of domestic work is defined by domestic workers into three levels: what is value for domestic workers, for employers, and for society. Value is relational, contextual-dependent and contradictory. Despite its importance for the human flourishing, devaluation appears at all levels of value, and it is expressed in the corporeal experiences by domestic workers. Findings hope to contribute to making visible the domestic work in a context of migration as well as enriching feminist economics epistemologies and methodologies of research.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Feminist theory has highlighted that social reproduction is at the core economic development and human flourishing. This research offers new insights into the value of domestic work as an activity for social reproduction from a critical perspective and reflective and engaging methodologies of research in feminist economics. The voices of Latin American domestic workers were absent in the literature regarding migrant care workers in the Netherlands and this study contributes to putting their experiences in the centre to give alternative understandings in the value of their work. In addition, the research hopes to contribute to making visible the value of domestic work in a migration context.

## **Keywords**

Domestic work, feminist economics, Latin American domestic workers, Netherlands, value, feminist epistemologies, migration.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

This research paper is part of a reflection process on knowledge production in Latin American Feminist Economics. Particularly, it is an invitation to reflect on the importance of listening to the voices of those whom we talked about when we talk of care work. The results of this research process are a product of deeply personal reflections around ‘doing feminist economics’ while living abroad and studying for a master’s degree in Development Studies in the Netherlands. From a feminist standpoint view epistemology and using qualitative methods of research and an interpretive approach, domestic workers’ experiences and thoughts are going to be framed to give alternative understandings of the value of domestic work.

Domestic work is going to be understood as a type of care work or *trabajo de cuidados*. According to the Feminist Political Economy (FPE) care work, both paid and unpaid constitutes an essential activity for the sustainability of life (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021). It is the fundamental instrument that permits the social reproduction of labour, capital, and, in general, the continuity of life. Basic daily activities are the base of the care work, from cleaning, cooking, and doing the laundry to taking care of an ill parent, playing with a child, or feeding a baby. Particularly, domestic work is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as “Work done primarily to maintain households. Includes the provision of food and other necessities, cleaning, caring for children and the sick and elderly, etc.” (International Labour Organization, 2022b), which suggests that it is not only about household keeping, but also taking care of people. ILO also stands that the care workforce is composed of care workers who can perform their jobs under market relations or not, and domestic workers are part of the first group (International Labour Organization, 2021, p. xxvii).

Despite its importance for the sustainability of life, domestic work is gendered, racialized, and faces a myriad of deficits regarding decent work. There is a historically established correlation between domestic work and femininity that naturalizes the fact that mainly women are in charge of this type of work (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez and Brites, 2014, p. 1). In addition, as Gutiérrez-Rodríguez and Brites (2014) stand “frequently, these women belong to an economically, racially, ethnically and religiously subordinated social group” (p.2). Moreover, there are factors such as the lack of formal working conditions and discriminatory social and economic valuation of the activity that leave the workers in vulnerable situations (International Labour Organization, 2018, p. 192). This undervaluation of domestic work reinforces prior gender and social inequalities and ignores how daily care activities done by domestic workers allow the economic system to function.

That contradiction between the importance of domestic work for the sustainability of life and its devaluation in society is not reflected in current conceptualizations of value. Neoclassical economics’ narrowness centers on market relations to define value and its dependency on productivity; human capital theory defines it in terms of the investments in the skills of employers. However, none of them explains the complexity of value and the undervaluation of domestic work considering the skills of domestic workers and the importance of domestic work for maintaining life. Other approaches such as Social Reproduction Theory are more accurate in explaining how value and devaluation is present in domestic work by giving structural explanations within the capitalist system. Nevertheless, it has focused on systemic perspectives rather than micro perspectives and the subject’s experiences.



Specifically, domestic work in the Netherlands is not treated as other types of work. The regulation of domestic work consists of a number of exceptions to the civil and public Dutch law obligations imposed to the employers (Rijksoverheid, 2015, p. 2). Households can hire domestic workers for fewer than 4 days a week and “are exempt of paying taxes on wages and social insurance premiums” (International Labour Organization, 2021, p. 206). As a consequence, workers lack decent working conditions and have restricted public access to social protection.

The situation of domestic workers in the Netherlands has been studied from different perspectives using qualitative methodologies of research and focused on specific countries. Sabrina Marchetti (2010) analysed of colonial legacies that exist in the actual forms of domestic workers within the migratory environment, particularly, for Afro-Surinamese women in Rotterdam; S.J Botman (2011) explains the conflictive labour relations between employers and domestic workers from different parts of the world in Amsterdam; subsequently, Sabrina Marchetti (2016) continues her investigation of domestic work studying family-like relationships between migrant employees and non-migrant employers, particularly in Filipina domestic workers; and there are other studies such as the case study by Lepianka and Ramos-Martin (2016) in which they give a wide map of the profile of domestic workers in the Netherlands. Those localised literature on migrant care workers in the Netherlands has focused on countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, and other dispersed parts of the world, but little is known about Latin American migrant domestic workers.

In consequence, this paper theorizes alternative meanings to the value of domestic work based on the experiences and thoughts of Latin American domestic workers. I situated myself in the feminist standpoint view epistemology, and with the aim of reflecting and diversifying methodologies of research in feminist economics, I conducted qualitative methodologies and used an interpretative approach to analyse the findings. The document has four chapters, including this introduction, which contains the research problem, the research question and the scope and limitations. The second chapter describes my epistemological and methodological reflections. Chapter three presents the findings related to the levels of domestic work value and chapter six presents the conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.1. Research problem

Domestic work must be done, in any socio-economic system, in any country, at any time in the life cycle. It has a “structural character as necessary societal labour” (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 75). However, despite its huge relevance for human flourishing, domestic work is contrastingly located “at the bottom of the value ladder” (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 89).

Domestic work, as part of the reproductive work, is set at the center of the sustainability of life (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 31). This idea proposed by the Feminist Political Economy (FPE) perspective re-values the reproductive realm in the androcentric economic discourse, considering it at the same level as the productive realm, and gives those activities a privileged analytical position in economics. The use of the term sustainability of life<sup>1</sup> makes it possible

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<sup>1</sup> This proposal of the sustainability of life has been developed in the last two decades mainly in the Spanish-speaking world (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 34). Even though the critics of orthodox economics are also produced and nourished by English-speaking knowledge production, the sustainability of life concept is a demonstration of a different enunciation place and a particular perspective of a systemic transformation. In Latin America, sustainability of life is related to notions coming from other heterodox perspectives such as the Social, Solidarity, Popular and Feminist

to account for the deep relationship between the economic and the social, and that raises the living conditions of people, women and men, as a priority (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 93). The reproductive function of domestic work is then constitutive of the production and reproduction of the economy (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 91). This labour is what sustains the rest of the economy because it extends the standards of livings and the household members' well-being, but also qualifies and allows the labour force to go to work (Picchio, 2001, cited in Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 128).

However, some conceptualizations of the value of work fail to explain the importance of domestic work as well as the reasons why it is undervalued. From neoclassical economics and marginalists, labour is analysed as any other market. The value of work is defined by the market forces of supply and demand, and it is represented in the wage, which is the remuneration to compensate the drudgery (opposite to leisure) that represents the productivity of a worker. Therefore, the value of the task increases with the level of drudgery. Wages would dictate then how much a determined work is 'worthy' for the society (Adams, 2020, p. 61), since it is defined by rational agents with symmetric information in the market. However, domestic work efforts in physical and time-consuming terms are not reflected in high wages, decent working conditions or a perceived worth for society. By its part, human capital theory, as an application of the marginalist school, would affirm that the wage is determined by the education, work experiences, and information of the employees. Thus, higher wages will result from increased investments in the abilities of employees. Nevertheless, most of the Latin American domestic workers, as it will be more explained in the section 3.1, have invested in their professional skills in different fields in their home countries, but this is not reflected in their salaries nor in the relation with their current occupation. Certainly, those perspectives are limited to reflect the complexity of how value should be understood, even more, when it is about migrant domestic workers.

In contrast, other approaches have defined the value beyond productivity terms and have explained value as a result of structural relations. Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), which is a strand of Marxism Feminism, has conceptualized specifically the value of domestic work. SRT's different developments are framed in the discussion of the domestic work's role in the reproduction of the labour-force in capitalism. This theoretical framework approaches the concept of value more accurately, since it locates the SRT in a specific economic system as well as highlights the idea of oppression as structurally relational and shaped by capitalist production (Bhattacharya and Vogel, 2017, p. 3). Consequently, it helps to comprehend that the undervaluation of domestic work is the result of a "phenomenon socially produced and culturally predicated" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 89). However, it is focused on a system view, giving importance to structural relations.

Without claiming to list all the theories that have conceptualised the value of labour - the ones mentioned above being the most important- none of them have addressed the micro level of the sustainability of life<sup>2</sup>. The goal of this level of analysis is to comprehend the

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Economy and its ideas of progress around 'the life that we want to live', in Spanish, *la vida que queremos vivir* to have a "good life" or '*buen vivir*' or '*vivir sabroso*'. *Buen Vivir* is a proposal from the indigenous communities from South America that poses to live in harmony with nature, people and having a community life (Rodríguez-Salazar, Adriana, 2021). *Vivir Sabroso* is a spiritual, social, economic, political, and cultural organizational model to live in harmony with the environment, nature and people. This concept is part of afro Colombian communities in the Colombian Pacific (Mena-Lozano and Meneses-Copete, s.f).

<sup>2</sup> FPE has proposed three levels of sustainability of life: macro, meso and micro. Macro level describes the 'open economic system' that is composed of the ecological subsystem, the economic subsystem and the social subsystem. The ecological system defines the boundaries of the economic relations,

subject's praxis in relation to the process of life's sustainability as transmitters and/or receivers (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 138). From this micro level, I will analyse Latin American domestic workers' own perspective on the sustainability of life process, making contextualized and non-universal analyses. By doing this, I will contribute to overcoming the methodological challenges that FPE faces in operationalising micro level analysis in the process of life sustainability (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 142), as well as to enrich the perspectives to understand value and how undervaluation is experienced by the subjects providing care in a context of migration.

## 1.2. Research question

The document will answer the research question of *What is the value of domestic work for Latin American domestic workers in the Netherlands?*

The process of research aims to explore alternative insights on the value of domestic work, considering the voices of migrant Latin American domestic workers. Findings hope to contribute to making visible the domestic work in a context of migration as well as enriching feminist economics epistemologies and methodologies of research.

## 1.3. Scope and limitations

This research does not pretend to generalize the results to the total population of Latin American domestic workers nor give a totalizing view of value. The scope of this investigation is framed in the experiences and thoughts of the participants, which are organized and theorized to give a particular view of value. My interpretations of their experiences and thoughts are crossed by my previous understandings considering my positionality of feminist economist. In the process of writing, there may be a loss of information since my thoughts as well as the fieldwork were conducted in Spanish.

## 1.4. Contextual background: domestic work in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is recognized as one of the countries with the most important progress in policies related to the demand for care services, but this is not necessarily the same in terms of the supply side of care. The Netherlands is the third country in the world with the highest public expenditure in care policies as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) at around 7%, after Sweden (approximately 8.8%) and Denmark (approximately 8.5%) (International Labour Office, 2018, p. xxxvi). This country has maternity, disability, sickness, employment and long-term care services and benefits; more specifically, it has cash for care schemes, such as the Personal Care Budget dedicated to funding the caring of the elderly or persons with special health needs (Lepianka and Ramos-Martin, 2016, p. 73). It also enacted the Flexible Working Hours Act in 2016 to promote part time job work with positive consequences for balancing work and family time (International Labour Organization, 2018, p. 298).

However, despite those advances from the demand care side, the supply side, specifically the domestic workers have experienced several exceptions to the benefits of social protection and decent working conditions. Domestic work in the Netherlands is not recognized as other

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and the social system, which encompassed the economic one includes all the interactions between the commodities production and the domestic work, as a 'human maintenance chain'(Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 112).

types of work. According to Parreñas and Silvey (2018) the majority of the countries of destiny where migrant workers go “do not fully recognize domestic work as labor, that is, as a legitimate matter of public concern that appropriately involves rights and duties designated by the state” (p. 431). Indeed, the Netherlands has not ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention 189 (ILO C-189). According to the Dutch Government, the Netherlands complies with the requirements of this Convention, except for article 14 related to social security (Rijksoverheid, 2015, p. 9). This article states:

“Each Member shall take appropriate measures, in accordance with national laws and regulations and with due regard for the specific characteristics of domestic work, to ensure that domestic workers enjoy conditions that are not less favourable than those applicable to workers generally in respect of social security protection, including with respect to maternity” (International Labour Organization, 2022a).

The Dutch exceptions for domestic workers regarding employee insurance, wage tax, and the differences with the traditional treatment of employer/employee are contrary to article 14 of the ILO C-189, and consequently, block its ratification.

Instead, domestic work in the Netherlands is regulated by the Home Service Regulation of 2007 (*Regeling dienstverlening aan huis*) which establishes that a private person can hire another private person for a maximum of three days per week (Rijksoverheid, 2015, p. 1; Eurofound, 2019). According to Farvaque (2015) 95% of the home services provided in the country fall in this model of work (p. 26). The Regulation of the Home Services consists of some exceptions to the civil and public Dutch laws (Rijksoverheid, 2015, p. 2). Employers who hire domestic workers for less than three days are not obliged to pay for vacations period (Dutch Civil Code or *Burgerlijk Wetboek (BW)* in Dutch, article 7:634), to respond in case of accidents or occupational diseases (BW, article 7:658), and to ask for permission from the UWV WERKbedrijf<sup>3</sup> in the case of a termination of the contract (BW, article 7:667-686). In addition, the domestic workers are not compulsory insured, and the employer is not obliged to pay employee insurance contributions on the salary paid to the domestic staff. Therefore, they cannot have access to the benefits determined by the Sickness Benefit Act (*Ziektewet* in Dutch), Labour Capacity Act (*Wet Werk* in Dutch), Unemployment Insurance Act (*Werkloosheidswet* in Dutch), as well as do not receive pension (Rijksoverheid, 2015, p. 4).

In sum, domestic workers in the Netherlands are seen as a private issue, that has to be resolved in a private manner between the employer and the domestic worker. As Gutiérrez-Rodríguez mentions, as it is in most of European countries, the State disregards domestic work as worthy of policy intervention (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 72). Even though, the Netherlands has some policies that aim gender equality, what happens is that it perpetuates local gender disparities based on global gender inequalities (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 74).

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<sup>3</sup> UWV provides a national implementation of employee insurance policies and labor market and data services (UWV, 2022).

## Chapter 2 Reflecting on feminist epistemologies and research methodologies in feminist economics

This chapter presents the ethic-epistemic considerations of my research process and the reasons for the selection of the methodology. First section is based on the classification of the feminist epistemologies (Harding, 2005; Intemann, 2010), and reflections on methodologies in feminist economics (van Staveren, 1997; Lapniewska, 2018; Tejani, 2019; Agenjo-Calderón, 2021; Schwartz-Shea, 2021). I reflect on why and how this research paper is based in the feminist standpoint view epistemology and contributes to the use of qualitative methods in feminist economics. In the second part, as part of a personal journey and with the intention of making explicit a production of situated knowledge, I explain how my personal and collective background influenced my decision of doing this research. Third, I describe the methodology used in the research, which is aligned to the previous reflections and lastly, I explain the ethical considerations taken over the research process.

### 2.1. Standpoint view epistemology in feminist economics

Feminist economists have reflected on the relationship between feminist theory and feminist economics. Some authors have highlighted how different feminist epistemologies dialogue with the production of knowledge in economics. Authors such as Robeyns (2000), Lapniewska (2018) and Tejani (2019) have highlighted that the feminist standpoint view epistemology (Harding, 2005; Intemann, 2010) can be aligned with feminist economics for two reasons. First, this feminist epistemology emphasizes that knowledge should be produced from the perspectives of living experiences of marginalized groups such as women in certain contexts (Lapniewska, 2018). For this strand, according to Van der Tuin (2016) “those in the margins of society have a better view on the center than those at the center themselves” (p. 1), so the everyday practices of a social disadvantage group gives them an epistemic privilege in the production of knowledge (van der Tuin, 2016, p. 1). Second, because of the enunciation of the positionality of the researcher that leads to ‘strong objectivity’, claiming that the economics is not value-neutral (Robeyns, Ingrid, 2000; Power, 2004, p. 10).

Regarding its methodological implications, feminist economics uses pluralistic methodologies, which do not discard mathematical approaches, rather, the election of the method depends on the topic, purpose and context of the research (Tejani, 2019; Agenjo-Calderón, 2021). Feminist economics have pointed out the limitations of focusing only on quantitative methods to address a problem. Instead, this strand has called out for a transdisciplinary approach to understanding social and economic phenomena (Tejani, 2019, p. 103). Even more, qualitative analysis are considered fundamental to detecting and explaining power relations, oppression and domination (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 58).

Following those ideas, this research paper is informed by feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2005; Intemann, 2010) and applies qualitative methodologies of research. The purpose of this document is to consider the voices of the experienced lives of domestic workers, using qualitative methodologies, which helps me to *explore* meanings, rather than having fixed meanings traditionally used in quantitative approaches based on sources such as surveys, census, or administrative registers.

According to standpoint epistemology, this group has an epistemic privilege of reporting what they think and experience as domestic workers, which has been omitted in the knowledge production in economics. This research explores the meanings of the value of

their work from their perspective and, through my analysis and positionality, I conceptualize from there to categorise and visualize how they, as domestic workers, refer to the value of their work.

From a feminist perspective, it is important to acknowledge one of the ethic-epistemic challenges that Sörensson and Kalman pose considering doing research (2018). This refers to the avoidance of making binary analysis “in which research subjects are represented as either victims or active agents” (Sörensson and Kalman, 2018, p. 706). Domestic workers are care workers that are exposed to cases of labour exploitation, lack of social protection, and discrimination in terms of access to decent wages, and indeed, are not treated as the rest of the workers on a macro level, nor have the same status compared to the household members. Considering this situation, this research will avoid the dichotomy between seeing domestic workers only as victims or only as workers that contribute to the care economy. Rather, I will acknowledge that the process of research is relational and beyond dualities (Dupuis, Constance *et al.*, 2022, p. 12). I will analyse their agency in context and in relation to their life experiences following Mohanty (1988) cited in Sörensson and Kalman (2018, p. 708).

Based on that, my intention is to contribute to the production of feminist economics. For that, I will use qualitative feminist research methodologies understood, following Dupuis, Constance *et al.*, (2022), as counter-narratives to traditional models of research that foregrounds “the experiential and embodied nature of doing research”(2022, p. 4). This will reveal a different insight coming from them.

Related to the feminist research methodology, this research is informed by the four dimensions in methodology research of the Black Feminist Thought proposed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and used in Sörensson and Kalman (2018) and Clemons (2019). First, I will consider domestic workers experience as the best source to give meaning to the value of domestic work, since there is more credibility to those who have lived those experiences than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences (Collins, 2000, p. 257, cited in Sörensson and Kalman (2018, p. 709). Second, through the dialogue with the domestic workers, there is a negotiation of previous ideas of what the value of domestic work is for them and for me. In this sense, the negotiation is not a failure, rather it is a source of knowledge (Sörensson and Kalman, 2018, p. 109; Clemons, 2019, p. 4). Third, there is a need for special attention to the expressiveness and emotions of domestic workers when we are dialoguing, since the production of knowledge is connected to emotions and experiences (Hill Collins, 2000). Lastly, words, consider the personal accountability that demands everyone to be accountable for their personal knowledge claims (Clemons, 2019, p. 4).

These four dimensions act as methodological principles that guide my research process and my interaction with domestic workers. The implementation of those principles is going to distance myself from my previous work and research experience, where I focus on indirect interaction with the subjects of research and exclude emotions and expressiveness as part of the information in the research process.

## **2.2. Positionality and action-research motivations**

Throughout the research process, I positioned myself as a feminist economist who is a member of a Colombian activist community with interests in care economics. I also introduced myself to the participants as a temporary migrant in the Netherlands for academic reasons. I am also part of a household that has hired domestic workers back in Colombia. Even though I have a strong interest in the subject, I am still an outsider. In terms of education and work experience related to what I studied, I consider myself a privileged woman. I declare myself to be a supporter in the improvement of working conditions of Latin American migrant domestic workers in the Netherlands.

My main interest of doing this research was based on a personal and collective journey of reflection around the construction of what is feminist economics from and for Latin America. From a personal perspective, my interest began after finishing my first master's degree where I did a research paper that measured the relationship between the gender income gap and the time dedicated to unpaid domestic work in rural zones in Colombia, using econometric methods and secondary data (Morán-Castañeda, 2016). Although this method was appropriate to make visible how much of the income gap was explained by the gap of the time dedicated to unpaid domestic work, I reflected in the importance of exploring different methodological approaches that can help me to understand power relations in a specific context as well as to have a closer relationship with the participants.

From a collective perspective, this research was motivated by my participation since 2015 as a member of the *Mesa de Economía Feminista* of Bogota. This civil organization is a women's economist movement that seeks to contribute to the development of feminist knowledge and transformations in economics. As part of this transformations, this research explores a qualitative assessment to examine domestic workers' own perspectives on the value of their work. It tries to make the understanding of the value more complex from a different and complementary perspective to the quantitative assessment. This personal shifting as well as my exploration of different research methodologies are part of my journey as feminist economist doing research.

### 2.3. Methodology of the research

The methodology was advanced in cooperation with Fairwork, a Dutch NGO that supports migrant domestic workers in the Netherlands in case of labour exploitation and human trafficking. Fairwork strongly supported me in the development of the qualitative methods applied and was the main bridge to contact the participants. Findings might not represent the organizations' view.

The methodology is developed in two parts. I conducted, first, exploratory Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and second, semi-structured interviews. Participants were Latin American domestic workers in the Netherlands who have performed their work in households for at least 6 months. I contacted them through FairWork, Veni Cultura<sup>4</sup>, and one Facebook group, and applied snowballing sampling technique. In collaboration with Fairwork, I tried to find as much variety as possible, in consequence, I contacted independent workers or workers hired through an agency, whose migratory status could be documented or undocumented.

First, exploratory FGD aims to know about an initial perspective of the different meanings that domestic workers have around the value of domestic work, as King *et. al* stated (2019, p. 94) (see Appendix 1). Following Irene van Staveren (1997), FGD can contribute to strong objectivity in the research (p.131), since “the researcher steps down from the position of objective and detached scientist (...). The researcher accepts the complexity, unpredictability, and multiplicity of interpretations of social life” (p.132). In addition, FGD allow the research “to replace standard assumptions in economics with concepts and interpretations arising from a selection from the researched group itself” (van Staveren, 1997, p. 132). In this case, I step down from my understanding of the notions of value and focused on facilitating a space to invite domestic workers to reflect and discuss the value of their work in the Netherlands.

To do that, the FGD was divided into three main activities. First, a general introduction of the participants; second, an exercise of perception scale around some statements referring

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<sup>4</sup> Veni Cultura is an organisation based in Amsterdam that advises and offers practical help in social issues focused on vulnerable groups (Veni Cultura, 2022).

to the value of domestic work and third, an imagination exercise of a hypothetical situation where domestic workers did not go to work in any household in the Netherlands. In the perception scale activity, domestic workers had to choose if they agree or disagree with some statements. This encouraged them to explain their position and thus generate discussion with the other participants on topics such as remuneration, the rights of domestic workers in the Netherlands, the relationships that can be established with household members, among others. The third activity allowed the participants to reflect on how society would be affected in the absence of domestic work and therefore, to think about why domestic work is important. In the FGD, individual stories were not delved into, but rather general ideas to feed the discussion.

I held two FGD in Spanish on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August of 2022 with nine domestic workers (see Table 1). Transportation costs were covered and each of the participants received 10 euro as a recognition for the time dedicated to the activity funded by Fairwok. Domestic workers come from Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela. Most of them did not know each other before this meeting, except for Lucía and Marbel who were friends. Marbel attended the activity because Lucía invited her. Although she had only 2 months working in the Netherlands, her experience of being a former domestic worker in Spain enriched the conversation with the other participants. The participants were between 25 and 60 years old. Seven of them have been working in the Netherlands for more than 20 years.

**Table 1. FGDs and individual interviews**

N.	Name <sup>5</sup>	Country of origin	Time in the Netherlands	Age	FGD participation	Interviews participation
1	María B.	Colombia	30 years	60	X	X
2	Alicia	Ecuador	23 years	42	X	X
3	Lucía	Ecuador	2 years and 6 months	31	X	X
4	Marbel	Chile	2 months	46	X	
5	Cecilia	Chile	23 years	52	X	X
6	Jacqueline	Chile	20 years	47	X	X
7	Daniela	Bolivia	10 years	35	X	X
8	Génesis	Venezuela	8 months	25	X	X
9	Maritza	Ecuador	2 years	37	X	X
10	Yuly	Colombia	3 years and 8 months	37		X
11	Martha	Colombia	25 years	61		X
12	Esther	Colombia	6 years	46		X
13	María	Bolivia	12 years	61		X
14	Ana Celia	Cuba	5 years	33		X

*Source:* own elaboration.

From the exploratory FGD the purpose was to have dimensions, levels, layers, or the resulting way of organizing how they understand the value. Because of that, I preferred not to ask direct questions about how they understand the *value* of domestic work, since the objective was to explore open meanings. The results guided the design of the next stage of the methodology: the semi-structured interviews. To systematize the information of the FGD, I used the program Atlas.ti and applied open coding that, according to DeCuir-Gunby

<sup>5</sup> According to the will of the participants, some of the names are pseudonyms while others are real names. See section 2.4. Ethical considerations for more detail on the ethics of care across the research.



*et. al.* allows me to “explore the ideas and meanings that are contained in raw data” (2011, p. 139). Subsequently, I applied axial coding to group the labels and to find connections between them (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011). From an interpretative approach (Schwartz-Shea, 2021, p. 145), using their words and the relations in the axial coding, I organized the information into levels: value for domestic workers, value for the employers, and value for society. Inside the levels there are also dimensions that domestic work contribute to: emotional or unmaterial, cleaning or material and environmental dimensions. There is a general category that collects those dimensions that is *essential chain work*. These results are deeply discussed in Chapter 3.

The next step was the semi-structured interviews that seek to deep into the levels and dimensions product of the FGD. I conducted in total 13 interviews including eight participants of the FGD and other 5 domestic workers who could not attend the FGD. The interviews were open-ended questions (see Appendix 3), and some of them referred directly to the value of their work. The interviews lasted for around 60 to 90 minutes and were held in Spanish for them to freely express and look for a common language of communication. Transportation costs were covered and each of the participants received 10 euro as a recognition for the time dedicated to the activity funded by Fairwok. New participants were contacted through Fairwork and using snowballing sample. The analysis was based on the transcriptions of the interviews and my field notes.

## 2.4. Ethical considerations

Ethics of care practices were considered throughout the research. Participation of Latin American domestic workers in the research poses risks related to the publication of sensitive personal information, which could expose them to discrimination and bring negative effects in their administrative processes, for instance, regarding their migratory status. Personal data was managed through an informed consent applied separately for the FGD (see Appendix 2) and the interviews (see Appendix 4). The informed consent asked them if they allow to be recorded and/or cited, and if so, what name I should use in the document. In the FGD all the participants approved to be audio recorded and cited in the research. In the interviews, 11 of the 13 were recorded and all of them approved to be cited. In one case, at the request of the participant, the informed consent was modified to include my obligation of sending her first the sections of the document where I cited her, so the participant could approve their participation in the research. I sent her the document before sending to the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) and changed some of the personal information requested by the participant. Based on the informed consent they signed, the names of the participants can be pseudonyms or real names. Recordings are managed with extreme confidentiality.

Domestic workers were informed from the beginning of the research about the purposes of this document and part of my commitments with them is to present the results on an exclusive meeting supported by FairWork once it is approved by the ISS.

## Chapter 3 Understanding the value of domestic work

Conversations during the FGD and furthered in individual interviews revealed, in broad terms, that there are levels to consider the value of domestic workers' work, as well as dimensions (see Figure 1). Levels refer to the agents from where they experiment the value. The first level is the individual, which refers to the domestic work value meaning for themselves. The second level is for their employers, which refers to the meanings of value that domestic workers think their employers have and the last level comes from a general idea of how the society or Dutch inhabitants value their work.

By its part, the dimensions are specific contributions of domestic work identified by the participants. This finding was the result of the third activity of the FGD, in which the domestic workers were asked to imagine what would happen in the Netherlands if no domestic workers went to work in any household. Dimensions were four: (i) emotional or unmaterial labour, (ii) cleaning or material labour, (iii) environmental labour and (iv) essential chain labour. Even though all the dimensions are present in the three levels of value and overlap, unmaterial and material labour dimensions are going to be explained in the employers' level, and environmental and the category of essential chain labour will be located at the value for the society. To open the explanation, I will first relate how they become domestic workers and what they do in that occupation.

Figure 1. Levels and dimensions of the value of domestic work



Source: own elaboration based on the FGD and interviews, 2022.

### 3.1. Becoming a domestic worker

For all the participants, becoming a domestic worker is a part of a migration journey that started before coming to the Netherlands. All participants first came to the Netherlands motivated to have better living conditions for themselves and their partners and/or family and ended up being domestic workers because it was the best possible option at a specific moment of their staying in this country. Of the 13 participants, 10 of them started to work as domestic workers during the first three months after their arrival. Nine of them are currently undocumented. The rest three, who are documented, decided to work as domestic workers some months after their arrival because it was a way to have economic independency, to ample their social networking, and diversify their daily routines. Thus, for the nine participants that are currently undocumented, the first option to work in the new country was in domestic work, as one of them stated “*here is the only thing I can do. I can't do anything but working in cleaning houses, because I have no other option being undocumented*” (interview,

2022), while for most of the documented workers, becoming a domestic worker was an option, in a slightly wider range of choices.

The labour tasks performed by domestic workers in the Netherlands are wide-ranging. The main characteristic is that the activities are mainly in cleaning and are paid on an hourly basis. At the time of the interview, none of them was working and living in the same place, although three of them worked in that modality when they first came to the Netherlands. All domestic workers at least vacuum the dust, clean the toilets, mop the floor, and clean the kitchen. Yet, several of them have done more than those basic activities. Besides doing the housework, they have taken care of children and pets and cooked for everyone in the households. Others also have given emotional support to the household members in specific situations. Therefore, the tasks involve cleaning and affective activities, which are grouped in the unmaterial and material dimensions, which will be discussed further in the following section.

The range of gross wages they receive covers from seven EUR to 35 EUR per hour. When they start working, they receive very low wages, and over the time in most cases, their salary conditions improve. One of the participants received seven EUR per hour and had to take care of the children, do the cleaning, and cook for everyone in the house of five people. The participant who receives the highest gross wage is a documented domestic worker hired by an intermediary.

Both salary and the kind of labour tasks depend on their migratory status. The range of domestic activities is wider for undocumented workers, while it is specific and smaller for documented ones. The documented participants tend to have more defined activities mainly focused but not exclusively on cleaning. Cecilia, who is working doing domestic work for elderly people with special health needs, has a labour contract with strict definition of the allowed activities. She is banned from cooking, doing groceries, climbing a ladder with more than three steps, or helping her clients in case of a domestic accident. However, when she finishes her duties, she stays with them to have a conversation and give emotional support.

This is very different from the situation of undocumented domestic workers. One undocumented participant mentioned that she would have to do everything their employers ask. If her employers ask to do the laundry, she will do it, if they ask to iron the clothes, she will do it. In the case of a domestic worker who had to live and work in the same house, she was the last person to go to bed when everyone had finished their daily routines. She had to cook, clean the house and the spa business her employers had on the ground floor, as well as take care of a girl. Thus, in general, for undocumented domestic workers the labour tasks cover more range of activities than for documented domestic workers.

Becoming a domestic worker is immersed in migration stories to look after a better future, but at the same time, it appears as the only option for undocumented domestic workers and in some cases for documented domestic workers. Domestic workers daily routines seem distinct, but there is a common factor for them. They all recognize that they do multiple kind of activities that also depend on their migratory status. Personal stories, migratory status and work experiences define what is the value for them, for their employers and for Dutch society.

### **3.2. Value for domestic workers**

*“This work takes its toll on you”* (Génesis, FGD, 2022)

Domestic work value from the individual level starts from the domestic worker’s statement that it is not a work that they would have wanted to do, as Génesis asserted *“When you are a child, you will never say “oh! I want to be a domestic worker when I grow up”* (FGD, 2022). To

comprehend how domestic workers understand the value of their work, I interiorised that being a domestic worker is not an occupational aspiration for domestic workers. Therefore, the idea of the value of their work is shaped by different reasons rather than by having achieved occupational self-fulfilment. For example, Génesis is a lawyer, Maritza is a geologist and Jacqueline studied management and secretariat, and all of them found domestic work their main source for living in a certain context with limited choices.

The individual value level was built from the domestic workers' expressions related to the meaning of their work for their lives. The individual value level can be organized into layers. The first is the direct benefits that comes from the use the money they receive. The second is related to how the value of their work is pursued and lastly, how the value is experienced in their bodies.

Firstly, the income that they received from their work has allowed them to increase their economic autonomy. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), economic autonomy is part of what has been proposed as autonomy for women. This concept was introduced in the 2000s, mainly used in Latin America, and refers to the ability to make free and informed decisions about their lives, in order to be and do according to their own aspirations and desires, in the historical context that makes them possible (ECLAC, 2011, cited in Güzmes, Scuro and Bidegain, 2022, p. 313). Particularly, economic autonomy is linked to the possibility of controlling assets and resources, as well as freeing women from the sole responsibility of reproductive work (Güzmes, Scuro and Bidegain, 2022, p. 313).

Domestic workers' earnings have been an instrument to improve their and their family's current living conditions and for some of them, have allowed them to guarantee a better future. They have used their wage to purchase basic items that would not be possible in their home countries, but also to save money for their future. María B. asserted "*being a domestic worker means my survival as some people say, because I live from this; and also, my future because I am making my future and I am very proud of it*" (interviews, 2022). Maria B. has a long history of living in the Netherlands. The income she has earned as a domestic worker allowed her to develop a personal productive project in Colombia and another one in the Netherlands. She cultivates the land and produces some basic foodstuffs for herself and her family. She also bought a house where she stays when she visits Colombia once per year. María B.'s situation is a particular case, as she herself recognises.

Although the other participants do not have the same amount of assets as Maria B., for all participants there is a level of economic autonomy that they have gained because of their incomes in euros, which contributes to do what they want to do in certain contexts. Lucía have helped their parents to have better living conditions back in Ecuador, Génesis has helped her mother to move to a better house to live and María paid one of her daughters' university fees in Bolivia, and still sends remittances to pay to a domestic worker to take care of her mother. Migrant's remittances indeed help secure consumption and contribute to the old-age security of their relatives in their home countries (Sabates-Wheeler and Feldman, 2011; Schrieder and Knerr, 2000, cited in Serra Mingot and Mazzucato, 2016, p. 792). This is the first layer of an individual value of domestic work considered by the migrant domestic workers, that they recognized would be unreachable in their home countries. Daniela undoubtedly asserted "*Well, the value is that it gives me money*" (interview, 2022).

Secondly, related to what it means to have an income for living, the value of the domestic work for them expresses in the possibility and effectiveness of being able to negotiate better working conditions. In other words, for domestic workers, the value of their work is the result of the actions taken to pursue it. Génesis mentioned "*First, we have to start valuing our own work for ourselves*" (interview, 2022), in the same sense, Martha mentioned:

*"We, who work in cleaning or housewives, or whatever you want to call it, are the ones who must give ourselves 'the value'. It is not the client, it is us, because if we do not set our limits, people trample on one and that is what we should not allowed"* (interview, 2022).

They consider that they are the first persons that must value their own work, and they do this through the individual and collective actions taken to improve their working conditions.

The acknowledgement of the necessity to negotiate better working conditions by domestic workers is the demonstration of how domestic work is inscribed in power relations defined by gender, race and, particularly, migration. Domestic workers' experiences of bargaining power are not homogeneous. Most of the participants have taken individual actions inside the households that they work in, and one of the participants has had a significant collective process in a domestic workers union. Therefore, with the purpose of recognising the variety of experiences, I will analyse both individual and collective actions in the light of autonomy-and structure-focused approaches to agency proposed by Mohammad-Taha (2011) in the case of Indonesian domestic workers.

The effectiveness of their bargaining power depends on their time working as domestic workers and their migratory status. Regarding time, Génesis mentioned *"as a domestic worker, when you arrive with nothing, you are afraid to put a price on your work, because you are in a hurry to have something and you accept it at any price"* (interviews, 2022). In the same sense, Yuly, who has been for almost for years in the Netherlands, asserted *"When I came here, I used to clean houses for up to 10 €, but now I don't do a cleaning job for less than 15 € per hour"* (interview, 2022). When the workers just migrate, they do not have enough resources that allows them to negotiate a better payment.

This could be analysed based on the individual agency and the pre-conditions to have resources according to the proposal of Naila Kabeer (1999). Agency is "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438) and can take the form of making decisions, but also in bargaining and negotiating, as well as cognitive processes of reflection and analysis (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). To exercise the agency, it is also necessary to have some resources, which could be material, but also social and human resources that come from the market, community, or family. Génesis and Yuly had clear motivations to come, and through time they have taken decisions to achieve better working conditions. As time passes, they increased their social networks as a source of contacts for more households to work. They also started to save money which is an asset that they can use in case they quit a job.

For Maritza, the exercise of her agency started from a cognitive process of becoming aware of the injustices, which then materializes in the change of work and an institutional form of denouncement. She has been in the Netherlands for two years, and although she has a European passport and the permit to work, she experienced long shift hours, no paid vacations, not social security insurances, multiple tasks, and mistreatment. She first tried to negotiate better conditions, but then decided to quit the job and started a formal complaint against them. Maritza has deeply reflected on her situation and is completely aware of her rights. At the time of the interview, she was working with an agency, and waiting for another household to work during the afternoons.

The bargaining power also depends on their migratory status. For most of the documented workers, the experiences at bargaining are inscribed in the terms of the labour contract, or the activities that they want to do. Martha, who is a documented independent worker and has been living in the Netherlands for about 25 years with a stable economic condition is permanently exercising her agency to control the tasks that she does. She puts a limit on the activities that she will perform in her job. This is very different from the scope of bargaining for undocumented migrant domestic workers. In the case of Lucía, although she has exercised her bargaining power, she recognises the options are limited because of her migratory status. After facing bad treatments, Lucía decided to quit a job and stated:

*"I put an envelope with the keys in the mailbox. And I wrote "(...) I have another house to work in and I don't have time to clean your house anymore. Thank you very much for everything". And that is it. When you don't have papers, you can't claim. You can't because they think they are better and they can tell you: "I'm going to call the police" (interviews, 2022).*

As she mentioned, the best option was to quit, because claiming was risky considering her status of an undocumented worker.

Indeed, migratory status is a fundamental power structure in which migrant domestic workers are immersed. From the participants, Jacqueline's experience was crucial to understanding the collective agency to resist and change the power structure resulting from migration. Jacqueline was a leader of the union of undocumented Latin American domestic workers in the Netherlands from 2009 until 2019. In 2016, the union jointly with the academic sector made an official petition to the Dutch government to request the regularisation of undocumented migrant domestic workers and ask for the ratification of the ILO Convention 189. They seek to do a similar regularization campaign as in Belgium in 2011 that resulted in a voucher system, which is a subsidized payment by the government "to purchase weekly housework service from an authorized agency" (Safuta and Camargo, 2019, p. 2). However, the results they were expecting were not achieved. The Dutch government rejected the petitions. Undocumented migrant domestic workers were not considered essential workers and only those workers who were documented and working with the elderly gained some of the demands. Jacqueline's experience is a demonstration that the value of domestic work must be demanded in a society that deliberately maintain the irregular condition of those who work in domestic work. Jacqueline's experiences represent the dynamics and the history of the struggles of being a Latin American domestic worker for more than 20 years living in the Netherlands.

The last layer of the individual value level resulted from the participants' thoughts on the relationship between the value of their work and the physical consequences on their bodies. This was shown up after asking them why their work was important to them, and almost all the participants explained to me and pointed what were the parts of their bodies that hurt. Maritza asked me explicitly to include in my research that domestic work must be better value because it is a hard physical work that deteriorates their bodies. Jacqueline also explained to me how her body shows the years she has been working in such demanding physical activity. She has tendonitis in her fingers, arms, and shoulders. For its part, Cecilia expresses "*Because housework is very hard. It is very hard and when you do it many times, well, your body deteriorates. That could cause me the disease "freeze shoulder". I cannot move my shoulder*" (interview, 2022). For them, documented and undocumented workers, the bodily consequences are a demonstration of the burden of being a domestic worker for long time periods doing displeasing activities, while for society and employers, it is a demonstration of the undervaluation of this kind of work, as Maritza mentioned.

The negative corporeal effect on domestic workers is one of the expressions of the undervaluation of domestic work. I will explain this using the notion of level of codification and affective value proposed by Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) based on Spivak (1985). For Gutiérrez, the value of domestic work is represented with 'codes' and in societal terms, the value is expressed in the money they received. However, this is not the value in itself. It is "an expression of the hegemonic cultural coding of this labor" and also of its labour force (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 141). Thus, the value assigned to the domestic work is not determined by its own qualities but by its social and historical codification.

Part of this social and historical codification is due to the concrete labour force who do this work, which is feminized, racialized, and geopolitically located. This labour force exercises the quality of affective labour of domestic work "by connecting its value production to the circulation of feelings and emotions" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 127) and explains

that “through affects notions of value translated into gestures of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ in the households, are expressed by women’s bodies and impressed on other women’s bodies, leaving a corporeal sense of devaluation or estimation” (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 127).

In those terms, one expression of the devaluation of domestic work is the physical consequences on their bodies, which is a way to codify the value of domestic work for domestic workers. For them, the deterioration of their bodies is directly related to the misrecognition of their work. Maritza mentioned that there is a lack of consideration by the employers because they do not comprehend the physical tiredness that implies this job and Lucía mentioned “*The work of domestic workers is very hard. It should be paid more than the one in the office because it is hard and tiring work*” (interviews, 2022). Those thoughts demonstrate what Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) stated that there is a “sensorial corporeality of the devaluation of domestic work” (p. 127). This is contrastingly different from what was mentioned in the section 1.1. regarding neoclassical economics. Drudgery being the opposite of leisure misrepresent the value of work.

Documented and undocumented domestic workers deal with overlooked work-related diseases all their life. To cope with this, documented workers have access to health insurance services, and undocumented have paid for private services or access through non-governmental organisations. In any case, the diseases are present and important when they think about the value of their work.

To conclude, individual value level constructed from their expressions unveiled the complex idea of how value is manifested in their lives. For them, value departs from the fundamental idea of material benefits to have economic autonomy to accomplish what they wish to do. But it goes beyond that, the value is not given, it is not something that they obtain automatically. Rather, they must pursue it to give that characteristic to their work, demonstrating the devaluation of domestic work. Individual and collective actions are taken to seek after the characteristic of value, which is a commonplace between documented and undocumented workers. The undervaluation of this work is always present, and it is embodied. Value is experienced, more precisely, the devaluation is printed in their bodies shown off through the corporeal sense of it.

### 3.3. Value for the employers

*“We are a fundamental piece because when they hire you here, it is because they don't have time to do anything or they don't like it”* (Ana Celia, interview, 2022)

The employers level group all the manifestations related to the situations and ideas that reflect how they think their work is important or not for their employers. As Ana Celia asserted, domestic work is valued by their employers, clients, or bosses, as they called them, because it is a necessary work that they are not willing to do or cannot do, but that is done by specific groups. To explain it, I first broadly describe how domestic workers enter the domestic work labour market and second, I explain how they shape the idea of value by referring to their perceptions of domestic work in Latin America. Lastly, I develop the idea of value for their employers according to their thoughts and experiences.

Domestic work labour market in the Netherlands mainly operates as an unregulated or informal market, including limited information on supply and demand. Domestic workers entrance as suppliers depends entirely on the information from direct contacts. From the participants experience, there are four ways to participate in that market. First, when there is a direct recommendation to work in a house from another domestic worker or from their employers with no condition. Second, when they ‘buy’ the quota or spot of a house of

another domestic worker and pay up to 300 EUR to work there. Third, when they ‘rent’ a house and pay a contribution of their hourly wage while the current domestic worker is gone. Four, when they work in groups, thus, two or more people go to a house and share both the amount of work and the payment. The last modality is very common for domestic workers who are just starting out, which was the case for four of the participants in the research. These transactions are strategies created by domestic workers to navigate an unregulated labour market.

The labour market is different for a documented migrant domestic worker. Three of the four documented participants are hired through an agency, and one has her own registered company and works as an independent. Those participants instead of referring to employers they referred to them as clients. The agency would play the role of their employers since the company oversees the working conditions. Communication with the agency is very limited; it is mostly online and for specific activities. Tasks tend to be more specific and differentiated.

Reflections around the value from their employers depend on who the employer is. Participants stressed they prefer not to have Latin American employers since it implies having worse working conditions and bad treatment. Esther mentioned *“Here, they sit you in the dining room, that's not done in Colombia. In Colombia, servants don't sit with the bosses”* (interviews, 2022). Esther, Cecilia, as well as Génesis’ mom worked as domestic workers back in their countries of origin, and they all agree domestic work there is about doing everything.

This reminded me of how it was in my grandparents’ house, which make me feel embarrassed. In Colombia, domestic workers used to live and work in the employers’ households. This is how I remember María in my grandparents’ house in Neiva, a medium city in Colombia. María, as Esther, Yuly, Cecilia and Martha said about domestic work in Latin American countries, had to cook, do the cleaning, do laundry and take care of the elderly and children, including Angie, her daughter, who was also living there. The activities were not differentiated, my grandparents and the rest of the family assumed she had to do it all, even taking care of me and my sisters when we went for holidays. Similar experiences to those of María were related by the domestic workers. I confronted myself with how my extended family’s experience was also part of the definition of unfair working conditions by domestic workers. Although I had already become aware of the abuse with Maria before, those conversations with the participants made me reflect on the importance of the separation of domestic activities and the recognition of their burden in terms of labour regulation. I will elaborate on this in the policy implications in the chapter Conclusions.

In contrast, as mentioned, in the Netherlands they work for hours and receive an hourly wage. The activities could be of different kinds, mostly for undocumented domestic workers. However, the amount of work depends on the number of hours they work per day. At a first glance, I observed a contradiction in their relates, since several of them also experienced the same bad treatment when they just arrived in the Netherlands. They had to do everything they were asked, and some had to live with their employers. However, I realised then that those employers that they were talking about were also Latin American, and that is why the participants try not to work with them. Domestic workers consider their work is not valued the same when they work for Latin American employers.

Considering that, the value is inscribed in the idea that domestic work is a fundamental job that is deliberately avoided by employers but done by certain groups. The quality of being a ‘fundamental job’ is given by the context of working in the Netherlands as well as the dimensions that domestic work contributes to.

On the one hand, according to the participants, there are two reasons that explain the characteristic of being a necessary work in the Netherlands. First, Dutch people do not have time to do those tasks, and particularly, from them, domestic workers are replacing women’s work inside the households, as Génesis explained:



*“It's very different here, here they don't raise women to stay at home (...) So that point is missing, who cleans the house? (...) Here the Dutch or European woman does not clean her house because it is not her priority, her priority is to go out to work, enjoy, travel, and eat every day in a restaurant”* (interview, 2022).

Second, the elderly in this country has not the same care network as in Latin American countries. Thus, they need some external people to take care of them. Cecilia mentioned in the FGD and then in the individual interview:

*“In my case, I work with elderly and sick people, and they value domestic work a lot. They feel so grateful because I do what they cannot do (FGD, 2022) “Here, very sick people still live alone. It's very curious, but that's how it is”* (interview, 2022).

Those first two reasons mentioned by domestic workers reflect the Dutch market performance from a gender perspective, as well as the age structure of the population and their care needs. Firstly, Génesis' thoughts reflected the gendered participation in the labour market. In the Netherlands, according to the Indices of Social Development (ISD) hosted by the International Institute of Social Studies (2020), the ratio of female to male labour force participation in 2020 was 89.9%. This means that for each 100 hundred men working, there were almost 89 women working in the labour market. In contrast, in Latin America, in 2020, there were 69 women working for each 100 men working in the labour market. For the countries of origin of the participants, on average the rate of female to male participation is 70.1%, which is 20 percentage points less than in the Netherlands. Thus, in the Netherlands women have greater participation in the labour market than women in Latin America. Génesis perception also revealed gender expectations about who must do the care work. They consider they are replacing the work that Dutch women would have to do, which reflects the notion of the sexual division of labour that assigns women to reproductive activities and men to productive activities.

Secondly, Cecilia's experiences with elderly and sick people reflect the changes in the household composition and age structure in the Netherlands. The number of single-person households has increased by 800% since 1960, which corresponds to 38% over the total households, which used to be 12% (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022). In the same sense, there is an increase in the percentage of people aged 65 years and over from 8% in 1950 to 20% in 2022 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022), from which only 10% of them reported receiving informal care provided by partner, children, friends or neighbours. Thus, there is an increase in the number of people living alone and a low percentage of informal care provided to people aged 65 years and over.

The relationship between the demand for domestic workers, the participation of women in the labour market, and the care needs of the elderly should be understood under the phenomenon of the care global crisis (Ferro, 2020, p. 90). This refers to the re-organization of the distribution of the care work in the world, as a result of multidimensional factors (Pérez-Orozco, 2006, p. 10). Some of them are the increase of some specific women participation in the labour market, which generates some demand pressures on other women's workers to cover the care job, as well as demographic transitions, specifically the decrease of fertility rates and the increase of the life expectancy, which require an increase of care needs for elderly people in comparison to previous decades (Ferro, 2020, p. 90). To cover these care needs, in the context of globalization after 1980, it emerged the transnational circuits of care, which are feminized migratory mobilizations from the Global South to the Global North (Romero, 2018, cited in Botman, 2011, p. 45; Ferro, 2020, p. 20).

On the other hand, the type of activities reflects the dimensions to what domestic work contributes to (see Figure 1). The first dimension refers to all the activities that domestic workers carry out in terms of companionship, affection, and emotional support to the members of the employers' household. According to their experiences, some domestic

workers take care of children, and provide emotional support to elderly employers or clients. I called this dimension also as unmaterial labour since this labour could lack a tangible physical form and it could be apart from the activities for which the domestic workers are hired. When the participants imagined how it would be without domestic workers (the last activity in the FGD), Alicia mentioned “*elderly people, who live alone and have no family would then have many problems, and if no one comes, they will get very sad*” (FGD, 2022) Cecilia, who works for households with one elderly person, explained that when she finishes her duties and before the end of the shift, some of their clients asked her to stay longer to talk and drink coffee. Even more, Cecilia recognises that some of their clients want mainly company rather than just do the cleaning. María also said “they always offer me a coffee and we chat for a while; they ask me about my family and how I am” (interviews, 2022). In this part, the most important finding is the recognition of unmaterial value dimension performed by the domestic workers as part of their job.

The second dimension refers to the fundamental activities of cleaning that all domestic workers do as part of their work. This dimension is material since it can be evidenced through the senses. In the third activity of the FGD, domestic workers imagined the houses where they work to be very messy if they were absent. Daniela asserted “*I imagine all the clothes lying around, the coffee cups everywhere, the plates*” (FGD, 2022) and Génesis said “*And above all, the fact that Dutch people work from home, so these offices would be really dirty, really filthy, without changing the bed sheets, for example*” (FGD, 2022) There are multiple cleaning activities that domestic workers do, as it was explained in section 3.1.

As Figure 1 shows, the emotional and cleaning dimensions overlap. Unmaterial labour is offered in the context of material labour, that is, unmaterial dimension is inscribed in the domestic work performance of cleaning. Both affect the way domestic work value is perceived. This overlapping explains what domestic workers referred as the link between organized and clean spaces and household members wellbeing. Marbel mentions “*If a house is tidy and clean, that is how a person feels. A messy, untidy house is how people feel. We would be sad. That is necessary. Domestic workers are very necessary*” (FGD, 2022). Daniela also shared the story of a couple whose wedding mutual gift was hiring a domestic worker since neither of them wanted to do the housework. Those and other stories were shared by the domestic workers related to how the people would feel without clean spaces.

This intersection between the material and the unmaterial labour dimensions reflects the value of domestic work related to the satisfaction of multidimensional and heterogeneous social needs proposed by the FPE. According to the FPE, the basic social needs include an objective or material dimension, referred to as feeding, daily care, and weather protection, between others, and a subjective or unmaterial dimension tied to the needs of affection, care and formation of social links (Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 85). That bond between physical and emotional needs reflects the vulnerability and interdependency of the agents, which is opposite to the concept of *homo economicus* from the neoclassical economics, which stand that the economic agents are rational and independent. Pérez-Orozco (2011) explains how life is vulnerable in terms of the need for care that everyone has. She mentions “life is vulnerable and finite; it is precarious; if it is not cared for, it is not viable” (p.43) and the way those needs are solved is through social interaction, which means the interdependency between people and environment.

Domestic workers explained well, on the one hand, the physical needs that they solved, and on the other, the emotional support that they had with their employers. But most importantly, the participants identified that there is a relationship between the material dimension and the unmaterial dimension, when they referred to how their employers would feel having dirty spaces or no one talking with them. This overlapping is precisely the demonstration of why domestic work is care work. Domestic work is led to sustain life of

the members of the household, and that sustainability of life encompasses an indissoluble relation between material and unmaterial needs of vulnerable and emotional economic agents.

Domestic workers consider there is a weak association between the value placed by employers on domestic work and the close relationships built with the household members. The privacy or intimacy of the work is what determines the possibility of creating closer relationships. Alicia, who has been in the Netherlands for almost 23 years, recognized the intimacy constructed in two houses where her husband and she have worked for 17 and 14 years, respectively. She loves the kids and likes to care of them (interview, 2022). Cecilia recognises that even when her contract clauses establish that she cannot get emotionally involved with her clients (interview, 2022) Despite the emotional attachments created, they recognize that those relationships are not that strong and can end at any time, as Ana Celia explained: *"They make it clear where you belong to. I mean, a Latino is very affectionate, but they're like, yes, we're happy with you, but this is your place, I mean, don't cross that line"* (interview, 2022). There are multiple experiences from them relating close relationships that ended when their employers decided not to hire them again. Thus, the link between the value and the personal proximity to children and adults depends on their employers' decision to end the labour relation.

Lastly, I will explain how domestic workers mentioned that the essentiality of domestic work is solved by hiring them specifically. Here, the unpleasantness and devaluation of domestic work appears again. Lucía asserted *"it [domestic work] should be highly valued. Shouldn't it? Because they don't like it, they don't like cleaning, so they look for other people to do that for them"* (interview, 2022). Employers are not willing to do what domestic workers do, because this is not a valued work. According to Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010), the devaluation of domestic work is not only in terms of poor working conditions, but in terms of the social significance of this work. In her words, "the value of domestic work is thus preset by a cultural system of meaning production based on historical and socio-political systems of gender differences and racialized hierarchies" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 92). Thus, the explanation of the devaluation is that the ones who do the work are migrant racialized and feminized bodies coming from determined countries. Lucía described this well when she says:

*"Have you seen them [the Dutch] working in a hurry? Have you seen them doing this and that? Take a good look at who is doing it in the street: foreigner, Turkish, Moroccan, Latino. All of them are here doing that job, you will never see them [the Dutch] cleaning in the street, you will see them sitting down and having a coffee, relaxed"* (interview, 2022).

Racialized bodies are reflected in Lucía's expression *"The foreigner is the one who gets dirty here, the foreigner does the things they don't want to do"* (interview, 2022). She is an indigenous woman who studied for a bachelor's in business administration and she has passed through deep reflections about her experiences as a domestic worker. Another related expression of the racialization was regarding being "Latinized" in the Netherlands. One of the participants mentioned: *"They see the Latina as a prostitute. They think that. That's how they see us. We have to be realistic. That's how they see us"* (interviews, 2022). Gutiérrez (2010) explained that being a Latin American woman is related to an exotic body and being sexually available, which is an expression the racialization (p.11), and particularly Peter Wade highlighted that domestic service is a space in which "race, gender, class and age together produce a particular and intense form of sexualisation" (Wade, 2013, p. 189).

Feminized bodies refer not only to the number of female workers, but also to their qualitative dimension. Some of the features that show feminized labour are low wages, no formal working conditions, and the integration with the emotional, communicative, and creative faculties (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 102). Génesis mentioned *"It is a little more difficult for men to gain the trust of their employers at the beginning simply because they are men, whereas you*

as a woman are not so much of a problem” (interviews, 2022). Skills such as being attentive, communicative and sensible that are related to domestic work have been socially allocated to what women do, and systematically undervalued (Steinberg, 1990). In other words, domestic work is devalued because it is done by racialized, migrant and feminized bodies.

To sum up, value for the employers is informed by the contradicting perspective of domestic work as needed fundamental labour in the Netherlands and at the same time as unwanted work to be done by the employers. The characteristic of being a fundamental work is contextual and content dependent in the Netherlands. Domestic workers recognizes that the contradiction is translated in that they are the ones in charge of doing this work with specific experiences as being ‘latinas’. Even though the close relationships with the employers are a source to consider the importance of their work, those are never sufficient to reveal a complete sense of high valuation for the domestic workers because those relations are unstable. The devaluation of domestic work in this level is manifested in the racialization and feminization of the workers.

### 3.4. Value for the society

*“People who have children would not be able to go to work. That would affect them economically and socially, because if teachers don't go to work, it's a mess. If doctors don't go to work, it's a mess. So, it would be a big problem (...) if someone doesn't help someone who is sick, it would be a mess. From what little I saw in my work, if it was a month or more without [domestic] workers, it would be a chaos”.*

(Alicia, FGD, 2022)

Alicia summarized what they consider is the value of their work for the society or for the inhabitants in the Netherlands, in general. This level was mainly the result of a collective construction in the FGDs and partly from the individual experiences narrated during the interviews. I try to keep myself loyal to what they want to say, but it is important to acknowledge that my interpretations of the notions of value are partial, since my previous understandings of domestic work impinges on how I understand their words. Domestic workers are not academic experts on defining the value of domestic work for the system in a totalizing way, rather the validity and expertise of their words are materialized through their life experiences and thoughts.

In the third activity of the FGD, the participants imagined a hypothetical situation in which in the Netherlands no domestic workers went to work. I also invite the reader to do it. Imagine a certain city or country without domestic workers. This exercise is not easy since there is always someone who must do it. Domestic work is not expendable work for daily routines. This activity revealed an enriching own perspective about the spaces or dimensions to which domestic workers contribute to society. There are two main ideas that explained the value of their work. The first is the environmental dimension and the second one is the category *essential chain work* (see Figure 1).

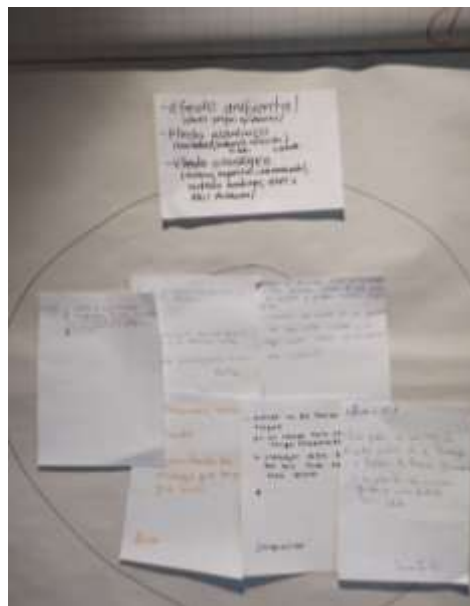
Environmental labour dimension clusters all domestic workers’ notions regarding their contributions to the waste separation and recycling of trash, as well as to control bad smells and plagues. María B. asserted *“If the domestic service did not provide its service, there would be an invasion of insects and rats, which is a serious thing. And here, when one rat comes out, it's because behind it come thousands”* (FGD, 2022). It is important to mention that from the individual semi-structured interviews the environmental labour dimension was not strongly related to their personal experiences. Particularly, this value dimension was constructed from a collective perspective when they imagine the Netherlands with no domestic workers working during the FGD.

Related to the material dimension explained in the previous section about employers' level, there is also an intersection between that dimension and the environmental dimension, which connects the employer's and society's level. Génesis mentioned having to clean the street outside one of the homes where she works, and Jacqueline brought into the discussion the consequences of the Dutch cleaner's strike in 2012 in the Netherlands when all the garbage accumulated in the streets. Those thoughts explain the intersection between material labour and environmental labour dimensions. This linking space group all the ideas regarding inside trash management with cleaning public spaces. As Génesis mentions:

*"I think that this country, the Netherlands, which is characterized by being such a clean country, would not be like that. I think it would be like our country where you see garbage outside (...) sometimes, they don't even take out the garbage, that's all done by one"* (FGD, 2022)

She recognizes an interrelation between her tasks regarding waste separation and recycling inside the households and her contribution to what she mentions as a clean country. This suggests how domestic workers think their work transcends physical boundaries and contributes to a macro perspective of the environment, as they explained during the FGD when they referred to 'environmental effect' in Spanish *efecto ambiental* during the first FGD (see image 1) or 'polluting effect' in Spanish *efecto contaminante* in the second FGD (see Image 1).

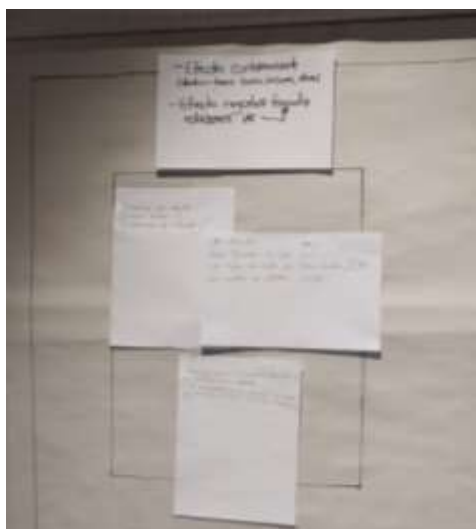
**Image 1. Netherlands without domestic workers in the first FGD held on 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2022**



*Source:* FGD results, 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 2022<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The environmental effect, '*efecto ambiental*' in Spanish, is reflected in the first idea of societal value explained in this section. The economic effect, '*efecto económico*' in Spanish, is reflected in the essential chain work category and the psychological effect, '*efecto psicológico*' in Spanish, is reflected in the intersection between the material and immaterial dimension explained in the previous section on the employer level.

Image 2. Netherlands without domestic workers in the second FGD held on 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2022



Source: FGD results, 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, 2022, Amsterdam<sup>7</sup>.

Regarding the second idea of value, there was a particular word used by the domestic workers during the FGD that reflected how they imagine the country if there were no domestic workers in any household, which was *chaos*. I used this as an in vivo code (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 quoted in (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011, p. 146), and from this I proposed the holistic dimension *essential chain work*, which I will explain using FPE perspective.

The expression *chaos* was also present in the individual semi-structured interviews when I asked them directly about the value of their work. When they referred to the word chaos, they referred to how everyone else could not do what they had planned, but also to how the Dutch society and the economy would be affected. Although it was labeled as an economic effect at the end of the first FGD (see image 1), I found that during the interviews and FGDs, the word chaos was mentioned more frequently (10 times) and better reflected the scope of the effects. María B. explained what would happen in one of the households she works:

*“If I don't go to work, then she can't go to work either. So, that's a problem because the Dutch have everything like that, their salary, which is exactly organised, so if they [domestic workers] are absent, they [employers] can't go to work. They automatically have a financial problem, [for example] in the case of her, who is a single woman, with her little daughter and her little dog”* (FGD, 2022).

Since María B. has lived in the Netherlands for around 30 years she knows very well who their employers are and feels proud to know about the Dutch culture. In this quote, María B. explained a possible sequence of what would happen in a house if she does not go and relates this situation to what she considers is part of Dutch society: organization and planning. At the end of the idea, she identifies financial problems for her employer as the last consequence of her absence. In the same sense, Jacqueline mentioned *“I think it's very chaotic if we go on strike and don't go to work for a week. I think the economy would be affected a lot here in the country and in general, because it is a very essential job within society”* (FGD, 2022). Jacqueline has significant life experiences around struggles for domestic workers' labour rights in the

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<sup>7</sup> The polluting effect, *'efecto contaminante'* in Spanish, is reflected in the first idea of societal value explained in this section. The negative effect on family relationships, *'Efecto negativo en las relaciones de familia'* in Spanish, is reflected in the intersection between the material and immaterial dimension explained in the previous section on the employer level.

Netherlands. She has expertise in unionisation and activism and knows well about the importance of her work.

Inspired by their words, and those of the other participants, I created the axial code *essential chain work* to cluster all the expressions regarding working links starting from domestic work and resulting in extended consequences for the economy. This category incorporates the material, immaterial dimensions explained in the previous section as well as the environmental dimension, which are intertwined and could not be separated. Each dimension contributes to solving specific social needs of vulnerable and interdependent beings that include workers, employers, and the rest of the society.

Essential chain work category could be explained from a FPE perspective for two reasons. First, from the role of household within the economy<sup>8</sup>. For the FPE, households are the basic unit of production, consumption, and distribution of resources in the economy. The household could produce goods and services for its own consumption or for the market. Its members are also consumers of what is produced inside and outside the household, and they receive and distribute part of the resources that come from unpaid work, paid work, transfers, savings, rents and investments. In this case, households consume services the domestic workers provide through their work, and for which they receive a payment. Provided services let the members of the household enjoy clean spaces, be fed, receive emotional support, contribute to a good health condition, and fundamentally, as the domestic workers mentioned, enable them to continue with their working lives.

Yet, the benefits of domestic work reach further stages. Carrasco (2021) points out that households are the centre of creation and recreation of life (Carrasco, 2017, p.69 cited in Agenjo-Calderón, 2021)). This quality locates households at the centre of the analysis in economics from a FPE perspective. Through households and the non-harmonic and hierarchized power relations inside household people socialize, build identities, learn and prepare for the labour market, mainly through women's paid and unpaid care work. Household is articulated, then, to the rest of the economy producing services to be consumed by people connected to other realms of the economy. Households constitute themselves as the ultimate agents of expansion and extension of wellbeing (Pérez-Orozco, 2014 and Gálvez, 2016, cited in Agenjo-Calderón, 2021, p. 125) and domestic work, paid and unpaid, is the engine to mobilize the rest of the chain.

Indeed, the second reason that explains the domestic work value as an essential chain work, from the FPE perspective, is because of the functions that domestic work has within the economy. Antonella Picchio (2001) proposed an scheme to conceptualize and integrate the reproduction activities in the macroeconomic analysis. Even though this scheme was focused on unremunerated reproductive activities, in this document, I emphasize on remunerated reproductive activities to highlight the functions of this activity in the system. From a macro level of analysis, the essential idea of the functions of domestic work within the system is fundamentally the same between remunerated and unremunerated work.

Picchio (2001) located reproductive activities in a dimension called human development space, where wellbeing is firstly generated. The major functions of those activities within the system are three. First, to extend monetary incomes through the transformation of goods and services to be consumed inside the household. Second, to expand the quality of life in effective wellbeing consisting of some specific levels of education, health and social life. Third, to regulate the labour force, which means that domestic work supports the *selection* of workers done by the labour market.

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<sup>8</sup> In this document I focused on households, however, Social, Solidarity, Popular and Feminist Economy in Latin America has called attention to considering the community and not only the household as an important agent in the sustainability of life.

The first two functions are proof of the wide range of activities that the domestic workers do. In other words, those functions correspond to the material and immaterial labour dimensions reported by domestic workers. By its part, the last function is the demonstration of the bridge enabled by domestic work between the households and the rest of the economy, specifically the labour market. Domestic work contributes to the 'selection' of the workers who go to the labour market. Workers that showed up in the labour market are those with their needs resolved and without responsibilities that prevent them from being gainfully employed (Pérez-Orozco, Amaia, 2018). Indeed, domestic work contributes to the definition of who can work or not. In consequence, the essential chain work refers to the first work that must be done for the others to occur.

Lastly, as well as the devaluation is present in domestic workers' and employers' level, its expression in the society level is set through the workers' migratory status. Génesis' expression "*Out of sight, out of mind*" (interviews, 2022) summarized how undocumented domestic experienced the devaluation, which could be condensed in the term invisibilization of them and their work. Three participants had an enlightening dialogue during the FGD that clarified this point:

“- Génesis: *We are neither seen nor few. We are not seen for an endorsement by the government.*

- Daniela: *We are not important.*

- Génesis: *Exactly, we don't exist. Because you're not going to listen to someone talking about employing someone working 'in black' (...)*

- Martiza: *Yes, here they don't have a register that says 'come on and register yourself, the legal and illegal domestic workers. (...) You cannot see that' (FGD, 2022)*

They are referring to different expressions of invisibilization. First, they feel unsupported by the government; second, they show how talking about undocumented workers by employers could be socially rejected, and third, they acknowledge a statistical invisibilisation. In words of Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) domestic work “is held in a state of irregularity” (2010, p. 44) and it is not treated as the other types of work. Moreover, there is a contradiction between the public and private spheres. While domestic work is irregular, invisible, and private, the migratory status is what is regulated, visible and a matter of the public sphere (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Encarnación, 2010, p. 46). One manifestation of the invisibilisation by the government is the no ratification of the ILO Convention 189 by the Dutch government. Jacqueline asserted “*The fact that it [the Convention] is not ratified, it is already noticeable that they do not value it*” (interviews, 2022). Particularly on the topic of statistical invisibility, as Maritza said, there is limited knowledge about the size and profile of domestic workers in this country<sup>9</sup> (FGD, 2022). The devaluation of domestic work is reflected in the lack of statistics deliberately absent in official registers, and one cause is that

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<sup>9</sup> According to ILO, in 2018 there were 12.397 domestic workers in the Netherlands, 11.329 were women and 1.068 were men, corresponding to 91,4%, and 8,6, respectively. For women, the domestic work sector employs around 0,3% of total working women (International Labour Organization, 2021, p. 273). Previous studies such as Seor (2013), estimated that there are 435 thousand domestic workers, from which 60% is undeclared domestic work (cited in Lepianka, Dorota and Ramos Martin, Nurial Elena, 2016, p. 70). There are other studies that reveal different numbers. For instance, FNV Migrante Domestic Union (no date) stands that there are 150.000 domestic workers in the Netherlands. The difference between the indicators published by the ILO based on the European Survey of Working Conditions and the rest of the sources might respond to the fact that the European Survey, which is the base of the ILO publication for the Netherlands, only reports the documented domestic workers. This partial approximation of the precise figures for domestic workers reflects what domestic workers highlighted during the FGD.



the employers are not obliged to register them, which impedes having an accurate number of domestic workers in this country.

One of the consequences of this invisibility is a restricted access to social protection. Especially for the undocumented migrant domestic workers, formal social protection is inaccessible because of working with informal or no labour contracts (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato, 2016, p. 791). There are frequent experiences related to how they must spend considerable amount of money on health and care services. They have had contact what has been denominated as the third-sector as well as to seek support on informal social provisioning. The third sector refers to international organisations and local non-governmental organisations who usually cover emergency care, such as food and health, advice on legal status (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato, 2016, p. 794). Participants also mentioned Red Cross as an important organisation for health services, who transfer them to a hospital in case they needed. While I was conducting the fieldwork of this research, one of the participants decided to contact FairWork for having legal advice and free of charge support in the labour abuse she was experiencing.

In the case of documented workers, I identify a link between the value from the society and the payment of taxes. Martha said:

*“My work for society is an honest, honorable way of being able to work and give the best of ourselves to a person or a society, because the little grain of sand that we are contributing we are also paying taxes, we are also contributing to the economy of a country”* (interview, 2022).

For María B., the fact of paying taxes is also a way to have a status in the society, and that is why María B. considers *“cleaning work is just another job and that's how it is among all the rules of this country, that we have all our rights”* (FGD, 2022). Even though the two groups have contrasting perspectives of the value from the society, both converge in the idea of how paying taxes gives them a different position. This is confirmed by the response of Jacqueline when she says, *“We want our work to be recognized for what, to pay taxes, to be visible”* (FGD, 2022).

To sum up, domestic workers thoughts and experiences created a notion of value related to the role of domestic work within the economy, which was theoretically explained by the FPE perspective through the role of household in the economy. Domestic work as essential chain work has to do with the functions to the rest of the economy, regarding the material, unmaterial and environmental labour dimensions. The participants elucidated the indissolubility of the unmaterial, material and environmental dimensions and recognized from their experiences the location of their work within the household as the basic unit in the economic system. This confirms what Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) mentions regarding how the reproductive function of domestic work is constitutive of the production and reproduction of the economy (p.91), which is well supported by the following Génesis idea: *“It [domestic work] is a link of the society, even though is very small, of course. Without it, there would be many negative effects”* (FGD, 2022).

## Chapter 4 Conclusions and recommendations

Through this research and the master's degree, I delved into different ways of thinking, researching, and narrating. In order to listen to and narrate the voices of care workers, it was necessary to go through a process of reflection and research on ways of producing knowledge that were not common to me. I had to engage with literature on feminist epistemologies and feminist qualitative methodologies. This certainly made me think and feel as part of a research process, with my body, my emotions and my thoughts. As I wrote, I thought about domestic workers, their experiences, and how challenging it was to put together pieces to present a story that respected their ideas and allowed me to continue my connection with Colombia, Latin America, and the feminist political economy. Indeed, the value of domestic work turned out to be much more complex than it seemed, as I will explain below.

### 4.1. New angles on the value of domestic work

Theorizing the value of domestic work through the eyes of domestic workers makes visible how the value is relational, contextual-dependent and contradictory. The value of domestic work is inscribed in the complex way of organizing lives that are connected. The life of the worker who provides the care, those of the household who receive it and those of the rest of human beings and animals who inhabit a specific place. The value, then, results from the interaction between those lives in different realms in a determined context. The characteristic of being contradictory is related to domestic workers' and domestic work's position within the overall system. Despite its importance for the human flourishing, devaluation appears at all levels of value, and it is expressed in the corporeal experiences by domestic workers.

The value of domestic work for migrant Latin American domestic workers in the Netherlands is not fixed, not given and nor is the same for all the agents in this determined context. The value of domestic work for domestic workers is embodied and experienced in their lives and bodies. It is experienced through monetary benefits that contribute to their economic autonomy aligned with the purposes of the migration. But value is not always there, value must be sought with daily individual and collective actions, because domestic work is indeed a devalued work. That devaluation is embodied, and it has a corporeal sense. Domestic workers have printed in their bodies, the years, the daily routines, and the affections resulting from their work.

For the employers, the value represents the contradiction of unwanted work versus a necessary work. The characteristic of being essential is explained by the context of working in the Netherlands and the provision of intertwined material, and unmaterial dimensions that solve specific needs of interdependent and vulnerable people. Domestic work might be not a pleasant job, but it is fundamental for employers. This paradox is solved by migrant Latin American domestic workers who are the bodies in charge of doing this work. Devaluation appears again, which is related to who does the work. Feminized and racialized bodies that have specific experiences and close relationship with employers.

For the society, the value of domestic work has to do with its contribution to the environmental dimension and in a wider way of being the essential chain work. Domestic work for society supports its value through a cumulative contribution of material, intangible, and environmental labour made in households, but with far-reaching consequences. Since the value of domestic work is ripple effect, it must be understood from an ample perspective. Domestic work is the first work that must be done for the others to occur, otherwise, as

domestic workers mentioned, we will experiment chaos. As it was present in the previous levels, devaluation here expresses in the right to work given by their migratory status. Invisibleness is the way devaluation is experienced by domestic workers, which have specific consequences in their lives such as limited access to social protection, and a sense of being invisible to society: absent in labour regulations for decent work and absent in statistical registers. The devaluation of domestic work does not occur because it is not important work for those who provide it and for those who enjoy the service. It is devalued because these care activities are not a priority for society, even though they are necessary.

## 4.2. Methodological further reflections

Feminist economics as a pluralist field has the advantage of opening the space for political intervention and study. This work considered a research question that explored meanings and asked those directly involved in the issue. This allows us to find dimensions that are missing in other research, specifically in quantitative methodologies that start from fixed meanings. This study was based on an interpretivist approach and invited domestic workers to reflect on and narrate experiences that account for the value of their work, which broadened the scope of what deserves to be known and who speaks. Migrant Latin American domestic workers profoundly know what the value of their work is.

The richness of using two different qualitative methods resulted in different outcomes. The focus groups provided a collective notion of the value of domestic work, which was primarily reflected at the societal level. Individual interviews provided more information about the levels of domestic workers and employers. The environmental dimension in individual experiences was not something they thought was important in their stories, but it did emerge from the discussion during the FGDs. In other words, some dimensions of the value of domestic work emerged collectively that were not visible at the individual level.

## 4.3. Policy recommendations

Public policy interventions around domestic work should aim at the sustainability of life. The devaluation of domestic work is experienced by the people who provide this work and, therefore, interventions must be aimed at sustaining the lives of those who sustain life. To this end, the actions implemented must be multisectoral and multidimensional. Based on the findings of this paper, three policy interventions are stand out:

- **Migration policies and labour regulation:** If the purpose is the sustainability of life, beyond migration status, the priority should be given to the type of work performed. In other words, migration status should be conditional on the type of work. One form of recognition is through direct migration regularisation measures that allow them to work freely, based on the fact that they are domestic workers. The main consequence is that the workers can access a regulated labour market with decent working conditions, for instance, to have clear differences on the skills, kind of activities and corresponding wages.
- **National statistical systems:** One of the manifestations of invisibility is the absence of statistical information on the number and profile of domestic workers. If this work is what sustains life, then there should be a periodic data collection that makes visible the working conditions in which the work is provided as well as characterizes domestic workers from an intersectional way.

- **Labour regulations and health services:** Part of the manifestations of devaluation are the occupational hazards that domestic workers experience in their bodies. The specific occupational risks of domestic work should be considered as a specific contribution that employers should pay for domestic workers and that in the long run can be taken over by public funds.

To researchers:

- **Environmental dimension and domestic work:** further develop the contributions of domestic work to the environment in a Dutch context.
- **Technology use and the value of domestic work:** participants mentioned a topic that could be considered in defining the value of domestic work for future initiatives. Experiences with household appliances and technological advances prompted some of them to consider how important their work will be in the future. They asked what the value of domestic work would be if technology replaced human labour, such as ironing, vacuuming, folding laundry, recycling, and caring for people and animals.

To organisations:

- **Making the value visible:** there are multiple dimensions to the value of domestic work. Further work can be done on how to make the contributions of domestic work visible in the country.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Focus groups guide (originally held in Spanish)

Actividad	Descripción
Presentación	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presentación de la facilitadora y la observadora.</li><li>• Instrucciones generales</li><li>• Presentación de las participantes</li></ul>
Ejercicio de percepción sobre ideas alrededor la valoración del trabajo doméstico en Holanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Las participantes elegirán si están de acuerdo, en desacuerdo o no están seguras con algunas afirmaciones relacionadas con el valor del trabajo doméstico en los Países Bajos que se leerán para todo el grupo. Algunas de las afirmaciones que se leen para todo el grupo son:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Como trabajadora doméstica puedo hacer relaciones cercanas y amables con los miembros de los hogares.</li><li>- Estoy orgullosa de mi trabajo.</li><li>- En Holanda el trabajo doméstico es considerado un trabajo como los demás.</li><li>- El trabajo doméstico debería ser mejor pagado.</li><li>- Mi trabajo es importante para la sociedad.</li></ul></li></ul>
Actividad de imaginación: ¿Qué pasaría si un día las trabajadoras del hogar no fueran a trabajar?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Primero, las participantes imaginan qué pasaría si un día no fueran a trabajar y escriben 2 o 3 consecuencias que tendría esto en los espacios y las personas en el hogar.</li><li>• En segundo lugar, las participantes imaginan lo que sucedería si ninguna trabajadora doméstica de ninguna ciudad de los Países Bajos fuera a trabajar. Luego escriben dos o tres consecuencias que tendría en los hogares y en las ciudades.</li><li>• Por último, juntas construyen colectivamente 2 o 3 consecuencias que tendría esta situación para las ciudades y el país.</li></ul>

Appendix 2. Informed consent for the FGD (originally held in Spanish)

Lugar: Ámsterdam Fecha: /08 /22 Hora: \_\_\_\_\_

El objetivo de esta investigación es conocer acerca del valor del trabajo doméstico para las trabajadoras domésticas latinoamericanas en los Países Bajos. Esta investigación es parte de la Maestría en Estudios del Desarrollo del Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sociales (ISS) ubicado en La Haya, Países Bajos, y se realiza en cooperación con FairWork, con sede en Ámsterdam, Países Bajos. Para la investigación se realizarán grupos focales y posteriormente entrevistas individuales semiestructuradas. En esta oportunidad se realizarán los grupos focales. Esta información será utilizada únicamente con propósitos académicos y será compartida con las participantes al finalizar la investigación.

Confidencialidad:

Su identidad se incluirá en las transcripciones de la entrevista y en el análisis sólo si usted lo permite.

Compensación económica:

Se le otorgará un reconocimiento de €10 (diez euros) por el tiempo que dure el grupo focal y se cubrirán los gastos de transporte en los que incurra.

Participación voluntaria:

Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Si no desea participar, o si decide retirarse en cualquier momento, esto no le causará ningún perjuicio.

Si tiene alguna duda después de participar en el grupo focal, puede contactarme al número +31 XXXXX

*¿Quiere participar en el grupo focal? Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_*

*¿Autoriza grabar video y/ o audio en esta sesión? Video y audio \_\_\_\_\_ Sólo audio \_\_\_\_\_*

*¿Autoriza ser citada en la investigación? Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_*

*Si respondió que sí, ¿prefiere que se utilice su nombre o un alias? Nombre \_\_\_\_\_ Alias \_\_\_\_\_*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de la/el participante

Yo, Angélica Morán Castañeda, estudiante de la Maestría en Estudios del Desarrollo de la ISS, certifico que esta información sólo será utilizada con fines académicos y que los resultados de esta investigación serán socializados, una vez finalizada.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de la estudiante

Appendix 3. Interview guide (originally held in Spanish)

Componente	Preguntas
Introducción	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentación personal de la investigadora e interés en la investigación</li> </ul>
Apertura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentación del objetivo de la investigación</li> <li>• Teniendo en cuenta que el objetivo de la investigación es sobre el valor del trabajo doméstico, ¿me podrías contar 3 cosas que son valiosas para ti en tu vida?</li> </ul>
Recorrido para ser trabajadora doméstica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ¿Me puedes compartir un poco cuál fue el recorrido que hiciste para llegar hoy acá y trabajar como trabajadora doméstica en Holanda?</li> </ul>
Valor del trabajo doméstico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ¿Cómo describirías el valor de tu trabajo para ti, para los empleadores y para la sociedad en general?</li> </ul>
Cierre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ¿Te gustaría compartir algo adicional?</li> <li>• Comparto información del cronograma de la investigación e invitación a la presentación final</li> </ul>

Appendix 4. Informed consent for the interviews (originally held in Spanish)

Lugar: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_ Hora: \_\_\_\_\_

El objetivo de esta investigación es conocer acerca del valor del trabajo doméstico para las trabajadoras domésticas latinoamericanas en los Países Bajos. Esta investigación es parte de la Maestría en Estudios del Desarrollo del Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sociales (ISS) ubicado en La Haya, Países Bajos, y se realiza en cooperación con FairWork, con sede en Ámsterdam, Países Bajos. Para la investigación se realizarán grupos focales y posteriormente entrevistas individuales semiestructuradas. En esta oportunidad se realizarán las entrevistas. Esta información será utilizada únicamente con propósitos académicos y será compartida con las participantes al finalizar la investigación.

Confidencialidad:

Su identidad se incluirá en las transcripciones de la entrevista y en el análisis sólo si usted lo permite.

Compensación económica:

Se le otorgará un reconocimiento **de €10 (diez euros)** por el tiempo que dure la entrevista y se cubrirán los gastos de transporte en los que incurra.

Participación voluntaria:

Su participación en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Si no desea participar, o si decide retirarse en cualquier momento, esto no le causará ningún perjuicio.

Si tiene alguna duda después de participar en la entrevista, puede contactarme al número +31 XXXX

*¿Quiere participar en la entrevista? Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_*

*¿Autoriza grabar audio en esta sesión? Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_*

*¿Autoriza ser citada en la investigación? Sí \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_*

*Si respondió que sí, ¿prefiere que se utilice su nombre o un alias? Nombre \_\_\_\_\_ Alias \_\_\_\_\_*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de la/el participante

Yo, Angélica Morán Castañeda, estudiante de la Maestría en Estudios del Desarrollo de la ISS, certifico que esta información sólo será utilizada con fines académicos y que los resultados de esta investigación serán socializados, una vez finalizada.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de la estudiante



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