1.3.2 Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two provides a detailed presentation of both Pentecostal migrant churches.

Chapter three deals with the first sub-question concerning the impact of the Netherlands as a transnational space on migrant churches. In this chapter, I aim to show that the Dutch nation-state is far from being a virtual, imagined or harmless reality. Dutch political and public debates on immigration and religious freedom in the public space are marked by a complex set of external and internal developments. The dominant discourses on immigration and religion, influenced by these developments, produce a lived social reality for migrant churches and their adherents, since they result in the making of legislation, rules for public order, and policing. The chapter opens with a discussion of a significant event that takes place in the Calvary Christian Center.

Chapter four focuses on the church building as a transnational space. It starts with another meaningful event, this time in the Igreja Maná Church. In this chapter I argue that the contentions revealed in chapter three, come to a climax in this case, on the local level. The events in both chapters show that, for all their differences, both churches fundamentally share the same experiences as migrant churches in the Netherlands as transnational spaces. In this chapter, two forms of analysis, relational and material, expose the potential for conflict between two church communities, in which different historical, political, social-cultural and theological processes play an important role.

In chapter five, I delve into the question of how the past is dealt with in both churches. This chapter will show how both churches differ theologically in their discourses. At the same time, through the reflections of their adherents, it becomes clear that the impact of these theological emphases cannot be understood without taking into account their social-political and cultural-traditional backgrounds. How background plays a role in the way adherents reflect upon their past is explored via narratives of who they are now (Christians, converted). The chapter pivots around what is and is not or cannot be said, and the ambivalences that this evokes in the process of conversion.

Chapter six will examine how in their discourses, both churches approach current difficulties in the lives of their adherents, given the victory-oriented worldview of most Pentecostal movements. As the title of this thesis
makes clear, being ‘more than a conqueror’ is a central aspiration of both churches. However, the two churches differ in their discourses of suffering. In the Maná church ‘suffering’ is hardly discursive, nor openly spoken about. At Calvary Christian Center, on the contrary, there is scope for speaking about suffering and for emotional/bodily expression, such as crying, sobbing and prayers of begging. Primarily, this difference highlights the limitations of the generalising and stereotyping assumptions that imply that Pentecostalism is not able to deal with suffering. Suffering and the bodily expression of suffering have a broad historical basis in Christianity, especially in Roman Catholicism. An examination of the way adherents do or do not internalise these expressions and bodily practices, uncovers some potential acculturation processes that these churches have undergone in the homeland, and which undergo further transformation in the Netherlands. This chapter once again highlights the view that in both churches not everything can be said. This opens up a space for ambiguity, in which adherents manage to connect these discourses with their personal life.

In chapter seven, I approach ‘power’ from the perspective of church leadership and organisation. Here, I demonstrate how the impact of church discourse also occurs through a variety of processes. In both churches, the authority of spiritual leadership is based on charisma, legacy and bureaucracy. It will be shown that both churches differ greatly in their structural outlook and discourses on authority and subjection.

Chapter eight deals with the powerful impact that processes of authorisation in both churches have on their adherents’ way of thinking, speaking and living. In this chapter I examine how these discourses are reflected in their members’ narratives and behaviour. Here I also discuss the frictions and potentials that these reflections reveal in relation to the daily lived power structures that these members are subordinated to.

By unfolding the three themes, ‘space,’ ‘time’ and ‘power’ in this comparative research project, two different pictures will emerge, and these will contribute to the scholarly debate on Pentecostalism as a transnational religion. As I will show, the impact that these two churches exert on their migrant adherents’ way of life and self-perceptions cannot be underestimated. Discourses are a powerful tool of the church. This power of discourse will
become clear, especially in relation to diversity. The more outspoken they are, the more vigorously such discourses will affect the lives of adherents. Nevertheless, since these discourses often find resonance in their adherents’ transnational background and context, their power should not be considered to be entirely self-grounded. In personal reflections on these discourses, there is always room for ambivalence, conflict and resistance.

1.4 Methodological considerations and choices

1.4.1 Comparison

This research project can be defined as a double and comparative case study. Case studies always have comparative elements, since the discoveries made through them are supposed to be connected and compared with those made in other case studies. Moreover, in case studies there is a comparative movement back and forwards between empirical data and theoretical debates (Lijphart 1975: 161). In this case study, however, by taking two different groups as research objects, comparison is primarily part of the internal design of the research.

This research on two Pentecostal migrant churches aims to discover and unravel complexities, rather than seeking standardising analyses. The churches are taken as entry points for research, but I aim at putting forward and thinking through their entanglement with their social environments, which consist of many complex layers of national and international developments, processes, virtual networks and social relationships. Instead of subjecting this study to a stringently designed framework of theories and hypotheses in order to find expected similarities or differences, a combination of deductive and inductive approaches have been chosen, best defined with grounded theory (Flick 2009; Glaser and Strauss 1977). I started my fieldwork with an initial theoretical framework and some preliminary questions. Subsequently, I collected data and discovered salient elements through conducting interviews, by attending church services and via personal contacts. Based on this process I rethought my framework and my central research question. Initially I had been more interested in the strong prosperity theological character and the language of