No Place like Home

Notions of home and belonging amongst Indian knowledge workers and their families living in the Netherlands

Master’s thesis
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'Home is [...] not a particular place that one simply inhabits, but more than one place: there are too many homes to allow place to secure the roots or routes of one’s destination'

Ahmed 1999:332
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Executive Summary

This study is about home among Indian expats living in the Netherlands. Since the last decade there has been a major increase of in- and out-migration of Indian expats. The majority of these expats work in the field of information technology. In this research the question asked is how they make themselves at home. They are here only temporary and have (a) home(s) in other physical places. What and where is home and how they relate to it can be tricky. In answering these questions this research addresses literature on notions of belonging and migration, in particular on high-skilled labor migration.

The question of feeling at home not only concerns the individuals themselves but also the Dutch policy makers. They are hoping to attract Indian expats, as they are economically beneficial for the Dutch economy. Initiatives, like economic benefits but also social and cultural activities are organized aimed at providing a pleasant experience for the Indians. Do these initiatives really make the Indian expats feel at home in the Netherlands?

By looking at the material aspect of home in relation to the immaterial feeling of home I tried to understand if and how the expats feel at home. The ‘feeling of home’ I define as an intangible emotion which is formed by the individual in engagement with his/her social and physical surroundings. In focussing on physical home making practices I was directly inspired by the anthropological theory of ‘material culture’, in which material is studied in order to understand social constructions.

During my fieldwork I looked at the expats’ physical environment, mostly their interiors to find out how they express their feeling of home while living in this particular place. I also looked at how the place influenced and changed them. I came to find out that they have material and emotional linkages with friends, family and places in India as well as relate to local social and emotional relations in the Netherlands. Migration to Europe is highly desired. It often means a higher salary and international work experience. Travelling through Europe and experiencing the Amsterdam city life is fun as well as a sign of success and prestige. On the other side migration means being away from family. It can also means that marriage is delayed, due to a busy career oriented lives far away from India. These situations play a part in the everyday lives of the expats. Every individual has a different way of dealing with the possible tensions and opportunities that come with living in the Netherlands. The most influencing factors are age, life phase and gender of the individual. In the process of negotiating between the dichotomies of Indian and cosmopolitan, technology and religion, family and individualism the Indian expats are creating new transnational identities and notions of home.
Vignette 1.

Familiar objects in unfamiliar spaces: a childhood memory of making a new home (February 1998)

The past seven months, my family and I had moved from Thailand to Friesland and now to Phokara, Nepal. In this empty shell of a house everything felt strange, and I strange in it. Rummaging through the boxes of our belongings, my mother found three black-and-white pictures. They had been hanging side-by-side in the hallway in our previous house. In the pictures my sister is playing on a white beach in Thailand. My mother hung up the pictures in the living-room using some nails left by the previous owner. They were dispersed and hanging at different heights against a dirty yellow wall. My mother’s attempt to make us feel at ‘home’ only made me more conscious of how awkward I felt in this particular physical space. The pictures looked misplaced and ridiculous in their new environment, as did we.
‘Home’ is often a complicated matter. For those who have moved their homes, the question of where one belongs can often no longer be answered by pointing to one place. Home is ‘a constantly reformulated ideal as well as a physical space where one strives to feel comfortable’ (Thompson 2007:1). This manner creating of home happens in the daily practices of living. It is an interaction between the individual and his or her environment in which both are changed and influenced by each other.

In this research presented here I focussed on Indian expats living in the Netherlands and their notions of home and belonging. Recently there has been a surprising flow of highly-skilled migrants from India to the Netherlands (Bal 2012, Sonneveld 2010, Buga 2012). Whereas in 1996 there were only 9,476 Indians living in the Netherlands, the number has now reached 23,420 (in 2012) and is still increasing.

Research questions

‘How do Indian expats living in the Netherlands construct their notions of home and belonging in relation to the physical space in which they live and how are these influenced by and expressed in their identity?’

To be able to answer this question I divided it into sub-questions. The first question stands in relation to the Indian expats’ physical space here in the Netherlands. ‘Being-at-home’ is defined by Ahmed as ‘when subject and space leak into each other...’ (1999:341). However, the subject and space do not always correspond, as described in the vignette above. One’s notion of home and belonging is determined by the individual’s relationship with the grounded, physical space he/she inhabits. The following sub-question will help me focus on this relationship:

1. How are Indian expats’ feelings of home and belonging expressed through and influenced by his/her physical and material environment?

When focusing on the relationship between the expat and his/her physical surroundings, there are two aspects in particular I want to include. One is the influence of people and places from before he/she moved to the Netherlands. The other is the influence of people and places he/she has encountered after moving to the Netherlands: local identities. I have formulated them in the following sub-questions:

2. To what extent are Indian expats’ feeling of home and belonging influenced by and expressed in the form of transnational linkages?

3. In what ways do Indian expats negotiate and construct local identities as an expression of belonging and home?
I have answered these questions by looking at how the expats have, make and feel at home here in the Netherlands. The having of home describes the actual grounded place the individual lives in, including their physical house. The activities that he/she undertakes in creating a home is defined as the making of a home. This may include the decorating of his/her house and/or making or maintaining social relations. These tangible activities of making and having home are based on an individual’s ideal of home. Likewise, the physical experiences of home will influence the individual’s ideals of home. To what degree someone feels at home in a place depends on the level of correspondence between their physical home and their ideals of home.

I found that the Indian expats living in the Netherlands carve out a home through a balance between transnational and local identities. How this is done depends mainly on age, gender, life phase and exposure. India is a rapidly developing country with a growing, increasingly internationally oriented middle class. The Indian identity is being reconsidered. Employment abroad is generally seen as a prestige. Bachelors embrace their freedom, living the Amsterdam life away from parental and social control. On the other hand, the ideals of marriage and caring for parents in India play a role in almost all informants’ lives. In most cases, their home in the Netherlands is perceived as a temporary one. Many informants live in pre-furnished rented houses. Statistics show that the average Indian highly-skilled knowledge workers only lives in the Netherlands approximately one to three years (Bal 2012).

However, the home that these expats are creating through their personal struggle between being home and away is part of a bigger journey. They are not necessarily looking to return to the India they left but they are formulating a new way of being Indian and being at home. Their homes in the Netherlands are an illustration of this transnational negotiation.

Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into a conceptual framework, a methodology chapter, a chapter explaining the context, and three empirical chapters.

The conceptual framework presents the concepts of transnationalism, identity, belonging and home. Inspired by Miller’s theory of the ‘humility of things’, I explain how material objects surrounding us influences us. Related to this concept is Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, in which he argues that we are all socialized by our physical surroundings and at the same time have an influence on these surroundings.

In the methodology chapter I explain the methods I have used to collect my data and explain how I have analysed the data. The context chapter presents the location of
my research - Amsterdam and Amstelveen and gives some information on the Dutch and Indian migration laws and trends.

Furthermore I present the data in three empirical chapters. They each present a significant area of the house: the front-door; the living-room and bedroom; and the kitchen. Each of these places plays a role in the construction of home and identity. Along with an analysis of my data I present separate vignettes which illustrated the key concepts expressed in each chapter.

The chapter ‘Front-doors: Managing the threshold’ explains how the front-door plays a role in protecting and/or connecting the inside and the outside of the house. In this chapter I specifically address how the physical and social surroundings outside the house of the Indian expat influences their daily lives. In some cases a third party, like their work or an agent has been involved in choosing their location. In other cases the location was chosen by the expat themselves. Reasons for selecting locations to live, whether chosen by the expats themselves or whether there was a third party involved are selected out of practical reasons like price, distance from work, school and other facilities. However I argue that location is also chosen out of social and/or cultural reasons. These choices reflect life-phase and life styles and how the expats give form to their new lives in the Netherlands. Families tend to choose more to live in the quiet Amstelveen attached to an Indian community. Of the bachelors and young married couples some choose to live in Amsterdam, connecting to a ‘cosmopolitan’ image struggling how to give form to their Indian identity.

The next chapter, ‘The Livingrooms and Bedrooms’: Making it Personal in a Temporary Place’ is situated inside the house. In this chapter I discuss how the interior of the living-rooms and bed-rooms of the Indian expats presents and represents their lives in the Netherlands. Most Indian expats included in my research live in pre-furnished, rented houses. They are made personal by movable objects like family pictures, religious images, souvenirs. By analysing these objects I reflect on the personal relationships between the expat and his/her family and what role this period of migration plays in their lives.

The impersonal character of pre-furnished houses reflect the temporary nature of their stay. The relationship with family and in particular with parents plays a big role across the large geographical distance. Different levels of responsibility, love and duty are expressed dependent on gender and life phase, in particular marital status. Indian bachelors take this opportunity to enjoy the liberal Western lifestyle in Amsterdam, breaking many taboos. However they do not have the desire to abandon their responsibilities of marriage or their loyalty towards their parents. Migration and the life in Europe for many seems to be a form of investing in social and cultural capital in the form of international work experience and travel. At the same time this period of migration can cause a delay of marriage and the distance away from parents can be experienced as an inconvenience. Traditional Indian values are merged with modern Indian aspirations. Both the Netherlands and India, as distant geographical and social realities are grappled in this personal space.

Lastly, I take the reader to the kitchen. This chapter, ‘The place of Search for Authenticity’, addresses the importance of food in the lives of the Indian expats. The chapter is divided into ‘food’ and ‘the food-maker’. The section on food illustrates how food
is a representation of culture. The longing for ‘authentic’ Indian food, difficult to come by in the Netherlands illustrates an emotional attachment to home. Whereas taking the opportunity of trying new foods represents wanting to learn new cultures. A variation in levels and combinations of these two desires are expressed. The section on the foodmaker describes the gender division played out in the kitchen and how this is challenged while living in the Netherlands. Bachelors learn how to cook while the women’s traditional role of culture bearer is renegotiated.

Conclusion

Home is formed by giving identity to one’s physical place. Concerning Indian expats living in the Netherlands, I have looked at how they have done this in and around their houses - negotiating between local and transnational identities. In their personal struggle of creating a home away from home they are trying to create their ideal version of India enmeshed with what they find good or desirable abroad. Migrants manage the threshold by opening and closing their front door at the right time and in the right space. Solid family bonds are held on to in temporary, distant living-rooms. In the kitchen the authentic Indian taste is practiced, improvised and abandoned, inconsistently and all at once. While traversing the dichotomies of Indian and cosmopolitan, technology and religion, family and individualism they are creating new transnational identities and notions of home.
Chapter 1.
Context and Social Relevance

1.1 Indian expats in the Netherlands

Since the last decade, there has been a major increase of in- and out-migration of Indian highly-skilled knowledge workers in the Netherlands (Bal 2012, Abdollozeh 2009). The majority of these expats is working in the fields of information technology (also going by the name of IT or ICT), consultancy, engineering, and management. They are here on an average period of one to three years (Bal 2012).

Like many other European states, the Netherlands does its best to stop migrations of unskilled labour and asylum-seekers, and to encourage skilled and entrepreneurial migration (Castles 2002:1146). Unfavorable demographic trends, like skill shortages and a changing economic climate led the government to reconsider the previous restrictive labour migration policies and to rediscover the benefits of ‘managed migration’ (Menz 2010:2).

In 2004, the Netherlands launched new policies stimulating the immigration of highly-skilled laborers by making the application processes easier. As a consequence, there has been a visible growth in the number of Indian migrants in the Netherlands (Bal 2012, Sonneveld 2010, Buga 2012). Of the 13,000 expats that have entered the Netherlands since 2004, the majority is from India (Bal 2012). From 9,476 Indians living in the Netherlands in 1996, the number has grown to 23,420 (in 2012). The migrants receive a permit based on their income. The importance of Indian businesses is increasingly recognized by local Dutch businesses (Bal 2012).

A few Indians expats I met, came here to study and afterwards stayed to work. The Netherlands has opened up opportunities for foreign students, hoping to attract foreign knowledge. Foreigners are given twelve months in which they have the time to find a job in the Netherlands as a highly skilled migrant.

Since the Netherlands is new to the trend of outsourcing IT tasks in comparison with Australia, Canada, the United States, or the United Kingdom (Abdollozeh 2009), they are in serious competition for global human capital (Castles 2002). Although the Netherlands houses a large group (160,000) of Dutch Hindustanis, making it the second largest ‘Indian Diaspora’ in Europe (Bal 2012), the geographical location of the Netherlands is at first glance a curious destination for knowledge workers from India. Firstly,

1 The official definition of ‘expat’ is someone who has left ‘one’s own country to live elsewhere’ (Merriam-Webster Online). As most of my informants referred to themselves as ‘expats’, I have chosen to use this term. Policy-makers however use the term ‘highly-skilled’ migrant, ‘highly-skilled labourer’ or ‘highly qualified migrant’. When writing about policies, this term is preferred.
2 At least € 50,183 per year for those over the age of 30 and € 36,801 for those under the age of 30.
3 ‘Hindustanis are descendants of indentured labours who migrated from British India to the Dutch colony of Surinam in the period 1873 to 1916 and moved on to the Netherlands [mostly] in the 1970s and 1980s’ (Bal 2012).
the Netherlands does not share a long migration history with Indian, unlike the United Kingdom or the United States. Secondly, this is a unique case since the Netherlands is not an English-speaking country, compared with other popular destinations for Indian migrants.

For this reason, the Amsterdam Metropolitan-area is actively promoted internationally with the icon ‘I Amsterdam’ as a key gateway for, amongst other things, business in mainland Europe. They highlight the fact that Schiphol Airport, and other communication forms, like telecommunication lines and good infrastructure link Amsterdam with the rest of Europe. IAmsterdam strives to offer the Indian company a complete package by working together with Eindhoven. They promise a strategic place for marketing and sales while Eindhoven specializes in research. A number of Indian companies has indeed planted their European headquarters in the Netherlands. At present, the Netherlands counts approximately 160 Indian companies. Many are located in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area and their number is presently increasing (Bal 2012). These Indian companies both attract Indian employees and provide jobs for thousands of local staff. Large multinational corporations like Tata Consultancy employ Indian workers regularly.

However it is not enough to attract migrants through a means of financial benefits alone (Levitt 2011). Whether he/she chooses to invest in a country is largely dependent on personal circumstances. It would therefore be wise for a country who is hoping to attract migrants to also invest in the personal lives of the migrant. After all, the individual is the one who makes the choices concerning financial investment, how and with whom they will use or share their socio-cultural skills.

Detecting this, the Dutch government is also trying to attract Indian expats on a more personal level. In an interview with a Dutch municipal policy maker it was mentioned that investments are put into the organizing of regular social events. The Dutch government hopes that this will make the Indian expats ‘feel at home’ and become ‘ambassadors’ for the city (conference paper Janssen, Bal and Kirk 2013:1). Other initiatives like organizing cultural and sports events have been taken to make the expats feel at home and economically beneficial regulations have been implemented. In 2008 an expats centre is opened at the ZuidAs. They provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ service, in which all important steps to receiving a residence permit is made possible in one place. It is especially aimed at companies who have a lot of highly skilled migrant employees. Another provision is an attractive taxation ruling, in which the expats pay tax over only 70% of

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4 Conducted by Bal and Kirk on 05-04-13
their income. In addition, a special India Desk was introduced at Amsterdam *in business* in 2006. In 2009, the India desk was also involved with starting up the site *Indian Expat Society* (IES). It serves as a social platform for Indian expats living in the Netherlands. In October 2001, the IES website had more than 1249 registered members.

1.2 Research site: Amsterdam and Amstelveen

Indians in the Netherlands live throughout the country, but the main concentration is in the bigger cities: Amsterdam, Amstelveen, Eindhoven, The Hague and Rotterdam. The Indian Embassy is situated in The Hague. They organize regular national and cultural events and have initiated an Indian cultural centre - the Gandhi Center.

However, most of the Indian knowledge workers included in my research live either in Amsterdam or in the neighbouring place Amstelveen.

Table 3. Indians living in Amsterdam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Double Nationality</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>1614</td>
<td>1694</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Gemeente Amsterdam: Onderzoek en Statistiek (Amsterdam municipality: Research and Statistics)*
Table 4. Indians living in Amstelveen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Husband (with wife)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>9,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband (with wife/child)</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent with children</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wifes in a family</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>24,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>16,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>33,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1326</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gemeente Amstelveen

Table 5. Indians living in Amstelveen by age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-11</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>74,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-54</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1326</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gemeente Amstelveen

The majority of the working population of Amstelveen is engaged in higher education employment. The disposable income of 39,700 euros in 2009 is higher than the na-

5 17,8000 people of the working population are employed in higher education, compared to 18,7000 who are employed in either lower and secondary education together. Source: Gemeente Amstelveen
tional average. Of the total population in Amstelveen, 13.3% is non-Dutch. For several years the Japanese community was the biggest group with 1,543; but now it has been outnumbered by the Indian community. Since 2004, when 152 Indians lived in Amstelveen, there has been an increase to 1,819 in 2013 (Gemeente Amstelveen).

The Indian expats in Amstelveen have established their own cricket competition, several Indian restaurants, and grocery stores. Statistics show that 74% of all Indian expats in Amstelveen are between the age of 25 and 39 years. ‘[in this] largest category, 33% of the knowledge workers are single, and 25% are married and nearly all have brought their wives’ (Bal: 2012: 17).

1.3 Motivation: research on the everyday lives of expats

In general, global migration is increasing and becoming more complex and diverse than ever. It has changed particularly in its make up and conditions. Whereas before large numbers of people from a few places migrated to a few different places (ie. the guest workers from Turkey and Morocco to Europe), now smaller numbers from many places are moving to many places (ie. expats to various parts of the world) (Vertovec [video file] November, 2010). In the age of faster, cheaper lines of communication and travel, short-term labour contracts, individuals and families are moving around the world. Especially for expats working with transnational cooperations, who are displaced frequently within the company, it is often assumed that the place of ‘home’ has evaporated, or more relevantly: digitalized (Castell 1989). Yet, especially for them, ‘home’ is an important issue and one that cannot be ignored. ‘Cultural studies [...] detailing the experience of migrants [...] as well as research on family formation and home-leaving claim that ideas about staying, leaving and journeying are integrally associated with notions of home’ (Mallett 2004:77). Studying the physical homes and belongings of expats can significantly say something about the impact of moving between geographical locations in relation to their material as well as immaterial home making practices (Walsh 2006).

While the motivations of moving abroad for labour migrants are generally company-based strategies (Sonneveld 2010, Salt 2008), and most research is focussed on this aspect of transnational labour migration. Nevertheless the decisions and experiences while living abroad have a big impact on the migrants personally in their everyday lives. Focusing on the individual’s homes and belongings automatically means being engaged at a very personal, local level (Walsh 2006). As short term, temporary forms of migration are becoming more common, living in some form of ‘transnational’ family is becoming reality for an increasing number of people (Yoeh et al. 2005). It is important to understand the personal processes this growing group is involved in. Ho and Hatfield (2011) note that there is a growing body of work on migration which focuses on the small-scale negotiations of everyday life that make up the human experiences (2011:710). However, current literature on highly-skilled international migration, (which is often a gendered process) still tends to ignore families and women (Yeoh & Khoo 1998:161). Studies on the home incorporate the whole transnational family, as they all play a part in the expats’ home making practices.

Although, as mentioned before, there is a small collection of research conducted on the personal lives of expats. In the Netherlands, academic research on Indian expats is
next to nothing (Bal 2012). With this research I hope to contribute to the literature on home making practices of expats. ‘In order to understand contemporary globalisation processes (including migratory flows), we need to enlarge our understanding of social reproduction and consumption processes which often take place at the site of the family/household’ (Yoeh et al. 2005:308). ‘The variety of ways in which the everyday’ can be understood presents opportunities for interrogating experiences from this perspective. Looking at a specific small group of people in a specific geographical location, at small scale, namely in their own homes, helps understand the big, abstract ‘contemporary globalisation processes’.
Chapter 2.

Conceptual Framework

2.1 Home

The concept of ‘home’ is something that is familiar to everyone. However when thinking about what it really means, particularly within the social sciences, the concept of ‘home’ remains a multi-dimensional, ‘multi-layered concept which is difficult to define’ (Duyvendak 2011:4). ‘Is home (a) place(s), (a) space(s), feeling(s), practices, and/or an active state or state of being in the world?’ (Mallett 2004:62). In the post-modern world, as written about in the case of displaced people [under which expats], ‘home is fluid, mobile, and shifts with multivalent and transnational identities’ (Koh 2012: 45). Al-Ali and Koser (2002) also argue that especially ‘for the migrant, home becomes an explicitly dynamic process, ‘involving the acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving ‘homes’(Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 6).

We, with our identity, do not stand alone in a universal emptiness but always have a contextual place An example of this relationship is reflected in Bourdieu’s (1980) concept of habitus, which I will explain later. It is not apparent that a certain person ‘belongs’ to a certain place. Appadurai (1996) criticizes the way anthropologists bind people to place when defining a ‘native’. Bell (1999) similarly argues that a person ‘does not simply or ontologically ‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it (Bell 1999:3). There is a relationship between the individual and the place. The ‘feeling of home’ in my research refers to this state of ‘belonging’. It is an intangible notion, an emotion. It is dependent on the relationship between one’s identity and the identity of one’s environment.

I argue that this notion of belonging, or feeling home is dependent on the state of the combination one’s ideal of home, and one’s having and making of home. This, in turn stands in relation to one’s identity, one’s past experiences and memories of home, one’s current home and the ability one has to manipulate or form this home. It depends on both emotional and immaterial as well as physical circumstances.

Having of home is the physical space where the individual is. It may, for example be his house. The making of home refers to the action that the individual undertakes in making themselves feel at home. This can be material - for example decorating your house - or it may be social, like making or maintaining friendships. How someone makes himself a home is dependent on and inspired by the ideal that person has of a home. The closer the physical home of the individual, through the having and making of home, comes to the ideal of home that individual has, the more the individual will feel at home. All three aspects of home influence and are influenced by each other. The ideal of home influences the making of home. The making of home influences the having of home. The ideal of home may also change, influenced by the conditions of having and making of home. As all these aspects of home change, the feeling of home the individual has is therefore fluid and likely to change.
This chapter is divided into five sections. Each explains a theory that is used to help to understand the link between the ideal, the having, and the making of home - which together form the feeling of home. I address the concept of ‘humility of things’ and ‘habitus’, and explain how geographical location and physical surroundings play a role in the individual’s process of ‘identification’. I also explain the distinction between ‘place’ and ‘space’ to indicate the individual’s actions influencing his/her surroundings. Next I explain the concept of transnationalism, focussing on the identity process when people move geographical places. Lastly I elaborate on the main process of identification.

2.2 Material culture: The humility of things.

Miller (2010) starts his book called ‘Stuff’ saying ‘Don’t, just don’t, ask for or expect a clear definition of ‘stuff’ (2010:1). The fine line between the less tangible forms of stuff, such as an email or a kiss make it hard to categorize. Instead he proposes in his book to give an introduction to his perspective on the study of ‘material culture’ (idem): ‘the study of the object world created by humanity’ (2010:2). In this research I incorporated the concept of ‘material culture’ by focussing mainly on the physical houses and interiors of the expats.

Things around us influence us - especially when we do not notice them. They are able to determine what takes place in a certain setting. For example how our kitchen is furnished: with a sink, a fridge and an oven - is something that we no longer notice and yet it influences how we use the space and what we do in the space. The phrase ‘blindly
obvious’ is well found. It refers to something so normal in its setting that we no longer notice its presence. Miller (2010) argues that then things are most powerful. Miller (2010) argues that the contrast that is normally assumed between tangible ‘stuff’ and intangible thoughts and beliefs not as clear as it seems. Tangible objects are the things that set the scene, and so become invisible. This would mean that who we are is not so much determined by our conscious choice but by our surrounding environment. Consciously focusing on how an individual has dressed - or has not dressed - a space reveals the choices he/she has made and what he/she perceives as ‘normal’. This says a lot about who this individual is and how he/she manifests in a particular space.

2.3 Habitus

This line of thought on materialism is something that Miller (2010) draws back to the structuralists. In particular he refers to Bourdieu and his study on the North African Berber community, Kabyle. Bourdieu argues that the Kabyle children are socialized through their practice of the things around them. Based on this finding Miller (2010) reasons that we are all socialized through the way we have been taught to use the things and reason with the things around us. It is important to note that the things are seen to stand in relation to each other to form a certain order, a ‘system of things’ (Miller 2010:53). Through the repeated practice of using objects in a certain way it becomes habitual. We use a table to sit at and a glass to drink from. The result is becoming used to a practice of interaction with things Bourdieu calls the ‘theory of practice’. (Miller 2010: 53). This links with Miller’s theory of the humility of things, in which objects shape people. We are shaped by things that are placed in our environment by previous generations. They determine our surroundings and directly influence our everyday practices, the way we think, and our cultural values. This unconscious underlying order is what Bourdieu calls ‘habitus’.

Habitus is encoded in one’s mental structures and physical body. One’s habitus is responsible for how a person perceives and acts in the surrounding world. At the same time the habitus of a person changes as a result of interaction in and with the external world. The habitus both changes and is changed as the individual engages with the external world (Bourdieu 1990). This is especially important to remember in the case of individuals who move geographical locations, like the Indian expats living in the Netherlands. On the one hand they take with them an embodied habitus which determines their outlook and actions in their new surroundings. On the other hand this new surrounding will, like every external surrounding, have influence on and effect their habitus. This is especially important when it comes to understanding the important difference between ‘place’ and ‘space’.

2.4 Place and space.

De Certeau (1984) makes a distinction between ‘place’ and ‘space’ - terms almost parallel to the ‘having’ and ‘making’ of home. Place is defined as the actual material location and the material elements in that location. In this case of this research, the place is the house and the material objects in the house. De Certeau (1984) argues that the law of the place is that elements - in this case the house and its objects - can never be in two
different places at once. Similarly it is not possible to have two elements, like two houses in one place. Everything has its own ‘proper and distinct location’ (1984:117). A place is a strictly grounded setting.

On the other hand, a space is a practised place, a place made meaningful. It is transformed by the people and their usage of the place. I want to relate this to the ‘making of home’. De Certeau (1984) gives the example of the street designed and constructed by urban planning. This place can only truly become a walking path when it is used by walkers - who transform the place into space.

The processes between places and spaces are endless. When referring to a place as being a dead thing and a space making it come to life, then a place can turn into a space and back again. Things can be put to death or brought to life. The process of transforming a barren piece of land by building a house is the process of a place turning into a space. The house again turns into a place when it is found by the next person moving into it. This person then has the opportunity of making the house a space by living in it. The continual interaction between the individual and his/her environment changes both the individual as well as his/her environment.

In the next section I want to go into more detail on the relationship between an individual and his/her geographical location when he/she starts moving, as is the case with the Indian expats. In describing the concepts of material culture, habitus, and the difference between place and space, the surrounding environment was the main focus. In this next section the individual is the main focus. For that reason I will also elaborate on the process of identification, taking into consideration the effect of when people move.

2.5 Transnationalism

Scholars recognize that migrants remain strongly influenced by their ties with their home country, (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004:1002). All my informants are in contact with friends and/or family in India while physically living in the Netherlands. This is something that most migrants deal with. Glick Schiller and her colleagues have come up with a concept which includes both the relationship with the place migrants have left and the place where they are present. This term is called transnationalism. They define it as ‘the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’ (Basch et al.1994:7). Transmigrants are therefore defined as ‘immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders’ (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004:7). Migrants’ identities are frequently situated between nations. ‘Increasing numbers of migrants orient their lives to two or more societies and develop transnational communities and consciousness’ (Castles 2002:1146). They bring with them ‘a trail of collective memory about another place and time’ but at the same time they are recreating ‘new maps of desire and of attachment’ (Walsh 2006:125). Under the conditions of globalisation it becomes increasingly clear that migrants have actually always moved in a transnational manner (Castles 2002:1146).

In order to be able to include their multi-placed homes as one whole I see them as living in a ‘transnational social field’. Levitt and Glick Schiller define social fields as ‘a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed’ (2004:1009).
In this definition grounded places are connected with far away places through the social and emotional ties of the migrants and those in the other place. On the one hand, all is local since the far-off and near-by connections access the individual in their daily lives. Simultaneously, within this local sphere this same person may receive ideas and information globally without having moved (idem).

Similarly ‘home’ and ‘away’ can not be understood simply as opposite experiences and concepts (Ahmed 1999). Ahmed argues that associating home with familiarity and away from home with strangeness, including migration is problematic (Ahmed 1999). Instead, by seeing the practice and idea of ‘home’ and ‘away’ as part of the same trans-national social field will help see the interconnected emotion and social relationships between different geographical homes (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004:1002). It helps me understand that their sense of belonging does not lay in one place alone, but is a complex, multi-layered network reaching far beyond national borders.

2.6 Identification

The identity of a person is hard to define since it is, like home, not a static or fixed state. Even a seemingly obvious and clear identity, such as gender, Bell (1999) reasons, is not a given but constructed. Brah (1996) adds that even within ourselves ‘what we call ‘me’ or ‘I’ is not the same in every situation; that we are changing from day to day’ (Brah 1996:20). It is understandable that most scholars prefer the word ‘identification’ instead of ‘identity’, since ‘identity’ gives the impression of being a fixed thing (Eriksen 2010:71).

Since identity or identification is an action and reaction - and thus a process, rather than a state - it is important to understand what the reaction stands in relation to. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) look at a person’s identification in relation and reaction to their surroundings. They define this term as ‘one’s sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act’ (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:17). Identity is therefore formed in reaction to one’s (social) surrounding. Whereas home is a description of one’s surrounding, one’s identity refers to one’s self. However they are in direct relation to each other.

The definitions above all seem to suggest that identity construction is a conscious, active process on behalf of the individual. However, this is not always the case. Erikson (1968) feels that identity formation is mostly an unconscious process (Brah 1999). Bourdieu also makes a distinction between ‘reflexive’ and ‘dispositional’ identities (Bottero 2010). He criticizes researchers that only look at the reflexive accounts of persons on their identities. He feels it is only the tip of the iceberg and does not describe the whole identity. During my research I tried to incorporate both conscious and unconscious factors that could tell me about the informants and how they stood in relation to his/her surrounding. This way I tried to be able to understand his/her notion of home.

One way of doing this was by keeping in mind the distinction between ‘ways of being’ and ‘ways of belonging’. ‘Ways of being’ refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with their actions. In the case of the Indian expats: by an outsider they may be seen as being practicing Hindus, while in contrast it may be the photography club that is most important to them. The individual may be attached to various institutions, organizations, and experiences but personally not relate to them (Levitt & Schiller 2004:1010). Sometimes what
seems like contradictory characteristics can exist side by side. Furthermore, individuals feeling connected to a variety of people and places, like migrants often do, present and hold more than one identity. Multiple ways of combining ‘ways of being’ and ‘ways of belonging’ are possible. It is like a gauge on a pivot which may sway one way or the other, changing its direction over time.

Although this has proven to be a useful concept in my research, it did not completely describe the anticipated situation. The concept refers to the balancing between two existing homes an individual may have. However, instead of swaying back and forth, the Indian expats seem to be moving forward, constructing a new, third identity.

Conclusion

Understanding the complex situation of the displaced person and his/her relation to home requires looking both at the identity of the individual as well as the identity of his/her environment. In this research I focussed on the Indian knowledge worker in his/her physical home in the Netherlands. Taking the broader scope of the transnational social field allows me to look at the whole notion of belonging which stresses out all the way to India and in many cases includes even more physical places. These environments have had influence in shaping the habitus of the individual as well as in shaping the present environment he/she is in. It is a constant process of places turning into spaces and vice versa as the individual engages with his/her physical environment. It is exactly when we, as people, no longer question our environment, that it has a powerful hand in shaping our actions. While looking with my informants at their social and material surroundings I paid special attention to how they regarded it, specifically in relation to the concepts of home. Where they physically live and how they think about this place, in the form of having of home. What initiatives they take in creating a home and asking after their feeling of home. This way I was able to grasp a deeper level of belonging and home in relation to where they were now, the places they had been, and the places they are dreaming of going in future.
Chapter 3.
Methodology

In this chapter I describe the methods I applied in order to get my data. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I name the tools that I used in collecting my data. It includes a reflection of the research tools and methods. A big part of this reflection is on myself, as a researcher and research tool. I describe the way I met my informants, as it largely determined my sample. The next section is the data collecting. I give a description of the initial contact and reflect on it in this section. I also give a basic overview of the samples I eventually ended up using. I have categorized the characteristics of my informants in graphs and explain why I have chosen to divide it in this way. In the third section I will be presenting the data coding and analysis. I have collected and sorted the data according to three categories: having, making and feeling of home.

3.1 Methodological tools

3.1.1 Interviews and life histories

In almost all cases I started with an appointment with my informants in a public place. Although O’Reilly (2012:116) suggests these be informal conversations, these meetings almost always ended up being 1.5 to 3 hour long interviews. The questions and topics that I prepared for the interviews were based on the above-discussed topics following my research questions. I developed a list of topics which I formulated in a set of questions (see Appendix 1.)

In total I conducted thirty-three semi-structured interviews. Twenty interviews were conducted with a person just once during my research period. I may have seen the individuals later in a casual setting, but I did not have another interview with them. Fourteen interviews were held in a public place the first time. Twelve interviews were first held at home. I conducted a second interview with seven individuals. In total I recorded six interviews. The rest I wrote out by hand and transcribed to my computer. O’Reilly (2012) suggests recording in-depth interviews. On the other hand she points out that it is important to make the right choices according to each particular situation. During my research it was difficult to record in public spaces due to the surrounding noise. In addition, I wanted my informants to feel as comfortable as possible. The interviews that I did record were all in the personal homes of the informants. With an exception of three, all were interviews with informants whom I had seen at least once before. I noticed that most recorded interviews had a formal nature. When the recorder was turned off, they were more informal.

‘Life histories are interviews in which an individual is interviewed on a specific topic in the context of their whole life story’ (O’Reilly 2012:128). My initial plan was to recording five life histories. I ended up recording one life history with a key informant
Photo 1 Interview at an informants' house
that I felt comfortable asking. I had met with him approximately five times prior to the life history recording session. My main focus during the life history were questions based on where he had lived, in which houses, and which locations: cities, towns, villages. An interesting result was discovering the life and relationship he had with his parents.

Although I formally only recorded one life-history - from birth to present day - I automatically included oral histories in almost all the interviews. Snippets of the past were often interconnected with the present.

3.1.2 Participant Observation

One of the main methods used in ethnography is participant observation. This includes participating in people’s daily lives over a period of time, observing, asking questions, taking notes and collecting other forms of data (O’reilly 2012:113). After I had met an informant the first time, I often tried to plan a meeting at their home. In many instances this was in the form of a meal. The bachelors generally only had time in the evening, after work, to meet with me. The women had time to meet me during the day.

At the beginning of the research period I thought it might be difficult to gain access to the personal homes of my informants. I had met Hari and had gotten to know some of his housemates by going to the cinema with them. When I said that I would love to come to their house, I felt some uneasiness and resistance. Later in g-talk he said:

‘But the Dutch houses that I have seen [from outside through the window] are super neat and tidy and not a thing out of place etc etc... so, I am reaaaally worried to show my house to a Dutch person....coz I feel its not clean/good enough. I feel embarrassed if I think what the Dutch would be thinking of us, when they see our house through the window while they walk past.’ – G-talk 18-01-13.

As the research continued and I came over to his house regularly this no longer seemed a problem. I had four key informants whom I saw on a regular basis (see Appendix II). On average I saw Hari once a week. Usually I took the metro to his house at 20:00 in the evening, hung out with him and his housemates in the living-room, had dinner with them at 23:00 and took the metro back. I would try and plan an interview with him or one of his housemates while I was there, which would take up an hour; but sometimes I would just come by. My main aim was to take in as much information about the situation while there. I observed the way they used the space. I tried to notice details like where they sat, how they spoke with each other, what language they spoke, who went to their rooms when, who did the cooking, what they watched on tv and how they reacted to me.

During these evenings, even though I did try to create room for talking - for example, by turning off the tv - I was also open, impassive, waiting and watching. They showed me a lot of things also. Photo’s of their holidays or short films. One time I asked them to draw their houses for me.

I saw Shiva and Dirash six and seven times, at different occasions. With Dirash I went to the Hague, to Republic Day. The train trip there and back was a good opportunity for talking. I also came to his house once when his housemate had cooked and invited over a couple of friends. I came over together with my husband and a friend to a potluck that he had organized. Shiva also invited me over for dinner on a few occa-
sions where he had invited over his friends. During these events I also tried to find out more about who his housemate was, who the friends were that he had invited and how they knew each other. Again, I tried to pay attention to the way they interacted with each other. Of course I was simultaneously a part of this interaction.

Sunita I met with four times during the research period. When in a group with others, I tried to capture the dynamics of the situation. However I was also alone with her on occasions. She had said that she likes going to museums and shopping while her daughter is at school. I decided to go with her. While in the museum walked around individually, and after an hour we would have coffee together and conversation.

Although I had a clear focus on a particular research site, namely the house, I was open for any other sites that developed through the friendships with the informants. It so happened that I also went with them to social events, like going to the cinema, lunches, and dinners; and walking around town. I attended some cultural events and meet ups. I invited Hari and his housemate over for dinner at my place. Once I invited a number of informants to a concert, to which three key informants came.

While I was in the informants houses to see them in their most natural setting, I was also there to pay special attention to the house itself. In some cases I photographed their houses. The next chapter is an elaboration of this visual method.

3.1.3 Visual tools: considering the role of the camera

Concentrating on the concept of ‘home’ amongst my research group, I visually observed the interior of their house and objects in the house as part of my data collection. I visited 15 houses inhabited by 22 people in total, of which ten people’s houses at least twice. I photographed the objects and spaces of 11 households. The practice of photographing the interiors and objects in order to better understand the inhabitants is not new. In Visual Anthropology: photography as a research method, John Collier (1967), one of the first to write extensively about practical use of visual anthropology, states the following:

‘The photographic inventory can record not only the range of artifacts in a home but also their relationship to each other, the style of their placement in space, all the aspects that define and express the way in which people use and order their space and possessions. ... The value of an inventory is based upon the assumption that the ‘look’ of a home reflects who people are and the way the cope with the problems of life’. (1967:45). The registration of artifacts and spaces is useful when wanting to interpret them and to be able to come back to them at any time. However the opinion that visual recordings are objective data and can be analyzed as such is outdated. Since the crisis of representation, the debate on the influence of the researcher on his/her data can not be ignored. Analyzing visual images, just like text, needs to include reflection on the role of the maker and the circumstances in which the image was made. ‘Most anthropologists would regard the processes by which knowledge is produced during research as the outcome of the relationship and negotiations between the researcher and informants, rather than of the former’s objective observation of the latter’ (Pink 2006:25). I cannot deny the fact that I was the one behind the camera, making the choices.

6 An example of this is Mead and Bateson’s Balinese Character (Bateson and Mead 1942).
There is also the reaction of the informants to me and the camera itself. As I look back I realize that the process of taking the pictures and questioning about the objects in the houses is also important information. However unconsciously, the camera played its own role. It made me and the informants think about what was suitable and ‘allowed’ to be photographed and what was not. It revealed to me the things that they prioritized, found beautiful or were proud of; and the things that they did not find worthy of photography. As it is important to reflect on the content of written text as data, so it is also important to reflect on the image as data. Not only the content but especially the way it was produced and by whom. Not only did I produce text and visual material as data, I also collected data as a result of digital communication with my informants, as described in the next section.

3.1.4 G-talk: a virtual research site?

In most cases during a research period in the field there are accounts of things that happen unprepared or unaccounted for. In my case this was the extensive contact I had with a few of my informants over g-talk. Almost immediately after I met my first informant he addressed me through gmail. Since most of my appointments and house visits were in the evening I ended up g-talking with a small selection of my informants during their office hours. At one point I was communicating through g-talk with my key informants on a daily basis.

At first I was confused as to what to think of this. Due to the fact that I was sitting in my own living room it did not seem to me like a research tool or research site. However, this digital contact gave new opportunities to discuss things that were different when discussed face-to-face. It also gave me the possibility to stay in contact with them while they were at their work. It was an effective way to arrange meetings. It gave both parties the opportunity to share interesting links, pictures, videos and music. Since all the conversations are automatically saved in gmail I am able to read back and reflect on the conversations. The internet conversations naturally developed into a valuable part of my data collection.

My impression is that different subjects were discussed over g-talk than face-to-face. Often the intangible, big themes like love and religion could not be properly discussed over g-talk. On the other hand, more confronting subjects like sex, which were more awkward to talk about face-to-face were easier to discuss through g-talk. Hine (2000) also speaks of the dilemma of either seeing this kind of digital data as primary or secondary source. She feels that in these cases it is blurred (2000:3). Just as with analyzing any other ethnographic data, it is of vital importance to consider the circumstances under which they are produced. A big part of my data was created - unplanned-through digital communication. It adds value to the data collection as a whole.

3.2 Data collection and reflection

In this chapter I first want to reflect on my position in the field. Besides having the role of a researcher, I feel that my gender, nationality, and social status in particular deter-

7 A chatting device provided by gmail.
minded my access to and my relation with my informants. In the second part of this chapter I will explain how I approached my informants. Initially this was mainly through forums - a factor that had great influence on my sample. This leads me to describe the sample that I finally ended up with.

3.2.1 Self reflection

Ethnography is done in a method we naturally all use to make sense of the world, ‘by watching, experiencing, absorbing, living, breathing, (…)’ (O’Reilly 2012:1). Our own involvement and interpretations as a researcher play a key role. Gay y Blasco and Wadde (2007) define the main pillars of ethnography as putting a live world into context, revealing the relationships, and the act of comparison (2007:5). Ethnography is a great way to gain personal, detailed, and first-hand information (O’Reilly 2012). However, we as ethnographers are also human beings, who, at the same time, color the ethnographic field we are in. We are never a blank sheet of paper. Writing itself is a process of observation, interpretation, and reflection. Data and data collection are never naïve (Herbert 2000:559). It is rather a ‘conversation between what [we] observed and what we theorize’ (Herbert 2000:552). The very tool of ethnographic methods - the element that results in good data - is at the same time our weak spot. We must do our best to keep the balance between gaining order from the field and imposing our own categories (Silverman 1985) mentioned by Herbert (2000). A way of doing this is by reflecting on our own role, position, and identity in the field.

First of all - whoever we are - while doing research, we temporarily take on the role as a researcher. As mentioned by Stone Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2007) one must reflect upon the privileges and power of his position and those of his informants (2007:136), since a power difference is typically present between the observer and the observed (Herbert 2000:561). Kvale (2006) critically looks at the asymmetrical power relations, particularly of the interview in which the interviewer may take on the role as a sympathetic therapist (2006:482) to be able to get behind the intimate walls of trust. Even though this is not something I consciously did, I do think it happened.

On one occasion an informant and I were done taping a two-hour long life-story. Afterwards I informally continued asking him personal questions about his thoughts, feelings, and experiences. With some difficulty he talked and I listened happily, thinking I had finally won his trust. However, in a reply the next day he wrote he regretted telling me so much:

You know what they say: just before you die, your whole life flashes before you. On those terms yesterday was a near death experience. …nothing against you.. but somehow I felt bad, that I talked that whole lot... it was good sharing with you and all, but somehow, there was a tinge of regret afterwards, deep inside.. probably because its after a long time.. well anyway, now you know a lot of stuff about me...anyway, don't bother about that ok? Write a good book about me. – Fragments from a g-talk conversation, 05-02-13.

Although I did not force him, Kvale (2006) believes the interviewer rules the interview
and the interpretation is monopolized by the interviewer (Kvale 2006:485). Reflecting on my relationship with the informants, I feel friendships were established – even though this was part of the framework of the research. I think this was present in the back of their heads as well as in mine. I listened to everything with a research-focussed ear, causing something of a dis-balance between us.

In the field we not only take on the role as researchers, we also take ourselves into it. We see and interpret everything we come across in our own personal way. The interviews done and pictures taken were regulated by me. I focused on the things that struck me, that I deemed important. Every part of me - my gender, nationality, age, color of skin, way of speech, in short; everything - played a role in the position and relation I had with my informants. This meant that I sometimes found myself swept away by my own emotions, led by my norms and values and confronted by my expectations. In this I tried to hold on to Nash and Wintrob’s (1972 in Herbert 2000:559) comforting remark, namely, that the observants’ ‘reactions, initial stumblings, discomforts, confusions and hard-fought competencies’ are also to be seen as informative incidents. An example of my own feelings playing a role:

I feel very upset to hear [that he goes to the Red Light District]. I feel very stupid about this strong emotion. Very stupid that I … can stand so in the way and everything becomes so awkward that I can not ask about it more and that I just block. … But it was so much for me to handle that I could not look at him the same way. I looked at his face, but it was different suddenly. I was confused. I know this is a weak spot with me. … I am not able to chew it over and talk about it in a grown up, objective sense. I have always felt it stands in the way. Because of my behaviour … things are shoved into dark corners, when it is especially these things I want to talk about. - Fragment from my diary kept during the field, 23-03-13.

To be able to analyse the data truthfully I must be transparent and incorporate these strong personal reactions.

3.2.2 Our identity, our access

As I mentioned in the introduction I felt that the three most important and determining factors that played a role in me as a researcher were my nationality, gender, and social position. As I would later learn, most of my informants did not have many Dutch contacts. Being one of the few locals they personally knew, I felt I held a special place. They were able to benefit from my position from time to time. It happened twice, for example, that I posted an informants’ room that was for rent on my facebook, because they were looking for Dutch housemates. On occasion I also made use of my network. It occurred to me that I was a valuable contact through which they hoped to meet other Dutch people.

That I am seen as a ‘local’ and as ‘Dutch’ automatically excludes me in several ways. I am not Indian. I am an outsider. I was not one of them, in a certain way. Especially in the contact with the women I think this may have been a reason for not gaining the access I had hoped for. I could not speak Hindi, did not know how to cook Indian,
nor did I own a sari. I did not have a child that went to an International School and my husband did not work in the IT.

On the other hand, there was also an advantage to not having any part in the social system of the informant's lives. First of all, they could be absolutely sure that I had no contacts in India and their information would not reach India in any way. Secondly, I was neither a colleague nor a housemate, nor a friend. My unknowingness liberated me, in a sense, to ask any questions about any subject, since I did not know what the social norm would be, nor what was particularly expected of me. I had a feeling the bachelors in particular eventually won my trust and were able to share their secrets with me. A common theme, for example, being their long lost, forbidden lovers in India. One informant said I was one of the only ones he ever talked to about this subject.

I believe being a woman was probably an advantage in having personal, open conversations with the bachelors. On the other hand, I was not invited and even unwanted on other occasions - for example when a group of guy friends got together for drinking parties. Were I a man, this would probably have been different.

All data is collected under particular circumstances. We must be fully aware of these circumstances including our own role in this. Our access and interpretations are influenced by our identity. This is both the strength and weakness of being your own research tool. In the next chapter I will further reflect on the research process - looking at how access with the informants was achieved and what methods were used.

3.3 Contact with the informants

3.3.1 Contact through forums
It was because I did not know any Indians living in the Netherlands that I used websites to get in touch with them. Though it was not my intention, this first contact eventually determined the sample that I was going to end up with. Most of the people making use of these sites were single men looking for friendship. It is not surprising that the majority of the informants in my sample matched this identity.

My first encounter with Indian expats in the Netherlands was through the site called 'Indian Expat Society'. I posted a short introductory piece of myself and the research on the forum under the section ‘introduction’ on the website but I received next to no replies. I was not the first researcher trying to get in contact with Indian expats through this site. I emailed one the researchers, a bachelor student, asking after his experience. He said that it was difficult to get people interested in participating in his research, but got me in touch with one of his former informants. This is where things started rolling. Although this enthusiastic participant was no longer living in the Netherlands, he put me touch with a former housemate and a friend still living in the Netherlands.

Another way I reached out to Indian expats was through a site called ‘meet up.com’. This site gives individuals the opportunity to start up, post and organize social events. It was also mainly visited by expats, but unlike the one above, not focused on Indians in particular. They are expats from all over the world who want to meet other people in Amsterdam. I signed up for the groups ‘Indians in Amsterdam’, ‘Indians in the Netherlands’, an Indian cooking site ‘More than Curry’, and ‘ExpatsmeetsDutchies’. As a member of a group you can make a suggestion for a meeting within that group.
In the ‘Indians in Amsterdam’ group I suggested drinking coffee at the Starbucks at Central Station. Although no one showed up, the founders of this group - two single men - contacted me and one became a key informant.

I also met one married woman through a meet-up group she had started. Through her I got in touch with other married women who lived in Amstelveen, and their families. They knew each other through the international school. I found out that there was a large group of them (around 25) who organized social gatherings in the form of lunches and games. Unfortunately I was never invited for such a meeting. However, I was able to conduct one interview with each of the three women that I met, and visit and photograph their houses.

3.3.2 Cultural Events

Besides visiting the forums I also attended cultural events in order to meet new informants and to observe the events. Usually the majority of the people attending these activities were families, unlike on the forums, where members were mostly bachelors. At both the Republic Day in the Hague and the Saraswati Puja in Amstelveen, I met families that had been living in the Netherlands for a number of years, sometimes even a few decades. The majority did not live in or around Amsterdam and I did not include them in my research as informants. I did take note of these events, the people I met and the conversations I had with them. It helped me narrow down further and distinguish my research group.

I also attended one ‘DutchiesmeetsExpat’ group meeting. This was organized through the meetup website for expats in general. I estimate that there were about 150 people there, of which five were Indians. Of those five, I was able to arrange an interview with one of them at his house.

3.3.3 Reflection on contacts

My intention when starting this research was to gain access to a broad range of people: married as well as unmarried, families, men and women. I initially thought that I would have the most contact with the women, because I assumed they would not be bound to a time-consuming job. I also thought that my own identity as a woman would lend itself to building a trusted relationship with my own gender.

It turned out that it was rather difficult to build up friendships with the women. The crowd that I was hoping to get to know mostly socialized with other Indian women. Not being Indian and not having children may have been what prevented me from fitting in. I ended up having the most contact with the bachelor men roughly between the age of 22 and 35. They were happy to meet with me and had a social life that I could more easily participate in.

3.4 Information on the informants

I went out into the field looking for Indian knowledge workers living in the Netherlands. It was an open search - at first I did not know what patterns or characteristics to look for. The only thing that was important at this point was their Indian background and the
fact that they were living in/or around Amsterdam. It was later that I began to see patterns and recognize relevant categories.

I categorized my informants and their information in terms of gender, marital status, location of their house, length of stay and employment. Facts like caste, religion and background played a less important role in this research. For this reason I do not mention them as key factors in this research. Below I give an overview of the samples on which I have based the information in my research. It gives an impression of the patterns that are important for answering the question in this research. To start with I looked at type of contract.

Initially I thought that the type of contract would be a major factor influencing the experience of home for the expats in the Netherlands. I tried to find a pattern between the two, but a few weeks into the research had to let go of this somewhat simplistic idea. However it is still a factor that determines their situation to a certain extent.

From Table 7 the conclusion can be drawn that most informants have a permanent contract. Otherwise the contracts are diverse in length - the second biggest group varying between ‘project based’ (meaning they have a contract with an Indian company based in India and they are here for a project) and one year.

Table 7. Informants’ type of contract of employment with current company (N=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of contract</th>
<th>Number of informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project based</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed *in all cases their spouse is working</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference of gender and marital status turned out to play a significant role in the lives of my informants and their experience in the Netherlands. As shown below in Table 8 and Table 9, the majority of my informants are bachelor men.

Table 8. Gender division amongst informants (N=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9. Marital status of informants (N=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Unmarried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also decided to indicate the difference in the location of the expats’ houses, a distinction turned out significantly different. Amsterdam and Amstelveen were the two places where most of the informants lived. As shown in Table 10 I had met almost an equal amount of people from both places.

Table 10. Location of the informants’ houses (N=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of their house</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amstelveen</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The length of stay proves to be an important factor when looking at how an individual experiences home in the place that he/she is now and the place that he/she has left behind. Most informants in this research have been living in the Netherlands for at least one year, shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Duration of time the informants have been living in the Netherlands (N=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 months</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 months</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12 months</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year - 2 years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 2 years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The nationality of the company often influenced the nationality of the colleagues and the work environment. I have made a distinction between the Indian companies and the non-Indian companies. Table 12 shows that the majority of the expats I met worked with non-Indian companies. These were either Dutch or another nationality such as Turkish or American. The difference between these nationalities did not seem to be so important

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8 There are however two informants in working in Dutch companies with the majority of Dutch colleagues. This did seem to be a significant difference.
Table 12. Nationality of company where informants currently are employed (N=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality of company</th>
<th>Number of informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian company</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indian company</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-employed *in all cases their spouse is working</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. Age of informants (N=31)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of informants</th>
<th>Number of informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 - 25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 35</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36+</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In short: my research has predominantly been with bachelor men between the age of 22 and 36 (see Table 13) who have lived in the Netherlands for at least one year. They almost all lived in the area of Amsterdam and Amstelveen, with an exception of three. They worked mostly with non-Indian companies under contracts with diverse lengths.

3.5 Data coding and analysis

Throughout the process of collecting the data through verbal and visual methods, I placed them in several categories so as to be able to read the data. Early in the research period I designed a chart to do some basic organizing in which I looked at the individual as the unit of analysis, see Table 14. For each person I subcategorized the data into either ‘having, making or feeling of home’. These categories I sub-divided into smaller sections.

Starting with general information about the identity of the informants, I looked at gender, age, marital status, origin, mother tongue, caste, class and religion. In addition I looked at their education and employment trajectory after their college. It was important for me to know what kind of experience they had had in relation to traveling within India and abroad prior to coming to the Netherlands. I looked at international exposure both in their education as well as in their previous and present employment. As part of the ‘making of home’ I looked at the relations that they had locally and internationally, both with family and friends. The relations they had with people living in India was particularly important. It is also significant to know about the contacts they had established while in the Netherlands and how they had established them. I looked at how frequent and on what terms these contacts existed. Again, nationality played an important role. Even though it is somewhat rigid and subjective, I usually asked for a number when speaking about friends. Their social life was determined by the family and friends they
Table 14. Data coding and analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General information about informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where he/he said to be from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste or class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition of their nuclear family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local factors: -house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms and conditions of house ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type and condition of furniture and purchasing of furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of and relationship to personal belongings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local factors: - social relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type and number of contacts made in the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(nationality was particularly important to know)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local factors: - employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local factors: - general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period of time living in the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice to come to the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and opinion about the Dutch language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts about the food here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts about the weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If they feel at home here or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How, where and with whom free time is spent, including holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The question of if they feel at home here or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type and number of other contacts outside of the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have. I also covered the things they enjoyed doing, how and where did they spend their weekends and holiday.

Focussing on the ‘having of home’, a big portion of my data was collected by looking at their physical ‘house’ and the content of their interiors. First of all the location of the house was significant. It was also important to know if the house was rented or bought, and if it was pre-furnished or not. In most cases the houses, both those of families and bachelors, were rented and pre-furnished. I therefore made a clear distinction between their personal objects and the objects, including furniture, that were not owned or chosen by them. In both cases, I tried understand what the object meant to them personally. This also involved looking at the placement of the objects. For example, in an informant’s room, some souvenirs were packed away in a drawer while others were hanging on the wall or stalled out in his room.

Related to the factors headed under making and having of home, I also asked about general opinions, which I would like to categorize under the heading of ‘feeling of home’. I tried to understand their plans and opinions about staying here or leaving for a new destination, and going back to India. I did this by making categories including what they thought of things like food and weather, and what their future plans were. I also asked them if they felt at home here or not. I incorporated their answers in this chart:

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have given a description of how I collected my data. In the first section of this chapter I described the methods I used. They were qualitative research methods in which interviews, participant observations, visual, and virtual research methods all played a role. I gave a reflection on myself as the researcher and so also the research tool. My gender, nationality, and age played the most important part in the contact with my informants. I continued with describing the way I got in touch with my informants and gave a basic characteristics of my sample.

As a conclusion I described how I coded and analyzed my data. I did this by categorizing the information I collected into the three parts: their material (having) and social (making) existence, as well as their thoughts and feelings on their lives in the Netherlands (feeling of home).
Chapter 4.
Front-doors: Managing the Threshold

Vignette 2.

Dirash’s frontdoor sometimes blows open

Dirash’s front-door faces a road. The road is paved with little red stones, with a canal running alongside it. It is a picturesque Amsterdam scene. From the pavement it is two steps down into a narrow alley, about the size of one door. To the right is a small set of stairs to the upstairs apartments. Dirash’s door, is tucked under these stairs. Often garbage lays around in this alleyway. It looks like it is either blown in or dropped by bypassers. Dirash says that people also use this alley way as a urinal. It smells. To the left of this alley, on ground level, is a set of windows behind bars which look into his living-room. During the day the street serves as a nice stroll along the canal to the Leidseplein. At night Dirash hears drunk people either peeing in the corridor or banging against the bar-protected windows. He does not like this. But he feels there is nothing to be done about either the peeing or the banging. Luckily his bedroom is on the far side of the house. He makes jokes about it. For example, mistaking it as a toilet himself, and peeing there.

The front-door opens straight into a wide open space; the living-room running into a hallway right opposite the door. It sometimes blows open when it is not closed properly. You think it is someone coming in but it is just the wind.

(Written based on participant observation described in field-notes: 23-01-13, 26-01-13, 06-03-13, photographs taken 02-04-13, and a phone-call dated 29-05-13).
The front door connects and separates the inside of the house to/from the world outside. Porteous (1976) argues that taking control over a physical space, like a house, is important for both individuals as well as small primary groups, like families. It answers two basic needs: security and identity. Physical and psychological security is achieved by defending space. Identity is obtained by personalizing a space. Personalizing a space gains self-knowledge and recognition of others in his/her environment.

Rituals, such as knocking on the front-door or ringing a bell, acknowledge the sanctity of the threshold and are important in maintaining this security.

However, the importance of a space for the individual extends beyond the front-door to the surrounding area. ‘The house derives meaning from its setting as well as its own characteristics’ (Clapham 2005:155). The inside of the house is marked by the perceived social and physical environment outside the front-door. Clapham (2005) argues that people will choose a location to live influenced by access to facilities, which was dependent mainly on demographics and their personal lifestyles. Amongst my informants I found that the location that they were living had influence on them but were also chosen according to certain (desired) lifestyles. Where they chose to live or where they ended up living reflected what they felt was a ‘good’ place to live. This was either to be connected to a certain social and/or cultural network or recreational facilities. Three informants moved from Amsterdam to the outskirts - two to Amstelveen because their wives (and in one case children) were coming to the Netherlands. Raj, for example, chose to live in Amstelveen, even when the prices of houses were better in places like Zaandam or Aalsmeer. He found it important that his wife could connect to the growing network of Indians living in Amstelveen. Raj specifically chose an apartment close to the house of another Indian couple with a daughter his daughter’s age, so that his wife and daughter could walk to their place. (Field-notes 23-02-13.)

On the other hand Dirash choose to live in the city centre of Amsterdam, to be able to experience an active, social life. The small wooden door and the bars at the windows are the only things that keep the crowds of drunk, partying people pouring into his house. Locations are chosen to suit a desired lifestyle. Out of practical reasons this is very understandable. Like in the case of Ashish (31). Ashish has been living in the Netherlands for four years now. He has also chosen to live closer to the Amsterdam city centre so that he can always make it home on foot, for example when he has drunk too much (Field-notes 12-03-13).

In some cases choosing a location to live was a strong identity marker. Ashish not only chose to live near Amsterdam for practical reasons, but also as a conscious choice of expression:
‘You see, if I have [the chance, I want to be more] international rather than Indian. I tend to avoid them that’s what I want to say. And I’ve met other cool Indians as well, who go to cultural things, like theatre. … The primary motivation to be in Europe is to learn the culture. To be honest I see Indians to be only with other Indians.’ (Field-notes 12-03-13).

Dania (27), a young married woman, insisted that the agent find a house for her husband and herself in Amsterdam, and not in Amstelveen. They are now living in an apartment in De Pijp. She said to me that she found ‘Amstelveen [to be] dead’, to which her husband corrected her with a smile, ‘It’s quiet, you mean’ (Field-notes date 07-03-13). An other informant also said about Amstelveen: ‘It’s so lonely, like when you go outside your house, it’s like a ghost town’ (Field-notes 25-02-13). He moved close to Amsterdam as soon as he could.

Clapham (2005) states Scase’s (1999) observation that, although the information technologies are enabling people to communicate with others across wide geographical distances, the importance of the neighbourhood remains. In fact, Scase (1999) mentions that some people choose to live in a location because of the ‘image’ and how the area plays a part in influencing their appeal (Clapham 2005).

In the local setting of the Netherlands, Ashish feels Amstelveen is really the stereotypical place to be if they want to be with the other Indians (Field-notes 12-03-13). In contrast, Amsterdam represents an international and open place, where he feels more at home.

However, choosing a location to live does not always have to do with a distinct identity marker. Laxman (32) said he got a house through his colleagues at work.

‘Um, because we, yeah, I could have stayed there [with], my friend’s friend, … [but] most of the time I was in contact with these guys from the office, so why not shift here [to their house].’ (Interview Laxman 06-02-13).

It is not only a case of choosing a location, but the location influencing the lifestyles of the individuals. Laxman and his housemates, for example live in a house with other Indian colleagues. Most of their social network consists of fellow Indian colleagues. The chance of them meeting local Dutch people, for example, is not so big.

At other times a location is chosen according to expected lifestyles, like Pavan’s. The front-door of this house is supposed to provide protection but instead acts more as a prison door. Certain life-phase expectations from his family in India are influencing Pavan’s decisions of home making in the Netherlands. Pavan has been influenced by his life here in the Netherlands is such a way that living according to Indian traditions is no longer fitting. In one of our last encounters he said that even though he has seen the world and is educated, he still made a decision out of duty to his parents (field-notes 13-02-13). A strong sense of alienation is felt between Pavan and the place he lives, torn between two worlds.
Vignette 3.

‘Men are merriest when they are from home’
- Shakespeare Henry V: Act 1, Scene 2.

Pavan (35) was sharing an apartment until his marriage plans finalized. After the wedding his future bride would come with him to the Netherlands. Hopefully not much later they would have a child. He is expected to have a good, big house to live in with his future family. He went out house hunting and was able to take over (from an Indian family) a three-story, fully furnished house in the outskirts of Amsterdam.

His front door - which is a decent, sturdy one - leads into a hallway, with on the right side a toilet and stairs. At the end of this entrance is another door, a wood frame painted white, containing glass panels in the top half - passing through into the living-room. The house is fit for a big family. downstairs are the combined kitchen and living-room. Upstairs a master bed-room, a work-space, a bathroom, and a bedroom for a child. While he is waiting for his bride to arrive, he lives in the kid’s bedroom. He has his laptop stalled out on the desk standing in the corner, a small heater beneath it and his single bed made up. The rest of the house is furnished, but empty, waiting in anticipation for new life to be blown into it. He spends most weekends at friends’ houses in Amsterdam.
(Written based on field-notes dated 19-01-13, 27-01-13, 13-02-13, and photographs taken on 27-01-13.)
Photo 2. Pavan’s house. Office space: empty
Photo 3. Pavan’s house. Master bedroom: empty
Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) claim, the process of identification of transnational migrants is a constant process of balancing and combining ‘ways of being’ and ‘ways of belonging’. As the individual changes, for example through outward exposure during a masters year, work, through the people he/she meets, or through personal factors - like getting married; his/her homing preference may change.

Even in the length of three months of my research I have experienced informants changing. Dirash, who told me he missed his parents, and thus was planning to go back next year (field-notes 26-01-13). However, when I reminded him of this he exclaimed something like; No way, I can't live in India! - after having lived in Europe for a year. Besides, his parents prefer it this way. They have their own life. (fieldnotes 03-04-2013).

It is not always a conscious choice. For Ibhyá his identity changed gradually while he kept on living here:

So when I meet these people [Indians straight from India], you know, so most of the things they have to talk about is movies and politics and I don't share the interests anymore. And also what I like here, you know, when I meet other expats, I meet people who have also been living here for five, six years, we have both lived outside our countries, we have both learned to adjust here and so you find things much more common with people like that than with Indians or non-Indians, it does not matter. (Interview with Ibhyá 07-03).

At the same, he has chosen to buy an apartment in Amstelveen, close to his ‘Indian group’.

**Conclusion**

One way that the Indian expats have made a home in the Netherlands is dependent on the location where he/she lives. Practical reasons are always important when looking for a place to live, like the access to certain facilities. Sometimes the choice of a certain location is based on social contacts they may have, as in the case of Laxman. In other cases a location is chosen as a way of presenting and representing one’s identity. Ashish and Dirash for example have consciously chosen to live in Amsterdam, distancing themselves from the stereotypical Indian in Amstelveen. Choices are sometimes strongly based on expectations of, for example, parents in India. In one way Indian expats are making locally based decisions like finding a location to live, on the other hand these decisions come hand in hand with what is desired and expected in a larger transnational field. In constructing a place of security and identity in the Netherlands, they take into consideration various social and cultural elements.
NO PLACE LIKE HOME
Photo 4. The slanted woodcut of a whale
Vignette 4.

Swetha’s living-room: a travellers temporary abode

Swetha’s living-room was a rectangular space of about five by six meters. Against the far side, across the windows, stands a cupboard with open selves, one part covered with glass doors. The shelves are filled with small things: cards, pictures, picture frames, letters, books, a pot of Vaseline, a bottle of some kind of medicine or sweets, and a stereo installation. There is a pair of very big green clogs. They look like a souvenir rather than for real use. Behind glass doors on the far right side of the cupboard stands a miniature eiffel-tower, a dinosaur, most probably assembled by her five year old son. A painting, two A4 sized papers with ‘star of the week’ written of them, a certificate with a picture of her son in uniform in the middle, a cup of pencils, and some more medicines, creams or lotions on the bottom shelf in boxes and bottles.

Some of the things were here when they came, like the stereo system and the empty picture frames standing there. Other things she said to have brought with her, like the pictures of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus depicted as a small child and another small picture beside it also depicting Jesus. She shows me a card made by her son for mother’s day.

Above the couches on either side of the living-room hang paintings. The ones to the right look like wood-cuts in the colours black, red, yellow, and blue on a white background. The images are floating, irregular oval formed solid shapes, like bubbles. They are both about one square meter with a gold and brown frame around them.

Later on I notice paintings hanging all around the house. Apart from the paintings in the living-room, all the others look to be from the same maker. Paintings with dark red, orange, yellow, and brown streaks, wildly moving in and out of the frame.

I asked Swetha about them. She said that they are not hers. They belong to the house. The landlord put them up. She sounds to be somewhat indifferent to them, with no strong likes or dislikes. This struck me, as these paintings have a telling presence in the house. Not only in their size do they cover a large areas of wall space, their colours and images attract a lot of attention. Her son does think and talk about them. He once told her that the one is a whale coming out of an ocean. She, herself said she was busy everyday and did not really have time to think about it. She has to take her son to and from school, as well as all the other daily tasks. In one month they are planning to move to a bigger house with an extra room. She is going to have a baby in a few months and her parents will come over from India for a period of time.

Later I go around taking pictures of the different rooms. I notice the woodcut of the whale is slanted a little to one side, out of balance. I walk up to it to hang it straight, change my mind and leave it. It is peculiar, she probably does not even take notice of it hanging lopsided. I take a picture of it.

(Written based on an interview and photo's that I took on 22-02-13).
In this chapter I look at the different living-rooms of the expats. In total I visited 15 homes of which I photographed 11 living-rooms and/or bedrooms. I focus on the objects rather than the room. Most of the houses of the expats that I visited were pre-furnished, rented houses, decorated by the previous owner - who in many cases is the current landlord/lady. In addition, Cooper (1971) states that it is ‘movable objects, not physical fabric itself that are symbols of self’ (1971:11). Porteous (1974) adds - focusing specifically on travellers - that ‘they carry small articles from home along with them and perform certain rituals that confer the feeling of home upon any temporary abode’ (174:387).

Although the expats are momentarily not travellers, the living-rooms are a witness of temporary ‘abodes’. Alongside all the landlord/lady’s abandoned knick-knacks the expats have added their ‘small articles from home’ and ‘perform certain rituals that confer the feeling of home’. The temporary character that these houses portray are telling in themselves. Some informants are outspoken about this fact. Naahbi (29), living in Amsterdam in a pre-furnished house with his wife, says he does not want to buy anything that will make it harder for him to move quickly (fieldnotes 07-03-13). Sumon (22), living with two other friends and colleagues in a rented, pre-furnished house said that the furniture was already standing there and so why move it? (Field-notes 03-02-13). Swetha also indicates to be moving again soon since her parents will be coming for the birth of her second child (field-notes 22-02-13).

However, in this temporary setting, a personal home is created through the practice of their daily lives. I want to illustrate this by focusing on the personal objects that are found in the living-rooms and bed-rooms of the expats. I divided these into two main categories: things that they brought with them prior to coming to the Netherlands, and things that they purchased after coming to the Netherlands. Pictures of extended family as well as pictures of their nuclear family displayed around the living-rooms speak of the relationships that are kept. Religious items in various forms also tell something of the relationship between parents and children. In most houses I also came across souvenirs that were collected during trips around European countries, after coming to the Netherlands - as in Hari’s drawer. They say something about the role that migration and traveling plays in the lives of the expats as well as their families. Something that I also came across in bachelor houses were collections of liquor bottles. As I was told that alcohol is a taboo for many at home, this is a significant point that I want to address in this chapter.
Photo 5. Raj’s newly rented, pre-furnished house.
Photo 6. Personal belongings laying on a nightstand
Photo 7. Personal belongings laying on a nightstand
5.1 Family: remembrance and confirmation

To start with I want to address the family pictures. I only saw pictures of extended family in married couples’ and families’ houses. Deepa (30), who lives in the Netherlands for three years now with her husband and five-year-old daughter, had pictures of her parents and in-laws placed in the cupboard underneath the tv (field-notes 27-02-13). Joyti’s (35) has been living in the Netherlands with her husband for two years now. Pictures of her parents and in-laws stand all throughout the house, alternated with pictures of herself and her husband. Only one picture stood by itself, in the corner of her living-room: a picture of a middle-aged man. Later she told me it was her father-in-law who had passed away (Field-notes 23-02-13).

Olson (1985) makes a distinction between pictures of people themselves as historical artefacts - telling of a significant moment in their own lives - and ancestral artefacts, representing family. The first, he interprets as having a confirming role. The second is for remembrance.

Not only are the family members, like parents, remembered; they are also in regular contact with them. Of the five married women I met - who do not have a job outside of the house - two speak with their mothers daily. Swetha speaks to them over skype in the afternoon everyday, during the week. In de weekends they do not contact them, but sometimes will skype with their in-laws (fieldnotes 22-02-13). Deepa (31) told me that although she is past thirty she still asks her mother for permission and advice about many things (fieldnotes 27-02-13). Not only do they skype, in most cases the parents come over once in a while. The close-knit bond with the extended family is something that clearly makes up their homes in the Netherlands.

Likewise, all the bachelors that I met had regular contact with their parents, ranging between daily and once every two weeks. Not having pictures of their parents around the house, and the fact that most seem to phone instead of skype; may have to do with the fact that they single. In a family both remembering as well as contact are shared experiences. Practically, over skype, the grandchildren will be able to speak to the grandparents.

In both cases, the relationship is both ways. Even though there are huge geographical distances between them, parents will help out when needed. Likewise, the expats themselves also look after their parents - a visible element in the lives in the Indian expats. In most cases the male takes this responsibility upon himself, whether he is married or not, no matter the distance.

Although Habib (30) has four sisters older than him, he still knows that it is eventually his task to look after his parents. I asked if the responsibility for caring for his parents is shared by his sisters or if it is for him. He said they have not said this out loud, but they would be happiest if he would take care of them. I asked if he eventually would go back for that reason. He said he would (field-notes 14-03-13).

The same thing applies to Prakash. Prakash (30) is the only male child in the family, so it is mostly his responsibility to take care of his parents, even though he lives here and his sister lives close to his parents. Although his parents don’t tell him openly, he always – through conversations – comes to know if there is something wrong. They do not want to worry him or bother him. Usually he will send a friend of his to have a look at
Photo 8. Pictures of parents and in-laws in the tv cupboard and picture of daughter on the wall
the problem - for example if something is broken in the garden or in the house. If any money is required for that he will transfer it. If it is a bigger problem, he will phone his brother-in-law for help. He said they have told him that they are happy to help in any way, that he can just contact them. He speaks to his parents and sisters every day. (field-notes 05-03-13)

The location has influence on this relationship and the important role the family plays in their lives have influence on the choices they make. The distance between them does not make it easier, on the contrary.

Soumya and Karthik have a daughter of five and have bought an apartment in Amstelveen. They are planning to stay in the Netherlands indefinitely. Soumya, the wife - speaks with her parents everyday before work. Karthik went to India once a year, Soumya goes more often with her daughter. They said they experience problems, being so far from their parents. The restricting Dutch laws determine that their parents are able to come to the Netherlands for no more than three months, after which they have to take a break from coming for at least six months. As their parents are getting older it becomes more and more difficult for them to travel. With the schooling and jobs of both it is hard to take a long leave to India (field-notes 23-02-13).

Others determine to go back to India as a result of this difficulty created by restricting laws.

Anu (25) said that 50% of Indian people living abroad will have this problem - that their parents are not able to live with them. For him that would also be the reason why he would not be able to stay in Amsterdam for a long term. He added: ‘I don’t want to visit my parents, I want to take care of them.’ (field-notes 25-02-13)

Baburam, a man in his 30’s gave a similar reason for going back to India someday. He has a permanent contract at a company but will go back to India when his parents get too old to take care of themselves. He does not plan to stay for more than three years. (field-notes 15-01-13)

On the other hand, many family houses also have pictures of themselves as a family. In Swetha’s living-room, for example there are pictures of her son in the form of school certificates displayed in the cupboard (Field-notes 22-02-13). Sunita (42) has pictures of her father, her daughter (a few years back), and her dog - which she had to leave in India - collaged on coloured paper, in the office space. In the living-room she has picture-frames sitting all along the windowsills and in the open cupboard. They are mostly of herself, her husband, her daughter, and her dog - all in different compositions and time periods (field-notes 29-01-13). These pictures seem to reconfirm the solid unit of the family over the waves of time and space, which Olson (1985) describes as ‘historical artefacts’. Again, this is not something found in the living-rooms of the bachelors. The bachelors, however, do have religious items, which they wear and carry with them - given to them by their mothers and grandmothers.
I asked if I could see his (Hari’s) ring. He had a gold ring with flower carvings in it on his left middle finger. He said his mother gave it to him and that it was blessed by some special church. He also showed me a thin, gold necklace and an other one made of cotton or wool, with beads, seeds, or small stones inside. Both from his mother, likewise blessed by some special church. He said that his mother is worried when she doesn’t see him wearing this ring. She might think that he sold it to buy drugs or something. So he always has to reassure her it’s safe (field-notes 17-01-13).

Other bachelors had small religious booklets put in their wallets by their mothers and small prayer booklets laying around their room given to them by their grandmothers. These religious objects are given to them by their mothers and grandmothers out of love and concern; which they, in turn, keep out of love and respect.

Both Deepa’s and Swetha’s houses are decorated with religious items in the form of pictures and idols. Deepa also has an altar with a set of ornaments depicting gods placed upon a chest of drawers in the kitchen/living-room area. She had gotten them from her parents nine years ago for her wedding, and they have been travelling with her since. She says she is not religious, but they make her feel connected. She has them and prays to them mostly to please her parents and in-laws. It makes her parents happy when they see their granddaughter being able to say the sanskrit chants (field-notes 27-02-13).

Religion appears to play a gendered role in the lives of the expats. Both for the bachelors as for the married women, religious objects connects them to their mothers and daughters.

**5.2 Good boys go to heaven, bad boys go to Amsterdam**

The distance between parents and children has an effect on their relationship - especially by influencing the way this relationship is given form. On the other hand, the specific geographical location of Amsterdam provides opportunities. This seems to be something related to bachelorhood. Bachelors do not yet have the responsibilities that they would have as a married man, but are also not living under their parents’ supervision, or other forms of social control. Deepak, a married man whose wife and five-year-old son live in India while he is here, explains how he was happily surprised by this social freedom:

‘In India, he explained, even if you live away from your parents, you will have a landlady/lord. He/she will be aware of what you do. Even if this is not the case then you always have a guard around your apartment who will be able to see what you do and be able to report this. Also you always have neighbours. And, he said, people will always have friends or relatives who will be able to make inquiries about you. This is particularly important when looking for a marriage partner. However this is not the case in the Netherlands. He was somewhat happily surprised but also found it somewhat exciting. He said his wife really worries about him and asks him ‘what are you doing there?’ (Field-notes 24-02-13).
This is again context bound, as Amsterdam is unique in its liberal laws concerning the Red Light District and coffee shops.

When I came, I was introduced to Red Light District, coffee shops, identifying the colours on top of gay bars etc - so I pass on the same thing to the others who come to Amsterdam. (g-talk 25-03-13):

This is something that Abdollozeh (2009) also came across among her informants, who said:

Amsterdam is the place to be if you wanna make your wildest dreams come true. Everything you always wanted to try but couldn’t do in India for the fear of society and parents can be tried in Amsterdam’ (Abdollozeh 2009:45)

The liquor bottles found in the living-room in Hari’s as well as Dirash’s house seem to be connected with this free, experimental world. In Hari’s living-room alcohol is happily drunk with friends. Hari’s housemate added that in India this is a big taboo. His parents do not know that he drinks. They would not accept it at all (Field-notes 17-01-13).

5.3 Souvenirs: the trophies of the travelled

Souvenirs of travels around Europe are found in almost every Indian expat household. Souvenirs of Europe is something that I came across in most people’s houses, both of the married and unmarried. When I asked about their personal motivations for coming to live in the Netherlands, the main reasons were international work experience, being able to see more cultures, and travelling. A higher salary was also important, but it was often mentioned last.

However, migration in itself is seen as a prestigious thing. As Dirash expressed it: ‘[Migration] brings pride, it is considered a smart thing to do’ (03-04-13). Likewise, Abdollozeh (2009) also found that being abroad means gaining status within the company and within your family (2009:23).

Another reason why Europe was chosen over other places (if they the option to choose) was - apart from work related reasons - the chance to travel around Europe. Anu (25) indicated: ‘I’m not leaving Amsterdam until I have done Europe’ (Field-notes 25-02-13). All informants I met had travelled to a few countries outside of the Netherlands or had plans to go. These trips usually were for a few days, sometimes only a long weekend. Swetha explained that Indians, usually do not have a lot of holidays to spend touring around Europe, as they spend their long summer breaks in India. They try and see as many sights in as little time as possible. She said it is often very stressful and not relaxing at all, especially with kids (field-notes 22-02-13).

Abdollozeh’s (2009) informant said: ‘Sometimes I wonder if only being there [in a European city on holiday] is more important than enjoying. Of course you need more albums in your Orkut profile’ (2009:23).

Dirash confirms that traveling ‘is seen as a prestige thing, [you] are considered rich and
Photo 9. Deepa’s religious ornaments
**Vignette 5.**

‘**Hari’s bedroom drawer: a treasure chest of souvenirs**

His room is to the left on the first floor. There is a double bed which takes up most of the room. It is made of iron rods both on the head and foot-end so you can sit up and lean against them. When coming in the door there is a small desk with a chair to the left and a waist-high cupboard about against the wall on the right. Both the table top and the cupboard are covered with small items.

At the other end of the room stands a white chest of drawers. He opens the top drawer; it is filled with small ornaments. Plastic miniature animals he bought at a toy-store in a shopping center near his house. He explains the beauty of their precise making, depicting a puppy with sparkling small eyes, a cat and an antelope. He also has souvenirs, one from each country he has travelled to in Europe. A shot-glass from Amsterdam; an eiffel tower from Paris, still wrapped in newspaper; a small clay house from Switzerland. He unwraps them as he shows them to me and then puts them all back safely and closes the drawer.

Once he showed me pictures taken during a road trip. Green, lush forests in the background; a group of four or five Indian guys, confidently eyeing the camera as they drape over their flashy new car. Hari explained that they were lucky this time. They had rented a car and had gotten a brand new one to drive in. Renting a car was one of the highlights of the trip, if not the whole point of the trip. When they went to the Black Forest they spend days driving back and forth through the area.

There were a few pictures with different group set-ups and different poses followed by some individual shots. One was a picture of a man leaning against the front of the car or gazing mysteriously into the distance, his arm resting casually on the open car door. Someone posing behind the steering wheel, staring through the window with a concentrated look. Hari said the guy did not drive during that trip, he doesn’t even have his European drivers’ licence. It was all for show. They reminded me of boy band pictures or Marlborough cowboy adds.

(Written based on seven house visits between 17-01-13 and 09-03-13, almost daily g-chatting between 01-09-13 and 01-05-13, and photographs taken on several occasions.)
Photo 10. Hari’s top drawer (photo taken by Hari himself)
doing well! If [you] do that!” (gtalk 05-04-13). Perhaps prestige and wealth are even more important than the fun. Migration, travelling, collecting souvenirs and photos to take back to India - these can be seen as a form of ‘cultural capital’. Not only financial but also cultural investment is being made in India by living in the Netherlands.

However, living in the Netherlands also has consequences. As mentioned earlier, Dutch laws prohibiting parents to come to the Netherlands for an extended amount of time influences the expat’s lives. Also, living in the Netherlands sometimes causes marriage to be delayed. It is hard to convince brides to come over to come Europe, especially now that it is being struck by an economic crisis. While migration may boost social status, it is also has negative consequences.

He (Ashish) is now 31 and not yet married, and his parents want him to marry. To avoid conversations on this subject they do not have much contact. When he was still working in India for an internationally well-known company it was easy for him to propose. Now it is hard. He said that due to the crisis, brides are afraid to go abroad. Also, people do not know the Netherlands. If you have a permanent citizenship here it’s different (field-notes 12-03-13).

Prakash has a similar situation. He said that he would have no trouble finding a bride though, because his father has a good family business, a good name, and he is the only male child in the family. It is not that he could not find a bride, but that his work and career choices have prevented him from marrying earlier. (field-notes 05-03-13).

Conclusion

The pre-furnished houses that the Indian expats rent are temporary spaces that they inhabit while living in the Netherlands. On the other hand, through the process of everyday living, the expats have constructed homes for themselves which speak of the social bonds they have with their parents in India and in their own family in the Netherlands. The individual situations differ from each other depending on life phase and gender. The bond with their extended family is a reality for both married and unmarried. Although they live far apart, this distance is bridged through skype and phone calls. The nuclear family is very important, especially now. It is a solid core amidst a fluctuating life. The expat’s work and their travels around Europe are experienced as a prestige by both the expats and their families. At the same time, the physical location where they live causes delay in marriage and the difficulty of finding a bride—resulting in stress and frustration. On the other hand, while being bachelors, the Netherlands and especially Amsterdam is the place experiment and seek adventure.

In the next - and last - chapter, a final significant place in the expats’ houses and lives is considered: the kitchen. Here I want to focus on something that plays a role in all the Indian expats’ lives: food.
NO PLACE LIKE HOME
Vignette 6.

*Deepa’s kitchen: ‘as mother made it’*

Deepa’s kitchen is connected to the living-room in an L form. The practice of making food takes up a big time slot of her day. Her day starts at 5 am in the morning with cooking Indian breakfast and lunch for her husband and daughter before they leave the house at 8 am.

Sitting at the dining table in her flat she showed me the special cooking equipment she uses to make the traditional Malayalam breakfasts. They are time-consuming dishes and she laughs, saying that many other Indian women did not bother bringing their cooking equipment from India because of this. She said that people say she is spoiling her husband and daughter by cooking extended Indian meals for them everyday. However, she emphasizes that they do not like non-Indian food. It is her duty. But it is something she also enjoys.

She also makes special, traditional dishes that are eaten on those festivals. For a major festival which is celebrated in Kerala ‘Onam’, she gets up at 3:30 am to start cooking. This festival has many dishes which need to be prepared. She usually gets together with a few other Indian families to celebrate. According to her, ‘Indians, you know, tend to have a very good social life. Since we don’t have family here, our friends are our family’. Also on occasions like anniversaries, that are usually celebrated with family in India, they celebrate with friends.

(Written based on an interview and photographs taken at her house 27-02-13.)
Photo 11. Deepa’s kitchen tools used to make ‘authentic’ Indian dishes
Chapter 6.
The Search for Authenticity in the Kitchen

Introduction

Pertidou (2001) did a study on the role of food in the lives of Greek students in England. He starts the chapter with the remark that home is much more than a physical place, a geographical location. A practice, like the making of food, can also be a way of constructing a home. In fact, he argues that because food triggers a series of senses, it can create a holistic sense of home. He names Sutton, (2001) who argues that food acts as a way to reconstruct the fragmented world of people who have moved, like migrants (Pertidou 2001:89). It is therefore an important element to study when looking at the home of the displaced. Not so coincidently food was a topic that came up as an important issue in the lives of most of my informants.

Srinivas (2006) did research among Indian transnational families living in Boston and their attitude towards packaged Indian food. She came up with the term ‘gastronostalgia’. Where the act of eating is transformed into trying to attempt a ‘cultural utopia of ethnic Indianness, not linked to the Indian nation state’ (2006:193). There is an anxiety for authentic foods ‘as mother made it’ (idem). For mothers and wives, making the food that their mothers made, is how they hope to keep a tradition alive, teaching their children their ‘Indian self’ (2006:194).

6.1 Food

A complaint that was frequently heard was that Indians could not get used to the food in the Netherlands.

Yogesh, an Indian expat who lived in the Netherlands for 15 months and is now living in Singapore, said that he and his wife were very disappointed in the food in the Netherlands. Especially when compared to Chec Republic which has many more Indian food places than the Netherlands - something he did not understand, it being smaller than the Netherlands but having more options of Indian food places (fieldnotes 12-01-13).

The sister of an Indian expat who lives with him and his family in the Netherlands explained: The food here is ok. They feel that they can get everything here. However, the restaurants are not so good. In the UK you have a whole chain of good Indian restaurants and because they have the competition they are of good quality. However, here the restaurants have adjusted the taste to the native Dutch. They may have also lived here too long, like 20 years, and may have forgotten the real Indian taste. (fieldnotes 23-02-13).

There are three main reasons for the disappointment. One is that it is hard to get used to the ‘cold food here’. Secondly, a lot of Indians are strict vegetarians. They feel that there
is not enough choice of vegetarian dishes. It makes life difficult for them. And lastly, when there are Indian restaurants around, it does not resemble the food they know from home.

_Cold food/ hot food_

From a fragment from an interview with Ibhya (36), who has been living in the Netherlands since 2005:

‘We are not used to eating salads in India. Even if we have salads in India, it has got a bit of something in it, you know? … And when I first came here, you know you have these round slices, you know, for the sandwiches, I couldn’t differentiate between chicken and [an other kind of meat] they all taste like plain meat. Now I’m used to it, I didn’t have much choice so I adjust, so its ok. But when I first came and had to eat those slices of chicken, it was like, almost disgusting, you know?’ (Interview Ibhya 07-03-13)

During an interview with Sumon he exclaimed ‘What’s with the Dutch, they eat breakfast for lunch! Like breads and stuff’. Although later on in the conversation he said that he likes the fact that he gets to try all kinds of new foods, like sushi, during the lunches and dinners at his work. (field-notes 12-01-13)

It is not only about the taste, it is about your whole well-being. Dirash has been living in the Netherlands now since October 2011. He told me that he could change his lifestyle, no problem, but not the food. Cold food was just not ok for him. He said that it changes a person. When I asked how it changes you, Dirash said that it makes you sad and more focused your own business. It makes you less nosy. There was a strong emotional attachment to what food you ate (Fieldnotes 19-01-13).

Pertridou (2001) similarly discovered that the Greek students in England link the way the food people eat to the way the people are. In his study one Greek student referred to the English being careless, cold and heartless, eating cold, fake food. In contrast this student describes his father as a caring person, who carefully and heartfully processes good quality olive oils (2001).

_VEGETARIANISM_

Eating non-Indian food is not only about a different taste. It is running the risk of accidentally eating something that is not good but impure, contaminated.

‘They [vegetarian Indian friends] want to go to Indian restaurants because they know for sure that they can get a few vegetarian dishes. Because even my friend’s family, they are strict vegetarians, so when we used to travel we had no other
choice but to go to Indian restaurants. It is not that they can not eat other foods, … but the concept of vegetarian is very vague here. … once, it was actually a company dinner, and the guy said, - I’m a vegetarian. So they gave him a chicken salad. And he said – sorry, no meat. And they brought it back and they replaced the chicken with fish. And the guy said – only vegetables. So they took out the fish and served it. But even if we go to restaurants because people .. to understand they still probably put ham and fish in it, so for them its also a risk that they end up eating something that is not vegetarian. So now they, its been after a very long time they have … pasta, with tomato and cheese and stuff.' Interview Ibhya 07-03-13.

Sumon mentioned that his housemate, who is a strict Jain, gets food sent over the post from India from his mother around twice a month, because she is afraid that he may not be able to get good food here. (Fieldnotes 12-01-2013)

Level of authenticity
An other reason why the food is such a disappointment here is because is does not resemble the taste that they know from home:

‘Because for me going to Indian restaurants doesn’t do it for me. Because most of the food is from North India and I’m from South India. And I don’t get what I used to eat at home. So for me going to an Indian restaurant here is not so much different than going to an Italian place, you know. Because those are foods that I won’t eat at home.’ Interview Ibhya 07-03-13.

The food is tested in levels of ‘authenticity’. Even when it is the right type of food, from the right region, it is often still not to their liking.

The term ‘authentic’ according to Rudinow (1994) is a value (1994:129). In focusing on the Blues, he feels that is comes from a certain ‘appropriate relationship to an original source’ (idem). In art fake from real is often distinguished by ‘the author’s own hand’ (idem). The relationship therefore lies in one of identity. In food this may be using the right, traditional ingredients. It is not a question of only taste. Food, as Pertridou (2001) indicates, has to do with a feeling and practice of home. It has to do with values and principles. The authentic taste which they search for here is the taste they know from their home in India.

6.2 The Food maker

If ‘authenticity’ is determined by its source of origin, authentic Indian food is determined by its maker. It seems that in India it is considered the woman’s responsibility to take care of the food. One of D’Mello’s (2010) informants who’s husband works in a senior job describes her responsibilities in the family:

As an Indian, whoever’s wife you are, whether it be the President’s wife or peon’s wife, there are certain activities you do, like cooking for the family. You cannot put your feet up or buy food off the rack as women do in Western countries (D’Mello 2010:143).
Photo 12. Kitchen
Photo 13. Kitchen
Many Indian bachelor men I met had started cooking for themselves since their mother was not around to cook for them, and there was no opportunity to buy something at the corner of the road in a small, affordable eating stand. Many told me that they were not able to cook prior to leaving home. Ranith (27) remarked that his mother did not even allow him to cook at home. She told him that when he needed to learn he would (Fieldnotes 26-02-13). Some phoned their moms or looked at youtube for instructions. However, what they cook is presented as only a substitute, a momentary solution. They would tell me that the taste only came close to the Indian taste.

Ibhya for example says:

‘Because I’m Indian I should know some Indian dishes. And it feels nice, when I get better, and I taste it and when it *almost* tastes like that the way it tastes in India, I’m quite happy.’ (Interview Ibhya 07-03-13 emphasis mine).

Shiva said once that he and his friend had made idli. I reacted surprised, as I knew this was a difficult, time-consuming job requiring special equipment from India. He, in turn replied, saying that the stuff they made is not authentic of course (fieldnotes 25-03-13).

When on home-leave to India, they are spoiled with excessive amounts of food from their mother’s kitchens. Often they do not return empty handed but stashed with homemade pickles and other eatable products. This precious food from India is then shared with other grateful Indian colleagues and friends and with pride given out to non-Indians for them to taste ‘the real thing’. During the several dinners I had with the bachelors I had the honour of tasting such home-made pickles from big jars standing somewhere in their small Dutch kitchens.

Hari told me that when he was back India, his mother kept asking him what he wanted to eat, saying he could probably not get this in the Netherlands, or this or this. When he did not make a choice between the dishes, she suggested she would make them all for him. (Field-notes 24-04-13).

However not all bachelors take up the task to cook for themselves, like Hari. Hari: [If my housemates are away] I just make some rice and mix it with some powder and some pickle and then eat it. I can even have just rice and pickle. I don’t care. If I’m alone I’ll just manage someway, it does not matter. If I have to cook for four other people then I have to cook something nice - right, that’s the problem. (interview 04-02-13).

Some also choose to eat Dutch sandwiches or other international foods. Shiva eats a cheese sandwich for lunch every day. It’s no coincidence since he is making great efforts to integrate in the local Dutch culture. Ashish is critical about Indians who only eat Indian foods, saying he wants to be more international and try out different foods (fieldnotes 12-03-13).

Even if they do try new foods, it will only be until they or their friends get themselves married, in which case they will have the opportunity to come over for meals. Dirash expressed his excitement about his friend and colleague Pavan’s newly wed wife coming to the Netherlands.
In a g-talk conversation he wrote:

Dirash: His girl is yet to come she will come next week, I am sure he will invite you to his place for lunch after she comes.
Me: and you?
Dirash: of course I’ll be there almost every weekend for the food! (G-talk 04-03-13)

In the research on Indian migrants in Canada Sheel (2008) states that ‘daughters are seen as symbols of cultural identity and must thus bear the additional ‘burden’ of preserving the culture’ (2008:227). Through the cooking of traditional food Deepa preserves the Indian values within her house in the Netherlands. Not only does she keep it within the boundaries of her own house, but she also represents an Indian culture towards outsiders by cooking Indian food at school socials. Food, in her life, also seems to be a general platform for social engagement outside of the house. Organizing potluck lunches and celebrating Indian festivals together with other Indian families is a way of acting on the Indian culture that she takes with her around the world. (Fieldnotes 27-03-13).

However, some Indian women have abandoned this role of the conserver of Indian culture. Joyti (35), a married Indian woman working with an IT company, says to not have time to cook Indian everyday. She told me she just grabs a pre-baked bread from the Albert Heijn on her way home since it is easy and comfortable. She does not take on this responsibility of cooking as a way of home-making the way Deepa does. Living in the Netherlands is something that perhaps has given her this ‘freedom’, as D’Mello’s informant (2010) calls it, to engage in a busy, working life - consuming pre-cooked foods especially designed for a busy, outwardly engaged life-style. Although she does have a lot of Indian spices in her bottom kitchen drawer, she says they will be used more when her parents get here.

On the other hand, even Deepa has changed her eating habits. She has started using less salt and spices, as well as changing her family’s eating times. When in India, she mentioned that it did cause a certain friction, as it clashed with the usual pattern of her in-laws. Physically they end up eating at different times and are therefore creating a distance (field-notes 27-03-13). Although she cooks the traditional Indian meals while here in the Netherlands, she is also influenced and changed by her environment here.

**Conclusion**

Food is a crucial element for the well-being of most Indian knowledge workers living in the Netherlands. The Dutch ‘cold’ sandwiches and salads are something that most could not get used to. It is not only a matter of taste, it is also a matter of an individualistic experience which is unappealing.

Furthermore, many informants I spoke were gravely disappointed in the lack of Indian restaurants in the Netherlands. Those who are strict vegetarians are afraid to eat in non-Indian places as ‘vegetarian’ seems to be a very loose term in the Netherlands. The taste and quality of the food in the Indian restaurants in the Netherlands is appalling. First of all, the food is usually from an area in India that is totally different than where they are
from. So the food is not what they would eat at home anyway. Secondly, even when it is a dish that is served in their home area, it is never the authentic taste as they know it. In this situation most bachelors living in the Netherlands are forced to learn to cook for themselves. On the other hand, their cooking is only seen as a temporary solution. When they get married or will again live with their mothers, they will no longer be cooking for themselves.

Authentic food is only called so when it tastes like the food from their home. Some married women, like Deepa, take on the role as culture keeper by spending a large portion of her day cooking varied Indian dishes for all breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. On the contrary, some women have embraced the freedom they have here in not having to solely cook Indian dishes. Women like Joyti are experimenting with other Dutch foods. Likewise, not all bachelors cook and eat Indian food. Some intentionally try out different foods because they are interested in learning about other cultures outside of India while they are here. Food is important in relation to ‘home’ and to the place where they are now: the Netherlands.
Chapter 7.
Concluding Remarks

Introduction:
The majority of Indian expats work in the Netherlands for a period between a few months to a few years on average. How they deal with making themselves at home here is something that I, having moved around myself during my youth was curious about.

My main research question was therefore:
‘How do Indian expats living in the Netherlands construct their notions of home and belonging in relation to the physical space in which they live and how are these influenced by and expressed in their identity?’

In answering this question this paper shows that Indians expats living in the Netherlands are constructing a new identity in an attempt to feel at home, influenced by their physical surroundings (having of home) and through their daily life practices (making of home). This is explained through the relationship between the immaterial notions of home and belonging in relation to the material. Both the individual as well as his/her surrounding are influenced by each other. I want to explain this while by answering the following sub-questions.

1. How are Indian expats’ notions of belonging living in the Netherlands expressed through and influenced by his/her physical and material environment?

‘Home’ is formed by meaning making in one’s physical surrounding and ‘belonging’ dependent on the identity of the individual in relation to his/her environment. Pre-furnished, rented houses in which most of my informants live, reflect a certain temporary state of being. These ‘places’, are turned into ‘spaces’ by a collection of movable, often small objects. Material elements in the house speak of broader immaterial identity constructions far beyond the house they live in.

2. To what extent are Indian expats’ notions of belonging influenced by and expressed in the form of transnational linkages?

3. In what ways do Indian expats negotiate and construct local identities as an expression of belonging and home?

In answering these questions it is difficult to separate the transnational from the local in the lives of the expats. They stand in relation to each other. Many Indian expats I met have regular, up to daily contact with relations outside their direct physical environment. Still, grounded realities, like the location of their house is influential on their daily lives, in building identities in their present situation. Most expats are family orientated, situated
in India, reflecting relationships of both love and duty. The distance caused by migration may form a constraint on being able to care for parents. On the other hand, migration is seen as a responsibility, good choice to make. Building financial security will also benefit their parents. Bachelors take the opportunity to experience the world, profiting from the liberal Western society. On the other hand, in this specific place, in this liminal period between childhood and marriage there is room for these practices. On the other hand gendered roles are contested. Whereas wives and mothers take or leave their role as ‘culture’ bearers, bachelors risk themselves in the kitchen.

It is a delicate combination between being in a specific geographical place, - its opportunities and grounded boundaries - at a specific time in your life that determines what makes you feel at home and how you will and are able to act in making this home. Determined by age, gender, life phase and exposure their engagement with their physical environment and the bigger ‘transnational social field’ they live in varies. One carves out one’s home by the daily activities of living.

I argue that during this journey a new life-style and a personal, new identity is developed in the process of negotiating. As a result a shadow of an imaginary ideal home is lived, reflected and restrained in the local spheres. As Ahmed (1999) put it ‘there are too many homes to secure the roots or routes of one’s destination’ (1999:332). Although the expats are here on temporary basis, they do not seem to be looking to return to the India they left but are formulating a new way of being Indian at home.

This thesis forms part of a bigger research project looking at Indian highly-skilled knowledge migrants, here and returned to India. The focus lies on how they may contribute to development in both sending and host countries through socio-cultural remittances. This is influenced and takes form dependent on their notions of belonging and civic engagement. I hope that this research in which I focussed on the notions of belonging of Indian expats in Amsterdam and Amstelveen will contribute to the further findings on the relationship between migration and development between India and the Netherlands.
Acknowledgements

This paper is the result of an exciting, intense year of researching and writing. This process would not have been possible without a lot of people who helped me along the way.

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Lastly I want to thank my family. The experience of making and remaking homes together all over the world will always stay with me. I am grateful for your direct and indirect support in this project. A special thanks to my mother Louise, who is always ready to help out at any cost. The lay-out is beautiful as always. Lastly I want to thank my husband Berthel. Especially the last few months in which you (almost) single handedly renovated and made us a new home, giving me time to research. And together with whom I share the knowledge of an always present, supportive, loving Heavenly Father. Thank you all for making this project to what is it now.
Appendix I.
Interview questions for Indian expats

Coming to the Netherlands
How long have you been living in the Netherlands?
What were your reasons for coming to the Netherlands?

Work and house situation
What kind of house do you live in currently?
Are you living here alone? Family? Spouse? Housemates?
Where have you lived before? (also within the Netherlands)

Where do you work?
What role does the company play in arranging things for you?
What does a typical day in your life look like here?

Social Relations
How many friends do you consider having in the Netherlands?
What nationality are they?
How did you get to know them?
Do you keep in touch with friends/family outside of the Netherlands? How? How frequent?

Feeling at home
How do you find the Netherlands? The food? The weather?
What is it you consider yourself doing or having that makes you feel at home?
Do you feel at home in your house? In your neighbourhood? In this city? At your work?
What are your future plans?
### Appendix II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key informants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Duration of stay in the Netherlands</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Employments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hari (man)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19 months</td>
<td>In Amstelveen with four other Indian house-mates</td>
<td>Indian company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirash (man)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19 months</td>
<td>In Amsterdam with one other Dutch housemate</td>
<td>Turkish company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiva (man)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>almost 3 years</td>
<td>In Amsterdam with one other housemate from Macedonia</td>
<td>Dutch company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunita (woman)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>In Amstelveen with her husband and daughter</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Gemeente Amstelveen


I Amsterdam


Vertovec, S.


NO PLACE LIKE HOME