



Taking Place

The Phenomenology of Expat Spouses' Familiarisation with a New Environment

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MASTER'S THESIS HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY NIJMEGEN

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“We say of young lovers that they dwell in each other’s gaze. They are free of attachment to things and to locality; they will abandon their homes and elope if they have to.”

~ Yi-Fu Tuan: Chinese Humanistic Geographer

Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, 1977, p.139

I. Preface

Ever since finishing my bachelor's thesis last year, which prominently featured a resolutely phenomenological approach with a focus on its geographical derivatives, continuing this work into a master's format with room for an expanded empirical study has been a personal objective. I believe the following presents the accomplishment of that goal, which I therefore sincerely hope you will appreciate and also enjoy reading. Before I let you do so, however, there are a few people I would like to thank for their respective significance regarding this text. Naturally, I thank my supervisor Roos Pijpers who has acted in and beyond her role this year, helping me as such to learn skills in addition to solely that of writing a master's thesis. For her mental support throughout the most challenging parts of the writing process and for her substantial support to the fine-tuning of the end product, I thank my girlfriend Sophie Starrenburg. Lastly, I thank Carola Eijssenring for welcoming me so warmly into her organisation, for being endlessly enthusiastic about my research and for facilitating it as best she possibly could, for which I may also thank the expat spouses who participated in the empirical study.

II. Summary

Studies of international migration typically fall into the trap of methodological nationalism, shedding light on the topic either from the perspective of the sending or the receiving country, whilst failing to direct attention towards migrants' individual experiences by obscuring them in statistical aggregates and averages. This is especially true in the case of expat migration, which due to its streamlined character does not even get picked up by the minority of academics conducting longitudinal trajectory groundwork. It must not be forgotten, however, that the arrival at one's destination does not signify a migration's culmination, but rather its shift into a second phase: integration. Similar to international research, explorations of integration are also in the habit of masking individual experiences, entrusting policy and discourse analyses instead. Sociologist Adrian Favell is the exception to both rules, investigating expats' experiences of integrating into different European cities - unfortunately without much of a theoretical underpinning. This thesis argues that a humanistic geography perspective could fill this *lacuna* and that the discipline itself would benefit from the particular empirical angle in furthering its theoretical foundations. It aspires to do both by examining expat spouses, of whom organisation *Indigo-Wereld* rightfully reminds us they are undergoing the comparative disadvantage, in reference to their husbands, of being unemployed and without a network of friends or colleagues; specifically, the course of their familiarisation of the Dutch city of Eindhoven where they have come to live in. To this end, the following research question has been formulated: what are the characteristics of expat spouses' familiarisation with the new localities they inhabit that empirical phenomenological analysis reveals and which discrepancies can be discovered between these findings and humanistic geography theories on space and place whereupon such framework can be expanded or nuanced?

The humanistic geography theories that frame this research conceptually hinge on the dichotomy between space and place, about which Yi-Fu Tuan writes that the former denotes freedom and unaccustomedness, whilst the latter denotes security and emotional attachment. A place is enclosed, made conversant, felt safe in, enjoying an intimate affinity with its people and, most importantly, endowed with value by its users who may, as such, differentiate it from the oblivious spaciousness in which it lies embedded. Through prolonged habituation, unfamiliar space can be converted into familiar place - a transition that is called place-making. This transformation is completed, David Seamon says, when a person is able to navigate the location instinctively - i.e. when he has embodied its configuration - at which point

he can be said to feel at home in it. People can accomplish this by virtue of the preconscious perception of the surroundings their bodies employ to function spatially without depleting cognitive energy. At-homeness permits openness, meaning an explorative attitude in which the world is intently dealt with, but the comfortable obliviousness it also facilitates may trick the person into habituality, or, a tendency to take the world for granted and leave it unnoticed, as well. Those discerning a site as place are referred to as insiders by Edward Relph. They belong to, and identify with, the location; in contrast, outsiders sense a detachment from the world around them. Insideness can be experienced to differing degrees, the most intense of which is existential insideness, implying a situation wherein the person has embodied the place and has made himself thoroughly familiar with it and its dwellers. Relph recognises a continuing trend of locations becoming increasingly inapt to foster insideness - of spaces that cannot be place-made - which he designates as placelessness.

The decision to commence the inquiry from a phenomenological starting point was founded upon the philosophy's close affinity with humanistic geography in conjunction with its explicit focus on individual experiences and its suitability as a methodological approach towards theory advancement or revision. In line with the phenomenological tradition of maintaining an involved, as an alternative to a disconnected, relationship between the researcher and the researched, the gathering of empirical data was operated by way of ethnographic participant-observations. For this purpose twenty-four separate meetings, trips and tours, coordinated under the authority of *Indigo-Wereld* as a means for spouses of expats employed by Eindhoven's University of Technology to become acquainted with the city, were joined by the researcher during a three-month period stretching from March up until May 2015. Throughout this term, in addition to observations and note-taking, he furthermore conducted a multitude of informal on-site interviews and five supplementary formal off-site interviews with the spouses, all adhering to an unstructured design, targeting descriptive and exemplary questions. Empirical data has been gathered at the hand of this methodology, yielding the following four conclusions regarding the ways in which humanistic geography theories on space and place can be expanded or nuanced.

Their short period of residence in Eindhoven confronts the respondents with an environmental and socio-cultural eccentricity that makes getting attached to the city problematic for them. They have therefore developed the predisposition to selectively engage with places, preferring those physically or atmospherically resembling places of their country of origin. Memories

bolster a mode of insideness not yet covered in Relph's classification, which could be resolved through the extension of a new retrospective form. The same intuitive preference went out to warm places, construed as sites that are experienced through a wide range of senses it stimulates, unlike the cold sameness of placelessness that tickles none. Relph's under-explored argument that placelessness cannot be place-made can thus be strengthened by including the concept of warmth in the equation; *videlicet*, places are warm, because they are experienced through all the senses, whilst placelessness is cold, because it is not experienced through all the senses. Respondents upheld an attitude of openness, which is inconsistent with Seamon's operationalisation, dictating that openness requires rootedness and at-easeness, which he believes to be unsustainable in space. Whereas they indeed fostered no rootedness, they did foster at-easeness thanks to the greater freedom they experienced as outsiders in Eindhoven than as existential insiders in their home countries where they were pressured to conform with a proper public image. This proved sufficient to compensate for the lack of rootedness. Lastly, it was discovered that upon absence or withdrawal of one of Seamon's five at-homeness determinants, an apartment may mentally displace its occupant, conceding that he or she - like the respondents - has only been living in it for a relatively short period of time. As a result of such a deprivation, the house loses its quality as a centre of rest.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Positioning Immigration and Integration Research

The greater majority of international migration reviews explicate either the sending or the receiving country's perspective on the issue; what these studies repeatedly uncover is a concurrence of both optimism and pessimism towards the outcomes of, and responses to, these cross-border movements of people (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino & Taylor, 1993, p.463). There is noticeable ambivalence at each of the two fronts. High emigration rates generally unsettle origin countries as the manifestation of a brain or brawn drain might deplete their precious, sometimes already scarce, human resources, propelling many governments to act with caution towards the departure of the state's most productive and talented citizens, with some going as far as to restrict emigration, even if these restraints conflict with people's fundamental mobility rights (De Haas, 2010, p.233; Oberman, 2013, pp.452-453). At the same time, however, around the world governments also exist that actively encourage their population to explore opportunities offered abroad in anticipation of harvesting the remittance influx and exploiting these external capitals to push economic growth (Gibson & McKenzie, 2011, pp.107-108). The Philippines, where nurses are explicitly trained for export and applauded as national development heroes, are an illustration hereof (Brush & Sochalski, 2007, p.39). Destination countries benefit in turn from the transfer of cheap or high-skilled labour, but migrants' settlement, accompanied by ethnic minority formation and various segregation patterns, have produced (undesired) societal metamorphoses and, subsequently, instigated the heightening of populist politics, such as Geert Wilders' anti-immigration and anti-Islam *Partij voor de Vrijheid* in the Netherlands or Marine Le Pen's *Front National* in France (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014, p.1).

This bias towards the national scale in international migration research is categorised as a case in point of the 'methodological nationalism' fallacy, designated by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, p.302) as "the assumption that the nation, state [or] society is the natural social and political form of the modern world." Glancing over the enormous tabulations typically drawn on to represent migration flows *en masse* - for instance the six page spreadsheet on emigration rates by educational attainment and country of birth outlined in the World Bank paper by Docquier and Marfouk (2004, pp.16-21) - illuminates how individual records and histories are often irrecoverably obscured in statistical aggregates stemming from methodological nationalism. It is impossible to read the reports' data and learn about the African migrant whose travel

came to an abrupt end when his raft capsized before ever reaching the European continent - or the one who did not possess the financial means to continue his journey beyond the national border and had to return home earlier than originally planned (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014, pp.265-267; Van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007, p.298). Certainly there are scholars aspiring to expose the complexities that compound migration beyond leaving one's country and arriving at another; Schapendonk (2012, p.27), for example, trailed sub-Saharan Africans on their turbulent journeys towards the European Union in the interest of detailing the "expected steps and unexpected turns in individual migration trajectories." He concludes that for countless people migration is nothing like the linear process the privileged believe it to be.

Those longitudinal studies are helpful in distilling individual migration experiences from coalesced data, but tend to centralise trajectories that capture the imagination - those of the African migrants whose journey is an obstacle course - thereby shutting the door on high-skilled or North-North flows, because those miss out on the turbulence that Schapendonk and like-minded allude to; there are, in other words, few longitudinal or trajectory studies on relatively privileged international migrants. For those migrants who hold a tertiary education degree, access to the global labour market is significantly enhanced, which has a streamlining effect on migration for a number of reasons (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2008, p.132). First of all, by virtue of the positive correlation between educational attainment and wage level, financial conditions to undertake migration are usually more advantageous amongst the high-skilled (Day & Newburger, 2002, pp.2-3). Secondly, whereas low-skilled migrants broadly find themselves inhibited from entering another country and are politically perceived as a problem (regardless of actual demands for manual labour), high-skilled workers are internationally welcomed with open arms or even unapologetically attracted by foreign governments in contemplation of the cherished human resources they supply (Chiswick, 2005, p.3; Storesletten, 2000, p.302). The latter circumstance conjointly implies that the high-skilled have better prospects of travelling through legal channels and of maintaining legal status once arrived, which of course substantially amplifies the incentive to migrate as well as its eventual returns (Boswell, 2005, p.3; Hall, Greenman & Farkas, 2010, p.491). The exodus of physicians, IT-experts, PhD-candidates or equivalently schooled personnel is construed as a reaction to those potentialities - i.e. increased salaries, superior labour conditions, and living a privileged lifestyle - rather than an exertion to escape absolute poverty (Anyangwe & Mtonga, 2007, p.96).

Taken together, the above considerations supplement an understanding of high-skilled migration as effortless and hence negligible, debated in fragmentary terminologies of national brain drain or brain gain that do no justice to the actuality of migration, namely that it is not over immediately upon crossing the final border (Regets, 2001, p.25). This entrance moment may denote the physical achievement of migration, but it also signifies the psychological journey still ahead: to unburden oneself from the soreness of farewell and put up the struggle with the precipitous socio-spatial rearrangement (Mazumdar, Mazumdar, Docuyan & McLaughlin; 2000, p.319). The difficulty of those challenges is overt in the emergence of enclaves where immigrants, parted from their erstwhile social circles, endeavour to conserve old identities all the while mediating new ones via temporary buffering from the wholly unfamiliar outside (Park, 1952, pp.99-100). Nonetheless, practically all Western governments discourage this segregated in limbo living, reminding immigrants of their responsibility to integrate (New & Merry, p.205; Van Liempt, 2011, p.3387). Integration is customarily inaugurated in a spatial sense by organising neighbourhoods' demographic compositions so that they resemble national ethnic, racial or religious averages, but uniformly dispersing immigrants is by and large aimed to assist the ensuing goal of socio-cultural integration, which ideally entails both the allochthonous and autochthonous population making adjustments in order to sculpt a harmonious ensemble, but in reality overwhelmingly boils down to assimilation instead (Phillips, 2010, p.211; Schinkel & Van Houdt, 2010, p.700). In essence, immigrants are requested to live amidst, adopt the same norms and values as, and become like, natives.

The verdict that integration has become an increasingly convoluted operation resonates throughout critical literature on the subject (Jacobs & Rea, 2007, p.3; Maxwell, 2010, pp.27-28). Policy and societal circles, once stressing the eminence of formal requirements, are now turning over a new leaf to accentuate moral citizenship as the stature immigrants should strive for. The distinction between the two lies in the former referring to one's legal status as a national, whilst the latter involves "an extra-judicial normative concept of what the good citizen is and/or should be" (Schinkel & Van Houdt, 2010, pp.697-698). To comply with these exhaustive moral standards is immensely complex, if not downright impossible. Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010, pp.708-709) disclose how conceptions of good citizenship are innately incoherent. And yet, owing to the propensity of papers written on the theme of integration or assimilation, whether supporting or opposing its administration, to almost exclusively rely on policy and discourse analyses in composing their argument, immigrants' struggles with integration, and their experience of these complications, lack proper documentation (Bale, 2008,

p.315; Li, 2003, p.315; Riaño & Wastl-Walter, 2006, p.1693). One of the rare exceptions is sociologist Adrian Favell (2008, p.138) whose work *Eurostars and Eurocities: Free Movement and Mobility in an Integrating Europe* notes that integration is not only imposed upon immigrants by the host country's government, but also chased by themselves and not merely for the sake of gaining greater access to economic opportunities or because they are obliged to, but also on the grounds that they wish to feel at home in the new country they inhabit.

What is intriguing about Favell's (2008, pp.136-138) publication is its explicit focus on the experiences of those European immigrants fortunate enough to capitalise on the continent's political amalgamation to live as expats in world cities like Amsterdam, London and Brussels and their encounter with seemingly banal acts of exclusion, which many others would dismiss as first world problems unworthy of attention. He portrays hidden games of linguistics played by natives to shut out foreigners notwithstanding the latter's comprehension of the language; the English, for instance, will ask an adoptive citizen which radio station they listen to so as to determine their political orientation (Favell, 2008, p.142). In contrast, the Dutch belittle non-natives by imposing English upon conversations whenever they pick up on the other's foreign background, whilst fulminating simultaneously against their unwillingness to acquaint the language (Favell, 2008, p.145). Correspondingly, the Dutch, Favell (2008, p.148) exposes, yearn to differentiate themselves by upholding prejudices against their language-sharing neighbours the Belgians who are pigeonholed as nice, friendly and stupid and their accents as cute. Favell (2008, p.153) continues by stating that, although "foreign residents may get beyond many of the rather trivial everyday barriers" they come across, institutional and broader societal hurdles must be confronted as well. Healthcare, and then principally the predicaments it engenders, is a decisive exemplification. Immigrants in England are shocked by doctors' reluctance to treat their illnesses or prescribe them medicines in absence of unquestionable physical evidence of urgency and, in the Netherlands, consternation befalls the expat who learns that a medical specialist will not even see them unless forwarded by a general practitioner (Favell, 2008, pp.154-156).

1.2. Research Objective and Question

Favell's book reads almost like a novel and is obviously intended for immigrants facing identical situations to relate to, for natives to empathise with and, perhaps, to take a good look in the mirror - and surely also for both groups to be amused with the sometimes whimsical descriptions. An underlying theoretical explanation accounting for said frustrations' impediment

of expats' integration is, however, held out on, which is somewhat problematic inasmuch as the class of experiences investigated pertain, in the words of Favell (2008, p.153), to one's existential being. Curiously enough, this discerned theoretical *lacuna* in Favell's rationalisation, with respect to immigrants' acclimatisation to the strange environment they have come to dwell within, is matched by what Moores (2006, pars.36-37) distinguishes as an empirical gap within humanistic geography - a disciplinary paradigm expressly immersed in theorising spatial familiarisation and at-homeness. In his *Positive Critique of Phenomenological Geography* Moores (2006, par.36) specifically solicits a shift in the emphasis of the field's research objects towards "people who have recently been involved in a transnational physical migration" as he presumes "that many migrants, on arriving in their new locations [...] are likely to feel [...] a disturbance of life-worlds." Encapsulating this hypothesis with a personal memoir, Moores (2006, par.38) recalls the run-of-the-mill struggles that befell him during the first few months after he and his family moved to Australia: longing for BBC Radio 5 to start playing the minute he would enter his car, inconveniently navigating through the diversity of unknown TV-channels, *etcetera*.

Phenomenological approaches, favoured amidst humanistic geographers, are particularly suited to interpret people's latent and existential experiences and applying such a framework to anecdotic inquiry comparable to Favell's would therefore present a compelling way of resolving the first hiatus (Buttimer, 1976, p.278; Entrikin, 1976, p.616). In addition, Moores (2006, par.39) calls unequivocal attention to the proposed exploration's potential for bringing the second gap to a close and, importantly, for advancing humanistic geography theory in its entirety - to quote his (still pending) appeal at length:

Migration is of interest [...] precisely because it can bring a disruption of day-to-day existence that might, in turn, give rise to a noticing and heightened reflexive awareness of environmental experiences. It also raises questions about the ways in which a migrant [...] might subsequently begin to accomplish the practical and emotional task of re-establishing habitual movements or senses of place.

In other words, since international migration destabilises one's *Lebenswelt* [life-world] to a greater extent than most occasions of national relocations, seeing as in latter case the new surroundings will still resemble much of the old one, canvassing the former will presumably

yield insights on coping with, and eventually inuring, unfamiliar space that may open doors for progressing humanistic geography theory.

Favell (2008, p.137) recognises expats as a peculiar brand of immigrants who change scenery not with the intention of settling permanently, but predominately on account of temporarily relocating as a stepping stone on their career ladder. More often than not they are brought in by a company or institution with a signed contract securely in place before taking off and their motives primarily lie with that business, instead of with the nation-state (Black & Gregersen, 1999, pp.54-56). In the Netherlands, for example, the city of Eindhoven in general, and its Technical University (TU/e) and High-Tech Campus in particular, take a fervent interest in attracting high-skilled professionals, PhD-candidates, engineers and teachers from all over the world. One out of three staff members of the TU/e was born in another country and invited to move to the Netherlands with the purpose of being hired by the university. On the basis of a Malaysian case-study Rostamzadeh, Anantharaman and Tong (2012, p.364) contend that, since a relation between sense of place and mental health exists, “new arrivals like expatriates who lose their home and their memories are more at risk of mental disorders,” for which reason they recommend, quite boldly, to the Malaysian government to physically and architecturally alter the living environment of the Malaysia’s expats in a way that reflects their country of origin “so that they become familiar with the new location sooner.” In opposition, Polson (2015, pp.642-643) argues that suiting the mobile lifestyle of expats is a mobile sense of place-making; “our experience of places are constituted more through relationships and communicative interactions than by geographic location.”

Dutch organisation *Indigo-Wereld* - brought to life in cooperation with the TU/e in 2006 and winner of the Forum for Expatriate Management’s 2014 Expatriate Management & Mobility Award for Best Family Support Programme - rightly reminds us that these expats, with regards to integration and adapting to the new environment, have the comparative advantage of being employed straightaway, circled by (native) colleagues, immersed in a professional network and having a structured daily outline. It, however, also reminds us of a group that cannot profit from these same benefits. Expats customarily bring very few belongings with them as plenty is accommodated by either the employer or the municipality, a video on the *Indigo-Wereld* website, introducing the so-called Get in Touch Project, informs; the one thing that is seldom left behind are their spouses. For these spouses moving to another country might turn out to be an unfavourable change, in contrast to the (usually male) jobholder. Arieli (2007,

p.18), who conducted an ethnography on expat spouses in Beijing and is one of the very few to direct attention towards this group, explains that, after relocation, “they find themselves in a situation in which they are pressed upon to devote a large share of their time and energy to serving their husbands’ careers, while neglecting most of their own previous social and occupational positions. They cope with these circumstances in a strange environment, away from their previous social and family networks, with very little support from their spouses, who are busy with their jobs.”

Indeed, the video on the *Indigo-Wereld* website addresses similar themes. Friends, family and home are left behind, but without a career and without a social network little is received in return, worsened by the fact that the majority of the Get in Touch spouses enjoyed a tertiary education and are ambitious individuals themselves, abruptly compelled to a passive housewife-lifestyle, whilst husbands often work long hours and only come back in the late evening. One of the video’s interviewed spouses discloses: “I feel a bit alone at home, because I used to have work and now, for a whole eight hours, I have nothing to do, nothing for me to do, so I feel a little bit depressed.” Another reflects: “I was used to a productive lifestyle and then to come here and maybe not have much to do was a bit frightening.” Along these lines, supposing furtherance of humanistic geography theory demands empirical examination of the most intense life-world disruptions, expat spouses impersonate ideal research objects.

Indigo-Wereld’s Get in Touch Project has been established to counterbalance the dilemmas expat spouses come up against when taking up residence in Eindhoven. The program’s participants are assisted in the development of a personal network, consisting of other members with whom they can share experiences. Via trips and tours they pick up on the educational, cultural and social facilities the city places at their disposal and, by handing them relevant information or contacts, they are supported in finding (un)paid work, schooling or other meaningful undertakings. Furthermore, it arranges social and festive gatherings, dinners, workshops, excursions and Dutch classes. Despite not featuring as prominently on the website, the prime ambition of *Indigo-Wereld* is to spawn an atmosphere in which these people do not feel forgotten or useless; somewhere they enjoy being at ease, socialise with others who they can identify with and who commiserate with their worriments and make their (temporary) stay in the Netherlands as pleasant as possible. All in all, the organisation attempts to realise a sense of at-homeness amongst its members. Through collaboration with *Indigo-Wereld*, this thesis is devoted to bolstering attainment of the above goal of the organisation,

by utilising a phenomenological framework predicated on humanistic geography theory. It does so to shed light on the profoundly subjective and existential experiences wherefrom feelings of at-homeness originate which more straightforward research approaches might leave cloaked. In other words, from a societal perspective this thesis will circumvent the trap of methodological nationalism and reject a policy or discourse approach in order to contribute an interpretation, or translation, of the overlooked individual experiences of expat spouses that *Indigo-Wereld* - and by extension other immigration-integration organisations - may borrow from to bring its good cause to an even better end, helping those people to feel at home in their new living environment.

In sum, the aims of this study will be threefold. Firstly, to divert from the common procedures eminently dictating contemporary immigration-integration analyses by disregarding national trends to redirect attention (back) to the singular being and by keeping discourse and policy debates at arm's length, adopting an original, arguably underused, phenomenological method as an alternative. As such, it seeks to be a companion piece to the aforementioned longitudinal trajectory studies that migration academics like Schapendonk have conducted, striving to fulfil the same mission of distilling and fixating individual experiences from national aggregates. It does so by centralising research objects that those inquiries have left unexamined: the high-skilled legal migrants who undertake their journey in the knowledge that there is a seat reserved for them at their destination - and by focusing on the integration part of the migration equation, supplementing the conclusion of Schapendonk (2012, pp.39-40) that trajectories are not over upon arrival, even if it concerns a smooth and coordinated migration. Secondly, to operate this design in pursuit of corresponding the otherwise hidden existential experiences of expat spouses to humanistic geographical conceptualisations, yet also in a format that *Indigo-Wereld* may draw from so as to expedite its members' at-homeness. Thirdly, to juxtapose the deduced empirical insights against this humanistic geography framework with the intent of ameliorating, expanding or nuancing its theoretical assumptions. The research objective therefore reads as follows:

To communicate original practical knowledge on the experiences of expat spouses regarding the way in which they begin to feel at home in their new (social) environment and, correspondingly, to contribute to existing humanistic geography theories on space and place by providing a basis for the amelioration of this framework.

In accordance with the protocols of phenomenological analysis encapsulated by Seamon (1982, pp.122-123), the aspiration of this research “is not explanation, but understanding” - signifying the requisite for the primary question to be descriptive (Grange, 1974, p. 359; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009, p.299). Granted phenomenology’s fascination for detailing every last idiosyncratic facet of the research object, these portrayals are essentially stepping stones for obtaining abstracted knowledge on universal mechanisms; in other words, “a major goal is to seek out within the uniqueness of concrete phenomena more general experiential structures, patterns and essences” (Seamon, 1982, p.121). The subsequent part of the research question transcends sheer description by taking a step back and allowing deliberation of the meaning and relevance of identified anomalies of empirical results in comparison to accepted theoretical accounts. The research question therefore reads as follows:

What are the characteristics of expat spouses’ familiarisation with the new localities they inhabit that empirical phenomenological analysis reveals and which discrepancies can be discovered between these findings and humanistic geography theories on space and place whereupon such framework can be expanded or nuanced?

The remainder of this thesis is divided into four sections. Shortly, the methodology will be explained and defended. In this passage it will be set forth why phenomenology is better equipped to construe existential experiences, and thus give answer to the research question, than more straightforward qualitative techniques. The practical execution of the researcher’s participant-observation approach towards data gathering will also be made intelligible here. Next, the humanistic geography framework will be outlined, reviewing some of the discipline’s pivotal authors - i.e. Yi-Fu Tuan, David Seamon and Edward Relph - and tackling the ideas that have come to be associated with each, particularly spotlighting their postulations heeding to the distinction between what is comprehended as ‘space’ and ‘place’ respectively and the processes that permit conversion from the former to the latter. Readers might notice the unconventional choice of letting the methodological chapter precede the theoretical one. This is because the phenomenological approach that will be clarified next parallels those humanistic geographers’ *modus operandi* that led them to the formulation of their theories, which are therefore better understood in this outline order; likewise, the methodological chapter will briefly introduce the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, which also reoccur in the argumentations of Tuan, Seamon and Relph. The extensive fourth chapter contains the

heart of the thesis and delineates the empirical results of a three months partnership with *Indigo-Wereld*, conveying the stories of expat spouses about their familiarisation of Eindhoven in a detailed narrative fashion. Extracting from these records, this thesis will end with a conclusion that answers above research question.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Philosophy and Approach

To elucidate existential phenomenology it is expedient to rehearse its derivation: the paradigm's denunciation of logical positivism and its proponents' affirmation of Cartesianism, which asserts that objective reality can be uncovered by filtering it from human experience and freeing it from linguistic dubiety, on top of conserving the imperative disengagement between mind and body (Giorgi, 1983, pp.145-147; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989, pp.134-135). Heidegger (1927, p.7) cut the former contention down to size by underpinning how our Being is demarcated in time and space - a position he nominated as *Dasein* and which must be fathomed as man's spatially situated practical everydayness and his numerous encounters with the world during the course of life (Draucker, 1999, p.361; Leonard 1989, p.42). Reality, Heidegger (1927, p.53) therefore claims, is continuously connected with, and influenced by, its environment and *vice versa*; it is only understandable as subjectively rooted *in-der-Welt* [in-the-world]. The second insistence of Cartesianism - its dualistic opposition between mind and body - is retaliated by Merleau-Ponty (1945, p.408) who exhibits our physique's capability to make sense of, and appropriately react to, external cues without any conscious coordination, in order to prove that the body is not a thing we possess, but which is lifeless in itself (Crossley, 1995, pp.53-54). Hence, the ontological separation of mind from body is flawed and, according to Merleau-Ponty, the two should be considered as one 'body-subject' - a sentient and sensible organism which "sees and can be seen, hears and can be heard, touches and can be touched," making it "a visible-seer, a tangible-toucher [and] an audible-listener" (Crossley, 1995, p.46; Abram, 1988, p.103; Wylie, 2006, pp.525-526).

The critiques of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty comprise the cornerstones of existential phenomenology's contextualised *Weltanschauung*, wherein experiences are sought to be probed as they are lived (Giorgi, 1983, p.137; Thompson et al., 1989, p.135). This is apparent in the approach's eagerness to investigate what methods dichotomising the observer and the observed, thought and action and persons and the world are ineligible to examine: the life-world, or, "the culturally defined spatiotemporal setting or horizon of everyday life" whereupon one does not reflect forasmuch as it encompasses the "taken-for-granted dimensions of experience, the unquestioned meanings and routinised determinants of behaviour" (Buttimer, 1976, pp.277-281; Valle, King & Halling, 1978, p.7). A hammer, Heidegger (1927, p.69) meticulously expounds, is perceived very differently by its owner when picked up and handled in its

natural state of hammering than when it artlessly lays static on the workbench, not to mention the immensely disparate hammering experiences one espies upon contrasting the fledgling layman with the skilled carpenter (Koschmann, Kuutti & Hickman, 1998, pp.26-27; Verbeek, 2006, p.364). Accordingly, the contours and configuration of an experience - what surfaces as its foreground or is vaguely eclipsed in its background - are always dependent on the unfolding scene and “coherently related to the ongoing project of the life-world,” which consequently defies objective depiction, bearing in mind that this would implicate decontextualisation (Thompson et al., 1989, p.136; Sartre, 1943, p.10).

Whereas more straightforward qualitative attitudes towards data collection and analysis endeavour to figure out how the world presents itself, the purpose of existential phenomenology is to get to the bottom of our long-established, otherwise uncontested and to that end underexplored practices (Creswell, 2013, p.76; Osborne, 1990, p.80). For its adherents, experiences are unveiled through deliberation of what lies behind people’s opinions and cerebration (Osborne, 1994, p.186). An example might concretise the dissimilarity between existential phenomenology and other qualitative approaches. For this, a brief excerpt from an interview with an elderly female respondent, taken from the author’s bachelor’s thesis, will be scanned:

- R:** After having lived in the far East for twenty years, we really tried going to this Dutch church, but we missed the atmosphere. Therefore we switched to the international church, which immediately felt like stepping into a warm bath.
- I:** Can you tell me what it was that you missed?
- R:** Oh, after half a year I still had no idea who everybody was. There was no contact at all and that was something I really missed. What also struck me was the liberality of that church. Mass went on about nothing really. We wanted something with meaning. It was not hard to leave that church in favour of the international one.

Straightforward qualitative analysis probably produces a conclusion declaring that the respondent prefers the international church over the Dutch one, because the latter involved little sociality and was too liberal for her taste. A valid judgement perhaps, but the existential phenomenologist hunts for a deeper resolution. The referred research described how the respondent, due to lacking social contact, never managed to install the level of familiarity with the

church necessary to make visiting it appear as an instinctive venture. She did not in the least get to acquaint the people inherent to the church space and so neither habituated the place itself. As a result, attending mass in the Dutch church remained an ambivalent and indistinct experience with little personal meaning. The international church, on the other hand, did bear such significance, perceptible in the discomfort befalling the respondent on the few occasions she would be obliged to skip mass. The existential phenomenological method can be said to contribute an extra layer of depth and acumen to the findings that one derives from the empirical data (Goulding, 2005, p.301).

A further crucial characteristic of existential phenomenology with which it sets itself apart from positivism is its conduct of maintaining and cultivating substantial affiliation between the researcher and the research object, instead of erecting “a screen of separation” between the two, conducive to keeping measurements “uncontaminated by [...] subjectivity and personal idiosyncrasies” (Seamon, 1982, p.122). Rather than procedural error, this peculiarity is reckoned as a boon to the inquiry by virtue of supplementing a miscellaneous range of perspectives on the same phenomenon; “various interpretations are equally legitimate and their relative value can only be assigned in actual research situations where the particular needs of the researcher will lead to a choice of one over the other” (Seamon, 1982, p.122). This inflicts no harm to the study’s soundness for the reason that the existential phenomenologist does not operationalise validity along the conventional criteria like the extent to which causalities are certified, the extent to which systematic inaccuracy is minimised and the extent to which findings are generalisable, but at the hand of ‘intersubjective corroboration’, which basically insinuates the recounted experiences’ relatibility and whether they are acknowledged by others in their lives as well (Seamon, 1982, p.122). Taking into account the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the researched in existential phenomenological scrutiny, a suitable methodology, purposing to apprehend the respondents’ sensations, emotions, impressions and sentiments by getting as close as possible to genuinely experiencing them, is participant-observation - a tactic usually associated with the broader ethnographic exemplar (Creswell, 2013, p.90; Jacob, 1987, p.37).

2.2. Practical Execution of the Empirical Study

Participant-observation is construed by Becker (1958, p.652) as joining everyday activities in which the studied group or organisation is engaged, paying attention to how they behave in those conditions and, lastly, talking to them in the interest of unearthing everyone’s under-

standing of witnessed events (Rollinson, 1990, p.190). The acclaimed geographical gerontologist Graham Rowles (1983, p.300), for instance, applied this scheme in his famous qualitative examination of the Appalachian elderly, wherein he accompanied them on everyday undertakings, such as grocery shopping, and conducted both formal and informal interviews with them. Up to this day, Rowles' research is still applauded as an epitome of empirical phenomenology. Drawing inspiration from these sources, the researcher took part in all activities *Indigo-Wereld* arranged, and the events it promoted, for its members during a three month period, stretching from March up until May 2015. Those activities were selected, scheduled, prepared, managed and joined by Carola Eijssenring - director of *Indigo-Wereld*, owner of Get in Touch and the researcher's internship supervisor. They covered a wide range, including: guided and unguided walking tours through several of Eindhoven's city centre districts and their most appealing hangouts; three biweekly meetings that served as reflective sessions on the challenges of living abroad at which the spouses shared personal experiences and tips with one another and found relief in conference; cooking or handicraft workshops coordinated by the spouses themselves to teach each other untried techniques and recipes from their home countries; excursions to a wide array of local museums, cultural hotspots and leisure areas; Dutch classes for the spouses to become versed in the language's ABC's; celebrations and parties in the organisation's common room on the TU/e terrain; and didactic programmes put together by the spouses to communicate and receive knowledge on various topics.

Throughout these three months, two sorts of interview strategies have been employed, which can be categorised as on-site and off-site. The former refers to the momentary and informal conversations that developed between the respondents and the researcher in the course of the participant-observations. They were embedded within, and reactive towards, the project in which both were involved at that moment in time; the intention is to capture the respondent's experience and perception. On-site interviews were not, or only sporadically, audio-recorded on the grounds that doing so was pragmatically troublesome and inconvenient if being engaged in some operation concurrently and also because the presence of such apparatus might have distorted the casualness of dialogue and thus the spontaneity of answers. As a substitute, the researcher penned notes promptly after any interchange or important observation. Off-site interviews, on the other hand, indicate those occasions that researcher and respondent met in a private setting in contemplation of a more formal and longer session, at which the latter's biography was deliberated; here, questions on the respondent's settlement in Eindhoven and their life in the city found the chance of being asked. During these interviews audio-recording

equipment was taken advantage of, since the researcher argued it is less likely to affect replies whilst laying at the side of a table and when the responses are memoirs than it is near one's face and pending reflective thoughts on new experiences.

Both on-site and off-site interviews adhered to an unstructured design, seeing as such arrangements, according to Gibson (1998, p.475), are “more productive than semi-structured interviewing in discussing experiences” and as structured variants are merely suitable for quantitative, as opposed to qualitative, exploration (Bryman, 2006, p.97; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.314). Moreover, Gibson (1998, p.475) also discloses that, although unstructured interviews are more time-consuming, they result in additional relevant data, whereas semi-structured alternatives produce shorter and more superficial responses. The researcher's unstructured approach conformed to the interview guidelines of Thompson et al. (1989, p.138) who specify that “the course of the dialogue is largely set by the respondent. With the exception of an opening question, the interviewer has no *a priori* questions concerning the topic.” What's more, “dialogue tends to be circular rather than linear; the descriptive questions employed by the interviewer flow from the course of the dialogue and not from a predetermined path. The interview is intended to yield a conversation, not a question and answer session” (Thompson et al., 1989, p.138). During these exchanges, the participant was respected as the authority on their own experiences; the researcher fine-tuned his terminology on the basis of the subjects' choice of words (Kvale, 1983, p.175). The interaction focused on descriptive and exemplary questions, while ‘why’-questions were avoided altogether; they “can be perceived as requests for rationalisations and can engender feelings of prejudgment and defensive responses [and] may also put the respondent in the position of a naive scientist seeking to find a plausible explanation for his or her actions” (Thompson et al., 1989, p.138).

The fieldwork amounted to a total of twenty-four participant-observation events and five off-site interviews, conducted in the TU/e library's study cells. These sessions were immediately converted into digitalised field notes or transcriptions and filtered with regard to the passages' relevance towards answering the research question (Creswell, 2012, p.193; Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000, p.114). This selectivity was necessary in light of the large quantities of data spawned by the empirical strategy of which a considerable part can be deemed redundant or extraneous; analysing these excerpts would have been inefficient and could have restricted the study's sample size. The collection of remaining fragments were, thereafter, authored into reader-friendly texts, heavily narrative and illustrative in character, encompassing plentiful

quotes or paraphrases elicited from the interviews (Creswell, 2012, pp.193-194). One last thing that should be noted about the data is that all respondents are women. The full title of the Get in Touch project is *Get in Touch: Support Program for International Spouses*, which insinuates gender neutrality, and indeed it is true that men are more than welcomed by the organisation to join, but in practice no man has done so thus far. There are two obvious reasons for this. Firstly, because 71 percent of the TU/e's PhD-candidates are male and the percentage is even higher amongst attracted expats. Secondly, Get in Touch's female constituency reinforces itself as women are more eager to join the group of international peers than men are in absence of other men within the group.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. *Space, Place and Place-Making*

Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who spearheaded the existential phenomenological revolution, discarding Cartesianism, are also credited with the humanistic turn in geography in view of the renewed awareness to the spatiality of Being their respective philosophies gave birth to (Aho, 2005, p.1; Davidson, 2000, p.646). Browsing through the discipline's most exalted titles, neophytes will quickly commit its decisive dichotomy to memory: 'place' versus 'space' (Curtis & Rees Jones, 1998, pp.646-647; Paasi, 2002, p.806). Whereas the layman treats the two notions interchangeably - both are taken-for-granted elements of his life-world - Tuan (1977, p.3), in his publication entitled *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, determines the sometimes subtle and sometimes antonymous differences between them, attesting their interdependence simultaneously (Taylor, 1999, pp.9-10). Place, he says, is preservation, whilst space is affiliated with liberty; "we are attached to the one and long for the other" (Tuan, 1977, p.3). Every single one of us is born an infant perceiving the world as a boundless spaciousness and grasping it is a time-consuming proceeding that transpires in baby steps, starting by acquainting our mother's body before making headway with their crib, the living room, the house, the garden, the street, friends' and family's houses, school, the neighbourhood, the city centre, *etcetera* (Bruner, Olver & Greenfield, 1966, p.2; Penfield, 1975, p.19; Tuan, 1977, pp.20-24). This personal development urge in itself already testifies to man's unending appetite to search for what lies beyond their place, even though one becomes so closely knit to it (Mokhtarian & Salomon, 1999, p.31). Migration, in this sense, is the ultimate rejoinder to the adventurous appeal posed by unknown and foreign spaces.

Freedom and space are inseparable; the former is symptomatic of the latter for "it means having the power and enough room in which to act" (Tuan, 1977, p.52). Surpassing their current situation in exchange for the next lies within the unrestrained's control and evidences itself as the rudimentary competence to move. Movement requires abundant space to manoeuvre through and, at the same time, the only way for humans to accomplish a dimensional grip on space is by traversing it, by conceiving its enormity: "an immobile person will have difficulty mastering even primitive ideas of abstract space" (Tuan, 1977, p.52; Van Manen, 1998, p.13). Be that as it may, thriving at liberty equally forebodes exposure and vulnerability; after all, open space is characterised by an absence of directed trails and anchored significance - "it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed" (Tuan, 1977, p.54). Barring the ex-

traordinary audacious, expeditions into remote territories will recurrently incite bewilderment over its ambiguity unless approached with a certain hesitancy and watchfulness (Davenport & Anderson, 2005, p.627; Shin, 1998, p.84). However, to be overcome with an impression of sheer spaciousness it is not at all necessary to voyage to some faraway and sweeping landscape as crowded cities and thick forests foment similar innervations. Constructions “that clutter up space from one viewpoint are, from another, the means by which a special awareness of space is created for [...] they encourage the mind to extrapolate to infinity, [appearing] boundless to one lost in its midst” (Tuan, 1977, p.56).

Places, on the other hand, are immured, acculturated and leisurely; their contents have been vested long ago and do not need to be ceaselessly deciphered (Lewicka, 2011, pp.209-210; Manzo, 2003, p.49; Sixsmith, 1986, pp.281-283; Tuan, 1977, p.54). By dint of their relaxed and healthy temper, they enjoy a supplementary affinity with those who inhabit the locale and return there time and again to lounge in its cosiness, assured that its warmth will protect the addressees from deleteriousness (Tuan, 1977, p.137; Williams, Patterson Roggenbuck & Watson, 1992, p.31). This idea of safety wherefore one resorts to place is accentuated by the fact that the intimacy of the residence seesaws analogously to the seasons with winter spurring ambiances of peril outside, ordaining the house as sanctuary, whilst “summer, in contrast, turns the whole world into Eden, so that no corner is more protective than another” (Tuan, 1977, p.137; Bachelard, 1958, p.29). Its pleasant hospitality is not so much shouldered by the place’s totality as by the tactile knickknacks it is compiled of or the specific qualities it harbours; e.g. the lazy living room chair that creaks when your tired body sinks into it, the bedroom corner where you would usually find the cat curled up in a ball of fur or the high-quality wooden cutting board and kitchen utensils with which thousands of delicious meals have been prepared (Stark, 1948, p.55; Tuan, 1977, p.144). Cherished experiences like these are not appreciated straightaway; in that moment “we do not know that the seeds of lasting sentiment are being planted” (Tuan, 1977, p.143). What we call our home is defined by mundanities too close to us - too much a part of ourselves - to be discerned, but over time those are the things that sedentarise us (Porteous, 1976, p.385; Tuan, 1977, pp.143-144).

“Place is a pause in movement” - one must come to a standstill and rest to make “it possible for a locality to become a centre of felt value” (Tuan, 1977, p.138). Chiefly for the reason that sites must be taken in - its configuration mastered, its people befriended, its sounds and smells recognised - before the profound person-environment relationship, essential in disencumber-

ing the blur experienced by any out-of-contact greenhorn, can be stabilised and they can make themselves at home (Manzo, 2003, p.49; Tuan, 1977, p.159). In sum, “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” - a transition we denote as ‘place-making’ (Tuan, 1977, p.6; Milligan, 1998, p.5). Evidently, this statement reveals the concepts’ kinship (Gieryn, 2000, p.465). They rely on each other for classification: there is no place without space or the other way around inasmuch as the mellowness of our houses is set off against the frigid exterior and it is the triviality of place that instils a desire for the elongated realm of space (Elmborg, 2011, p.346; Griffin & Hayllar, 2009, p.129; Tuan, 1977, p.6). “In open space one can become intensely aware of place and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence” (Tuan, 1977, p.54). A wholesome life lusts after both and inclines towards oscillation.

Spaciousness is disquieting *inter alia* because it represents loneliness and a fear thereof, immediately conspicuous upon the addition of a second man or woman, which triggers a condensation of its ominous volume (Tuan, 1977, p.59). For Tuan (1977, p.140) this annotation qualifies as evidence that in a state of solitude, or with friends, family and loved ones unavailable, “things and places are quickly drained of meaning so that their lastingness is an irritation rather than a comfort.” Like the quotidian habitualities that lodge the domicile’s amiability, genuine social interaction may perform as a catalyst to sink in a new elusive fondness to the contact point, which may imprint itself on the inmost membranes of our psyche to be savoured upon reminiscence, but which will not be saved in the shape of self-evident mementos (Milligan, 1998, pp.28-29; Tuan, 1977, p.141; Wiles, Allen, Palmer, Hayman, Keeling & Kerse, 2009, p.666). Logically, it would be foolish to think such affairs can be calculatedly planned. The geographical setting of this sentimentality is of great importance, but can still be transcended due to the mobility of its source: the human other.

Despite commenting that the feelings made vivid above are in principle unrealisable through premeditated design, Tuan (1977, pp.161-162) nevertheless expresses that, although we predominantly identify with places viscerally, instead of visually, physical prominence facilitates a place-experience. Distinctive constituents catch our attention and where we are captivated, our eyes take a breather, envisioning a cerebral representation of the locus of our absorption as it stands out from the rest of the panorama - a focal point, earning the placelike trait of being noticed first and foremost in opposition to its imprecise surroundings (Tuan, 1977, p.161). That these centrepieces gain a stature within experience at odds with actuality is exhibited

whenever someone gets frustrated trying to capture the matter on film as they will repeatedly be disappointed by the snapshot's diminutive portrayal, which seems to mismatch their magnified perception of reality, "revealing a midget where we would expect to find a giant" (Tuan, 1977, p.161). Unlike the city that, as an entity, peacocks as the undoubtedly outstanding architectural order versus "the chaotic forces of terrestrial and infernal nature," streets or neighbourhoods are generally so interchangeable in terms of structural arrangement that any uniqueness expedites people's place-making thereof (Tuan, 1977, pp.171-173).

3.2. Movement, Rest and Encounter

The previously introduced Merleau-Pontian notion of body-subject already inspired Tuan (1977, pp.34-37) to argue that place-making is an intrinsically corporeal operation, decided by the posture and anatomy of individual bodies and relations between them, which is why spatial skill and navigational talent are ordinarily achieved through embodiment and without cognisant alertness (Brown, 1932, p.123; Kozlowski & Bryant, 1977, p.590). It was Seamon (1979, p.16), however, who bid for the desirability of a geographical reading of the French philosopher's work and who did so in his text *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter*, wherein he narrates people's physiological and experiential engrossment in their everyday world at the hand of those three titular animations. The majority of movements, including elementary gestures, are accrued, virtually uncontrolled, mannerisms, originating from a mechanical, but delicate, wilful bodily compulsion. These mannerisms are only hindered when: the exercise's setting is, out of the blue, materially altered; the imminent situation demands an exceptional action; a normally automatically proceeding undertaking must be conducted in an unacquainted site (Andrews, 1903, p.135; Maddux, 1997, pp.334-335; Seamon, 1979, pp.38-45). The body-subject eagerly remodels needs into deeds so that our day-to-day existence may transpire uninterrupted by the burden of being obliged to think out every step in advance, allowing us to "rise beyond such mundane events as getting [to] places, finding things [and] performing basic tasks, and direct our attention to wider, more significant life dimensions" (Seamon, 1979, p.48; Buttimer, 1976, p.291). It learns to do this through reiteration and, provided that a movement has been rehearsed often enough for it to become consolidated in the body-subject's spectrum of prereflective understandings, it is considerably affiliated with the doing, stimulating annoyance upon aberration (Seamon, 1979, pp.48-49).

Fluid and undeliberate motions reinforced by body-subject are capable of growing remarkably mosaic, continuing over spatiotemporal scopes that ought not to be underestimated (Simon-

sen, 2007, pp.173-174). According to Seamon (1979, pp.54-55), these ostensibly minor gestures accumulate and hence evolve into compositional ventures more than able to bolster a fixed purpose or intention - dishwashing, car driving, remote controlling or cloth folding for example - which he refers to as 'body ballets'. Under regular conditions, numerous body ballets have a tendency to mature into 'time-space routines', or, successive strings of habitual behaviour around which a substantial part of one's day may be arranged, such as a person's morning groove, covering the discrete body ballets of stepping out of bed, making coffee, eating breakfast, reading the newspaper, *etcetera* (Middleton, 2011, p.2871; Seamon, 1979, pp.55-56). With "taken-for-granted segments of daily living" firmly established within one's schedule, it may ensue "with a minimum of planning and decision," unbinding their conscious to keep an eye on new experiences instead (Seamon, 1979, p.56; James, 1950, p.122). Withal, time-space routines are not incredibly adaptive to beneficial modification, as their perpetuators get accustomed to them "and forget that life could be otherwise" (Seamon, 1979, p.56). On the occasion that there is a spatial interweavement of various people's bodily habits on a regular basis, a powerful sense of place is fashioned that arises from a familiarity with the location itself and with those who traverse it and which "each person does his or her small part in creating and sustaining" (Seamon, 1979, p.59; Trell & Van Hoven, 2010, p.92). In the narrowest sense people immersed in such a place synergy, which Seamon (1979, pp.56-59) designates as 'place ballet', recognise each other, but even friendships have been reported to stem from it (Cresswell, 2004, p.7).

Rest alludes to junctures of comparative spatiotemporal durability, but is definitely not postulated as the forthright opposite to movement (Seamon, 1979, pp.69-70). In its purest manifestation, rest is almost synonymous to at-homeness; *videlicet*, the latent tranquillity of, and conversance with, "the everyday world in which one lives and outside of which one is visiting, in transit, not at home, out of place or travelling" (Seamon, 1979, p.70; Wu, 1944, p.268). But in spite of the house's role as the nucleus for our resting, midpoints around which momentary business is oriented are founded no matter where we are, nor for how long; imagine by way of illustration someone standing up to visit the restroom during his wait at the dentist practice and observe how he will likely install himself in the same chair again after he is done (Seamon, 1979, p.73). Interiorly, "specific implements and fixtures such as seats, desks, tables and beds become centres," whilst "larger places such as offices, parks, shops, eating establishments and other foci of activities become centres" exteriorly - assuming that the person makes frequent use of them (Seamon, 1979, p.74; Manzo, 2003, pp.49-50). Since these stations are

often coupled with, and linked by, body ballets, time-space routines and place ballets, people are apt to develop similar emotional attachments to them, which shows when they are palpably transformed to the displeasure of habitués (Seamon, 1979, pp.74-76; Casey, 2001, p.689).

As said, the house constitutes the apex of resting centres - one that its occupants not simply abandon because of some inconvenience like a leaking roof or a broken window (Cuba & Hummon, 1993, pp.112-113). Seamon (1979, p.78) subdivides the experience of at-homeness along five more or less categorical parameters, a few of which associate with his theorisation of movement, whereas others closer relate to Tuan's (1977, p.137) conceptualisations. 'Rootedness' derives from the resident's unavoidable naturalisation of the house that, "although inescapably a part of a larger geographical whole," furnishes the start and finish of every cycle through which it, more than any other location, culminates as the axle of embodied regularity; "the person who is at home can move fluidly through the dwelling" (Seamon, 1979, p.79; Dovey, 1985, p.35). 'Appropriation' is the owners' idea of custody and privacy; they decide over who is granted and who is refused entrance and at what time the house needs to be empty (Korosec-Serfaty, 1985, pp.76-78; Seamon, 1979, pp.80-81). 'Regeneration' covers the physical and psychological revitalisation taking place indoors (Seamon, 1979, pp.81-83). Here a person can securely take a breath, lie down and doze off, preventing upset as a result of fatigue and tension (Dovey, 1985, p.41). 'At-easeness' concerns "the freedom to be: the person who is at home can be what he most comfortably is and do what he most wishes to do" (Seamon, 1979, p.83). It is where one can act in answer to abrupt urges as there is no anticipated shame in doing so (Cuba & Hummon, 1993, p.113). Lastly, 'warmth' involves the cordial and nurturing mood engendered by one's dwelling (Seamon, 1979, p.84).

Movement and rest are instinctive thanks to what Seamon (1979, p.115) calls 'basic contact' - the preconscious perception of the surroundings that helps the body-subject to synchronise its actions - which operates in the background throughout other, more attentive, forms of encounter it facilitates: 'obliviousness', 'watching', 'noticing' and 'heightened contact' (Weiss, 2008, pp.235-236). The former implies our moments of pondering on "thoughts, feelings, imaginings, fantasies, worries or bodily states which have nothing or little to do with the world at hand," usually occurring in the interim of monotonous exertions and household chores or when absorbed in negativity and exhaustion (Seamon, 1979, p.104). Watching, on the other hand, suggests extended outwardly awareness of a physically existent entity; the world, especially an animate feature thereof, engages the watcher either because not much

else is going on then or because it is actively drawn towards something beautiful or of interest (Jacobs, 1961, pp.35-38; Seamon, 1979, pp.105-107). Noticing is a swifter effort than watching; an object the individual was oblivious to nanoseconds ago grabs his attention without warning, perhaps in view of its “incongruity, surprise, contrast” or (un)attractiveness - “noticing makes the unnoticed world known, without required participation or desire of the noticer” (Seamon, 1979, pp.108-110). During heightened contact someone feels one with the environment in an almost spiritual or meditative way, described by words as emotional, harmonious or peaceful (Maslow, 1968, p.10; Seamon, 1979, pp.111-113).

Basic contact fosters at-homeness and is in itself fostered by rootedness; the dweller can safely roam about obliviously, seeing as “a perceptual matter-of-factness” is relentlessly maintained so long as no eye-opening variance is happened upon (Seamon, 1979, p.117). The offshoot is a dichotomy between ‘habituality’ and ‘openness’, or, “the tendency of the person to take his everyday world for granted and notice little that is new or different” versus “a situation in which the person strives for fuller understanding of the world because he feels comfortable and at ease” (Seamon, 1979, p.118). At-homeness enables the latter, but also potentially disables it through the former; habituality implicates conserving energy for outward encounters - watching, noticing and higher contact - and thus discovery, however, automatisms may preclude the individual from unfamiliar experiences, supporting an oblivious and unbroken humdrum (Crossley, 1995, pp.53-54; Seamon, 1979, pp.118-119). In the same manner that humans wish to consume both place and space, a rewarding life cries out for habituality as well as openness for the reason that, admitting an incessant stream of unpractised enterprises would threaten attendance to immediate needs, personal growth comes solely from naturalising “realms of chaos and disorder [...] into an expanded sphere of at-homeness” (Seamon, 1979, p.120). Habituality assumes unfavourable form if it restrains openness; openness does so if it brings the subject into contact with incomprehensibility.

3.3. Insideness, Authenticity and Placelessness

Printed for the first time roughly coincidentally with Tuan’s (1977, p.3) opus, *Place and Placelessness* of the Canadian geographer Relph (1976, p.22) explains the inception of its title in curiously analogous terminology, stressing places’ meaningfulness and their distinguished position against circumambient space; “they must have an inside that can be experienced as something differing from an outside.” Reversing it, Relph (1976, pp.12-16) shuffles the diametric anatomy, in which humanistic geographers have systematised their two cardinal no-

tions, and supplants a dialectical one: places prejudice human apprehension of space, yet they obtain character from their spatial embedding as well (Casey, 2001, p.689). In addition, Relph (1976, p.80) deviates from colleagues by not romanticising place's everlastingness, warning his readers of real threats to its existence, which he believes ought to be recorded, documented, studied and learned in pursuance of renovating damaged places, making new ones and, above all, impeding an impending placeless geography. With this ambition in mind, he proposes two types of place-identities: the identity of a place versus the identity with a place (Relph, 1976, p.45). The former he interprets in more or less the same terms and conceptualisations as Tuan (1977, pp.161-162) and Seamon (1979, p.59). Like them, Relph (1976, p.47) considers a location's physical context, the activities taking effect there and the meanings ascribed to these events as the most important determinants of the identity of a place.

Having said that, Relph (1976, pp.49-50), in laying out the identity with a place, insinuates that the accepted analysing schemes fall short in construing the intensity of place-experiences, for which he offers a measure of his own, ranging from the sensation of 'outsideness' to that of 'insideness' (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p.45). Those on the far right of this scale - the insiders who belong to, and identify with, the place they are in - are archetypical; in general, people will be situated somewhere in-between and their degree of relatedness heightens in correspondence with rightward shifts (Relph, 1976, p.49). The balance between insideness and outsideness is the balance "between safety and danger, cosmos and chaos, enclosure and exposure, [...] here and there" and orientation and disorientation (Lyndon, Moore, Van der Ryn & Quinn, 1962, pp.34-35). "From the outside you look upon a place as a traveller might look upon a town from a distance; from the inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it" (Relph, 1976, p.49). The outsider intuitively detaches themselves from the world, such as in the case of a homesick person or someone returning to his motherland after having lived in a distant country for some decades (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p.45). Society is jammed with obvious manifestations of this dualism: walls, fences and barbed wire, road signs that tell drivers they are entering the city, border patrols and boom barriers or the curtain disconnecting economy class travellers from business class travellers. Still, in many instances the polarity prevails in nuanced and latent forms.

In its most pronounced disguise the incidence of estrangement, regularly endured by just-arrived neophytes, assumes a quality that Relph (1976, p.51) labels 'existential outsideness' - a kind of "self-conscious and reflective uninvolvedness [or] homelessness" due to which the

environment presents itself to the alien as fictitious and disapproving of him or her (Manzo, 2003, p.52; Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p.45). To the existential outsider, unfit to join in the inside's spirit, places "are at best backgrounds to activities that are without sense, mere chimeras, and at worst are voids" (Relph, 1976, p.51). They seem unanimously hollow, irrelevant and uniform (Melbye, 2010, p.86). Its antonym - 'existential insideness' - pertains to unpremeditated, but nonetheless wholly significant, perhaps even subconscious, place-experiences that are human in scale and organisation (Manzo, 2003, p.52). It is a condition evinced in place ballets for example, wherein partakers have made the site's tangible and intangible contours conversant "and are known and accepted there" (Relph, 1976, p.55; Seamon, 1980, p.161). The existential insider is at home; he is as integral to the location as it is of him, whilst "the person who has no place with which he identifies is in effect homeless" (Relph, 1976, p.55; Hutchison, 1943, p.36).

Regardless of place-identity's inclination to hinge on inner emotion rather than fact, as expounded upon above, Relph (1976, p.58) insists that it is possible for a consensual idea on a certain setting - "in effect its lowest common denominator" - to be pinned down in two dissimilar ways: the public and the mass identity (Mills, 1956, pp.298-324). Importantly, the former denotes an amalgamated rendering, "developed out of the free opinion and experience of groups and individuals" and therefore mirroring an 'authentic' sense of place, which Relph (1976, p.64), by way of explanation, formalises as candid and natural appreciation of the concerned place-identity, unaffected by ready-made, oftentimes inaccurate and stereotyped, perceptions on "how that experience should be" (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p.46). Before anything else, authenticity precipitates from unself-conscious insideness. Nevertheless, Relph (1976, pp.65-66) is keen to assure his readers that authentic place-experiences may even be conceived deliberately and by outsiders, conceding that they adopt a disposition of openness that assists instances of concentrated contact (Seamon, 1979, p.118). In contrast, deceptively, selectively and irresponsibly streamlined mass identities are prefabricated for the general public by opinion-makers, such as commercial media, inducing those advertised with their counterfeit images to perceive their surroundings through proportionally tinted glasses, thereby contriving "a pseudo-world of pseudo-places," or 'inauthenticity' (Relph, 1976, p.58).

"An inauthentic attitude to place is essentially no sense of place" (Relph, 1976, p.82). It leaves no room for any commendation of places' subtle virtues, nor for any sensitivity towards their individuality, and its escalation has as a consequence spurred gradual annihilation

of premodern heterogeneity, building in its stead a today boundless flatscape, wherein we, recurrently “neither experience nor create places with more than a superficial and casual involvement” - summarised by Relph (1976, pp.79-82) under the banner of ‘placelessness’ (Cullen, 1971, p.59; Lyndon et al., 1962, pp.33-34; Norberg-Schulz, 1969, p.268). The placelessness wave that floods society, according to Relph (1976, p.82), flows on the one hand from our “uncritical acceptance of mass values” - examples hereof include the outlandish plastic ornaments low-priced snack bars install on their terraces and the plastering of city centres with posters of half-naked men and women promoting boxers and lingerie - and on the other hand from our determined hunt for maximised efficiency - examples hereof include orderly patterned suburbia crawling as far as the eye sees and geometrically monotonous central business districts (Grant, 1969, p.15; Lyndon et al., 1962, pp.33-34). Mass communication that standardises trends and preferences, mass culture that invents “uniform products and places [...] for people of supposedly uniform needs and tastes,” big businesses that overlook their impact on places for the sake of positive revenues, the general authority that blindly imposes its rules indiscriminately, and the economic system that actively aspires an eradication of place attachment so as to realise greater spatial efficiency, all contribute to the placeless geography Relph (1976, pp.90-121) expresses (Kurtz, 1973, p.20; Morrill, 1970, p.202; Wagner, 1972, p.57; Whittlesey, 1935, p.90).

Relph’s (1976, p.141) titular dichotomy thus accounts for two experiential genres: that of a meaningful spatial medley and that of “a labyrinth of endless similarities.” The latter steadily magnifying - the former steadily curtailing, indeed occupying nostalgias unsuited to the present-day landscape (Relph, 1976, p.139). Notwithstanding Relph’s (1976, 139-140) explicit accusation against this trend for expunging existential insideness, considering such a fervent sense of place cannot flourish where place itself is non-existent, he equally unreservedly criticises framings of this modern scenery in exclusively dissenting terms, since those would be founded upon unreasonable comparisons with idealised memories of a past long gone. “If we regret the disappearance of significant places,” he says, “this is only sentimentality and we should at least acknowledge the benefits of the new geography” (Relph, 1976, p.144). It is a small minority who bear malice towards, and are unwilling to get enthusiastic about, the thousands of sensational and exhilarating architectures that have been raised from the soil, towering sky-high, or who honestly resent the luxurious comfort and leisure brought about in search of increased efficiency; “and while our experiences may have a shallowness they also have great breadth [for] placelessness also means freedom from place” (Relph, 1976, p.140;

Ellul, 1964, p.436; Grant, 1969, p.138). The book concludes that, *in lieu* of being repugnant, the present-day landscape is basically just in line with present-day society, which is ours to change - or not (Relph, 1976, p.147). Space, place, placelessness and all of the other conceptualisations introduced in this chapter are always contextualised through the human experience thereof; it is these experiences that will be focused on in this thesis' results section.

4. Results

The following chapter gives a rundown of three months of empirical data gathering in partnership with *Indigo-Wereld*, set forth along thematic, rather than chronological, lines. The presented word picture is an amalgamation of the conducted participant-observations and off-site interviews with the latter supporting the latter and *vice versa*. Where pragmatically possible, quotations have extensively been incorporated into the text so as to enrich the findings as well as to communicate them in the subjects' own formulations. Quotations are applied in two discrete fashions; the reader will come across in-text references that are designated with double quotation marks, but also transcript excerpts that are separated from the preceding and ensuing paragraph. The former may come forth from either one of the participant-observations or an off-site interview; the latter come forth from one of the off-site interviews without exception - these consist of interviewer-respondent dialogues with the letter I representing the interviewer and the letter R representing the respondent. It is important to acknowledge here that all quotations have been edited with an eye to reader friendliness and conciseness, be it to a minimal degree; what has been said is kept one hundred percent the same - how it has been said, ninety percent. Lastly, it should be noted that the included stories are filtered from a larger data collection, representing the most illustrative or exceptional samples with regards to the relevance they bear towards answering the research question. Table 1 gives an overview of respondents who have been spoken to on more than one occasion.

Name	Age	Country	Time*	Name	Age	Country	Time*
Ali	27	China	2 weeks	Natalia	28	Ukraine	2 years
Ana	27	Moldova	5 months	Nooshin	28	Iran	9 months
Anastasia	27	Russia	2 years	Polly	27	Russia	< 1 week
Haruno	27	Japan	7 months	Reffat	26	Bangladesh	2 years
Hoa	27	Vietnam	5 months	Seda	27	Turkey	1 year
Iris	35	Taiwan	1 year	Shirin	25	Iran	3 weeks
Iro	31	Sri Lanka	3 years	Shruthi	25	India	< 1 week
Mohini	24	India	2 months	Uliana	24	Russia	6 months

Table 1: The sixteen most important respondents of the research || * The time that the respondent has been residing in Eindhoven at the start of the research in March 2015 || The following five respondents have also been interviewed off-site: Seda, Haruno, Ana, Ali and Uliana.

The chapter is drafted as an unbroken narrative, but has been divided into eight thematic paragraphs with a view towards intelligibility. The following is a synopsis of which subject is covered in each of these sections.

This paragraph will discuss:

- 4.1. Spatial and socio-cultural differences that the spouses encounter that withhold them from settling down emotionally in Eindhoven.
- 4.2. Actions that the spouses consciously undertake in order to cope with the hardship of missing one's homeland, friends and family.
- 4.3. Unconsciously employed strategies with which the spouses moderate the displacing effect that the unfamiliarity of Eindhoven has on them.
- 4.4. Situations wherein the language barrier does, and situations wherein it does not, exclude the spouses from meaningful involvements with places.
- 4.5. The spouses' perceptions of, and reactions towards, commercial and industrial placelessness and cold or threatening places.
- 4.6. Perks of living abroad, most notably the freedom that the spouses report to experience by virtue of Eindhoven's posed unfamiliarity.
- 4.7. The fleetingness of at-homeness in case of an incident or other unpleasantness regarding the just recently occupied apartments of the spouses.
- 4.8. Aspects of at-homeness that the spouses seek and find outside of their house if it fails to provide the regenerative comfort it ought to.

4.1. Spatial and Socio-Cultural Differences

Subsequent to his initiation into the Get in Touch group, the researcher unceasingly stumbles upon indications and implications of the discrepancy between the spouses and their unversed new surroundings. Rubbernecking a cheesemaker practising his craft, one of them blurts out in amazement: "I always thought they made the orange coating first and then injected it with a yellow fluid that hardens inside." It is, however, also plain from the beginning that they are prone to put effort into resolving this by learning about Eindhoven and the Netherlands as a whole - one of them even mentions to have joined the extravagant Dutch carnival celebrations in Maastricht in the very first week of her arrival. The result: a not seldom recurring Q and A between subject and researcher. "How late do Dutch people eat their dinners?" "How do you end a phone conversation with a Dutch person?" "What do Dutch people eat for breakfast?" "How late are you supposed to leave when you are a guest at a Dutch person's house and how

do you know that?” And of course, “how do you say that in Dutch?” And these are only a handful of questions that pop up on the first day of the empirical research. Plenty of the researcher’s answers are moreover succeeded by whimsical exchanges on the customs, norms and values of the spouses’ countries of origin set in opposition to those of the Netherlands.



Figure 1: *The spouses and researcher watching a cheesemaker practising his craft.*

These interrogations, in most instances, spring from some encountered polarity, which is logical, seeing as no urgency to adjust would remain supposing that the Netherlands was a duplicate of their country of origin and no variation would therefore ever have to be accosted. The sort of differences that the spouses single out are manifold, ranging from the big and obvious ones, such as the people, the culture, the language, the food and the infrastructure, to surprisingly peculiar ones that would not straightforwardly come to a native’s mind if solicited to juxtapose his birthplace to foreign lands. Take Haruno, a spouse from Japanese descent whose advent coincided with shock over the scarce presence of Disney advertisements in the Dutch streetscape. She comments to see no posters of the film studio’s major productions, no prints of their leading characters on packaged food and simply no commercial usage of any aspect of Disney, aside from in toy stores. Nor is there much evidence of related animation figures like Hello Kitty or Studio Ghibli, she notes; “Japanese people love Disney, but here you see none of that and it feels weird, as if there is missing something. It is not like I want to buy Disney products, I just want to see them around. I miss it.”

Clashing with these dissimilarities round-the-clock is affirmatively coupled with the realisation of one's positioning in an uneasily comprehensible space that significantly deviates from the known places of one's home country, yet the spouses who are keen on giving notice of instances of this unevenness are not equally unnerved by them, depending on the question whether or not the subject has had prior experience with living abroad and undergoing a culture shock. Before relocating to the Netherlands, the Moldovan Ana already had a taste of how it is to reside in a foreign country for an extended period of time thanks to her two years of studying electrical engineering in Poland - a change of address she chronicles as exceptionally exasperating due to not speaking a word of Polish and the country's illiteracy in English. She delineates how these circumstances turned five-finger exercises, such as going to the supermarket, into wearying homework assignments: "I would first have to write down basic phrases, like that I do not speak the language and if the cashier could please help me out with something, and memorise them." Seda is a spouse from Turkish origin who, before a turn of events brought her to Eindhoven, lived almost half her life in the United States, and like Ana she too voices to have gone through consternation upon setting foot on the American soil. "For the first two years I was in a culture shock," she explains, "I isolated myself from the surroundings, I did not know anyone and I did not know any place - it was just a flat land for me; everywhere was so quiet, there were no people in the streets, because a lot of people drive cars instead, and the buildings all looked gloomy as well."

Conversely, both Ana and Seda are convinced that overcoming the upset of moving to another country once, abundantly prepared them for a second time, as if the struggle hardened them. To a certain extent, it is fair to say that Ana and Seda are somewhat familiar with being within utter unfamiliarity - that is, the sensation thereof. This surely is not to suggest that, owing to their prior experiences, they have developed an aptitude to be unconditionally comfortable in space. On the contrary, if anything, it withered Ana's hopes for Eindhoven; "moving to Poland was really, really hard," she recalls, "but it also prepared me. I did not make any dreams and did not expect anything great from the Netherlands. I was ready for a difficult time, knowing that feeling comfortable was going to take a long time - months even - and I did not make any illusions about the Netherlands being the best and most beautiful country in the world. So I was quite prepared." However, it does mean that they, in comparison to spouses with no such prior experience, are less dismayed, or specifically discomforted, by the unfamiliarity in which they land. "For me it was just so much easier to adapt," Seda elucidates,

“because I already experienced the culture shock and the new environment difficulties before - a lot of people tell me that they had a culture shock when they came here, but I did not.”

In sharp contrast, the Chinese spouse Ali, who has been in the Netherlands for hardly three months at the time of the interview, having never lived in any country but China, professes to have actually suffered a vexatious allergy in reaction to the immigration; “ugly you know,” she blurts whilst making a wry face and pressing her forefingers to her cheeks as an attestation of where an irritating rash had developed then. “I felt a little bit terrible in the first week here, because I had allergies,” she spells out before apprehensively continuing: “I never experienced such problems in China, so I assumed that the Netherlands did not like me.” Her husband makes an attempt to diagnose the cause of the rash in a more scientific manner by expounding on her transition from a humid to a non-humid environment and how this sudden change probably engendered her skin’s hypersensitivity, but Ali does not want to hear any of that nonsense and, shaking her head, she instantaneously intervenes to resolutely disagree, attributing the infection to homesickness instead: “it was Chinese New Year the week that I came to Eindhoven and so I really missed my parents - I just wanted to go home.”



Figure 2: Ali showing how to do Chinese embroidery to one of the other spouses.

The spouses are predominantly pretty self-confident that differences can be accustomed, or at least coped with, and that any subjected to shock will taper off in the long run - many foretell

a critical turning point when they have gotten to master the Dutch language. Still, they are pessimistic in their hopes of ever devotedly esteeming Eindhoven as their true home, which is attributable to the steadfastness of prevailing bonds with the country of origin: their home country. Set side by side, the Netherlands is discerned as unintelligible and impenetrable, for which reason it insinuates a deceptive distance from the spouses who, accordingly, have the funny feeling of being mere visitors - of being outsiders. Signs that the researcher picks up, but also direct disclosures of the spouses themselves, indicate that the cause hereof can be traced back to an anchoring to rapturous recollections of left-behind people and places wherefore hitherto they have not established, nor will as admitted in some of their statements, substitutes. For instance, Seda explains during the interview that she was not used to negotiate where to meet with friends when she lived in Turkey, the way she and the researcher did; generally, people would not determine a gathering point as insiders naturally knew where that point would be:

I: So if you would meet with somebody in Turkey, you do not choose a place, but you just both know where to go?

R: Yes exactly.

I: That is cool. Do you miss such places?

R: Yes, I do. If I wanted to meet my friends, I would say: “let’s meet at the place.” They knew where the place was. It was like a base where we would always go to. You would not have to propose an address or a time, because people would just know that. I do not know how that is possible, it is hard to describe.

I: And you do not have that in the Netherlands yet. Do you think that will ever be?

R: I do not know to be honest.

But not only the utmost joyful of memories moor the spouses to their roots; sorrow ones and melancholy over unsettled issues - real, magnified or imagined - imbed them as vigorously. This theme is called attention to by the Russian spouse Anastasia in the first of a series of three reflective sessions on the challenges of living abroad. Sitting with a clique of other spouses in a circle on the second floor of the *Parktheater*, she opens up: “my past prevents me to make a fresh start here in the Netherlands.” Albeit she sounds to be on the brink of confessing a crime of no laughing matter, the bygone incident Anastasia is in point of fact alluding to

rather comes across as not worth bothering about. “I said something to someone,” she cryptically launches into elucidating the succinct episode in her life, “who I have not seen since and whose life path is now in every way separated from my own - I would like to take back what I said that day, but that is not practicable, not anymore.” She is of the opinion that by emigrating Russia this bone of contention has not been brought to a satisfying close. Despite the years that have passed, its unresolvedness does not give up plaguing Anastasia and, because she cannot let go of it, the affair anchors her to a place and time that is not here and now, though she suspects that the person with whom she shares the quarrel has forgotten long about it - she even admits to have never really cared for this individual to begin with.

A loss that pronouncedly continues to bind the spouses to their country of origin as well is that of family and friends - the regret for their absence withholds them from becoming truly domiciled in the Netherlands. Resuming where she left off, Anastasia also acknowledges to blame herself badly for deserting everyone she cared for, above all her parents: “I am worried they get sick and I will not be able to look after them as I am supposed to.” There are few Get in Touch meetings during which there is not a moment that the conversation switches to the topic of committing to, and maintaining, friendships as an international spouse. They frequently refer to an internal dilemma: to invest time and effort in sustaining heartfelt relationships with people they meet and whom they sense a connection to, knowing well enough that as “the expat life” - as Seda typifies it - inevitably intervenes, they will be saddened over and over again, versus keeping merely superficial acquaintances and enduring solitude, but free from grief whenever their friends or they themselves must emigrate again. Faithful to the former stance, Seda is incontestably upset upon one of the Italian spouses’ announcement that this will be her last Get in Touch meeting for she will move back to her home country next week in contemplation of a job opportunity she is offered; “I get so emotional every time one of the girls leaves,” Seda responds to the notification, “it is as if I am losing a family member.” At the first reflective sessions, one of the spouses concurs: “as an international you learn that any bond you form will not take long to be broken - saying goodbye is difficult, but loneliness is difficult as well.” Seda picks up on this issue in the interview the researcher conducted with her:

R: You want to find someone who is like you. Someone who has the same opinions, the same hobbies, the same interests. But here everyone is so

different, so it is hard to find someone that can be a best friend. And everybody is here temporarily; they will move away eventually.

I: Is it hard for you to know that international friends will leave or that you will leave them?

R: Yes. That is why I do not make best friends. I am a very attachy person and when I do get attached to people, it very hard for me to leave them. I cry my heart out, so I try not to get attached to people - not anymore.



Figure 3: *The spouses discussing challenges of living abroad during a reflective session.*

4.2. Coping with the Loss of Homeland

During the second reflective session, for which the spouses assemble in the restaurant that accompanies the exhibition of the famous Dutch designer Piet Hein Eek, Ana suggest that the humblest of artefacts are capable of alleviating the travail of homesickness and left-behind friends and family. She provides the example of bringing dried sausages and *vișină în ciocolată* [cherries in chocolate] - traditional Moldovan bonbons filled with cherry with stone, cream and small amounts of alcohol - with her to the Netherlands whenever she flies to her parents' house, asserting that those foods "are more or less the same as having pictures of back home." Ana's observation is subscribed to without dissent by the other attendees, one of whom reciprocates her example with one of her own: a coffee mug she got from her best friend before the latter emigrated to New Zealand - "I possess a shelf full of such little relics

that awake memories of a certain person, place or time and they are incredibly important to me,” she comments. The Indian spouse Shruthi simultaneously conjures a golden earring from her handbag, carefully wrapped in paper, put in a petite jewellery box and bundled again in a protective net; a keepsake from her mother she clarifies.

Iro, in the interim of another Get in Touch meeting, confesses how she was on the verge of crying pending her departure from Sri Lanka, which her younger brother then tried to prevent by granting her his beloved teddy bear - an act of generosity that of course rather provoked than kept tears from flowing. Strategically planted next to her bedroom pillow, it now reminds her of Sri Lanka each night before dozing off. Finishing the discussion she started herself, Ana brings up another Moldovan relic - one that is not edible - namely the family’s table cloth she took with her to her new residence, which according to herself has the same effect as Shruthi’s earring and Iro’s teddy bear; “it connects me to my background and makes me feel at home more easily,” she declares. “At the same time, however,” Ana adds to her statement, “all the travelling and the undertaking of moving to a new and unknown country have reduced me to a very practical person,” by which means to say that she purposely remains emotionally detached from commodities she will not be able to uncomplicatedly transport if she were ever to permanently leave the Netherlands, such as furniture; “for mobile people like myself, home has become, and must be, unmaterialistic,” she concludes, engaging the researcher’s interest:

I: Many of the spouses say that in order to cope with the grief of having to miss people or places, they take stuff with them from their home country. During one of the reflective sessions, however, you said to consider yourself a very practical person who tries not to get too attached to such material things. You said that for somebody as mobilised you, home has become something immaterial.

R: Maybe what I tried to say by that is that people themselves create home.

I: Can you tell me a bit more about what you mean?

R: I have learned that bringing back stuff can mean a lot of problems afterwards, because it has to be carried from one place to another. It is not stuff like that, but people who make their home feel like a real home - who transform space into place as you said. When I move to another place, the first thing I focus on is trying to transform it into something personal. I try to add some colour, by which I mean accents, so that eve-

rything bears some meaning to me. I will change the furniture a little bit in such a way that I feel comfortable in it. Now, if I put this like that it means that it belongs to me. This in fact made me understand that when I have to move to a new place, it will not be a problem for me to change the characteristics of this place so that I feel more comfortable in it.

Over and above, Ana rationalises that this is also why for her the apartment itself does not carry as much weight as its whereabouts onto her sympathy for the accommodation and the swiftness of settlement, in light of how conveniently the former can be corrected to personal tastes and desires whereas the latter cannot. The quantity and quality of nearby transport networks, sufficient parks or green areas, the availability of a wide selection of supermarkets and specialised shops and the proximity of such amenities as a coffee bar, a cafeteria to go out to and, preferably, a restaurant or two, all constitute boxes on Ana's mental checklist with which she gauges a location's suitability as a promising home place. She narrates her thoughts upon inspecting, for the first time, the quarter where she is currently taken residence: "I found several chain stores - a Lidl, an Albert Heijn, a Hema - and after a little bit of a tour through the neighbourhood I encountered a lot of shops that I really like; then I discovered that to reach the city centre takes only five minutes by bike if I cycle fast, so yeah, I was immediately fond of the region. When looking for an apartment I analyse the surroundings first."

Ali, who always has the admirable appearance of being in high spirits, grapples with her homesickness for China differently. Espying her snapping a selfie for the umpteenth time, the researcher approaches her with the question what she in fact does with the pile of photographs she is amassing. She shows him an app on her smartphone, which looks to be an imitation of Snapchat, she operates to share the pictures of herself with her Chinese friends with whom she, for all intents and purposes - judging from the amount of snapshots Ali takes on a daily basis - seems to be in contact almost nonstop. Ana is hooked up with her relatives back in Moldova through thick and thin as well. Not only did she just recently return from a two-week vacation at her mother's house over Easter, where she helped out in the preparations for the celebration party, she and her mother also maintain regular contact through Skype; "no less than three times a week," she emphasises, immediately going on to say - as though this frequency is something to excuse oneself for - that ringing her mother used to be a daily ritual at the time of her two-year master's programme in Poland.

Ana recounts being so faithful to this regimen throughout her studies abroad that, on the busiest of days, the Skype call could consist of a mere exchange of hellos and a promise that tomorrow she would be available for a lengthier dialogue. Ali contacts her mother once or twice a week too and, like Ana, she describes these conversations as conventionally mundane in nature - as if she has never left and they are sitting in the living room together, chatting away about garden-variety topics, such as what kind of activities she has done that week, what kind of activities her mother has done that week, how she is doing, how everybody over there is doing, *etcetera*. “No long discussions,” she alerts, “because when I say, say, say...” - she ventriloquises her hand to make plain that with this she implies rattling on about something frivolous - “... my mother is apt to just excuse herself for dinner and say goodbye.” Uliana sets forth a matching persiflage of the daily Skype calls she has with her relatives, which she reports to transpire as follows: “how are you doing?” “Fine, how are you doing?” “Good, okay see you tomorrow.” Ana’s parents are divorced and her father’s house has no internet connection. Phoning him is expensive, but an endeavour she is willing to pay the money for. She expresses: “it is important to stay informed about what is going on there and to not miss any information that would make us even more distant, that would make us even more foreign.”



Figure 4: *In the beginning I had to do everything by myself.*

A further prominent stumbling block in the spouses process of familiarising Eindhoven is the paucity of a daily work schedule and a discrepancy between objectives and the to some extent

idle actuality of their new quotidian lives - in no uncertain terms: the lack of having a career whilst their husbands are off to the TU/e day in, day out. Barring no one, the spouses are exclusively in possession of master's degrees or international equivalents, hence it is no wonder that an almost unanimously outspoken impressive professional ambition exists amongst them; "I want to follow up my studies by doing a PhD" or "I want to be a successful businesswoman" and "I want to be the manager of a big company" are several outgivings overheard by the researcher during the first reflective session's groupthink on (near) future aspirations. Making dreams like these come true is experienced as a steep challenge by those who are still fixated on naturalising all that is new to them - one that encumbers their potential to establish a rhythm to which they can get attached; "sitting at home all day long really begins to bother me, I want to get out and do something meaningful," one of them complains. Uliana, who moved to the Netherlands half a year ago to reunite with her boyfriend straight after her graduation, but who has not found employment in the meantime, boldly chimes in: "I am so irritated about not getting a job here that I have reached a point where I will either go back to Russia or continue my studies elsewhere." She substantiates her assurance, proving it to be no bluff, as she reveals to already been accepted to a follow-up master in Finland as well as a position within a prestigious Russian company.

Nobody befell the breakdown appending abrupt unemployment as much as it happened to Seda the first weeks after her arrival in the Netherlands, conceding how she was in the blink of an eye deprived of not one, but two jobs; by way of explanation, acquiring a livelihood in the United States, Seda freelanced as a substitute English teacher in the second language department of a high school in the daytime, only to afterwards hurriedly rush herself towards the psychiatric hospital to serve the evening shift - she habitually got home around eleven o'clock, hardly in time to catch eight hours of sleep before repeating the same routine again at sunrise. Be that as it may, Seda never regarded this hectic cadence as a rut. She unveils: "I like to be busy actually, when I am not, I get... well, not depressed, but down you know. If I do not have anything to do, I feel useless. So when I came here, and could not go to school and could not go to work, it was as if I were in prison. That is how it felt in the first days: as if I was about to serve a two-year sentence." Her prison allegory may be a tad drastic, but it helps to make plain just how crucial the role of employment can be for the spouses' sense of at-homeness. Seda enjoys far more free time now, but does not feel more free as a result, on the contrary. Fortunately for her, she no longer rocks the boat in search of employment and rejoices over the ere long prospect of starting a family.

4.3. Places that Resemble Home

One day the spouses gather in the cafeteria adjoining the *Van Abbemuseum* [Van Abbe Museum] to catch a glimpse of the exposition *Vooruit!* [Forwards!] of the Kurdish-Turkish Ahmet Ögüt. Before entering the first exhibit, tour guide Daniel throws light upon the promoted installations, sculptures and videos, breaking down Ögüt's intention to convey, through art, the conflicts that have afflicted his region of origin and which continue to do so this day. Ensuing Daniel's question whether the spouses have heard about, or come into contact with, the artist's work before, Seda declares to have done a brief background check just after the museum visitation was announced on the Get in Touch agenda. Having lived her pre-adolescent years in Turkey, she presumes, enhances the relatability of the displayed art; she pointedly admits to find their meaning accessibly interpretable by having faced the same brawls that inspire Ögüt's makings. This becomes apparent upon moving towards the collection's opener: a barricade comprised of a crushed car, railings, bricks and scrap metal that is decorated with original paintings and which stretches from one wall to the other, preventing visitors from reaching the opposite side of the hall without detouring the whole museum first. The psychedelic krautrock soundtrack accompanying the obstruction transforms it in a festive décor and it promptly reminds Seda of her youth when she and her childhood friends would climb and play on similar barriers erected by angry crowds.

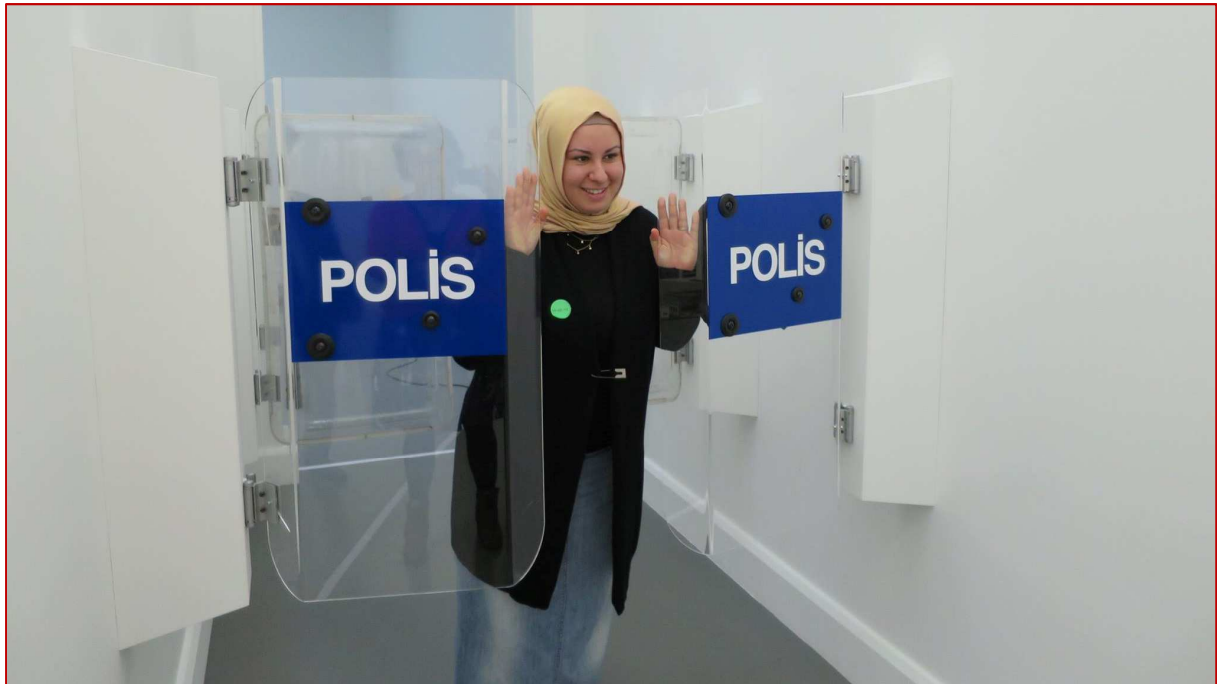


Figure 5: Seda posing with one of Ahmet Ögüt's artworks in the Van Abbemuseum.

In the stark white galleries, the sizeable art objects are visibly distinguished from their purposely neutral staging, abducting people's attention and contemplation. They demand to be watched, but it is clear that the spouses do so in two different manners; whereas the majority accepts the symbolism as Daniel explains any underlying message or motive of their maker, Seda's observations are of a more authentic nature inasmuch as she barely adopts those commentaries and is resolute to regard each piece on her own terms, which is not only signalled by the anecdote in relation to the barricade that she tells the group, but by her excitement for everything of Ögüt the museum put on view and the many stories about her homeland she recounts in reference to those works. As the tour reaches its end, the impression that Seda experiences a greater sense of insideness than her peers is validated as she remarks: "this is something to remember, it felt as if, for a few hours, I was back home in Turkey." Correspondingly, as the spouses wander through Eindhoven's creative hotspot Strijp-S to inspect several of the area's hangouts, it becomes evident that their connection with each venue is influenced by personal traits and histories. The spouse whose brother is a fervent skater, for example, is eminently thrilled by the gigantic wooden indoor skate park AreaFiftyOne, planted in a former factory of Philips - the Eindhoven-based global electronics enterprise.

Ali verbally and nonverbally discloses spirited enthusiasm towards the *Ontdekfabriek* [Discover Factory] they stop by - a lounge that simultaneously acts as a wood shop for children where they can build the figures from their fantasies and afterwards produce films featuring their creations with the help of green screen technology; a keen interest that stems from her former occupation as a handicraft teacher on a primary school. She enjoys a pronounced association with the spot compared to the rest of the group, who merely think of the atelier as a charming idea, despite that she, like the others, had never heard of it before. On the other hand, she appears fairly apathetic towards the place they drop over next: Seats2meet, which is an accommodation where students, freelancers and professionals can come to work on their respective projects for free under the condition that they are willing to share their knowledge with other attendees. Russian spouse Uliana is more intrigued. Unemployed although possessing a university degree in electrical engineering, Seats2meet's concept offers an appealing way for her to feel useful, and reckon her expertise as valuable, once again. "Since it is only a short stroll from my apartment, I definitely consider making use of this service," she states. No more than five minutes later the spouses actually meet with a woman who joined the Get in Touch group at the time her husband was still a TU/e PhD-candidate and had now scheduled a meeting with someone at Seats2meet, which Carola introduced her to years ago.



Figure 6: *The spouses as they are told about the Ontdekfabriek.*

Before the spouses sit down to launch the dialogue of the third and final reflective session - convening at the apartment of Russian spouse Anastasia - they first saunter from her house to the other end of the square, where the well-maintained *Pastoor van Ars Kerk* [Pastor from Ars Church] stands, to be shown around its recently renovated interior, which has been refurbished to integrate the church's modern-day function as one of the headquarters of the foster care organisation *Combinatie Jeugdzorg* [Combination Youth Care]. The house of worship has a distinctly atypical façade, built with the masonry common to terraced houses and supporting a colossal, sharply sloped roof of red tiles that nearly extends all the way to the ground. As such, it bears greater resemblance to the architecture of some American gospel churches than to the traditional Dutch Catholic ones, which as expected does not go unnoticed by Seda who notifies the researcher: “when I walked up to the church I thought to myself how curiously familiar it felt, though I have never seen it before.” The same experience befalls her upon cruising the city centre:

- I:** Are there are other places in Eindhoven besides your own house where you feel at home?
- R:** In Eindhoven? Maybe the centre, because the structure of the streets is very similar to the shopping centre of Istanbul. So when I am walking in Eindhoven's city centre, I feel like I am in Istanbul. And there are usually

a lot of people, so it is crowded all the time, like it is in Istanbul. Just having people around makes it feel like a place - just having people around is good.

I: And that familiarity is what attracts you to the city centre of Eindhoven?

R: Yes.

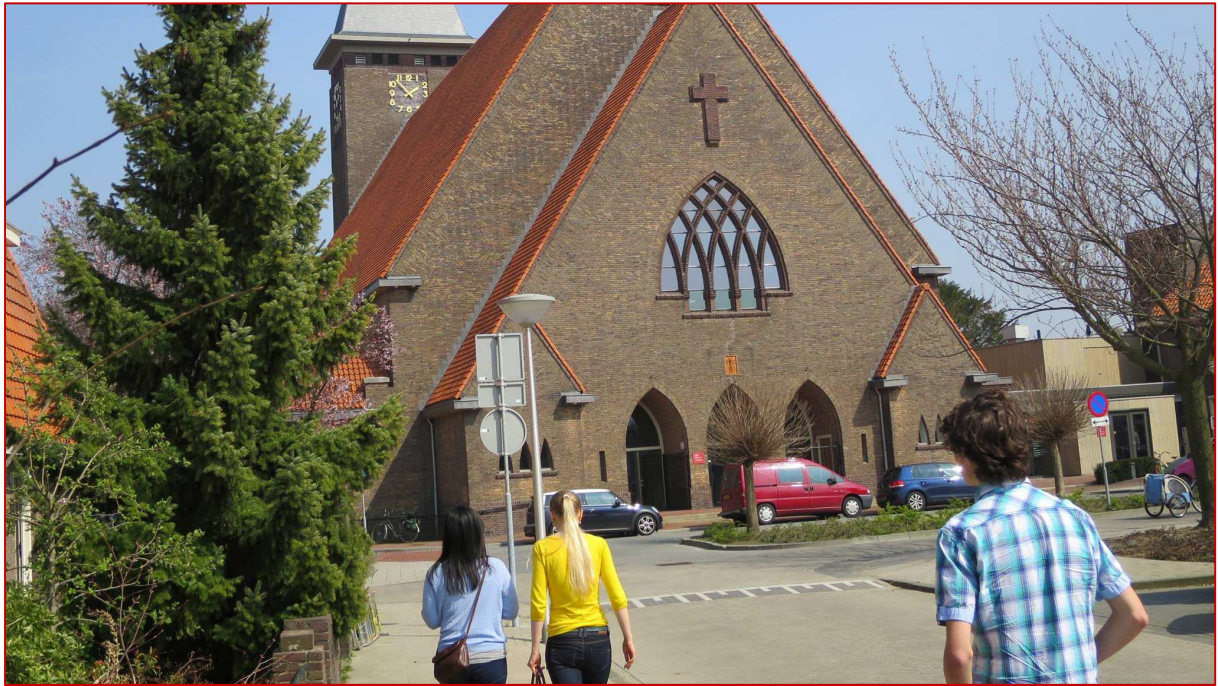


Figure 7: *Haruno and Uliana leading the bunch towards the Pastoor van Ars Kerk.*

The house Ali and her husband occupied up until a few months ago in China stood in the province's capital, which shelters approximately six million citizens - roughly twenty-five times the population of Eindhoven. She recalls the streets being invariably filled to the rafters with crowds of people, hordes of traffic and 24/7 honking klaxons; no wonder she terms Eindhoven - still the fifth largest city of the Netherlands - a quiet and peaceful town. So quiet and peaceful that it brings back memories of the village where her father and mother dwell and where she grew up as a child. Not unlike this place she said goodbye to a long time ago, her current neighbourhood has ample space to allow its residents a modest garden and a multi-story house, Ali enumerates, plus the air is fresh, poles apart from the gargantuan metropolis in which she proceeded to live after marrying her husband and where unhealthy smog turns the skies grey. She supposes that it are these parallels that contributed to the effortless with which she felt comfortable in the new neighbourhood; the thought of ending up in a milieu she had been vested in previously was a positively reassuring one.



Figure 8: Project manager Ad telling Carola and the spouses about Planetree (see below).

Whereas visiting Ögüt's exposition in the *Van Abbemuseum* or Eindhoven's city centre leads Seda to imagine herself back in Turkey, the Get in Touch group's visit to the psychiatric hospital *Landgoed De Grote Beek* [The Large Creek Estate] leads her to imagine herself back in the United States. Graduated from an American university as a clinical psychiatrist, Seda is enthralled by the refinement, capacity and the accessibility for the general public of the institute. She is even more impressed by the so-called Planetree approach that project manager Ad informs the spouses about. He tells, whilst Carola translates, that his work over the past five years has been devoted to bringing a paradigm shift to fruition in the way clinical psychiatry is practiced on *Landgoed De Grote Beek*. Planetree diverts from the centurial top-down dogma that canvasses patients as curable and in need of pills and therapy, and family, friends and hobbies as factors curbing this treatment trajectory. Ad gives details on how this novel program attempts to overturn the old one by promoting a bottom-up and cooperative client-psychiatrist relationship that empowers the residents of *Landgoed De Grote Beek*, furnishing circumstances which help them to cope with their mental disorder, instead of aspiring the impossibility of full recovery. Swarming around him for the larger part of the day, Seda is the one spearheading the arsenal of questions fired at Ad about the monumental assignment, concurrently giving the other spouses, Carola and the researcher an account of the ward she used to work for in the United States and how it compares to *Landgoed De Grote Beek*. "This place

makes me miss my job and my patients,” she sighs as Ad says goodbye, “the past hours were as if I was back in the United States.”

4.4. Language Barriers and Warm Places

Exiting the Seats2meet building, Carola bumps into a friend with whom she catches up for a few minutes, during which the spouses are enticed by the colourful assortment of free postcards, printed with Dutch phrases they obviously cannot read, at the desk. They are indecisive about what to do with them, but their openness draws them to the cards’ puzzling, yet stimulating, fun and bright outlook. It also spurs them to encircle the researcher, interrogating him about the translation of each saying. Card after card is pushed into his arms as he endeavours to give a decent interpretation of each. A lime green one, for example, has the text “*ik zie jou wel zitten*” written on it, which he enlightens literally translates as “I do see you sitting” - an allusion to the idea behind Seats2meet that participants, by perusing a digital map, can request assistance of any other attendee whose labelled specialisation is pertinent to the espied difficulty - but which in Dutch has a witty overtone, uttered by the speaker to express they are attracted to the hearer. Soon enough the rack is emptied as all spouses grab a handful to give to their husbands and explain the pun to them.

This episode depicts how the metaphorical language barrier can turn out to be obnoxiously real if it operates to omit people from engaging in the production of meaning; a native might pass by the counter, notice the postcards, pause to chuckle about the silly play on words and take one with them, whereas the spouses approach the scene more as outsiders for the double entendre resembles gibberish in their eyes - a predicament that, on the face of it, is not easily overcome by frequent encounter, but must be mastered through Dutch proficiency. Reflective session number one ripens into a debate over the complexity of making career in the Netherlands without being fluent in Dutch - a peculiar allegation, considering the lion’s share of the group graduated from beta studies, such as electrical engineering, for which opportunities in Eindhoven abound with the city’s giant multinationals - and reflective session number three is taken up by the Uliana to lament about how her deficient Dutch and imperfect English, in combination with her already shy personality, restrain her in communication and, consequently, in acquainting her neighbourhood. In the interview, Haruno conjointly exemplifies how a lack of confidence in her speaking skills makes her nervous around natives with whom she must interact, owing to the suspicion she has of them that they have an aversion to conferring in English. This is also the reason why, she reckons, Dutch people treat her differently than

they treat fellow nationals; that is to say, in Haruno's experience Dutch citizens talk to her frowningly, curtly and overall less friendly.

Especially in the course of formal or legal drills, the spouses tend to run into exclusion by said language barrier insofar as those proceedings ordinarily stand in need of an exceptionally high level of comprehension as otherwise the repercussions of misinterpretation could be adverse or even dangerous. The Bangladeshi spouse Reffat pitches this concern in one of the Dutch language classes midst which the collective practises their conversation skills by way of a group discussion. She makes the band of women aware of an eye infection she is afflicted with, which ought to be treated with an unusual surgical intervention she wishes to undergo in Singapore where, she hears, a panel of doctors with unequivocal expertise on her malady are employed. Neither her general practitioner, nor the desks of hospitals she consults will supply her with the necessary paperwork for a medical procedure of this gravity however. Reffat supposes that the cause of this impediment lies in the impregnability of the formal Dutch language all official documents are drafted in, of which she cannot read a word. Due to the bureaucratic nature of these filings, she continues to be sent from here to there and back and forth between institutions without making much progress. Upset that she never seems to get the answers, prescriptions or forms she seeks and confused by the Dutch jargon in which most of those affairs transpire, Reffat loses sight of her pressing questions at the *moment suprême* and is impelled to make new doctor's appointments again and again to be fully informed.

In advance of the Strijp-S sightseeing, the spouses are welcomed into the *Portiersloge* [Porters' Lodge] - Eindhoven's information portal for internationals and the starting point of guided tours coordinated by the local *Vereniging voor Vreemdelingenverkeer* [Visitor Centre]. Behind its tiny door lies a fluorescent toxic green lobby with in its middle a grand white architectural model of the city district in a glass case, used by guides to give day-trippers an account of Strijp-S beforehand. It includes a sign that reads '*U bevindt zich hier*' [you are here] with an arrow pointing down at a representation of the crossroad Glaslaan-Philitleaan, which is the address of the *Portiersloge*. Detecting the emblem, Carola cannot help but ask the spouses the tongue-in-cheek question if they are able to figure out where on the replica they are located. They lay siege on the model right away, but their orientation strategy does not prove very efficient, nor successful. Someone discerns one of the miniatures as the *Klokgebouw* [Clock Building] - perhaps the best-known renovated Philips factory, famous for the hefty clock that peaks it and which lights up at night - jubilantly exclaiming "that building

I know, I have even been inside!” Withal, it takes them two or three minutes to ascertain the proper intersection, which Shirin reveals by uncovering the two bus stops in front of the *Portiersloge* first. The spouses’ inability to unravel what is written on the marker constitutes a problem for them to spot the edifice; to distinguish it, in absence of material prominence, from the space wherein it lies embedded. In contrast, the idiosyncratic architecture of the *Klokgebouw* makes it stick out without requiring an arrow accentuating it.

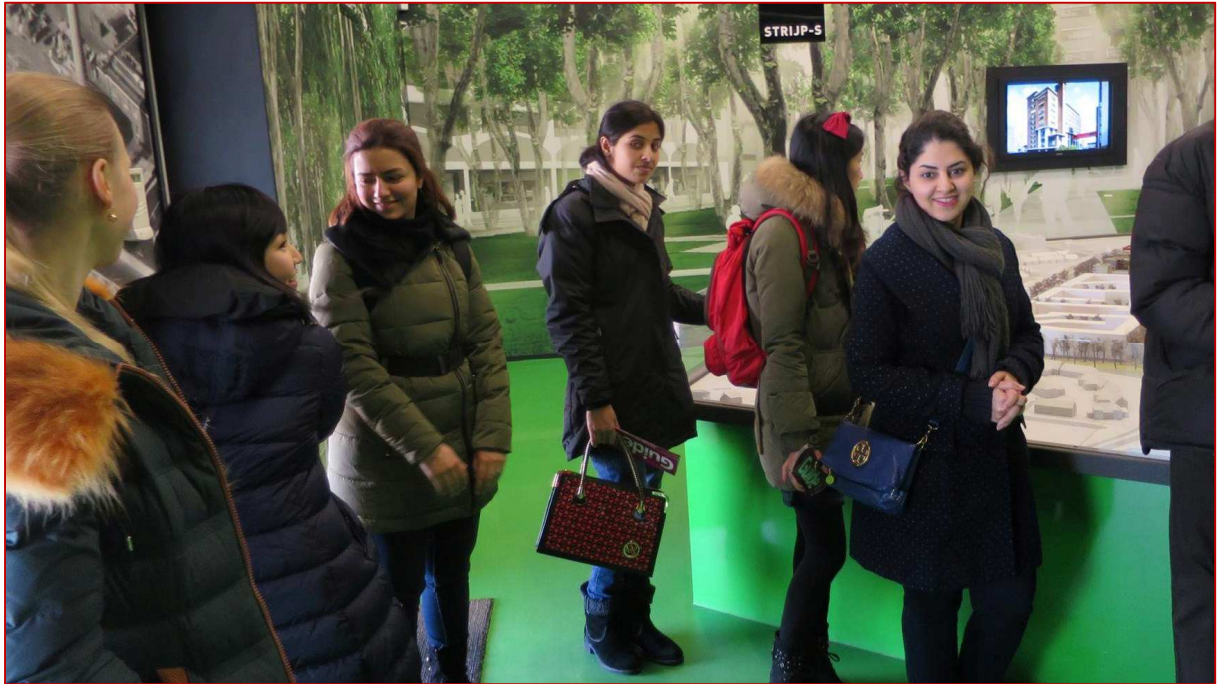


Figure 9: *The spouses inside the Portiersloge with the architectural model of Strijp-S.*

Be that as it may, none of the spouses is the least bit disconcerted by opaque writings monopolising the milieu where their other sensitivities are aroused, as in the case of them looking around in a bucolic agrarian grocer that specifies and prices its merchandise on Dutch handwritten stickers - used *inter alia* to discriminate between twenty herbal tea varieties - but which is nevertheless described by them as hospitable and cosy by virtue of the jazzy panorama of organically coloured and textured vegetables, meats and dairies, lavishly and profess- edly drunkenly showcased, that saturate the lodge with a rich aroma of untreated spices. Before long, the narrow cash register is clogged. Undeterred by their uncertainty about what strain of crop or meat it is exactly that they are purchasing, all spouses buy at least something to take home or hand out amongst the others; the appetising *stroopwafels* [syrup waffles] Seda paid for a minute ago now form the joint luncheon of the Get in Touch group members, who form an obstructing ring in the middle of the already cramped shop, adding further to its

neighbourly setting by delighting yet another sense: taste. The circle unanimously decides that they are indeed standing in a lovely place.

An hour later the spouses descend upon the grand lunchroom that is located in the same urban park as the aforementioned agrarian grocer, which supplies it with fresh and ecologically sustainable farm products to serve its customers with. As everyone is handed their coffee, tea and chocolate cake with a generous dollop of whipped cream, they overlook the broad, yet populous, decor in which they consume their warming beverages and they, roughly in chorus, pronounce that it is wonderfully *gezellig* [sociable] - a Dutch idiom none of them fully understands the scope or meaning of, but which they nonetheless unhesitatingly associate with the described atmosphere of the cafeteria. Through description of what they deem outstanding about this intuitively and physically perceptible ambience, the spouses make intelligible to the researcher why *gezellig* is an appropriate denomination for the brasserie. They firstly refer to the robustness of its timber construction as a reason; secondly, the exterior and interior with various greeneries stacked in vases on plateaus of differing heights. Moreover, nobody is sitting by themselves; everyone is either with friends or with family and conveying the impression of having a relaxing time. The cafe is furthermore festively lighted - as if Santa Claus decided to celebrate Easter in the Netherlands rather than take off for the North Pole after Christmas - and the walls are decorated with handwritten menus on tall chalkboards.

In the interim of one of the Dutch language classes, the teacher, informed about the researcher's interests, throws the six attending spouses the exercise to pick a place where they feel at home besides their own house, paint a word picture in Dutch of that location and elucidate why it evokes such fondness. With no prior knowledge on each other's answers - everyone is given five minutes to pen down theirs in advance of presenting them - half of the spouses decide upon outdoor markets: specifically, the *Woenselse Zaterdagmiddagmarkt* [Saturday Afternoon Market of Woensel] and the *Duurzame Weekmarkt* [Weekly Sustainable Market]. Their justifications once more call attention to the satisfaction such venues content the senses with; testimonials are made about the eye-catching palette of garden-fresh fruits and vegetables on display, the odours of cheese and meat products in the air, the unmistakable tastes of carrot pie or freshwater fish that are exclusively available there and then, *etcetera*. In addition, the three characterise the markets' tone as laid-back, sociably huddled with relatively large numbers of foreigners, natural, organic and healthy; particularly the latter denominators synchronised composes a philosophy - to use the terminology of Spanish spouse Laura - that they

believe bestows those markets with a special sense of place. Uliana makes a similar case for a sparerib restaurant in Eindhoven she sporadically goes to eat with friends, articulating in her best Dutch that it has a warm ambience, which the researcher teasingly counters by requesting her to formulate what she means by that. She replies: “the restaurant is always filled with a nice amount of people who all seem to have a very good time there. The food is yummy and good music is playing in the background; there is a pleasant smell hanging around obviously.”



Figure 10: *The spouses during the Dutch language class, discussing where they feel at home.*

The interviews are time and again taken advantage of to ensure that the researcher recognises that the language barrier only precludes them, as the above examples aim to portray, from grasping certain situations, never people. Partly this is a result of the Dutch population’s knack for, and willingness to communicate in, English, Ana suggests as she analyses why alike inconveniences throughout commonplace undertaking have not befallen her in Eindhoven the way they did in Warsaw. The other spouses resolutely agree and, in general, they rejoice in the people’s eagerness to use English as an auxiliary. “When I went to Brussels, everyone I met spoke French and I did not understand any of it,” Haruno grumbles, “and in Italy they did not speak English either - I feel more comfortable here, where everyone speaks English.” Not always though. The Dutch language class’ discussion serves as a platform for the spouses to ventilate how they take issue with being repetitively answered in English on occasions they do their best to talk in Dutch with someone; natives pick up on their indisputable

accents or their struggle to find the right words and forthwith seize the opportunity to switch over on a *lingua franca* as if a greenhorn's slightest hesitation is an open invitation thereto.

Even Uliana, so shaken by the language barrier that she barely opened her mouth at all during the first week of her stay in the Netherlands - she was not taught English in Russian high school, nor had she ever been expected to speak it - proclaims to have always comprehended the extent of the dialogues she had with either Dutch or internationals. Riposting the researcher's lancing question whether Ali comes up against complications befriending people who do not speak Mandarin, bearing in mind that she, as one of the only spouses, is able to readily express herself neither in Dutch, nor well in English, she declares: "No, I do not think so - yes, my English is a really big problem, but not in making friends, because my feelings towards others are much more important than any expression thereof." For example, she met an elderly Dutch lady earlier that week when she and her husband walked past the woman's house and wanted to take a picture of a graceful flower growing in her garden. Noticing a couple of strangers standing in her front yard, the lady opened her door to greet the two and, with the necessary sign language, she invited Ali to come back next week to glimpse the flower in full bloom. "She is a kind person," Ali apprises, "and you know, she does not speak English very well either, but I believe that you can tell a lot through emotions and actions."

4.5. *Commercial, Cold and Unpleasant Places*

Just when the teacher is about to give Ana the go-ahead to speak on behalf of the place where she feels at home in Eindhoven, Uliana discloses that she had a second example of such a locality she wishes to plead for - one so surprising it gives rise to half-suppressed laughter with the rest of the class: the *Bijenkorf* [Beehive] - a Dutch chain of high-end department stores, which can be found in the major cities, including Eindhoven. In reaction to this giggling Uliana immediately assures that she did not choose it on behalf of being some sort of shopaholic, but for the reason that the warehouse strongly reminds her of Russian equivalents. The effect of cruising the *Bijenkorf* for Uliana parallels that of Seda laying eyes on Ögüt's exhibition in the *Van Abbemuseum* or being a guest of *Landgoed De Grote Beek*; the latter imagines herself in Turkey and the United States respectively, the former in her country of origin Russia. Still, these experiences are somewhat at variance, considering Seda is given cues of past happenings, thereby reliving old and foreign encounters in the here and now, when *Bijenkorf* in fact functions more like a filter that obscures elements reminding Uliana of how she is not in Russia at that moment. Who is to determine, once inside the store's walls

and between its international merchandise, which shut her eyes from the Dutch landscape, where she is truly shopping? It could be the Netherlands, it could be Russia; there is little basis on which to prefer one conception above the other - after all, alike warehouses occur almost everywhere on Earth.



Figure 11: Hoa, Haruno and Uliana completing an exercise in the Dutch language class.

Inside, symptoms of the Dutch language may give away the geographical location of the *Bijenkorf*, but with the proviso that Uliana ambles the boutique more or less obliviously, it assumes no particularly Dutch, nor Russian form; actually, without any existential insiders to run into, *Bijenkorf* is rather placeless. It is presumed placelessness is incapable of fostering at-homeness, but for the spouses, especially those who have only been living in Eindhoven for a few months and are therefore still much more attached to their homeland, placelessness is not contrasted to thoroughly familiar surroundings, but to a sea of unknown space - one that constantly emphasises how they are not at home; i.e. not in Russia in this case. Entering placelessness provisionally relieves Uliana from the pressure of place-making and, although *Bijenkorf* will probably never be cherished with profound affinity, that may in itself be decidedly comforting, which is at least one component of at-homeness. The markets that the rest of the group nominate are not much different in this respect. Their appearance may be less cold than that of *Bijenkorf* and they may have a greater appeal to the human senses, but the spouses' underlying motive for avouching a bond with these venues remains their resemblance to

counterparts in their country of origin - marketplaces are a worldwide phenomenon, existing everywhere in negligibly diverse fashions. Ana puts across how the *Woenselse Zaterdagmiddagmarkt* looks like, and has an identical atmosphere to, the bazar she was accustomed to buy meat and vegetables from in Moldova and, on top of that, Hoa adds: “they sell a lot of Vietnamese products I cannot purchase anywhere else.” What is more, Hoa highlights the possibility to bargain prices there - “just like you do on Vietnamese markets,” she tells ecstatically.



Figure 12: One of the spouses getting dressed up in a kimono in Strijp-S (see below).

The Strijp-S tour continues to have more in store for the spouses who resume by looking in on restaurant *Radio Royaal* [Radio Royal] - thirteen hundred square meters of unpolished industrial design with a French-German cuisine - posted in Philips’ former engine room called the *Energiehuis* [Energy House]; pop centre *PopEi* [Pop Egg] - rehearsal platform, talent factory, music workshop and recording studio for Eindhoven’s upcoming pop acts - established in the *Klokgebouw*; and the *Leidingstraat* [Power Line Street] - a five hundred metres long industrial pergola harbouring an indoor market with a wide range of local shops - unsurprisingly yet another reminisce of Philips impact on the city. After everyone’s legs are tired, the spouses sit down to exchange views on the location they have seen at the terrace of ‘*t Koffiehuisje* [The Tiny Coffee House] - the smallest espresso bar of Eindhoven. Seda has a quick glimpse inside to check the corner for a free table, but as expected it is already packed with a staggering crowd of three customers sipping their latte macchiatos. A consensus is reached in virtually

no time that those “cold, ugly buildings actually conceal a lot of warm and creative places.” They go along with each other’s annotations like: “you would not tell from its grey appearance that so many great hangouts are hidden in Strijp-S” or “it is good that we had this tour, because I would have never found these spots on my own, they need to be discovered.”

The trouble with Strijp-S, Seda points out, is that unless you have somehow gotten to know these cool secret stomping grounds, you will not voluntarily pay a visit to the city district either. She gives a rundown of the locale as if it concerns a ghost town: “it is just buildings with broken windows.” The other spouses see eye to eye with this description. Strijp-S is taken for a cold zone for business - one that is and feels completely abandoned. The latter is contemplated as extra problematic; “it is a strange sensation to walk through Strijp-S, because it is like you are the only one there - so awkward,” Seda grimaces. Ali previously addressed Eindhoven as a peaceful town, which she says to be gratified by as it passes for the placidity of the municipality where she grew up as a child; however, since the spouses are exceedingly born and raised in the biggest capitals of Europe and other world cities, Eindhoven’s pertinent tranquillity is primarily regarded as yet another difference that is problematically accustomed and thus not at all as a positive asset *per se*. “I grew up on the streets of an extremely crowded place where there are a lot of people around you all the time,” Seda imparts, “and so, coming from there to a lonely place like Eindhoven, I am constantly wondering: where are the people? Where is everybody?” Haruno furthermore complains about the limited variety of night-life activities in Eindhoven, which is indubitably directly connected to the city’s laughable relative size in comparison to her place of birth: Tokyo. Ana does not discourse Eindhoven’s small size with an excessively positive frame of mind either. With a notably dissenting tone underscoring her opinion she responds to the researcher’s question:

- I:** What are the biggest differences between the Netherlands, Moldova and Poland that you have encountered?
- R:** I was really unused to living in a small city. In Poland I was living in the capital and also in Moldova I was living in the capital. So there always was a lot of noise, traffic, people and so on. And then coming here it was suddenly silent.
- I:** Well Eindhoven is a pretty big city for Dutch standards.

R: Yeah well... For my standards it is not. I tell people Eindhoven is a big village, because I can reach a different part of the city in fifteen minutes; it is not a real city.

Consonant perceptions intermittently surface in sites of which no one would argue they are vacant in any way, for example the *Studentensportcentrum* [Student Sports Centre] of the TU/e that Ali judged to be an unattractive place, not because she loathes the enmeshed activity of physical exercise - “I do want to improve my body,” she pledges, substantiating her assurance later on in the interview by quoting chapter and verse of her history as a fanatic basketball player and mountaineer - but on the grounds that she endures loneliness there. Loneliness in a fitness crawling with students, employees and staff members? “I do not like it there and think it is a little bit too small, but the more important thing is that I do not have any friends there with me,” she explicates, “there are only muscled men; no girls, no women - it is crazy.” Illuminating how this makes her feel, she point her finger at her husband, articulately verbalising her dissatisfaction: “men always go with him, but there are no girls to...” - she interrupts her sentence, looks up at the researcher and moves her arms, whilst groaning, as if she is pumping iron - “... with me, so I feel lonely. I need my friends.” Haruno struggles to be comfortable in public spaces as she condemns how they spotlight her foreignness due to a perceived scarcity of fellow Asians, which she is unseasoned with, owing to the absurdly sparse diversity of Japan’s population. Hence, she diverts from the other spouses who cling to Dutch echoes of locations from their countries of origin; “yes there are plenty of places that in some way look like Japan, but they do not feel like Japan, because they are packed with white people, making me feel like a stranger,” she urges.

Inquired about other city districts in Eindhoven that she steers clear of, deems unpleasant and generally does not feel at home in, one of the spouses - intentionally anonymised for this paragraph in view of the sensitivity of her unembellished statements - forthrightly acknowledges to reckon neighbourhoods, of which she notices many Turks or Moroccans reside in, as unsafe or scary. If she finds herself lost in one of those streets, she says to instinctively increase the distance between other pedestrians or cyclists and herself. “First, however, I grab my shoulder bag and I put it in front of me,” she elaborates, “then I try not to make eye contact.” Carrying the thing marsupially, as though it is a body armour shielding her from whomever might attack her, it affords her the slightest sense of reassurance - just enough to beat a hasty retreat. The spatial proximity or remoteness of people from Turkish and Moroccan descent

affects her experience of security even when she is insulated by the defensive walls of her own house, which is exposed by what she divulges about the search of her and her partner for a new apartment: “the first thing I ask is if it a safe place, so without those types of people.” Having said that, her anxieties encompass not merely minority populations for she, over and above, developed a phobia for birds and in the Netherlands, she guarantees the researcher, that fearfulness is not mutual:

R: I really do not like birds, that is the problem. I hate them, I am afraid, I am scared. But Dutch birds are not afraid of people.

I: Do you feel less secure because of those birds?

R: Yes. It is nice weather these days, so I want to be outside, but last week, when I was outside, suddenly a bird flew into the garden and I ran into the house. It was scary. I always look around to see if there are no birds.

Ali is terrified of dogs. “I love them in China,” she insists, “but there we keep them very small - here people like dogs with strong muscles and a tall figure.” Her husband, who is in attendance in order to assist in translating the interview questions, tacks on by positing that almost all Chinese men working in the Netherlands are panicky around dogs here. Granted, Ali’s case is slightly exceptional in view of the fact that her aversion stems from an incident of being bitten in her leg by a fully-fledged, aggressive, black exemplar when she was sixteen years of age. On the two occasions that the group comes across one she responds to its intimidating presence, first of all, by widening the space between herself and the animal and, secondly, by retreating behind one of the girls or preferably the taller researcher. Hidden away, she envisions a safe and contracted place where she is protected and may calm down. She reflects: “with a big dog around I feel very nervous, because I remember the time I was bitten; I try to shut my eyes away, hoping that if I do not see the dog, it will not see me either - I pray he does not see or bite me.”

4.6. The Freedom of Living Abroad

The roles are reversed when a farm with a field of free range chickens is paid a visit to, where Ali makes herself as small as possible, not because she is frightened, but so as to keep the poultry from scattering. Imitating the barnyard fowls’ onomatopoeic clucking and their staccato mannerisms, she enchants them into nearing the chain-link fence in the wake of which she eagerly anticipates their landing with her smile turned towards the mobile phone at her

fingertips, all set to snap a quick selfie as soon as a hen or rooster enters the frame. Space clusters into a condensed first-hand place-experience as she squats and the intermediating fence is coolly glossed over as if transparent. This ritual is reinaugurated a minute later as the spouses set foot in the cowshed and follow Ali's example by getting on their knees to pet the new-born calves - or the little moos as Ali calls them. A bit cowed - in the most literal sense of the word - at first, nearly all spouses dare to stroke the full-grown specimens as well, ensuring the researcher's demonstration of their tempered nature; i.e. they did not bite off his hand.



Figure 13: *Ali feeding straw to one of the new-born calves, ready to snap a photo.*

Likewise, the spaciousness of the setting in which they find themselves has unmistakable repercussions for both the spouses' person-environment and their interpersonal relations. By way of illustration, throughout the *Van Abbemuseum* excursion they distribute themselves incongruously in reaction to the atmosphere of each exhibition room; forasmuch as the initial awe over the aforementioned bombastic barricade propels the spouses to closely knit together, the next setup instigates the opposite effect. Stepping into an ivory hall that could host an elephant, but which contains nothing, they spontaneously disperse, taking off in all directions in order to give its walls the once-over, despite them being carbon copies - the artwork, Daniel points out, lies under their feet: a floor made of solid asphalt. By the same token, whenever an ongoing activity, such as a walk through the park, is briefly interrupted to allow Carola to inform her troops about a passed site, sign or associated memoir, the spouses tend to congre-

gate, but the instant ambulation is set in or their bikes are mounted, the group repeatedly crumbles apart in duos or trios, all moving at different speeds, notwithstanding that the leaders' pace is ever so slow. Moreover, there are two breaks in the course of the cycling trip through the *Philips de Jongh Wandelpark* [Philips de Jongh Walking Park]; once on a modest grass court, hemmed in by ditches, bushes and the *Wilhelminamonument* [Queen Wilhemina Monument], and once on a broad and open field. In line with previous observations, the spouses flock together in the first instance, but spread out in the second.

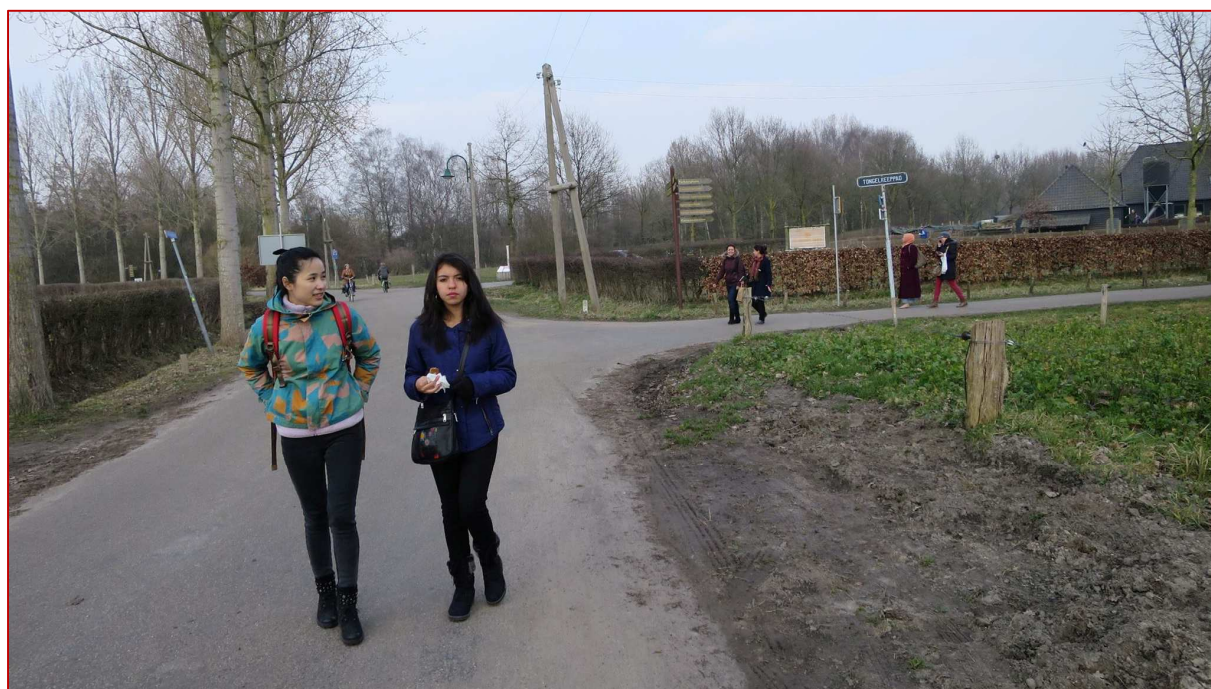


Figure 14: *The Get in Touch group tends to fall apart in duos whilst walking (see below).*

Carola and the researcher are bewildered by how incredibly crowded the bistro of the *Van Abbemuseum* already is by the time they step inside. Due to two conference lunches that are convened in the diner, it is difficult to discover a set of empty chairs, so they have no choice but to join the table of a couple of strangers who quietly chew their sandwiches in back of the café. The spouses are a tad late and it takes a quarter of an hour, plus two perimeter checks by the researcher, before they trickle in one by one, annexing chair after chair to the heartland that is the back corner's table. As the conference lunches draw to an end, the restaurant looks as though it is deprived of ten customers for every woman the Get in Touch group grows, thus inciting an employee to notify the spouses after approximately twenty minutes of the vacant larger tables in the middle of the room where they could sit without obstructing the museum corridor. His word of notice causes them to temporarily interrupt their chitchat, survey the

eatery's volume and acknowledge the quirky sight they have laid the foundations of: a company of about ten people swarming a table for two in the by now completely deserted cafeteria. An attitude of openness encourages mobility and scouting nebulous space, but the above suggests that the inverse holds true as well; in other words, being positioned in the vastness of space seems in itself a catalyst for exploration, for travel and for individual experiences, whilst the creature comforts of place and intermission tranquilise one's inner adventurer by persuading him to stay near others.

To put a match to the groupthink of the third reflective session, Carola devises an impromptu exercise for the participants to complete. Conform the conference's thematic header 'how to keep track on the winding road', alluding to the accumulation of foreseen and unforeseen chicanes on the spouses' progress towards nestling in a strange country, she hands each of them ten pieces of paper she cut down to an appropriate size earlier that morning, on which they are requested to scribble the most troublesome hindrances they are challenged with in daily life and their greatest supports in overcoming these obstacles - "your dinos and your darlings," Carola explains in her own terminology. Curiously, two of them address living abroad in itself as a darling on their cards, arguing that being far afield from their erstwhile social circles, norms and values and expectations opens doors for them to evolve as a person, be themselves and seek new opportunities. "Not like in Japan, where everybody always seems busy trying to outshine one another," Haruno begins her plea, "here I do not feel as if I am continuously being watched and judged by those around me; I can be who I want to be in the Netherlands." She proceeds: "for instance, I find comfort in just sitting anywhere outside, staring at playing children. It is something insignificant, but it nevertheless makes me happy. If I would do that in Japan, I would feel as if I am being frowned upon - here that is not the case." In the interview she shows ambivalence over the question whether this results from a divergence between the Dutch and Japanese mentality or from personal experience:

I: During the third reflective session you said that you do not feel judged here. What did you mean by that?

R: I think Japanese people care more about how other people think about them. Here I do not feel that. Do you? Do you feel that other people are looking at you while you are doing something. For example, when you are eating on the train, do you feel like people are watching you?

- I:** Maybe. I do not often eat on the train, but I can imagine that if I did, I would look around to see if people were not watching me eat and make sure that I eat very properly.
- R:** But do you care? Do you think that they are angry at you that you eat?
- I:** Not angry, but I would think that maybe they do not like it that I am eating.
- R:** Maybe, that is the thing. There are a lot of rules in Japan in public - often not written or mentioned, but just norms and values. Especially after the earthquake, people feel more as if we need to do the right thing for other people; to help each other. Here, I do not feel it that much. People here do what they want.
- I:** But you also said that you do not feel at home in the Netherlands, that you feel like a foreigner.
- R:** Yes, but I do not not like to be a foreigner. I am okay with it.

On a similar note, Iro - one of the earliest Get in Touch members - recapitulates the holiday she spent in her home country Sri Lanka about a month ago, during which a reunion of her university class took place that she deliberately passed upon for the reason that she suspected it to be an event for conceited bigheads - a hunch sparked by her enrolment in a closed Facebook group comprised of approximately twenty former classmates, which she claims predominantly serves to ostracise those without admission to the online platform and to badmouth them behind their backs. Iro makes plain that she despises these folks and is happy to have ditched them for now she is unrestricted by the prospect of being gossiped about. Knowing the place and its people, Iro boasts existential insideness in her Sri Lankan territory. Correspondingly, this also implies that they themselves are known by the other insiders and thus vulnerable to their gaze. On Dutch soil she has nothing to fear; as an outsider, she distinguishes insiders as occupying a different life-world, apathetic towards hers. It leaves Iro and Haruno cold how they are regarded by people they do not know and who do not know them. In point of fact, their openness has the earmarks of being more at-ease in the unfamiliarity of space than in the density of place. One week later, Dutch women's glossy magazine *Mijn Geheim* further confirms this conclusion by publishing an interview article conducted with Anastasia, the title of which announces in a playful white font "*In Nederland ervaar ik meer vrijheid en kan ik doen wat ik zelf wil*" - a quote extracted from the transcript that translates as "In the Netherlands I experience greater freedom and feel as if I can do whatever I want."



Figure 15: *Iro and Haruno as they have written down their dinos and darlings.*

For the duration of one Dutch language class, the three attendees debate the theme of at-easiness and being at-ease in the Netherlands; in spite of their not seldom confusion of the concept with that of liberalism, each is definite in her pronouncement that it is indeed less burdensome to be yourself here by virtue of both the country's progressive norms and the spouses' outsideness to their unfamiliar environment. Natalia considers it out of the question that she would ever go to her work in Ukraine wearing red nail polish or red tights, afraid of, and kept in tone by, what others might think of her and whisper to one another, or what if somebody comes up to her to bitterly point out the intolerable extravagance of her outfit? "You have rules, norms and values about this as well," she stresses to specify that it is more than purely the open-minded angle of the Dutch population that runs interference for the boldness of being clothed in whatnot, "but I feel much less bounded by those, because few people know me here." Hoa believes to enjoy greater independence from the community than she did in Vietnam and appraises this autonomy as pleasant in behalf of the worries about peoples' opinion of her it eliminates. Reffat is also convinced; "compared to Bangladesh, here I am far less scared of people's reaction whenever I tell my opinion about something or when I openly disagree with what someone is saying," she vents.

4.7. At-Homeness at Threat

At the same time as that Ali is taking photos of herself and the chicken at the farm the Get in Touch group is visiting, Ana recaps the shocking incident of two weeks back when a fire outbreak seized the room and life of the Turkish TU/e post-doctoral engineering trainee Özhan Coskun, who lived only two doors further down the hall of Ana's apartment building. Although the technical research report of the police demonstrates that the fire has presumably been caused by an unfortunate accident in the kitchen, Ana nonetheless says the disaster has made her apprehensive of her own condo. She was host to three guests who would spend the night in her apartment that day, whilst her husband went elsewhere with a mate of his. The quartet went to bed fairly late and Ana could not catch much sleep by cause of a fever, so she was the first to notice the alarm going off around four o'clock in the morning. With a pinch of drama, she rehashes her actions in the literal heat of the moment: "I opened the door and, oh my God, a lot of smoke and such a string smell - when I breathed, the smoke suffocated me."

Wisely, Ana ran back in, woke up her friends and yelled that they ought to gather their precious belongings, put on their coats and follow her outside as fast as they can. Within minutes they were out on the curb and it was only then, witnessing dark clouds emerging from one of the windows, that she realised just how close the fire had broken out to her own apartment. They stood there for three hours before the fire-fighters declared the building safe to enter again. Ana analyses how it was possible for the flames to consume much of the residence with no alarm bells ringing: "it is a problem with the smoke detector's sensor. The thing is not located in the kitchen, but in the corridor, so if the door in-between is closed, the smoke does not reach the sensor immediately - it is not well located I think. Everything inside the man's apartment was synthetic, making a bit of smoke enough to be suffocated by; he could have died three times in the time it took for the alarm to go off." This malfunction on top of the accident itself have made Ana concerned about the safety of her own apartment, all the more as she is still reminded of the hazard by the smell that has not blown over since.

Supposing that the house is the cardinal trestle of one's contented sunrise-to-sunset, it is not relinquished at the drop of a hat, however, conceding an event, development or issue kindles the deterioration of any at-homeness ingredient - warmth in this illustrative example - proportional damage may be inflicted on the house's endowment to bind its inhabitants to it. The conviction of invulnerability that is rudimentary to the place-making of home is as experientially corroded by the calamity as the incinerated apartment has been physically. The factual

risks - or there being none - is irrelevant; the imagination thereof, innervated by the consternation over the flames and smoke, is what counts after all. Left unable to adequately supply a chronic demand of assurance and nurture, Ana's apartment displaces her and drives her to feel not-at-home in it - impressions that one can assume are more readily available to those who have not yet had much time to invest in their domicile and therefore still lack the most profound sense of place: the spouses. On two separate occasions, spouses share stories about issues they experience, or have experienced, with their respective apartments, that are complementary to Ana's account, be it a tad less spectacular.

Chased out of one of the TU/e library's studios that Get in Touch presses into service for the Dutch language classes by a team of students who reserved it for the next two hours, the attending spouses make some conversation in the hallway outside until one of them drops the question: "does one of you know how to get rid of pigeons?" Perplexed glances of the other spouses, Carola and the researcher persuade her to elaborate a bit more on the context of her out of the blue inquiry. She elucidates that cacophonous birds are terrorising the neighbourhood around the new apartment building she has been designated by the municipality with their cooing and that she must, sooner rather than later, plot a contrivance to shoo them. Unsure about what possible lifehacks - if any exist at all - might thrive to eliminate her feathered botheration, the fellowship mutes - a silence the researcher breaks by wisecracking: "you did not draw the shortest straw with regards to accommodation, did you?" A few days earlier she had namely also complained about malaise with her new home: a saturated and irremovable cigarette smell left there by the former owner. She almost starts tearing up as she concedes "no, not really" in the saddest voice and with the saddest look on her face.

It was a terribly sluggish and helter-skelter odyssey that brought Seda and her husband Furkan to the doorstep of their apartment in Eindhoven the first time around and she ventilates how this entrance far from reimbursed their exhaustion and distress. Coming from a whale of a five bedroom detached house in the United States to a single room studio of barely 38 square metres here in the Netherlands was bothersome at best. She construes feeling not at home at all in the awkwardly pint-sized dwelling, especially in the prospect of being left by herself the entire day as Furkan labours at the TU/e, working on his PhD. The narrow space between those four walls imprisons and disheartens her. The thought of having to be alone in it for such extended periods of time is enough to make her claustrophobic she adds. Throughout the initial weeks or months of her advent, Seda could not manage to regenerate in their apartment;

instead, she only got more desolated by it. Her own home displaces her the same way as that the anxiety over a potential fire hazard displaces Ana and noise and smelly nuisances displace one of the other spouses. There is a reason why Seda's situation is narrated in present tense as later in the interview the following communication emerges:

I: So you are still living in that small apartment?

R: Yes we are, but we are actually thinking about moving out. We have to, because - as I think I told you - we want to start a family, so we need a bigger space for the baby. Right now I have no spot in the house to put the baby's crib. I can't even drop a needle; it is that clustered.



Figure 16: *Seda and Furkan do not want to move out of their small apartment.*

I: But I hope you have begun feeling at home in it by now.

R: Yes, I was just thinking about that. When me and Furkan talk about moving out I am like: "oh my God how am I going to move out of this place." Right now it feels like home to me, even though it is a small place. So sometimes I am like: "I do not want to move out of here and especially this area." I do not want to have to readjust again by moving.

I: That is interesting, because first you really did not feel at home in your apartment, because it was so small, and now you do not want to leave it.

R: Yeah. The first days I did not feel at home, but then the further I got used to it... I made my apartment. First it was very empty, but I made it a home. I got a TV, a couch, I made it look nice - or at least tried to. So now it is like a home you know.

I: What kind of stuff did you do to make it feel like a home?

R: Like putting pictures of my family around. It is like my husband and I built it together. We bought furniture together and we built them, because you know we buy from IKEA. I mean, we actually built the furniture together. It is like I have memories there right now; I built memories in one and a half year. So, thinking about leaving them there, is just... I have an attachment to that place.

4.8. *Comfort Outside of the House*

Biding her time waiting for the other spouses to reach the coffee shop of the *Van Abbemuseum*, Seda notifies Carola about the short vacation together with her husband she has made reservations for that morning: a weekend sojourn to Almelo - a town in the Dutch *Achterhoek* [Rear Corner], which is celebrated as one of the country's least urbanised regions - where they will stay in a competitively priced bed and breakfast in the interest of being, in her own wording, "away from technology for a while, simply savouring the countryside." She tells Carola: "I love to come to rest in it, to breath in the fresh air." Judging from how Seda rehearses to feel on occasions that she is somewhere far remote from the urban landscape, it sounds not unlike a meditative experience; "overnighting in a provincial ranch is something I was accustomed to do every once in a while at the time I was still living in Istanbul, it is wonderful to just leave all of the city behind for a few days and to become one with nature." Seda gives an inkling of fleeing telecommunication and a bustling modern lifestyle in pursuit of serenity, but in the same vein she moreover solicits liberation from everyday rhythms and the axiomatic quietness they bestow one's itinerary with - which are conceivably, under these circumstances, beheld as a rut rather than a blessing - as a way to pioneer experiences apart from those recurrently provided for by the regularity of established routines. She is asked this during the researcher's interview with her:

I: I overheard you telling Carola, in the *Van Abbemuseum*, that you had booked a weekend to Almelo. Earlier you said that you like crowdedness. That cannot be the case in Almelo.

R: That is a different thing, because then you see nature. There you do not want people, because it is a place you just want to go to for relaxation. And I loved it there. I even told my husband that I wished we could buy a house around there and just come over on the weekends. I did not want to come back to Eindhoven, seriously. I told my husband: “you can leave me here, pay for whatever rent and sell the other apartment or rent it out, because I am staying here!” After breakfast I just told my husband: “let’s walk around and enjoy the green.” I sat on the grass and there was no one around, but it was so beautiful. And just watching the cows, the trees and the quietness - listening to the quietness was so peaceful. Yeah, I found serenity there.

I: So Almelo was a different experience?

R: Yeah, definitely. It is green and animals are just walking around freely, like cows. Turkish villages are not that organised. They are old - you do not want to go there, because it is not relaxing. But in Almelo I felt so relaxed. I literally did not want to come back.

I: But I also heard you saying that in Turkey you did similar things. Something about going to a ranch?

R: My husband’s family own a ranch in Istanbul. It is an hour from their house in the city. They organised it in a way that it looks really pretty, but the houses around it are not. When we wanted to get out of the crowdedness and business, we just went there to relax.

Seda effectively escapes familiar place in search of unfamiliar space and does so with a motive of finding heightened contact, which she indeed attains, considering her run-down on experiencing serenity and peacefulness whilst “listening to the quietness” as she so poetically makes vivid. Heightened contact is indeed affiliated with such escapades, but in addition she fixes her rural outing also for the sake of regeneration, italicising relaxation and respite multiple times as paramount benefits sought in, and harvested from, the brief recreation. Regeneration is a mode of rest that is commonly band together with at-homeness, instead of out-of-placeness, but as earlier accounts exemplified, the house does not always operate as optimal in this department as the owner would hope. One bothersome element may be enough to precipitate the antipode of regeneration: fatigue. This, because of the extensive amount of time continuously spent inside, corrosively exposed to the influence of that one element. During

the first reflective session, Seda remarks that, despite not being too overwhelmed by any trepidation upon her arrival to the Netherlands, it took her quite a while to regenerate sufficiently to resume the lifestyle she had just shifted to the other side of the globe. She says: “I needed some time to rest before starting something new here - my body needed rest, six months of it.” Not so surprising bearing in mind how annoyingly teeny her apartment is and how much of a long-drawn-out process it was for her to get used to living in a cramped space, for which reasons it, for a long time, malfunctioned as a personal centre of rest. Escaping from such a confined capacity must surely expedite leisure and the recuperation of energy, which is by all means not merely Seda’s motivation, but that of most people who book their vacations.

Uliana sporadically sojourns at a spot where heightened contact goes hand in hand with regeneration as well and, much the same as in Seda’s recital, it concerns an outdoor, composed and green area: the *Karpendonkse Plas* [Pool of Karpendonk] - a recreational park she discovered via her somewhat unorthodox daily practice of drawing upon Google Maps to propose her locations she has never been to before and then go there by bike as a way of exploration; “I like knowing where I live,” she defends. It was on one of these trips a few weeks back that her attention was caught by the large pond that characterises the *Karpendonkse Plas* and which prompted her to enter and take a gander. Uliana imparts how she already sensed at that point what an amiable place the park is, whereupon the researcher wants to know which constituents make it so appealing to her; “the nature, the lake, the trees, the rabbits, the birds, everything really,” she sums up a rejoinder that holds its own against Seda’s evocation of the even-temperedness she experienced on her holiday to Almelo. A stroll through the park, preferably around the waters of the *Karpendonkse Plas* itself, is an activity Uliana is all too happy to undertake in her spare time, but it is not solely her legs that get unleashed during ambles, it is also her mind - for she gladly takes a breather from the tour around the lake to plump herself on one of the droves of wooden benches scattered across, relishing the sunshine warming her face, leaf through a book she brings along and, indeed, ponder about her life.

Uliana puts the latter into perspective: “I go to the park to think about what I am going to do next, because right now I have some complicated choices to make.” Accordingly, she favours wandering the *Karpendonkse Plas* alone and has no difficulty staying for hours at a time. “I do not think that I would go to the park if a lot of people were there, since I go there for the quietness,” she notes, explaining that retracting herself in the hush of public green areas has been a strategy to weather the storm of having an hurried lifestyle in a big city ever since she

started adulthood in Saint Petersburg. The comparison to what Seda has been saying is again easily made; Uliana evaluates crowdedness as an asset to the warmth of places, but admittedly not in case she is on a quest for regeneration - at that instant she hankers for silence, assigning affection to those places that can offer it. She concludes: “I feel that maybe soon I will leave the Netherlands and that is why I would like to visit the sites that are most dear to me one last time, and the *Karpendonkse Plas* is my favourite - I love it.”



Figure 17: *The two Russian spouses Uliana and Anastasia in the latter's apartment.*

5. Conclusion

With the empirical results extensively narrated in the previous chapter, the first part of this thesis' research question has been answered:

What are the characteristics of expat spouses familiarisation with the new localities they inhabit that empirical phenomenological analysis reveals and which discrepancies can be discovered between these findings and humanistic geography theories on space and place whereupon such framework can be expanded or nuanced?

Now, in answering the second part of this research question, the conclusion will specify where the empirical findings do not align with the humanistic geography theories expounded upon in the theoretical framework, demonstrate the cause of each of these disparities and, importantly, set forth propositions on how to amend those theories so that they correspond better with practice. It will advance four contributions: two with reference to Edward Relph's framework and two with reference to David Seamon's framework - which will be summarised at the end of the chapter.

5.1. Propositions Regarding Relph's Framework

Nearly all the spouses from Get in Touch who participated in this research have had their home in the Netherlands for less than a year. In some cases the span of their residence in Eindhoven is hardly expressible in weeks, signifying just how new everything must be for them. On top of that, they are not granted the chance natives get to adapt gradually to their neck of the woods. They are thrown in at the deep end, compelled to surmount not only environmental, but also socio-cultural separateness - an in itself contradictory evolution inasmuch as the spouses, in the course of its transpiration, are unremittingly confronted with their own foreignness, admonished they do not belong. Each of the spouses needs to come to grips with personal quagmires of unforeseen multifariousness, although there are three recurring themes which constitute a leitmotif in their hardships: the seclusion from family and friends; the brusque shift from a dynamic, employed lifestyle to a passive and unemployed one; and, lastly, the language barrier. These three, in conjunction with abundant dissimilarities between the left-behind and the recently-entered country that are petty on the face of things, but which might prove to be markedly strenuous to overcome, have the thorny effect of both muddling

the spouses' process of taking root in the unfamiliarity they turned up in, plus inspiring a yearning for the nest they are no longer a physical part of, especially for those moving abroad for the first time in their lives.

A majority of the spouses contact their parents, family and friends through Skype or telephone virtually on a daily basis and with a sense of normalcy as though they never left the house so as to reduce the distance between them. Befriending new people is an uphill battle with in the back of their minds the concession that every relationship is committed to with the knowledge it will presumably be temporarily, lasting until the expat life inevitably intervenes. Withal, some of them have brought artefacts from home with them in order to be reminded of their history, whilst those who deliberately brought none seem to have difficulties fomenting a more than superficial acquaintance with their house, overlooking that it is by such "components and furnishings, [and] not so much by the entire building," that the "enchanted images of the past are evoked" that make us "think of the house as home and place" (Tuan, 1977, p.144). Not to put too fine a point on conserving stable linkages with, and affectionate sentimentality towards, the home front, which is by all means beneficial to one's psychological well-being, but being mentally located neither here, nor there, but somewhere halfway, is the lead cause of an initial discordance between the outlined humanistic geography theories and the spouses' experience of settling down in the Dutch city of Eindhoven. Tuan (1977, p.6) identified geography's constitutional dualism in the wonderfully digestible aphorism "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value." This maxim breaks down that the act of place-making - converting nebulous space into accustomed place - is a natural consequence of the occupancy of a location, as well as a culmination generated by the works of one key fuel: time.

Weighted against their husbands, the people who are born and raised in Eindhoven, or other natives who at some stage in their lives decided to move there, the progress of familiarising the space that the city presents is undergone in a unique manner by the spouses. Unlike the participants of this research, natives are not encumbered with the double burden of adjusting to a strange setting and to strange people, norms, values, rules, practices, *etcetera*. The spouses instinctively compensate for this double burden through the integration of a particular selectivity in their place-making strides, the criteria of which get designated by dint of the foreign background they are thus still doggedly attached to. In other words, they play the game fairly offbeat in that they do not place-make the spaces that are antithetical to the ones they

were used to run across in their former homeland as much as they adhere to spaces bearing physical or atmospheric resemblance to those wherein they made themselves at home in their country of origin. Correspondingly, appreciable energy is preserved as no conception of new-fangled meaning ensues; merely a remembrance of the meaning they once bestowed places with that they are nowadays far removed from. This unpremeditated favouritism towards scenes that trigger memories from old times to surface and, in essence, to be relived there and then, absolutely helps the spouses to make themselves at home somewhere swiftly and with little effort. It also reinforces aforementioned ties to their motherland and is to a degree responsible for instigating indifference towards other sites that do not have earmarks of dearly held lost places.

Nonetheless, thanks to the revival of past place-experiences, the spouses assume some form of insideness within these specific locations' perimeters; "to be inside a place is to belong to it and identify with it," which holds true in those instances, whereas elsewhere in Eindhoven the spouses discern sites almost invariably from an outsider's perspective, experiencing them as visitors, rather than residents (Relph, 1976, p.49). What the spouses describe going through whilst being positioned in one of those spots, due to which they are led to dwell upon flashbacks, cannot be captured by any of the four clear-cut classifications of insideness - 'vicarious', 'behavioural', 'emphatic' and 'existential' - that Relph (1976, pp.52-55) lists. Subsequently, Relph (1976, p.62) warns that, "with the exception of existential outsidership which replaces all the others, these various types of [place] identity are not discrete, nor mutually exclusive, nor unchanging." In light of this clause it is germane to make allowances for the ascertained mismatch between the revelation propounded above and its unavailability as a class within Relph's theoretical systematisation, either by expanding the current framework with the premise that any guise of insideness, apart from existential, may at all times be facilitated by indirectly associated place-experiences, harked back to as a result of the places' physical or atmospheric similarity, or by christening it an additional - fifth - genre of insideness; conceivably something along the lines of 'retrospective insideness'.

Notwithstanding that the majority of locations where the spouses assert feeling at home in would fall under this supplementary tier of insideness, the researcher witnessed, and was told about, occasions in the interim of which they caught at least certain at-homeness' symptoms, that would most accurately pertain to what Tuan (1977, pp.136-138) and Seamon (1979, pp.84-85) formalise as the intimacy or the warmth that the comfort of unwinding in a place

may precipitate, in other settings too. “Warmth refers to an atmosphere of friendliness, concern and support that a successful home generates” (Seamon, 1979, p.84). Venues blessed with such warmth, in keeping with the spouses’ involvement, have ambient virtues in common that are best examined in juxtaposition with a city district they collectively appraise as cold, forsaken and unattractive: Strijp-S. Black, white and, above all, grey tones monopolise the industrial region and further add to its already dilapidated pretence, outwardly cloaking the entire locality in an unassailable sameness - placelessness - that Relph (1976, p.109) would surely blame on the historical establishment of the multinational Philips, which “brought with it a standardisation and gigantism that was both potentially and actually damaging [as] the sheer scale of [such] business enterprises tends to obliterate places [...] simply [by] building over them.”

In contrast, sites that excite the spouses by an impression of warmth welcoming them in, show every sign of heeding the reasoning of Tuan (1977, p.12) that a place only “achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses.” It concerns venues where there is a festively multi-coloured interior to be seen, where there is a convivial buzz of comrades having a good time together to be heard, where there is a gamut of appetising foodstuff to be tasted, where there is a scent, arising from these products to be smelled, and where there is an assortment of textures and haphazardly arranged objects to be touched. Crowdedness, which is pretty much favoured by all of the spouses inasmuch as they, without exception, all grew up in populous cities from around the world where they got used to, and knew nothing else but, having a bunch of people around, buttresses an unmistakable, sixth, sense of sociable ambience to a place as well, notably if the crowdedness is one the spouses can identify with - women or other internationals for example - so that they do not appear socio-culturally excluded by it.

“To a very considerable degree we neither experience nor create places with more than a superficial and casual involvement,” Relph (1976, p.80) writes, construing the “now widespread inauthentic attitude of placelessness.” Having said this, he opens up the nexus of the theoretical distinction between placelessness and space as defined by Tuan (1977, p.6); the latter is a personal experience, the former a universal one - by way of explanation, what an insider perceives as place, an outsider perceives as space, but placelessness is perceived identically. Hence, whereas it is no sinecure to place-make space, it is absolutely paradoxical to place-make placelessness, supposing no attempt of rehabilitation is endeavoured. Despite that Relph

himself barely stipulates explicit clarification on the proposition specified above, it is possible - although never pursued by anyone - to link the inherent logic of the hypothesis to Seamon's conceptualisation of basic contact, coupled with the contention of Tuan (1977, p.12) that place-making is an operation performed by all the senses synchronically.

Basic contact is laid out by Seamon (1979, pp.115-117) as “the precocious perceptual facility of body-subject, [...] helping its actions to be in phase with the world at hand” and he goes on to call it “an essential component of at-homeness, [providing] a perceptual matter-of-factness” that helps people to save enough cognitive energy for other forms of encounter. Tuan (1977, p.72) explains that “when a person comes to know a [place] they know a succession of movements appropriate to recognised landmarks.” Accordingly, body-subject can be seen as relinquishing basic contact in placelessness, since furnishing an adequacy of recognisable landmarks around which a certain habituality can be whipped into shape comes to naught in its monotony. Placelessness thus depletes people of the perceptual matter-of-factness needed in order to salvage ample cognitive energy to take in the space they are in, handicapping any place-making thereof. However, taking in mind how the spouses, nested in Eindhoven too short a time to get sufficiently installed, do not foster basic contact anywhere - let alone in the locations visited on the Get in Touch trips and tours - yet immediately enjoy greater fondness of those places that are composed of a diverse spectrum of stimuli in comparison to those that are not, uniting said arguments of Tuan and Relph via Seamon's notion of basic contact turns out to be invalid in practice. An empirically less erroneous description would be sketched if their dialectics were to be run via Seamon's notion of warmth instead. Simply put, places are warm, because they are experienced through all the senses, whilst placelessness is cold, because it is not experienced through all the senses; as long as it remains so, it cannot achieve the same concrete reality as place - i.e. it cannot be place-made.

Nevertheless, an unpredicted finding derived from the empirical research was that of one of the spouses ostensibly experiencing vibes startlingly similar to what has just now been interpreted as retrospective insideness, be it somewhere that Relph (1976, p.114) would determine as placelessness without question, namely a *Bijenkorf* retail store, on the grounds that within those outlets “they create wells of stone and steel that offer few clues to the identity of any particular city.” As a matter of fact, that is precisely why they are capable of eliciting such emotions for, as Relph (1976, p.114) himself points out, “the retail outlets of companies assume similar characteristics everywhere [...] and all the other visual forms of international

business provide reassurance to the confused and weary traveller.” He thereby raises a decisive divergence between the respondent’s experience and that of retrospective insideness. In this case, the *Bijenkorf* awakes no sentiments for places the subject was specifically and heavily attached to, nor is she incited to mentally dwell on them in the present-day. Principally, placelessness’ scarcity of indicators able to nail down its geographical location permit inspectors to temporarily lose sight of their own positioning, which sounds considerably worse than it is in reality, insomuch as it are these manifestations of difference that, as has previously been debated, find it necessary to constantly tell them they do not belong and are out-of-place.

Relieved from this nonstop pressure, the spouses may indeed recover brief respite in placelessness’ inauthenticity which does not clamour for acclimatisation, supplementing one more defence to the analysis of Relph (1976, p.140) on why placelessness must not be canvassed in exclusively negative terms and that, “while our experiences may have a shallowness, they also have great breadth [for] placelessness also means freedom from place and [...] comfort.” It is important not to lose sight of the time period in which Relph wrote about the threat of placelessness for, in the late seventies, commercialisation was still in the process of developing on a global scale. Shopping mall culture started out in the West, but has globalised since with indistinguishable shopping centres popping up in all the world’s major cities (Sari, Kusuma & Tedjo, 2012, p.157; Sýkora, 1994, p.1160). The spreading shopping mall culture gave rise to new behaviours, remodelling urban lifestyles (Erkip, 2003, p.1073). Wandering those complexes is less about buying the articles one needs and more about leisure, recreation and socialising (Sari et al., 2012, p.157). The participants of this research, predominately of the 24-28 age cohort, grew up in societies that were already ingrained with this shopping mall culture and belong to the generation that Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz (2010, p.509) explain to “find shopping a pleasurable experience” in itself. As such, this thesis reinforces the conclusion of Shim and Santos (2014, p.113) that, for this generation, “shopping malls and the experiences they facilitate do increasingly matter” and that they therefore need to be “understood as a negotiated reality between the forces that create placelessness and those that enhance the appeal of these malls.”

5.2. Propositions Regarding Seamon’s Framework

“Space lies open,” Tuan (1977, p.54) notes, it “is a common symbol of freedom, [...] it suggests the future and invites action.” Broken away from the pacifying demarcations of place into the capacitating boundlessness of space, humans are inclined to give in to the temptations

that spaciousness introduces: to move around in it and to explore - basically, to make good use of its afforded scope - which are impulses underlying the foremost understanding of what space entails, that is, “having room in which to move” (Tuan, 1977, p.12). The spouses embody these assumptions impeccably. In moments of intermission and moments of panic, they resort to, or try their hand at spawning, a place for themselves, and whilst being in place, they closely knit together, feeling secure and placid; the minute they set themselves in motion, and space opens up for them, they disperse, absorbing as much of the surroundings as they can. The spouses undertake the multifarious Get in Touch trips and tours into the unfamiliar territories of Eindhoven, sustaining a receptive attitude that corresponds to the orientation Seamon (1979, p.118) labels openness: “a situation in which the person strives for fuller understanding of the world because he feels comfortable and at ease. [Openness] is less associated with obliviousness [...] and more related to watching, noticing and heightened contact.”

In this context, comfortable refers to the at-homeness determinant Seamon (1979, p.79) defines as rootedness - “the power of home to organise the habitual, bodily stratum of the person’s lived space” - and at ease to the one Seamon (1979, p.83) defines as at-easeness - “the person who is at home can be what he most comfortably is and do what he most wishes to do.” He insists that rootedness is a precondition to support openness; without it, he is convinced, vital cognitive energy is squandered on the sort of behaviours a person usually accomplishes automatically, conserving too little of it to engage in an active-reactive interrelation with the world around him or her. Rootedness is a state of being that is, to the exclusion of anywhere else, attained in meticulously acquainted place. It follows that Seamon repudiates the idea of bolstering openness in space, sowing the seeds of another inconsistency between the empirical findings of this research and the outlined humanistic geography theories in view of the fact that the spouses were not only observed doing exactly what Seamon deems undoable - bolstering openness in space - but moreover reported undergoing the with openness affiliated encounter of heightened contact in locations where they were incontestably not rooted, for example on vacation or in a park they visited for the first time.

That someone cannot be rooted in space is an indisputable statement for the reason that if “body-subject comes to know the placement of home and its relative location in terms of paths, places, people and things” - the exposition Seamon (1979, p.79) gives of rootedness - it transforms that space into place, as place, or “to be in command of space, [...] means that the objective reference points in space [...] conform with the intention and the coordinates of the

human body” (Tuan, 1977, p.36). To demonstrate how the spouses, in opposition to Seamon’s formulation of the abstraction, are still able to be at ease in space, one must once more put the notion of insideness under a magnifying glass; more accurately, its existential appearance, about which Relph (1976, p.55) declares: “it is the insideness that most people experience when they are at home and in their own town or region, when they know the place and its people.” The quote implies that an existential insider has knowledge of all other existential insiders of the place in question and is, by the same token and in the same degree, known by all of them. It is this insideness the spouses endured abiding in their country of origin and that, especially for those stemming from conservative or traditionalist regions, constituted a permanent and stringent tension to comply with the formal and informal rules, norms and values of keeping up a proper public image, making it both difficult to be at ease in the sense of being yourself and doing as you wish, and consequently to foster an attitude of openness.

The spouses therefore communicate to reap the benefits of greater freedom laying eyes on Eindhoven from an outsider’s angle inasmuch as they believe to be pressured less into something they are not by the gaze of insiders who, in their experience, pertain to a separate life-world, out-of-contact with theirs, the disjunction of which is conceived to be even more aloof due to socio-cultural incongruity. They are not rubbernecked or judged and even if they were, they have little reason to care; after all, they are as much a stranger to the insiders as the insiders are to them. To that end, being vested as a residing outsider in Eindhoven, for all intents and purposes, nourishes an at-easeness during practical life that would seem to equip the spouses with the requisite comfort to counterbalance shortcoming rootedness whilst maintaining an attitude of openness. All in all, the empirical data of this research supplies convincing evidence that goes against Seamon’s postulation that openness depends on rootedness and at-easeness, testifying to the motions that the latter, on its own, is already enough and, furthermore, that at-easeness may actually be enjoyed in outsideness more than in insideness.

“Attachment to home,” Seamon (1979, p.78) writes, “is associated with the experience of at-homeness - the taken-for-granted situation of being comfortable and familiar with the world in which one lives his or her day-to-day life.” Besides the determinants rootedness and at-easeness mentioned earlier, at-homeness is also constructed by the components appropriation, regeneration and warmth. The empirical results delved into several instances in which the latter two were, in one way or another, diluted or even completely eliminated from the spouses’ impression of at-homeness in their apartments - two of them were made to feel unsafe or

distressed by their houses, draining them of their warmth, and one was made to feel irritated and claustrophobic by hers, preventing it from presenting itself as a place for regeneration. In those case histories it is elucidated how the absence or deprivation of just one of the five factors that decidedly influence at-homeness may mentally displace the spouses from their apartment, which is somewhat logical, considering that the unavailability of any of those five brings with it circumstances wherein the home's quality to accommodate comfort to its inhabitants - a fundament in one's attachment to home as Seamon alerts in the quote at the beginning of this paragraph - is undermined.

As a result they come up against stumbling stones in their path to making their home an intimate place, since "intimate places are places or nurture where our fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss," as well as when they try to acquire the necessary rest - the "pause in movement" - for each home "to become a centre of felt value" (Tuan, 1977, pp.137-138). As one can imagine, this is extra nerve-racking, compared to native long-time residents, for the spouses who, for the most part, neither avail themselves of the comfortable restfulness of place in Eindhoven; it is tiresome to return, after a day of wandering through and confronting space, to a house powerless to satisfy, in all respects, the relaxation one then hungrily longs for. Unsurprisingly, a number of spouses acknowledge to seek, or have sought, regeneration elsewhere, escaping the demarcations of their defective, and hence unsettling, homes and the space that nudges to their disconnection from the surroundings. A trip or vacation and a sojourn to a local green area are popularly pursued options; despite their unfamiliarity, those destinations are nonetheless endowed with a few of the comforts that a place or a home is endowed with too.

These qualities are, before all else, brought to the surface by way of seclusion - when, through reading a book or sinking into deep thoughts, everything superfluous around one is turned a blind eye and a deaf ear towards, creating a little place for themselves, much like the way in which some of the spouses react to disheartening situations, such as an intimidatingly barking dog, a cacophonous pigeon flying just past one's head or getting lost in a sinister neighbourhood, by shrinking themselves. On the basis of this research's findings, Seamon's at-homeness framework could be slightly enhanced through the inclusion of the provision that a house might displace its occupant on the occasion that it is missing, or dispossessed of, any one of the five at-homeness determinants, because of an incident out of his or her control, but only if the occupant in question has never had the chance - such as in the spouses' case - to

heartily, and for a long period of time, experience the presence of that disappeared quality; if the occupant has had that chance, he or she may, as Seamon (1979, p.78) proclaims, “bear cold and threat of sickness because of their bonds with home.”

In sum, the empirical findings deviated from the humanistic geography theories set forth in the theoretical framework on four points; integration of the following four propositions with regards to the amendment of said theories would resolve those dissonances. Firstly, the insideness classification system of Relph (1976, pp.52-55) should either be preceded by the principle that each class, except for existential, can be achieved, or at least expedited, through recollections of formerly familiarised place-experiences with a strong physical or atmospheric resemblance, or broadened with a newfangled, similarly defined, conceptualisation of insideness, possibly designated as retrospective insideness. Secondly, the statement of Relph (1976, p.79) that placelessness accommodates nothing but commonplace and mediocre experiences, and as a consequence cannot be place-made, must be substantiated with the argumentation that this is because placelessness, in contrast to place, lacks stimuli that are perceptible through the senses, for which reason it conveys no warmth and never achieves the same concrete reality as place. Thirdly, the laws concerning openness Seamon (1979, p.118) stipulates, demarcating it as an attitude only achievable and maintainable when the person is at-home in the sense of them being rooted and at-ease in the place they are at, ought to be nuanced in that rootedness may be cut out of the equation altogether and that at-easeness does not need place to be fostered, but can be realised in space and as an outsider as well. Lastly, it could be added to the at-homeness framework of Seamon (1979, p.78) that at-homeness, chiefly if the occupant has just recently moved into their apartment, might be drained unconditionally and, as such, displace the occupant, upon the elimination of but one of its five determinants - rootedness, appropriation, regeneration, at-easeness or warmth.

6. Recommendation

“In het begin moest ik alles alleen doen” [in the beginning I had to do everything by myself] - this quote from Gerard Philips, co-founder of Eindhoven’s world-famous electronics multinational, prominently features on the front page of this thesis in a photo with the researcher and eight of the spouses standing underneath it. Despite the quote’s pertinence to a separate situation, it nevertheless accurately captures the spouses’ experience upon their arrival in the Dutch city, where they are confronted with an unmitigated unfamiliarity, which they must face on their own, for their one travel companion - their husbands - is occupied with long workdays, frequently continuing over the weekend, and need to focus their attention on the completion of their PhDs. This is when *Indigo-Wereld* and its Get in Touch support program step in. Get in Touch is not based on a scientific method or governmental approach; it is a bottom-up initiative, provided in its content by one woman and a bit of funding by the TU/e. Still, three months of extensive internal scrutiny of the organisation by the researcher have not only yielded results with which humanistic geography theories may be ameliorated, it has also yielded the as of yet undiscussed conclusion that Get in Touch indeed successfully generates comfort and elements of at-homeness amongst its members in ways other organisations can learn from.

Entering Get in Touch, the spouses no longer deal with their challenges alone as they are introduced to a sympathetic assemblage of international peers, all in roughly the same stage of their lives. Get in Touch is, however, more than a project that brings together expat spouses, serving as a medium through which to confer their distress and find relief in each other’s stories; it is a program that by virtue of this camaraderie facilitates the process of familiarising the strange new environment that they have all come to live in. There are multiple reasons for this, but the one this thesis really wishes to communicate to other migration-integration organisations and governmental programs is Get in Touch’s method of inspiring openness. Functioning as a nexus of activity in the form of group visits to unfamiliar locations, *Indigo-Wereld* ameliorates discovery, and becoming acquainted with the place, to be an enjoyable experience in itself, instead of just something that happens whilst visiting a site because one needs to. At-easeness is highly stimulated by touring new places in tandem with people akin to oneself - a group to whom the spouses feel they belong through which displacing differences are effectively mediated - and perhaps even more so by the open environment that Get in Touch perpetuates, wherein everyone is free to be themselves.

7. Reflection

Looking back on the process of creating this thesis, the trickiest stumbling block was confronted at the time of writing its theoretical framework, which commenced later than originally planned due to unforeseen circumstances that postponed the thesis' outset by two weeks. There was the intention to review four, instead of three, classical authors, being Yi-Fu Tuan, David Seamon, Edward Relph and Doreen Massey, plus an ambition to link their theories to contemporary examinations and expansions of their ideas. To work away the backlog, the researcher was given the choice to either compromise on the length of the theoretical chapter or the empirical one. His decision for the former was based on the conceptual density that had already been accomplished without the angle Massey's *Space, Place and Gender* would have added to the framework, as well as on the fact that, of those four authors, her perspective is least connected to the phenomenological debate on space and place and more associated with the Marxist paradigm led by Edward Soja and David Harvey.

Massey's viewpoints would have primarily broadened the theoretical chapter's scope and for that reason the researcher regrets her exclusion from the thesis less than the missed opportunity to deepen and nuance the framework as it stands now through the integration of present-day publications. The humanistic geographers - Relph especially - reflected, sometimes fairly critically, on society as it was in the late seventies. Naturally a lot has changed since then and, although the theories of Tuan, Seamon and Relph still spearhead the discipline, a fresh look upon their work would have surely facilitated bridging this thesis' theoretical and empirical sections; consider, for example, how none of the research's respondents was even born before the eighties. Relevant questions that have been left unanswered are therefore what modern interpretations or derivatives of the humanistic geography theories exist and how accurately those schemes analyse expat spouses behaviours towards, and experiences of, the spatial phenomena discussed in this thesis? Maybe even more interesting would be to see if and how such commentaries compare to the conclusions of this research; do they reinforce one another or do they reveal different approaches? And if so, where do those discordances stem from?

8. Bibliography

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