The Spice of Life

A Study on Food, Memory, and Identity Among Indian Migrants in the Netherlands

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Introduction

Food lies at the heart of a culture. It is a tool through which people connect and communicate. It can act to strengthen and maintain social fabric. Despite its cultural significance, however, food has only recently been given an explicit spotlight in anthropological theory (Counihan and Van Esterik 2013; Mintz and Du Bois 2002). The subdiscipline of the anthropology of food often combines its knowledge with that of other (sub)disciplines. We have done this as well by employing concepts and theories from material culture studies, identity studies, migration studies, and psychology. With this, we show how food – when seen as a power-possessing object – can influence one's process of identity construction. We show how the sensory experience of food and foodways, referring to "the range of material and non-material cultural practices in which food is embedded" (Camp 1989), can trigger memories otherwise untapped. These functions of food are then placed against a backdrop of transnational migration, specifically in the case of Indian migrants in the Netherlands.

Through the conceptualization of food as a category of material culture, which has only recently emerged (De Solier 2013), one can ascribe to it certain properties otherwise associated with material objects. These properties include "carrying out social functions, regulating social relations, and giving symbolic meaning to human activity" (Woodward 2007, 3). Notions like these provide the foundation for our argument that food and foodways are influential actors in the process of identity construction and remembrance. This is especially true in the context of transnational migration, as this process can put one in a state of flux or limbo – a state of liminality. Migrants find themselves to be betwixt and between two places, leaving them with the task to navigate their ambivalent relationships with each of these countries (Fortier 2000, 2; Jackson 2013, 2; Voight-Graf 2018, 342). Food can play an anchoring role for migrants in their journey to construct and reconstruct their identity in an unfamiliar environment (Abbots 2016, 117). It can also provide them with comfort, allowing them to create a sense of continuity – a remembrance and reconstruction of home (Mata-Codesal 2010; Sutton 2001).

These are the notions we will combine and build on with our research concerning a specific population: Indian migrants in the Netherland. They constitute the second-largest flux of migrants that enter the Netherlands today (CBS n.d.), resulting in annual celebrations of Indian holidays such as Holi, Indian Republic Day, and International Yoga Day in a handful of major Dutch cities (Rajamony 2019, 198). In Amstelveen, the number of Indian inhabitants has become so high that it now holds the nickname "Little India" (Boon 2016). Despite all of this, we have noticed that the Indian community remains relatively invisible in Dutch society. This could be due to the fact that – unlike some other large migrant communities – Indian migrants are generally not considered disruptive or threatening to Dutch society. Many Indian enter the Netherlands as highly skilled migrants (Van der Meij and De Mooij 2019). According to Hercog (2008), highly skilled migrants are actually very much welcomed by the Dutch state. Their position in Dutch society is thus somewhat paradoxical: relatively out of frame in the public eye, yet very much physically present. Because it is expected that Indian migrants will remain a

large migrant community in the Netherlands, we believe it is crucial to learn more about this population. We wish to make a contribution to fill the cultural and societal knowledge gap and to cultivate a broader understanding of this population's experiences of living in the Netherlands, which could be beneficial for both governmental and non-governmental actors involved with Indian migrants, as well as Indian migrants themselves.

Moreover, Indian migrants in the Netherlands are still underrepresented in scientific research. However, we believe that the Indian diaspora is an interesting research population because although this diaspora is very widespread and culturally diverse, food remains an important binding factor for its members (Ray 2004, 55). The Netherlands in particular is an interesting location as it is set to be the second-largest host country for members of the Indian diaspora in Europe (Nicholls-Lee 2019). The shift towards this status has taken place over a relatively short period of time. Because of this, there is a limited amount of research pertaining to this specific population in this specific context. The only similar study comes from Ajay Bailey (2017), who has recommended future research in this specific context to lay more focus on the power of food itself (Bailey 2017, 59). We address this call with our research in an effort to begin filling this knowledge gap in scientific literature. What we have described above has led us to the following research question:

> *How do Indian migrants in the Netherlands construct a sense of identity and belonging through the body memory of food and foodways?*

With this question, we seek to gain an understanding of the social role of food for Indian migrants in the Netherlands. Specifically, we are interested in its influence on how Indian migrants construct their (post)national identity aided by body memory. With postnational identity, we refer to processes of self-identification that transcend ideas and perceptions of national identity (Bosniak 2002, 983). We relate this to body memory, an implicit form of remembering. The term argues that memories can be stored in the body as opposed to the brain (Fuchs 2012). Body memory is often connected to deep, sensory experiences, used by anthropologists (e.g. Mata-Codesal 2010; Sutton 2001) in relation to foodways. Our fieldwork took place between February 8 and April 25, 2021, during which time we spoke to Indian migrants across the Netherlands. Our participants came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, as will be expanded upon in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Our methods and positionality

Our research is embedded within a phenomenological approach. With this, we strive to gather knowledge on intersubjective, individual, lived experience (Jackson 1996). During our fieldwork, we made use of semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation, participant observation, and informal conversations. Keeping in mind our phenomenological approach, we searched for subjective, individual

experiences from our participants. To achieve this, we kept our interviews as open as possible and we kept an open dialogue with our participants about our methods and findings. Those who participated in photo-elicitation were asked to photograph anything important to them in the context of food and foodways. In keeping this question broad and open to interpretation, we ensured a more subjective and personal outcome of the photos for each of our participants, without us steering them in a certain direction.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the national curfew that was implemented in the Netherlands during our fieldwork period, we were limited in our possibilities of carrying out this research. This forced us to be flexible with our research methods[1], which may have affected our findings. In addition, our positionality as ethnographers relative to our research population has to be taken into account. Anthropologists in the past have remained largely hidden from their own works. Recently, however, the discipline has experienced a shift towards a more reflexive one. The idea that ethnographic knowledge is inherently impartial is rejected, and an acknowledgement of a researcher's social positions is encouraged (Lichterman 2017). We vehemently agree with this sentiment. We wish to emphasize that, though our phenomenological research strives to present an account of the subjective lived experience of our participants, observations and findings are never absent of interpretation. In conducting research and writing this thesis, we have combined and represented knowledge of our interlocutors and scholarly literature, but the connections were made by us: two white, Dutch women in our early twenties.

We have found that these identifying characteristics have not played an immense role in the course of our research, but our position as guests to a home *has*. As will become apparent in Chapter 3, hospitality is an important factor of Indian food culture. Guests make for a special occasion, especially in times when inviting someone over for dinner might be a rare occurrence. Our presence at the lunch or dinner table might have had some influence on the size and content of the meals provided - meaning a more elaborate and fully Indian meal (or rather: a less spicy version of a fully Indian meal). This led to a better understanding of the etiquette our participants practice when hosting guests, but it did not necessarily tell us much about everyday food customs. Conversations around the table allowed us to compensate for this missing information, as well as direct questions about our participants' daily and weekly menu in semi-structured interviews.

Plan of the thesis

In this thesis, the chapters are arranged as follows: Chapter 1 will concern our theoretical framework. Because there is a lack of scientific research pertaining to Indian migrants in the Netherlands, we use our theoretical framework to analyze the social roles of food and foodways in a broader context. The

[1] For example, most of our interviews were conducted online. Social gatherings were substantially restricted. Many public spaces such as restaurants and houses of prayer were closed. This limited our possibilities of practicing participant observation. In an attempt to compensate for this knowledge gap, we asked questions pertaining to this missing information during interviews and informal conversations.

concepts and theories discussed here will be applied to our research population in Chapter 2: *Context*. Chapter 2 will also provide information on the history of the Indian diaspora and the presence of Indian migrants in the Netherlands. We will then provide a general description of our specific research participants. While safeguarding their anonymity, it is important to highlight their ethnic, regional, religious, and generational background, as well as their gender and dietary preferences.

Chapters 3 through 5 are our empirical chapters. These will employ concepts and theories explored in our theoretical framework and relate them to our collected ethnographic data. Chapter 3 provides a basic understanding of Indian cuisines as they are experienced by our participants. How and when is Indian food eaten? What does the process of preparing Indian food look like? What are the symbolic meanings and social roles of said food? In Chapter 4, experiences of foodways will be analyzed more deeply, in a phenomenological description of bodily sensations of the senses and their relationship to body memory. It builds on works such as Marcel Mauss's (1934) *techniques du corps* and aforementioned literature concerning foodways' memory power and their ability to construct and reconstruct a sense of home (Mata-Codesal 2010; Sutton 2001). Finally, Chapter 5 will describe how Indian migrants' (post)national identity is constructed, and how their ideas of home and belonging have been transformed as a result of their migrant journey. Subsequently, the role of Indian food in the construction of Indian migrant's identity will be analyzed. Throughout the empirical chapters, references will be made to recipes, most of which are written by our participants. The recipes can be found in our appendixes. They are accompanied by quotes from interviews or personally written texts about memories or stories of the dish at hand.

Based on the collected research data and literature written by scholars before us, we discuss the answer to the central question of this thesis in Chapter 6. We argue that, throughout a migrant's life, food plays a central role in experiences of body memory and identity construction. Food-centered childhood memories of meals, spaces, people, and emotions contribute to a foundational idea of identity. In a period of (transnational) migration, this sense of identity is broadened and convoluted, resulting in a postnational identification. However, we argue that "Indianness" remains an integral part of one's sense of self. A continuity in Indian foodways aids in a reinforcement and remembering of this facet of one's identity, as it triggers memories of one's childhood and offers a sense of comfort and familiarity. Through this, we expand on theories of material culture as we explicitly take into account factors of temporality and memory in relation to objects' influence on identity construction.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

Tamar Oderwald & Flori Visser

Our theoretical framework is embedded in the question: *How do Indian migrants in the Netherlands construct a sense of identity and belonging through the body memory of food and foodways?* With this, we join those who went before us as scholars of the anthropology of food. In our first section, we give a brief historical overview of the most significant intellectual developments in this subdiscipline, and we sketch a broad outline of some useful key concepts for our research. The second section argues for the inclusion of food in a framework of material culture. The powers attributed to material objects – and consequently also to food – will be explored in the third section, where we analyze the roles that food and foodways play in the context of transnational migration.

1. The Anthropology of Food

Flori Visser

Our research employs concepts and theories that are rooted in the anthropology of food. Therefore, this section starts with a brief overview of the development of this subdiscipline. We subsequently give specific attention to the relationship between food and identity, since this is the subject within the anthropology of food on which our research mainly focuses. In doing so, we offer a better understanding of the concepts on which we elaborate in the following paragraphs.

1.1 The Development of the Anthropology of Food

The study of food within anthropology finds its roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where anthropologists gave attention to rituals and other behaviors around food in their ethnographies and monographs (Boas 1921; Cushing 1920; Mallery 1888; Richards 1939; Smith 1889). During this period, however, the anthropology of food was not yet established as a subfield. This happened in the second half of the twentieth century through the works of Roland Barthes (1961), Mary Douglas (1966), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966; 1978), and Pierre Bourdieu (1984), who conducted research on the material practices surrounding food and the exercise of power and meaning making through food (Counihan and Van Esterik 2013, 3-4; Klein and Watson 2016; Mintz and Du Bois 2002, 100).

An actual turning point in the anthropology of food came after the publication of two important works: Jack Goody's (1982) *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class* and Sidney Mintz's (1979) *Time, Sugar and Sweetness*. These two publications became so influential because they offered a new way to explore transnational connections - which increasingly shape social relations and everyday experiences – by exploring patterns of food and drink production, distribution, consumption, communication and taste. Moreover, Mintz and Goody moved beyond the debates between proponents of materialist and symbolic theories, with which ethnographies were entrenched at the time. By doing this, they showed that the

study of food is actually an important approach to understanding modern life (Klein and Watson 2016, 3).

Since Mintz and Goody's publications in the eighties, the amount of interest in food studies among anthropologists exploded (Counihan and Van Esterik 2013, 2; Mintz and Du Bois 2002, 100). It became a legitimized subject which was studied by scholars of different disciplines once it became clear that food can serve as a vehicle through which a very wide variety of phenomena can be explored. As Counihan and Van Esterik (2013, 2) explain: "Food links body and soul, self and other, the personal and the political, the material and the symbolic." Because of its importance in studying the self and the other, identity construction through food has become a prevalent theme in the subdiscipline. In the next paragraph, we go into detail on some concepts concerning the relationship between food and identity, which apply to our case on Indian migrants in the Netherlands.

1.2 Food and (National) Identity

Food can act as a means to establish social relationships and to distinguish social positions (Clarke 1997, 154). It can serve as a way to solidify group membership or to set groups apart. Ethnicity, nationality, class individuality, and gender are all strongly related to the way we behave around food (Mintz and Du Bois 2002, 109). Bourdieu (1984) has been very influential for the study of the relationship between food and identity (Ashley et al. 2004, 64). He discovered how food is used as a means to produce and reinforce class identities and cultures that structure power relations.

Food is also a means through which a sense of national identity is encouraged. When it comes to national identity, it is useful to include the concept 'imagined community,' which was developed by Benedict Anderson (1983). Anderson argues that nations are imagined, since they construct a sense of belonging among people who cannot know each other at first hand. Despite not knowing everyone who is part of their nation, people experience this sense of community in their minds. The concept of an imagined community can be linked to how nations have a national diet. For example, in Great Britain, the English breakfast is seen as a national dish. Although most British people will only eat an English breakfast occasionally, in their minds it is imagined as an important part of their national identity (Ashley et al. 2004, 81-82). Similarly, our interlocutors found that certain Indian foods were integral parts of their (trans)national identity.

In our research, however, we found that Indian migrants in the Netherlands often do not simply identify themselves as Indian when it comes to their national identity. Rather, they identify themselves in ways that fit in with theories on postnationalism. Scholars have used the concept 'postnationalism' quite casually and in different manners. Broadly, these scholars seem to refer to a set of social, political, and cultural processes which serve to undermine the national order of things (Bosniak 2002, 983). But what exactly is meant by this? Based on the literature it could be said that postnationalism is constituted by two main empirical claims: the first concerns a perceived decline of state sovereignty; the second

concerns a perceived rise of the transnational subject (Bosniak 2002, 984). Although these empirical claims overlap, the second claim is of most interest for our research. Scholarships concerning transnationalism examine how people increasingly create and maintain lives across national borders. It is a process through which immigrants' social relations link together their societies of origin and settlement and thus cross geographic, cultural, and political borders (Bosniak 2002, 987-988). According to scholars of postnationalism, transnationalism is a process that could end the relevance of national citizenship in the long term[2] (Bloemraad 2004, 390).

Not much has been written about the relationship between food and postnationalism specifically, but an interesting example is Nieves Pascual Soler's (2017) work, in which she analyzes the experience of the transition from nationalism to postnationalism through food. This article shows how a sense of national identity can be affected by migrating to another nation because one might be confronted with the fact that dishes from the nation of origin or dishes which one's mother made are not accessible anymore. One has to adapt to new eating habits and, as a result, might reconsider one's identity. This adaptation from nationalism to postnationalism through food is something which some of our interlocutors experienced as well.

What we argue in this section is that food provides a new perspective through which a wide variety of social and cultural phenomena – including the development of (post)national identity – can be studied (Counihan and Van Esterik 2013, 2). Therefore, we deem it valuable for our research to use food as a lens through which we analyze the construction of identity, sense of belonging and memory among Indian migrants in the Netherlands.

[2] Note that it can be questioned whether transnationalism could end the relevance of national citizenship. In our research we found that our interlocutors also experienced postnational sentiments, but that being Indian still remained part of their national identity, as will be explored further in Chapter 5. Therefore, we are not fully convinced of these scholars' argument.

2. Food as a Category of Material Culture

Flori Visser

While the previous section discussed the relationship between food and identity, this section gives attention to symbolisms and associations attached to food by employing theories of material culture. According to Ian Woodward (2007, 3), the term 'material culture' refers to the way objects carry out social functions, how they regulate relationships, and how they give symbolic meaning to human activity.[3] Material culture thus concerns itself with objects, but in this section we will show that concepts of material culture can also be applied to food. This is useful for our own research, since material culture helps us to understand how the symbolism and social behavior around food contributes to the construction of identity and sense of belonging among (Indian) migrants.

2.1 Identity Construction through Objects

There are different ways through which objects perform social actions. For example, objects work as social markers: what we like and what we value says a lot about which social group we belong to. Because of this characteristic, objects contribute to the construction of identity (Bourdieu 1984; Woodward 2007, 5-6). In *Understanding Material Culture*, Ian Woodward (2007, 10-12) uses the Bible as an example of how an object marks identity through its symbolic meaning and the associations people have with it. Although the Bible is a mass-produced object, it has a very high degree of personal meaning and authority. It is an object that is respected, and which symbolizes the cherished values of Christians. There are also a lot of stigmas attached to the Bible, however, which makes it an interesting object. When a person possesses a Bible, there are a lot of assumptions that people can make about this person's identity, because of the many associations attached to the object. While the Bible is a very clear example, this works for all objects. Even objects that are purely owned for their aesthetic or practical reasons contain symbolic meaning and have associations attached to it, which means that they, too, are markers of identity (Woodward 2007, 10-11).

Another way in which objects work as markers of identity, is through their role in the relational classification of people. Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1966 [1954]), which describes gift exchange in different societies, is a good example of how social relations are established and maintained through the exchange of objects. He describes that, although gifts seem to be voluntary, spontaneous and without self-interest, they are actually obligatory, planned and self-interested. Once someone offers you a gift, you are obliged to receive it and to repay it by gifting something in return. If you do not act on this obligation, you might harm the relationship with the person or group that offered you the gift. In this way, the exchange of gifts and other objects is an integral part of establishing and maintaining

[3] Within material culture, there has been discussion regarding whether objects should be perceived as passive – where material culture mainly concerns itself with social behavior surrounding objects – or as active – where objects have a social life of their own. In our research, however, we will not concern ourselves with this discussion, but we refer to Arjun Appadurai (1988) for more information regarding this. We also refer to Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn (2012) for more information regarding the trend that has resulted from this discussion.

relationships (Mauss 1966 [1954]; Woodward 2007, 91). Below, we turn to the relationship between material culture and food specifically. Food has often been neglected within the study of material culture, but we argue that it is nevertheless useful to include food as part of material culture, especially in the case of our research.

2.2 Food as a Material Object

Unlike other material goods, the actual substance of food is gone when it is consumed. It is for this reason that food has often been neglected in material culture (Sutton 2001). It was only at the turn of the century, with the growth of the anthropology of food, that food became increasingly recognized as a legitimate object of study in material culture (De Solier 2013, 2). David Sutton (2001) argues that food is useful to include in material culture because although consuming it makes it disappear, it can act as a bearer of power in the same way as objects do. It is for example linked to the mind, which includes previous and future acts of consumption, because of the memories and associations attached to certain foods. Since Sutton's argument applies to our findings on the effect of Indian food on Indian migrants, we will elaborate on Sutton's findings in section three.

Like Sutton, Isabelle De Solier (2013, 3-7) states that the social functions of food can be studied in the same way as other material objects are studied in this field. This is for example illustrated by Michael Di Giovine and Ronda Brulotte (2014, 3), who argue that the process of gift exchange as described by Mauss (1966 [1954]) applies to food as well. Food is often turned into commodities, wages and objects. In this way, they work as mediators that bring people together through economic exchange (Di Giovine and Brulotte 2014, 3). An example that illustrates how Mauss's theory applies to food in this case is champagne. A bottle of champagne symbolizes success and is given as a form of congratulations. It thus signifies a 'symbolic exchange value' (Woodward 2007, 76).

What we argue here, is that considering food as an object that can be studied as part of material culture provides an opportunity to pay specific attention to how characteristics and symbolisms of Indian food contribute to the construction of identity. By applying concepts from material culture, we treat Indian food as a bearer of symbolic value in the context of Indian migrants in the Netherlands, as this sentiment was expressed by our interlocutors as well. Where theories of material culture fall short, we argue, is their lack of consideration for temporality and memory. Material culture concerns itself with one's current possessions in relation to processes of identity construction. However, our findings indicate that not only current possessions, but also associations attached to objects from the past, can prove foundational to one's sense of identity. This includes meals consumed in the past. In the section below, we show how such meals can bear meaning in the context of transnational migration.

3. Food, Foodways, and Transnational Migration

Tamar Oderwald

We have argued above that food ought to be incorporated in the field of material culture. With this, we ascribe to food certain symbolic properties and social functions often associated with material objects. It is precisely these attributes that we wish to explore further in the context of transnational migration. In this section, we will focus our attention on a few different symbolic properties which food and foodways can retain for transnational migrants, utilizing concepts such as sense of belonging, (group) identity, and body memory.

3.1 Home, Identity, and Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is marked by feelings of emotional attachment, home, and safety (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). One can feel a sense of attachment to a nation, a collective of individuals, or to ideologies, to name a few (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Sociologists and anthropologists alike have found a sense of belonging to play a substantial role in the process of constructing one's identity (Mintz 2008). Who or what does one identify with? And – often overlooked, but no less important - who or what does one *not* identify with (Jenkins 2008, 19)? Where is one included, and where is one excluded? Sociologist Anne-Marie Fortier (2000, 10) emphasizes that identity narratives are part of a never-ending, dynamic process of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong.

Fortier seeks to grasp the construction of group identity and belonging of Italian migrants in the United Kingdom. She coins the concept of 'migrant belonging,' which finds its grounds in the often tense position of the migrant: between movement and attachment, suture and departure, outside and inside (Fortier 2000, 2). Fortier argues that the manufacturing of cultural and historical belongings – referring to both possessions and inclusion – enhances the performance of her participants' group identity. In addition, sociologist Richard Jenkins (2008) reminds us that group identification is the result of an internally communicated definition; its boundaries and attributes can only be constituted by the group itself. Notions of similarity and difference are key here: Jenkins (2008, 102) stresses that there can be no conceptualization of 'us' without being aware of the existence of 'them.'

In the context of transnational migration, especially a diasporic one, constructing a group identity becomes more challenging. Because of their fragmented nature, diasporas[4] form a unique system of communal identification and belonging. Much like Fortier, cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1996)

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[4] It should be noted that there is no general consensus on the definition of the term 'diaspora.' There are three general criteria attached to the definition: 1) dispersion, or widespread migration; 2) an emphasized value ascribed to a real or imagined homeland; and 3) preservation of a distinctive identity vis-a-vis a host society (Brubaker 2005, 5-6). However, the term is used in a variety of different contexts and is often used as a synonym for transnational migration. We shall do this as well, seeing as the differences between the two concepts are quite minor. Diasporic migration is often conceptualized as being more forced than transnational migration. Its trajectories may be more complicated, less traceable and more widespread, such as the Jewish diaspora and the black or African diaspora (Hall 1996). However, as noted by many scholars, the increasing speed of globalization and growing interconnectedness of the world make transnational migration more widespread and common (Eriksen 2007, 92). The two concepts thus continue to grow closer in meaning.

emphasizes that the creation of a one-ness, or a shared culture, is crucial in the construction of a sense of belonging to a diasporic identity. However, he notes, the weight of difference and fragmentation must not be forgotten. Perhaps a diasporic cultural identity is shaped precisely because of its lack of a known, fixed home. Diasporas are often paired with extensive, complicated patterns of (forced) migration, making it more difficult to form a homogenous narrative of what constitutes a certain cultural community. Though members of a diaspora have all traveled different roads, the simple fact that they all *have* traveled roads, connects them. How do these connections manifest themselves in the context of food and foodways?

Drawing from her own experiences with transnational migration, Indian-American novelist Chitrita Banerji (2007) argues that diasporic or transnational migrants experience a deep need to recreate and relive homeland memories, to rekindle old connections, and to avoid disconnection (Sarkar 2019, 237; Srinivas 2006, 211). Communal activities such as buying groceries 'ethnic shops' (Abbots 2016, 117; Vallianatos and Raine 2008, 366), preparing and consuming specific ingredients or dishes with others can provide this sense of connection to one's country of birth (Bailey 2017; Mata-Codesal 2010; Parasecoli 2014, 420; Sarkar 2019, 234). Vallianatos and Raine (2008, 365) consider food to be a symbol of ethnic identity. Their informants - female migrants of South Asian and Arabic descent - emphasize how important it was to have traditional spices and produce available to them in their new environment: urban Canada. The lack of ethnic food symbolized isolation; it was an accentuation of their otherness. Much like material objects, food is used as a building block for one's cultural identity. Commensal eating, for example, reiterates one's bond with others at the table, as well as with one's identity as an individual or as part of a collective (Parasecoli 2014, 425).

This leads us to the following property of food and foodways: food allows one to create their own version of home in an unfamiliar environment. Fortier (2000) would call this a 'space of belonging.' A space of belonging can be constituted of both public and private space – either physical or symbolic. Examples include the home, the market, ethnic shops, restaurants and neighborhoods (Ashley et al. 2004, 105-106), but also rituals, community events and commemoration (Fortier 2000, 11). A key characteristic of these spaces is their underlying emphasis on the perceived reproduction of tradition (Fortier 2000, 1). In a way, migrants bring with them notions of culture and tradition that they freeze in time. Even if these traditions become increasingly imagined, they still persist and are reproduced in a space of belonging. They thus heavily rely on memory, a concept to be explored in the next paragraph.

3.2 Food and Memory: Social, Nostalgic, and Bodily Remembrance

Anthropologist Paul Connerton (1989) argues that our experience in the present heavily relies on a collective memory of the past; the latter is used to legitimize present-day social order. A social memory, as also explained by Antonius Robben (2018, 57) applies to a specific, relatively homogeneous community of people. Remembering, Connerton (1989, 7) continues, is manifested in two ways: through

bodily practice and commemorative ceremonies. Bodily practices represent centuries of culturally determined standards by which to present and behave oneself. Bodies unconsciously carry historical knowledge, some of which is transmitted not through verbal communication, but solely through mimesis (Connerton 1989, 73). Communal ceremonies during which one is asked to reflect on a shared past, construct and shape a narrative, and subsequently a memory, of a collective history (Connerton 1989, 7).

The body plays an important role in processes of remembering. In *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) argues that the body ought to be viewed as an object rather than a subject. He saw it as an impressive actor of empirical perception. In other words: a person does not merely *have* a body; a person also *is* a body. His views closely resemble those of Marcel Mauss (1934) in his analysis of 'body techniques.' One's values and habits encultured since childhood are inscribed in and on the body, manifesting themselves in unconscious, mundane bodily practices and one's perception of the world. Eating, for example, can be considered a fundamental body technique (Mauss 1934; Turner 1996, 176). It is an activity with a basic psychological function which is also heavily influenced by culture. What one eats, what one does not eat, how it is prepared, and in what context it is consumed - these are all culturally determined and subsequently embodied habits.

Later research put a spotlight on the influence of food on memory. One of the most cited ethnographies of this genre is Sutton's (2001) *Remembrance of Repasts*. Here, he analyzes how his informants on the Greek island of Kalymnos would vividly remember past events through the bodily experience of eating specific foods. He argues that the sensory, somatic experience of food makes it an intense and compelling vehicle for memory. Sutton also argues that – for migrants – the sight, smell, feel, and taste of food can lead to a temporary transportation to one's homeland, fueled by feelings of nostalgia. The same can also be said for cooking tools. Sutton and Hernandez (2007, 75) would call familial kitchen tools 'inalienable possessions' with an almost totemic personal and family history, unable to be sold, only to be passed down from generation to generation. When handling these tools, the user is reminded of the actions previously performed with it by its former owners, in turn remembering those people and the spaces they occupied (Sutton and Hernandez 2007, 76).

It is thus important to emphasize that nostalgia and memory surpass temporal and spatial borders. Over time, one's recollection of the past gets hazier and more imagined (Holtzman 2006, 363). Not only because of the brain's unreliable storage of memories, but also because the space one leaves behind will continue to change and evolve after one's departure. The place migrants remember as being their homeland, therefore, lives on in their thoughts, but it might no longer represent an accurate image. Sentiments of foodways' memory power have been echoed by many contemporary scholars (Bailey 2017; Sarkar 2019; Vallianatos and Raine 2008), as well as by our research participants. Mata-Codesal (2010) uses the recently coined term of 'body memory' to give words to her informants' experiences in her analysis of Ecuadorian migrants' foodways. The term body memory stems from psychology and is

often researched using phenomenological methods - as it puts an emphasis on bodily, somatic perception and seeks to understand holistically real lived experience (Jackson 1996). Much like the theories of Connerton and Sutton, the notion of body memory emphasizes the body's ability to store and retrieve memories and feelings that have either been encultured or re-enacted from one's past (Fuchs 2012). Also called tacit, involuntary, or implicit memories, these bits of knowledge are stored outside of the brain. And yet they trigger reproductions of history.[5]

Conclusion

In the theoretical framework above, we have combined interdisciplinary knowledge to explore the meanings and functions of food in the context of transnational migration. We have argued that food and foodways can serve as powerful actors in the construction of one's (post)national identity and that they can serve to trigger one's memory of an (imagined) homeland. By viewing food as a category of material culture, we have attached to it certain social and symbolic properties also associated with objects. It has also become clear that foodways can take up an anchoring role in the fragmented process of transnational migration: it provides continuity, a reproduction of an increasingly imagined culture. Its powers are at play in a multiplicity of spaces and become visible through a heightened sense of symbolism. As an addition to theories of material culture, we have argued that associations attached to meals consumed in the past are reignited in the present, leading migrants to remember their roots through which they reiterate a part of their identity in a new spatial environment. The theories discussed so far have been based on a broad population in a broad array of contexts. In the third section of our context, we will explore the ways in which these notions are manifested in our research population: Indian migrants in the Netherlands.

[5] This phenomenon is perhaps most accurately and elegantly illustrated by novelist Marcel Proust (1922, 63-65), whose experience of eating a *madeleine* cookie soaked in lime-flower tea triggered gustatory nostalgia, during which images of his past "rose up like the scenery of a theatre." He found himself transported back in time where he relives childhood memories of eating the cookie with his aunt, on Sundays before Church.

Chapter 2. Context

Tamar Oderwald & Flori Visser

In our theoretical framework, we have focused on interdisciplinary research amongst migrant populations of differing national origins in differing spatial settings. We now focus our attention on our research population: Indian migrants in the Netherlands. To do this, we first delve into the history of the Indian diaspora.[6] We then explore the general profile of Indian migrants in the Netherlands, after which we tie together the conclusions drawn in our theoretical framework, which will be applied to our contextual setting. Finally, we provide a description of our research participants.

1. The Indian Diaspora: A Brief History

Tamar Oderwald

With an estimated total of 25 million people, Indians today constitute the third largest group of diasporics living outside their homeland (Hedge and Sahoo 2018, 3). Because of the large geographical reach of these migrants, their historical trajectory of mobilization can be defined as a diaspora, though it should be noted that the term 'transnational migration' is often used as a synonym for diasporic migration (Jain 2018, 3). The differences between the two concepts are relatively minor, which is why we shall use them both when referring to the large-scale migration patterns of persons of Indian descent.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Indian people moved across the Southeast Asian subcontinent as early as the ninth century AD. Trade especially was a big driving force behind a lot of these trajectories, as Indian merchants moved within the country and beyond its borders to buy and sell their goods (Hedge and Sahoo 2018, 3). When the British colonized Eastern India in 1757, the native population was subjected to a period of forced, indentured migration, during which time Indians were shipped to another British colony to work on farms and plantations. An estimated six million Indians were recruited for such labor. It is unclear how many returned to their homeland (Lal 2018, 19). After gaining independence in 1947, a new era of migration began, which continues to this day. The mobility of this period is characterized as a skilled and professional diaspora to Europe, North America, and the Gulf region (Hedge and Sahoo 2018, 5; Pandey et al. 2006, 71).[7]

Many Indian diasporics residing in the Netherlands came through Suriname or other Dutch colonies where they were sent under the guise of indentured migration (Vahed 2018, 331). This changed in 2004, when the *kennismigrant visum* (highly skilled migrant visa) was introduced (Bailey 2017, 51),

[6] As noted previously, we are aware of the many different interpretations of what makes a diaspora and how it might be distinct from transnational migration (see also Brubaker 2005). However, the long-established migration trajectories of persons of Indian descent we explore here are widely referred to as a diaspora by academics (e.g. Jain 2018), which is why we apply this term also.

[7] For a more detailed historical overview of Indian emigration in the 19th and 20th century, see appendix 1.

which led to an increased influx of Indian immigrants to the Netherlands. In the next section, we briefly discuss their demographic characteristics and the celebration of Indian culture in this new environment.

2. Indian Migrants in the Netherlands

Tamar Oderwald

Over the last few decades, the Netherlands has developed into a diasporic node for people of Indian descent, referring to a country or region where migrants have lived long enough and in large enough numbers to have created a permanent presence as a community (Voight-Graf 2018, 343). In a study by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) conducted in 2019, more information is given on the motives for migration and the gender and age profile of Indians who migrated to the Netherlands between 2012 and 2017 (Van der Meij and De Mooij 2019). In total, 35,490 Indian immigrants entered the Netherlands in that time period. Most of them were male and between the ages of 21 and 30. The overwhelming majority of Indian migrants are categorized either as highly skilled migrants (44%) or as family migrants (37%). According to the CBS, highly skilled migrants operate mainly in the IT-sector, which is likely why many find residence in urban areas of the country – Amsterdam, The Hague, Amstelveen, Eindhoven, Utrecht, and Delft house the vast majority of Indian immigrants (Van der Meij and De Mooij 2019). Indians are the second-fastest growing group of immigrants in the Netherlands as of 2019 (CBS n.d.). It has become clear that, for many of these migrants, their residence is not permanent: a little over a third of the people who entered the Netherlands in 2012, still lived there in 2017.

Indian culture is celebrated more and more in the Netherlands as a result of the growing Indian community (Rajamony 2019, 198). Public holidays such as Indian Diaspora Day, Republic Day, Independence Day are often celebrated at the India House in Wassenaar, the residence of the Indian ambassador. The Gandhi Institute, the cultural wing of the Indian embassy, strives to enhance Indian cultural knowledge through media such as music, dance, and cinema (Indian Embassy n.d.). As of yet, Indian food in the Netherlands has not been written about extensively in academic texts nor in other media, which is why we will make a contribution to reduce this knowledge gap in the section below.

3. Indian Food in Dutch Public and Private Space

Flori Visser

With the growing number of Indian migrants, the availability of Indian food in the Netherlands has also increased. This is mainly due to the growing amount of Indian shops and restaurants in the Netherlands over the past few decades. Examples of foods being sold include traditional, Indian-grown spices, produce, and dried goods. Before the presence of these shops and restaurants, Indian migrants travelled to the United Kingdom or France to buy Indian products. In addition to a growing number of shops and restaurants, Indian products are nowadays sold through online platforms (Bailey 2017, 54). Furthermore, religious festivals, regional festivals and themed parties are celebrated in the Netherlands. Since food

sharing in social situations is considered important among Indians, Indian food plays a major role during these festivals as well (Bailey 2017, 56; Rajamony 2019, 198). What this all indicates, is that there is a continuity in the employment of Indian foodways and products among Indian migrants in the Netherlands and that Indian food is valued by them, as also made clear in previous studies amongst people of different migratory backgrounds (e.g. Abbots 2016; Fortier 2000; Mata-Codesal 2010; Parasecoli 2014).

When it comes to the household level, the value ascribed to Indian food among migrants is visible as well. It has been argued by Ajay Bailey (2017) that Indian food plays an important role in social remittances among Indian immigrants in the Netherlands. He found that Indian immigrants brought Indian food with them from India when they first came to the Netherlands and that they continue to cook Indian food, as this helps them to cope with the dislocation and it reminds them of the daily rhythms they experienced at home, similar to what Vallianatos and Raine's (2008) interlocutors experienced after their migration. Food which has been prepared by family members and which is sent to them is especially valued, because these foods reduce feelings of loss and distance. In addition, the taste of these foods brings back memories of home (Bailey 2017, 55). Though Bailey himself does not mention body memory, his findings are in line with those of Fuchs (2012) and Sutton (2001) in their description of sensory-induced triggers of implicit memory.

Apart from Bailey's study, not much research has been done on Indian migrants' relationship with food in the Netherlands. However, studies conducted in other countries such as England and the United States confirm Bailey's findings concerning the value of Indian food among Indian migrants, their experience of feeling connected to their homeland, and their construction of a transnational identity (Duruz 2010; Hedge 2018; Sarkar 2019; Vallianatos and Raine 2008). Now that we have talked about Indian migrants in the Netherlands as a whole, we will offer a description of the Indian migrants who specifically participated in our own research in the section below.

4. Description of Research Participants[8]

Flori Visser & Tamar Oderwald

Twenty-three Indian migrants have participated in this research by having at least one conversation or interview with us. In searching for participants, we have strived to reach people of different ages, genders, and regional backgrounds so as to hear a diverse array of voices. All participants are adults, ranging from the age of 22 to 75 years old. All but one are first generation migrants, who have been living in the Netherlands for four months up until more than fifty years. Many of them are highly skilled migrants who came to the Netherlands to study or work, or because they have a Dutch partner. Today, our participants work in a variety of sectors and live widely distributed throughout the Netherlands.

[8] To safeguard their anonymity, our participants will be referred to by pseudonyms in this thesis.

Most of our participants have parents of Indian descent, although three come from a mixed background. Fourteen out of twenty-three participants are female while nine are male. Our participants came from a variety of states in India, a visual representation of which is visible in figure 1. Most come from a Hindu background, some were raised Christian, Sikh, or Muslim, though many consider themselves atheists. In regard to dietary preferences it can be said that, although most participants were omnivores, there were also some vegetarians[9] for religious or health-related reasons.

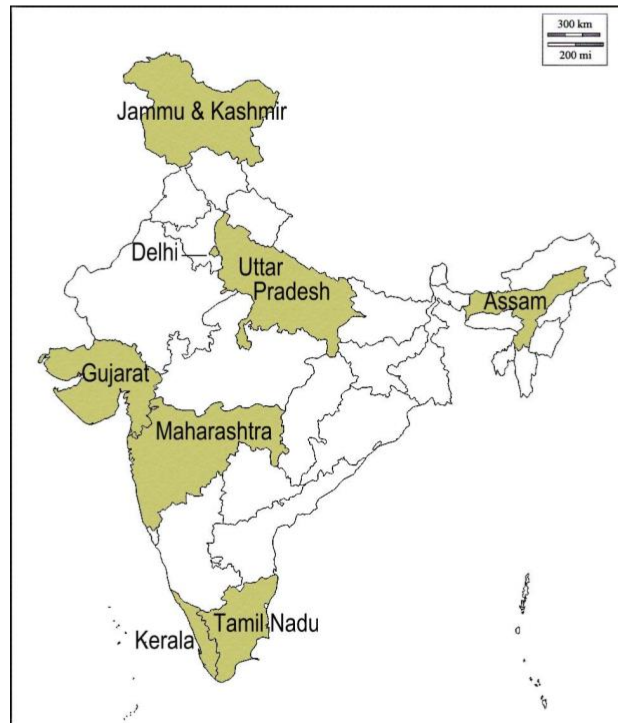

Figure 1: Map of India and its state borders. The highlighted states represent the regional backgrounds of our participants.

[9] Strictly speaking, a vegetarian diet in India also excludes the consumption of eggs, though each individual can have their own perception of vegetarianism.

“This is my *masala dabba*. I think it’s very beautiful. It’s very convenient. It’s nice to have it. It’s like your… I don’t know, legacy is a big word, but you have it as something which you really cherish and like. Those are things which still keep you connected with your own food. I think it’s a very unique thing over here. Especially at the initial stages. Of course now people know where I come from and I show them this, they are like ‘wow!’ They were really amazed by the different kinds of *masalas* and how we cook the Indian food.”

Figure 2: Masala Dabba, Photographed by Rani

Chapter 3. Indian Foodways and their Symbolisms

Tamar Oderwald & Flori Visser

After having discussed some theories and concepts regarding the relationship between food(ways) and migrants, memory and identity and after having sketched an overview of our research population, we now delve into our own findings on Indian migrants in the Netherlands. In this chapter, we analyze the symbolisms attached to Indian food for our research population. First, we discuss the symbolisms concerning the preparation and consumption of Indian food. Subsequently, we focus on the symbolisms of Indian food in social situations.

3.1 Preparing and Consuming Indian Food

Tamar Oderwald

It is an early Saturday morning at Sumi's house. As we walk down the stairs, we are greeted by the sound of a steam pan bubbling away in the kitchen. In it are *idlis*, a traditional south Indian breakfast item that Sumi had started preparing the day before. Its batter contains soaked and grounded idli rice and *dal* (dried legumes), which is then combined with water and salt before having to ferment for a full day. As it is a cold and rainy day in March, Sumi had put the batter in the oven overnight to let the residual warmth of the enclosed space work its magic. Sitting down in front of our plates the next morning, we are served the steamed, hot discs accompanied by two types of home-made chutney[10] to spread on top. After laying everything out, Sumi sits down. "*Eet smakelijk* (bon appetit)," she says with a smile.

Figure 3 : Idlis being steamed in a traditional pot. Photographed by Maya.

A dish such as idli, shown in figure 3, is a prime example of how labor-intensive Indian cuisines tend to be. The three main meals of the day – breakfast, lunch, and dinner – are generally warm meals with a handful of different side dishes. To prepare a typical Indian meal, Sheela explains, one might have to spend two hours in the kitchen, not taking into account any preparation that needs to be done the night before, such as soaking and grinding pulses, as is the case with idli.

"You are really a slave to the kitchen if you're cooking Indian meals," Gita tells me. We land on the topic of gender roles and differing perspectives of time between India and the Netherlands. Gita

[10] Chutneys are pungent and flavorful accompaniments to any meal. They are both spicy and fresh. A true balance of flavors. For Peegee's green chutney recipe, see appendix 2.

explains that she grew up in an environment where she saw her mother and mother-in-law spending hours in the kitchen every day. She realized that she had started picking up this trait. It made her aware that women in India are judged on their ability to cook, while men are not held to those same parameters. Preparing food is *supposed* to take a long time, her female relatives tell her: "If it's not taking time, it means not enough love has gone into the food. And what's the point of life if food is not made with love?" But in the Netherlands, she says, there is a different perspective on time and effort when it comes to cooking. One which she herself has now adopted. When she sees the gusto and enthusiasm with which her family eats Indian meals, it signals to her that it has been worth the effort. But she – or her husband – now only cooks one Indian meal a day.

Many of my participants come from a relatively high socioeconomic background; most came here on a highly skilled migrant visa themselves, or they moved here with their partner who did. In India, it would not be uncommon for them to have two to five people to help in their household. This included a cook, who might visit them up to once a day:

> "She would do a lot of the prep work. Whether it was peeling and chopping vegetables or making the *chapatis*[11]. Even if I wanted to cook something which only *I* know the recipe for, it was very easy. Because I would just call her and ask her to prepare everything. It would free at least an hour of my time because she would have the ginger-garlic paste ready or chopped onions ready."[12]

The cost of household help in the Netherlands is considerably higher than in India and therefore likely unattainable for those who move here. With the absence of a cook and the presence of a full-time job, many Indian migrants cannot find the time to prepare Indian food every day. Over time, their meals in the Netherlands become less elaborate and less time-consuming for the sake of convenience. One might look for shortcuts or ready-made meals – frozen *parathas*[13] from the Indian shop, or premade *papars*[14], only needing to be crisped up over a flame. Cooking a proper Indian meal during the week tends to be stressful, whereas weekends may open up possibilities to spend more time in the kitchen and prepare two to three Indian meals per day.

In addition, specific Indian dishes are cooked during festivals. Those from the state of Maharashtra might celebrate the Ganpati festival in honor of the Hindu god Ganesh. The preparation of *modaks*, Ganesh's favorite food, is reserved only for this ten-day festival. These sweet, dumpling-

[11] A chapati is a type of Indian flatbread made with flour and water, cooked on an iron pan. They are served alongside different side dishes or gravies. Pieces are teared off to scoop up spiced vegetables or meats. For Sumi's chapati (or *poli*) recipe, see appendix 3.

[12] Yahvi, semi-structured interview 2 March 2021.

[13] Parathas are a type of flat bread typically associated with Punjabi or north Indian cuisines. They are thicker than, say, a chapati or *roti*, and they can be served either plain with a dollop of *ghee*, or stuffed with a spiced vegetable or *paneer* (Indian cottage cheese) mixture. For our stuffed paratha recipe, see appendix 4.

[14] A side dish with many names, *papars* are thin, crispy flatbreads made from ground pulses. They serve as accompaniments to main meals, or – when seasoned – they can be eaten as a snack on their own.

resembling treats, visible in figure 4, are made with a rice flour dough and a coconut and *jaggery* (cane sugar) based filling. Its preparation is quite intricate, especially when one has never made it before. But many Hindus find it important to mark these days of celebration, even if they are not able to celebrate them in India. Preparing the appropriate dishes help make for a more festive and traditional environment. Yahvi expressed feeling a sense of pride after creating modaks with a similar taste to the ones she grew up eating: “I did actually make it last year. It turned out quite clumsily because I’d never made it before. But it tasted quite nice. It was pretty funny that it actually resembled something I could recognize.”

Figure 5: Modaks being steamed. Photographed by Aanaandee.

Figure 4: Decorated statue of Ganesh. Photographed by Aanaandee.

A lack of time and available ingredients thus creates less opportunity to prepare and consume Indian meals. In addition, Indian migrants are introduced to new cuisines and new perspectives on food through their (Dutch) friends or partners, leading to a more diverse weekly menu in their households. The longer one lives in the Netherlands, the more one finds themselves adapting to a Dutch mentality on food. Peegee, who has an Indian father and a Dutch mother, describes these differing mentalities as such: “The Dutch eat to live, whereas Indians live to eat.” In the Netherlands, eating Indian food becomes a special occasion for Indian migrants; the wait makes it more eventful, Naina tells me. In the next paragraph, we pay specific attention to the social symbolisms connected to these eventful occasions.

3.2 Social Symbolisms of Indian Food

As has become clear from the previous section, food is considered a very important part of life among our interlocutors. Peegee illustrates it as follows: "Indians talk about food as much as the Dutch do about the weather."[15] Food is an integral part of Indian social life. In this paragraph, I discuss what the social symbolisms of Indian food entail exactly and how it is meaningful to Indian migrants in the Netherlands.

Hospitality and social remittances

Rani, a 40 year old woman who has been living in the Netherlands for 17 years, talks about the differences she experiences between India and the Netherlands regarding the offering of food to guests: "Here when you go and meet people you have tea, coffee, and a biscuit, so food is not really offered." Rani continues: "My mother was very surprised when my parents came here and they went to see the [Dutch] in-laws. She said: 'They are not giving us food?' I said: 'No they don't. That's not there in the culture here.'" Rani explains further in what ways the Dutch have different social behaviors around food compared to Indians. Finally she notes: "On the other hand I have to say when people come over here, we always offer. Even if it's soup or anything, you know? I make something, a toastie or something. We always offer. So here [in the Netherlands] it's only because of a reason. Socializing is not the reason to give food." Like Rani, many others experience it as a surprise to discover that the Dutch only offer their guests a coffee and a biscuit when hosting guests. Similarly, they experience it as a surprise that these gatherings always have to be planned beforehand. In India, the door is always open for guests, they are always offered food and they will always be invited for dinner. Some of my interlocutors note that Indian families make sure to always prepare an extra meal in case a guest comes to visit. If a guest visits without there being enough food, a member of the family will offer his or her own portion to the guest instead. Maya describes the differences in food-based hospitality between India and the Netherlands as follows:

> "I think everyone in Europe is really each to themselves, right? So you could pay for someone's coffee or something, but you don't have to, right? But in an Indian context it's okay to pay for someone. Even for a meal. Like if I go out with a friend I pay sometimes and maybe she pays another time, but it's really relaxed about who pays. There's no strict: 'you send me a Tikkie[16] and I send you a Tikkie'. That's not the culture. I mean is it practical or not is different, but from a social standpoint food is really seen as an exchange of... It's not so compartmentalized. I think that's different here."

[15] Peegee, informal interview 15 February 2021, my translation.
[16] A Tikkie is payment request that can be sent to someone through an app by the same name. It is a means through which, for example, a restaurant bill might be split between two or more people.

According to Maya, the great role ascribed to food in social situations can be explained by the fact that, in India, people have to depend on each other more, because there is no proper social security system. People have to take care of themselves. Therefore, Indians deem it important to maintain good relationships with other people. In this way, the exchange of food is a way to create and maintain social relationships. Food acts as a symbol of hospitality and as a symbol of the relationship one has with one another. It is a form of social remittance where, as described in Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1966 [1954]), its semiotic significance makes it meaningful.

Opening up and expressing love at the dinner table

Paragraph 3.1 explained that Indian migrants are cooking less Indian food since migrating to the Netherlands due to a lack of time. Therefore, many Indian dishes are not eaten as a standard, daily meal anymore and are now considered more meaningful and special. My interlocutors tell me that they often prepare Indian food when guests are coming over, since this is regarded as a special occasion. They enjoy preparing Indian food for Dutch (or non-Indian) guests, either because their guests are fond of the Indian cuisine (and sometimes even expect to be served Indian food, as will be explained in Chapter 5) or because they like to introduce their cuisine to their guests. Sumi, who regularly cooks Indian food for Dutch guests, gives another significant reason: "You bring your country to them through food and then there's always stories about that, you know? I tell a story. See, if I make Spanish, say a *stifado*, there is no story about that. Stifado is tasty, with saffron or whatever, but if you make Indian [food] then you tell stories of: why this street food? What does it look like? How are you going to eat this over there in India? So there is a story that makes it a little bit lively."[17]

When Indian guests are coming over, Indian food similarly acts as a means to start conversations at the dinner table in which (shared) memories and stories are told. In addition to eating Indian food with Indian guests, however, cooking Indian food with them is also considered as a more special experience, as Eshana explains: "I think one of the things I personally have experienced here, is that many of times if I cook with people from my own home country it's more of an experience of cooking together, rather than having the end product to enjoy. Whereas if I have dinners with my non-Indian friends, then it's more about what the end result is, rather than the process." Eshana further explains that this is the case because her Indian friends are already familiar with the cooking process, so they can focus on enjoying the cooking instead of focusing on the cooking tasks.

Even when my interlocutors eat Indian food without there being any guests or special occasions, this food is considered just a bit more special, especially if it is a meal that has taken a lot of preparation

[17] Sumi, semi-structured interview 17 February 2021, my translation.

time or if there are certain memories attached to the food. For Ekta, *biryani*[18], visible in figure 6, is an example of such a meal. “I love biryani,” says Ekta. “I have this friend who loves biryani as well, so we always cook biryani together. [...] When I used to live in London and I was really homesick, he went out and went to an Indian store, got all the stuff and we made it. It’s a very huge, long process. It takes hours. It’s like a huge thing. So we did that and ever since then it's been one of our things, you could say.”

Figure 6: Biryani. Photographed by Peegee

As mentioned before, Indian migrants generally ascribe more value and symbolic meaning to Indian food than to other foods. Offering Indian food to guests is a way to express love, because it is more time consuming to prepare it and because it is considered special. It is a way for my interlocutors to tell stories about who they are and where they come from, which will be elaborated on further in the next chapters. It is a means which encourages them and their guests to open up and to bond with each other, as also argued by Bailey (2017) and Sarkar (2019). In this way, eating Indian food together can be viewed as a communal ceremony where Indian migrants and their guests reflect on a (shared) past, which aids in the construction of a collective history, similar to what Connerton (1989, 7) describes. Now that we have discussed the symbolisms of Indian food, the next chapter goes more in depth with regard to the memories and stories that are told and relived through Indian food, and what this means for Indian migrants in the Netherlands.

[18] Biryani is a popular dish made with rice, fragrant spices, meat and vegetables as its main ingredients. These ingredients are layered on top of each other.

"You must always be able to provide guests with food and drinks. It doesn't matter at what time they arrive. It's not like nobody will arrive at half past five because it is dinnertime. In India, that is at eight o'clock. No, you arrive *precisely* around dinnertime. That way, you can join in for the meal. There is always enough. There is always too much and something can always be prepared. You are always welcome. It is a culture of eating together, which allows you to enjoy it more than when you do it alone."

Figure 7: A fully stocked cupboard. Photographed by Peegee.

Chapter 4. Sensory and Embodied Memory

Tamar Oderwald

In response to René Descartes' infamous equation of *thinking* and *being*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) argued that I *am* "to the extent that I have a body and that through that body I am at grips with the world." It is through bodily perception that one creates a conceptualization of a subjective worldview and of the self. As we seek to draw conclusions on the connection between implicit memory and identity, the body is thus a valuable place to start. In this chapter regarding experiences of body memory for Indian migrants, I analyze what different sensory stimuli are experienced when preparing and consuming food. These sensory experiences are then contextualized in relation to body memory.

4.1 Sensory Experiences of Foodways

It would take decades to fully realize that which Merleau-Ponty (1945) argued for in *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, namely that the body ought to be considered a subject rather than an object in academic inquiry. From the 1990s onward, anthropologists recognized the need to look "beyond the body proper" (Lock and Farquhar 2007), describing it as a ground on which cultural knowledge is embodied and by which this knowledge is enacted (Csordas 1994). These ideas provide the foundation for the paragraph below. I discuss the sensory experiences of preparing and consuming Indian food, arguing that these 'body techniques' (Mauss 1934) are heavily influenced by the cultural environment the body finds itself in.

The autopilot chef

"We were not really that religious – my father, mother, or the kids. But my grandmother was [Hindu]. You were not allowed to taste the food while you were cooking. Because if you taste it, you cannot give it to the god as an offering. […] We have learned to cook using only smell."[19]

When I ask about sensory experiences during cooking processes, smell is often mentioned as being most important. The scent of the dish can tell you when the *masala* (spice blend) is cooked properly, if the onions have been sufficiently caramelized, or if enough salt has been added to the dish. This skill in judging the food by its scent is fueled by memory and intuition. Many of the women I speak to recall learning to cook from their mother and grandmother at an early age, more so than my male interlocutors. These women have watched their mothers and grandmothers, memorizing their recipes before trying them themselves. The term "recipes" should be interpreted liberally here, though. When one cooks with intuition, it is near impossible to write down measurements and amounts. Everything is put in on instinct;

[19] Sumi, interview 25 February 2021, my translation.

your senses will tell you if the food will turn out well. For instance, when Naina learned to cook *sheera*[20] from her mother, she asked how long the semolina needed to be roasted. Her mother did not give her a timeframe. Rather, she told her to "roast it until you can smell the semolina in the next room." That is how you know that it is roasted enough to make a good dish.

As explained in the previous chapter, some Indian dishes are prepared only on certain days of the year. These festival foods tend to rely on challenging cooking techniques and specific ingredients often difficult to find in the Netherlands. For example, *gheevar*, as pictured in figure 8, is made only during the Hindu festival of lights: Diwali. It is a sweet, refined dish made from fried dough and topped with rose-infused powdered sugar, pistachios, and gold leaf paper. Sumi says most women will not be able to make this without it crumbling apart, as it is *that* refined. If it were not for her grandmother teaching her how to make this dish, she herself would not have been able to do it. The dough is made with flour and *ghee* (clarified butter), the ratio of which is based on the look, feel, and smell of the dough, rather than fixed measurements. It is then fried in a traditional copper pot filled with more ghee. Its smell will indicate if the temperature is right. Cooking these dishes is often based entirely on one's recollection of one's sensory experiences, which in turn manifests itself as a sense of intuition.

Figure 8: Gheevar. Photographed by Sumi.

In repeating and memorizing the sensory perceptions of preparing certain dishes, this sense of intuition becomes embodied, especially for those exposed to such practices from a young age. In addition to gheevar, Sumi has stored close to 350 recipes in her cranial memory drive (making it a quite literal example of embodiment). Most of these recipes are typical to her home state of Maharashtra. But that which she calls her sense of proportion, she learned from her Gujarati grandmother. It made her a perfectionist in the kitchen, similar to her mother and grandmothers. By observing their cooking techniques and the proportions of the ingredients used, Sumi was able to develop that intuition. Even now, as she has lived in the Netherlands for over 20 years, she is able to prepare the dishes these women taught her to make – no written recipe needed. It goes beyond mere muscle memory. It is what Marcel Mauss (1934) would describe as a body technique. The body learns how to move, how to perceive, and how to judge in an encultured environment. It takes on these traits and inscribes them upon itself. Though cooking is an everyday, somewhat mundane task, it is in this case very much culturally determined. The recipes become part of the body, able to be executed without much thought: while being on "autopilot

[20] Sheera, also called *kesari* in south India, is a sweet dish made with semolina, sugar, milk, saffron, green cardamom powder, and nuts. It can be consumed as a side dish for all main meals of the day. For Naina's pineapple sheera recipe, see appendix 5.

mode," as Gita describes it. The same might be said for techniques of consuming food, as explored below.

Hands-on consumption

The table is set for lunch at Maya's place. To accompany the large bowl of basmati rice placed centrally on the surface, her cook had prepared several vegetarian dishes the night before: *brinjal bhaji* (spiced eggplant), *saag aloo* (spinach and potato), paneer[21] in a yogurt sauce, a dal[22], green chutney, a mixed pickle, and to my very left: spiced potato and pea patties. I am given a teaspoon to pour the dal over the pressure-cooked rice, and I use it to scoop it up, along with a combination of the other side dishes laid out in front of me. Maya wants me to try the potato patties with a dollop of green chutney, as the two complement each other well. I grab a patty with my left hand, break off a piece with my right, and dip it in the chutney to try. "It feels so natural, right?", Maya says between bites. "To eat Indian food with your hands. You just *have* to lick your fingers."

People in many regions of India eat primarily with their hands. This is done so for a few reasons, as my interlocutors explain to me. Eating with your hands allows you to focus on your food without distractions, making your experience of its flavors more intense. It also promotes the production of saliva which allows for easier digestion. It shows respect for your food and the cook when you do not cut it with a knife after it has been prepared. And finally, as underscored by Tanvi, the owner of an Indian street food restaurant in Haarlem, eating with your hands promotes bioenergy: the energy we have in our bodies is transmitted to our food and back into our body, creating a deeper sensory experience and focus. When the guests of her restaurant are served a *thali*[23], they are only given a spoon to eat the dal, as it is too much of a liquid to eat with your hands. The absence of cutlery ensures that guests slow down in eating their meal, therefore paying it – and its cook – respect by allowing for a better understanding of the flavors and an appreciation for the effort that went into it.

There is a specific technique for eating Indian meals with your hands. One that takes months, if not years, to perfect. Much like the sense of intuition in cooking, this method of consuming food also becomes embodied. It highlights something also prevalent in Sutton's fieldwork with the people of Kalymnos: that the senses ought to be viewed as culturally shaped, embodied skills that are crucial in academic research on food and foodways (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011, 469). Sensory experiences aid the development of 'body techniques' (Mauss 1934) and support the conceptualization of a subjective worldview (Merleau-Ponty 1945). Subsequently, inquiries into the senses enlighten us on the intricacies

[21] Paneer, also spelled *panir*, translates to 'cheese' from Persian. It refers to Indian cottage cheese: a soft and malleable type of cheese which is often pan-fried and added to gravies.
[22] In this context, dal refers to a dish comparable to a thick lentil soup. It may also be spelled 'daal' or 'dahl,' depending on the regional tongue. For Peegee's dal recipe, see appendix 6.
[23] Traditionally speaking, a thali is a large steel serving platter used during a lunch or dinner. The platter is filled with different side dishes, drinks, rice or breads. The word 'thali' can also refer to the meal itself: an Indian-style lunch or dinner that is served on such a platter. Its contents vary greatly from region to region.

of said worldview. As Sutton (2001, 10) argues in *Remembrance of Repasts*, an analysis of the senses has the opportunity to be deeply linked to body memory. It lends itself especially to an examination of the *form* of memories, rather than the *content*. How does one remember? What triggers body memory? And how is this related to foodways? These questions are answered in the next paragraph.

4.2 The Body Remembers: The Senses and Body Memory

Having explored some particularities in the sensory experiences in Indian foodways, I now turn to their influence on body memory. Body memory is a term used to describe an implicit form of remembering, one that is inscribed in the body as opposed to carried out in the brain (Fuchs 2012). Being deeply rooted and embodied, its ignition often relies on bodily perception. In this paragraph, I describe how sensory experiences of foodways can ignite body memory, as well as allow one to figuratively travel back in time through vivid recollections of one's childhood.

Dal and rice: An analysis of a childhood comfort food

"What dishes qualify as comfort food for you?" When I ask this question, the answer almost always includes rice and dal, regardless of someone's regional background. It is a hearty and nutritious, protein-rich dish that is relatively simple to make. Sumi tells me that, in India, dal and rice is consumed by people of all ages. The ingredients and cooking techniques of dal will vary throughout the country and between households, but the foundation remains the same. Kids are often introduced to it at an early age, as it is a meal that contains little spices or heat, making it more suitable for a child's developing palate. When I ask her how it feels to eat dal today, Sumi switches from speaking Dutch to speaking English when she tells me: "It touches somewhere in your deepest natural self, when you were a child. It sort of epitomizes your beginning phase of your life when you're actually not worried about anything. And that mouthfeel, and that taste, and that smell, all put together, maybe makes you feel that you have no worries in life."

Sumi experiences bliss when she prepares and consumes dal. This is also true for Rani, who defines comfort food as a dish or snack that makes you remember home. Something that ignites a warmth in your heart. When she prepares and consumes dal today, it takes her back to India. She revisits scenes of the dinner table in her childhood home, where she and her family would consume this meal together. This is not to say that comfort food is strictly defined as foods that ignite implicit memories. It can also be a meal that takes little effort to prepare, or simply an indulgent treat such as a piece of chocolate or a slice of cake. However, most participants named dishes they remember eating as a child. The simple, home-cooked dishes that you cannot get at a restaurant. It gives them a comforting feeling to eat it. This sense of mental comfort is also described by Diana Mata Codesal (2010), whose informants told her that "food from home" provided them with a sense of continuity in their new environments. It is a matter of groundedness, Rani explains. As an expat, she finds it important to feel connected to her home country

to feel grounded. Though you build new memories in your adopted home, memories of India bring Rani happiness, as she feels closer to her family and to her country of birth.

Let us circle back to the specific dish of dal and rice. Maya and Rani separately tell me that their parents used to make this comforting dish for them when they were sick. According to Sumi, there is a strong connection between comfort food and illness. As one starts building up food-centered memories from childhood, those foods start becoming synonymous with the worry-free era of one's youth. When experiencing illness as an adult, either mildly or severely, the body will yearn for these foods in an effort to relive those times and rid of worry. Sumi calls it a sort of primal force: the body sends signals to go back to your roots. It is indicative of what Sutton (2001; 2011) describes in the accounts of his fieldwork in Greece. First, that remembering, though seemingly an individualistic act, is always collective in some ways. The individual dal-related memories of my regionally diverse interlocutors follow a similar path and have a similar effect when the dish is consumed today. And second, that sensory experiences of foodways are powerful triggers of those memories. It emphasizes the importance of an inclusion of temporality in theories of material culture. The meals once consumed years ago still hold much influence over one's sense of self today. Many of my interlocutors explained in vivid detail the social and spatial conditions in which they remember consuming this dish, as if they were right back at that dinner table. It is a phenomenon I shall delve into more deeply below.

Remembering spaces

Munna, a 75-year-old man, has lived in the Netherlands for approximately 50 years. He grew up in Jammu, Kashmir, until he moved to Delhi in 1966. When he thinks of Jammu, he recalls the strong and memorable smells that he associates with the city. Even now, he speaks about those smells with his childhood friends. The aroma of spices brings him back to Delhi: "When I go to the Albert Cuyp street, there is one spice shop where he grinds the spices for you fresh. So when you walk by, you catch that smell and you are back again, immediately, in the *masala bazaar* in Delhi. […] That smell comes back. And that brings the streets, the people… It brings everything back."

Smell makes an impressive vehicle for memory. Along with taste, smell is a rather abstract and under-analyzed sense. It is often emotionally charged, as a recollection or a description of a scent often relies on memories associated with it. Some argue that aromas are thus highly symbolic, since they give rise to things greater than themselves. The emotional and bodily nature of smell makes it more subjective and more difficult to describe factually (Sutton 2001, 88-90). It is why a description of a scent – or a flavor – often relies on synesthetic or rather vague descriptors (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011). For Naina, who was born in the state of Maharashtra and moved to the Netherlands with her now-husband four years ago, this is exemplified in her description of *ambemohar* rice, a product specific to her home state: "When we served it, [my husband] had just one spoonful and he said: 'Oh my god, this tastes so much like home. What is this? How did you get this?' That was really surprising because I thought it's just

me, but it also reminded *him* of home. A lot of homes have that. It's called ambemohar. It is known for its smell and it tastes very beautiful. Like a farm of mangoes."

It should be noted that the senses are seldom experienced in an isolated fashion. It is a collaboration of sensory stimuli that perhaps affects body memory most intensely. A verbal description of a dish or ingredient might evoke a visual image, a smell, or a taste (Korsmeyer and Sutton 2011, 465). As Peegee gleefully speaks about oranges, for example, his mouth starts to water: "A delicious orange. Perfectly ripe; not too dry, not too raw, but a perfectly ripe orange – that is a gift from God. Just like some really delicious strawberries. My mouth is already starting to water. That says a lot." I thus argue that the multifaceted experience or ambiance of a space created by the synesthesia of senses most heavily affects body memory. Aanaandee explains how she is reminded of India when discussing a photo she took at a market in Groningen, illustrated in figure 9. It is a simple display upon first viewing: a woven basket filled with vibrant bunches of green parsley and a red pepper resting on top. Its striking colors and the presentation of the products in a woven basket reminded her of how vegetables would be stalled in her hometown in India. It sparked a conversation about the women who sold them door-to-door, carrying large baskets on their heads, filled to the brim with home-grown produce and herbs. Aanaandee recalled the strong, personal relationship she had with the vendor in a vivid description of their interactions on her doorstep. It shows the impact of a seemingly simple produce stall on a Dutch market. Bearing enough similarities to her recollection of vendors in India, it allows her to relive that space and time despite the physical and mental distance.

Figure 9: A woven basked filled with parsley and a red pepper at a Groningen market. Photographed by Aanaandee.

It is important to emphasize that, for many Indian migrants, body memory is not only triggered by Indian meals. As will be explained in Chapter 5, many of our interlocutors consider themselves to possess more of a postnational identity, especially those who have made multiple transnational journeys, such as Sheela. Though she was born in the Netherlands, her father, Sameer, would often travel and migrate for his occupation. Sheela lived in multiple countries during her childhood as a result and has continued this path in her adult life. Her history of migration has influenced her experience of body memory, she explains: "All places in the world introduce you to all sorts of delicious things that you take with you." In a way, she adds these recipes as pieces to her identity, as will be further explored in Chapter 5. Sameer, now 75, describes his adventurous appetite in eloquent recollections of Taiwan's snake alley, or a traditional meal he shared with the nomadic Bedouin people of Saudi Arabia. It seeps through in the meals he consumes today. "I'm no typical Indian," he tells me, in reference to him cooking Indian meals but once or twice per week. Other days are reserved for a diverse array of meals from

different cuisines. In doing so, he echoes his daughter's words. His diverse palate underscores his postnational identification, while also expanding his perception of body memory. When Sameer remembers his youth, though, he not only recalls the spaces that defined his childhood. He also commemorates his family, especially his mother. Mothers are regarded by many as having an influential presence in their food-based memories, as I delve into below.

Remembering mothers

"The kitchen is where you met your mother. Her *sari* always smelled like food."[24]

Munna reminds me that memories associated with Indian food always include the women who cooked it: aunts, mothers, and grandmothers.[25] "Every household has a little touch of mother in it," he tells me. This was especially true for his mother, whose guidance would be heavily present in the family's kitchen, despite having hired cooks and other household help to prepare their meals. Mothers are an influential presence in a nuclear family. Even if they had to go to work in the morning, they would wake up early to prepare lunch boxes for each family member to take to school or work. Kitchens would be filled with the smell and sound of crackling spices, or the sound of *dosa*[26] batter being ground in the blender, from as early at five thirty in the morning. The most archetypical sound experienced in Indian households, however, is the whistle of a pressure cooker, an appliance often brought to the Netherlands when migrating (see also Bailey 2017, 56).

Figure 10: Traditional chapati cooking tools. Photographed by Sumi.

Tools and appliances can often turn into family heirlooms. For example, a chapati rolling pin, visible on the top left of figure 10, might be passed down from (grand)mother to daughter, or from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. When Sumi uses her mother's rolling pin, she feels connected to her mother. She views these tools as an extension of her own body. The

[24] Sumi, semi-structured interview 25 February 2021, my translation.

[25] This is not to diminish men's influence in food-based memories. Gita, for instance, mentioned that her father did most of the cooking in her household. She followed it by stating that theirs was quite an unconventional household for this very reason. Mothers generally hold a more substantial presence in a private kitchen. Whereas men tend to find a place in food-based memories in a public setting: street food vendors for Gita, and a tea shop owner for Munna, to name a few.

[26] A dosa is a typical south Indian breakfast food. Its preparation is similar to that of idli. A batter made of soaked and ground pulses and rice is left to ferment for a full day, before being cooked on a cast iron pan and made into an ultra-thin, crepe-like product. They can be eaten plain with different chutneys, or stuffed with a spiced potato mixture, among other things.

matrilineal, generational, and emotional connections associated with the tool make it a prime example of material culture (Woodward 2007, 10-11). The value created through these objects is one of personal family history. The objects are taken out of the stream of commodities and turned into an heirloom. They materialize social and sensory relations (Sutton and Hernandez 2007, 75). Touching the object sparks memories of its previous owner(s) and the social conditions in which it was used. For Sumi, it helps her feel connected to the women in her family.

Staying connected with family as a transnational migrant has certainly become easier in the digital age. Yahvi, for example, started cooking with her mother via Skype to learn new recipes after moving to the Netherlands. Naina calls her mother-in-law almost every day. When they have a conversation, the topic of food seldom remains untouched. Her mother-in-law will tell Naina what she made for lunch or for dinner, which inspires Naina to make these dishes as well. She develops a craving that triggers memories of her childhood home and the dishes prepared by her mother. In her own cooking, Naina always bases her choices and considerations on what she remembers eating as a child: "Whenever I eat any kind of food item, I'm always trying to look for that nostalgia-feeling. Like: 'Ooh, this one is like the one I had there' or 'this one is like my mum's.' That's what I'm looking for." This nostalgic perception of correctness can seep through in individual narratives of authenticity, as I explain below.

Narratives of authenticity

As with any cuisine, there is no true "authentic Indian food." For one, many will point out that there is no such thing as *an* Indian cuisine. In a country so vast, so highly populated, and so rich in history, it should come as no surprise that there exist many different regional cuisines, each with their own historical influences. Moreover, the large amount of migration within the country results in (extended) families of mixed backgrounds, each with their own styles of cooking. Narratives of authenticity and traditionality therefore not only rely on one's personal regional background, but also the background of one's (grand)mother and (grand)father, one's caste or socioeconomic status, as well as the overall milieu in which one grows up. The general consensus seems to be that history, proper ingredients, and simplicity of a dish can contribute to the verdict on its authenticity. Home-cooked food – as mother made it – is generally considered to be more authentic (Srinivas 2006). Gita expresses one of her biggest regrets in life: not learning traditional Himachal Pradesh recipes from her grandmother. The two women do not share the same regional background, as Gita was born in Delhi (though she describes herself as being Punjabi). "[Himachal Pradesh has] a very, very different cuisine which is not accessible anywhere outside of the state," she tells me. "You need to be in Himachal to be eating that food. Unlike some of the more popular cuisines that have permeated throughout the country. So I don't know how to make all of those things. And I miss having that food. I have nothing to look forward to because I have not learned

it from [my grandmother]. I can always go onto the websites and find the recipe, but it won't be the same taste."

Ajeet, the owner of *Authentic India*, an Indian supermarket in Amsterdam, tells me that even restaurants in India will not reach the same level of authenticity that home-cooked meals do. Restaurants, both in India and in the Netherlands, tend to cook food according to their guests' pallets, rather than keeping with traditional recipes and techniques. Though an exception can be made for *dhabas* (roadside restaurants), according to Munna. Dhabas are less commercialized than restaurants. They tend to be family-owned with a long-running history. One particular paratha stand situated on the road between Delhi and Punjab comes to mind for Munna:

> "I go to Delhi and I go for paratha only. It is a two-hour drive from Delhi out into Punjab, a place called Sonipat. And there on the roadside is a dhaba which is a hundred years old, started by the current owner's grandfather. He makes the parathas and they are still the same. You will see a row of cars standing there. He only makes paratha and he puts raw, white butter on it. And a glass of *karnemelk* [buttermilk]. Nothing else. It's superb! My mouth waters when I talk. This is remembering India!"

It is the simplicity and the historical continuity of the ingredients and cooking techniques that make the dish authentic, as per Munna. On a more personal scale, this is also experienced in the home, where family recipes are passed on from (grand)mother to daughter, or from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. These meals shape one's conceptions of authenticity. This is why I gather that body memory is experienced more intensely with meals or snacks relying on nostalgia, as was also exemplified by Naina in the section above. The sense of memory and connections becomes stronger when a larger distance is created between an adopted home and a country of birth, Tulasi Srinivas (2006, 211) argues. In a moment of cultural loss, one – either consciously or subconsciously – seeks to reconnect with their roots (see also Banerji 2007). The gustatory memories provide a symbolic link between the migrant and their family – between the present and the past. As alluded by Sheela, embodied recipes and food practices also provide grounds for identity construction. Having explored the triggers and workings of sensory body memory, we now analyze Indian migrants' processes of (post)national identification and its connection to memory in the next chapter.

“I still dream about walking across the market in India. And this is what I see in my dream.”

- Sumi

Figure 11: Vegetable stall in Pune, India. Photographed by Sumi.

Chapter 5. Indian Food and Identity

Flori Visser

The previous chapter discussed the sensuous and embodied memory as experienced by Indian migrants through Indian food. In this chapter, I turn to how Indian food aids in the construction of (post)national identity for our population. The first paragraph of this chapter describes how Indian migrants in the Netherlands perceive and experience their (post)national identity and how this is connected to their sense of belonging. The second paragraph focuses on how Indian food plays a role in these perceived identities.

5.1 (Trans)national Identity and Belonging

In his collaborative ethnography on migration and questions of being, anthropologist Michael Jackson (2013, 3) writes the following: "Whether planned or accidental, desired or dreaded, the passage from one place to another, one life stage to another, or one state or status to another often figures centrally in the stories we tell about our lives and who we are. Though we may hanker after hard and fast differences between self and other, human and animal, man and machine, male and female, these boundaries get blurred, transgressed, and redrawn." It is these blurred boundaries that I focus on in this paragraph. Here, I discuss how my interlocutors have (re)constructed their sense of (trans)national identity after migrating from India to the Netherlands. I analyze how their thoughts and ideas about the meaning and experience of identity and home are linked to the concepts 'postnationalism' and 'sense of belonging.'

Cross-border identities

Transnational migrants increasingly create and maintain lives that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders and which connect their country of origin and country of settlement. As national boundaries get blurred, so does the sense of national identity for these migrants (Bosniak 2002, 987-988; Bloemraad 2004, 390). For my interlocutors, it is not sufficient to define their national identity as solely Indian. They frequently use terms such as "universal," "international," or "world citizen" to describe their national identity, which are terms for self-identification that bring to light how they perceive their identity as something which exceeds national borders. It exemplifies the presence of postnationalist sentiments. Eshana explains how she has become more aware of this for herself since migrating to the Netherlands: "Although it's been quite many years living here, I definitely see that the more I live here, the more I feel like I'm part of something more global, beyond India. Although it sounds very cliché, it's something I have thought about and kind of exposed myself to. That I'm not gonna be only constricted to my own bubble that I grew up in."

There are three[27] main reasons why many Indian migrants ascribe a postnational identity to themselves. First of all, traveling has an effect on this. Migrating to the Netherlands exposes Indian migrants to a completely different cultural environment than what they were used to while growing up in India. Many of my interlocutors have also traveled to or lived in other countries, such as the United States, England, or France, which adds to a postnational self-identification as well. As illustrated through Sheela's story in Chapter 4, people take experiences with them when they travel, which add little pieces to their identity. "I've lived in so many places, I've traveled to so many places, that my passport is only my ethnicity," says Deepika while talking about why she feels more like a "citizen of the world." With this she could refer to the fact that although she is born Indian, in her mind she does not explicitly perceive herself as being Indian.

Second, many Indian migrants grew up in families which were already internationally oriented. For example, they already had family members studying abroad or working there as highly skilled migrants. Many Indian migrants remained in this international environment after migrating to the Netherlands, since they started to work in an international company where they were surrounded by colleagues with a variety of nationalities, and because many of them have friends or partners of different nationalities, as is the case for Rani:

> "My roots are Indian, but I feel I'm more of a world citizen because I can connect to anyone with any background. I have worked in an international environment and I have no problems connecting with people from any background. [...] And I think it's also because my father was in the Indian army. We had to travel every two years, we had to shift cities. Every city over there is like a country. You could compare it to a country. So literally we were shifting countries like the Netherlands to Germany, Germany to Spain, Spain to Portugal. Every two years we had to do that."

Finally, some Indian migrants note that while living in India, they already did not explicitly experience their Indian nationality as part of their identity. India is one of the largest countries in the world and is extremely culturally diverse. As Rani noted in the quote above, moving from one city to another feels like moving to another country. Because of this, some Indian migrants say that – while living in India – they felt more connected to the state in India where they came from rather than the country itself. India's colonial history has contributed to disconnected nationalism as well: "I know that I'm Indian, but I would guess my grandfather's generation would say that more proudly than I would," Bob says while discussing his national identity. "I guess I'm struggling, because Indian identity today is a very fractured thing. I'm two generations away from the people that fought for independence, so I don't have a thing with that. But I do want Indian identity to be a thing in a way that doesn't cause more strife back home,

[27] In addition to these three reasons it should be noted that, for those of a mixed background, the fact that they did not consider their national identity as solely Indian is also partly due to the fact that only one of their parents was of Indian descent, while the other parent was of Dutch or German descent.

because there's lots of movements who are like: 'we're this, we're that, we're not India.'" Here, Bob refers to the current political disunity and fragmentation among Indian citizens as he perceives it. According to him, there is no strong sense of unity among Indians, which contributes to him not feeling Indian. Another reason why some Indian migrants do not feel like their Indian nationality was part of their identity before migrating, is the language. Although Hindi is considered the official language in India, many people in India do not speak it. Therefore, many Indians use English as their language instead. Deepika for example explains how English is one of the languages she learned while growing up, because her parents spoke different languages from each other and because she learned English at school. Speaking English has been so present in her daily life that she even thinks in English and speaks in English to her mother whenever she is angry. Now that I have discussed how my interlocutors perceive their (post)national identity, I turn to how narrations of home and belonging add to this identification.

Rethinking home and sense of belonging

As explained in our theoretical framework, a sense of belonging is marked by feelings of emotional attachment, home, and safety (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). For transnational migrants, who may have traveled and migrated across the globe multiple times, this sense of belonging and feeling of home can become blurred. This also turned out to be the case for my interlocutors. On the one hand they have been building a life in the Netherlands, where they have met new people and found a social network, but on the other hand they often also remain in close contact with their Indian family and friends who either remained in India or who migrated to other countries as well. Like many migrants, they are left with the task to navigate their relationships with people from each of these countries (Fortier 2000; Jackson 2013, 2; Voight-Graf 2018, 342). They thus find themselves to be in between two places. Despite this tense position, for Sumi, the Netherlands has become her home. As she explains: "There were years that I would dream about my Indian friends and India, but now I dream from here and I speak Dutch in my dreams. [...] I never feel like I have to go back to India or like I miss India. I miss India in some aspects, but it is not a longing I have. I am happy and settled here."[28] Kabir, on the other hand, has traveled across the globe so often that there is not one fixed location that he considers as home: "Now actually [home is] where I am, or where I am going to sleep that night, because I have just been to so many places."[29]

All in all the answers to the question where home is located varied among my interlocutors. So what do these varying answers say about the sense of belonging for these migrants? For my interlocutors, belonging is closely tied to fitting into a society. Some believe they do not belong anywhere, because they feel as if they are a foreigner both in India and in the Netherlands. Some feel as if they belong both in India and in the Netherlands, since they have experienced that they fit in both societies because they

[28] Sumi, semi-structured interview 17 February 2021, my translation.
[29] Kabir, semi-structured interview 20 February 2021, my translation.

know the local customs. There are also some, including Maya, who feel as if they belong in the Netherlands, because they relate to certain societal, cultural or political aspects of the Dutch society:

> "In India, I almost get suffocated sometimes, because I have to fit in, because there's religion and then everyone around you is like: "No, but you have to go to the temple and do this." And I don't want to do any of that. And here I can really pick my life in terms of how much of what I want myself. So [I like] big parts of the society here and people here and then I combine that with what I like about India, so it's really my bubble. This is the life I've created for myself. I don't have any obligations like I did back in India, right? To show off, be a certain way, meet certain nans that you don't wanna meet, but it doesn't matter. So for me this is perfect."

It can be noted from this narrative that Maya rejects certain expectations that come with being Indian or with living in India. In a way she wants to distance herself from these. Like Maya, Sumi also feels as if she belongs in the Netherlands. Her reason for this, however, is that she does not feel like a foreigner at all: "I am so comfortable with my friends, with my Dutch friends. Luckily they are not really typically Dutch either, but I really don't feel that I am a foreigner with Dutch people." Fortier's (2000, 2) concept 'migrant belonging' can be applied to my interlocutors because – as is often the case with migrants – they are in a paradoxical and tense position: between movement and attachment, outside and inside. On the one hand, their sense of belonging is deterritorialized, but on the other hand it is also reterritorialized. This happens for example through the consumption of Indian food, as will be explained further in the section below.

5.2 Indian Food and Identity

In "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," Sidney Mintz and Christine Du Bois (2002, 109) state: "Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart." In this paragraph, I elaborate on how this process works in the case of Indian migrants in the Netherlands. Here, I analyze what role Indian food plays in Indian migrants' construction of identity and their sense of home and belonging as described in the previous section.

Remembering India: Back to the roots

While the previous section made clear that Indian migrants may not always feel as if their identity is *solely* Indian, being Indian is still at least part of their identity, despite the fact that their journey through life has broadened their sense of identity. It was mentioned multiple times that India remains the place where their "roots" lie. It is the country where they grew up, the country where their family still resides.

It is exactly this part of their identity – their Indian roots and upbringing – that is reinforced and maintained through Indian food.

As explained in Chapter 4, mothers are very present in stories about and memories of Indian dishes. There is great importance ascribed to them in relation to the preparation of Indian food. The memories of mothers that are attached to certain Indian dishes contribute to the reinforcement of Indian identity. For Kabir, a 25-year-old graduate living in Nijmegen, chicken curry is an example of such a dish. It is a dish he learned to cook from his mother. It therefore reminds him of his mother and it makes him feel connected to his family in India, making it a dish he holds close to his heart. Although he cooks this dish very often, it is still challenging for him to make his chicken curry taste exactly the same as he remembers from his mother. His mother stopped making chicken curry according to the original recipe, since she wanted to eat more healthily. "A chicken curry can be tasty if it's healthy, but if you just add a little more oil, a little more butter, a little more seasoning and all that, a little more salt, it's just that much better." Kabir also adds: "My mother doesn't make it that way anymore so I still have to be able to make it that way myself. So that's kind of like it actually only exists when I make it."[30] This narrative exemplifies a form of 'gastro-nostalgia,' as Srinivas (2006) would call this. Through recreating the "authentic" chicken curry, as his mother made it, a continuity is maintained in Kabir's ability to remember where he came from. It is a means through which youth memories are retrieved and kept alive.

The memories that are attached to Indian dishes are also brought to life by the conversations one might have while eating it with a group of people, as Paul explains: "If I for example eat [Indian food] together with other people from India, then the conversations are often also about home and about India. It also happens very often that when I am eating one [Indian] dish while talking to people, that the conversation is about other kinds of Indian dishes and about what I miss most and about what I would eat if I went back. The conversation is also often about India or abroad or something. That would happen less I think when you eat other types of food."[31] It is also through this storytelling of (shared) memories, that Indian migrants are reminded of where their roots lie, which in turn reinforces consciousness of their Indianness (Connerton 1989; Fortier 2000).

Another way in which Indian food can contribute to the reinforcement of the Indian part of one's identity is eloquently illustrated by Maya's story about her *masala dabba* (spice box), which can be seen in figure 12. Spice boxes can be found in most Indian kitchens. They are made of metal and contain seven cups in which spices such as chili, cumin seeds, turmeric and mustard seeds are stored. These are all spices which are put in most dishes, so it is convenient to store them together in one larger box. "It symbolizes the Indian kitchen which I was also trying to reject for a long time, because I wanted to just do things differently. But now I'm back doing it, because it's more convenient and just easier," Maya

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[30] Kabir, semi-structured interview 20 February 2021, my translation.
[31] Paul, semi-structured interview 6 March 2021, my translation.

explains. She talks about how, when she migrated, she wanted to explore new ways of being instead of lingering in her Indian bubble while living the Netherlands. However, she ended up cooking a lot more Indian food than she thought she would do initially, because it is convenient for her to cook Indian and because she also wants her children to become familiar with the Indian food culture. “It is not just a utility item, it is maybe the most symbolic picture out of all the pictures we have seen so far, because it really means just coming back to the food I know, my kitchen identity to a certain extent, after many years.” For Maya, acquiring a spice box symbolizes embracing the Indian part of her identity. The spice box is something she associates to be typically Indian and therefore it acts as a marker of Indianness. It is thus an example of how, as argued in material culture, an object can function as an actor in identity construction (Woodward 2007). Now that I have discussed how Indian food aids in the construction of my interlocutors’ perception of their identity, I will analyze the role of Indian food in their sense of home and belonging.

Figure 12: Spice box. Photographed by Maya.

Reconstructing home through Indian food

During conversations with my interlocutors, ‘home’ is regularly mentioned in relation to Indian food. For example, Ekta says the following while talking about her experience of eating Indian food with the people she loves: “It makes me feel very comfortable and happy and, like, a feeling of home.” Another example comes from Michelle, a 47-year-old woman from The Hague, who explains how an unavailability of Indian food contributed to feelings of isolation during her first years in the Netherlands: “Even the food you missed, because it was not available here in the Netherlands. There were very few Indian shops where you could purchase certain things. [...] So you don’t have the food that you had all that time, which you had for the first twenty years or twenty-five years [of your life]. Suddenly you went to this different, big bubble, where everything changes. Home at that moment was India.” What Michelle experiences here is in line with what Vallianatos and Raine (2008) argue on how food ought to be considered a symbol of (ethnic) identity. For their interlocutors, a lack of ethnic food symbolizes isolation. It confronts migrants with the distance between them and their country of birth. Like Ekta and Michelle, Maya also mentions the availability of Indian food in the Netherlands while describing why she considers the Netherlands as her home: “I don’t really miss anything, because I get the food here. Of course once in a while I wanna go back because it's a familiar place, but in all honesty I don’t miss India that much.”

What becomes clear from such statements, is that Indian food contributes to my interlocutors' sense of home and belonging. Eating Indian food offers Indian migrants a sense of continuity and familiarity with what they were used to back in India. It reminds them of where they come from and in doing so, Indian food can act as a marker of identity, as argued by Vallianatos and Raine (2008). The way in which Indian food acts as a marker of identity here is very specific: the memories attached to certain dishes, as explained in Chapter 4, hold strong associations of demarcated temporal and spatial scenes which inscribe themselves on the body. With this, they provide a foundational sense of self. It demonstrates what we have argued before: that objects – including food – not only act as markers of identity at times when they are physically present, but also at a later stage in life when one is reminded of the memories attached to said objects.

On being the Other

Indian food does not only play a role in identity construction through the way Indian migrants think and behave around Indian food themselves, but also through the way their environment reacts and behaves around them and their foodways. When it comes to my interlocutors, they have experienced little to no discrimination while living in the Netherlands and most of them have said that they do not feel as if the discrimination that they have experienced has had any effect on their self-perception. The reason for the little amount of discrimination might be that Indian migrants are a relatively new group of migrants to enter the Netherlands and that few prejudices exist about them, as was explained earlier.

Although Indian migrants experience little discrimination, it happens quite regularly that Dutch people, or other non-Indian people comment on them – either in a positive or negative way. Interestingly, many of the reactions that my interlocutors hear are related to Indian food. For example, others might start a conversation with them about their interest in Indian food, as Paul explains: "Sometimes when we cook with [non-Indian] friends and we eat with our hands, they often try to join in and they also try to eat with their hands and stuff. They try to adapt a little bit to the context of the situation in which they are sitting with people from India. And often they are curious about how the food is made and want to learn something from it. Also, they want to know where you can buy those herbs and want to learn about those dishes."[32]

Another example comes from Sheela, who notices that, despite the fact that she and other Indian migrants usually cook dishes from different cuisines, the Dutch often expect to be served Indian food when they are invited over for dinner by an Indian migrant. Whenever someone comes over to her house to stay for dinner, her children ask her: "Will you be cooking Indian again?" Sheela also speaks about how during her student days, when she still lived at home with her parents, her parents were often away, traveling, for long periods. Her mother would often fill the freezer with a month's supply of Indian

[32] Paul, semi-structured interview 6 March 2021, my translation.

meals. Sheela's Dutch friends were aware of this and often came over to eat when her parents were away. After a while she noticed that her friends often continued to eat with her. She thought that was normal, but she found that one of her friends, for example, only took her boyfriend with her when she came to eat with Sheela – not when she went to eat with someone else. "Do you come over for dinner because you like me or because of the food?" Sheela finally asked her. Her friend confessed that in the beginning they mainly came by for the food, but that it grew into friendship. These experiences show that the Dutch strongly associate Indians with their food and that they have certain expectations of Indians with regard to this. Although my interlocutors mostly have positive experiences with other people, these experiences reinforce their consciousness of there being an "us" versus "them" in a subtle manner. In this way, a consciousness of the Indian part of their identity might be triggered (Jenkins 2008).

Despite the positive experiences, there are also those who have had negative experiences. For example, Rani mentions that her neighbors started to complain about the smell of her food when she was cooking at home: "They can be really picky about these things. I mean, if I smell the meat[33] I don't complain. We don't complain, but people here complain very easily with different things. I try to let it go. My [Dutch] husband said: 'I can't help it. The houses aren't made that way.' Like I have to close the door, but in India we cook Indian food every day. That smell goes away, because you can open the window, there's ventilation." What Rani describes here, is exactly what some of Bailey's (2017) research participants experienced as well. He called such comments regarding the smell of food "sensorial othering" (Bailey 2017, 58). Through this process, Indian migrants are reminded of their 'otherness.' Eshana's statement illustrates as well how otherness can be reinforced through comment on food(habits): "There are sometimes people who make certain comments, like: 'Oh your house smells like curry.' They don't mean it in a bad way, but sometimes people do associate certain comments regarding the food based on your living situation or your daily habits. For instance, you eat a warm meal so they guess you're Indian." It thus happens through this othering, that one is reminded of the differences between oneself and 'the Other,' which in turn can lead to a stronger identification as being an Indian.

[33] Rani was a vegetarian at the time this interview was conducted.

Kabir’s Chicken Curry

Serves 7 people

1) Fry a tsp of nigella seeds in a bit of vegetable oil

2) Add two onions, 1 tbsp of ginger and 1 tbsp of fresh chili (less chili if you want it less spicy!)

3) Add 1 tsp of *kurkuma* [turmeric], 1 1/2 tsp garam masala, 1 tsp of chili powder and pepper to taste and fry for five min

4) Add 500 grams chicken and fry for another five min

5) Add 1 package of Chinese cabbage and fry for a few min

6) Add one can of crushed tomatoes and maybe a little bit of water

7) Add five crushed garlic cloves to the pot and after a few minutes add one small can of peas

8) Add 1 1/2 cups of water and let it simmer for a bit, then add one cup of creme fraîche and let everything cook with the lid closed

9) After around 15 min, add one can of coconut milk and cook for a few more min

10) Chop up one handful of fresh coriander for garnish

Figure 13: Chicken Curry. Photographed by Kabir.

Serve with rice or daal

A tip from Kabir: You might need to add less than 1 1/2 cups of water. Just see how it looks at that point. You want it to be sort of liquid but not really a soup.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and discussion

Tamar Oderwald & Flori Visser

In this thesis, we have analyzed the relationship between food, body memory, and identity for Indian migrants in the Netherlands. The foundational concepts provided in our theoretical framework have been discussed in relation to this spatial and demographic context. Thereafter, some characteristic features and symbolisms of Indian foodways were presented. Sensory experiences of Indian foodways were subsequently analyzed and contextualized in relation to body memory. It has become clear that meals consumed during childhood are perceived as profoundly significant in an accumulation of implicit memories, to be ignited by sensory stimuli at a later stage in life. And finally, Indian migrants' narratives of (post)national identities were explored in relation to Indian food(ways). Specifically, we analyzed Indian migrants' reconfigurations of their identity, their thoughts on home and belonging, and the image of Indian migrants as imposed by others. These perceptions were then analyzed in relation to foodways. We now discuss and answer our central question based on the presented data and analyses. We will do so by following a migrating life's journey: from childhood to migration to settlement. What roles do body memory and identity construction play in these eras? How are the two concepts connected over the span of this journey? And what role does food play in all of this? In doing so, we answer the question: *How do Indian migrants in the Netherlands construct a sense of identity and belonging through the body memory of food and foodways?*

6.1 Childhood Identities: Building Memories

Tamar Oderwald

Childhood is a fundamental stage in one's life. It is the time during which one's conceptualization of 'normal' is developed. How does one ought to live? What is daily life supposed to look like? It is also a time during which one's first memories are inscribed on the brain and the body, which include memories of food that is prepared and consumed during this time. This stage of life thus provides the foundation for many experiences to come. In our research we found that our interlocutors' food-based childhood memories were heavily present in discussions of body memory or identity construction. It thus becomes clear that food from the past still affects processes of identification today. As David Sutton (2001, 7) states: "If 'we are what we eat,' then 'we are what we *ate* as well."[34]

In the study of material culture, it is argued that objects, including food, function as markers of identity (Bourdieu 1984; De Solier 2013; Woodward 2007, 5-6). In other words, possessions hold meanings that are in turn related to or inscribed onto their owners. Where theories of material culture fall short, we argue, is their lack of consideration for temporality and memory. We consider food to be a temporary object in two ways. First, food is by nature perishable and non-lasting. Once a meal is

[34] Emphasis mine.

consumed, it ceases to exist in its original form. Second, as has become clear in Chapter 4, foods consumed in the past are deeply tied to experiences of body memory. In this case, these remembered meals have tied themselves to a particular temporal and spatial dimension of one's life. They thus not only aid the construction of one's absolute identity, but they more specifically characterize the memories and identification experienced during this demarcated time period. When we view food as a symbol and building block of ethnic identity (Vallianatos and Raine 2008, 365), we can argue that meals consumed during childhood serve as its foundation. A child builds social and emotional associations with the foodways they experience. These can include recollections of spaces, sounds, smells, tastes, and the people with whom these foodways were experienced. Meals associated with this era, in a sense, trap these associations and tap into them every time the meals are prepared or consumed again. Meals like these become part of a foundational sense of identity. They become part of the body. The encultured and remembered foodways in turn manifest themselves as body techniques (Mauss 1934).

For Indian migrants, food-centered childhood memories often come with associations of people, spaces, and emotions. Mothers have proven to be an influential factor in these memories, as they were regarded to be the supervisor of the kitchen in many Indian households. The spaces most often recognized are the home, markets, and dhabas or other street food environments. The senses play an important role here. A repeated occurrence of specific sensory stimuli - such as the sound of a pressure cooker or the smell of a masala bazaar – entrench the implicit memories associated with a space and a time, especially in a food-centered context. Aside from sensory experiences, emotions also engage with the sensation of recollections. Because childhood is generally perceived as a carefree era and food is consumed at moments of happiness and bliss, these sentiments become associated with the meals that characterize this stage of life.

It is important to again underscore the vastness and cultural diversity of India and its people. Individual food-centered memories will vary widely, as is to be expected, but the characteristics presented above are shared to a certain degree. Meals consumed during childhood often rely on one's regional background. In regard to one's experience of food-centered memories, this is manifested in two ways. First, regional cuisines in India maintain their own traditional recipes and foodways, at times influenced by religious dietary requirements or geographical histories, such as an integration of Persian or European cuisines. Second, on a smaller scale, regionally diverse families in India create a new sense of traditionality in the home. Differing regional cuisines are combined, exchanged and passed on to a new generation, whose food-centered memories reflect the diversity of their family history. This emphasis on regional identification is one reason why some interlocutors did not identify as completely Indian, even in childhood. This perception of identity can also be experienced when growing up in an internationally oriented environment.

Circling back to the relationship between food-centered childhood memories and processes of identification, we can conclude that the association one builds around meals consumed during childhood provide the base for a further journey of identity construction. Youth is an era where one first gets

acquainted with one's sense of self. The spaces, people, emotions, and foodways that mark that period become interconnected and inscribed on one's sense of body memory, to be ignited later in life. Continuing the identification journey, we now turn to processes of identity construction in the context of a literal journey: migration.

6.2 Complicated Identities: Broadening Horizons

Flori Visser

Migrating from one country to another can put one in a state of confusion with oneself. On the one hand, a migrant has to find their way in a completely new environment and a new culture, but on the other hand they have taken the cultural baggage from their country of birth with them. Migrants are therefore left with the task to navigate their relationships with both their country of birth and country of settlement (Fortier 2000; Jackson 2013, 2; Voight-Graf 2018, 342). As explained in the previous section, childhood is a fundamental stage in life for the construction of one's (national) identity. For many Indian migrants, their sense of national identity was already challenged while they were growing up in India, due to the reasons described in the previous section, but migrating to another country challenges this sense of national identity even further. Chapter 5 described how traveling to other countries, living or working in an international environment, and meeting people from all over the world can result in the construction of a sense of postnational identity among Indian migrants. It is a situation where one feels as if one's (national) identity is no longer bound to a single geographically limited space, but where this identity transcends boundaries instead. Ideas about where home is located and where one belongs might get more blurred as a result.

Although most of our interlocutors ascribe a more postnational sense of identity to themselves, the Indian facet of their identity never seems to be completely gone. In this research, Indian food and foodways have proven to be a means through which the Indian facet of our interlocutors' identity is reinforced. As Vallianatos and Raine (2008, 356) argue, food connects across time and space. It can be a fundamental component of maintaining connections to home and it can signify (transnational) identity. It offers a continuity of routines and practices that one was familiar with in one's country of birth. For our interlocutors, the preparation and consumption of Indian food also offers them a sense of home and belonging, and it reinforces their connection to (family and friends from) India. Through the (childhood) memories that are attached to Indian food, stories from India are brought to life and in this way, Indian food reminds our interlocutors of their Indianness. On the one hand, Indian food can thus offer our interlocutors a sense of groundedness in the complexity and confusion in which they might find themselves with regard to their sense of belonging and identity. On the other hand, however, this might complicate their situation even more: although Indian migrants might perceive themselves as postnational, Indianness is still intrinsically linked to the foundational sense of self that was developed in childhood.

In addition to their own reconfigurations of their identity, our interlocutors are confronted with the opinions and thoughts of the people around them concerning their identity. Although many of our interlocutors do not feel as if the beliefs and expectations that prevail in their (new) societal environment affect their identity that much, some feel as if their Indian identity is to a certain extent imposed on them by others. By being labeled as a "foreigner" or an "Indian," Indian migrants are reminded of their otherness. Interestingly, this often happens through food. The comments that people around them make regarding Indian food or eating habits, or the conversations that people start with them on these topics, remind our interlocutors of their Indianness and of how they might be perceived as 'the Other.' It can be concluded from this, that othering is another factor which aids in the undermining of the postnational identity that Indian migrants might ascribe to themselves.

In this section, we have explained that Indian migrants' sense of national identity, home, and belonging becomes clouded as a result of migration. The seeds for this process might have already been planted in childhood, when they were familiarized with international influences. Their migration journey complicated their sense of national identity even further. Many of our interlocutors view themselves as being postnational as a result. However, the Indian facet of their identity is still present in their lives. Through the continuity of their Indian food habits and processes of othering they experience, they are reminded of their Indianness. In the next section, we draw our final conclusions based on what we have described in this chapter so far.

6.3 Continuous Identities: Post-Migration

Tamar Oderwald & Flori Visser

It has been argued in Chapter 4 that body memory is experienced most intensely with foods that play into nostalgia, as well as foods experienced in a multifaceted sensory environment. After a period of migration, riddled with discontinuity and disruption, Indian food can provide Indian migrants with a sense of mental comfort, as also explored by Mata-Codesal (2010). The meals associated with childhood develop into comfort foods that – when prepared, consumed, or simply experienced after a period of migration – serve as a means of spatial and temporal transportation (Sutton 2001). It is the reason why these meals are often craved in moments of unease or illness. The carefree and happy emotions deeply attached to, for example, rice and dal, are reignited with its smell, sound, and taste. A context of transnational migration enhances these experiences. As Tulasi Srinivas (2006, 211) argues: "[P]aradoxically, as the local fades further and further away for cosmopolitans, the memory and the imagination of family, mother and place become more powerful." This leads to a strong reinforcement of a compartmentalized facet of one's identity.

As the previous paragraphs argue, childhood is a fundamental phase for the construction of one's identity. People carry childhood memories with them through their journey of life, which means that certain childhood experiences will always remain part of how one behaves, thinks and identifies oneself. Whenever our interlocutors eat an Indian meal that they are familiar with from their childhood, this meal

triggers certain memories and sentiments of nostalgia that are attached to the food. Through this process, one is reminded of their roots. Indian food thus works as a powerful actor in the provision of continuity of Indianness in a migrant's identity. Indian migrants might identify themselves as postnational, but the (childhood) memories that they carry with them and which are triggered through Indian food will continue to play a role in how they construct their identity. Another factor that reinforces Indianness is the experience of othering. Because of their Indian foodways, Indian migrants might be perceived as 'the Other' by those around them, causing an increased internal awareness of this status. All this is best summed up by Lambek and Antze (1998, xvi; as cited in Sutton 2001, 10): "the past and its retrieval in memory hold a curious place in our identities, one that simultaneously stabilizes those identities in continuity and threatens to disrupt them."

This brings us to our final conclusions. We argue that the study of material culture ought to implement factors of temporality and memory in their study of objects as identity markers. In our research, we have found that objects that have contributed to processes of identity construction in the past, continue to do so in the present. In this line of argumentation, we include objects no longer in existence, such as food. It has become clear that implicit memories of foodways tie themselves to demarcated times periods in one's life, of which childhood is a highly influential one. These memories are reignited through bodily sensations at a later stage in life, providing migrants with stability and comfort in a time often characterized by disorder. With regard to identity, this disorder becomes visible in narratives of postnationalism. We found that, contrary to popular predictions made by scholars of postnationalism (Bloemraad 2004, 390; Bosniak 2002), the nation continues to be of importance to those who consider themselves to be postnational. For our interlocutors, their Indian background continues to be present in their sense of self. This becomes evident through the connections that they maintain with (family and friends in) India and the memories of India that they continuously relive through the experience of Indian foodways. With this, we question the idea that national identity will become obsolete in the future.

Recommendations

As is true for most – if not all – ethnographic inquiries, our research is not all-encompassing. We have encountered one main knowledge gap that we wish to recommend further research on. All but one of our participants were first-generation migrants. Through their stories about their children and cultural changes in India, it has become clear that processes of (national) identification and experiences of body memory are perceived differently amongst second-generation migrants and those of a younger age group. The social climate in India is changing. As Marco, a 26-year-old student, explains: "My mother used to say: 'You're in a generation where people have to learn [to cook]. Men have to learn, too.'" Perceptions of gender norms and traditional gender roles are shifting, creating differing experiences of foodways for today's Indian youth, which they take with them during and after their migration. As the Dutch cultural and demographic milieu develops into a more multicultural one, experiences of Indian foodways in this spatial context might also be experienced differently.

For those born in the Netherlands to Indian parents, it is more difficult to feel connected to their parents' country of birth, especially in a food-driven context. Sheela explains that her mother, a first-generation migrant, would cook Indian meals every day for their family. Sheela notices, however, that her own children more often request dishes such as pasta or pizza; their palate has become more adapted to western cuisines. This was also prevalent in the study of Vallianatos and Raine (2008, 368).

It would thus be interesting for further research to focus more explicitly on second-generation migrants and those around the ages of 18-25 in analyzing the concepts of body memory and identity, which could include concepts such as Arjun Appadurai's (1996, 78) 'armchair nostalgia.' As time goes by, we have no doubt these experiences will take on different forms for Indian migrants. As Fortier (2000, 10) puts it: the construction of an identity narrative is a never-ending process. Therefore, we argue that research on identity should continue to be executed across time.

"This is to show that we are fond of a fusion. From a young age, we have been eating Dutch cheese with, for instance, Indian chutney on our sandwiches. That is just delicious. Whether it is green chutney... In this case, it is a more south Indian chutney that we eat with idlis and dosas and such. But here, we just put it on our cheese sandwich. How I usually eat it is by cutting the bread in pieces and then putting a blob of chutney on top – and that's delicious!"

Figure 14: Home-made Indian chutney and a block of Dutch cheese. Photographed by Peegee.

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Appendix 1. History of the Indian Diaspora

Destination	*Period*	*Reasons for emigration and profile of emigrants*
British, Dutch and French colonies	1834–1920	Migration of unskilled, mostly indentured, Indian laborers to Burma, Canada, Ceylon, Fiji, Guyana, Hong Kong (China), Jamaica, Japan, Malaya, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Thailand, Uganda, and elsewhere was prompted by demand for labor by new plantations, industrial enterprises, and commercial ventures in European colonies. The abolition of slavery in the British (1834), French (1846), and Dutch (1873) colonies caused severe shortages of laborers on sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, rice, and rubber plantations. China and India provided alternative sources of labor. Most unskilled migrant laborers settled overseas, although the system of indenture was abolished in 1917.
	Late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries	Indian traders, skilled artisans, bankers, petty contractors, clerks, professionals, and entrepreneurs migrated to Burma, East Africa, Fiji, Natal, Malaya, and Mauritius to tap new opportunities, booming trade, and thriving industry.
Industrial countries	Post–World War II	Although some Indians migrated to the United Kingdom during the period of British rule, the major influx of Indians took place after 1947, when large numbers of educated Indians migrated to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Some people of Indian origin from Africa and the Caribbean also migrated to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In contrast to the indentured populations, these migrants have maintained close ties to India, particularly through remittances and investments. Large-scale migration of Indians to the United States occurred after the repeal of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. By 2001, about 1.5 million Indians were living in the United States. They belong primarily to the educated and professional elite class and include engineers (primarily information technology engineers), scientists, teachers, accountants, doctors, managers, hoteliers, and businesspeople.
Gulf countries	Mid-1970s–2004	Most skilled and unskilled migrants to the Gulf countries have been working on a contract basis, hired to build, manage, and operate the infrastructure needed by the oil export industry. Their major impact has been the flow of large remittances to India.

Source: Pandey 2006, 72

Appendix 2. Peegee's Green Chutney

"In the same way Dutch people always have a jar of peanut butter in their cupboards, we always had this chutney. And it immediately makes me think of… My mother had very special chapatis made. [...] We took those chapatis with us in our lunchbox, like people would take sandwiches. The school had a warm lunch that we participated in. But also in a way we did not. We took those chapatis and we would often put Dutch cheese and this chutney on top. As soon as I walked in the classroom, they would get claimed: "[Peegee], one chapati for me! One chapati for me!" Just like that, two or three chapatis were gone. But we did not mind because we would be able to try other things that we had never had before. That was quite funny. So that chutney is special to me."[35]

Ingredients

40 grams fresh coriander
5 grams fresh mint
3 cloves of garlic
1 small red onion
3 cm piece of ginger
5 green chilies[36]
120 grams fresh coconut
1,5 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon chat masala
1.5 tablespoon sugar
Juice of 1 lime
Glug of olive oil
Large pinch of salt

Method

1. Place all ingredients in a small food processor and blend until it resembles a slightly liquid pesto.

Figure 15: Ingredients for green chutney. Photographed by Peegee.

A tip from Peegee: This green chutney is also delicious on a typical Dutch cheese sandwich, making it a Dutch-Indian fusion.

Peegee's advice on spiciness: "I add six green chilies to my chutney. I find that with a chutney: it should be eaten as a sort of sambal. It should not be eaten as a kind of hummus. Because then it will be gone before you know it. Then I would have to make it every day. I don't want to make chutney every day. So I make it once every three, four, five days. But now it has turned into a *normality* for everyone. So I have to refrain from making it for a while, so that it will be more special when I prepare it again."[37]

[35] Peegee, semi-structured interview 23 February 2021, our translation.
[36] Green chilies can be found in Indian supermarkets and some international food shops. They can also be substituted for red chilies, although this will affect the color of the chutney.
[37] Peegee, semi-structured interview 23 February 2021, our translation.

Appendix 3. Sumi's Ghadi chi Poli

Whole-wheat bread – Ghadi chi Poli *(also called just Poli or Chapatti)*
Maharashtrians eat unleavened, whole-wheat flat breads for lunch and dinner, and in some families also for breakfast. These are rolled out fresh, daily. Left-over ones are recycled by crumbling them, stir-fried with onions, green chili and roasted peanuts, which are cooked as breakfast the next morning. It is a comfort-food breakfast in many Maharashtrian families. Some families make a stack each morning and use them for all three meals as well as a snack in between. On an average about a kilo of flour is kneaded per day, for a family of four, so you get my drift! There are many varieties of flatbreads made all over India, but this folded version is thinner than parathas, in fact the more skilled the housewife, the thinner and softer the Poli! My grandmother stood by my side and over two attempts got me right, and I was just 13. I think anyone can make it, as it is not rocket-science. Just buy Indian *chapatti atta* or very finely ground Spelt flour. Trick is to keep a light hand while rolling out. And think of it as a game, don't stress out, you'll get there in one to five polis.
Makes about 8 - 9 Polis

Ingredients
1 ½ cup whole wheat chapati flour/225 g
¼ tsp salt
1 tbsp oil
160 -170 ml water to knead
Extra oil for brushing layers
Extra flour for dusting
Ghee for brushing on top

Method
1. Mix the flour & salt together. Drizzle the oil over it and rub in with your fingers.
2. Gradually add a little water at a time and gather the dough together. You should be able to get a soft dough which is not sticky anymore.
3. Then on a lightly floured surface, knead the dough using the heel of your hand & your fingers till the dough is firm but soft and silky. The softer the dough, the softer the poli.
4. Coat your hands with a tsp of oil and knead for the last time to coat the dough.
5. Cover & let rest for 15-60 mins. This is important to get soft polis.
6. Heat a flat iron pan or griddle, keep it on low heat. Keep a plate ready with a dishcloth on it.
7. Take a piece of dough and roll it between your hands to form a ball- 4-5 cm Ø
8. On a floured board or on the kitchen counter, roll out the dough to about 10 cm Ø
9. With your fingers or a pastry brush the surface with a thin film of oil.
10. Fold over one half –make a half moon. Brush again some oil on the half.
11. Fold over to get a triangle.
12. Now keep the apex towards you, and roll out the rounded side lightly.
13. Next turn the poli to have the apex on the right side. Roll up and down once each, to create nearly a round poli.
14. Keep lightly dusting with flour as you need, rolling, and turning the poli to get to about 15 cm Ø. Try to keep the edges thinner than the center, roll lightly, do not press down hard.
15. Brush off excess flour if any, place the poli on the hot griddle. Roast for 1 min, flip over and increase the heat.
16. Roast for about 1 minute, you will see small bubbles forming, and if you pick with a spatula, you will see that small golden spots appear at the bottom. Flip over again.
17. Now the poli will start puffing up. With a cloth, press the edge if you see steam escaping.
18. After 30 secs flip over again, reduce heat roast 30 secs more.

19. Remove from the griddle, onto the plate. Press, to let steam escape. Brush with some ghee. Cover with the ends of the dish cloth. By keeping it covered with the dish-cloth you ensure it stays soft.
20. Start with the next poli.
21. After all polis are made, keep polis in a large box with the dish-cloth, or covered under a large bowl till you serve them.

Appendix 4. Our Stuffed Parathas

While doing fieldwork, we regularly spent our time trying out Indian recipes at home. One such recipe is stuffed parathas. On a Tuesday afternoon, we stationed ourselves in the small kitchen of Flori's student home, doubling the recipe below and making enough parathas to share with housemates and friends. It is a recipe Tamar learned during an online cooking workshop a few months prior. Being unprepared at the time, no notes were taken on the proportions and methods of this flatbread. All we had to go on was a list of ingredients. We ran with improvisation and intuition to create our own version of this quick and delicious stuffed flatbread. They taste best when shared with others.

Ingredients
1 cup flour
1 tablespoon oil (we used olive oil)
Water
2 green chilies, minced
1 onion, minced
2 or 3 cloves garlic, minced
2 potatoes, cooked and cut in pieces of 1 cm
1 tomato, cut in small pieces
Mustard seeds
Cumin seeds
Turmeric
Salt
1 tablespoon sugar

Figure 16: Parathas and green chutney. Photographed by Tamar.

Method

1. Heat oil in a baking pan. Roast the cumin seeds and mustard seeds in the pan until they start to crackle.
2. Add the chilies, onion and garlic to the pan and wait until the onion starts to turn transparent.
3. Add the tomatoes and potatoes and cook until it has become mushy.
4. Add curcuma, salt and sugar.
5. Turn of the stove and let the mixture cool down completely.
6. Add the flour and a tablespoon of oil to a mixing bowl. Knead the mixture while adding water as needed to form a soft dough.
7. Divide the dough in equal pieces. Roll out the pieces with a rolling pin into circles of 15 to 20 cm and a thickness of 0,5 cm.
8. Once the filling has cooled down, put 2 or 3 tablespoons of filling on half of the rolled out dough.
9. Fold the other half of the dough over the filling and close the dough by folding the edges. You could also use a fork the press the edges closed.
10. Once all the paratha's have been filled, bake them in a baking pan without oil on a medium heat for about 2 minutes on each side. Wait until both sides start to turn brown.
11. Nice to serve alongside *muttar paneer* or Peegee's green chutney.

Appendix 5. Naina’s Pineapple Sheera

Sheera is very staple in Maharashtrian cuisine. The ingredients are always ready in every marathi household. It is prepared as an offering on auspicious days. But also when guests turn up unannounced. The ghee, rava and the cardamom when put together make the whole kitchen smell oh-so divine. As a child, I could always tell when my mom would be preparing this even if I was 10 feet away. Even though this is a dessert, it is considered to be a healthy one because it is a complete meal in itself with a good balance of carbohydrates, proteins and fat.

Ingredients
1 cup rava (semolina)
1 cup homemade ghee
1/2 to 3/4th cup sugar
1/2 cup pineapple
2.5 cup water
5-6 cardamom pods - freshly ground
10-12 saffron strands

Method

1. Roast the rava in the ghee on a pan. This should be done by alternating between low and medium heat. Heat this till it's fragrant enough so that you (or anyone else) can smell it outside the kitchen. Don't let this get too brown.
2. In a separate pot, add the pineapple and water and boil it till the pineapple is soft but not too mushy. Add the saffron strands to this mixture just before turning the heat off.
3. Add the water and pineapple mixture to the rava while stirring continuously. Cover this with a lid for about 5 mins.
4. Add the sugar and cardamom. Cover again for 5 mins.
5. Serve hot.

Appendix 6. Peegee's "Great Indian Dal"

Serves 4-8 people.

Ingredients
2 cups dried red lentils
1 cup dried chana dal[38]
6 cups water
1.5 teaspoon turmeric
1 teaspoon salt
Glug of oil
2 tablespoons ghee
1.5 teaspoons mustard seeds
1.5 teaspoons cumin seeds
10 curry leaves
2-3 pinches *asafoetida*[39]
2 medium-sized onions – diced
3 cloves garlic – minced
3 cm piece of ginger – minced
1 or 2 green chilies – minced
2 medium-sized tomatoes – diced
Optional vegetables (zucchini, eggplant, bell pepper etc.) – diced
2 teaspoons garam masala

Method

1. Wash the red lentils and chana dal thoroughly until the water runs clear.
2. Add it to a pot along with the water, turmeric, salt and oil. Bring it to a boil and stir occasionally to cook the lentils.
3. In a separate pan, heat up the ghee.
4. Add mustard seeds, cumin seeds, curry leaves and asafoetida. Fry them briefly in the ghee.
5. Add onion, sauté for a few minutes.
6. Put in the garlic, ginger, and chilies. Stir well.
7. After a few minutes, add the tomatoes. Cook for a few minutes.
8. (Optional) add any vegetable you like and stir until cooked through.
9. Stir the garam masala through the mixture and fry for a few more moments.
10. When the lentils and dal are fully cooked, combine the two mixtures together.
11. Stir well and allow to cook some more.
12. Adjust the consistency of the dal with water to your liking. If the dal it too thin: let it cook a little longer to thicken.
13. Serve alongside rice.

Peegee on the importance of asafoetida: "You make dal and you think highly of yourself for doing so, but you are missing something. What am I missing? And then you find out that you have not added *hing* (asafoetida) to the dish! [...] A regular person might not miss it, but it is an important thing to add. If you know the authentic stuff and it's not there, *then* you miss it. Then when you put it in, you say: 'Ah! Now it is complete.'"

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[38] The proportions of lentils and dals can be adapted to your liking. It is also possible to use different types of dals, either as a substitution for or an addition to the chana dal.
[39] Asafoetida, also called *duivelsdrek* (devil's dung) in Dutch because of its pungent smell, is a staple addition to many Indian dishes. It can be found in Indian supermarkets or web shops.