Imagined mobility: migration and transnationalism among Indian students in Australia
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Citation for published version (APA):

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Download date: 20 Jan 2019
Appendix I:

Data, Dilemmas and Doing Fieldwork the Ethical Way

From Bangalore to Melbourne

My interest in Indian overseas students has its origins in earlier research that I conducted for my MA thesis in 2003. At the time I was interested in the question how working in the Indian IT industry of Bangalore (a highly modern and transnational work environment) influences life outside the office and vice versa. For this reason I had rented an apartment in the HSR-Layout\textsuperscript{86}, close to Koramangala, a hip and upcoming neighborhood in Bangalore, famous for its numerous IT companies. The complex itself was located on the Outer Ring Road, a very busy and dusty road that led to all sorts of construction sites nearby. At one such site a fly-over was being built to alleviate the busy traffic coming in and out of the city via Hosur Road. I would often pass by this site, either by auto-rickshaw or on foot, on my way to an interview and notice how the whole project was taking shape everyday. Here, I realized, India was ‘developing’, here it was ‘growing’, ‘happening’. On the corner of the same crossing where the fly-over was being built Indian computer giant WIPRO had one of its many offices. The company’s main campus was located at Electronics City though, which could be reached from there in about half an hour by auto-rickshaw. Electronics City houses a number of other important IT companies, the most famous being Infosys. At WIPRO’s campus construction was progressing well. The company had outgrown its facilities and was in need of a new addition. Around the same time, Infosys announced it was hiring again. The slump in IT which had hit the industry hard, worldwide, had also left its mark on the Indian IT industry, though many would tell me that the layoffs had not been as bad as they had been elsewhere. Companies were hiring again, the government seemed to be tackling Bangalore’s many problems, and generally it seemed as if people were very proud of being part of all the excitement. All in all, it seemed to be an excellent time to be in Bangalore. This was certainly something I, as a researcher, felt and I imagined that my research participants experienced it the same way. It was here that my first important research question started mushrooming into one that eventually guided my subsequent fieldwork. The question was, simply: why leave?. Why leave India when now seems to be the time to stay? Eventually I came to

\textsuperscript{86} HSR stands for Hosur Sarjapur Layout. The neighborhood is located between these two busy roads.
rework this question in relation to what studies on migration and transnationalism had already attempted to explore in this context. I was convinced, however, that both studies were not able to fully grasp the dynamics at play here. By investigating the output of both fields of study, combining this with an historical survey of what had been published on the overseas students so far, I became aware of the following:

- Studies on migration often stopped where those on transnationalism began;
- Where studies of migration were able to highlight certain processes that migrants undergo; studies on transnationalism often assumed the process to become ‘transnational’ to be already over;
- Both studies did not really seem to be able to deal with people who, irrespective of the framing of what they were supposed to be (migrants or transnationals), had their own ideas about this and would follow their own course;
- This came particularly to the fore when looking at the case of overseas students; literature had often dealt with them, and even hinted at the problem of non-return, brain drain and double intent, yet actually viewing them as people who were consciously migrating or opting for a transnational existence, was ignored completely.

These ‘early’ conclusions triggered me to go beyond the book, and treat these Indian students as a new group (of migrants) altogether; a group that had previously received little or no attention in the literature. They were new migrants, having left their home country with the idea of becoming transnationals, yet at the same time never making use of that term themselves. The way they explained it they were becoming more mobile in the sense of being able to cross (mostly western) borders. These were obviously not just conclusions I simply left Amsterdam with; they were thoughts that became more concrete along the way.

In this first appendix I will provide an in-depth analysis of the way I conducted research among Indian students. I have made a very conscious decision to keep this out of the methodological considerations as expressed in the first chapter. The reason for this is simple: many of my fieldwork considerations, decisions, and ponderings are not relevant to the general argument this dissertation makes. Yet I do feel that my fieldwork and everything that happened before and after is relevant for current anthropological research as it shows a number of problems that I believe more and more anthropologists will be faced with. Broadly, these problems fall into five different categories: (1) big city research and related issues of mobility and multi-sitedness; (2) falling in love with someone in the field; (3) issues of privacy and the private; (4) research the ethical way, and (5) online research among affluent, highly educated people.
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Big City Anthropological Research

One of the central problems while doing fieldwork for me was where to locate the field. What was I supposed to understand as my research field? The campus of Latrobe University was at least an hour away by public transportation from the city center, and the same went for the Sikh gurdwara located in the suburb of Blackburn, but then in a completely different direction. Monash University where I was a research fellow myself had four large campuses, two of which would mean a daytrip to visit them. Doing fieldwork in Melbourne meant spending excessive amounts of time on public transport, going from one location to another. It provided me with a sense of urban distance that I had never been familiar with before. Coming from Amsterdam, a city with barely 700,000 inhabitants, where any location can be reached on a bicycle, to living in a city where going from one corner of the city to the other can take hours by train or car, was simply a novelty (not to mention a nuisance at times). The sheer size of Melbourne, locations being spread out all over the map of a city with many hearts (all beating for different reasons, and in different rhythms), gave me the type of experience which Indian overseas students might also experience: that of desperation, loneliness, being overwhelmed by what lies ahead, of not quite getting a clear sense of where it starts and where it ends. In that sense, spending time in trains and trams – going from one appointment to another – provided me with the sort of very practical notion of in-betweenness that is so instrumental to being a migrant. It may even seem rather romantic, spending time in trains, staring out of the window, watching suburb after suburb pass by, rethinking research ideas, reworking research questions, meanwhile feeling the sun on your face and knowing that you are heading somewhere. But often it wasn’t quite like that; often time simply seemed too short to spend so much of it on the road, in-between locations and in-between data; no longer at that starting point where everything is still largely unclear, yet also not quite there yet: that point of arrival when all that one needs to know to finish one’s research is there. That moment, looming on the horizon, but with the emphasis exactly on that (‘looming’), was what made it both a fascinating as well as a difficult process. I would often dream of shrinking Melbourne to the size of a quaint fishing village, somewhere on the Konkani coast, where villagers would leave by boat in the morning, return in the evening, following a clear pattern, it all taking place in a geographical location of which I could draw a clear (though clumsy) map; the way I had seen in so many classic ethnographies; the anthropology of my imagination, the romantic type; and of which I also realized that less than ideal tales could be told.

What I did could be labeled ‘big-city anthropology’. And with more people than ever before living in big cities all over the world, questions of how to do such fieldwork the best way possible is going to be one with which fieldworkers will be confronted in the coming years. Research into one particular neighborhood, in that sense, will increasingly have to make way for research in ‘multiple localities’, or it will mean simply
(as was in my case) having to let go of the idea of particular localities all together. The Indian students I did research on lived all over Melbourne, sometimes close to their campuses, sometimes more than an hour away. Sometimes they would live in areas with other Indian migrants, but often also not. It is this haphazard spread of ‘locations’ which anthropological literature on fieldwork still deals very little with. Yet, I firmly believe it is a situation more and more anthropologists will be confronted with.

A simple conclusion would be that such fieldwork entails making some difficult choices from the start but I would argue the opposite. Choices would imply fixed locations, limiting the researcher to a research population defined by clear parameters. Of course that could work, but doing so would disregard an element of surprise that has often been instrumental to anthropological fieldwork. I decided not to let my fieldwork be guided by too many – already and maybe even irreversible - choices. I gave the field (huge and amorphous as it was) control and simply followed where it took me. And in an odd way that actually made the field more legible; not that I would be able to use a red pencil and draw the borders on a map, but by letting it locate itself, it at least took me where I needed to be.

Where studies such as the one by Marcus (1995) describe the emergence of multi-sited fieldwork, and Gille & Ó Riain (2002) address the topic of global ethnography, such research and ethnographies often still seem to be about fixed locations, yet spread globally. Fieldwork the multi-sited way has become en vogue recently and seems to be in line with the ‘mobilities paradigm’ as set out by John Urry (2007). People are mobile, on the move, not bound to a particular location, and this is something that we should incorporate in our fieldwork. Yet being mobile should not necessarily just be understood as a crossing-border phenomenon. The lives of migrants, for instance, are certainly not always transnational. Often they are simply in one location, at least seen from a satellite’s point of view. Such a location, as was in the case of Melbourne, may know countless different locations where migrant-life takes place. On the one hand there is the neighborhood approach where, for instance, migrants from an area such as Southall are put central (Baumann 1996), yet on the other when we follow lives in the kind of multi-biography way as I present it here (see also Marcus 1995: 109-10), we have to understand multi-sitedness on an individual’s level, mapping what they do and why they do it, and also where they do it. With mobility increasing everywhere, ‘following lives’ will pose a considerable challenge to our understanding of anthropological locations and fields (see also Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

*Love and Longing in Bangalore*

Doing fieldwork in Bangalore among IT professionals in 2003, I learned for the first time of Indian students going overseas to Australia. Yet something else important that intersected with this happened as well: I felt in love with an Indian who was planning to go to Australia. We met one evening (early 2003) at a party at a recently
opened lounge bar on MG Road and have been together every since. That very first evening that we met he told me that he had recently finished his IT degree and that he was now waiting for news to come back from IDP about the universities in Australia that would admit him. While having a beer, watching guys dance on the dance floor, I wondered out loud why he would bother going to Australia. As a Dutch person I had come to equate going to Australia mostly with eighteen-year olds who would go there on their first major trip abroad. The stories they would bring back were mostly infused with tales of all-night parties, lying on the beach, and looking for jobs (sheep shearing being a favorite) to make ends meet.

Rithesh, my then-to-be partner, explained that he was intending to stay on in Australia since the Australian government provided an option to apply for permanent residency after graduation. So you are migrating there? I remarked. This certainly made sense to me, being gay in India is far from easy. I would have done the same had I been born (gay) in India. We finished our beers and ordered another round. As quickly as the topic had come up, it was off the table again. Some friends were interrupting, a new song was being played, and it was only weeks later that I thought of the conversation again. Meanwhile Rithesh had been busy filling in the forms, talking to IDP, communicating with banks, and so on. It was initially because of him that I developed an interest in Indian students going to Australia. It seemed there were quite a number doing so and now that it was on my mind I started noticing the aggressive recruitment going on; advertisements in the papers, banners in the street announcing some education fair, the guys smoking outside the IDP building in the center of town. The attraction of Australia seemed mostly about migrating there, I realized. Rithesh confirmed this. But they certainly weren’t all gay, I reasoned. Why were they so keen on leaving then? What was all of this about? Eventually these questions would form the foundation for a PhD research proposal that would provided me with a four-year scholarship with the Amsterdam School for Social science Research (University of Amsterdam), starting April 2004.

It is probably one of those few romantic notions about ‘doing anthropology’ that might actually hold a bit of truth to it. While the idea of the ‘noble savage’, of primitive villages bathing in golden sunlight, fishermen returning to shore with the catch of the day, of proudly dancing warriors calling upon the Sun God to give them strength, or of whatever other notions associated with anthropological settings; falling in love with a member of the research population seems to be something that keeps happening time and again. In my case it happened on a Sunday evening when I had no intention of going out, or meeting up with anybody, as I was still recovering from a hang-over caused by a little too enthusiastically participating in the lives of my research population (Indian IT professionals) the previous evening.

It is one of those ways you end up in the field, I guess. I met Rithesh that evening, and a little more than two years later it was Rithesh who picked me up
from the airport when I arrived in Melbourne. Meanwhile the research I had been planning on doing had gone through a number of different phases. An important quest from the start had been to understand why these young Indians were leaving. This question seemed to connect to my reasons for having engaged myself in research on IT professionals earlier. Where India had long been associated with underdevelopment, with stifling bureaucracy and mind-boggling corruption, slums reaching far into the horizon and poverty beyond imagination, slowly India was emerging as a modern nation (at least in the eyes of the media) with a high-tech IT industry and thousands of software programmers busy solving problems such as the ‘millennium bug’ and working on the latest version of Microsoft Windows. Confronted with such contrasting images I had wondered how that works out in practice when one is living on the right side of the fence. What does it mean to be middle class yet to live among the teeming masses that have virtually nothing? How does one understand your own country’s development in light of the knowledge that there is still so much to be done? My experience was that the Indian middle classes, especially the ones living in cities such as Bangalore, had everything they needed to deal with life’s annoyances; bad roads sure, but a decent car to drive over them; no drinkable water from the tap, yet a water filter to take care of that; no water pressure, no problem, with a water tank on the roof; power cuts, very annoying, but a generator that kicks in the moment the lights go off; air-conditioning to deal with the heat; cable connections that bring more than a hundred channels into a household; servants to wash, cook and do the lawn. It is not bad to belong to the affluent middle classes although, as my informants would sometimes grumble, one still had to live in India.

I realized that the way I saw/observed/perceived India was probably not the same as an Indian itself would. I was a visitor, able to leave whenever it pleased me. India was the oriental ‘other’ for me; I could romanticize India, seeing no apparent point in leaving the country. I had wanted to be there! That is also why I had come there; of my own free will. The realities of day-to-day life in India were only my problem for a couple of weeks a year. I came from the West, the so aspired and desired West. I knew I had to let go of the question of why leave. The question said too much about me as a researcher, seeing India as place where I wanted to be because of all the wonder and mysteries it offered. India was home to a religion (Hinduism) that had fascinated me for years, it was the country that produced literature that I had consumed by the truckloads (Naryan, Rushdie, Chandra, Seth), and it was the place that inspired me to think beyond my own (Dutch) borders. I was in love with India and thus could never understand why anybody would want to leave. The question of why leave was about me. From an independent researchers’ point of view it made sense to detach myself from that and ask different questions, such as how these young, middle class Indians experience migrating abroad. How do they experience the shift in social status? What are they trying to get out of it precisely? What, to put it simply, was I
missing? And so the research took me away from India and to Australia; a country I was only marginally interested in. Although as a child I had had a brief love affair with Australia – fascinated with everything Australian, ranging from cuddly koalas, hopping kangaroos, glimmering opal stones, and the fairytale Sydney opera house – my desire to go to Australia was virtually absent. For a change this absence of wanting to go there seemed exactly the best reason to actually do so.

Privacy & the Private Anthropologist

While reflecting on one’s behavior in the field has become more and more the norm when writing a dissertation, reflecting on what one, purposely, did not do, is much less common. The course of the fieldwork, the way it was conducted, is both an end product of the peculiarities of the field and the fieldworker himself. Usually one tries to give both as much thought as possible before actually commencing with the fieldwork. In my own case I knew one thing for sure: doing anthropology the hard way – the way it is often fantasized about (living with one’s research population, learning their language, getting to know their culture, participating in all their activities, truly attempting to become ‘one of them’) – is not my thing. Although most people will probably describe me as rather outgoing, talkative, ‘friends with many’, I am at heart a rather private person and the idea of actually living with my research population, not being able to close the door behind me, at least for a while, makes me nervous. It is simply not my thing, and knowing that it is not my thing I knew I had to find a way ‘to do anthropology’ differently.

Fortunately there was an easy way out, or should I say: an easy way in. By the time I reached Melbourne, Rithesh had already been in Melbourne for a year and as my plane landed the lease on his student room expired, and thus were we able to look for a place together; Rithesh being an overseas student, and an Indian for that matter, made things easier in a certain sense. Yet Rithesh is also a rather private person and although he had always shown great interest in my research, he was adamant about me not turning him into an entry in my notebook. I remember looking at him, quietly nodding and realizing that that was going to be very hard. He was after all an Indian student, he had gone through the whole process of coming to Australia, and he was going to be around a lot, to say the least. He would be there in the morning when I woke up next to him, and he would be there at the end of the day when I would return from fieldwork. How could I detach him, as my partner, from the fact that he had also come to Australia as a student and with the intention of getting a PR?

When I arrived early February, summer was still going strong (some of the hottest days were yet to come). My fieldwork began with the kind of considerations I described earlier. Looking back on it, it was a confusing period where I spent massive amounts of time in trains and on trams, traveling from one campus to another, trying to get a grip on where I was, what I could make of it and how I was going
to make use of the data I was gathering. It was in many ways a very bewildering experience. Melbourne was huge! Although I had already mentally prepared myself for that, actually experiencing a city where the suburbs have the nightmarish quality of never seeming to end, and where everything else seems big too, from multiple-lane highways intersecting the city to the muscles of the guys parading on Chapel Street, was truly a new and confusing experience. And then there was the Australian education industry: bold, boisterous and, as I realized fairly quickly, in deep trouble. Universities had become highly dependent on overseas students and the motto of the day seemed to be ‘get more money out of Asia’.

As the months progressed and I got more of a grip on the whole situation I got to know more and more about the lives of Indian students. As best as I could I tried to keep my word and not turn my partner into one of my research subjects. He quickly became an important informant though, commenting on and criticizing what others had told me, and, of course, my interpretation of things as a (Dutch) researcher. Yet, this is also what he remained: a commenter and criticizer. In a similar fashion he will also read this section about him and, probably, comment on it and, if necessary, provide the necessary criticism. He never introduced me to anybody, never took part in any my research, and he stayed as much in the background as he felt was necessary. Being gay certainly played a part in this, knowing that India is still a rather homophobic country, but it also had to do with not wanting to live life under a microscope; my anthropological microscope so to speak.

During the day I would usually be on the road, visiting campuses, meeting up with informants, interviewing students, or simply gathering information in some other way. I would return home in the evening, type out my notes and have dinner. Sometimes I would wonder if it would make a difference if I lived with a group of Indian students, as so many of these students seem to be doing, but then my partner would interrupt these thoughts by saying something, and I would realize that although I was keeping a private life far removed from my fieldwork, some of the worries these students had not so far removed from some of the things I was worried about myself. My partner and I had decided that after my fieldwork we would move to the Netherlands and so he was going to need residency there, something which turned out to be a long and difficult process. While my fieldwork was about understanding the difficulties Indian students face when planning a more permanent life abroad, at the end of the day I would return home and be faced with the practicalities of ensuring that my partner and I could continue our lives together on the other side of the planet.

Ours was a strictly private life, which in almost every way was directly related to my fieldwork yet at the same time was never supposed to be part of it. Not knowing how my research contacts would react to the fact that I had a relationship with a man, I kept this fact completely hidden from them. Among Indian students, at least, it is not uncommon to share a house with a close friend, and for instance sleep in the
same bedroom, and in this case I was living with a very close friend whom I had met in Bangalore a couple of years ago. In fact, it often turned out to be a useful thing to say (that I was sharing a house with a fellow Indian student) as that would then open up the other person, as we suddenly had something in common. Clearly, what I know about the world of Indian students in Australia has greatly been influenced by what my partner has told me. Still, I do not refer to or mention him on the pages that make up this dissertation. He never wanted to be ‘one of those students’ I interviewed, and this is also something he never became.

Ethical Ways of Ignoring / Doing Research the ‘Ethical’ Way
In order to get an Australian research visa I was invited to become an honorary research fellow with the Monash Asia Institute (MAI), part of Monash University (Australia’s largest university). What I, as a Dutch researcher, had not realized though was that I would have to undergo the procedure of getting ‘ethical approval’ for my research by a so-called Ethics Board. Although the whole idea annoyed me intensely, having to fill in numerous forms, and basically having to postpone my actual fieldwork, it was certainly also an experience in itself, albeit a slightly bewildering one.

I realize that more and more countries are resorting to so-called ethics procedures to ‘check’ if a research meets the ethical requirements stipulated by the university in question (often in conjunction with the local Government). Australia already has such regulations firmly in place, but so do countries such as the US, South Africa and the UK. Most of these ethical rules seem to be inspired by medical research, which has worked with informed consents, consent forms and specific guidelines for informing research participants for years. A cynic would argue that most of these rules and regulations are there to prevent liability claims but they probably also do express a genuine concern for a research populations’ well being. From discussions in recent years I have never been quite able to take one particular clear position on the matter. Although I share the concern for the well being of a research position, knowing how easy it is to get carried away in local interests, party politics and the maze of local power play, rules and regulations also have a habit of making what was once ‘out in the open’ go into hiding or pretend to be something else. Perhaps coming from the Netherlands and having an office on the outskirts of the infamous Red Light District makes me specifically aware of this dilemma. Prostitution was initially condoned in the Netherlands and then recently the profession was legalized, since there seemed to be no point banning a profession that had and (probably) will always be there. Although I will not go into the debate here if this particular policy has been successful or not, it shows a certain reasoning which appears to run counter clockwise to the debate on ethical rules and regulations. Increasingly research is indicated as unacceptable, too risky, not in the interest of the research population, and so on. The question now is who benefits from these new policies the most.
In early 2005 I attended an Indian classical music concert at a school about a ten-minute drive from Monash University’s Clayton campus. Most of the attendees were Indians who had lived in Australia for many years. Interestingly some of the members of the audience were Australians who, through their work (often for local universities), had developed an interest India. During the break I met a couple of them outside. While they were having a smoke I told them about my research and the ethical procedure I had to undergo. It turned out that they (three in total) were anthropologists themselves, working in different regions in Asia. One had recently started research in the border region of Thailand and jokingly informed me that according to the research proposal he had submitted to the ethics board, he was doing something else altogether; something with poor people and NGO’s, or similar. Laughingly he added that it was always pure coincidence that he would end up with interesting ‘border’ material. His casual narration of fooling the local overseeing bodies reminded me not just of how easy it was to ‘fool’ a serious organ yet also how easy it is to shroud certain practices in a curtain of fog and haziness, basically shielding them from the public eye. In a sense it was not that different from banning prostitution; it had never made prostitution go away, it had simply made it go underground because of which nobody quite knew what went on anymore.

Although Monash University clearly instructed me to stop doing fieldwork while I already had started doing so, I must admit that I never quite complied. For one I had already started my research long before I arrived in Australia. I had met people online whom I had discussed my research with and who had introduced me to their friends. Besides that I was squeezed between the interests of two institutes. Monash wanted me to do things the (Australian) ethical way, whereas the Amsterdam School for Social science Research simply trusted me to protect the privacy of my informants and wanted me to do things the (Dutch) ethical way; the way I had discussed it with my supervisors in preparation for my fieldwork. I knew what Monash demanded would limit me too much. They wanted me to give each and every person I met in the field an ‘explanatory statement’ and have them sign a ‘consent form’. Although I was always absolutely clear to anybody in the field where my interests lay, I could not imagine myself turning every situation into one where forms had to be signed. Knowing how much anthropological research depended on informal situations, it struck me as odd, to say the least, to formalize these settings by having people sign forms that were supposed to protect their interests. I would, for instance, always tell them that I would never use their real name in any publications, and if that did not suffice, in terms of confidentiality, I would even change more than that (place of origin, university studying at, you name it), as long as it still reflected the situation that I wanted to describe. Yet now they had to ‘sign’ for this; something that made them feel more vulnerable than not having to do so. This was something I got back in the feedback at the start, when I would very carefully begin every interview with the
explanatory statement and the consent form. My informants did not appreciate it at all and in some cases they plainly refused to sign. They were more than willing to talk but they were not going to sign anything.

In the end I did things mostly relying on what I myself, as a researcher, thought was ethical. This meant not asking anybody to sign any form yet assuring my research population that I would never do anything that would get them into trouble. Most of the things they told me weren't things that would get them in trouble in anyway. Of course there were issues that were a bit more problematic. At times, for instance, I would be told not to write something down. I would simply comply though also knowing that they could not control my memory. This approached seemed to work. By spending massive amounts of time among and with my research population I gained their trust and eventually this is, of course, all that matters. No form can ever make a difference there.

Logons and Continuations; Research into the Future

To a large extent, my research concerned what I call ‘following lives’. I would try to understand how these students would move through life, experiencing the things regarding education and migration that came on their path. This ‘following lives’ also knows an online dimension that is increasingly becoming a new zone of research. The way lives are lived online – or even if we cannot so much speak of actual living, then at least the way people make use of the Internet to enrich their lives (gather information, create new identities, etc.) – can produce important supplementary data. I have been a long time user of the Internet, and have come to rely on it as a rather useful research tool. I find it especially useful when it comes to making initial contact with people who are potential research informants and/or participants, or people who could introduce me to others who might be interested in the research. Before my fieldwork had started I had already become a member of a number of Yahoo groups. Through these groups I was able to quickly gather quite a bit of information about the world of Indian students. Often I would simply ‘lurk’ in the background and follow members’ discussions. Sometimes I would openly recruit participants for my research. Especially in these very early phases it turned out to be useful to do quick interviews by email with students I had ‘met’ online. Most of these students were still in India, and thus busy gathering information about studying in Australia. Some had already made the

decision, paid the fees, filed all the documents and were waiting for their student visas to come through. I would approach them with the request if I could ask them some questions for my research and often these students would say yes. My questions would mostly be about where they were from, where they had graduated and what had led them to decide to go study abroad. As can be expected from interviews by email the answers were usually rather short but still they provided a glimpse into the world of studying abroad. I stayed in touch with some of these students for longer, asking them more detailed questions about their families, future expectations, and related matters. And finally there were a number of students with whom I was able to meet up in Australia as they arrived there more or less around the same time as I did.

While my fieldwork was in full swing I kept participating in many online communities and as I gathered more information in the field, I also became more active online, giving students advice or simply explaining in general what I was working on. An often recurring theme in my interviews was that these students felt they had, in a way, been misled about things. They felt they had not received correct information, or, at least when it came to PR related issues, had not been able to get the correct information. Reading the many posts on the many different Yahoo! groups I noticed a pattern. Many questions that were being asked seemed related to this problem. As quickly became clear, getting the right information was no easy matter in India, and as a result students relied heavily on the Internet, and such online communities for answers. Although I had no intention of being their ‘savior’, I could not help but feel awkward about the whole situation. I could clearly see that students were making decisions based on less than half of the information they needed. At the same time, of course, this was also an important ‘fact’ for my research. I cannot say I had a particular plan to deal with such issues beforehand. It simply depended on my mood, and on what I had come to know the previous days (via interviews and conversations) and how this had, for instance, amazed or shocked me. Although these were people making important life-changing decisions, they were also (young) adults and thus responsible for their own actions. I knew it was not my place to ‘help’ them but could not always stop myself for wanting to and sometimes doing so.

After I finished my fieldwork in February 2006 I stayed in regular contact with a number of my informants. Among these were about ten Indian students and a similar number of non-Indians who were all, in one way or another, connected to these students’ world. Because of this I was able to keep gathering data, though I also realized that if I were to finish my dissertation in a reasonable amount of time I would at some point have to stop gathering (or at least using) new data as well. It is because of this reason that some of the newer developments have not made into this dissertation. One way I stayed in touch with my informants was via email and Facebook. Many kept updating their profiles on Facebook over the years and because of this I kept informed about who got married, who changed jobs, who moved where, and
so on. By subscribing to Google Alerts I was also able to stay abreast of what was being published on the topic in magazines and newspapers. All in all this created the feeling that I was not as far away from the field as the distance on the map suggested.

In July 2008 I returned to Melbourne to attend a conference and give a couple of lectures (in Sydney and Wollongong). I was able to meet most of the informants I had stayed in touch with again and even ended up staying with one in Canberra for a couple of days. I was invited to participate in a class in a college located in the center of Melbourne where the issue of PR seemed more serious than ever before. The sense I got from being in Melbourne, interacting with students, was that the situation had become grimmer and harsher at the same time. There had been a huge taxi strike in which hundreds of taxi drivers (most of whom were (ex-) Indian students) had participated after a driver had nearly been stabbed to death (see also appendix 3). FISA (the Federation for Indian Students in Australia) had also finally become more active. Issues of loneliness, abuse, exploitation, plagiarism, depression and suicide were all widely discussed in the newspapers. It made me aware of how ongoing the topic of my research was and how many dimensions there were to it that deserved more attention. And so I will not only continue to follow my informants in the coming years, but at the same time I will attempt to keep myself updated on what is going on in the field itself.