Mobility and the region: A multi-scalar ethnography of the Vohra Gujarati community, in India and abroad
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Citation for published version (APA):

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PART I

Introduction
India and Gujarat

Anand town and surroundings

Gujarat with the Charotar region highlighted
Introduction

The idea that India is a land of Hindus is so prominent and internationally successful that, over the past few years, I have found myself repeatedly explaining there are also Muslims in India, and further that there are Muslims in India who feel a strong sense of local ancestry and regional belonging. I have had to explain this not only to Dutch students enrolled on bachelor’s programmes at the University of Amsterdam but also to residents of the region where I based my PhD research, central Gujarat in India. It is often forgotten that India has the second largest Muslim population in the world (after Indonesia) and that it contains 11% of the world's Muslim population. Muslims are, in fact, an important part of the social fabric of cities, towns and villages in many parts of India, and so they are in central Gujarat. And, when Indian Muslims migrate abroad and become ‘overseas Indians’, their relationship to India remains of importance and some keep investing emotionally and financially in their home region. This is precisely what has happened to a group of Gujarati Muslims, Charotar Sunni Vohras, whose regional and transnational attachments are the subject of this thesis. They originate from a small region called Charotar in Gujarat, a region characterised by fast spatial transformations that are, in part, the consequence of an episode of violence against Muslims in 2002. In the aftermath of this violence, there was substantial migration of Muslims within the region, with those living in Hindu-majority villages moving to a ‘Muslim area’ in a town called Anand, seeking safety in numbers. The thesis describes how these developments are experienced and how notions of locality, regional belonging and community are reconfigured in this context.

Looking at these developments and reconfigurations from different angles is central to this study. As participants in the ‘Muslim area’ include both residents of the town and Muslims from the region living abroad, to do justice to the translocal aspects of life in the neighbourhood, the research for this thesis took a multi-sited approach. The fieldwork concentrated on two key perspectives: the perspective of residents of Anand town, who stay in touch with villages in the wider region despite shifting residence to the town, and the perspective of transnational migrants in the UK, who are in touch with the ‘homeland’ and with Anand town through holiday visits, investments, and donations. The result is a multi-sited community study of Charotar Sunni Vohras, the most prominent community among Muslims in the town.

Muslims in India have been marginalised in various ways, and this has increased in recent decades. They are excluded from power within the state apparatus, are underrepresented in the judiciary, the administration and the police (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 4-6), are marginalised within the formal sector of employment, and are only minimally present among the salary earners of the public sector (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 314). Moreover, Muslims in India are experiencing increasing impoverishment and have the lowest literacy rate among all Indians (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 2-4). In some parts of India, Muslims have been the victims of violent attacks on their lives and property, resulting in massive displacements as they flee their homes and move into Muslim-majority neighbourhoods, described as ‘ghettos’ or ‘enclaves’ in the literature (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; see also Gupta 2015; Jasani 2008; Mahadevia 2007; Rajagopal 2010; Sattar 2012). One wave of violence took place in Gujarat in 2002, India’s greatest human rights crisis in a decade, during which mobs of men travelled around the state, killing and raping, looting and burning, while police and politicians waited and watched or even encouraged people to ‘vent their anger’. Muslims were the main targets of this violence. These developments have taken place in the context of an increasing popularity and power of Hindu nationalist politics, which defines Muslims as non-Indian, not belonging in India (Guha 2008 [2007], 633–659).

Previous studies of Muslims in Gujarat and elsewhere in India have described various ways in which they manoeuvre self-identification and assert themselves as human beings on their own terms. Though they have been marginalised and confronted with an ascribed social identity as ‘the other’ (Ghassem-Fachandi 2010, Simpson 2006b), there are still ways in which Muslims can maintain a sense of self-worth and affirm social status: by defining themselves as educated people, highlighting achieved status over ascribed status (Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2004a); by cultivating membership of a ‘trading’ community shared with local Hindus (Heitmeyer 2009b); by claiming to be a separate community different from other Muslims (Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012, 59–66); or through status competition between different Muslim groups to (re)establish local hierarchy (Simpson 2006a, 87–109). Anthropologists have explored how ideas and practices are employed within these processes, tracing dynamism over time in specific local contexts. One important avenue of (re)formulating identities among Muslims has been the cultivation of modern religious identities through

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2 In comparison, lower Hindu castes are catching up in terms of social-economic position and education (Basant and Sharif 2010, 239; in Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 3).

Islamic reform (Osella and Osella 2008a; Osella and Osella 2008b; Osella and Osella 2011; Simpson 2008).

This study acknowledges the richness of these earlier studies and contributes by describing how regional and transnational attachments are implicated in processes of community making. While place-based identities always deserve attention alongside religious, caste and class identities, they are particularly important in the specific case of the community studied in this thesis, Charotar Sunni Vohras, whose regional orientations and narratives represent a challenge to the now dominant idea of the Muslim as an outsider. Through ethnographic explorations among people who consider themselves Vohras, this thesis will look at how this self-affirmation as a regional community is sustained in central Gujarat and among Vohras living abroad while maintaining transnational ties to Gujarat.

On the one hand, the thesis can be read as a ‘community study’ in the classic anthropological sense, in that it looks at community as ‘an empirical phenomenon’ (Cohen 2000 [1985], 38) and seeks an understanding of this phenomenon by trying to capture people’s experiences and the meanings they attach to community (Cohen 2000 [1985], 38). On the other hand, it is different from the classic community studies in that it explores the complex processes of community making from different spatial angles, thus taking a multi-sited and multi-scalar approach. Here the ‘community’ is conceived of as geographically dispersed across different villages and towns and across different countries. Being localised in a town, with research visits to nearby villages and abroad (mostly in the UK with some additional research in the USA), the thesis shows how ideas and experiences of belonging take shape differently in each context and among different individuals.

Through a highly specific community study, this thesis contributes to three specific discussions in the social sciences, about the region, transnationalism, and ‘ghettoisation’, and thereby to a wider debate in the social sciences about how people (re)construct a sense of place and community in an increasingly interconnected world. The Vohra community provides an interesting case study in this discussion, because Vohras have travelled the world and are traveling more today, while maintaining a sense of being a specific community derived from a small region in India. Though questions on ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnational community’ have been taken up prominently in studies of transnational migration (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Sökefeld 2006; Brubaker 2005; Baumann 2000), we still understand very little about how spatial attachments and feelings of regional belonging can take shape in contexts of mobility and dispersal. Why and how do people cultivate ideas of and emotions towards a region/homeland? How do experiences of travel and migration affect
this process? How can a regional community be maintained in the face of experiences of exclusion and memories of violence?

In order to answer these questions, it is useful to consider the community of Charotar Sunni Vohras, which derives its name from a region in central Gujarat known as ‘Charotar’ and which has historically been a prominent community in Charotar. Vohras have, like many other communities in India, preferred marriage within the community or within smaller sub-groups of the community (e.g. Chaud, Arsad, Dewataja or Makeriya). By doing so, they have maintained a distinct identity as a specific community among other Muslims and Hindus in Gujarat. In recent decades, their social position has been affected by the political, social and economic marginalisation of Muslims in India. In the violence in Gujarat in 2002, Vohras suffered particularly in the villages and towns where they were a minority and, partly in response to this, many have moved to Anand. Despite this, Vohras in Anand still narrate their community history as a regional one and continue to maintain social and economic ties with the wider region beyond the town. Today, they describe Anand as the ‘Vohra head quarters’, as the regional ‘centre of the Vohra community’, or even jokingly as ‘the Makka of Vohras’. This raises further questions. How, living in this urban context, do they maintain and cultivate a sense of regional belonging? How are Vohras making this safety zone into a key town within a web of rural-urban linkages?

As part of their regional history, Vohras have participated in the centuries-long history of international migration from central Gujarat, to East Africa in the colonial period, to Karachi (Pakistan) during the Partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947, to Gulf destinations since the oil boom in the 1970s, and later to the UK, USA, and Australia. Vohras settled in the UK and USA (re)construct a sense of community as Indians, as British/American citizens and as Muslims, but also retain a sense of being a community with a specific regional background, for example by establishing ‘Vohra’ community associations in the new context, by marrying within the community, or by maintaining social and economic ties with central Gujarat, which they visit for holidays, to meet family, to find a spouse, to invest in real estate, and/or to support charitable projects. These regional attachments at home and abroad are noteworthy because of the prevalent marginalisation of Muslims in Gujarat: living in a society dominated by public debates about Muslim terrorism and Islamophobia, these transnationals are confidently voicing the idea that their host society is more welcoming of religious minorities than Gujarat has been.

4 The joke was made by a man when explaining the history of the Vohra community to me during a community event in Anand (see Chapter 3).
For Vohras living abroad and maintaining transnational connections to Gujarat, Anand town has become an important locus of attention. Despite originating from different villages and towns in the region, their ties to the home region have increasingly come to be centred in Anand and Vohras living abroad have become an unmistakable part of the social and economic life of the Muslim middle class in the town. Even some of the elderly and settled migrants, who left at a time when Anand was still an insignificant town, now participate in the town. So, why and how do Vohra migrants cultivate ties to this town, as a new locus of attention, within a region where they are marginalised?

These empirical considerations have led to a multi-sited research project on Charotar Sunni Vohras and their sense of region and community within the context of political, social and economic developments in central Gujarat that affect them. The following research questions are central to the thesis:

*How do people who consider themselves Charotar Sunni Vohras, in central Gujarat and in the UK, maintain a sense of belonging to the Charotar region despite experiences of exclusion and memories of violence and displacement?*

*More specifically, how do they relate to Anand town as an emerging centre of the Vohra community, both in the region and in transnational social networks?*

By answering these empirical questions, this thesis contributes both to current discussions about the position of Muslims in India and to discussions in anthropology about place and region, local and transnational community making, and migration and development. The region, which has emerged from the fieldwork as important, is the central notion in the thesis. I argue that mobility is constitutive of the regional experience, and approach the interface between mobility and the region from a localised and from a transnational perspective.

In terms of theory, this study integrates three distinct discussions: first, the anthropology of place and region, which provides clues to understand the mobile and regional experiences of local residents; second, scholarship of transnational migration, in which the notion of the ‘homeland’ is understood in relation to the notion of ‘diaspora’; and a third discussion, localised in India, about marginalisation and ‘ghettoisation’ of Muslims in Indian cities. The thesis can be seen as an invitation to other scholars of Muslims in Indian cities and in urban studies in general to explore how neighbourhoods and their wider surroundings and networks are important in the lives of urban residents through a multi-sited and
multi-scalar approach. The thesis illustrates this approach by including regional and transnational networks within an ethnographic research project grounded in a neighbourhood as a micro-locality of everyday life.

Chapter Outline:
This thesis is a multi-sited community study, and the reader will visit many places as we follow the people around. Using the notion of ‘scale switching’ (Hastrup 2013) as a classifying device to put different spatial perspectives to work in a study of a community and as a rhetorical device to guide the reader through the chapters, the thesis starts with a town, zooms out to a region, then zooms further out to the transnational realm, and finally revisits the town to see it in all its regional and global connectedness. At each of these scales of analysis, a ‘Vohra community’ takes shape. First, then, the thesis contextualises the Vohra community in Anand town. Next, it describes how the urban Vohras continue to maintain ties to the wider region, and depicts their urban life in relation to the predominantly agricultural area of central Gujarat. After that, we move to the UK, to look at the community from the viewpoint of transnational migrants residing in the UK. How do they remake the ‘Vohra community’, how do they view the ‘homeland’ from a distance, and how has Anand town become an important centre of attention within it? Their experiences reflect the ‘global’ character of Anand town, a hub of regional and transnational mobility and a key node of regional and transnational community making.

Part I. Introduction
In Chapter 1 (the analytical framework), the question of how community identity is constructed among Charotar Sunni Vohras is positioned within debates on the ‘region’, the ‘homeland’ and ‘the town’ within anthropology and the social sciences. Regions can be thought of as ‘imagined’ and as ‘practiced’ and I use both perspectives in the analysis. While the ‘homeland’, a guiding notion among scholars of transnational migration, has so far been studied mainly as an imagined space (‘myths of the homeland’), there are good reasons for exploring the lived experience of the homeland too. The chapter discusses these different approaches and formulates a multi-scalar framework for the study of a regional community from a local and a transnational perspective. I argue that mobility is constitutive of the regional experience and understand the interface between mobility and the region through the notion of ‘pathways’. An empirical focus on the town as a centre of regional and transnational mobility helps bring these perspectives together.
In **Chapter 2** (on multi-sited and multi-scalar research), I outline the research methods of this study. My approach has been to understand people from a geographically grounded perspective (a neighbourhood in Anand town), while also moving beyond the particular geography of the single field site to incorporate the circulation of people in different sites of activity. My research took place at multiple ‘scales’ (local, regional, transnational) and in multiple places (in central Gujarat and in the UK, with some additional research elsewhere). The questions addressed here are: what were the challenges of this multi-sited and multi-scalar approach, and how did I resolve them?

**Part II. A local community**

**Chapter 3** (on the town) familiarises the reader with the main fieldwork setting, Anand town, and with the Vohra community as a prominent group among local Muslims. Muslims have moved to Anand for two reasons: to seek safety from Hindu-Muslim tension after the 2002 violence and to achieve upward mobility through rural-urban migration. Within Anand, a ‘Muslim area’ has emerged, where residents feel comfortable, and where middle class residents affirm social status through education and religious reform. Here Vohras maintain a distinct community identity through endogamous marriage practices. The chapter shows that the processes of migration, segregation and ‘ghettoisation’, so far observed mainly in metropolitan and large Indian cities, have also taken place in a small town in a rural area.

**Chapter 4** (on the region) explores the construction of a regional identity among Vohras of Anand town. Despite their urban residency, ties to the wider rural area are still an important aspect of how Vohras affirm community identity: as a regional community. How do narratives, village-based marriage circles, and everyday experiences of travel generate experiences of regional belonging? This chapter presents a view of a ‘Muslim area’ in a regional town in which rural-urban linkages are a crucial aspect of everyday life, thus asking if scholarship of ‘ghettoisation’ has perhaps overemphasised the isolation of Muslims in Indian cities.

**Part III. A transnational community**

**Chapter 5** (on the homeland, from an overseas perspective) focuses on Vohras who have migrated away from the region. After describing the migration trajectories, I zoom in on the UK as an important site of Vohra settlement, with some comparisons to Vohras in the USA. I describe the position of migrants in the
UK and show how they have reconfigured themselves as a ‘Vohra community’, through kinship, through a formal association, and through a notion of a shared homeland. While Vohras feel that their position in the (political) homeland of India/Gujarat is ideologically problematic in the present imagination of Hindu nationalism, they maintain affinitive ties with the home region of Charotar/central Gujarat. It is not so much an abstract ‘myth of the homeland’ but rather the more practical social ties of marriage and kinship that create a homeland, or homelands.

Chapter 6 (on transnational place-making) brings all these different threads together. It ‘emplaces’ the homeland by describing how Vohras living abroad participate in the social and economic life in the villages and towns in region, and how migrants and locals collaborate as ‘agents of development’ in central Gujarat. This process is clearly visible in Anand town. Migrant ties to the home region have increasingly come to be centred in it after the town has become an important regional centre and meeting point after 2002, even for those for whom it is not their town of origin. How is this development perceived and evaluated?

In the conclusion, I show how the thesis contributes to finding a ‘way out of the ghetto’ in studies of Muslims in Indian cities (Gupta 2015) through a multi-scalar perspective. First, it does this by drawing attention to the enduring emplacement of Muslims in a rural region despite migration and residential segregation, breaking with the view of Muslims as isolated and immobile through the regional ‘scale’ of the study. Second, through incorporating transnational migrants and local residents within the same case study, the thesis adds a transnational scale and simultaneously contributes to the ‘placial turn’ (Gielis 2009) in studies of transnational migration. This it does through localised field research that implicates the neighbourhood and the pathways that connect the neighbourhood to what lies beyond. Such a multi-sited and multi-scalar perspective is likely to be increasingly relevant in studies of social life in ‘global towns’ in migrant-sending regions in South Asia and beyond.
This chapter provides an analytical framework for the study of Charotar Sunni Vohras as a regional community. There are, broadly, two bodies of literature that have provided starting points for the analysis. First, there are studies on the ‘region’, which uncover how people engage with their direct surroundings and which provide tools to implicate spatial experiences in a community study. Second, there are studies that uncover how people look at their ‘homeland’ from afar, conducted mainly among transnational migrants in their societies of arrival. By analysing a regional community from both a local and a transnational perspective, this thesis develops a more dynamic anthropology of the region, incorporating different ‘scales’. Since notions of space are, to a large extent, shaped by experiences of travel and mobility, the thesis looks at how different forms of mobility are implicated in the process of regional community formation. As an empirical focus on the town as a centre of regional and transnational mobility has been helpful, I also introduce the reader to discussions on the ‘town’ in the context of South Asia.¹

¹ In this chapter, to draw an analytical framework for the thesis, I confine the literature review to the notions of the region, the homeland and the town. More localised literature on the position of Muslims in Indian cities is discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, while studies on diaspora, transnational migration and development introduced in this chapter are discussed further in Chapter 5 and 6.
While the interest in the region and regional identities is not new in the social sciences, for some time the spatial angle was lost in discussions about transnationalism and globalisation. Today’s world has been described as characterised by an intensification of global interconnectedness, where people are cast into increasing and immediate contact with each other (Inda and Rosaldo 2008, 2; see also Cochrane and Pain 2004; Guillén 2001). Scholars have argued that the growing possibilities for human mobility, interaction and communication, technological developments and improving wealth have caused social relations to become disembedded from places (Lupi 2008, 30). The resulting reordering of time and space has been described as time-space compression (Harvey 1999; Inda and Rosaldo 2008, 6), a shrinking of the globe in which the organisation of human activity is less constrained by time and distance, or as time-space distantiation (Giddens 1995 [1981]; Inda and Rosaldo 2008, 8), a rearrangement of social relations through a disembedding of relations from localities.

These ideas have been criticised as it became apparent that revolutions in transport and communication did not erode regional and national identities. In fact, instead many revivals of such identities have been observed, leading to awareness that technology, as much as enabling moving away from places, enables the nurturing of regional and national attachments across distance (Anderson 1998, 58-76). It is now argued that mobilisation runs parallel to significant and complex forms of territorial anchoredness (Christensen 2012, 894; see also Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle 2012; Sheppard 2002). It is also said that the accelerated change and mobility that characterises today’s world, ‘epochal in scale and seriously disorienting’ have made issues of place and place-making all the more urgent (Friedmann 2007, 260). Anthropologists have been particularly vocal in arguing that processes that transcend territorial boundaries still have territorial significance. From this perspective, deterritorialisation (Appadurai 1996, 27–47), the lifting of cultural and social processes from spatial locations, is always linked to processes of relocatisation (Inda & Rosaldo 2008, 12). Anthropologist Peter Geschiere (2009), for example, has explored how claims of autochthony, which seek to establish a primordial right to belong, have come to the fore in different parts of the world, resulting in fierce political struggles over inclusion and exclusion as a ‘flip side’ of globalisation.

The question of how processes of deterritorialisation and relocatisation are changing social relations has been approached from various angles. Three concepts have
been useful in analysing the case study of Charotar Sunni Vohras: ‘transnationalism’, ‘place’, and ‘scale’. The transnational perspective was introduced by Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992) and further developed by different anthropologists and sociologists (Kivisto 2001; Levitt 2001; Portes 2001; Vertovec 1999), who took up the intellectual challenge to look at the world through a ‘transnational optic’ (Levitt and Khagram 2007) and to move beyond ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). This approach has been taken up in different fields of study, particularly in the study of migration to foreground the processes by which migrants ‘forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’ (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1995, 48). Much of the discussion has focused on how transnational migrants establish themselves as individuals and communities in their destination countries while also maintaining relations with their nation of origin, the so-called ‘homeland’.

While the introduction of the transnationalism framework has resulted in rich scholarship on the formation of spatially stretched-out social relations and has become a dominant perspective in the social sciences today, there has been mounting awareness of its limitations. One problem is that it tends to privilege the perspectives of a particular kind of flows and networks, those crossing international borders, at the expense of more localised flows and networks, such as rural-urban migration (King and Skeldon 2010, 1620–1622; see also Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003; Kalir 2013; Olwig 2003; Skeldon 2006). Another critique is that the analysis too often only focuses on the perspectives of transnational migrants, at the expense of more sedentary actors in the region of origin, who also take part in transnational social fields (Faist 2008, 14–15). This thesis takes these criticisms into account by paying equal attention to transnational and more localised processes. At the same time, the thesis draws on insights from transnational studies and is part of the effort to move beyond the ‘nation-state container model of society’ in the social sciences (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1006) and to understand how social processes are stretched across different spaces.

This brings me to the second concept that has guided efforts to understand spatial attachments in a world of accelerated change and mobility: ‘place’. This approach has been developed among anthropologists, who have traditionally based their research in micro-localities but who have increasingly come to study these places more as objects of study in and of themselves, and less as merely the backdrop for social life (Allerton 2013; Feld and Basso 1996; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Rodman 2003 [1992]; Thornton 1995). ‘Place’ can be understood as the way in which people engage with or appropriate
an otherwise abstract external ‘space’ (Gray 2003 [1999]; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; see also de Certeau 1984). Places are brought into existence when people build and shape their environment. Places are appropriated, experienced, and given meaning by people as they travel and perceive the landscape around them in certain ways. A criticism of the focus of anthropologists on micro-localities has been their overemphasis on agency of the local actors, a problem that may arise when localised systems of meaning are treated as autonomous, in isolation, without taking into account the wider political and economic structures and processes that influence them (Wolf 1997 [1982], 13–19). Anthropologists need to recognise that places are thoroughly penetrated by social influences quite distant from them (Rodman 2003 [1992], 211), and need to position their place-based research in wider contexts of circulation and exchange (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 3). This has also been a concern for this research project.

Third, the notion of ‘scale’ has been widely discussed, first in geography (Allen and Cochrane 2007; Jessop, Brenner and Jones. 2008) and later also in anthropology. The anthropology of globalisation and transnationalism initially focused almost entirely on the relation between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ (Kearney 1995), or the ‘glocal’ (Eriksen 2001 [1995], 294–311), studying local appropriations of global processes, or ‘large issues’ in ‘small places’ (Eriksen 2001 [1995]). The local-global dichotomy was, however, still a ‘rudimentary’ analytical tool to think about data in a global framework (Tsing 2005, 58) and the notion of scale has been a valuable addition to escape the oversimplified dichotomy of a homogenous global and a heterogeneous local and to arrive at more dynamic analysis. This thesis combines the anthropology of place and of transnational networks through a multi-layered spatial approach, which is why I call it a ‘multi-scalar ethnography’. I have used the idea of scale as an analytical and methodological tool in the research and as a rhetorical device for the organisation of the thesis in chapters.

Two types of scales are distinguished: (1) taxonomical scales, a hierarchy of spatial layers central to bureaucracy of the nation-state, e.g. the national versus provincial state; and (2) emergent scales, which are actor-centric or activity-specific, do not have definite shapes and are hard to map but are made into reality (Xiang 2013, 284–285). In anthropological research, both types of scales can be productive research tools. My own study was approached through three scales of attention: the local, the regional and the transnational. I have tried, as far as

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3 Though I limit this overview to the discussions within anthropology, to which I aim to contribute to through this thesis, I am aware that discussions on scale and location among geographers have informed discussions among anthropologists and that, in geography, the discussion has taken different turns, including proposals for eliminating scale as a concept altogether (Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005) and efforts to address the limitations of too sharp a scalar turn (Jessop, Brenner and Jones 2008, 389). This thesis broadly follows the latter’s suggestion to seek a multidimensional account of sociospatial relations, in which scale is important but is not the only spatial lexicon.
possible, to construct these scales as emerging through fieldwork as spatial frames through which people understood the Vohra community. Over time, I came to understand that the region is a spatial zone of importance for Charotar Sunni Vohras and that the self-narrated Vohra community history is a story of regional connectedness. This sense of being a regionally specific community was found not only among Vohras living in the region itself but also among Vohras in the UK, although in different ways. Following up on the ‘topographical awareness’ (Hastrup 2013, 156) of people I met in the field, I selected the ‘region’ as a key emergent scale, with the town of Anand figuring as a key node of social relations in the region.

In this chapter, therefore, I describe discussions on the region as they have taken place in the social sciences, in order to provide an analytical framework for the study of Charotar Sunni Vohras. First, I introduce discussions on the ‘region’, which have taken place mainly from the localised perspective of the residents of an area. Second, I delve into studies of transnational migrants, whose regional attachments have been discussed so far mainly through the notion of a ‘homeland’. How is a homeland different from a region? Do the lenses of the region and the homeland offer different perspectives on the process of community making? Is it possible to use both lenses and see more? A specific but relevant body of literature on the role of towns in regional economies in South Asia, which I explore at the end of the chapter, provides some tools to develop a dynamic anthropology of the region.

The region in anthropology

So what is a region? And how can we understand regional identity? Older discussions on ‘the region’ provide useful clues – earlier social scientists realised ‘the importance of the phenomena which belonged neither to the abstract “level” of the nation, nor to the slightly more concrete and visible level of village’ (van den Muijzenberg, Streefland, and Wolters 1982, 1). A region sometimes overlaps with a nation-state, but is distinct from it if there is no attempt to frame it as a sovereign domain. A region is also distinct from a place, because a region is imagined to include localities outside and inside people’s personal experience. A region is imagined to consist of various places, as if they are somehow connected to each other, thereby forming an entity.

Regions have been thought of as ‘collective mental maps’, as geographical areas with social meanings that, depending on historical circumstances, differ between social groups and from issue to issue (van Schendel 1982). There are official regions,
imagined by administrators, marked on maps, and defined by clearly demarcated geographical boundaries, but here I am talking about other regions, those imagined by common people and which may be unknown to outsiders (van Schendel 1982, 41). To understand how regions or ‘micro-regions’⁴ are locally recognised requires a ‘bottom up’ approach that unravels how the people under study have come to think of seemingly unconnected places as an interconnected system. Research on regional identities has shown that people construct ‘region’ in various ways – spatial, linguistic, economic, cultural, and/or historical (Cohn 1987), and that regional identities can become politicised and contested (Koskimaki and Upadhya 2013).

Regions do not always have clearly demarcated outside borders, but may be imagined as existing around ‘centres’ or market places (Bertocci 1975; Heesterman 1982; Skinner 1964; van Schendel 1982), specific ecological zones (Gommans 1998), or oceans (Simpson and Kresse 2007). They may be imagined differently by different individuals, who encounter the same places but experience them in different ways depending on their form of engagement. For instance, a shepherd going around the hill with his sheep every day develops a concept of the entire hillside based on the sub-sections his sheep particularly like (Gray 2003), while a peasant walking to the market towns in the vicinity of his village develops a concept of an ‘intermarket span’ (Skinner 1964; 1965a; 1965b; in van Schendel 1982), with the home village at its centre and all market places reachable on foot within the time span of one hour at the corners. These ‘micro-regions’ should not be seen as isolated but as connected to other regions that lay beyond.

An understanding of regions as ‘mental maps’ highlights cognitive processes of regional formation that are partly accessible to the researcher through talking to people. However, as these examples show, regions come into being not only through narrative, but also by people's personal experiences and practices (Rodman 2003; Gray 2003). Phenomenological approaches, highlighting people's intimate knowledge of their direct surroundings and attempting to describe ‘local theories of dwelling’ (Feld and Basso 1996), have paid specific attention to experiences and embodied engagements with places, in addition to narrations of places (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). Tim Ingold, building on Casey (1996, 24), describes the region as a network of interplace movements, a network of ‘coming and going’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 235) emerging alongside ‘paths of observation’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 229). This understanding of the region draws attention to the practical engagements of people with their immediate surroundings and to the ‘social labour involved in establishing equivalences and connections across places’

⁴ To describe locally defined regions and distinguish them from officially defined ones, van Schendel (1982) uses the term ‘microregions’, which he borrowed from Bertocci (1975, 355), who, in turn, took inspiration from discussions among Bengal scholars. According to Bertocci, the term was first used in an unpublished paper by Ralph W. Nicholas.
Regions are forged ‘in the passage from place to place, and in histories of movement and changing horizons along the way’ (Ingold 2005 [2000], 227).

In this thesis I describe both the ‘imagined’ and the ‘practiced’ region. One of the concepts that I find useful with regard to the practiced region is the concept of place-making, which has been employed mainly in studies of urban neighbourhoods (e.g. Friedmann 2007, 259). At the neighbourhood level, ‘place-making practices’ may include the arrangement of a social event or the cleaning of the street. By doing so, people transform a geographic ‘space’ into a practiced ‘place’ (Gray 2003, 224). Through ethnographic fieldwork among Italians in Toronto, Harney (2006) describes place-making as a form of claiming and colonising space in an urban neighbourhood. Place-making includes the most ordinary, repetitive acts and routinised activities such as the ritual of taking an evening walk, or the more collective periodic colonising of public space such as the Good Friday Procession of Italians in Toronto (Harney 2006, 38).

Walking is mentioned frequently in the literature as a way through which people make place: this is relevant for urban neighbourhoods as well as for the shepherd walking the hillside and the peasant walking from the village to the market town, as mentioned above (Gray 2003, 231–233; van Schendel 1982, see also Pink 2008). People’s engagements with places, it has been argued, can be studied by moving along with them (Gray 2003, 227; Moles 2008; Pink 2008; see also de Certeau 1984): following people around during their everyday practices enables the researcher to understand more of their lived experience. Studying such mobile practices in combination with people’s narratives of place helps to understand ‘the critical ways in which places that may be separately named and recalled are connected to one another and form a unified whole’ (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003, 18).

A classic approach to this is the notion of ‘pilgrimage’, used by Anderson (2006 [1983]), who builds on Turner (1967; 1974), to analyse how administrators in the Spanish colonies could start imagining a geographically bounded community (the nation). Anderson argues it was through being stationed in various posts within an administrative domain that the administrators of American colonies could slowly start conceptualising a ‘nation’ and started thinking of themselves as a national community. In a somewhat different way, the ‘pilgrimages’ of education, from the village to the provincial town and then into the capital, were a way for young intellectuals in the Netherlands Indies to start imagining the (territory of) the nation.6

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5 The concept of place-making was introduced by architects and psychologists in the 1970s and found its way into the social sciences in the 1990s, giving rise to discussions about the way in which spaces acquire meaning in people’s everyday life (for an overview of these discussions, see Lupi 2008).

6 For a further discussion and critique, see van der Veer (1994, 106-137).
I incorporate the idea that travel generates spatial experiences and identities but broaden the focus on walking. Walking with research participants helped understand the experiences of South Asian peasants thirty years ago and is still useful today to understand experiences of living in the micro-locality of an urban neighbourhood. However, when living with residents of central Gujarat, it was through motorised travel that I slowly gained an understanding of informants’ sense of region. An indispensable aspect of life in central Gujarat is travel: by car, by train, on a motorbike, or in shared auto-rickshaws that ‘shuttle’ between villages and towns. As I show further on, these everyday practices of mobility are producing a spatial experience of the ‘Charotar’ region among Charotar Sunni Vohras. Thus, this study looks at the region from the bottom up, using narratives, experiences and mobile practices as access points to understand how people construct themselves as a regional community.

In this thesis, I thus understand the region as imagined (Anderson 1991), and as practiced, in line with phenomenological approaches in anthropology (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 88), which have considered lived experience and point at the body as a living entity through which people experience the world. In addition to the explicit rhetoric of the local, as found in representations and narrative, Jain (2010) speculated on ‘another sense of the local’ that informs processes of cultural identity-formation without being explicitly invoked.

this sense of locality is marked by the relative absence of articulateness or self-reflexivity: it is grounded in performative practices and interpersonal linkages that are not always relayed back via overarching symbols of community. Indeed, it is precisely the relative absence of self-recognition or self-acknowledgement that makes this interpersonal habitus hard to reify, because it is irreducibly local, nonexchangeable with other forms of identity. But also, by the same token, this enacted or performed rather than ‘imagined’ (Anderson (…)) community does not map onto explicitly political formations such as nation or civil society (Jain 2010, 35-36).

Like Jain, I pay attention to the performative and practical aspects of making place and region, as well as to processes of imagining and verbalising the region. This, as I have shown, is not a new approach. Like the earlier scholars, I incorporate the practices of travel through which the region/homeland is made and experienced.8

7 The name ‘Charotar’, an informal name used to identify the region under study, is clarified in Chapter 4 of the thesis.
8 Related to the discussions on the ‘region’ are discussions regarding the ‘area’ of area studies (van Schendel 2002) and the ‘territory’ of states (Ludden 2003, see also Jessop, Brenner and Jones 2008). Due to limitations of space, I have left these notions aside in this literature review. In the empirical chapters, I address territory when local power dynamics or state borders impose constraints on the situations described.
Before we continue, it is useful to position this study within the specific literature on the region of Gujarat, where research has been based. Though Gujarat is now perceived as if it has always been around, the current state of Gujarat only came into existence in 1960 after a political campaign to divide Bombay State in Gujarat and Maharashtra on linguistic grounds (Simpson 2010a, 1–2). The ‘idea of Gujarat’ has been particularly popular in the area under study, central Gujarat, most notably among the agricultural caste of Patidars who have been powerful in Anand town and the surrounding countryside (Tambs-Lyche 2010, 108). Their home region became the ‘centre’ of Gujarat when the Patidar power base was extended more widely after Independence in various ways, for example, through land reforms in the 1950s that benefitted Patidars in the regions of Saurashtra and Kutch (Tambs-Lyche 2010; Sud 2010; in Simpson 2010, 12–14). Having gained the upper hand both economically and politically at the time of the formation of Gujarat, the Patidars of central Gujarat show considerable pride in Gujarat and in being Gujarati.9

The ‘idea of Gujarat’ has been received with less enthusiasm in areas with less political influence and with very different administrative and cultural histories. This has been the case for some residents of the now ‘peripheral’ coastal regions of Saurashtra and Kutch, where formerly dominant groups lost influence with the advance of the ‘centre’ over local affairs. In Kutch, local historians narrate regional histories of kingdoms and goddesses linked specifically to the land and territories of Kutch (Simpson 2010b, 76–77), thus different from the rest of Gujarat, resisting the idea that their region is Gujarati or even a part of Gujarat (Simpson 2010a, 12). The existence of such regional histories raises the question what alternative regional stories can be found within central Gujarat, for example, among non-Patidar groups that constitute an internal periphery within the centre.

An old map of social groups in Gujarat mentions Sunni Bohras (Vohras) along with Patidars and Rajputs, in the area surrounding the Narmada river (1947, in Kapadia and Simpson 2010, 29).10 Since 1947, Patidars have gained in influence, Rajputs have lost power and Vohras have become almost invisible as a social group, increasingly subsumed into the larger category of ‘Muslims’. Today, Muslims are easily excluded from the idea of Gujarat: they are not seen as central to the ‘imagined community’ of Gujarat. The most frightening aspect of the violence in Gujarat during 2002, Tambs-Lyche argues, is that the ‘silent majority’ tolerated and, to some extent, even encouraged the acts of violence against Muslims (Tambs-

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All of this raises the question of how Vohras themselves look at the region and their role in it; how they maintain and cultivate a sense of regional belonging.

The *homeland* in diaspora studies

Vohras have moved within the Charotar region, from village to village and from village to town, and beyond the region, to Mumbai, to Karachi, to various Gulf destinations, to East Africa, the UK, USA and Australia. They have also moved in between some of these places, sometimes without touching Gujarat in between. After moving away, many have kept engaging with the region of central Gujarat in various ways. To understand the regional affiliations of such mobile persons, I use insights from studies on migrant transnationalism, specifically engaging with the concept of the ‘homeland’, which has been coined as an important element in processes of identity and community formation within studies of ‘diaspora’ (Axel 2002; Cohen 1996; Falzon 2003; Morawska 2011; Safran 1991).

There are quite different ideas about what a ‘homeland’ is. Since the perspective of the ‘ancestral homeland’ has been the dominant view, I begin by describing it in detail before introducing a contrasting view, following that up with my own take on the discussion. The term ‘ancestral homeland’ (or ‘original homeland’) was introduced in two founding articles of ‘diaspora’ studies (Cohen 1996; Safran 1991). While their definition of a ‘diaspora’ has been criticised for its essentialising portrayal of migrants (Brubaker 2005) and for its understanding of the ‘homeland’ (Clifford 1994), their ideas about ‘homeland’ remain prominent in discussions of processes of community and identity making under conditions of migration.

Safran defined the ‘original homeland’ or ‘ancestral homeland’ as a ‘true, ideal home’ of a diaspora, which was, in turn, defined as an ‘expatriate minority community’ whose members are ‘dispersed from a specific original “centre” to two or more “peripheral”, or foreign, regions’, who ‘retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland’. A diaspora was said to relate to this homeland in a way that defines their identity: migrants feel a collective commitment to ‘the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland’ and perceive of the homeland as ‘the place to which they or their descendants should eventually return’ if circumstances allow (Safran 1991, 83-84). In Cohen’s (1996) slightly altered version of the definition the idea of an original homeland is adapted and fits in better with a constructivist framework, putting more emphasis on the subjectivity of the homeland: rather than talking about the existence of an ‘original homeland’
as an empirical fact, he speaks of ‘an idealization of the putative ancestral home’ as a creative act.

Since those initial studies, work on the ‘homeland’ has expanded enormously, often in connection with ‘diaspora’, sometimes with otherwise defined transnational migrant communities. Considerable discussion has been focused on the emotional and political attachments of migrants to an imagined homeland. In line with Cohen, most of these scholars do not necessarily consider the homeland as an empirical location, but as something that is created, through imagination. Thus, rather than revealing something about a space, they investigate people’s ideas about space. This empirical work includes studies on migrants’ long-distance engagement with homeland politics (Anderson 1998; Feyissa 2012; Orjuela 2008; see for an overview Østergaard-Nielsen 2003) and on migrants’ engagement with media from the homeland (Gillespie 1995; Morley 2000). Research specifically on the ‘Indian diaspora’ and the ‘homeland’ has drawn attention to the social labour of (de)constructing Indianness with regard to the immense diversity in migration trajectories, religion, social-economic background, and destination contexts (Biswas 2005; Oonk 2007; see also my own work on Indian cinema and the Indian diaspora, Verstappen 2005; Verstappen and Rutten 2007).

One conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that although the ‘homeland’ tends to be perceived and represented as primordial by the people themselves, transnational affiliations to it are not necessarily a revival or extension of already existing communities (Falzon 2003, 664). A sense of ‘Heimat’ or homeland can arise as a result of moving away (Anderson 1998, 60), or later, decades after the moment of migration, in response to specific events and new developments (Sökefeld 2006) like the activities of political parties and institutions in the home nation, who suddenly ‘discover’ the lost sons and daughters of the soil and make an effort to reconnect (some of them) to the nation (Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff 2005; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Orjuela 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2003). While an interest in (re)connecting to the homeland may also be triggered by experiences of discrimination and marginalisation in the host society (Kurien 2001, 278; Safran 1991, 96), signs of connectedness to another nation-state may lead to a questioning of loyalty and (further) hostility towards the migrants in the host society. Facing new constraints and opportunities in the society of arrival and departure, confronted with new political ideologies and discourses, taken-for-granted notions of ‘home’ are reconsidered, and a ‘myth of the homeland’ develops.

Another insight that I draw from these studies is that multiple spatial affiliations interact in complex ways. This brings us back to the discussion on scale, introduced
earlier in this chapter. In some cases, migrants’ regional identifications have been replaced by national ones, for example among Polish migrants in the USA, who arrived with a sense of belonging that ‘extended no further than the okolica, the local countryside’ and who gradually replaced their localised affiliations with a national self-identification as ‘Polish Americans’ because of their exposure to the ‘salad bowl model’ (Morawska 2011, 1033). In other cases, regional affiliations and village/hometown affiliations remain relevant alongside national and religious identities (Upadhya and Rutten 2012). Although the more localised affiliations usually remain invisible in the public sphere of the host society, they can nevertheless form a basis for processes of community mobilisation, for example through small-scale ‘hometown’ or ‘village’ associations (Caglar 2006; Faist 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Orozco and Lapointe 2004), or through the emergence of a ‘transnational village’ (Levitt 2001) or a ‘translocal village’ (Velayutham and Wise 2005) as a social field through which norms and values travel back and forth and through which localised gossip is reproduced. The enduring importance of local and regional identities has been highlighted in case studies on Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants in the UK (Ballard 1990; Ballard 2003b; Gardner 2008; Singh 2013; for a critique, see Gardner and Shukur 1994). While this thesis confirms the importance of localised identities, it puts the transnational region, rather than the transnational village, centre stage.

Critics have argued that there has been an overemphasis on the myth of the homeland in studies of transnational migration and diaspora. Clifford (1994, 306) argued that ‘transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland’. Some have redirected their studies by using other ways of conceptualising a diaspora (Brubaker 2005; Sökefeld 2006), or have delinked diaspora spaces from the original homeland (Falzon 2003), others have tried to reformulate the concept of the ‘homeland’ by further delinking it from place. One example of the latter approach is a case study by Axel (2002), who criticises studies of the ‘homeland’ for supporting an ‘essentialisation of origin and a fetishization of what is supposed to be found at the origin’ (Axel 2002, 411), instead repositioning the homeland as a ‘temporalizing and affective aspect of subjectification’ and drawing the homeland ‘in relation with other kinds of images and processes’ (Axel 2002, 426). More concretely, in this case, ‘Khalistan, the

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11 Prema Kurien pointed out that associations of Indians that manifest themselves in the public sphere in the USA organise around religion or around an Indian/South Asian identity, while more localised regional affiliations remain invisible in the public sphere. Lecture Civic and Political Activism of Indian American Groups, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, January 3, 2014 (see also Kurien 2003).

12 In the realm of border studies, a ‘transnational region’ refers to a region divided by a national boundary. Here, however, I am concerned with the conceptualisation of a region in a context of transnational migration.
homeland, is not necessarily conceptualized as an empirical place of origin that Sikhs wish to return to and reterritorialize (Axel 2002, 412) but rather the ‘Khalistani Sikh subject’ seems to be constituted by violence of the Indian state, and by the circulation of pictures of tortured Sikh bodies on the internet and in temples in the UK and USA. This approach thus looks at the homeland as an affective and temporal process rather than a place. While I agree with Axel that the concept of a ‘homeland’ can be useful as a conceptual tool even in the absence of empirical place-based references, in this thesis I describe people that do attach value to place.

What both approaches to the homeland, the ancestral and the affective, have in common is that they tend to understand the homeland as something that ‘exist within a community wherever it lives’ (Axel 2002, 426, emphasis original). The objects of study are thus the minds and emotions of the migrants. In my opinion, both of these propose ‘placeless’ homelands because both are, to a large extent, dislocated. They tend to exclude from the analysis the actual encounter with the places and people assigned to comprise the homeland. When this happens, the experiential aspects of the actual homeland remain abstract and unexplored. Taylor (2013, 397–398) has critiqued this tendency in studies of diaspora to foreground the societies of arrival of the migrants without taking into account historical and social dynamics in the home region:

If diasporic identities are inherently transnational, we require transnational research to investigate them. However, despite an explosion in the field of transnational studies, much contemporary transnational social science research displays a northern bias (Taylor 2013, 402).

He adds that:

(...) the majority of existing studies of South Asian diasporic identities, despite some notable exceptions (...),13 focus too heavily upon dynamic processes of intra-diasporic identity formation within Western societies, neglecting equally important dynamic processes of identity formation within South Asia, the original source of migration. The influence of South Asia upon diasporic meanings of home is considered highly significant by previous studies. However, this influence is not analysed in detail and is represented as static and unchanging (Taylor 2013, 398, emphasis original).

13 Here Taylor refers to the work of authors including Gardner (2001 [1995]), Osella and Osella (2000), and Ramji (2006), about which more below.
The ‘placelessness’ of homeland approaches within diaspora studies is surprising because there is considerable evidence that migrants visit their home region, build houses and roads there, send ‘remittances’ and fulfil social obligations. In this thesis, I therefore attempt to ‘emplace’ the homeland by including the face-to-face encounters of migrants with their home region through visiting, collaborating, investing, and donating. These face-to-face interactions have been discussed in literature on ‘migration and development’, a different field less concerned with questions of imagining or belonging and more concerned with the impact of international migration on economic development in migrant-sending regions. I next show how I use insights generated in this field to understand the ‘homeland-as-practiced’.

The homeland in studies of migration and development

Increasing awareness of the volume and significance of household remittances, diaspora philanthropy, and transnational investments in migrant-sending regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America have led to renewed political and academic debates about the impact of international migration on economic development (for overviews, see de Haas 2005; de Haas 2009; de Haas 2010; Faist 2008; Piper 2009; Raghuram 2009). A significant proportion of scholarship in this field has consisted of efforts to measure the economic impact of migration and remittances on developing countries, with some discussions about ‘social remittances’, the transfer of values and ideas across national boundaries (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamban-Nieves 2010). This literature on various types of remittances and their impact on economic development provides insights in the role of transnational migrants in migrant-sending countries, although many of these stay at the national level.

Anthropologists have also contributed to the discussion through on-the-ground ethnographies that explore the transfers of remittances and other migrant resources within their socio-cultural context, paying close attention to cultural meanings and to social and political processes implicated in resource transfers (Upadhya and Rutten 2012; see also Ballard 2003a; Dalakoglou 2010; Gardner 2001 [1995]; Osella and Osella 2000; Taylor, Singh, and Booth 2007). Through their ethnographic approach, these anthropologists have also been able to contribute to a better understanding of the old and newly emerging social formations through which resources are channelled across national borders. They have shown how existing forms of organising social life, such as kinship (Ballard 1990; Charsley and Shaw
2006; Gardner 2006) and caste/community (Upadhya and Rutten 2012, 19–20; see also Roohi forthcoming) can become important channels of resource transfer. In addition, discussions on transnational migrants as ‘agents of development’ have shown that new types of transnational networks are shaped both ‘from the bottom up’ by migrants and facilitated or constrained ‘from above’ by government policies (Caglar 2006; Faist 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Vertovec 2007).

All these discussions are relevant in India, where, in recent decades, the nation has been reconfigured as a transnational nation (Lessinger 1992; Walton-Roberts 2004a; Xavier 2011). India has adopted a range of ‘diaspora policies’ that aspire to demarcate the Indian diaspora as a part of the Indian nation and to incorporate it in economic, cultural and political terms (Xavier 2011, 34), including financial schemes to attract foreign direct investments and remittances (since the 1990s), experiments with a new kind of diaspora ‘citizenship’ (Overseas Citizen of India scheme, since 2003), and the creation of a ‘Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs’ (2004). These policies have emerged in parallel to neoliberal economic policies, in which diasporas and their resources are recognised as a source of foreign direct investments and as an asset to economic development (Xavier 2011, 35). The increasing visibility of migrants in Indian media and society (Allessandrini 2001; Moorti 2001) has resulted in lively discussions about the potential consequences of migrants’ long-distance involvement with India’s development (Hercog and Siegel 2013; Lessinger 1992; Walton-Roberts 2004b, 61–64; Xavier 2011, 43).

Simultaneous with the invitation of overseas Indians to participate in India’s ‘development’, however, anxiety has been increasing about the ‘foreign hand’ in India’s development. NGOs such as Greenpeace, Cordaid, Amnesty International and ActionAid have been accused of “serving as tools for foreign policy interests of western governments” by sponsoring agitations against nuclear and coal-fired power plants across the country’. The legal tool used to curtail them is the Foreign Contribution Regulation (FCR) Act, promulgated during the Emergency under Indira Gandhi (1975-77) to secure India’s sovereignty and revised in 2010 to prohibit utilisation of foreign contributions of organisations for ‘any activities detrimental to the national interest’. Critics of the amended Act say that it has...
been used to curb freedom of expression and association and to particularly target progressive NGOs and minority associations.\(^{18}\) In 2012, 4000 NGOs had their FCR Act registration cancelled, among them many church-backed groups and anti-nuclear protesters.\(^{19}\) In Gujarat in 2015, five Muslim associations were banned from receiving foreign funds.\(^{20}\)

All this raises questions about who is invited to participate in India’s development, and whose contributions are seen as threats to the nation. While the introduction of a special citizenship status for ‘overseas Indians’ offers an ‘opening up’ of citizenship beyond state borders, there is a simultaneous “closing of ranks”, with acquisition of citizenship through birth or by registration and with trends that reinforce cultural identity as constitutive of Indian citizenship (Roy 2006, 1421). As BJP (Hindu nationalist) governments have been prominently involved in the development of these policies, the tendency has been to understand the Indian diaspora as a ‘Hindu’ diaspora, extending the exclusion of Muslims from the definition of ‘Indian’ into the ‘Indian diaspora’.\(^{21}\)

Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff (2005, 193) argue strongly for (political and academic) inclusion of Muslims in the Indian diaspora, to prevent denying Muslims their history and rendering them academically ‘homeless’.\(^{22}\) Their findings show that even though they are not usually included in rhetoric of the ‘Indian diaspora’ by the Indian government, Muslims of North-Indian descent in Suriname do see India as their homeland. My findings also show that Muslims of Gujarati descent in the UK and USA feel a connection to their region of origin in Gujarat and send remittances, investments and donations. They can thus be seen as ‘transnational agents of development’ (Faist 2008) even though their politicised position as Muslims constrains their participation in certain ways.

The migrants I introduce occasionally visit the region, receive visitors from the home region in their homes, and stay in contact with acquaintances in the home region over the phone. All these encounters contribute to the (re)conceptualisation


\(^{22}\) For earlier discussions on religious nationalism in India, see van der Veer (1994) and Blom Hansen (1999). For discussions on religious nationalism in relation to overseas Indians, see van der Veer (2002), Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff (2005), Biswas (2010), Therwath (2012).

\(^{23}\) Similarly, van der Veer (1994, 196) argued that anthropological studies of South Asia that neglect Muslims or treat them as an entirely separate culture unwittingly support Hindu nationalism.
of the homeland, and to an awareness of its dynamics. Paying attention to these dynamics helps to ‘emplace’ the discussions of the ‘homeland’ in diaspora studies, which are too often based mainly on conversations with migrants in their own living rooms without following them during their return trips to the ‘homeland’. I thus follow the example of Ramji, who has illustrated the contradictions between what Clifford (1994) refers to as the ‘desired’ and ‘lived’ home through the case study of first-generation British Hindu Gujaratis retiring to India (Ramji 2006). Although migrants develop fantasies about a nice retired life in their home town in Gujarat, where fields are lush and green and where the sense of community is solid and strong (Ramji 2006, 650), when the desired return to the home town is finally realised, they find that their idealised home town is different from what they had hoped (Ramji 2006, 655–657). As a result, they start re-evaluating their ‘Britishness’ and ‘Indianness’. A complicated process of conversion takes place when transnational migrants engage with or move back to their homeland (Carruthers 2002) and Ramji’s work highlights the experiences of migrants in Gujarat and the resulting complex processes of reaffirming identities. Identities are negotiated and reformulated as a result of encounters with the actual space of the homeland and with the people that live there.

I hope to contribute to these explorations into the homeland-as-practiced and, by looking at Muslims within this framework, I also hope to contribute to the project of reinserting them in discussions of diaspora, migration and development in India. By looking at the migrants as ‘agents of development’, the thesis draws the imagined homeland in relation with the pathways of travel between specific nodes in a matrix of movement, applying Ingold’s ideas of the region (2005 [2000], 235) on a transnational ‘scale’.

**Mobility and the region/homeland**

Comparing the ‘regional’ perspective to the ‘homeland’ perspective described above, it is evident that experiences of mobility figure in both perspectives as important aspects of regional identity formation, but in different ways. In studies of the region, the informants tend to be local people who reside in a region, and their range of mobility is also localised. One example I use to illustrate how localised mobility ‘makes’ a region was that of the shepherd walking along pastures and thus envisioning an entire hillside. In the homeland approach, the subjects of

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23 For an overview of discussions of return migration, see Biao, Yeoh, and Toyota (2013).
study are always transnational migrants and mobility is always crossing national borders. How transnational mobility ‘makes’ a homeland has been illustrated through the example of the Polish migrants in the USA, whose sense of belonging to the okolica (local countryside) was replaced with a national self-identification as ‘Polish Americans’ after migration. Thus, scholars who have studied the ‘region’ have highlighted how mobility within the region contributes to conceptualising it, while scholars who have studied the ‘homeland’ have highlighted mobility from and back to it.

With one academic perspective that is limited to the views of locals and one perspective that is always looking at the region from a distance, we are left wondering: are local ‘regions’ different from transnational ‘homelands’? If so, how? Is it perhaps possible to track connections and see similarities between the two? How have ‘regions’ and regional identities been affected by the growing possibilities for human mobility and communication across the world? And how have ‘homelands’ been constituted by localised experiences of travel? In short, is it possible to develop a more dynamic anthropology of the region in which different forms of mobility are recognised as interlinked and potentially constitutive of the region?

By integrating the ‘region’ and the ‘homeland’ into one analytical framework, I contribute to the discussion on a problem that has been put on the research agenda again and again, with little progress so far: the question of how to integrate ‘internal and international’ migration into one conceptual framework. In the recent past, there has been a bifurcation in the literature (Skeldon 2006, 17–18; Thomas 1984; Zelinsky 1971) and, in their article ‘Mind the Gap!’, King and Skeldon (2010) argue that this existence of two almost entirely separate literatures, written from different conceptual, theoretical and methodological standpoints, is problematic and needs to be overcome. While earlier theorising on ‘migration’ was all about migration within countries (e.g. Ravenstein 1885), in the last decade or so, ‘migration’ has somehow come to be synonymous with the crossing of international borders, even if the volume of what is now called ‘internal migration’ is still much higher (King and Skeldon 2010, 1620–1622; Skeldon 2006). This shift in academic interest from internal to international migration is not the result of an empirical change, but is related to the political problem that cross-border migrants have come to present in a world with increasingly heavily guarded state borders: migrants are perceived as ‘potentially upsetting for conventional links between territoriality, sovereignty, or national belonging’ (Kalir 2013, 314).

In order to bridge the gap between internal and international migration, King and Skeldon have introduced an analytical model that traces connections between various steps in migration pathways: e.g. migration from a rural region to an urban
centre facilitates international migration, and vice versa, international migrants who return to the home country sometimes choose to settle in urban centres rather than in the rural home region. While this model can explain some of the dynamics that I explore in this case study, it is focused on individual migration pathways and does not help to understand how various forms of mobility within a community or even a family are related to each other.24

My study is quite different from most studies of migration in that it pays equal attention to rural-urban and international mobility. The people I studied are those who still reside in the region as well as those who went abroad but keep ties to the region. I consider local Vohras and Vohra migrants within the same study rather than as entirely separate groups (cf. Rutten and Patel 2003). While migration pathways of the Charotar Sunni Vohras are discussed as a contextual background, the main theme is how the intersection of various forms of mobility contributes to the making of a region and a regional community.

Overall, the key contribution of this study is thus that it looks at social processes from a truly transnational perspective, through different spatial angles. I have been inspired by anthropological studies that have taken a similar approach, studies that have taken a transnational perspective while also being deeply immersed in a specific region in South Asia. Such studies have, for example, been conducted in Sylhet in Bangladesh (Gardner 2001 [1995]) in connection with London (Gardner 2006; Gardner 2008), Doaba in Punjab in India in connection with Jat Sikhs in the north-east of England (Taylor, Singh, and Booth 2007; Taylor 2013), the town of Madhapur in Gujarat in connection with Patidars in London (Ramji 2006), in Kerala in India in relation with Muslim entrepreneurs in the Gulf (Osella and Osella 2009), in villages in central Gujarat in connection with Patidars in Britain (Rutten and Patel 2002), and on coastal Andhra Pradesh in connection with Kammars in the USA (Roohi in her forthcoming PhD thesis as part of the Provincial Globalisation programme).

A limitation of these earlier multi-sited studies is that they have often focused on relatively powerful groups within migrant-sending regions (except the Osellas): Patidars in central Gujarat, Patidars in Kutch, Jat Sikhs in the Punjab, Kammars in Andhra Pradesh. The research participants tend to be landowning families in their village or town of origin, who own ancestral land, and who have further enhanced the social position of their families and caste/community in their village or town through migration. Their remittances, their investments in magnificent houses on

24 While King and Skeldon (2010) do refer to social links in their explanation of various migration pathways, they do not include these significant relations in the analytical model itself.
family-owned land, and their support to temples, hospitals, schools and water purification plants thus significantly contribute to enhancing their already privileged status and powerful position in the home village or town. In addition, these migrants and their local relatives are well-connected to local politicians, and the schools and temples they support tend to be closely associated with the ruling party in the home region, enabling them to benefit from government funds to finance a part of the expenditure (Dekkers and Rutten 2011, 16) or to acquire the necessary government permits (Roohi, forthcoming). Gardner (2001 [1995], 95-96) also indicates that migration in Sylhet is concentrated in families which were already well-off, thus helping to maintain the status quo or even polarising power relations between landowning and landless families.

As a whole, the body of work described above gives the impression of a power balance in which the migrants, derived from the most powerful groups within their home regions, have so much agency that they can do what they want without any major constraints or limitations imposed on them. The main resistance they appear to face is from reluctant relatives and insulted co-villagers, who complain about the arrogant and extravagant attitude of the migrants (Dekkers and Rutten 2011, 11) and about the way they flaunt their wealth (Taylor 2013, 408-409). These complaints and contestations refer to internal frictions within the community/caste and, on the whole, transnational activities are perpetuating and deepening caste divisions in these regions (Taylor, Singh, and Booth 2007, 343).

The indirect consequence of this focus on mainly relatively dominant landowning groups in migrant-sending regions is that the home village is projected as a primordial and original space, with which nostalgia and privilege are closely connected. This projection is wholly disrupted in this thesis, as it highlights the experiences of people who have more mobile attachments to the home region, without fixation on a specific ancestral homeland or village of origin. What makes this case interesting from the perspective of the discussions on ‘homeland’ and ‘diaspora’ is that it presents a counter-case to primordial constructions of the ‘home’: Vohras are fully aware of the newness of Anand as a home town of Charotar Sunni Vohras. Their home town is not simply there as an ancestral or original place of belonging, it has to be actively made. Their ability to shift attention from an ancestral or original home village to a previously insignificant town, which is actively made into a (new) home in the home region, shows their engagements with the homeland are very much interlinked with the travels and migrations of their local acquaintances. An understanding of social processes and spatial transformations in the region and a multi-sited research approach to include transnational migrants and local residents is indispensable to understand how
this comes about. A focus on the town has been helpful to develop such a multi-scalar approach.

The *global town* as a hub of regional and transnational mobility

One way of understanding the construction of a regionally attached community while including intra- and extra-regional mobility in the analysis is through focusing on an urban centre. Some previous studies have noted how cities in migrant-sending countries have come to acquire special meaning as meeting places for dispersed communities (Christou and King 2010; Falzon 2003). Clifford (1994, 306), for instance, argued that ‘decentred, lateral connections may be as important [to diasporas] as those formed around a teleology of origin/return’. This argument has been developed further by Falzon (2003), who introduced the terms ‘centres’ or ‘cultural hearts’ to describe cities that are functioning as ‘home’ for migrants who live dispersed over various countries, creating a sense of community linked to place yet delinked from the ancestral soil. A ‘cultural heart’ or ‘centre’ is distinct from the ancestral homeland: Falzon argues that these centres, ‘constructed and represented as a result of the diasporic process are often of much greater practical importance than a notion of homeland which survives the process or is created and projected back in time to seem primordial’ (Falzon 2003, 665). As this notion of a centre is very useful in this study, I shall elaborate on it a little, using Falcon’s case study of the Hindu Sindhis in the Sindhi ‘centre’ of Bombay/Mumbai.

The region of Sindh, the ancestral homeland of Sindhis, part of British India from 1843 to 1947, became part of the newly-formed Pakistan after Independence. Sindhis share a narrative of forceful displacement at Partition in 1947, and the notion of a ‘Sindhi’ community followed rather than preceded the time when Hindu people were living in Sindh. Hindu Sindhis are now dispersed over more than hundred countries, but retain a degree of cohesion through kinship practices and business networks (Falzon 2003). While the notion of a distant homeland is central to their diasporic consciousness, Sindh is now part of Pakistan and perceived as threatening by many Hindu Sindhis, and practical associations with the region have weakened considerably. However, the Sindhis are not rendered...
homeless, they have established a ‘Sindhi cultural heart’ in Mumbai. The city is now the largest single concentration of Sindhis anywhere in the world, as thousands of Sindhis living elsewhere have a second house in it, relatives, or both. The city has, furthermore, become a site of Sindhi investment in real estate and of Sindhi patronage of public institutions, such as schools and hospitals. During wedding season in December, Sindhis from all over the world flock there to attend marriages, engage in business networks, to enjoy themselves, and arrange marriages (Falzon 2003, 672). Falzon interprets this ‘pilgrimage’ by Sindhis to Mumbai as ‘a rite which establishes periodically the individual Sindhi as a member of a “we”’; moreover, a translocal ‘we’ (Falzon 2003, 679–680). Mumbai has become ‘a sort of community shrine for Sindhis’.

In this thesis, I show that the internationally dispersed Vohra community is also building such ‘centres’. Like the Sindhis, Vohras have traditionally had significant links with Mumbai, and there is a sizeable Vohra population and a regular coming and going of visitors in Mumbai. But, unlike the Sindhi diaspora, most Vohras stayed on in their ‘homeland’ during Partition, and practical links with central Gujarat remain important, even among those with strong connections in Mumbai. As a result, the town of Anand, one of the main urban centres of central Gujarat, has developed into an important ‘centre’ or ‘heart’ of the Vohra community. Vohras living in the UK and USA feel that it has increased in significance for the community after 2002, and these sentiments are shared by migrants who do not consider Anand their natal or ancestral home town. Studying their relationship to the town may shed new light on how towns in migrant-sending regions are being refashioned into ‘centres’, as towns often mark intersections of flows within the region and beyond. The buzz around ‘global cities’ (Sassen 2001) has obscured the fact that towns are crucially linked up to other cities, including to global cities in various parts of the world (Denis, Mukhopadhyay, and Zérah 2012, 23), and that towns can become an important anchor of identity and community making. By shifting attention from the city to the town, the thesis counters the overall ‘metrocentricity’ in urban research (Bunnell and Maringanti 2010) and in studies of migrant transnationalism and globalisation.

A mobile understanding of towns is not new. Historical studies of South Asia also point at the market town or qasba as a centre of the region, as a node for mobility within the region and for mobility between the region and the outside world (Hasan 2004 in Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 15). The Moghul empire in South Asia relied on networks of trading centres and on traffic routes connecting them (Heesterman 1982, 10–14). Rather than any external geographical boundary of an empire, the furthest outposts of the empire were the qasbas in the rural interior,
from which the borders of organised agriculture and tax demand were pushed outward. The qasba, integrated with surrounding villages and with larger towns, became a locus of identity and attachment for the members of the educated and landed Muslim gentry. Historical studies thus project regional towns as a centre of connectivity and as a locus of identity, which suggests that the extent to which studies of contemporary mobility have lost sight of this is unjustified.

Sociological studies on small and middle-sized towns in India in the 1970s and 1980s have emphasised the role of towns as nodal points within the regional or national economy, and suggest that towns have a pivotal role in regional development processes (Corwin 1977; Dahlberg 1974; Prasad 1985; Rana and Krishan 1981; Rondellini 1983; Spodek 1976, 113). They have described the towns as bridges linking the agrarian sector in the rural hinterland with the industrial and trading sectors, through the provision of manufacturing, markets, and services, and as serving as market places spaced over the countryside to break the isolation of the rural dweller from the national market (Spodek 1976, 107), so acting as ‘nodes’ or ‘hubs’ within systems of rural–urban connections. In central Gujarat, towns have been described as market centres for agricultural produce, as centres of manufacturing, of secondary education, of religious pilgrimage, and as administrative centres where peasants had to travel to attend to offices and court (Hardiman 1981, 264). Thus, these earlier studies have highlighted the relationship of towns with rural areas and the key role of small urban centres in rural-urban linkages and regional development (Ballard 1983; Denis, Mukhopadhyay, and Zérah 2012, 23; Tacoli 1998). However, though valuable, these studies have projected a limited view on the ‘hub’ function of towns, emphasising their role as nodal points within the regional or national context without paying attention to their role within the global context, as nodes connecting regions within India to the wider world.

Towns are connected locally, nationally, as well as globally, and the international networks that ensue from them sometimes bypass the metropolis (Denis, Mukhopadhyay, and Zérah 2012). Their global connectedness is unmistakable in regions with strong patterns of international migration, where they are ‘key nodal points in regional social formations’ as well as ‘as sites through which transnational traffic moves and often congeals’ (Koskimaki and Upadhyya 2013, 2). Such towns should be seen as ‘nodal points in networks and movements that are symbolic as much as material’, which ‘create a regional fabric as well as connect the region into trans-regional and transnational networks’ (Koskimaki and Upadhyya 2013, 14).

27 This brief overview of previous literature on the regional hub function of towns in South Asia has also been described (in a somewhat different and more extended form) in an article I co-authored with my supervisor Mario Rutten (Verstappen and Rutten 2015, 230-232).
In this thesis, I use the term ‘global town’ (introduced in Verstappen and Rutten 2015) to describe Anand town as a hub of rural–urban and transnational migration. The term ‘global town’ is a nod to Saskia Sassen’s ‘global city’ so is meant to contest the overall ‘metrocentricity’ of social research of transnationalism and globalisation, which has projected the view that while megacities are hubs of international mobility, towns are merely nodes of rural–urban mobility. As an urban conglomeration with a population of just over 200,000 residents, centrally located in an agricultural region with a long history of international migration, the town of Anand in central Gujarat clearly functions as a node of interconnection between rural–urban and local–global mobility. It is both a regional hub and a platform for departure and arrival of various transnational flows (Verstappen and Rutten 2015, 232). Due to its function as a hub of mobility, the town has acquired a central place in the imagination of the region itself, both for the local residents and for the transnational migrants returning ‘home’. In this thesis, I therefore present Anand town as a ‘centre’ (Falzon 2003) of the Vohra community, as it is through and from the town that Vohras can still cultivate their specific regional identity.

Conclusion

During a conference in Amsterdam in 2014, the founding mothers of the transnationalism paradigm and others came together to discuss if the paradigm was still useful within the current and much changed political, economic, social and cultural global context. While it may be true that transnationalism speak is over its peak after all the discussions in recent decades around globalisation, transnationalism and multi-sited ethnography, a transnational optic is still needed in the social sciences and a multi-scalar approach can be a useful tool for this.

The focus on the region and the town, seen from nearby and from afar, has been suitable to the case study of Charotar Sunni Vohras, a Muslim community in the region of Charotar in central Gujarat, India, whose affirmations of local belonging represent a challenge to the idea of the ‘Muslim as an outsider’ now dominant in India. What makes the case interesting in relation to earlier multi-sited studies on transnational migrants and their homeland is that it presents a counter-case to primordial constructions of the ‘home’, drawn from studies among landowning or otherwise relatively privileged groups. The emergence of Anand as a safe zone and as a new home town of Charotar Sunni Vohras in Gujarat and abroad indicates

that, for them, the homeland is not there as an ancestral or original place of belonging, but has to be made, actively.

An understanding of social processes in the region and a multi-sited research approach to include transnational migrants and local residents is indispensable to understanding this active process of homeland construction. As the older rudimentary framework of the ‘local and the global’ that has long prevailed in multi-sited anthropology does not provide enough tools to understand the mobile, dispersed and fluid processes described in the case study, I have developed a multi-scalar approach to study the regional identifications of the Vohra community. Through the empirical focus on the ‘global town’ as a hub of transnational and regional mobility, this thesis provides a multi-scalar perspective of community making, and a town-based perspective of a transnational region. It thus contributes to earlier academic attempts to understand the ‘stretching’ of social life across space by positioning the anthropology of place and the region within a transnational framework and, conversely, by ‘emplacing’ discussions on the homeland, doing so through developing a multi-scalar approach. I hope the thesis thus contributes to specific discussions on Muslims in India, and to wider academic discussions on how to understand regions and processes of regional community formation in a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world.
Multi-sited fieldwork is not a new phenomenon in anthropology (Hannerz 2003, 202–203) and, in the methodological sections of research presentations, it has become quite common to find summaries of places visited (Wilding 2007, 336). This trend stems from concerns about the inadequacy of classic single-site fieldwork methods to study a mobile, changing, globalising world (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 3) in which groups migrate, regroup in new locations, and reconfigure their histories and identities without maintaining tight spatial boundaries (Appadurai 1991, 191, 196; in Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 3). However, critical methodological questions have been raised about what has also been labelled ‘hit-and-run ethnography’ (Geertz 1998, 72; in Wogan 2004, 130). The question is: How does one do an ethnography of mobility and connections (Tsing 2005, xi)?

It has been argued that anthropological research can still best be accomplished by staying long-term in one place (as was advocated in Evans-Pritchard 1976), as that enables a grounding of the multi-sited research in the peculiarities of a well-known place (Wogan 2004). If researchers ‘spread themselves too thin’, meeting many people in many places without staying put anywhere, this may prevent
them from getting to the core of ethnography: understanding and revealing the perspectives of actual people through ‘immersion’ in the process of social life in the field (Hastrup 2013, 147). If fieldwork is not to be contained within a single site, while at the same time grounding fieldwork in a place is still a condition for good fieldwork, this then raises the question of how to construct the ‘field’ of fieldwork.

Various approaches have been suggested to deal with this problem, some of which have helped to shape the contours of this study. Marcus’ oft-quoted article (1995) about the methodological consequences of globalisation encourages experiments with multi-sited ethnographies and highlights various ‘modes of construction’ that can function as guides for designing a research project with multiple sites of participant observation. These devices of construction include (pre-planned or opportunistic) movement by the researcher, the tracing and mapping ‘within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it’ (Marcus 1995, 106). The techniques he discusses are: follow the people, follow the thing, follow the metaphor, follow the story, follow the biography, and follow the conflict. In this project, while I have used the technique of following the people, that broad strategy still does not answer the underlying methodological questions: which people? Why them, and not others? How does one choose whom to follow and whom not? And again, how to construct ‘the field’?

My main answer to these questions has been to spatially embed the research in a town, more specifically, a neighbourhood in a town, and to ‘follow the people’ from there. Anand town is a centre of mobility, from which people move in multiple directions and to which they and their resources return. The town can be called a ‘global town’ in the sense that encounters and interactions in the town connect it to destinations far beyond; connections that can be followed up by the researcher if she is open to surprise. In the process, collaborations with local interlocutors led the researcher to ‘see’ unforeseen connections and unforeseen forms of mobility, which then also led to new research themes and questions. The initial research plan was gradually expanded to include more and more of these unforeseen connections, travelling with informants even if the destination was sometimes unknown, rather than adhering strictly to a pre-formulated research plan. The research was thus mobile as well as located, sharing life with the people I met in Anand town and tracing their connections to other locations, and, at the same time, it gradually became more focused: from the town to a neighbourhood in the town, and then to a specific community that turned out to be prominent within that neighbourhood.

The act of ‘scaling’ or ‘scale switching’ has been crucial in the analysis of all these connections. Scaling puts different perspectives to work in the study of a subject:
depending on situation and perspective, the fieldworker’s attention stretches and bends to privilege different ‘scales of attention’ at different points in time (Hastrup 2013, 145). One advantage of scaling is that, as it involves multiple levels of analysis in the same study, it helps to overcome ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) without falling in the trap of replacing that much-criticised framework with equally fallible methodological transnationalism or methodological regionalism. My research project positioned the town in relation to three ‘scales’ of attention: a neighbourhood in a town, the town as a node in a region, and the town as a node within a transnational social network.

How these three scales developed over time, by trailing the people and mapping their connections, is discussed next. Briefly, as far as possible I tried to follow up on the ‘topographical awareness’ (Hastrup 2013, 156) of Muslims I met in Anand and their connections elsewhere by following the leads I found during fieldwork. Doing research at these multiple levels was challenging, as I developed a wide-ranging set of contacts in different places, following a multiplicity of cases along with a multiplicity of people. This involved frequent travel and difficult choices about whom to visit when, and how to divide the time.

Below, I outline the multi-sited and multi-scalar approach of this fieldwork. First, I introduce the reader to the neighbourhood that became my home during the research period, and explain how I studied it. Next, I introduce the region, the second scale of attention on which the research took place. Since a region, more abstract in its conceptualisation than a neighbourhood, is a slippery subject to study, I explain how I went about that. Third, I take the reader abroad, elaborating on the purpose of the research trip to the UK (and USA) and how this linked up to the neighbourhood and the regional study.

The study is based on twelve months of fieldwork: ten months of fieldwork in central Gujarat, in the period of 10 September 2011 until 28 June 2012, and two months of fieldwork in the United Kingdom, from 1 July to 10 September 2012. A ten-day orienting pre-fieldwork trip took place in April 2011, during which my supervisor Mario Rutten introduced me to scholars and friends in Ahmedabad, in Anand, and in a village near Anand. Two brief follow-up trips took place, one to Anand in February 2014 and one to join a community event of Vohras in the USA in May 2015.

The qualitative research in Gujarat was based on participant observation and interviews, and the research in the UK was based mostly on interviews with some participant observation. The core of the research in Gujarat consisted of frequent participation in the everyday affairs of fourteen Muslim families and four Muslim associations, in addition to less frequent interactions with many other families...
and associations. The mode of participation was often ‘participation to write’ (rather than a fully experiential style, Emerson 2005, 17–20): my acquaintances were used to me carrying a notebook around most of the time and sometimes encouraged me to take notes or pictures of what they thought significant. I also had approximately 200 ‘interviews’ in central Gujarat - I put ‘interviews’ between quotes because many of the interactions developed more like fragmentary and frequently interrupted conversations, during which I asked directive questions only occasionally. These conversations were sometimes audio-recorded. In the UK, I had 28 interviews, which had a more conventional format: a clear beginning and end, and a concentration on the topic at hand, a highly condensed type of conversation. There I made an audio recording of 18 interviews for transcription, and participant observation consisted of sharing residency in an apartment in East London with a group of two young couples and a baby (all Vohras from central Gujarat), and participation in social events in the houses of others.

In addition to the qualitative research, quantitative data was also acquired in three surveys. Survey A is a household survey of 147 households in Anand town, Survey B collected data from 35 migrants in Australia and Survey C from 35 informants in the UK (for survey questions, see appendix A.2.1, A.2.02, A.2.3). In addition to the three surveys, quantitative data was gathered on mosques and in a shopping area in Anand.

Throughout the research in central Gujarat, my neighbour and research assistant Minaz Pathan helped me approximately three days per week. She had various tasks, one of which was to translate (Gujarati and Hindi into English), particularly in the first months. I had taken Gujarati language classes (for six months with Amrita Vyas of the Sri Uganda Hindu Union in The Netherlands, and for one month fulltime with Professor Raymond Parmar in Ahmedabad) but it was a few months before I could have basic conversations in Gujarati independently. Short written sources encountered in the field were translated by Minaz, while longer and more complex written texts were translated from Gujarati to English by Mayur Macwan and Monica Macwan in Anand, and one source was partly translated by Rashid Vohra in London. Sources in the Gujarati language included information produced by associations, locally produced history books, pamphlets, (pictures of) public notice boards, invitations for social events, and some audio-recorded interviews.

While the fieldwork mainly focused on Muslims, I also talked to Hindus and Christians. I had ‘interviews’ with approximately 30 Hindus in Gujarat, most of whom I met them through Muslim acquaintances. In addition, I have been in regular touch with two Hindu (Patel) families in the region, whom I know due to a previous research project (Rutten and Verstappen 2014). I myself was positioned in
the local category of ‘Christians’, being from a Catholic family background in The Netherlands. Consequently, I also organically developed friendships with three Catholic families in Anand.

A neighbourhood study

It was my local supervisor, emeritus professor of sociology Amrapali Merchant\(^1\) of Sardar Patel University, who first drew my attention to the neighbourhood at the edge of Anand town where I eventually based my research. That day she had taken me to Anand in her car, driving us there from the city of Ahmedabad where we were both staying at the time. During the trip, she pointed out significant sites in the landscape, shared her life philosophy inspired by Jainism, and voiced her support for Ana Hazare’s hunger strike against corruption that then was dominating the news. After two hours, we approached Anand, and she suddenly asked: ‘What is your religion?’ I mentioned my Catholic family background. She continued: ‘All religions are pathways to God. Now look outside the car. These houses you see here weren’t there before. This was just agricultural land. In 2002, there were riots here. Then, there was a lot of killing in the villages around here, and so many Muslims were murdered. After that, they left their village and came here. Maybe 50,000 Muslims are now living in Anand. They occupy the gate of the town. Whenever you enter Anand, you pass Muslims.’

I registered as a student at Sardar Patel University and based myself at the student housing assigned to me on the campus in Vallabh Vidyanagar, the educational hub of Anand town’s urban conglomerate. From there I started my research among Muslims in Anand, initially with help of two professors of the Agricultural University and later with help of Minaz Pathan, a young Muslim woman who had just completed her bachelor’s studies at Sardar Patel University at the time. Minaz’ presence was a tremendous help in establishing rapport, as some of the families we visited knew her family personally. After two months of commuting from Vidyanagar to different research sites, I found a family willing to rent out the apartment built on top of their bungalow, in the ‘Muslim area’ that had been pointed out to me that first day from the car window. The invitation enabled me to participate more in everyday life in the neighbourhood, seven kilometres away from the campus. The family kindly took me in as their ‘paying guest’ by sharing lunch and dinner with me in their living room while giving me enough

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\(^1\) Professor Amrapali Merchant was a former vice chancellor of the Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, honorary professor at the Gujarat National Law University GNLU and the president of the Gujarat Sociological Society. It is a great loss that she passed away on December 23, 2014.
privacy on the top floor to work on my field notes and receive guests. Through their introductions, I quickly came to know more and more families in the neighbourhood.

The residential area is locally referred to as a ‘Muslim area’, despite the presence of century-old churches and various Hindu shrines that testify to a more diverse occupancy. The specific housing society I was in was a Muslim-only housing society. Residents almost uniformly identified themselves as followers of the ‘Tablighi Jamaat’. In terms of caste identification, of the 22 residents in this housing society, the majority were Vohra (13 families) while other residents were from other backgrounds (9 families, including Diwan, Shaik, Pathan, Khan, and Momin).

It was a middle class territory. The large, freshly painted bungalows testified to the relatively wealthy character of residents. My neighbours were employed in different occupations, some in various kinds of business (including real estate brokers, a tobacco trader, a car trader, and a shopkeeper), others were white collar workers (a bank manager, a professor, an advocate, and a deputy superintendent of police). Some worked for the government or for private companies, others were self-employed. Table 2.1 gives an overview of the occupations of the heads of households of this housing society. The residents themselves consider their housing society relatively well-to-do and highly educated. Due to its relatively wealthy character, in this thesis, I use the invented name ‘Majestic Housing Society’ to refer to it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Households</th>
<th>White collar*</th>
<th>Business**</th>
<th>Farmer</th>
<th>Transport/driver</th>
<th>(Civil) engineer</th>
<th>Mechanic/electrician</th>
<th>Housewife</th>
<th>Unclear***</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* In this thesis, in the category ‘white collar’ I include ‘government’ jobs and office jobs in private companies, e.g. tax officers, clerks, advocates, bank employees, as well as teachers and professors.
** The category ‘business’ includes both owners of large corporations and small-scale entrepreneurs.
*** One stated only ‘retired’, the other ‘working’.

‘Majestic Housing Society’ and the neighbourhood surrounding it became the main site of the research, giving the fieldwork a grounded character in spite of its multi-sitedness. The neighbourhood study started with an orienting round of interviews with local families and associations. After moving in, my role gradually changed from the interviewer asking questions to the curious neighbour who participated in social life. With some key informants a more intimate relation

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2 The table is based on a household survey (Survey A), the methodology of which I explain further on in this chapter. There were two ‘closed houses’, where the residents were absent at the time of the survey, bringing the total of houses in the society to 24.
grew, one that can perhaps be called friendship: a regular sharing of words and activities. As is to be expected in a gender-segregated society most of my friends were female, but some men were also able to spend time with me without offending social norms. Close acquaintances developed with individuals in fourteen families, eight Vohra families and six non-Vohra Muslim families (Pathan, Diwan, Malek, and Patel). In all of these families, at least one of the members spoke some English. Some of them lived in my own housing society, others a little further away, but all within walking distance. They can be classified as middle class Muslim residents of Anand town.

To get to know the neighbourhood better, where possible I joined neighbours in their everyday activities and accompanied them to the social events they attended. For example, my female neighbours regularly took evening walks, and by joining them I learnt a lot about the neighbourhood. I also visited the local associations they were connected to – schools, hospitals, charitable associations, a madrassa, and the Vohra caste association. Although mosques were inaccessible for me as a woman, other associations were open to receiving me. Schools turned out to be rewarding places to spend time with people. There was a government school nearby, but most schools in the interior of the neighbourhood are managed by Christians and Muslims while schools and colleges on the main road and in the rest of Anand are managed by Hindus. I ended up visiting privately managed schools of all denominations because they were in some way connected to my Muslim acquaintances. Two associations in particular became my home base: a primary school and a charitable hospital. Both associations were managed by a trust of Vohra men. In these associations, I was allowed to visit as often as I wanted, and I talked repeatedly to staff, volunteers, trustees, and parents and students, most of whom also lived in the neighbourhood. These associations then also invited me when they organised special events, which I attended when possible. In this way, I participated in the social life of the neighbourhood as much as I could.

Throughout the research period, Hindu acquaintances responded with caution when I mentioned where I lived. Officials and teachers reacted with surprise, awkwardness, or disapproval when I mentioned the research site, students I had befriended in the campus area surrounding the Sardar Patel University praised me for coming to India to do ‘such a hard job’. These and other ideas circulating about the neighbourhood are described further in Chapter 3.
A regional study

It was through the neighbourhood study, through living in Anand and participating in social life, that I came to see and experience the residents’ involvement in the wider region over time. I used a qualitative approach to explore the region. This meant I generally followed residents’ formulations of the region rather than officially defined ones. This ‘bottom-up’ sense of region emerged both from conversations and from travelling. In the process of getting to know my neighbours, I often received invitations to visit nearby villages or towns, to meet their relatives, to see their workplaces, or visit associations they were involved in. By following up on these, I came to see how Anand is embedded in regional networks.

I thus used the research strategy of ‘following the people’ (Marcus 1995) to explore the region from the perspective of my neighbours. The strategy of moving along with informants has been highlighted recently as a way to ‘propel anthropology towards a pragmatic definition of the field’ (Hastrup 2013, 155). According to Hastrup, ‘the field is constituted through people’s connections to each other within the region’, and mapping these connections is a ‘way of figuring out the field in the first place’ (Hastrup 2013, 157). It was through motorised travel that I came to gradually gain an understanding of the local sense of ‘region’. Travel usually took place on the back of a motorbike or in shared auto-rickshaws that ‘shuttle’ between villages and towns, occasionally by local train or (with the more privileged) in a car. Experiencing these everyday practices of mobility by moving along with urban residents has been instrumental in producing a bottom-up understanding of the region.

Excursions into the region took place partly in the sphere of family and business, and partly in the world of ‘Muslim trusts’ (associations managed by Muslims). I visited twenty such ‘trusts’ during the research, ten in Anand town itself and ten elsewhere in the region. These included eight schools and four hospitals, two madrassas and two banks, and various other types of organisations. Most associations I visited only once, but two associations outside Anand became a site of fieldwork more intensively because I visited them frequently. These two trusts were located in two smaller towns, both within an hour’s travel from Anand. I did not really select the trusts, they selected me: they were enthusiastic to receive me, sometimes even insistently so, and regularly invited me to take part in their activities. Both were mixed gender environments, one a school, the other a health clinic and youth centre. Being embedded in these associations enabled me, to some extent, to compare the situation in Anand to the situation in two smaller towns nearby. One association was a Vohra trust, the other was directed by a Saiyed.
Access to the twenty associations was facilitated by people who were themselves leaders or staff members of an association, and who invited me to accompany them on visits to other associations. For them, the trip provided a good opportunity for networking. For me, they literally opened up the field. Asif Thakor had a special role in shaping this regional field: his extended regional networks and superb skill dealing with all kinds of sensitivities that occurred in different local contexts made it possible for me to visit a wide range of associations and their leaders. Though not a Vohra himself, he was employed by a Vohra trust, and also guided me to mostly Vohra-managed associations – a consequence of the dominance of Vohras as leaders in the world of ‘Muslim trusts’ in central Gujarat. Asif is a social worker and a former Ford Foundation Fellow, a resident of Bhalej village who studied Sociology in NS Patel College in Anand and Child and Youth Development at the International Institute of Social Studies in w. His academic training made it possible for us to brainstorm together about fieldwork choices, about where to go, whom to talk to, what subjects to discuss. Asif’s position as a social worker also shaped his interest in working with me: he thought it necessary I would get sufficient information, because ‘your report is going to people outside, like the World Bank, and they should understand the situation of Muslims, what problems they face around here’.

It was a major challenge to do both a neighbourhood study and a regional study simultaneously, that too within the limited time frame of ten months. Over time, the questions of where the region ended, which connections to follow and which not, emerged. As I came to know more people in various villages and towns in the region, I was invited to meet them again, to talk more, and to participate as the foreign ‘special guest’ in weddings and institutional events such as Republic Day or Annual Day. It was frequently believed that I should really meet so-and-so because he/she would be a useful contact for my research. In many cases I benefited from such an arrangement and went with the flow. However, after some months of extending my networks and receiving ever-more invitations, this strategy led to exhaustion. Trying to be everywhere, travelling between different villages and towns and meeting new people in all these locations, became difficult. It took an illness where I was forced to stay in bed for a week to realise that many interesting things, which I had not noticed so far because I had so often been away, were going on within my own house. This led me to slow down a bit, and to concentrate on the neighbourhood study again. This, however, meant I had to say ‘no’ to invitations elsewhere, which was not always accepted easily by the now disappointed people that I had so willingly joined before. Switching scale between neighbourhood and
region was thus not a choice I could make on my own, but was a constant negotiation with various interlocutors who had their own ideas about what I should study.

Where did the ‘bottom-up’ region end in a spatial sense? The answer to this question was not straightforward, but over time I could see a pattern emerging. The furthest outposts of overland connectedness were, for my neighbours, the cities of Ahmedabad and Vadodara, Mumbai, and in rare cases Surat. To explore these, I went to Mumbai for a few days, and to Ahmedabad and Vadodara, to have follow-up conversations with people I had met in Anand, or with their acquaintances there. However, I found that residents of Anand were not as keen to take me to the cities as they had been to take me to small towns and villages in the direct vicinity of Anand. This was undoubtedly partly due to the greater distance and longer travel time. But I also sensed that they felt somewhat insecure vis-a-vis their city-based acquaintances and wondered how the foreign guest would be received. A man first invited to take me to a trust he had collaborated with in Vadodara, then hesitated and said that I should ‘learn more Gujarati first’. A family spoke with great enthusiasm about their relatives in Mumbai but became nervous when I suggested meeting them, because they were ‘very religious’, ‘more orthodox than us’. A man who had happily taken me around the region in his car and kept inviting me to visit his home village, never considered taking me along on his frequent trips to Ahmedabad. Overall, travel-along visits to Vadodara and Ahmedabad remained limited. The city seemed to be a universe apart, a known yet somewhat unfamiliar domain.

The consequence of entering the region from a Muslim-majority neighbourhood in a fast-growing town is that I could not spend as much time with Muslims still living in more traditional residential areas, in mixed neighbourhoods with Hindus, such as the central market areas of towns and villages of central Gujarat. Their invisibility in this study is compensated for by a recent PhD thesis about Vohras in precisely such a neighbourhood, in the smaller town of Mahemdabad, just an hour’s drive from Anand (Heitmeyer 2009a). I also spent some time in that town myself, through a case study that led me there. That has helped me to appreciate Heitmeyer’s rich work and enables me to draw, where relevant in this thesis, comparisons between the two towns.

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3 In addition to following up on connections from Anand, I also visited the cities of Ahmedabad and Vadodara to meet with scholars and NGOs, to spend some time at the Gujarat Institute of Development Research (GIDR), and to attend academic seminars.
A transnational neighbourhood and a transnational region

Approximately a third of the families in Majestic Housing Society (9 out of 22 households) have at least one relative abroad (see table 2.2). In addition, there are two ‘closed’ houses in the society, where we established that the family probably resides abroad. The apartment I lived in exemplified this transnational character of the neighbourhood. It had recently been constructed on top of the house, using remittances, as accommodation for the holiday trips of the two sons of the family, who had moved to Australia a few years earlier. The apartment became available for rent soon after the younger son’s holiday trip ended. As a result, my landlady wore new sweaters her sons had gifted her from Australia, used Australian barbecue sauce on her homemade pizzas, and experimented with Facebook and Skype on the laptop her son left for her. Apart from the Australian connection, there was also an American one: every few days, I would find ‘Uncle’ on the couch of the living room. Uncle was from America. Having lived there since 1993, he has been spending several months a year in Anand ever since his retirement, to escape harsh winters. Uncle regularly visited our house for a chat and a cup of green tea.

Throughout the research period, I was always ready to meet ‘transnational migrants’ (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1995) who were in some way engaged with the local society. I ended up talking to visiting migrants, return migrants, acquaintances of migrants, and potential migrants. Many of my neighbours helped me to spend time with migrants, for example by inviting me to their houses to meet them there. Some conversations happened spontaneously, when I unexpectedly found a visiting migrant in the house of a neighbour. Other meetings were more arranged, after I asked people if they would please introduce me to their visiting migrant relative. Over time, it became well known that I was interested to meet everyone’s migrant acquaintances, and people started informing me on their own.

In many cases, my neighbours were present while I talked to the migrants. One neighbour, himself a return migrant from London, took the task so seriously that he started to tip me off well in advance every time a migrant visited his house, informing me what time the person was to come so I would be able to plan my day around it. It was not always possible to spend time with the visitors for more than

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4 I use the term ‘migrants’ and ‘transnational migrants’ throughout the thesis, although I have wondered if this label is the right term. Is a young man staying two years on a student visa in the UK a migrant, a student, or a temporary labourer? Is a retired man spending his winters in Anand and his summers in London a return migrant or a resident of Gujarat with transnational ties? The purpose of using the label ‘migrant’ in the thesis is to distinguish them from the local residents, but in some cases this distinction is not entirely clear.
an hour, because they were often restless and travelling a lot, on their way to relatives, friends, dentists, doctors, banks or shopping malls. Often I knew the local family better than their migrant relatives.

Having said that, a few migrants enjoyed spending time with me and took me along for a day or so. This happened particularly with British and American citizens who were in some way involved in the associations I frequented (in Anand and elsewhere in the region). These people had heard about me from their local acquaintances before they visited, and were therefore curious to meet the foreign woman who had investigated ‘their’ association. They expressed themselves in English with ease and usually also had a car available, which allowed them to take me along during some of their activities in the region. This allowed us to talk outside the family setting, which provided a different perspective. With three visiting migrants, one from the UK and two from the USA, I had a particularly intense period of fieldwork where I followed them around for several days at a stretch as they took me along as a participant on their busy schedule. These periods were spent travelling and in meetings with mainly male companions of the migrant, sometimes till so late in the evenings that my neighbours started worrying about my safety. My joining in as a woman was accepted because this was the migrant’s choice, although it sometimes had to be negotiated. In such cases I tried to take Minaz along, as being two women considerably eased the tension of crossing gender boundaries.

The qualitative research was complemented by a household survey designed to find out how many families in this neighbourhood are connected to transnational migrants, and to collect some other demographic details. An overview of the questions is provided in the appendix (Survey A, table A.2.1). The household survey was executed by Minaz Pathan5 in six housing societies (147 houses), all within walking distance of each other. These housing societies were chosen because we had access through personal connections, and because we knew at least one family in them had a relative abroad. The response rate was high: in all houses except three, a resident was available and willing to answer the survey questions. All of the six surveyed societies were occupied solely by Muslims6 and they were occupied mainly by relatively well-to-do (middle class) residents.

Table 2.2 provides an overview of the main survey findings regarding international migration. Additional results of the household survey are discussed later in the thesis.

5 I thank Abedaben Vahora, Shifa Vahora and Sajid Vahora for helping Minaz Pathan to carry out the household survey in Anand.
6 To contextualise the findings, we conducted the survey in a seventh housing society occupied mainly by Christians. The findings of this additional housing society are not used in the thesis.
Abroad

The transnational links found in the neighbourhood and the regional study were followed up abroad at the end of the research period. A two-month research period abroad had been planned and budgeted for in advance, with the intention of gaining additional understanding of the families and associations studied in Anand town and central Gujarat. The idea was to locate people whom I had heard about but whom I had not been able to meet in Gujarat, to follow those I had met in Gujarat to their location of settlement, and to collect information that had not been accessible in the home region. As my acquaintances in Anand led me to addresses in the UK, Australia, and the USA, the choice of location was a difficult one. In the end, I chose the UK for the two-month research period and collected some additional data on Australia through a survey carried out among migrants by a research assistant, and on the USA through a brief fieldwork visit of five days.

I chose the UK for the planned fieldwork period abroad because it has a long migration history, resulting in a diverse group of migrants from the region so leading to a variety of links with the region: I had encountered UK-based Vohras visiting Anand in their holidays, had found UK-based Vohras who had invested in houses and land in Anand town, and had met local families maintaining dense transnational relations with families in the UK. I had also encountered a few charitable associations in central Gujarat that aim to 'do good' in the home region by providing health and other services to the poor in Gujarat with money collected in the UK. In short, I had encountered multiple cases in Gujarat that led to the UK, whereas I had fewer and less varied cases studies leading to the USA and Australia.

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Table 2.2. International migration in Majestic Housing Society and other housing societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Majestic Housing Society</th>
<th>Total six housing societies, including Majestic</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total houses in housing society</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses with a link to abroad</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total residing families with a member abroad</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with one or more children abroad</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed houses; family (probably) abroad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return migrant (temporary or permanent)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households without a link to abroad</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of the research abroad, I designed a survey with basic questions about the characteristics of the migrants and their social and financial links with people in Charotar (see appendix, A.2.2 and A.2.3). This survey was carried out among 35 informants in Australia (Survey B, appendix A.2.2) and 35 informants in the UK (Survey C, appendix A.2.3). The Australian survey was relatively brief, discussing only basic demographic details; the UK survey was more extensive, including more questions about home villages, family relations and social-economic ties in Gujarat. In Australia, the survey was made possible by Abedaben Vahora, a resident of Anand visiting Australia, who offered to collect information there as a temporary research assistant. The informants, whom she gathered through her personal networks, were all Muslims with links to the Charotar region, the majority Vohra. They were quite recent arrivals (maximum 9 years ago) and relatively young (below 35 years old). In comparison, in the UK the survey participants were more diverse, and included settled families with British citizenship and young recently arrived individuals and couples. In the UK, I gathered the information myself and the survey questions were, in most cases, asked as a small part of longer semi-structured interviews.

Table 2.3. Characteristics of survey respondents in the UK and Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey UK</th>
<th>Survey Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vohra7</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (non-Vohra) Muslims</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of stay</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years or less</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 years or more</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born here or arrived as a young child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary visa (student visa, dependent, ‘breezing’, etc)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship, ‘PR’ (permanent residency), or ‘indefinite leave to remain’</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey in in Australia (Survey B) and in the UK (Survey C), 2012.

In the UK, I followed up on addresses collected during my stay in central Gujarat, but also ‘snowballed’ further to other people from these initial contacts, prioritising, when possible, the families that had social or economic links to central Gujarat. Snowballing became easier when I discovered an organised network of Charotar Sunni Vohras in the UK, the ‘UK Vohra Association’, whose members kindly helped

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7 Based on the surname noted in the questionnaire and including respondents with the surname ‘Mansuri’, who are considered Vohras (Heitmeyer 2009a, 80).
me to find more British informants. During interviews, I was sometimes accompanied by a woman I call ‘Aunty’. People in Anand had told me to meet Aunty because ‘she will help you. She helps all the new people that come to London’. As a Vohra born in Mumbai, having come to the UK with her husband six years previously, and knowing a considerable number of Vohra families in the UK, Aunty helped me just as she had helped other new arrivals from Gujarat to start their lives in the UK. Her condition was that we would practice English. With her burqa and my salwar kamis we made an interesting pair in the London bus, until she bought me two long-sleeved t-shirts and told me to start wearing Western clothes: people had apparently complained about my rural Gujarati attire. In this way, she not only provided contacts and information, she also acquainted me with the social norms I had to learn to adapt to in this new research context.

Relying on the Vohra community network meant that the data collected on Vohras in Anand became, in hindsight, more important, which led me to change the focus of the study. While I was in Anand, my focus had been on a middle class neighbourhood that included various Muslims, mainly Vohras but also including non-Vohras, and I had not prioritised one Muslim community over others. The UK-based research, however, took place almost exclusively among Vohras from Charotar, although I also spent some time with a Diwan student and a Pathan family from Anand, and a Muslim from Baruch with social links to Anand. This community bias made it necessary to start asking more questions about the Vohra community itself, what it meant to people, and how it was organised in the UK. After the fieldwork, during the analysis phase, I re-read my notes on Anand through the lens of the ‘Vohra’ community and found enough information to build the thesis on. In the research and writing process, I thus increasingly focused on the Vohra community.

The research project was thus not pre-planned as a community study but became one over time. Insofar as this has led to gaps in the data, I was able to fill in some of them by returning to Gujarat for ten days in February 2014. During this brief follow-up trip, I interviewed two new people who had been mentioned to me as important contacts for migrants in the UK, and went back to previous informants to talk to them once more about subjects I had asked about before but which had now acquired different meaning because of what I had learnt in the UK. This did not lead to very surprising data but provided the information I needed to write with confidence about the two settings.

For the interviews in the UK, I used a set of questions (appendix A.2.4) to map social and financial links with Anand and central Gujarat, particularly transnational marriages, transnational associations, and transnational investments. I also used some provocative statements made by informants in Anand, an interview strategy
designed to evoke reflection and discussion. The interviews took place in the family sphere. More than 50 informants participated in 28 interviews. A husband and wife were often interviewed simultaneously, in other cases it was ladies only, or the head of household was interviewed while his children, friends, siblings or (grand)parents listened in to the conversation, sometimes commenting or adding information. The shortest interviews lasted half an hour, the longest more than four hours, the majority were something in between. The interviews were based on open-ended interview questions (appendix A.2.4), in addition to a short section of closed survey questions (Survey C). I made use of audio-recordings here more often than I had done in Gujarat. At the beginning of the interviews, I handed out a ‘Research Consent Form’ signed by myself (not by informants), in which I promised not to share the audio-recordings with anyone else.

Participant observation took place mainly among newly arrived migrants because I lived in a shared apartment in East London with young immigrants. They were two couples and a baby, all Vohras, three of them from central Gujarat and one from Vadodara. Sharing housing with them helped me to understand their daily routine, prayer and leisure patterns, and to meet some of their friends, although, due to time limitations, I did not follow them outside the house, to their work place. It was possible to contextualise these findings because of an earlier fieldwork experience among young Hindus from the region, who lived in the same neighbourhood and whom I also visited during the research period. Participant observation was possible in the households of settled migrant families when they invited me to social gatherings such as Iftar, Eid, funeral prayers, and a wedding.

Due to the limited time available, just two months, the UK segment of the fieldwork had a somewhat ‘hit-and-run’ character. Even within London itself it sometimes took two hours of travelling before I reached the home of a research participant. I also travelled to Leicester, Newcastle, Crawley and Guildford. Informants had arrived in the UK through diverse trajectories and at different moments in time, lived in different economic circumstances, had different networks and different religious convictions and practices. This diversity made it hard to contextualise information. While I did not reach a comprehensive understanding of each family, I consider the research in the UK effective because the point was not to reach complete local knowledge but to gain, though this side-route, additional understanding of what I had seen before, in Anand town and central Gujarat.

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8 From 2007 to 2011, I collaborated with Mario Rutten and Isabelle Makay on a documentary film entitled ‘Living Like a Common Man’ (2011), and thereafter with Mario Rutten on related publications (Rutten and Versstappen 2014, Rutten and Versstappen 2015). For further information on the documentary, see http://sites.google.com/site/livinglikeacommonman. The film was recorded among migrants from central Gujarat, in the same neighbourhood in East London where I lived during fieldwork for this thesis, and among their parents in India.
Some access problems occurred in the UK, though only with men I had not met in Gujarat before, and mainly with those of the ‘second generation’. Some were puzzled when they heard that a Gujarati-speaking European woman had visited their relatives and had asked many questions. They could not understand why anyone would take an interest particularly in the small Charotar Sunni Vohra community, and started to theorise. One man explained to me how his friends were worried about me being a spy, for Modi, for the ‘anti-Muslim’ Dutch or Danish government, or perhaps for the Israeli secret service. Two men confronted me, explained their worst fears, and demanded deletion of their families’ personal details from the dataset (which I did). I thought their awkwardness stemmed from a strong sense of vulnerability, probably related to increasing Islamophobia across Europe in the context of the worldwide ‘war against (Islamic) terrorism’ (Atom 2014). Their disengagement from the research may also have been related to the fact that I presented myself as a scholar interested in Gujarat and Gujarati, which did not fit their self-identification as ‘British Muslims’ (Gardner and Shukur 1994, 163).

The reluctance of a few contrasted with the enthusiasm of many to participate in the research project. Rapport was best with first generation migrants, especially with those who shared with me an intimate knowledge of Anand town. My (basic) knowledge of the Gujarati language and my personal experiences in Gujarat ensured that they felt comfortable and were sometimes very enthusiastic about talking to me. They realised I could differentiate between Mumbai and Gujarat, between Ahmedabad and Anand, and between Boriavi and Kanjari (two adjacent villages). Due to this shared knowledge, they could explain to me the exact location of their family’s house or other sites of significance. Sometimes we had common acquaintances. The specific research trajectory of starting in the home region is largely responsible for the fact that I was able to gain good contacts with first generation migrants, who felt comfortable talking to me about highly localised issues. If I had begun the project in the UK instead of Gujarat, this would have generated a somewhat different entry into the Vohra community.

The Vohras in the UK who enjoyed reflecting on themselves within a ‘Gujarati’ or ‘Vohra’ framework of identity particularly found purpose in my research project. Young people who did so were drawn into my conversations with their parents, spurring on the discussion by listening intently, sometimes adding questions or stories. The most rewarding fieldwork occurred when interviews overflowed in group conversations, a sort of informal focus-group discussion. In their own living

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9 I am aware of the difficulties of talking about people in terms of ‘first’ and ‘second’ generation (for a discussion, see Charsley 2013, 17), and limit the use of these terms as much as possible, but I occasionally use the term ‘first generation’ to indicate those who migrated to the UK as adults and the term ‘second generation’ or ‘second and later generations’ to indicate their offspring, those born in the UK and those who arrived with their parents at a young age.
rooms in the UK, at a distance from Gujarat, the reflections of the migrants about Gujarat were often more lengthy, more concentrated, and more pronounced than the statements I had recorded in Gujarat.

The USA fieldwork trip was an afterthought, and occurred on the occasion of the ‘Vahora Families Reunion’ in May 2015, organised by the ‘Vahora Association’ in the USA. During the three days of the event and the two days after, I met many people, took many notes, and captured part of the observations on video. However, since this fieldwork was so short and took place so close to the end of completing the thesis, I have not followed up on new findings (yet) and have mainly used the data to enrich the existing argument.

Conclusion
Combining research in the country of origin and the country of arrival of transnational migrants is methodologically very complex. My work follows up on an established genre of multi-sited ethnographies based on long-term research. While other researchers have studied a particular region for many years and later incorporated transnational migration into their research (Gardner 2008; Rutten and Patel 2003), I have attempted to achieve similar ethnographic depth within the limited timeframe of one year, which poses many challenges for the project. One of these was the flexibility of the research design. The research grew more and more focused over time, shifting from a neighbourhood study to a community study. While it was not necessarily my intention to do a community study, the Vohra community became the focus of the project in the process of constructing and reconstructing the ‘field’. Although this process was only partly the result of an independent decision-making process, has been somewhat intuitive and is therefore hard to describe, I have tried to shed some light on how I have developed the ‘field’ in this chapter. I have explained how I ‘landed in’ a specific neighbourhood in Anand town, the kind of people who guided me from there, and how the field has been constructed and reconstructed because of them. The shift from a study of a neighbourhood to a study of a community connected to a neighbourhood took place at the very end of my research, in the UK, because Vohras there had organised themselves on the basis of a ‘Vohra’ identity. This has enabled me to ‘snowball’ through Vohra networks with relative ease within the UK but it also caused a challenge during the writing phase, when some of the data I gathered in Gujarat ultimately did not fit into the thesis.

Such flexibility is inevitable when combining a localised field study with a multi-sited and multi-scalar approach. I have followed the trend of doing multi-sited fieldwork in anthropology, which stems from concerns about the inadequacy
of classic single-site fieldwork methods in an increasingly interconnected and changing world and have conceptualised the research at three interconnected ‘scales’ (local, regional, transnational) as a way of putting different perspectives to work and of thinking through the complexities of a multi-sited ethnography. At the local level, research entailed ‘immersion’ in a particular neighbourhood. From there, connections that mattered to the people in the neighbourhood were mapped, and sometimes followed. This approach requires some flexibility in the research design and good rapport with local interlocutors, who open up further-away field sites as guides and gatekeepers. It also imposes constraints on the research as the researcher cannot always choose where to go even though she still has a degree of choice about which trails to follow and which to ignore.

Being open about the way in which local interlocutors guided my decisions, rather than pretending that the anthropologist had more control than she did, is in line with the increasing recognition in anthropology of how collaborations influence the production and negotiation of the ethnographic ‘field’ (Gupta 2014, 394–395; Middleton and Cons 2014, 280). While I have allowed local interlocutors to guide my research in many ways, I have also guided them to guide me, in the sense that my curiosity for their multi-sited connectedness was quite obvious to them, and they were generally happy (and able) to make me ‘see’ the links. This approach, combining openness with selective attention, has enabled me to construct the case studies that form the basis of this thesis.

The specific research trajectory of starting in a neighbourhood in a fast-growing town, zooming out to the region, from there tracking transnational connections and following up on these networks abroad, renders some things visible and others invisible in this thesis. Some readers may be baffled by the choice to leave out the ‘national’ as a key scale of research. While this methodological choice has been part of the effort to avoid ‘methodological nationalism’, it is not as bold as it might seem: nations and their symbols are important aspects of the lives of the research participants, and this is reflected in their stories in the empirical chapters. Of the three scales (local, regional, transnational), the region was the most central and this is reflected in the research questions and build-up of the thesis. However, my locatedness in a town ensured a specific view of the region, a town-centric view of the region, seen from the perspective of the residents and visitors of this town. Starting in India rather than in the UK has been an influential methodological choice too. Having lived in Anand for some time before I came to the UK to meet the migrants, my best contacts were with those among the migrants who also felt some connection to the places and people that I had come to know there. I could
understand their discussions of highly localised issues in central Gujarat, which would not have been possible if I had started out this research in the UK. Another result of this choice to start in Gujarat is that the concerns of those born and/or brought up in the UK were harder for me to address. Some British-born Vohras have nevertheless collaborated with this study and have contributed interesting additional insights, which are included where possible in the thesis.

Now that I have outlined the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the methodological approach of the research project, I continue to describe the empirical findings of the research. In Part II, I describe the Vohra community as a local community, based in Anand town and in the central Gujarat region. In Part III, I describe the Vohra community as a transnational community, based in the UK and USA with ties to Anand town and central Gujarat.

For clarity, I repeat the research questions outlined earlier. Empirically, I ask how Vohras in central Gujarat and abroad maintain a sense of belonging to the Charotar region and how they relate to Anand town as an emerging regional centre of the Vohra community in the region. An underlying question involves the three key concepts of the thesis, mobility, community and the region: how are different forms of mobility (local and transnational) constitutive in the process of regional community making?