Mobility and the region: A multi-scalar ethnography of the Vohra Gujarati community, in India and abroad
Verstappen, S.B.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
PART III

A transnational community
Main places of settlement of Charotar Sunni Vohars
By describing Vohras as a town-based and regional community in Part II of the thesis, I have described the ‘Vohra community’ from a local perspective. Now, in Part III, I will describe the wider migration trajectories of Vohras and analyse the community from a transnational perspective. Where have Vohras migrated and how have they regrouped as a community in their new settings? Is ‘that Vohra thing’, as one young man in the UK called it, still relevant for those who settled abroad?

This chapter explores how community is reformulated and negotiated during the active and dynamic process of ‘group-making’ (Brubaker 2002) under conditions of migration. How do collective identities emerge, what cultural work is involved, and how is this process affected by the experience of migration? In the previous scholarship on these processes, I can broadly discern three approaches. First, scholars have drawn on the classic anthropological notions of kinship and caste to understand how social relations are reconfigured in response to migration and how ‘transnational social fields’ emerge in the process (Ballard 1990; Charsley and Shaw 2006; Charsley 2013; Gardner 2006; Upadhya and Rutten 2012). Second, scholars have looked into the institutionalisation and politicisation of identities,
for example through the formation of migrant associations (Caglar 2006; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Sökefeld 2006; van Der Veer 2002). Third, scholars have looked into the formation of ‘diasporas’, based on an ethno-national consciousness of being dispersed from an ancestral ‘homeland’ (Clifford 1994; Cohen 1996; Safran 1991; for a discussion, see Faist 2008, 34–36).

These three analytical lenses are used in this chapter to explore how Vohras have reconfigured themselves as a transnational community: first, the intimate sphere of the family; second, the formal organisation of the community; and third, the shared homeland. In line with earlier studies on South Asians in Britain (e.g. Ballard 1990, Gardner 2006), my findings show that notions of family and relatedness are crucial to the process of (chain) migration and to the reconfiguration of the community. While there have also been attempts to organise the Vohra community more formally, this has featured bursts of enthusiasm and of disinterest. Approaching the situation through the notion of the homeland helps to understand how the migrants think of themselves as Indians, as Gujaratis, as Indian/Gujarati Muslims, and as Vohras from the ‘very small region’ of Charotar. However, rather than collectively idealising the ‘putative ancestral homeland’ or nurturing a dream of future return (Safran 1991, 83–84; Cohen 1996, 515), what is shared is critique on the marginalisation of Muslims in Gujarat/India.

Vohras have participated in the long-standing history of international migration from central Gujarat: to the former British colonies in East Africa, to Karachi in Pakistan, to Dubai in the Middle East, to Australia, the UK and USA. This chapter is primarily based on conversations with Vohras based in the UK, with some references to conversations with Vohras based in the USA.

Migration trajectories

Gujarat has a long history of international migration and has long been an important migrant-sending region of India (Kapur 2010, 52, 55, 79, 90). Studies of migration in and from central Gujarat suggest that migration has been distributed unevenly between groups. Until recently, it was mainly the rural elite, particularly the landowning agricultural community of ‘Patels’ or ‘Patidars’, who migrated abroad (Guha and Rutten 2013; Michaelson 1979; Morris 1968; Rutten and Patel 2002; Tambs-Lyche 1980; for background, see Pocock 1972). In the Chronicles of Charotar (1954),¹ a book with history of Charotar containing almost 200 pages

about international migration from the region, almost all migrants had the same surname: Patel. For example, in Kampala (Uganda), of 347 migrants mentioned, 287 are Patel and 14 are Amin (also considered to be Patel). Only a few other names are mentioned in this list: Dev (4), Mistri (2) and Vohra (2). This shows caste networks were crucial to accessing opportunities created due to British colonial rule in the East African colonial territories of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Vohras have migrated in smaller numbers and have followed diverse migration trajectories. As a result, their transnational networks are not as visible in the region. Conversations with Vohras in the UK who had lived in East Africa confirm that Vohras only occasionally participated in colonial migration: in their memory, ‘from our side in Charotar, there were only eight or ten people.’ Over time, these eight or ten people moved on from Africa to the UK, and contributed to starting the process of Vohra chain migration there. More recent developments have opened up the UK, USA, Australia and Canada, as well as the Middle East, to new generations of migrants increasingly independent from caste networks and derived from wider segments of the population. Visa agents I interviewed in Anand estimated that while 80% of their customers are still Patel, their customers now also include members of other Hindu castes, Christians, and Muslims.2

The household survey I organised in Anand shows that 36 of the 147 households have one or more family members abroad (table 2.2, in Chapter 2), mostly offspring: a total of 35 children (27 sons and 8 daughters) were found abroad in 26 households.3 Table 5.1 shows the destinations, visa status and numbers of years abroad of the sons and daughters who went abroad. Most are in the Australia (10 of 35), USA (10 of 35), and UK (8 of 35), a few are in the Middle East or South Africa, and one is in mainland Europe (table 5.1). Almost 50% of the children are said to hold permanent residency (17 out of 35). These numbers are in line with other findings of migration from central Gujarat, which show that the UK, USA and Australia are important destinations for migration from this region.4

---


3 Of these 26 families with children abroad, 19 were recorded as Vohra (the surname was not recorded in all households).

The survey findings confirm that migration is an important aspect in the lives of middle class Muslims in Anand town, and is no longer confined to a specific caste network. Below I outline the diverse migration trajectories of Vohras from central Gujarat, and their destinations.

First, an important migration destination for Vohras from central Gujarat has been Mumbai. Central Gujarat was a part of the Bombay Presidency in the colonial period, has been connected with Bombay/Mumbai through the railways and has been an important centre of education and business for a long time, which has attracted many migrants from Gujarat. As a result, Gujaratis are the second largest linguistic group of this metropolis. As early as the 1930s, Vohras of Charotar were organising themselves as a community in Bombay. In the community directory of the ‘Mumbai Charotar Sunni Vohra Samaj’, 264 Vohra households are listed as residents of Mumbai. Besides those who settled in Mumbai, there are those who used the city as a stepping stone to further off destinations, such as the UK or USA.

A second migration destination for the Vohra community has been Karachi. After Partition — the break-up of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947 — millions of people moved across the new borders, Hindus and Sikhs to India, Muslims to Pakistan. In this period, Sunni Vohras migrated from central Gujarat

---

Table 5.1. Countries of residence, visa status and number of years abroad, of sons and daughters abroad in 147 Muslim households in Anand town

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total sons and daughters abroad</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Years abroad</th>
<th>Visa status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Less than 3.9 years</td>
<td>‘PR’ (permanent residency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4 to 7.9 years</td>
<td>Student visa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 to 11.9 years</td>
<td>Spouse visa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12 years or more</td>
<td>Work permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-response</td>
<td>‘Breezing visa’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visitor visa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Illegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstated/unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unstated/unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6 Vohra Darshan, page 78-90.
8 Information based on interviews with migrants in the UK.
9 While the demographics of these migrations have been recorded relatively well in the Punjab region (Schechtman 1949), less is known about migration patterns to and from Gujarat after Partition. The 1961 Census recorded that the number of persons who had migrated from Pakistan into Kheda district was 4,634.
and Bombay to Pakistan. The ‘Sunni Vohras or Sunni Bohras’ Wikipedia page, says that ‘after independence in 1947, many members of the community moved to Pakistan, and there is a 15,500 strong community in Karachi’, who have organised themselves into the Charotar Muslim Anjuman (association of Charotar Muslims), established in 1952. The community directory of Karachi produced by this association mentions approximately 500 families from 47 villages in central Gujarat.

Among the Vohras from central Gujarat who migrated to the British colonies in East Africa (the area now known as Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania) were labourers working in the businesses of other Gujaratis and teachers. After Independence, in the 1960s and 70s, a few stayed on in Africa but the majority migrated onwards to the UK. In as far I was able to talk to these pioneer migrants, now old and retired in the UK, they said their migration to East Africa had been made possible because of the help of a friendly neighbour or a well-connected college friend - a co-villager of the Patel community or a Muslim acquaintance from the coastal parts of Gujarat.

In their community in Gujarat, migration was rare at the time and, in some cases, was strongly discouraged by relatives. When a Vohra man from the village of Kanjari in central Gujarat had the opportunity to become a school teacher in a Khoja (Muslim) school in Tanganyika (now Tanzania), arranged through the help of a friend from Surat, his family strongly disapproved and tried to prevent him from taking up the position.

A few individuals migrated to the UK and USA in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, via Mumbai, Pakistan, or East Africa and, in some cases, directly from Gujarat. Once settled, these individuals have helped relatives and acquaintances to make the move. In the UK (about which more below), there are approximately 110 to 120 households of Vohras settled with British passports, and a varying number of migrants on temporary visas, estimated at sixty by members of the UK Vohra Association in 2012. In the USA, there are at least 350 individuals, approximately

---

12 Charotar Muslim Anjuman (Pok) Regd. Members Directory, Karachi, Pakistan. The directory was given to me by a family in Anand, who had brought it with them after a recent visit to relatives in Karachi. The book is undated but mentions the date of the foundation of the association, 1952. From the name of the organisation, it is unclear whether the organisation is for Charotar Sunni Vohras only, or for all Muslims from Charotar, but the ‘community hall’ where marriages of the community takes place was described by the family in Anand as a ‘Vohra community hall’.
13 This is based on interviews with Vohras who came to the UK via East Africa. A man who had lived in Tanganyika said that there were three Charotar Sunni Vohra families in Tanganyika, three or four families in Uganda, and, similarly, a few in Kenya. The Charotar Sarvasangra mentions two Vohras in Kampala, out of 347 migrants from Charotar in Kampala (Uganda), Purushotam C. Shah and Chandrakandh F. Shah (eds.), Charotar Sarvasangra (1954): 926-952. Nadiad: Parekh Kevdachand Kanjibhai and Sons.
14 Support by acquaintances of other (non-Vohra) communities was a theme in the narratives of the first generation migrations I encountered in the UK. Heitmeyer (Heitmeyer 2009a) presents a similar argument, through a case where a man with good cross-community connections succeeded in getting his visa, while an unconnected man with similar credentials could not.
65 Vohra families\(^15\), most of whom live in two main areas (on the east coast and in Illinois). Thirteen migrants arrived in the USA as early as the 1960s and 1970s, mostly as students, and this group of migrants brought over their relatives and acquaintances, who then raised their families in the USA. This chain migration has been facilitated in the US by family-sponsored immigration, whereby ‘aliens who are the spouses and unmarried minor children of U.S. citizens and the parents of adult U.S. citizens’ can apply for legal immigration.\(^16\) Immigration into the USA was still relatively easy in the 1970s and 80s but has now become a slower and more difficult process due to tightening migration regulations. A Vohra community association was established in the UK in 1992 and in the USA in 2001.

**Australia** is currently a preferred destination for education-based migration from India (Baas 2010). In central Gujarat, education-based migration has become more accessible since the 1990s, leading educated youth to the UK (Rutten and Verstappen 2014) and to Australia. In interviews with visa agents in Anand who arrange student visa, they stress that the majority of their customers are actually not that interested in pursuing education, but want to work and earn money abroad and to acquire residential status.\(^17\) Through a survey in Australia (Survey B, see table 2.3 in Chapter 2), I acquired details of 35 Gujarati Muslims in Australia, 22 of them specifically from Anand or nearby villages and towns.\(^18\) Of the 35 respondents, 21 were Charotar Sunni Vohras. Most of them reside in Sydney and are aged 25 to 35. The majority initially entered on student or a spousal visa. Among those who have studied, twelve respondents studied ‘cookery’ in Australia, while others had studied ‘accounting’, ‘nursing’, and ‘social welfare’. At the moment, six of them still have a student visa, seven are on other temporary visas, and fourteen have acquired either ‘PR’ (permanent residency) or citizenship. Most work at the lower end of the labour market, in processing, cookery, cleaning, or security. A few described themselves as doctor (1), nurse (3), housewife (5), or in business (2).

Finally, migration to the **Middle East** is a significant feature of everyday life in central Gujarat. Indian migration to Gulf countries grew exponentially after the oil boom in the 1972-73 and 1979, and is rather diverse, including skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, professionals and entrepreneurs (P. C. Jain 2007).\(^19\) The Provincial Globalisation survey in central Gujarat shows that migration to Gulf

---

\(^{15}\) During the 2015 Vahora reunion, 350 attendees were registered, from Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, various other states in the USA, and four from abroad (including myself).


\(^{17}\) For an in-depth study of Indian students in Australia, see Baas (2010).

\(^{18}\) Others were from Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Mumbai, Baruch, and Khambhat.

\(^{19}\) An interview with a return migrant, who said he was the first in his village to go to the Gulf in the late seventies, shows that while this type of migration was still rare back then, it is now popular among young men in his village.
destinations is mostly to Saudi Arabia, though there is also migration to other countries. Through interviews with Gulf returnees (from Oman, Qatar, UAE and Saoudi Arabia) in Anand and in the nearby village of Bhalej, I established that they had found the job offers in local newspapers or through agents. These men were attracted by the promise of a better salary in the Middle East for work similar to what they were already doing in Gujarat.

In the household survey in Anand (table 5.1), only a few of the households mention Gulf countries as a migration destination (4 out of 35 children abroad). These relatively low numbers compared to the other destinations is probably related to the specific urban middle class composition of the neighbourhood studied in Anand. In some nearby villages, Gulf migration is more noticeable, and in one village there was a discernible excitement about going there, particularly among young men with a background in vocational training. However, among the urban middle class families I met in Anand, the dream is rather to send one’s children to the UK, USA or Australia on a student visa with the purpose of work and settlement abroad, even if large loans have to be taken to get them there. Migration to Gulf countries is seen as less lucrative because the relatively low currency differentials (in comparison to Western countries) and the extremely stringent naturalisation and citizenship laws that make it almost impossible to acquire a permanent resident status (Jain 2007, 176). In spite of these drawbacks, migration to Gulf destinations is still seen as a viable option among young men of the urban middle class, a back-up alternative if the bigger dreams for UK, USA or Australia do not work out.

In summary, a wide variety of paths have been travelled from central Gujarat. Overall, there is no one ‘Vohra migration pattern’ that stands out. Due to the wide dispersal of localities of settlement and due to the different temporalities of each migration trajectory, Vohras abroad cannot really be described as part of a ‘transnational village’, with one town of origin intensely connected to another node of high-density settlement, as outlined by Peggy Levitt for Miraflores (Dominican Republic) with Boston (USA) (Levitt 2001). Instead, as I argue in this chapter, they are better understood as a transnational community linked to a region of origin.

The idea of a regionally specific ‘Vohra’ community has been institutionalised in the various places of settlement. There is a Mumbai Charotar Sunni Vohra Samaj (association of Charotar Sunni Vohras) in Mumbai and a Charotar Muslim Anjuman (association of Charotar Muslims) with a ‘Vohra community hall’ in Karachi. There

---

is also a UK Vohra Association and a Vahora Association of the USA, which both maintain Facebook based online networks of more than 100 and 200 members respectively. All these associations are specifically aimed at Vohra families ‘who are originally from Kheda/Anand District of Gujarat/India’. The character and level of activity of the community associations varies, but each organises social meetings and maintains an address list with details of known Vohra families in the respective city/country. The associations are not united in a transnational umbrella association, although there are some social contacts between specific individuals in the different countries. These attempts to institutionalise show that the idea of a specific ‘Vohra’ community identity has persisted abroad and, despite diverse migration trajectories and backgrounds, is actively being remade.

How and why do people take efforts to (re)construct the Vohra community abroad? Why and how is ‘being Vohra’ of importance after going abroad, if at all? What does the Charotar region mean in the new context; is it perceived as the community’s ‘homeland’? To answer these questions, I now shift the locus of the thesis to one of the destinations of arrival, the UK. I first describe the people themselves, their social position in the UK, and their transnational ties with India, then how they have engaged in community making.

Along the main roads in Anand, many travel agents and billboards promote the attractiveness of studying in the UK, USA or Australia.

22 Website Vahora Association of USA, accessed July 14, 2015.
Social position in the UK and ties with India

Abdullahmia Hassan Vora from Mumbai is remembered as being the first Vohra in the UK (in 1959). More Vohras arrived in the UK in the 1960s, 70s and 80s from Mumbai, East Africa and Karachi. These pioneer migrants facilitated chain migration by helping relatives to come on work and business visas and through marriages. More recently, primary migration from central Gujarat to the UK has been taking place on student and temporary work visas.

Who are the Vohras that arrived in the UK? What is their position in the UK and to what extent have they maintained relations with India? Vohras here have followed diverse migration trajectories, have a variety of occupations, divergent religious beliefs and practices, are embedded in a variety of social circles, and live dispersed across the country (although mostly in East and West London). To describe such a diverse category of people, I have to make simplifications. I categorise Vohras in the UK in three groups: the recently arrived migrants, the settled (first generation) migrants, and those born and/or brought up in the UK (the ‘second’ and later generations). I realise that many other categories could be chosen to describe Vohras in the UK, but this one is useful to describe their situation in the UK and their engagements with India.

The first category, recent arrivals from central Gujarat, have made their way into the UK mainly on student visa and other temporary visas. The aim of many ‘students’ from central Gujarat is to earn and save money to improve their position in the home region and to experience life abroad for a few years, often with the hope of potential settlement (Rutten and Verstappen 2014). Most of these young migrants work at the lower end of the labour market, as carriers, cashiers, shelf-stackers, or service providers in shops and supermarkets. One of the hubs for migrants from South Asia is the area around Green Street in East London, where they can find relatively affordable housing with other newly arrived migrants. Indian imported items, cheap groceries and migration-related services can be accessed easily in this neighbourhood.

Young, newly arrived men and women on student and other temporary visas maintain close connections with relatives in India. Some are in a relation of financial or moral indebtedness to their parents or other relatives, for example, relatives who have taken out loans in India to pay for the visa fees. Though financially supporting the family is not always possible in the difficult first period after arrival, some still hope or make plans for that. Apart from financial obligations, social relations with relatives in India are very important for this
group. Still in the process of building local support networks in the UK, phone calls with relatives in India are often an important source of social support. On the whole, these young migrants can be considered as part of the joint family they have left behind in India. Though socially and financially involved with relatives in India, their financial constraints make it difficult for them to visit India regularly. For those involved in complicated and lengthy procedures to extend their visas, and for those who ‘overstay’ the visa and continue to live in the UK (illegally), visiting India is nearly impossible.

The second category among my informants are those who migrated to the UK in the 1960s, 70s and 80s through the various routes described above. Of the 35 survey respondents, 21 came to the UK more than 11 years ago and 24 have a legal right to stay permanently in the UK (table 2.3, in Chapter 2). Their occupations are diverse: some having started their own shops or agencies, others work in transport or security, yet others are employed in administrative jobs. West London and Leicester are among the places where the earlier arrivals of Vohras have settled in family homes in a more upscale (sub)urban setting, as house owners or through social housing schemes. Their local networks in the UK have become the main sources of everyday support.

This does not mean that contact with India is lost, far from it. One striking indicator of their enduring relations with India is the common presence of a visiting parent, brother, aunt or niece staying as a long-term guest in the household. A family visitor visa for a maximum duration of six months is not difficult to obtain for families who can afford to support their relatives for the duration of their stay.23 Other ways of maintaining contact with Indian relatives are frequent phone calls - among my informants on average every other week and, in some cases, every day. Holiday visits to India are common among elderly men, some of whom now visit their Indian relatives ‘at least every year’ now that they are retired and with air tickets more affordable than in the past. In addition, some families have bought land or a house in central Gujarat for investment and/or holiday purposes. Financial resources also continue to be exchanged with relatives in India, for example through remittances, loans, or donations.

The offspring of the migrants, those born and/or brought up in the UK, are an even more diverse category. They belong to different age groups, some are young, others middle-aged. Their occupations, orientations, and participation in education are also varied. The diversity among them was often emphasised in my conversations

with them: one middle-aged woman even presented herself as a good informant by saying that: ‘It is good for your research that you met me. So you understand that we are not all like... (person X).’ This diversity is also shown in their attitudes towards India. Some of those born and brought up in the UK felt awkward discussing their lives with me in terms of a ‘Vohra’, ‘Gujarati’ or ‘Indian’ family background, they presented themselves rather as ‘British’ or ‘British Muslims’. One man even declared bluntly that ‘nothing but trouble comes from Gujarat.’ Others were quite interested in talking about Gujarat and highlighted the experience of having opportunities both in the UK and in India. This attitude occurred among some of those married to a spouse from India, whose social ties had been re-energised through the spouse and his/her relatives. Inheritances of family property are another reason to intensify the relations with India and to visit it more frequently, at least temporarily, to arrange the paperwork.

In summary, Vohras in the UK are a diverse category of people. I met recently arrived young migrants from Gujarat struggling their way into the UK labour market, men and women settled with their families in large houses in suburban neighbourhoods, and their children and grandchildren. There is diversity in the social position of informants in the UK and also in the way they maintain ties with India.

Is it justified to speak about all these different people as a ‘community’? I approach this question from three analytical angles: first, in the intimate sphere of the family; second, through tracing the establishment of the ‘UK Vohra Association’; and third, through the notion of a shared homeland.
The Vohra family

The main thing you have to know about Vohras, is that all Vohras are related. Not in one way but in two, three, four, five different ways.

The statement is from a conversation with an elderly migrant in West London, born in Mumbai and married to a woman from a village in central Gujarat, father of five UK-born children. The conversation had been filled with statements about kinship. Whenever he mentioned the name of a person, he immediately specified: ‘She is my brother’s son’s wife’s mother, and she is also my wife’s father’s sister’s daughter.’ He would add that her husband is also a relative of his, or that her daughter had married one of his cousins. Such illustrations of the many ways in which Vohras are related to each other, through marriages between closely linked families, were a regular occurrence during conversations with Vohras in the UK (more so than they had been in Gujarat).

Studies of the South Asian presence in Britain have paid considerable attention to the subject of kinship and marriage, interest that stems from the recognition that kinship structures and marriage patterns are reworked under conditions of migration and contribute to shaping novel transnational networks. Marriage has been described as a factor in the facilitation of (chain) migration (Ballard 1990; Gardner and Shukur 1994, 156–158) and as a factor in the exchange of remittances and other resources (Upadhya and Rutten 2012, 54; Singh 2006). A classic field of study in anthropology has therefore been reborn: the attempt is to explain why and how kinship structures and marriage patterns are reproduced in the diaspora, how patterns transform in response to conditions of migration, and how they have affected the formation of transnational networks.

Marriage is an important aspect of the way Vohras in the UK are (re)configuring a sense of community. After the pioneer migrants settled, their marriages were arranged within the Vohra community, mostly in India and, over time and with the expansion of the community, also within the UK. More specifically, most of the migrants were derived from the Chaud utara in the Vohra community and also arranged their marriages within the Chaud utara. Through these marriages, families in the UK started to grow and links between families were confirmed both within the UK and across national borders. The resulting couples, now middle-aged or nearing the age of retirement, are in the process of marrying off their offspring and reformulating their marriage strategies: this is probably why the issue was of the utmost importance to them and they were enthusiastic about discussing it. For these parents, who still remember the process of arrival and
settlement in the early years, chain migration through marriages appears to be key to their sense of being part of a community in the UK. This was evident during every meeting I attended, as people often started the conversation by pointing out how they all were related, summaries sometimes dazzling to hear and impossible to remember. I ended up drawing the kinship charts I had seen in classic anthropological handbooks, which pleased informants and solicited additional information.

Of the eleven parents who answered the interview question of what kind of marriage partner they preferred for their children, seven answered that they preferred marriage within the Charotar Sunni Vohra community. A father explained:

I always encouraged my son to marry within the Vohra community. I told him to take a look around during Vohra meetings. But I didn’t think it would happen. In the end, I thought, as long as she is Muslim it will be fine. One day he came up to me and said he had met a Vohra girl, and would like to marry her. I couldn’t have been happier.

In the previous chapter, I have described the marriage practices of Vohras in Gujarat, based on ataks that are often linked to specific village names in the region. In Gujarat, community endogamy is fundamental to the construction of a shared and localised Vohra identity (Heitmeyer 2009a, 131-132). In the UK, the preference for marriage within the Vohra community is maintained. The main reason given by parents for the preference for marriage ‘within the family’ is that it is hoped that it will ensure a continuation of the joint family. A mother from Mumbai explained:

Parents want their son to stay with them after marriage. They want to live in a joint family. They want to keep good relations.

A father from Anand further clarified that this necessitates a good match not just between the spouses but also between the family and the daughter-in-law:

I am afraid if any girl comes as my daughter-in-law and she cannot mix with mother-in-law or father-in-law, or maybe with sister of the boy, then maybe there will be disaster. This is not a small thing, this is a lifetime relation. So maybe the son and daughter-in-law will live separate. So we thought let us think and decide.
Those born and/or brought up in the UK are aware of their parents’ wishes. A young woman explained:

In our generation we all confirmed to our parents’ wishes. For us.... it was always in the back of our minds that we have to marry according to our parents’ wishes.

It is likely that the maintenance of the traditional marriage pattern has reinforced the elite status of the Chaud (14) community, the ‘higher caste’ or privileged class of business families among Vohras in central Gujarat, because the majority of the initial migrants belonged to the Chaud community and also married their children within the Chaud community. This has allowed more Chaud youth from Gujarat to settle in the UK, although some Arsad (68) girls also made it into the UK through marriage (in line with the system of hypergamy or marrying girls up), and an Arsad boy married into a Chaud family opposed to the utara system. Some families were interested in discussing these concepts of Chaud (14) and Arsad (68) with me, and specific individuals (especially women) maintain detailed knowledge of the utara system.24 This knowledge was celebrated during some of the interviews where tales of the family's history as ‘Vohras’ were central to the conversation: here, grandmothers were called from the kitchen to clarify the ataks of all the relatives, encouraging conversation and satisfying as much the curiosity of the family as that of the researcher.

Still, informants clearly stated the utara system has no practical value for marriage arrangements in the UK. The system is seen as a relic of the past and not as playing a role in current marriage arrangements. In these conversations, the utara system was often labelled a ‘caste system’, and considered a remnant of a Hindu past, thus a sign of the community’s ancestral heritage in India. The hierarchy embedded in caste clearly contradicts notions of equality within Islam, and was criticised during some of the interviews from the perspective of Islamic reform, as a ‘cultural’ survival from India that should be abandoned. My questions about the marriage practices of Vohras in the UK therefore generated awkwardness, particularly among men. This surfaced, for example, when a man went through the UK Vohra list with me to point out the utara of each household.25 Standing in a busy corridor near other men at a Vohra family gathering, the man spoke in a low voice and acted nervously, instructing me not to mark any household with the

24 For example, an elderly couple gave an explanation of how the Chaud (14) utara actually consists of three sub-units, one of which was endogamous while the two other groups were exogamous, consisting of two groups of villages that exchanged spouses.

25 He himself was from the higher Chaud (14) utara.
numbers ‘14’ or ‘68’ on the list, and pressing me not to tell anybody that he was the one who had given the information, since, he added, it is better not to talk about these things: ‘People don’t like it’.

Despite the tabooisation of ‘caste’, the utara system seems to regenerate itself under a new logic. While hierarchy is tabooed, the close relations in a small circle of interlinked families can be maintained in other ways. Among other South Asian Muslims in the UK, cousin marriages are common (Charsley 2007; Shaw 2006) and in this context the assertion that all Vohras are interrelated in multiple ways becomes a sign of being Muslim (not only Vohra). Rather than stressing utara identity, these families explained to me that it would be beneficial if their child were to marry a ‘relative’, or ‘people we know’. This would give some security that the spouse is trustworthy and that the child would not encounter marital problems.

Processes of changing values in marital arrangements under conditions of migration have been described elsewhere in the world (Oonk 2013, 132; Kalpagam 2005). The argument I am making here is that through endogamous marriage practices a trusted family network has been (re)produced within and across national boundaries. While the preference for community endogamy is maintained, there are important changes in the form and legitimation of the system, which includes a shift from an utara system to marriage with ‘people we know’. I have so far focused mainly on the role of parents in perpetuating these marriage practices: what this section has shown is that marriage practices are changing in response to the process of migration and adaption to the new context. The next step is to explore how the notion of relatedness has been appropriated by those born and/or brought up in the UK. Have they internalised the idea of a ‘Vohra thing’? To answer this, I describe their participation in the spatially dispersed family network and how they discuss and evaluate this. How do marriage regulations produce a transnational family?

Appropriating relatedness

We value family, we value family values.

Everyone keeps telling me how they are related. I know we are all related but I keep forgetting how everyone is related to everyone.

These statements were recorded in conversations with men born and brought up in the UK, the ‘second generation’. It struck me as significant that this group talked about the Vohra ‘we’ mostly in terms of ‘family’ and in terms of ‘being related’. How
do those born and/brought up in the UK appropriate the notion of being Vohra? How does the notion of relatedness figure in this?

Talking to the younger generation about the Vohra family or community, I found it interesting to see how they appropriated the notion of relatedness in their own ways. There are clearly differences in the experience between the parents and their children but there are also differences between the youth themselves. Here I give three examples of how young people appropriate that ‘Vohra thing’ in their own way. First, there was a young man who had built a digitised Vohra family tree on his laptop. I had first come to the house to interview the father. The second time I came to the house I met the son, and he immediately volunteered to show me the family tree. Clicking through the file, this young man explained:

See, it has all the names of relatives I know of. It was difficult to find a system that shows all the different relations: people are related to each other in different ways. But this system uses hyperlinks and it works well [demonstrating the hyperlinks]. I still keep expanding the tree. When we have a family gathering, I talk to my aunts, the elder people. When someone is visiting from India I always talk to them, often they know new names that are not included yet.

As I had never heard about anyone in Gujarat recording a family tree, I was fascinated. His parents, listening in to the conversation, understood my amazement. They clarified they were initially pleased with his enthusiasm about this project but over time had grown slightly uncomfortable with this novel approach to the family relations: ‘We’ve asked him, where will this end? You can’t go on and on with this. We don’t even know many of the people he has in that file...’

When talking to young men and women in the USA, another novel appropriation was found. In the American setting, the term ‘tribe’ was used frequently to talk about the Vohra community. In response to my question about what it means to be at a ‘Vohra meeting’, a woman replied:

Here at this meeting, you don’t know many of the people but still you know you are related in some way or another. I explain to my American friends it’s like a tribe. It’s more than a family because in a family it’s only your mom’s side and your father’s side. Here it’s much bigger but you are still related.

In a comparable conversation, a young man discussed the Vohra community as a tribe and the Chaud, Arsad, Makeriya and Dewataja groups as clans. I thought it was
interesting they used the term ‘tribe’, as this term would in India refer to the so-called ‘Scheduled Tribes’ of historically disadvantaged people, which the Vohras are not associated with. When I mentioned this, a man argued: ‘We have always been a tribe. People in India just don’t call it that way, but we were.’ The term ‘tribe’ may reverberate specifically with the American experience, where the term ‘tribe’ clearly has a different connotation, although it would require more research to fully understand this interpretation.

The notion of (extended) ‘relatedness’ seems to be key to the way those socialised in the UK or USA perceive of their ‘Vohra’ identity. However, not everyone is equally pleased with this notion of extended relatedness. This is shown in the third and last example, of a young man who feels overwhelmed by the multiplicity of affinitive relations and with all the social obligations these bring. In fact, he is so fed up with all his cousins from India asking for support that he rejects the very notion of a ‘Vohra thing’:

My father has helped so many people to come here from India. And not only family. These people over there, they ask around. When a fourth person knows a third person, and the third person knows a second person, then they approach the first person who might be your relative…. so all these people come to us. My father used to let them stay in his own house for months and months. If they didn’t have a job he would maintain them, feed them, help them to get a job... (...) My father used to help anybody only because they are Vohra. For me, Vohra is just a surname. OK, when my father tells me to go and help somebody because he is a Vohra, I will do it, because he is my father. But if he hadn’t asked me I would not go. For me, that Vohra thing doesn’t matter. We are interested in issues that are of importance to us, the second generation. We are living in the real world. My father is still living in his world, in India...

This statement shows that the notion of relatedness does not necessarily generate a harmonious or cohesive community. Tensions emerge within the extended family. Despite all the cheerfulness and wonderful food, the meetings in the migrant households also expose the inequalities between participants.

The statement above also draws attention to the transnational character of the Vohra family. It is in the migrant household, through affective ties, that relations are made and sustained both within and across national borders, so that a ‘transnational social field’ (Levitt and Schiller 2004, 1009) can become lived experience. This field constitutes ‘a domain of interaction where individuals who do not move themselves maintain social relations across borders through various
forms of communication’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1009) and thus includes those who perceive themselves as fully local, and who may never even have travelled to India. As I have shown, chain migration was very important in the early years of arrival and settlement. Today, exchanges with Indian relatives continue as temporary migration has become more accessible to young people in India and as the settled families bring over relatives temporarily on a visitor visa. Overall, while traveling may have increased in volume, it also has a more temporary and circular character so a flow of people coming and going is a regular occurrence.

The frustration this young man feels towards his Indian cousins draws attention to a geography of power in which new arrivals from India are dependent on the hospitality, resources, and networks of the settled families in the UK (Gardner 2008, 492). This inequality can be a drain on the settled families when newly arriving migrants ask for support in the migration process, such as the sharing of living arrangements, knowledge and resources, which creates alliances as well as some tensions. While the settled say they are doing the new migrants a favour by helping them, some of the new migrants indicate that they feel awkward or even exploited in these dependent relationships. The migration process of the newly arrived thus seems to be linked to forms of dependency and patronage in the first years after arrival. This geography of power causes tensions between the settled and the newly arrived and, in this case, also between a father and a son.

In this section and the previous one, I have shown how a Vohra community has been established in the UK through endogamous marriage practices and how family ties are made into lived reality through social ties within and across national borders. In the analysis so far, spatial aspects have seemed almost irrelevant: the Vohra family can be maintained and experienced at any family gathering, regardless of where it is organised, for example, at a wedding in Gujarat or at a wedding in London. I will return to the spatial dimensions of the transnational Vohra family later in this chapter.

The UK Vohra Association

In this section, I analyse the process of community making through the lens of institutionalisation through a case study of the ‘UK Vohra Association’. This association has had a dynamic history and the disputes around it show that the idea of organising the community has not always fallen on fertile ground among the intended ‘members’. The organisation, founded in 1992, initially attracted
much enthusiasm, fell apart after a fractious meeting in 1993, but was revived in 2002, after the news of the riots in Gujarat, when everyone felt the urgency to take collective action.

The UK Vohra Association was established in 1992. The five self-appointed board members belong to the first generation or what one called the ‘transitional’ generation, having come to the UK as young people, with their parents as children, as students, or after marriage. They are now middle-aged or elderly men, well-settled with families in the UK. They are derived from places as diverse as Sunav and Vasana (villages near Anand), Vadodara and Mumbai, and had arrived in the UK through various routes. Most of them lived in London, one lived in the Midlands. One of the committee members remembers their first discussion on starting a Vohra association as follows:

In 1992, we were discussing this: ‘In India, they used to have these Vohra meetings and you know there will be like a hundred marriages performed, there would be food, all the people would meet, all the people you haven’t seen for so long... Why don’t we have that here? It would be so easy to organise!’ In that time there was no email, so you needed to write letters, get telephone numbers... So we started making a list. The first list had 65, 70 households.

The idea of organising social meetings was based on the existing Charotar Sunni Vohra community association in Gujarat - the idea of ‘hundred marriages performed’ is a reference to the group marriages of the Charotar Sunni Vohra Samaj.26 The main goal of the UK Vohra Association was a ‘social purpose’: to meet each other, to facilitate social interaction and thereby, perhaps, to encourage marriages within the community. Introducing the children to each other during Vohra meetings was an important part of this endeavour - I already noted that the organisers had families. As one elderly lady, wife of one of the five committee members and an active organiser herself, explained:

The whole point [of the meetings] is like, you get together. The kids get to know the other kids... and then maybe, the kids who are at a marriageable age, you know, who’s available, who’s not available...

26 During the group marriage of the Arsad Vohra community, which I witnessed in Anand on January 22, 2012, twelve weddings were performed.
The committee member quoted above continued:

Initially the reason for the Vohra meeting was that as well [indicating marriage]. In 1993, we had a meeting and we thought: ‘This time, let’s make a list, not just of husband and wife, but let’s make list of how many kids, what are the ages of the kids. If we look for potential partners, maybe not now but in five years, you can see: “so-and-so has three daughters, they have three sons, we can meet.”’ This was our intention. So we put this in our letter. (...) What I wanted to do was have a list of how many boys, how many girls, what ages... This sort of list exists in India. And I’ve seen this. (...) Very meticulous. Who is married to whom, where, how... it was very good, you can just take this book and say ‘Oh, we’re looking for a bride within the Vohra community.’ And you’d find it straightforward.

The idea of making a Vohra ‘list’ was, like the idea of the Vohra meetings, modelled on a practice of the Vohra community in India. These Vohra lists or books that exist in India, Heitmeyer (2009a, 111–112) suggests, are part of an overarching project conceived by the community’s organisation in central Gujarat as a means by which Charotar Sunni Vohra families can find potential spouses for their children.27 In addition to the localised books produced in Gujarat, I also found such a book in Mumbai,28 produced by the Mumbai Charotar Sunni Vohra association, and one from Karachi,29 produced by the Charotar Muslim association. The friends that started the UK Vohra Association were aware that these books existed, and their idea was to make a similar list of all the Vohra families in the UK. The version of the UK list that I saw (2012) contains information about the lead name of each household, the address, phone, email, and in some cases the ‘Indian city/village’ for 114 households.

The idea of meeting each other during a Vohra event received a positive response, and the first event in 1992 in London was attended by an estimated 200 to 250 people. The second event, in 1993, was also well-attended. The event had three main purposes: meeting each other, bringing the children together with the intention of encouraging marriage within the community, and organising

27 This practice of producing books with demographic details has also been observed among other Gujarati endogamous communities, for example, among migrants of the Patel/Patidar community.
28 This book was given to me by the director of the Mumbai Charotar Sunni Vohra Society in Mumbai. The Mumbai Charotar Sunni Vohra Society, Mumbai, 1999.
29 I found this book in Anand, in the house of a family who had taken it with them after a family visit to Karachi. The Karachi book lists the ‘native place’ of each head of household (towns and villages in central Gujarat), residential address and phone number. Charotar Muslim Anjuman (Pak) Regd. Members Directory, Karachi, Pakistan, undated. Like the UK Vohra list, it only mentions the head of household, not each individual family member, and does not list educational level or occupation.
collective charity. One such charitable project was a *qurban* for poor Muslims in Anand, a second project entailed the completion of a Vohra community hall in Nadiad, a town near Anand in central Gujarat. Donations for the two projects were collected by cheques in the post, and in cash during the gathering. For the two projects together, £1,715 was collected (reported in the UK Vohra Association's Newsletter, April 1994). A third charitable project was a collection of clothes, which were sent to an association in Anand using the free flight cargo allowance of 100 kilograms of a member who worked for an airline company.

During the meeting in 1993, there was a row over the desirability of gender segregation and music. The organisers had refused the request of some participants to have separate spaces for men and women, since ‘the idea is to meet each other’. Next, there was a game of ‘musical chairs’. After a while, a *maulana* took the microphone and announced that this was ‘not proper according to Islam’. One of the organisers described how this made him feel:

> It’s like: ‘Oh my God.’ This is a social function, nothing to do with religion! You meet up. You have a meal. We’ve got them do games with the kids. And now you’ve got *mauli sahib* saying that it’s *haram*, and we made them do this! So I got upset with this. I said: ‘OK, you do what you wanna do, I’m not going to do [organise] any other meeting again.’ Then there wasn’t another meeting again.

After this incident, there were no more Vohra meetings for nine years. However, in 2002, after the riots in Gujarat, the UK Vohra Association and its bank account found a new purpose: to collect donations for the victims in Gujarat. There was a sense of urgency, and Vohra men from different parts of the UK decided to meet to discuss the situation. The meeting took place in the middle of the country, in Leicester, so that ‘nobody should travel so far’. A new committee was formed, to organise the collection of funds. This committee included the original committee members who had started the UK Vohra Association earlier, and also various others. In a group discussion with three friends who attended the meeting in Leicester at the time, they remembered the following:

**30** A *qurban* is a sacrifice of an animal and distribution of the meat. In a separate information brochure (in Gujarati, with English translation provided), the organising trust in Gujarat introduced itself as a trustworthy organisation led by religious experts, organising poverty reduction through the medium of *zakat*. They asked for a donation of £35 per donor.

**31** A fundraising (English) letter from the Charotar Sunni Vohra Samaj in Gujarat, responsible for the construction of the community hall, explained that the construction of a marriage hall would facilitate marriages and meetings of the community without needing of hiring an expensive hall. It said that the hall was already 75% constructed, and that they needed money for the completion.
A: All 85 families were present. The heads of each family, all of us were there. And what was decided at the time?
A: It was decided that we collect some funds, whatever they needed at the time, like utensils and... everybody just left their houses. They were looted.
B: We gave them lorries as well.
C: Roofs.
B: Some people lost their roof, we gave them a roof as well.
C: Food.
B: Money to start a business. Small business.
Did you divide tasks at the time?
B: Yes. (...) What happened was... I took the responsibility of ten [families in the UK], he took responsibility of another ten families, we would collect [money from these families]. That's how we operated.

A newsletter was sent around, sharing information about the riots and the relief societies in central Gujarat. Funds were raised in different parts of the UK, not only among Vohras but also among Muslims in general and, to some extent, among the wider public. Collections were organised in mosques in Southall, Leicester, Birmingham, and Coventry. A mela (fair) was organised in Leicester to raise money for the riots victims, with a ‘jumble sale’, home-made samosas and cakes, speeches and information stalls. Men and women raised money among their acquaintances. More than £28,000 were collected.\(^{32}\) The money was used, amongst other things, to buy land for construction of a housing society for refugees in Anand, consisting of thirteen small houses (one room and a kitchen) and a communal water pump. The treasurer of the UK Vohra Association explains:

In 2002 it was different. It was a bit bigger then. Because it was visual. People could see it on the TV (...) and we had disks and there was internet I think. You see [showing files on the laptop], charity bazaar, letters, the houses that we built, mosque appeal, 2002, Leicester, things that we did like flyers... this was an info pack that was created. See, these are the people who are responsible, number of people that stayed, how many people they were looking after in certain areas... in Borsad, Tarapur, Pedlad, Anklav... I just put this together for the Muslims, for the Vohras in this country. So they got to know what's happening.

In this period, ties were re-established between Vohras in the UK and as a group

\(^{32}\) I was originally told that £28,000 was collected but, according to another committee member, this was only the first instalment.
with Vohras in Gujarat. To organise the transfer of donations to Gujarat, the association relied on members who ‘were very involved on the Gujarat side. They had contacts there. They knew what was going on.’

Some people happened to be in Gujarat at the time. The wife of one of the committee members was in Ahmedabad for a family visit when the riots broke out. Worried, he travelled to meet her. This is his account:

At the time of those riots, my wife was in India. (…) My relatives rang me ‘please don’t come.’ (…) They said: ‘How are you going to come to Anand from [the airport in] Baroda? Vehicles are burning on the roadway, houses are burning on the roadway. How are you going to go? Cancel your ticket!’ I said: ‘No my wife is there, I have to come there, I am not going to cancel.’ (…) Then my wife called me, she said: ‘you can come now, it’s a little quieter.’ Then I saw with my own eyes... I heard with my own ears what was happening there. How people suffered. How my wife’s family suffered. Because we had been going regularly. I had seen the town, how happy they were living, they had spent a lot of money, they had made a nice bungalow. All ruined. All looted. (…) What happened? A lot of Vohras came together in Anand at the time and made camps. Because all the people were fleeing from the smaller villages. Relief camp. There were so many relief camps over there. And I went to visit them. Personally. In each camp. Had a word with them. Find out what their grievances were. What they suffered. How they suffered.

That was daring of you, as a tourist, a visitor!

Cause it is my community. I am a Vohra. This is my community.

The account highlights how the man visited the relief camps, how he heard the stories of refugees and established contacts with the organisers. He elaborated on the tragic tale of the town where his wife's family had lived previously, a Hindu-majority village with only ten Muslim families. The Muslim's houses and their vehicles and properties were ‘ransacked’ by a mob, the residents fled to relief camps and never returned to the village afterwards.

The account shows how the shocking events mobilised feelings of being ‘Vohra’: this is ‘my community’. After coming back to the UK, experiences were shared with other ‘people of my community’ too:

Then I came to the airport [in the UK], I talked to my brother-in-law, and to other people of my community, I gave them all the reports. What I’ve seen with my own eyes. Business is burning. I can still see the flames coming out.
Some scholars have noted that traumatic events in the homeland can be a powerful trigger for mobilising against repression (Koinova 2011, 348), this has certainly been the case here. The sense of urgency at the time made it all ‘different’, ‘more visual’ and ‘a bit bigger’. Even the second generation took active part in the collections, the committee members remember, although ‘the second generation didn’t feel that much. Not as much as I would’.

When the dust had settled, the association returned to the ‘social side of it’ and started to organise social gatherings again, in 2009 and 2010. The event in 2009 was well attended. During it, the community’s member base was extended by inviting approximately 30 ‘students’, new arrivals on temporary visas. However, some committee members had resigned because they were ‘only interested in the charity side of it’. A larger event planned 2010 was eventually cancelled due to lack of funds and interest – residents of East London found the venue in West London too far away and did not subscribe – so a smaller meeting with cricket match was organised. Since then, the association has reverted to being dormant, with some attempts to encourage interaction through Facebook. (At their request, I have also made a small contribution to this by sharing some findings of my research there.)

UK Vohra meeting (2010): cricket match. Picture taken by a participant and printed with permission.
In conversation with the committee members, they complained about the lack of interest. Some compared the UK with the USA in this regard:

You know in ’92, ’93, we did these two meetings, after that the Americans started their meetings in ’95 (…). What they did: it was even better than us. (…) They had funding and they had barbecues. Ours was one day. The first meeting they had was for three days, you know Saturday Sunday Monday. They had a bank holiday, they hired out a scout camp, hired out log cabins, they had a barbecue going, they had a badminton tournament going, they had swimming. Can you imagine? We can’t even sit in one room [referring to the discussion on gender segregation] and they are having swimming races... boys and girls you know, enjoying themselves. Music is going on there, dancing (…). They looked at our model and they improved on it. (…) I’m like: ‘Well, ours is finished here!’

The Vohras in the USA I talked to do not agree that they ‘got the idea’ from the UK: their own history starts in 1976, when a small group of young Vohra students from central Gujarat met up for the first time in a small town near Philadelphia to celebrate the first birthday of the first American-born child. However, the other descriptions given in the quote above are largely accurate.

The community event of Vohras in the USA I attended in 2015 was attended by 350 people. They came from Maryland (106), Connecticut (99), Illinois (45), New Jersey (41), Pennsylvania (19), and also from other states in the USA, including Virginia, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, California, and Texas. Some had travelled for hours in a car or in a bus to get to the event, a few had spent thousands of dollars to pay for air tickets for the entire family. The event was a long weekend of camping in a scouting area in the woods. Among the activities organised were American games, Indian cooking, Gujarati folk dance, and Islamic prayer. Although there was no swimming, there was barbecue, volleyball, tug-of-war, scavenger hunts, nature walks, ice-cream and popcorn, in addition to Indian bhajias (snacks), cricket, and a spiritual programme for the children. Music was not a problem, there was musical chairs in the afternoon and Gujarati garbah dance in the evening. There was no gender segregation either, men prayed collectively while women continued chatting on the other side of same hall, boys and girls met at the campfire. A remarkable moment from the perspective of community making was the ‘Family Feud’, a competitive quiz where teams were asked questions such

---
33 Information provided by the organisers, who derived these numbers from the registration process. There were four guests from abroad, including myself.
as ‘where do Vohras go in their holidays?’, ‘what is Vohras’ favourite food?’ and ‘what is the Vohras’ favourite car?’

Overall, what these meetings, lists, Facebook pages and collections show is that there are individuals who try to maintain and organise the Vohra community, and that others have responded to this with varying degrees of enthusiasm in different spatial and temporal contexts. In the UK, not everyone was as interested in the association: some of the intended members did not pay the membership fee for unknown reasons, others accused the leadership of being in it for themselves. The suggested idea, of registering details of the children in the Vohra family list, was contested, so the list does not include details of children, unlike as had been hoped for by the initiators. What surprised the organisers most was that some young men claimed they did not ‘believe’ in the existence of a Vohra community: for them, Vohra was ‘just a surname’.

What these contestations show is that ‘community is not a social reality but a discursive construction, which, however, is meant to further the establishment of social unity’ (Sökefeld 2006, 279). If it appears that the efforts to unite the Vohras as a community have been more successful in the USA than in the UK,34 I should note both associations have had their ups and downs. The event I witnessed in the USA was being organised after a time lapse of nine years.35 It was organised by dedicated volunteers, but here too some participants found issues to disagree about. Overall, the formalised associations can probably best be understood in relation to the family networks described earlier. This was shown in the USA event where references to the history of chain migration and relatedness were made as participants publicly thanked their initial sponsors over the microphone: ‘I want to thank [my brother/grandmother so-and-so], we are here because of him/her.’ 36

34 To explain the observed differences between the USA and UK, more research would be needed, particularly in the USA, to contextualise the findings. Possible explanations can be sought in the characteristics and migration histories of the migrants, in the residential dispersal and social position in the settings of arrival, and in the models of migrant integration/assimilation available in both settings.


36 It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with the ‘integration’ debate, but note that transnationalism and integration/assimilation, often juxtaposed as contradictory in political discourse, can actually reinforce each other (Kivisto 2001). Studies of comparable organisations that emerge ‘from below’ show that the organisers are often elderly and educated people, who have lived abroad for a long time (Portes, Escobar, and Radford 2007, 276). Their efforts to establish a community association do not have to reflect a desire to separate oneself from the dominant society. On the contrary, it could be argued, the efforts of migrants to organise themselves as a community in the UK can be understood as an essential aspect of the process of settlement in British society, where processes of ‘integration’ of migrants in the dominant civil culture are often linked to attempts to organise people as ethnic or religious groups (Baumann 1999, 46–47). Baumann, comparing different nation-states in their way of dealing with ‘the multicultural riddle’, argued that in the UK, the fight for emancipation is not an individualist battle, that ‘it is community based’. In this context, he compared British civil culture with ‘a soccer tournament. Everyone should fight for a team and fight for it squarely but fairly. Teams, be they ethnic minorities or religious ones, should stick together at all cost’ (1999, 46–47).
The homeland (1): ‘India’ and ‘Gujarat’

So far, the process of community making has been explored in the sphere of the family and association. The third and last tool of group-making I discuss in this chapter is the notion of a shared homeland. In scholarship of ‘diaspora’, the ‘homeland’ is described (Cohen 1996; Faist 2008, 34-36; Safran 1991) as a nostalgic fantasy of an idealised putative ancestral homeland towards which the diaspora feels a shared responsibility (for critiques, see Clifford 1994; Axel 2002). In the case of the Vohra community, while there is also a sense of shared responsibility towards the homeland (as shown by the 2002 episode described above), there is little or no nostalgia in the accounts, or at least not as long as the conversation remains at the national level. If the homeland has a binding function, it does so as an object of shared critique with regard to the vulnerable position of Muslims there. In the rest of this chapter, I explore how the homeland works as a tool of community making, first through the lens of the national imagination (India/Gujarat versus the UK), then by looking at the more localised engagements with ‘Charotar’.

When asked to talk about ‘India’ and ‘Gujarat’, Vohras in the UK present a rather dark ‘myth of the homeland’: discrimination is a key feature of their stories. Personal memories of exclusion, even of humiliation and embarrassment are recurrent themes and are linked to more general narratives of political developments and historical events in India and Gujarat. Here is a clear statement that summarises some of the feelings I have encountered:

UK is far better than India. I wouldn’t say India, whole India, I would say especially Gujarat. (…) Gujarat is very bad. (…) If you know about the communal riots, [they] only took place in a few states: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bombay, and a few other (middle-aged man from Anand in London).

Conversations that revolved around ‘India’ and ‘Gujarat’ showed firm criticism of India. Some described communal violence as a national ‘Indian’ problem, others highlighted the peculiarity of ‘Gujarat’ as a particularly riot-prone state, or described Gujarat and a few other Indian states as particularly hateful of Muslims. The nuances between the two layers of state were important in some conversations,37 which highlighted that the Hindu nationalist BJP political party was in power in Gujarat whereas the secular Congress political party was in power at the centre. The fact that the Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi (BJP) was the favoured

37 This multi-scalar perception of the state was also observed among Gujarati Muslims in Ahmedabad by Jasani (2011).
candidate in the run-up to the national elections at the time was, for example, described as ‘very scary for Muslims’ in an interview.

When informants voiced criticism of Gujarat or India, they sometimes substantiated their views with some evidence, articles read or films seen. The film *Final Solution* (Rakesh Sharma, 2004), which documents the carnage and its immediate aftermath in relation with the poll campaign during the elections in Gujarat in 2002, is an example of an information source that had been seen by some. A young migrant spoke at length about his displeasure with Narendra Modi’s leadership in 2002, on the basis of this film. In other interviews, the evidence used to substantiate their critiques were personal experiences of discrimination. A recurrent theme was experience of discrimination in educational institutes. Below is the example of a first generation migrant, a middle-aged man who came to the UK after his marriage.

Muslims are a minority in Gujarat. It happens a lot in schools that they gang up on you. When I was in primary school, one of my teachers was always making bad statements about Islam. I don’t think it was needed. I can’t remember exactly what he was saying, but nasty things about Islam. I don’t know but come on, what do you want to teach children at the primary level, are you with me? (…)

I had a very bad experience [in a college in Anand]. I had an exam, on that day it was *Jumma* [Friday], so I wanted to do my prayer and then I went to my exam. I was fifteen minutes late. I didn’t expect my lecturer would have an issue with that. But when I arrived, he asked me: ‘Why are you late?’ I told him I was doing prayer, and he sent me off. I was not very religious, only in college I became a little more religious and I started praying. Then I realised: this is not easy. If you want to practice anything that goes against…. [long silence]… ehhhhh… which probably doesn’t synchronise with their way of doing things, you know. I experienced communalism a lot.

The quote represents Gujarat as a place where Muslims are a vulnerable minority, where children get bullied in school by their peers and by teachers and where practising one’s religion is not easy.

In the interviews, a binary opposition was drawn between the host and home society, the UK versus Gujarat/India. Migrants describe major differences in how religious minorities are treated in the host and home society. A discriminatory homeland was juxtaposed against a more benevolent host society, where there is

---

freedom for Muslims to practice their religion and rituals without hindrances by
the dominant society and where people are allowed to do what they want as long
as it does not interfere with anyone else’s life. Here is a comment about these
differences between India and the UK, as explained by a young man in Anand after
having lived in the UK for two years:

In London, I can go around dressed in my white clothes even in the centre of
the city, and nobody turns to look. In East London, the Muslim drivers, six out
of seven wear a beard, and they feel safe! In Gujarat, it’s different.

Some of interviews even indicate that the marginalisation of religious minorities
in Gujarat/India was the main reason to migrate abroad. A young woman, recently
arrived in London with her husband, explained,

I came here because my husband wanted to work here, and I wanted to be
with him.
SV: Was it not possible to work in Gujarat?
For Muslims, it is not possible to get a job in Gujarat.

A middle-aged man, settled in the UK with his family for approximately ten years:

[In the period before I went abroad], I often talked to an old man. The old man
told: ‘In 1972, my sister told me to send my children to America, but I didn’t
believe it. (...) [Now], my son is a qualified engineer, but we have suffered a lot
because he could not get a job in India’. So this old man told that if I had believed
my sister’s advice to take immigration, my son would not be in this position
now. He is regretting now. (...) That story touched me. They were Banya, Jain
people, they are always well-to-do people, you know, they are not Muslims. I
am not Jain. I am Muslim. People can attack me, people can do anything with
me, I am a minority, it is not that easy. Then, I decided to take immigration.

Even some of the ‘twice migrant’ elderly men, who migrated to East Africa before
India’s Independence and Partition, said that discrimination against Muslims
motivated them to go abroad. An old man, who moved from Gujarat to East Africa
in 1955 said that:

When you became a graduate, you didn’t get the service at that time. Even
today the same question....
Another man explained the time when he visited India as a young man on a holiday trip, from his home in the British colonial territory of Tanganyika. He felt that, at the time, there were no opportunities for Muslims in India:

In 1962, when we went to India, I saw there were a lot of our Muslim brothers who were educated, and they couldn’t get decent jobs. There was discrimination against Muslims. Even though they were educated, they were not given good jobs. I thought: ‘I don’t want to go! I can’t survive there!’

For this man, there were additional reasons to choose the UK over India at the time, which were explained on another occasion. While discrimination should not be seen as the sole reason for migration, it is remarkable that this memory of discrimination is highlighted in this migration narrative from so early on.

While these informants present discrimination of Muslims as an inherent characteristic of India, others pointed rather at a sense of loss, and drew on nostalgia for a more harmonious past, before 2002.

My family was the only Muslim family [in a housing society in Anand] in 1989. Like eighty percent were Hindu in that society. But now not a single person Hindu in that society, because of these riots. Hindus moved from that place and Muslims don’t like to live in villages, they like to live in community so they get protection. (...) Still my father has lots of Hindu friends. And I have. That’s why I say people please come here [to the UK]! Learn from these people. Not fight about religion.

In summary of the above, when asking Vohras in the UK about ‘India’ or ‘Gujarat’, they responded by drawing a picture of a discriminatory homeland. Exclusion, humiliation and an overall sense of vulnerability were recurrent themes in their stories. Personal memories of discrimination in school in Gujarat are evoked to substantiate the critiques. Some migrants even feel that the vulnerable position of Muslims in Gujarat was an important ‘push factor’ for them going abroad.

To understand the outspokenness of the criticisms, the context of the conversations must be understood. At the beginning of the conversation, some informants established what I thought about politics in Gujarat, as if they were testing my views before sharing theirs. One man explained that ‘because of these riots people have become more cautious and they don’t like to share their personal things’. They said that the 2002 episode or the position of minorities in Gujarat was mostly
discussed among themselves, and talk about ‘politics’ was usually avoided in conversation with Hindu friends. The sharing of critiques and negative memories with each other (and with me) thus also seemed to be an act of group-making, involving decisions of in- and exclusion.

At home in the UK

The descriptions of the discriminatory homeland are juxtaposed with a story of a more benevolent host society, where there is freedom for Muslims to practice their religion and where the Muslim minority can feel more at ease. Their positive and perhaps romanticised ‘myth of the host society’ was surprising to me in the European context of increasing Islamophobia in Europe since the international ‘war on terror’ after September 11, 2001 (Atom 2014; Poynting and Mason 2007). Confronted with questions about this, first generation migrants affirmed they do not experience Islamophobia in the UK. Two quotes to illustrate:

SV: I thought, well, probably Muslims in the UK after 9/11…. there is so much anti-Islam attitude… I am very surprised to find people find it a liberation to go to the UK.
This started after 9/11. But when it comes to religion, UK is far better than India. (…)
It is true that in the media there is a negative stereotype about Jamati, it is associated with terrorism [in the UK], because Osama Bin Laden was also wearing a beard. But there is a lot of interest in Islam among the English people. I met four white people converted to Islam! (…)
My uncle had told me that the position of Muslims in the UK was very bad in London after 9/11. He had not been to London himself, he had heard about it. But when I landed at the airport, immediately I saw three or four men with beards in a high position: they were stamping passports and working as security guards. So immediately I realized: what my uncle said is not true (quote from a young man, interviewed in Anand after returning from London).

People are given more freedom in those countries [in the UK], as compared to India. When I went to uni [university in the UK], the first thing I noted was that every religion was allocated a separate space for prayer. I was really surprised! This is really good, there is a mosque in the university! And not
The visible presence of Muslims in positions of authority, the wide availability of Islamic institutes and the presence of white people in those institutions were frequently mentioned as evidence of the better position of Muslims in the UK. Other examples often given were the presence of prayer rooms in hospitals and universities, and the relative tolerance of the British public when they see Muslims wearing Islamic clothing in public.

What can explain this very striking juxtaposition of a discriminatory homeland and an open host society? These ideas contrast remarkably with the classic hypothesis of diaspora studies, that ‘myths of homeland’ are nostalgic and romanticised, a result of experiences of discrimination and exclusion in the country of arrival (e.g. Safran 1991). Here, the reverse is the case: the homeland is criticised in response to being excluded in the country of origin, and included in the country of arrival. This idealised ‘myth of the host society’ begs an explanation. How is it possible that migrants’ lived experience of Britain does not reflect the popularity of anti-immigration right-wing political views and the trend of Islamophobia?

To explain this, we need to contextualise the migrants by looking at developments and situations that affect them, both in the home and the host societies. The context in the home society is important and has been discussed: the memory of the 2002 riots, youthful memories of exclusion in school, and sometimes more general discussions about the political ideology of Hindu nationalism. With regard to the position of the migrants in the society where they actually live, it is important to recognise the life situation of the (first generation) migrants, which may prevent them from personally experiencing Islamophobia. This was illustrated in an interview with a middle-aged man, who happened to be one of the founders of a hospital in central Gujarat. As he had been involved in collecting funds for charitable purposes for Muslims in Gujarat, I had asked him how his collections were affected by the changing political climate in the UK. I suggested that the economic recession was likely to backfire on his charitable work and might result in complaints that migrants send all their money back home rather than investing in the UK economy. The response of the father was confusion. He had never heard any such complaint, he said. At that point his son, who was listening to the interview, interrupted. His response indicates that the second generation, who
participates in British schools and is groomed in British institutions, is much more aware of racist and anti-migration discourses than their parents.

I feel that more [than my father]. I have been to college here, now I am trying to find a job. I am moving in the outer circle. So I can agree that something is definitely changing: they want a UK for white people only. But my father is not moving in the outer circle, he is moving in the inner circle. So he is not aware of that.

This father had come to the UK in the eighties and was now settled with his family in a predominantly white non-migrant suburban neighbourhood. He agreed with his son that he was only moving in the ‘inner circle’: he had no contact with his white neighbours, he said, and his collections for Gujarat only took place among Muslims in the UK. At the time of the interview I found the statement enlightening, but in hindsight I wondered what was meant by an ‘inner circle’. This man certainly does not live in a closed world. In fact, during the process of migration and settlement this man has greatly expanded his social networks. His social circle today consists of people from different parts of the world, from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, to manage a social welfare association in Gujarat, that too consistently for more than ten years, shows his skilful usage of contacts both with donors in the UK and with local caretakers in India. Such a very diverse network makes one wonder about what is ‘inner’ about this ‘inner circle’. Despite this nuance, what the conversation revealed was a kind of ‘blissful unawareness’ that can occur among some of the (first generation) migrants. If the parents have felt excluded in Gujarati schools, their children become aware of exclusionary discourses and practices when they go to college in the UK. How school-going can become such a powerful generator of an awareness of being different, is a question I leave to others to deal with (Connolly 2014).

There is a second aspect of the local context that might help to understand the strong juxtaposition of home and host society: the presence of a wide range of Islamic institutions in the UK and the role of the UK as an international centre of Islamic education. The UK is seen as a good place to learn about Islam both in Gujarat and among Gujarati Muslims in the UK, and it is also an interesting place to practice religion because of the presence of many other Muslims from different parts of the world, whom one can meet through religious institutions. A young man indicated he had ‘learnt a lot’ about Islam in the UK, and spoke enthusiastically about the Islamic group travels he participated in, organised by the Tablighi Jamaat in the UK. A young female migrant regularly attended a reading group with other
young women in her neighbourhood in East London. In the settled families, parents indicate that it is their children, brought up in the UK, who are more elaborately educated in religion. They talk about their children as ‘more orthodox’ or ‘more religiously learned’ than themselves. Some families have made considerable changes in their religious practices and rituals at home over time, and these changes have at least partly been inspired by the religious learning of the children.

In summary, the narrative of the discriminatory homeland is juxtaposed with a positive and somewhat romanticised narrative of the host society, particularly among first generation migrants, who talk about the UK as a more Muslim-friendly space and as an international centre of Islamic knowledge. This juxtaposition can be explained by looking at their migration experiences and their specific situations and living conditions in the UK.

The homeland (2): ‘Charotar’ and ‘Anand’

The quote above sums up just about everything I have discussed in the chapter so far, the idea of a Vohra community, the notion of relatedness and dispersal, and the homeland, in this quote described as an ancestral home region from which all offspring have come. In this final section, I explore the ‘homeland’ through a more localised lens to see if and how place comes into play in the process of community making.

In the descriptions above, there are several indications that place matters. In the Vohra family, the homeland emerges first of all because of the exchanges with people and places in India that these transnational marriages generate. In the early part of the 1980s and 1990s, it seemed natural to the parents to seek a spouse for their children in India. Through transnational marriages, social ties have been strengthened between families here and there, between London and Gujarat or between Leicester and Mumbai. The marriage arrangements have resulted in, for example, regular telephone calls between families, visits to and fro, and exchanges of resources. A recent development is the gradual shift from acquiring spouses
mainly from India to actively seeking spouses within the UK, partly because of the increasingly exclusive rules for marriage migration into the UK (Wray 2011), which make it harder and more expensive to continue this practice. According to an elderly lady, it is ‘only recently, in the last ten years say, that some weddings have started to happen in this country.’ She went on to say that 50% of marriages still takes place in India – even if this is an overestimation, it still points to a continuing relevance of these exchanges.

In the community associations, the homeland has also been important. In the USA, the website of the association indicates where this group is from: ‘Anand/Kheda district’. In the UK, the region has served as a model of community (re)building, a source of inspiration. This was shown in the deliberate reinstating of characteristic practices known among Charotar Sunni Vohras in Gujarat, such as the Vohra family list, the institution of the Vohra meeting and the ideal of community endogamy itself. Besides being a model, the homeland has been a site of shared responsibility, particularly during that key moment in 2002 when everyone saw the need and urgency to organise. I have shown that at that time personal links were crucial to the distribution of the funds, and that all of the funds were channelled through a ‘relief committee’ of personal acquaintances based in Anand town.

On the other hand, the word ‘Charotar’ has, as such, disappeared. In the interviews the references are either to more generalised spatial referents, such as ‘back home’, ‘India’, or ‘Gujarat’, or to more specific referents such as ‘Anand’, ‘in and around Anand’, or to other specific towns, cities and villages. It is telling that both associations, the UK Vohra Association and the Vahora Association of USA, have left the word ‘Charotar’ out of the name of the association. In contrast, in Karachi (Pakistan), the Charotar Muslim Association has maintained the word ‘Charotar’ but dropped the word ‘Vohra’. In the UK and in the USA, ‘Charotar’ appears to have become a word of the past, remembered only by the older generation. This older generation was happy to discuss it with me, but some of the children listening to the interviews said that they were hearing the word ‘Charotar’ for the first time in their life! When I described myself as doing research among ‘Charotar Sunni Vohras’ during the community event in the USA, probably to the bafflement of the younger ones, I received applause and cheers from the older generation.

It is not hard to see the reason for this ‘forgetting’ of Charotar: the region is completely unknown in the UK. Only in Gujarat is the word ‘Charotar’ well-known. In the Gujarati imagination, ‘Charotar’ conjures images of a fertile agricultural region of tobacco exports and long-standing transnational networks. The region has been described as ‘the centre of one of the most powerful rural nationalist
movements in India’ during the Independence struggle (Hardiman 1981, 1) and as a central place of power in Gujarat after Independence (Tambs-Lyche 2010; Sud 2010; in Simpson 2010, 12–14). In the Gujarati context, claiming to be ‘Charotri’ holds symbolic significance. In the UK and the USA, saying one is from ‘Charotar’ does not get a person anywhere. This does not mean that the home region has become irrelevant. In the interviews, people did refer to places in central Gujarat all the time. In each interview, people located their Indian ‘vatan’ or ‘pir’ (hometown, see glossary) in addition to the specific villages and towns where their relatives now live - these included Anand, Kanjari, Boriavi, Sunav, Bakrol, Narsanda, Umreth, Pedlad, Tarapur, Vera, Vododla, Baroda, Ahmedabad, and various other places in or around central Gujarat. Within the Vohra list, there is also an attempt to link each family to an ‘Indian city/village’ (table 5.2), although the list does not mention the ataks or utaras (indicating that the places of origin can be freely interpreted). The 25 places mentioned in central Gujarat include Borsad, Sunav, Kanjari, Malataj, Mogri, Vaso, Kathalal, and in three cases Anand. Mumbai and Karachi are also mentioned frequently as ‘Indian city/village’ in the list.

Table 5.2. Column ‘Indian city/village’ in the UK Vohra family list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Households listed (total)</th>
<th>114</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Column left blank</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places in central Gujarat</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachi</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan (city other than Karachi or unknown)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At the community event in the USA, the idea of a ‘place of origin’ was even more important. During all activities throughout the weekend, the question ‘where are you from’ was a prominent feature of the conversations, and participants kept exchanging the names of villages, towns and cities in Gujarat. Moreover, almost all activities included public introductions in which people were given a microphone to answer three questions: ‘What is your name?’, ‘Where are you from in the USA?’, and ‘Where are you from in India?’ When a boy could only produce the answer ‘India’ to the last question, the parents were publicly mocked: ‘Hey, someone needs to teach this kid where he is from!’ Among the hometowns most frequently mentioned during this community event was Anand.
To summarise, the transnational Vohra family is a group of spatially dispersed interconnected families derived from a small area in Gujarat: for the old generation ‘Charotar’, for the young generation either the more generic ‘back home’ or the more specific ‘Anand [or another village/town] and around there’. If the Vohra community can be described as a ‘diaspora’, it is a regionally specific diaspora built on the emotional and social work of reproducing a kinship-based social network. However, the places and people with whom migrants interact in the home region are diverse, and we should therefore perhaps not speak of ‘a homeland’ but of a multitude of personalised ‘homelands’. These more specific homelands are not so much ‘imagined’ but are ‘practiced’ and, like the region, can be thought of as a network in which specific households forge specific relations with each other, thereby opening up pathways of travel.

Conclusion

The Vohras who have migrated away from central Gujarat have regrouped in different places as a ‘Vohra community’. In this chapter, to seek an understanding of the process of ‘group-making’ (Brubaker 2002; Brubaker 2005) through the lens of relatedness, association, and homeland, I have described the Vohra community from the perspective of the UK, with brief excursions to the USA.

First, I used the lens of family relations to analyse the process of group-making. Notions of family and through experiences of relatedness have been critical to the (re)generation of ‘a Vohra thing’ abroad. The Vohra family involves the intertwining of chain migration and kin alliances in which mutual support and (inter)dependency in the migration process contribute to the reproduction of community in the new context. Through this process, a transnational social field takes shape and can be experienced in migrant households in the UK with reference to relatives in India and visitors who may temporarily or permanently take part in the household. While Vohra marriage practices are changing under conditions of migration, they are key to producing and maintaining a transnational social field (Charsley and Shaw 2006).

The attempts to organise Vohras as a community have resulted in the establishment of a formal association with a board, a bank account and a list of members. These efforts to ‘get the community together’ have met with spurts of enthusiasm, disinterest and even discontent among the target members. The significance of these associations is their attempt to keep the Vohra community alive, which shows that the idea of the Vohra community persists, even if the association is dormant most of the time. The association suddenly became relevant at the time of crisis, in the period after 2002, then generating a flurry of collective activity.
With regard to the notion of a ‘diaspora’ and its homeland, I argue that Vohras in the UK and USA fit academic descriptions of a ‘diaspora’ (Axel 2002; Brubaker 2005; Clifford 1994; Cohen 1996; Morawska 2011; Safran 1991) in the sense that they share a sense of responsibility towards an ancestral ‘homeland’. In earlier studies, myths of the homeland are described as fantasies based on nostalgia and primordialism, on a dream of future return (Safran 1991, 83–84) or on idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a ‘collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation’ (Cohen 1996, 515). While these myths of the homeland would allow a mental escape from the lived experiences of marginalisation and discrimination of migrants in the host society, Vohras in the UK instead voiced strong criticism of the situation in India and in Gujarat, and described the UK in much more idealised terms as a space where there is more freedom for them as a religious minority. Despite their criticism of Gujarat/India, people do maintain transnational relations and forge transnational marriages, and some travel to the region frequently, sometimes spending months on end there. This indicates that stories or ‘myths’ of the homeland, especially when captured at the national/state level, cannot fully capture their relation to it.

For a more complete understanding of the emerging transnational social field, it is imperative to reconnect the narratives, discussions and family events among migrants in their place of settlement with their practices of exchange with the actual space of the ‘homeland’. In the next chapter, therefore, we will travel back to the geographically and socially dynamic region of central Gujarat to explore how socially durable ties between specific people here and there get entangled with specific villages and towns. We leave the living rooms of the migrant households in the UK behind and follow the trails of the migrants when they visit Gujarat, to explore their locally embedded social networks and the practical exchanges they engage in during their visits.
CHAPTER 6

Transnational place-making

This thesis began with a description of Vohras in Anand town and in central Gujarat, then moved abroad, to Vohra households and community events localised in the UK and USA. How are these disparate sites connected? In this final empirical chapter, I follow the migrants back to central Gujarat and offer a truly transnational perspective.

There has been increasing interest in the study of place-making in the context of migration and migrant transnationalism and I aim to contribute to this discussion here: the ‘placial turn’ in studies of transnational migration (Gielis 2009). Drawing on Appadurai’s idea of the ‘translocality of place’ (Appadurai 1996; Appadurai 2002, 35; in Gielis 2009, 280) and on Massey’s notion of ‘a global sense of place’ (Massey 1994, 156; in Gielis 2009, 278), Gielis argues that scholars of transnationalism need to break open migrant places. By ‘breaking open’, he means scholarship should not be restricted to what is visible in a place, but rather it should be focused on how various social networks and systems are present and interrelate: ‘only with an open, global and progressive idea of these migrant places are we able to observe the various crosscutting social networks in which transmigrants are involved in these places’ (Gielis 2009, 278). Here I take this idea out of the context where it has been used so
far, the migrant neighbourhood in the society of settlement, and apply it in the context of a migrant-sending region. The question I ask is: How do Vohras living in the UK and USA, in collaboration with their local acquaintances, ‘make place’ in central Gujarat?

The notion of place-making has been described as the way in which people turn a universal or abstract ‘space’ into lived experience through their frameworks and practices (Rodman 2003 [1992], 207; Thornton 1995, 11). Place-making can entail forms of claiming and colonising space, which may occur through activities and events, through building monuments, or through asserting oneself in an existing building or square (Harney 2006, 34–35). Through place-making, people locate identities on ‘the actual and imaginative multicultural map’. In this chapter, I show how transnational place-making practices relate to localised power dynamics, community politics and spatial changes in the migrant-sending region. The recent emergence of Anand town as a centre for Muslims in the region is a spatial consequence of the history of violence against and marginalisation of Muslims in Gujarat, and migrants are confronted with this as they visit the home region and get implicated in place-making practices in Anand town.

Migrants respond to the spatial changes in the region in different ways. Some make a point of holding on to ancestral family land in the original home town or village, and find that their position and influence as Muslims is not seen as ‘natural’ by other villagers and has to be defended, for instance through an active politics of secularism and communal harmony. Others have no specific nostalgia for their home town, but still remain involved in villages to sustain the survival of Muslims there. Most have shifted their attention partly or entirely to Anand town, which has become an important focal point in the Vohra transnational family network as previously dispersed relatives have shifted there. Some migrants have helped relatives relocate to Anand by sending remittances, some invest in real estate in Anand themselves, others are involved in charitable initiatives. Migrants indicate they feel at home in Anand town even if they have been ‘uprooted’ from their villages. It is through intimate relations that they find pathways to this town, and eventually a sense of home.

‘Not enough migrants’

We now return to the residents of central Gujarat. I have so far described them mainly within the local setting of a neighbourhood in Anand town and while traveling into the wider region from there. Here, I ‘open up’ the town and the region
to describe these as a ‘transnational space’. The household survey showed that approximately a third of the families have a link abroad (42 out of 147 houses, table 2.2). In my research among twenty associations in the central Gujarat region, I found seven local trusts that had received some form of funding from transnational migrants, five that had now, or in the past, been affiliated to an international or migrant association, and five that had been (co)founded by a Vohra residing in the UK or USA. My findings indicate that while migration is relatively recent and not as large-scale among Vohras and other Muslims compared to other local groups with a longer history of transnational migration, such as Patels/Patidars, it is significant enough to ask how Muslim residents seek alliances with transnational migrants and how these collaborations affect their neighbourhoods, towns, and villages.

On the whole, residents’ thoughts about the role of migrants in the neighbourhood are quite positive. This is worthy of note because previous studies of migrant-sending regions in India point at recurrent conflicts between locals and migrants, especially when migrants ‘flaunt their wealth’ or display arrogant manners vis-à-vis the local residents (Dekkers and Rutten 2011; Rutten and Patel 2002; Taylor 2013). One reason for the overall positivity in the way locals talk about migrants might be the relatively limited number of well-settled migrants as migration has only recently taken off on a larger scale. Feelings of social distance are perhaps more likely to arise with older and well-settled migrants, who, over time, start distancing themselves financially, culturally and emotionally from their India-resident relatives (Ramji 2006). These types of migrants are relatively few among Vohras and other Muslims in Anand. Moreover, when these migrants do visit Anand they do not seem to congregate in special housing societies at some distance from their relatives, as do Patel visitors in the Vaishnav Township in Anand, in which 56 out of 60 properties are owned by migrants (Verstappen and Rutten 2015, 240).

Within the Muslim community, the majority of the visiting migrants are still young and ‘just starting’. When they visit, they live with their parents. They are also financially more or less embedded in the joint family. When I discussed the investments made by migrants (in a new parental house, an extra floor on top of an existing home, or the instalment of air-conditioning), it was sometimes unclear whether these were intended for the parents’ comfort or to accommodate the migrants in their holidays: local interests and migrant interests were hard to distinguish. This might also explain the relative absence of local complaints about migrants and migration (in comparison with Taylor, Singh, and Booth 2007, 338–340; and with Rutten and Patel 2002, 326–327).

One complaint was however voiced recurrently by some of the residents: that
there are not many or not enough migrants in the Vohra/Muslim community. This complaint was voiced by families working to start the process of migration themselves and by those in leadership positions, managing schools and social welfare associations. Teachers and trustees announced that ‘we have more and more students in our community starting their lives abroad’ but said that only ‘few migrants are already in a position to financially support the community’. These remarks of ‘starting migration’ and ‘not enough migrants in the community’ should be understood in the wider local context, of community politics and regional development. The remarkable transformations in some nearby villages associated with the transnational migration history of the region are well-known among the residents. These developments include the foundation of hospitals, schools, and temples, and also the construction of roads, water purification plants, even amusement parks (Dekkers and Rutten 2011), all financially supported by transnational migrants who have remained connected to their home village. My informants are aware of these developments because this ‘NRI’ [non-resident Indian] involvement in local villages is so widely propagated: stories of NRI-sponsored development projects in the villages are reported in local newspapers and the stories also find their way into everyday conversation, not least because some of the local Muslims have found employment in these projects. Overseas Gujaratis are prominent in the official and popular consciousness of Gujarat (Mehta 2015, 329), and newspapers regularly feature news items about how they contribute to ‘development’, or fail to do so. An announcement in a news item by TV9 Gujarati (2014):

NRGs (... [non-resident Gujarati]) have rolled up their sleeves in the development of rural areas of the state. NRG’s joint initiative to give new rays to the villages of the state has taken the place of government. NRG fund is used in the development of villages which is their own initiative and fulfil[s] hopes and expectations to ease struggling life of villagers.2

An example of a news item in Times of India (2014):

When it comes to paying back to their motherland, NRGs from north Gujarat have reached out to a wider area as compared to their illustrious central Gujarat peers, according to the first-ever survey of NRG contribution to the

---

1 In a forthcoming documentary film, we show some of these developments in one of the villages of central Gujarat. Though only some of the development projects are in this short film, the footage shows a wide variety of projects, all supported by transnational migrants of the Patel community. Transnational Village Day, Mario Rutten, Sanderien Verstappen, Dakxin Bajrange, expected in 2016.

state’s development. (…) The survey shows almost all districts have seen significant contribution for education in the form of donations for building schools and colleges.³

These are merely two examples of how the news media link ‘migration’ to ‘development’ in Gujarat. This kind of migrant sponsoring of educational institutes, hospitals and other social initiatives has become an available model of development in the region. The Gujarati state government also highlights this, and encourages ‘non-resident Gujaratis’ (NRGs) to participate in ‘development’ through, for example, an official bureaucratic cell started specifically to encourage this (Mehta 2015, 329).

In the popular imagination, ‘NRGs’ are often synonymous with Patels, especially in central Gujarat where they are a very prominent community despite being a numerical minority. This was evident when Muslim leaders discussed migration and development in terms of community, comparing Patels with Muslims:

You see, all the development that you see here in Charotar is because of the Patels. They are getting lots of donations. They have many NRIs [non-resident Indians]. If it was not for Patels, Charotar would still be like Saurasthra… where dust goes on in the sky… [He continued the conversation by explaining how Muslims are ‘lagging behind’].

Vohras are going abroad more than other Muslims. Before it was not like that, that time only Patels went out, but now others are also going out, if they are educated. Vohras have good chances to go abroad, because they are educated.

The comparison of communities in terms of their volume of migration and donations brings out the Patels as a (role) model of development, Muslims as ‘lagging behind’, and Vohras with a good chance of catching up. It is said that Vohras and other Muslims are ‘just starting’ their migration process, unlike the local Patel (Hindu) caste, who are famous for their long-standing tradition of migration and transnational involvement in local ‘development’. These ideas were so prevalent that I was sometimes told during my research that I was studying ‘the wrong community’. During a research visit to a hospital known to have received significant donations from the UK, and managed by a Muslim trust, a doctor told me:

This type of development is not there among Muslims. This is the Patel trademark! You have to go to that community. Why do you focus on Muslims? It is very insignificant (the doctor is a Hindu, not Patel).

The doctor acknowledged that his own employers received funds from migrants in the UK too, but felt this was an extra-ordinary situation.

Though Vohra and other Muslim migrants do contribute to processes of development in central Gujarat, their role is relatively invisible. One reason for this is the limited volume of migration and remittances – yet I still found enough empirical data to write about the Vohras as ‘transnational agents of development’.

A second reason is that these migrants tend to work individually or with small groups of trusted local acquaintances, operating without drawing much attention to themselves - without the donation plates, congratulatory displays and public events that are common in some of the Patel trusts (for a description, see Dekkers and Rutten 2011, 6). The absence of donation plates in Muslim trusts was explained by trustees as a strategy of keeping unwanted intrusions at bay (about which more below), of protecting the donor against additional requests by others, or of avoiding status being given to the donor, so that rewards would be granted in the ‘afterlife, not in this life’.

Notice board in Anand (2014), advertising an event of the ‘NRG Centre’, the non-resident Gujaratis Centre, started in December 2009, a collaboration between Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Government of Gujarat to provide information and assistance to NRGs.4

---

How do Vohras of central Gujarat collaborate with transnational migrants to improve their own lives and those of others - in other words, to ‘develop’ the society? Answering this question would contribute to existing scholarship on migration and development, not just to fill in the specific empirical gap of how Vohras operate as ‘agents of development’ but also to reflect critically on the implications of politics of community and place in the migration-development nexus.

Vohras as ‘transnational agents of development’

Political and academic discussions about the relationship between migration and economic development have flourished since the 1990s (Davies 2007; de Haas 2005; de Haas 2007; de Haas 2009; de Haas 2010; Faist 2008; Kurien 2009; Kapur 2010), and are related to the realisation that, in developing countries, the volume of remittances now far surpasses the level of official development assistance. Empirical studies show a heterogeneity of migration impacts (de Haas 2010). What distinguishes the present discussions from the earlier scholarship on remittances and the ‘brain drain’/‘brain gain’ is the raised awareness of the circularity of flows and the shift in perspective from the individual migrant to transnational networks and communities through which resources flow (Faist 2008, 26). Anthropologists have contributed to this through exploring the social and political processes in which transnational migrants and their resources are embedded (for an overview, see Upadhya and Rutten 2012), understanding migrants and remittances within the context of ethnic and community politics (Kurien 2002), social inequalities (Ballard 2003; Taylor, Singh, and Booth 2007) and the transforming of social institutions, gender and class relations (Gardner and Osella 2003, xiv; see also Gardner 2001 [1995]). My research builds on this anthropological work, which has paid particular attention to the localised power dynamics involved in such processes.

In central Gujarat, an already dominant group has been in a better position than others to capture the benefits of migration and remittances. In the initial phase of migration, when families started sending their children abroad for the first time and international migration networks and institutions are being established, the Patel/Patidar caste has had almost unique access to the most profitable forms of migration. Once abroad, Patel families have been well-positioned to make their mark on political and social-economic developments in the home region and have, through remittances, further strengthened their already relatively powerful
position. This conclusion can, to some extent, be drawn from earlier studies on Patels in central Gujarat (Rutten and Patel 2002; Dekkers and Rutten 2011; Guha and Rutten 2013). Within this context, the relation between ‘migration and development’ cannot be considered without taking the localised politics of community and caste into account.

Here I take cues from a transnational and longitudinal ethnographic research project in the Doab region in Punjab and in the UK (Taylor, Singh, and Booth 2007; Taylor 2013; Taylor and Singh 2013). Taylor and Singh argue that:

... Doaban transnationalism is shaped by, and shapes, the social structure of the region. [The article] focuses upon the relationship between contemporary Doaban transnationalism and caste and argues that multifaceted Doaban transnationalism is not only shifting the dynamic caste relations of Doaba but is also deepening the established patterns of caste domination and inequality (Taylor and Singh 2013, 50).

This deepening of established patterns of domination occurs because:

The very kinship and caste-based networks which have historically enabled Doaban migration to the UK have simultaneously restricted many of the benefits of transnationalism – social mobility but also remittances, investments and philanthropy – to these same social groups (in the case of our study, the Jat Sikh caste) (Taylor and Singh 2013, 53).

Taylor and Singh (2013, 50) present their case study of the Punjab as a contribution to the Provincial Globalisation project proposed by Upadhya and Rutten (2012) to counter the simplistic, economistic and methodologically nationalistic representation of transnational flows within much literature, research and policymaking on ‘migration and development’ with a series of ethnographic studies at the regional level. Here I make a further contribution to this ‘series of regional-level studies... (allowing) for comparison’ (Upadhya and Rutten 2012, 59, in Taylor and Singh 2013, 58).

If the Jat Sikhs of Doab and the Patidars of central Gujarat have, to a large extent, reaped the benefits of transnational migration, reinforcing their position as the

---

6 Through research and film footage shot by Dakxin Bajrange, we learnt about conflicts of a transnationally funded Patel trust with other villagers, for example with regard to a grazing ground for cattle in the village that had been dismantled for one of the projects. *Transnational Village Day*, Mario Rutten, Sanderien Verstappen, Dakxin Bajrange, expected in 2016.

7 Taylor and Singh’s argument has been contested by Singh and Singh (2008), who suggest that NRI investment does ‘trickle down’. To this, Taylor and Singh respond (2013, 56) that the largely quantitative approach of Singh and Singh fails to capture the nature of caste relations and transnational caste inequalities.
dominant castes in their region, what are the experiences of other groups in such regions with long-term histories of migration and transnational exchange? Overall, my findings suggest that Vohras of central Gujarat are embedded in resourceful transnational networks, even if the volume of migration and hence resource transfers are much more limited than among the local Patels. How are transnational networks of Vohras implicated in (re)making the region? My findings indicate two processes are reinforced by the transnational resource transfers: the maintenance of a Muslim presence in the villages where Muslims are a minority and the creation of a new hometown for Muslims in Gujarat.

These findings are relevant because of the increasing recognition within India of the role of migrants as ‘agents of development’ at the level of policy making (Walton-Roberts 2004, Xavier 2011) and the simultaneous exclusion of Muslims from the national imagination. This was already noted during the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in New Delhi (in 2003), when a critical voice asked why ‘Indian Muslims should be expected to have Ram and Sita in their hearts’, thus questioning the definition of diaspora maintained by the Indian government, and which groups are included in the ‘global family’ and invited to ‘reconnect with their motherland’ (Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff 2005, 200-201). Similar questions have been asked by diplomats in the run-up to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent visit to Australia, where it was observed that those putting together diaspora meetings in Australia were closely associated with the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, a foreign overseas wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (a militant Hindu nationalist organisation). This association of Indian diaspora events with Hindu nationalist leaders and rhetoric could alienate Muslims from feeling part of the ‘Indian diaspora’.

There is thus a paradoxical situation in which ‘overseas Indians’ are wooed and welcomed to share their resources and ideas with the nation (Xavier 2011), while Indian Muslims at home and abroad are defined as ‘others’ and ‘foreigners’ (Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff 2005; van der Veer 2002). In Gujarat, five Muslim associations were banned from receiving foreign funds in 2015. In my own research, I came across two Muslim associations that had been severely affected by increasingly strict regulations under the Foreign Contributions Regulations (FCR) Act. These two associations were educational institutes that had received financial support from a transnational Memon association, and which had subsequently been labelled as suspicious, receiving regular police inspections on their premises and being subject to lengthy bureaucratic procedures. This was experienced as

---


intimidating by the employees and trustees involved. A likely explanation for why these two trusts were marked as suspect is that they were linked financially to a Memon association – this may have drawn the attention of the police because of the 1993 Mumbai bombings, in which the so-called ‘Tiger Memon’ has been a prime suspect and his brother, Yakub Memon, was hanged in 2015 for playing a supporting role.10

The Vohras I met in my research have not been directly affected by such police interventions; their organisations have not been marked as (potentially) suspect. However, some were aware of the interventions in other Muslim associations. Besides, as shown previously, many spoke of an atmosphere of (potential) distrust vis-à-vis Muslims in India. This chapter therefore pays specific attention to how visiting migrants feel their role in ‘development’ is constrained by their specific positions as Muslims.

With regard to discussions about the much-contested notion of ‘development’,11 I take the position that ‘development’ implicates a desire to improve society, to do good. In the field, I have looked for emic interpretations of what that desired improvement could be. As each ‘agent of development’ has their own different ideas and strategies, I do not generalise but describe the personal aims, concerns and practices of three migrants, in three case studies. While the migrants I spoke to did not use the word ‘development’ by themselves, although they were more than confident about using it when I introduced it into the conversation, their aims were broadly formulated as helping people, helping people to help themselves, encouraging people. The aim of doing good sometimes went hand in hand with pleasing God, or with helping oneself, now or in the afterlife.

In the three case studies, I introduce three Vohra men visiting central Gujarat from the UK or USA, each of whom feels he is making a positive contribution to improving the welfare of people in central Gujarat. Philanthropist Ayub (based in the USA) started a health clinic and youth centre in his hometown; maulana Rashad (based in the UK) supports 290 widows in villages across central Gujarat;12 and

11 Different positions have been taken towards the notion of ‘development’ in history (Leys 2005; Rist 2008): a cycle of growth and decline in Antiquity, infinite progress in the Enlightenment, social evolutionism in the 19th century, discussions between the Modernisation and the Dependencia view of development with the establishment of the field of ‘Development Studies’ (Rist 2008, 28-43), and then a plethora of discussions in which ‘every imaginable paradigmatic position with respect to the question of development and underdevelopment was reviewed and awarded its own label’ (Schuurman 2000, 7).
12 To contextualise, the trusts I have encountered in central Gujarat are concerned with ‘self-sustenance’, e.g. by building hospitals and schools in Muslim-majority localities and organising services to ‘the disadvantaged’: health services, education, or the direct distribution of funds and food items. In an earlier study of Muslim associations in Ahmedabad in Gujarat, two types of associations are distinguished (Turèl 2007): self-organising associations and political associations that concentrate on lobbying with political parties and state institutions to demand the endorsement of constitutional rights. In the villages and towns of central Gujarat, I found only associations of the first kind. Activists I spoke to in the cities of Ahmedabad and Vadodara confirmed that the lobbying activities of the second kind of association focus more on the cities where the media and more powerful politicians are...
businessman Idris (based in the UK) feels his real estate ventures in Gujarat have contributed significantly to providing Muslims with housing in Anand after 2002. All three can be called ‘transnational agents of development’ (Faist 2008). I conclude each case study with reflection about how it relates to community and place, asking how these ‘transnational agents of development’ collaborate with local actors in the context of localised ‘community’ politics and how their activities are emplaced in the villages and towns of central Gujarat.

Case study 1: upholding secularism in the hometown
Ayub is a US citizen with OCI status (Overseas Citizen of India), who has lived in the USA for more than forty years. He was one of the first in his home town in Gujarat to go to the USA in the late 1960s as a student, received a medical degree, started up various businesses and eventually settled his family in a suburban town on the east coast of the USA. In India, he has maintained close relations with relatives and other acquaintances. Throughout his life, Ayub has contributed to associations active in the field of health care and education, particularly in his home region, central Gujarat.

In November 2011, Ayub visited Gujarat for three weeks to arrange the foundation of a new trust in his own name. On this occasion, I accompanied him for some days while he organised the registration papers of the trust with a legal advisor, checked on the construction process of two buildings on family-owned land in his home town, hired employees, met old friends, and travelled around the region to meet like-minded people. The trust then entailed a health clinic with free doctor's consultations and free medicines and a youth centre offering free courses in computer skills, English conversation training, and sports. By 2015, the youth centre had grown into an educational centre offering free coaching classes in Mathematics and English. Ayub’s overall aim is to ‘give confidence’ to people and to ‘create opportunities’ which the government is not providing for the underprivileged. He feels this is necessary in Gujarat today more than ever, because of the 2002 violence that made people ‘lose confidence’. His home town was seriously hit by the 2002 attacks, with some deaths and substantial destruction of Muslim property.

When Ayub sat down with me to be interviewed in 2011, we talked about what drove him: what motivated him to come back to Gujarat regularly, to contribute financially to social welfare associations, and then to start his own association? He

---

13 The information on Ayub and his association is based on findings from the research period in Gujarat, 2011-2012, a brief return visit to his association in Gujarat 2014, and conversations with him and his family in the USA in 2015. In 2015, I read out some parts of (an earlier draft of) this chapter to him. He felt I had quoted him in an appropriate way, gave some corrections and much additional information, some of which is included here. I have changed his name and omitted some details to prevent recognition, and thank Ayub, his family, friends and employees, for collaborating with the research.
expressed his gratitude for the people of his hometown who had helped him to make it abroad, and his wish to contribute something to the society now that he had the resources:

Everybody in this town, everybody contributed to my life. Everyone. Small to big, from backward to the highest society, Banya, Brahmin, Harijan, Christian, everybody. They love me and I love everybody. I have great respect and love for them and they for me too.

His desire to do good stems from a religious conviction, in the sense that he follows the Islamic principle of zakat: those who are wealthy should help out those in need. 'I just want my God to be happy', Ayub explains. He and his wife have been lucky, he feels. They have everything they need and he sees no purpose in ‘taking our money into the grave’. Now that his children have completed higher education and are financially independent in the USA, the family’s financial capacity to contribute to charity has further increased.

His principles, Ayub stresses, are 'very secular'. Ayub likes to talks about the national spirit, which in his opinion got lost in the new Gujarat, the new India:

When I grew up in Gujarat, in India, I never imagined India to be like this. Two different societies it has become. I come from a family of nationalists, who care for the nation. My father had the choice to go to Pakistan. He didn’t go to Pakistan. My father said, if every Muslim, if all the good leaders go to Pakistan, then who will take care of the poor and uneducated? Who will take care of those Muslims who have no direction? And who will bring them together with the right wing of Hindus?

When I was growing up, we didn’t have this kind of divide, of Hindu and this thing. The majority of my friends were Hindu. Unfortunately after a certain time because of politics (...) they came to... ‘they are Hindu, they are Muslim, they are Christian, they are Dalit, they are backward’, this thing. It (...) created a cellular India. Divided the hearts. I tell you one thing, today’s kids are very unfortunate kids. (...) Teachers even differentiate. And particularly in Gujarat, unfortunately. (...). Hindu party and RSS14 has built this [Gujarat] as a lab, a laboratory, experimental laboratory, to make this thing nationwide. Grab the power here, use the same theory and grab the power everywhere else. (...) They are trying to still do it in UP [Uttar Pradesh] and Bihar, but they fail,

---

14 Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a militant Hindu nationalist organization.
because many many many Hindus are not that kind of fundamentalist. Majority of Hindus are not like that.

The statement strongly resembles the ‘homeland’ narratives discussed earlier in the thesis. It is therefore interesting to see how Ayub maintains and actively recreates his lost homeland when he visits central Gujarat. In his home town, Ayub is still living his secular India, meeting up with old school friends, Muslims and Hindus, who share his spirit of secularism. Some Hindu friends are informally involved in Ayub’s trust and I saw that they frequented the meetings organised by the association even after Ayub had returned to the USA. Ayub made a strong point of including Hindus and Christians as partners, employees, and beneficiaries.

Statements of ‘secularism’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ were not only volunteered during conversations, but were also made publicly. During an event organised in Ayub’s trust a few months after he left, videotaped for him so that he could see it afterwards, the hall was decorated with Indian flags and the students of the youth centre performed dances to Hindi songs that conveyed a message of inclusive nationalism. Ayub feels this inclusionary ideology is a direct inversion of the current norm in the region. In the USA, he reflected that ‘it is people like us who still try to bring back some of that old spirit’.

From a local perspective, inclusiveness is both an ideological goal and a strategy. Ayub and some of his local employees and friends explained how they feel the need legitimise the trust’s’ activities in the face of outside suspicion. Ayub feels it is not always easy to convince people in Gujarat of his good intentions:

People [like us] do good work and still... they don’t get it. Because you are Muslim, they think: ‘Oh... you’re gonna help the Muslim!’ Come on! I want to do it for the entire community! Not doing for Muslim, not for Hindu, not for Christian. For whole humanity. Everybody. All Gujaratis. But some people don’t see it this way.

The buildings of Ayub’s trust are located in an area where the majority of neighbours are non-Muslims, mainly Hindus of lower caste. The trusts’ employees are therefore making a point of including all neighbours, by visiting their houses and inviting children for free courses and sports activities. According to the social worker managing the youth centre, ‘it is important that our neighbours feel that “this is for us as well” and that they support us. Otherwise, if they feel that “this is only for Muslims”, it will create problems’. This is because ‘some people in this town don’t
like our coaching classes. They think we are making Muslims stronger.’ In 2015, Ayub even estimated that 80% of the employees and students are now Hindus.

Would his contributions fit the model of ‘overseas Gujarati contributing to development’ as advocated by the Gujarati and Indian government? Or would it be labelled as unwanted interference of the ‘foreign hand’? Ayub aims to contribute to the greater good through secularism, but feels his activities are still seen as potentially dangerous simply because he is a Muslim. He counters the fear of the Muslim other by an inclusive definition of ‘community’, simultaneously challenging the status quo and creating legitimacy for his association. Through his active inclusion of non-Muslims in the projects, he maintains his local networks in the town of his youth and purposefully contributes to the maintenance or recreation of a sphere of communal harmony in the town. Here a primordial love for the hometown is not a ‘natural’ position but has to be defended, legitimised vis-à-vis fellow villagers. Holding on to the family land in this way, by turning it into a charitable project targeting disadvantaged Muslims and Hindus, becomes a mission to maintain the legitimacy of the Muslim presence in the home town. This mission is an ambitious one but is acted out on a small scale. Ayub purposefully operates ‘under the radar’ and likes to keep things small to ‘avoid interference’. He hopes to be ‘just a spoke in the wheel’.

Case study 2: supporting poor Muslims in the villages

Maulana Rashad15 is a British citizen and an Overseas Citizen of India, who has lived in the UK for 26 years. He grew up in Mumbai, studied the Quran to become a religious scholar, then travelled to the UK in 1986, where he was able to secure a long-term visa due to his work as a religious teacher and later married and settled down with his family. In 2011, I met him for the first time when he visited Gujarat to oversee the affairs of his trust. In 2012, I met him again in the UK.

Rashad's trust specialises in the distribution of zakat collected in mosques in the UK to poor and destitute Muslims in central Gujarat. The main purpose is to provide financial support and hope to ‘the most vulnerable in society: orphans, young girls, widows and the elderly’. At the time of my research in 2011, the trust was working in nine villages and towns in central Gujarat. It organised different projects, one of which was the distribution of an allowance of 400 rupees per month to 290 widows. Among the other projects were the annual distribution of

15 The information in this section is based on interviews and other conversations with three volunteers of the association and with Rashad himself. I have been in touch with the volunteers regularly throughout my fieldwork in Gujarat, met Rashad first in 2011 when he visited Gujarat, and interviewed him again in 2012 in his home in the UK, then in the presence of his family. I have changed his name and omitted some details to prevent identification, and thank Rashad, his family and all the volunteers and employees for their collaboration in the research.
food items during Ramzan and structural financial support to orphans so that they could study in an English medium school.

When I ask Rashad why he started this trust, he had two explanations, the first based on religious doctrine, the second on a personal history. The first was explained in London, in presence of his wife:

Rashad: In Islam if you start your own charity, rewards will keep coming to you even after your death. Because it is done in your name.

His wife: So as long as the charity keeps going, it will be beneficial for him in the afterlife.

Rashad: That’s the basic idea behind doing all this, why I started it. After my death it will still generate rewards.

If the underlying purpose of the endeavour is the rewards granted by God in the afterlife, it does not explain why he is doing his charitable work in Gujarat rather than anywhere else. That he explained as follows:

I saw real poverty for the first time in my life when I visited Gujarat [as a young man, from Mumbai]. In my family there was some poverty as well, but this was different. Real poverty. At that time I already thought that one day I would do something to help these people. When I came to the UK, this was still in my mind, but in the beginning I was struggling myself. But every time I went to India, I thought about it. (…)

Every time I visited India, many people used to approach me and ask for money. I used to give them also, but it was hard for me to understand who is really needy and who is not. People can easily hide things for me. Maybe they tell only half of their story. I cannot check on them. So I realized, I want to do something for these people, but you really need locals to understand who is needy and who is not.

Then one day I calculated, I had 500 pounds for zakat! I thought that was an enormous amount of money! How will I spend that wisely? That time I went to India and I met my cousin. I discussed it with him. He said: ‘I will help you’.

Today, Rashad no longer relies on his own zakat alone. Donations for the trust are collected more widely now among Muslims in the UK, in mosques in different cities, which Rashad tours every year during the Ramzan period to collect zakat. The trust’s spendings are impressive: £20,000 pounds in 2008, £28,000 in 2010,
£35,000 pounds in 2011. 

People give him the money, Rashad feels, because they trust him and his local contacts in Gujarat. Trust is key to the functioning of the association, as Rashad explained when seated in the office with his volunteers. Looking around him, he said:

These people here [in this room] are very good. You really need local people that you can trust. When I was doing it on my own, I was getting lots of misinformation.

A volunteer: ‘He spent so much money and he was cheated too much!’

In the end, that’s what it is all about. Trust. All the people in this room are my friends and relatives. I know them for a long time. And they know the local situation. They have clear-cut criteria and they know the people. I don’t know much about how to handle everything here, that’s up to them. My job is only the financial part. I attract the money and I do the checking up while I am here. I go through the accounts, I want to see bills of everything, make sure everything is done properly. I need to know that the money is wisely spent.

Rashad visits central Gujarat every other year or so, not every year. Most of the time, he relies on his Anand-based cousin to manage his affairs in Gujarat. This local cousin is, like Rashad, also a ‘Hafiz’, a scholar of Islam, who can recite the Quran by heart. During my stay in Gujarat, I accompanied this learned cousin and the small group of trusted (Vohra) friends who surrounded him on three occasions on their monthly tour to distribute the monthly allowances to the widows in the villages. Pictures were taken of the exchanges in every village - men in white clothes handing over envelopes to colourfully dressed women - so that the donors in the UK would see. Once a videowallah followed me around - I was instructed to ask questions in English so that the donors in the UK would be able to understand, which I did awkwardly.

How is Rashid’s transnational charity embedded in local networks and forms of sociality? To get things done for the Muslims here, and to do it fast and efficiently, Rashad’s cousin skilfully uses a network of acquaintances, partly through his own family ties and partly through the religious networks of the Tablighi Jamaat. During our visits, we were always received by a local maulana or by a relative in the village. These local acquaintances knew that we were coming and had already informed the beneficiaries in advance. In some cases, maulanas had organised religious classes for the beneficiaries, which were to be followed before the money was

16 Based on records of the UK Charity Commission.
distributed. As the volunteers explained, these local acquaintances are important to the functioning of the association. It is they who ‘know the people’ and who select the worthy recipients in the villages. Without them, the work would be impossible. Here family and religious networks are activated to support the continuing Muslim presence in the villages of central Gujarat.

How are the activities located? Unlike in other case studies of ‘transnational agents of development’, this trust is not active in the ancestral home town of Rashad itself (a town at an approximate 40 minute drive from Anand). Rashad is not driven by a primordial love for his ‘roots’, his choice of working in Gujarat is pragmatic:

People give money to me because they trust me. They are less concerned about the exact location of the work. In fact it may be more necessary to give money elsewhere, in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, there is much more poverty there. I considered becoming active there, but I have no network there, not anybody I trust like my cousin. So I would not be able to start it up there. People would spend the money for their own purposes, they would cheat, and when you are abroad there is nothing you can do...

Nevertheless, the Gujarati cousin and his friends are clearly not completely at home in some of the villages they distributed money to. Some of the villages we visited were Hindu-majority. Within this context, I found it remarkable to see how the team entered the villages only briefly to distribute the money and then left for the next village in a hired rickshaw or on motorbike, literally village-hopping. In the evening, they returned to their own homes - in Anand town. From their home base in Anand, these friends thus make use of their wider regional networks based on family and religious ties. During our travels, I found that one of the villages had been the native village of one of the volunteers, a retired school teacher now living in Anand. He indicated that there had been violence in his village in 1947 and in 2002, and that most Muslims had left to Anand afterwards. The remaining Muslims, he thought, were just a handful, as only the poorest of the poor stayed behind. Through the project of distributing zakat, thus, the Muslim presence in rural spaces is maintained - by sustaining their survival.

Case study 3: developing real estate in Anand town

Idris is a British citizen with OCI status (Overseas Citizen of India) who grew up in Anand. After his arranged marriage to a young Vohra woman in the UK in 1999, he...
moved to the UK. In the first years of his residence in the UK, he has been busy working and settling his family. Since his father passed away, he has returned to Anand more frequently to collaborate with his mother and other relatives in the business affairs of the family.

When I first met Idris in 2011, he had taken a ‘sabbatical’ and was staying with his wife and two children for six months in a spacious bungalow in Anand town, in the suburban area that is now ‘the Muslim area’. At that time he already explained about the numerous charitable and business activities his family engaged in in Gujarat. Idris said that:

We took a sabbatical from work and are now here to help our uncles manage the family land and real estate business, to get more involved in the family business, and to oversee the projects we are dedicated to.

At the time, Idris said that his friends in the UK measure each other’s status by the amount of land and investments owned in Gujarat. Later I learnt that these friends were all Patels from central Gujarat, with whom he meets as a men’s club every weekend - he is the only Muslim in the club. In a time when segregation was not as pronounced, Idris had lived in a Patel-majority neighbourhood in his youth and went to schools with mostly Patel students. His father also had many Patel friends. After migration, Idris maintained those contacts, both because they are enjoyable at a personal level and because he feels this contributes to the success of the family business in Gujarat: ‘Whoever is in the system is our friend. Some of our lifelong family acquaintances are now high up in the BJP [the ruling political party in Gujarat]. In this way they have come to know that not all Muslims are bad. This is why they support us when we want to get our work done.’

In April 2012, when Idris visited Anand again, he took me around in a car for a day to show me what he is doing during his extended stays in central Gujarat. During the day, he showed me a series of plots of land, some of which he inherited from his deceased father and some he acquired more recently. In the previous years, he has tried converting several plots from agricultural land into non-agricultural land in order to resell it at a higher price, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. As he drove me around, I understood that the investments are dispersed throughout the region but have, in the period after 2002, focused particularly on the peri-urban stretch now known as the ‘Muslim area’ of Anand town. Here, Idris’ father acquired agricultural plots with the purpose of converting it to non-agricultural use in order to divide them into smaller plots and sell to individual house builders. According to some of the local people who knew Idris,
he had been ‘making business’ out of Anand’s rapid growth at the time. Idris agrees but feels that this business has also contributed significantly to a larger purpose, that of resettling Vohras in Anand town after the 2002 displacements. He explains this as follows:

Nowadays, Anand has become the centre of Vohras in India. When I was three years old, there were about seventy Vohras in Anand! All our neighbours were Patels. During the riots in 2002, soooo many people came to Anand. Especially Vohras. At the time, my father and me thought we had to do something for these people. So we started a housing society. It was his vision and I agreed with it. He wanted to do something for all the displaced people who came here. This whole area was a jungle ten years ago. We bought this land at that time. We could acquire it from a farmer, because we have good relations with Hindus: a friend of my father owned this land. We bought it and sold it in smaller plots. After we sold the plots, people have been buying and selling with their plots and they have made some money out of that. We also encouraged them to do so: we told them: ‘buy two plots, sell one plot after a few years and with the profit build your house on the second plot!’ In the past five years, some plots have been sold five times. Now slowly slowly people are starting to build houses...

We bought this land on loan. Over the years we have paid 700,000 rupees on interest for that loan. In fact we have not made a profit, in the end we have made a loss on this property! But what is better, give 700,000 rupees to people for their consumption, or invest 700,000 rupees and now they live in 142 houses?

If Idris feels that he has not made profit on this particular land, or perhaps not enough, he presents the efforts as having a larger goal: they contributed to housing the newly arrived Muslims, who, in the process, made some extra money out of the buying and selling of the land.

An interview with a (Vohra) friend of Idris in London helped me to understand how this real estate business was related to the politics of place and community. He drew a map of the area where Idris’ property was located, and explained:

This area is located in Anand now, although part of it is still registered as agricultural land. Before, in this area, Patels were the landowners. Now, Vohras are becoming the landowners. Patels have gone abroad and they have

---

lost their interest in agriculture; they close the house, and nobody is there to take care of the farm. So, Vohras have bought some of their land and they try to convert it to non-agricultural purposes.

We can see now how Idris’ social networks enable his participation in real estate development in central Gujarat. In a sense, his actions are presented as a form of philanthropic brokerage between a Hindu farmer and the Vohra immigrants. Being embedded both in Patel and Vohra networks and thus able to get things done, Idris explains how the family investments in Anand rely on a well-maintained local network of acquaintances: relatives and friends, businessmen and politicians, Vohras and Patels. Throughout the day, Idris repeats: ‘I am good at networking. I can feel comfortable with anybody.’

With regard to the emplacement of his investments, Idris is again an interesting counter-case to discuss the assumption of primordial love for the ‘hometown’ or ‘home village’. Although he grew up in an older part of town with mainly Patel neighbours and talks affectionately about how the town used to be, he is not committed to the restoration of a lost past. During his extended stays in the town, Idris lives comfortably in the developing ‘Muslim area’, using it as a base from which to be active widely beyond it. Rather than holding on to family land, Idris is buying and selling properties where profits can be made, flexibly playing into socio-spatial transformations in the region. Rather than lamenting Anand’s ghettoisation, he goes with the flow and tries to make the most of the recent urban developments. For Idris, who had been repeatedly staying in Anand for long periods before I met him, there seems to be no distinction between the ‘desired home’ and the ‘lived home’ (Clifford 1994; Ramji 2006). He is still at home in Anand, his life develops along with the changing town.

Making a home in Anand town

Each of the ‘transnational agents of development’ I have described has their own goals and interests. There is no overlapping agenda, no commonly shared value, nor a common spatial approach towards the ‘home region’. Philanthropist Ayub aims uphold the ‘spirit of nationalism’ in the town where he grew up, *maulana* Rashad does not attach as much importance to his hometown but contributes to the survival of poor Muslims in different villages and small towns of central Gujarat through the mechanism of *zakat*, and businessman Idris has gone along with the changes in the region, contributing to urban developments in Anand town.
Overall, these results point in different directions, showing migrants are implicated both in continuing the presence of Muslims in the villages and towns where they are in a minority and in the residential concentration (or ‘gethoisation’) of Muslims in Anand town. While these case studies are not, as such, ‘representative’ in that each is unique and was not repeated elsewhere, the last strategy (of Idris) was quite common among the other migrants in the UK I talked to. Even if most other migrants do not see Anand as their place of origin, the town has become an important node in their transnational social life.

Previously I have explained how Anand town has become a ‘centre’ for the local Vohra community in response to developments of migration, displacement and residential segregation in the region. These developments affect the migrants when they visit central Gujarat, and they respond to them by turning their attention to Anand town. Next, I show how migrants feel about Anand town as an emerging regional centre and as an important node in the transnational Vohra family. How are transnational migrants making a home in Anand town?

Visiting migrants: making a (new) home

In the neighbourhood surrounding Majestic Housing Society, I regularly encountered men - migrants - staying in Anand for weeks or months on end. Most were retired men with a UK or US passport, who left a wife and children behind in the country of settlement in the winter period, others were middle-aged men who had settled abroad but used their frequent visits to India as a holiday, to escape from the constraints of hard work and family life. Some of them owned a house in Anand. Most of them were not originally from Anand but from other nearby towns and villages, or even from Mumbai. Why these men choose to stay in Anand when they ‘return home’ requires some explanation so in this section I focus on the perceptions of this group. At the end of the section, I contrast their views with those of the second generation and of the younger migrants more recently departed from Gujarat.

The redirection of attention from the ancestral village to Anand town is a response to the massive resettlement of Muslims: migrants have followed their relatives to the town and are making it their second home. One elderly migrant, who was born in Gujarat, grew up in East Africa and moved to the UK during his teenage years, explained how he feels about Anand in comparison to his natal village.

I am from the village of Sundargam.19 Now, nobody of my family lives in Sundargam. So obviously, I don’t have any feelings about Sundargam. Even

---

19 The name of the village has been changed to maintain anonymity.
though it is my birthplace. Because there is nobody there now! They all have shifted to Anand! (...) 

So how do you feel when you visit Anand?
I feel at home when I go to Anand... I feel at home (interview in London).20

On their holidays and during their post-retirement trips, migrants are turning to a town they never thought about much when they were young. While they may have visited Anand in the past, their sense of it as a key site of attachment and even belonging arose only after 2002, when their relatives moved, causing a previously insignificant town to suddenly emerge as a nodal point of their transnational lives.

This development, although it had already started before 2002, took off when Vohras abroad organised themselves to collect funds to assist the relief efforts Gujarat in 2002. All money collected in the UK was sent to Anand town, and a ‘relief committee’ consisting of personal acquaintances of some of the migrants. Initiatives started in the town that were partly funded or fully funded by migrants in the UK and/or USA include three housing societies built for riot victims, contributions to existing schools, hospitals and social welfare associations, and the establishment of new associations. While some of the charitable activities during that period have also been linked to villages,21 it is remarkable that so many migrants were prepared to invest in the town. Anand was where it all happened.

One of the reasons for this sudden interest in Anand was the arrival of many Vohra victims of the riots. These refugees included relatives of the migrants themselves, and this prompted the migrants to turn their attention to the town too. How this worked is shown in the following case:

Abdullahbhai and his sister Taslimben went to the UK in the 1960s as teenagers, when they moved there with their family from East Africa. Now they are retired. Having kept in touch with relatives in Gujarat throughout their lives, 2002 was a turning point in their interactions with the region. Some relatives relocated to Anand by their own means, others did so with some support from Abdullahbhai and Taslimben. Eventually most of their relatives, who had previously lived dispersed across various villages and towns, relocated to a single neighbourhood in Anand, where their new houses were within walking distance of each other.

---

20 This quote and my analysis of it has been published in Verstappen and Rutten (2015, 243-244).
21 In a village nearby Anand, a Muslim school was going to be opened and a fundraising was organised by relatives of the villagers in the UK. Despite the initial enthusiasm, the school never materialised as the expenses required were much greater than the capital injection.
Abdullahbhai and Taslimben responded by buying residences in Anand too. Abdullahbhai bought a flat in an apartment building within walking distance of their relatives, while Taslimben bought a bungalow which doubles as a holiday home and a family house for one of their relocated relatives. Taslim’s husband visits Anand regularly and then stays in the bungalow with his relatives, becoming part of their joint household during those periods.22

Abdullahbhai and Taslimben are two informants out of a group of sixteen settled Vohra households interviewed in the UK, whom I asked questions specifically about their investments in Anand town. In this group, ten of the sixteen households had invested in land or houses in the town. Most investments were made after 2002, and most of the investors trace their origins not to Anand, but to villages in the region. The reason for buying a house in Anand, migrants explain, is that in their holidays they like to be close to their relatives, who, in many cases, have also moved to Anand town. Anand is also a convenient base from which they can be in touch with relatives in it and in other towns and villages in central Gujarat, as well as in Vadodara and Ahmedabad, and from where they can make trips to Mumbai. Another reason for these investments is the lucrative real estate market that emerged in Anand around the turn of the century.

The three case studies described above are instructive. For businessman Idris, the involvement in Anand town was already illustrated. But it is significant that maulana Rashid has also chosen Anand town as the home base for his charitable association even though he is working in the wider region. He had tried to start up a health clinic in a nearby village, but this was difficult and failed because all his resources, knowledge and networks were concentrated in Anand town and then had to be transported to the selected village, causing much inconvenience for his volunteers and employees. It should be remembered that Rashad grew up in Mumbai, and has no ancestral roots in Anand town. Nowadays, however, when he travels to Gujarat, he stays in Anand.

As the case of philanthropist Ayub shows, not everyone feels at home in Anand town. As I have noted, Ayub is not only active in his home town. During the riots in 2002, he collected funds in his local mosque in his residential town near Philadelphia and sent the money to Anand to build a relief society there. In the same period, he was involved in several other charitable associations, including two new primary schools in Anand. However, in hindsight, he is extremely disappointed with how this developed. The first disappointment was that some of the projects were not carried out as he wanted. He had no power over the execution

22 This case study and my analysis of it has been published in Verstappen and Rutten (2015, 244).
and felt part of the money had been misused. One reason for this is that, compared to what he had in his original home town, he had no trusted networks in Anand town. The second disappointment was the stringent segregation of Hindus and Muslims in Anand, which, in hindsight, he feels sorry to have contributed to. When I talked to him in the USA, he spoke with disdain of the ‘ghetto’ of Anand, comparing it to the segregation in some American cities. During his return visits, he stays in his original hometown, where he feels he has more influence and can trust the people, and where Hindus and Muslims still live in mixed neighbourhoods.

Still, even critics like Ayub do not entirely avoid Anand. He is still involved in the town through a collaboration with cousin, who started up a transport business. This cousin wanted to start his business in Anand because ‘Anand has become the centre of business in Charotar’. With capital from his uncle, he built an office and keeps a separate room ‘for my mama [uncle], when he comes he can sit here’. Interestingly, through the choice of location in an area known as a ‘Hindu area’ and, by aiming mainly at Hindu customers, this initiative resisted the trend of segregation.

Anand’s growth and its special role in the 2002 episode as a site of safety and settlement has made it a place of return and investment for transnational migrants. Though the names of the villages and towns of origin are remembered abroad, it is in Anand that many locate their ‘return’ and are building a sense of home. For some migrants, the transformations in the region result in feelings of loss and disenchantment. They may distance themselves from Anand, but are still sometimes drawn to it through their social networks. For others, the sense of home in Anand is rather fulfilling. A lot can happen in ten years, so much that a sense of ‘home’ can be experienced in a place without personal history. This sense of homeness is, to a large extent, dependent on the personal contacts the migrants cultivate, which have come to be more and more centred on Anand town.

I can walk down the street there [in Anand], I can bet you, there will always be someone who will be related to me... We have good contacts there and [whenever we need anything] someone would mention a name: ‘Oh so-and-so is doing good work, I know him, he is so-and-so’s son, and was on the phone with him yesterday.’ That’s how it goes. It’s who you know. And everyone [in the UK] is in touch with everyone back home [middle-aged man, British citizen, brought up in Mumbai, born in a village in central Gujarat, has stayed in Anand during several holidays].

To contextualise, I now briefly compare the experiences of the first generation with the experiences of the second generation, and to the younger migrants who have
recently left central Gujarat. While their experiences are different, they confirm that Anand has also emerged for them as an important node in the transnational network.

The second generation: ‘not a holiday resort’

How do the children of the pioneering migrants, the second and later generations, look at Anand town? As my findings are based on very limited research among this group (see Chapter 2), I summarise them only briefly. Like Bolognani (2013) and Louie (2001, 369), I conclude that there are differences between the first and the later generation in terms of what they seek in the country of origin. While the first generation attaches much value to the maintenance and building of a relationship with relatives, the second generation visits the country of origin also to ‘relax’, ‘enjoy’, taking a holiday in a relatively cheap country. For those born or brought up in the UK or USA, the choice is between Anand and other places of interest in India, like Mumbai or the Taj Mahal, and/or between visiting India again and sightseeing in Europe, Turkey or Morocco, perhaps Dubai. Their feelings towards Anand reflect the position of it as a small town in an agricultural region, where there is ‘not much to do’. Meeting the relatives is enjoyable, they feel, but otherwise they easily get bored of the town. Some also feel that there is ‘a language barrier’ as well as a ‘culture barrier’ between themselves and their cousins in Anand.

Though very brief, these findings show that the emergence of Anand as a node of regional and transnational networks of Vohras also affects the holiday visits of the second generation. While Anand is not necessarily a preferred holiday resort for them, it is still a point of anchorage in their transnational family network. Insofar as I have spoken to this group, most informants had visited Anand as part of longer holiday trips to India. A few had even spent several weeks in the town or visited it repeatedly.

Youth from Anand in the UK: ‘it’s where I grew up, innit?’

Finally, how do the new migrants, the ‘students’ as they are called in the UK, look at Anand town? I discuss this category last because their feelings conform to the ideas already widely projected in the literature about ‘homelands’, ‘home villages’ and ‘home towns’, that is, the primordial notion of belonging. For young migrants, the prominence of Anand town as a site for Charotar Sunni Vohras is more self-evident than for the older migrants. If Anand has become a home town for elderly migrants, for the new generation of migrants who is now venturing abroad, it was already their home town before they left.

23 For those born and/or brought up abroad, finding a spouse is an additional reason for visiting. I have collected data on this theme but do not deal with it here.
A young man from this generation, met in the UK, explained his feelings towards Anand as follows:

I love [Anand], it’s my place. I am born there, so much memories innit? (…) This is better life here [in the UK] than in India. But, at the same time I cannot miss my Anand, that is part of my life. (…) I want to die in Anand. I told all my friends; if I get in an accident, please send me to Anand. (…) I really want to die in Anand. Definitely. I don’t want to die anywhere else in the world.

For young people brought up in Anand, Anand has emerged as a true hometown, even if their parental villages and/or their ataks pointed at other places of significance in the region. Anand has also become a point of significance even for those derived from other nearby towns. In London, I found young migrants from villages like villages Bedva, Narsanda and Bakrol, who could talk to each other for hours about the best ice-cream stall, the best pani puri stand and the best samosas in Anand. Their knowledge of Anand was shared, creating common ground, whereas their home villages were not known to all. Their shared knowledge stemmed from the fact that most of them had studied in the town. One of them had left her home village and relocated to Anand in 2002 after the destruction of her father’s business in the home village. As a result, she had lived in Anand for several years before marriage and moving to London. Among this group of friends, information on land prices and land deals was an important part of the conversation, especially as the youngest had recently bought a plot of his own in Anand ‘with money earned in London’ and was applauded for this success. There was also talk of perhaps opening a shop in the campus area of Vallabh Vidyanagar some day. This shows that, after going abroad, those who reside nearby, even those who have moved there in response to violence, recognise Anand as a place of special significance. While Anand may not be their home town, it functions as a key location in the memory of which they find a sense of togetherness.

Multiple centres of the transnational Vohra community

It is important to note here that Anand is not the only hub in the transnational family networks of Vohras. Although the town-centric approach of my research project may give the impression that Anand is the centre of the universe for Vohras,
and that all Vohras share a sense of belonging to it, this is definitely not the case. I think of Anand as one of several nodes in a spatially dispersed family network. To explain this, I need to explore the relationship between this town from the perspective of the migrants in relation to Mumbai and Karachi, to show how multiple nodes play a role in this spatially dispersed family life.

In the next part, I first discuss the view of the Mumbaiwallahs, for whom Anand has gained in significance too, and then the view of the Karachiwallahs, for whom Anand and central Gujarat has recently become almost inaccessible due to national border policies. This final part serves as a reminder that transnational place-making is constrained by governments, in particular by national borders. With all this transnational networking, donating, and investing, the impression may be that the ‘transnational agent of development’ is entirely free to travel. This would feed the idea that the power of nation-states is declining, a continuing debate in scholarship on globalisation (Guillén 2001; Cochrane and Pain 2004). This view of the mobile subject needs, however, to be contextualised. National boundaries do have a very significant effect on the transnational place-making practices in Anand town. I show this by drawing attention to the differences between the Mumbaiwallahs and the Karachiwallahs: one group, from Mumbai, participates with ease in the social life of Anand town, the other, from Karachi, is completely invisible in the town.

The Mumbaiwallahs’ perspective

Mumbai has already been mentioned repeatedly in this thesis. I have explained that it hosts a large Vohra community of at least 264 households,24 who have their own caste organisation, the ‘Mumbai Charotar Sunni Vohra Society’. Vohras from Mumbai routinely participate in the social life in Anand, and I regularly met retired men from Mumbai, some of whom owned a house in Anand and spent several weeks a year in Gujarat. An interview with the director of the Mumbai Charotar Sunni Vohra Society confirmed that exchanges between Mumbai and Anand are common, as are marriage exchanges and travel to and fro. All of this can be easily arranged as the train between the cities takes only five hours.

During the research visits to the UK and USA, Mumbai was also unavoidable in the conversations with migrants. Some explained how they divided their time between Mumbai and Anand during their holiday trips to India, others had most of their close relatives in Mumbai and were less acquainted with Anand. A man in this latter category was very disappointed by the fact that I had spent only a few days in Mumbai for my research project, since ‘Mumbai is a major city for the

---

Vohra community! On many occasions, Mumbai figured as part of the conversation.

The importance of Mumbai is illustrated next through an encounter with a migrant family in the UK. Ahmad was born in central Gujarat, in the maternal village of his mother. He lived in Mumbai till the age of seven, when his parents took him with them to the UK (in 1973). A snippet of the conversation shows how his family is linked to multiple places. During the initial part of the interview, the conversation focused on the ties of the family to Gujarat.

I am the only one who was born in India. My brothers and a sister were all born in the UK. But we have strong ties with Gujarat and back home. Although I didn’t go back since I came in ’73, I went back in 1987, and since then I have been going near enough every year. Often there is a marriage in the family and we have to attend, because we are like, related somehow, they’ll call us and we have to attend. Sometimes it’s just a holiday. Meet the family basically. All my mother’s side is in Anand, in and around Anand. So we go back and meet them. That’s it.

During this conversation, Ahmad’s wife Samin sat with us. At some point, they exchanged a few words with each other in a language I did not understand, and Ahmad apologised:

I am sorry... my wife and me lived in Bombay basically, so we don’t speak Gujarati to each other. [They both burst into laughter.]

Samin: It’s very strange. We always speak Urdu. I am born in Bombay. I am from Gujarat, my parents speak Gujarati as well, but I am living in Bombay, my friends, all, everybody was speaking Urdu, all the mix...

Ahmad: For seven years I lived in Bombay and I learned this language. So when I speak to Samin it’s like she’s from Bombay, I’m not going to speak with her in Gujarati! But with our mothers we both speak Gujarati.

The conversation shows that Mumbai and Anand/Gujarat are both important places in their transnational family network. While Ahmad’s marriage was arranged in Mumbai, the marriages of his younger brothers were arranged in Gujarat. Living close by each other and meeting each other at least every Friday, the families are closely intertwined and so are their transnational networks with Mumbai and Gujarat. Ties between London, Mumbai and Gujarat are strengthened through the marriages of the next generation, which brings in new migrants from Mumbai and Gujarat.
The case also shows that ‘Mumbaiwallahs’ are among the investors in Anand’s lively real estate market.

We’ve invested some money. Basically we bought land: ‘we will build a house’ or whatever. In Anand. (...) We bought quite a big plot, we wanted to build a house like this one over here [in the UK]. Huge plot.

Why Anand?
Because that’s where the family is. If we go there on holiday we go to Anand.

This is not the only case of a Mumbaiwallah buying a house in Anand town. Among the elderly and middle-aged transnational migrants ‘returning’ to Anand regularly, there are several who have been raised in Mumbai but who have nevertheless decided to buy a house or land in Anand, as a holiday home or as an investment.

For ‘Mumbaiwallahs’ directly from Mumbai or living abroad, investing in Anand is also attractive because of the price differential between Anand and Mumbai. Land prices in Mumbai are unaffordable, only for the hyper-rich, while land in Anand is still affordable, particularly when currency differentials between the UK and India (pounds/rupees) are taken into account. Moreover, people living in Mumbai are believed to be ‘very busy’ with their own lives, living in an expensive and congested city and working hard to make ends meet, and consequently not to have as much time and commitment as the relatives in Anand to help the migrants arrange all kinds of practical affairs. ‘Corruption’ was mentioned as another reason to prefer Anand to Mumbai for investment, not because there is less corruption in Anand but because trusted acquaintances in Anand had offered help in dealing with it.

When I discussed these developments more generally with a migrant in London, and asked why it was that Vohras from Mumbai would invest in Anand, I received the following answer:

That’s because all the Vohras are there! Especially since 2002. And this is because Anand is just so prosperous and fast-developing. Actually Anand is great for business. That is why... you know after 2002 when everybody came, it was in a way quite lucky for them. Just a few months and they could quickly pick up some business. Had they landed somewhere else, it might have been harder to restart their lives. Now everybody knows this. Anand is a blossoming economy. So everybody comes there to invest.

In summary, Anand is one of several hubs in the transnational family networks of Vohras. Mumbai is also an important hub. Another one might be Vadodara.
Baroda) – I have found but not fully explored links between Vohras and that city in this research. The recurrent presence of ‘Mumbaiwallahs’ in Anand again highlights how the town has become an attractive site for social networking and investment. The tendency of metropolitans to invest in a rural town rather than in the metropolis seems to confirm to a pattern of investment described elsewhere as a ‘small pond’ strategy (Lin 2014) in which mobility is used to maximise social and economic capital so that migrants become ‘big fish in a small pond’.

The Karachiwallahs’ perspective

After the Partition of British India into the two separate nations, India and Pakistan, many Muslims from India migrated to Pakistan. Insofar as Vohras joined this migration, they arrived in Karachi, a port city in Sindh. Karachi now hosts a Vohra community of approximately 500 households, who have their own community hall and an active community organisation, the Charotar Muslim Anjuman. There is a website of the Charotar Muslim Anjuman and the history of Vohra migration to Karachi is even explained on a ‘Sunni Bohra’ Wikipedia site. If Mumbai is one node of importance in the spatially dispersed Vohra family network, Karachi is another.

In the UK and in the USA, the link between relatives in Pakistan and India is clearly visible. In the UK, it was repeatedly pointed out to me that the Vohra community also included Vohras who had come to the UK via Karachi: I was told so-and-so was from Pakistan, or so-and-so was married to a Vohra from Pakistan. In the Vohra family list by the UK Vohra Association, of the 51 families that indicated their ‘Indian city/village’, 11 indicated that they are derived from Pakistan (6 listed ‘Karachi’, 1 listed ‘Lahore’, and 4 listed ‘Pakistan’, see table 5.2). Also in the USA, a significant group among the Vohras is derived from Karachi. Both in the UK and USA, marriages have occurred between Vohra youth from India and from Karachi, and through these (endogamous) marriages, family ties separated due to Partition have been re-established. The exchange of spouses between Pakistani and Indian families is not a new phenomenon, but seems to have received significant stimulus as a result of the proximity of relatives from both sites in the UK and the USA. The importance of Karachi as a nodal point for the Vohra community was made even more strongly to me when a migrant in the USA (from Gujarat) reading the abstract of my research project noted that I had mentioned all the migration destinations of the Vohra community except Karachi, and made me promise to correct this mistake in the thesis.

In Anand, Vohras from Karachi are completely invisible. They do not participate in the thriving real estate market, nor do they participate, as far as I’ve seen or heard, in marriage ceremonies and other family events in Anand town. Vohras of Pakistan are only publicly remembered in Anand in some history books, and through a story that circulates about ‘the first Vohra school’ in Anand, the I. J. Kapurwala Commercial Highschool – it is said that the school was funded by rich Vohras from Bombay and had to close when these philanthropists chose to move to Pakistan, cutting off the funds. In the end, I found two families in Anand who had married a daughter to a family in Karachi, but they were initially hesitant to talk to me about their visits to Pakistan. Once they opened up, their accounts showed they had enjoyed their brief visit to their relatives in Karachi, even if ‘there is no better place, no more pleasing place other than India in the world’. Both families told me it was best not to mention their visit to Pakistan to anyone.

Geographically, Karachi is not far from Anand town, less than 1,000 kilometres. However, it is not accessible from Gujarat directly because of a heavily guarded India-Pakistan border. The border crossings that had been used by the two families I met in Anand were Munabao in Rajasthan and Wagah in the Punjab. What the travellers found is that there are social and political barriers related to exchanges with Pakistan due to public and political anxiety. Marriage exchanges and family visits between the two countries are allowed, but visits to Pakistan are distrusted by the Indian state and police. For example, phone calls to Pakistan are not allowed on a mobile phone, and calling from public phone booths can lead to police inquiries about the purpose of the call. This why the two families mentioned above rarely phoned their relatives in Karachi: the police might have suspicions about their intentions. The difficult relations between India and Pakistan have a profound effect on social relations between Vohras in Karachi and Gujarat: ‘The older generation has no problem traveling between Pakistan and India, but the younger generation is scared to be in touch.’

The stringent border controls also have an effect on those living outside South Asia, as was explained to me in the USA. A middle-aged woman from Karachi explained that the Indian government will not grant her family a visa because of her Pakistani nationality (US nationals of Pakistani origin can hold dual nationality). She felt the situation had become increasingly tense and that this was related to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, when the attackers came from Pakistan by sea.28

---

I came to the USA when I was 18 years old. As a child in Karachi, my father used to receive guests from India frequently and he used to throw them big parties. We kept close contact with our relatives in India. This was because my father was the only one in his family who went to Pakistan in 1947, the others stayed in India. My father did well in Karachi, he had a thriving business in the port. He used his wealth to support a lot of people in India, like he helped one of our cousins to start up a business, things like that. When we were children, we used to travel to India frequently. We used to stay in Ahmedabad, Surat, or in Chaklasi [a village near Anand]. After moving to the USA, we still travelled to India every now and then. But three years ago when we applied for a visa, we didn't get it anymore. We paid 1200 dollars for our visa application, but we didn't get it and there was no refund. They told us to denounce our nationality but we're not going to do that for a holiday! So we went to Turkey that year and we had a wonderful holiday. There are so many nice countries besides India! But still our relatives call us regularly: ‘When are you coming? When are you coming?’ They keep inviting us. But what can we do?

In summary, Vohra migrants in the UK and the USA produce a view of a transnational Vohra network, scattered across multiple places yet tied together through marriages, in which selected cities function as anchor points: these nodes of significance include Karachi, Mumbai, and Anand, and, perhaps to some extent, Vadodara and Ahmedabad too. There are thus multiple nodal points in the transnational Vohra family network, of which Anand town is an important one. However, the border between India and Pakistan creates a break in this transnational network. As a result, Mumbaiwallas do, but Karachiwallahs do not, participate in transnational place-making in Anand town.
Conclusion
Through an ethnography of networks and places, I have contributed to the ‘placial turn’ in studies of transnational migration (Gielis 2009). The region I have studied can be seen as a ‘zone of awkward engagement’ (Tsing 2005, x–xi). It is a zone of ‘engagement’ because it draws different actors together, connecting villagers and townspeople residing in central Gujarat with people residing elsewhere, and the engagement is ‘awkward’ because each of the actors has their own goals and interests, and there is no overlapping political agenda or commonly shared value as such. Still, through their combined efforts, their collaborations contribute significantly to the making of place. Through real estate investments and through charitable initiatives, a form of claiming and colonising space takes place (Harney 2006, 34–35), which contributes, overall, to the visibility of ‘Muslims’ in the central Gujarat region, maintaining a niche for Muslims in the villages and small towns of central Gujarat and building a new home in Anand town.

Both the continuing presence of Muslims in the villages and towns and the processes of urbanisation and ‘getthoisation’ have been important themes in the discussions with the transnational migrants. How these developments are experienced when migrants travel to central Gujarat has been illustrated through the case studies of the philanthropist Ayub, the maulana Rashad, and the businessman Idris. Ayub’s love for his hometown, which has to be defended and
legitimised vis-à-vis fellow villagers, has turned into a mission to maintain the legitimacy of the Muslim presence and influence in the town and in the nation. In the case of businessman Idris, I have shown how the opposite development is being sponsored by migrants through investment in real estate and by transferring the land from agricultural to non-agricultural, from Patel to Vohra, from Hindu to Muslim. This development is then supported in smaller ways by other migrants who invest in a house or plot or who have helped relatives to make the move through remittances, and has economic and symbolic value for the residents, whose sense of safety and comfort in the ‘Muslim area’ of Anand town. Hafiz Rashad’s distribution of zakat in the villages reveals that the town remains connected to the rural hinterland. For him, Anand has become a safe and comfortable home base where he stays during his visits and from where trusted relatives and friends shape his engagement with the wider region. For these trusted associates, working with Rashad is a way of ‘doing good’ in their natal village/town and in other nearby villages where they support the most destitute among Muslims, sustaining their survival in the region despite having moved to Anand themselves.

The empirical data presented in this chapter indicates that Anand has become an important hub for both the local Vohra community and for the transnational Vohra family. I have come to think of Anand as one of several nodes in a spatially dispersed family network, in addition to Mumbai and Karachi - and perhaps Vadodara and Ahmedabad could be added too. There are thus multiple nodal points in the transnational Vohra family network, although the border between India and Pakistan created a break in this network, keeping Karachi- but not Mumbiawallahs from participating in transnational place-making in Anand town.

In this chapter, I have drawn connections between the experiences of migrants acting as ‘transnational agents of development’ and spatial transformations in the region of origin in relation to localised power dynamics and community politics. The findings disrupt the binary framework between a (primordial or nostalgic) home town and a city abroad projected by migrants derived from dominant castes/groups in their home regions. To understand the case study of Charotar Sunni Vohras, it has been necessary to pay close attention to localised forms of mobility and more fluid attachments to land. My findings show that hometowns can be actively and reflexively ‘made’, even if notions of (lost) ‘roots’ remain relevant. Both processes occur simultaneously: an awareness of (lost or maintained) original home villages and the creation of a new hometown. The newness of Anand as a recently emerged ‘home’ of Charotar Sunni Vohras thus challenges primordialist
assumptions in studies of migration and development and highlights the changing and morphing character of ‘homeland’ affiliations (Falzon 2003; Morawska 2011) by showing how hometowns can be actively ‘made’.