

'Feeling good or at home?'

The role of social relations in the homemaking processes of
Latin-American female migrants in the Netherlands

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Cover: Latin-American women who are living in the Netherlands
Photos: Alista Leemhuis-Hut & private archive of the women

A ghost

A ghost hunts me...

I am afraid, uncertain and I feel lost at an unknown planet
This ghost has many faces and it speaks to me in a strange language
It tortures me and it makes me scared.
It says: "I want to know who you are and why you came here"

I am a woman who fell in love with one of your soldiers
When I met him, blood was burning in my veins
I only knew that I wanted to be with him till death
I followed my husband and he is born here

And who am I?

I am a woman who wants to scream:
"Yes, I miss my family, the colours of my country,
the sound of the guitars and trumpets,
the smell of fresh coffee that my father used to make every morning.
I miss my mother very much, the woman who gave me my life!

I miss the warmth of Mexican parties!
The word 'Mexico' is tattooed in my heart and that hurts
I am so far away

I don't know anymore exactly who I am...
I had a weird metamorphose
I still know that I want to be with my husband till death.

I just know that I am a woman, with fears
and with thousands of feelings at the same time.
A woman with hope, expectations and dreams of a good future.

I am a woman...just like you

- A 'Latina monologue' at the International Day of Women, Eindhoven, March 2009 -

Abstract:

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands, this thesis studies the relation between the homemaking processes of Latin-American female migrants in the Netherlands and their social relations. It analyzes the homemaking processes of Latin American women in the Netherlands in relation to past and present experiences of the women and their agency in this process. This study contributes to a better understanding of the key concepts of home and homemaking from an ethnographic point of view and contributes to the discussion about the relation between homemaking and social relations. While many Latin-American women think of home as feeling good, this thesis shows that the concepts of home and homemaking are much more complicated than it looks like at first sight and that there is a difference between feeling good in a 'new' country and feeling home. By using the terms of 'feeling good' and 'feeling home', this thesis shows the different ways in which different social relations influence homemaking.

Resumen:

Esta tesis estudia la relación entre el proceso de "*homemaking*" en migrantes Latinoamericanas en Holanda y sus relaciones sociales, fundamentándose en una investigación etnográfica. Analiza el proceso de "*homemaking*" de mujeres Latinoamericanas en Holanda en relación con sus experiencias pasadas y presentes, y sus agentes en este proceso. Este estudio contribuye a comprender mejor los conceptos de *home* y *homemaking* desde un punto de vista etnográfico. Además aporta a la discusión sobre el vínculo entre *homemaking* y relaciones sociales. Mientras que muchas mujeres latinas consideran "*home*" como un sentimiento, esta tesis muestra que los conceptos de "*home*" y "*homemaking*" son más complicados que lo que aparentan a primera vista . Pues hay una diferencia entre "sentirse bien" en el nuevo país y "sentirse como en casa". Utilizando ambos términos: "sentirse bien" y "sentirse como en casa", esta tesis demuestra las diferentes maneras que las relaciones sociales influyen en el proceso de *homemaking*.

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1. Introduction

“When I migrated to the Netherlands I left many things behind: my roots, my family, many friends and one of the most beautiful periods in my life. But with me I took my certificates, my books, my knowledge, my memories and a lot of courage. My Dutch husband and my three children they are the most important thing in my life. And with them and through them I also have new roots in the Netherlands. Roots that enlarge through my grandchildren. Who ever migrated to another country knows that migrating means to share, but also to add. Living in between two worlds or two places. I experienced this myself: if I am in the Netherlands, I miss Brazil, but if I am in Brazil I miss the Netherlands.”¹

Latin-American women in the Netherlands feel in between two countries. While they can feel good in the Netherlands, they never feel completely at home. This research is about how these women² try to make themselves at home and which role their different relationships play in this process.

Studying the homemaking processes of these women and the role of social relations in it is both socially and academically relevant for a number of reasons. Socially it is important because it can give insight in the problems with integration that ethnic minority groups in Dutch society face. It can also give specific information on the needs of Latin-American female migrants, which can be of importance for different organisations in the Netherlands that focus on the group of Latin-Americans or a part of it. Academically this research is interesting because while there is done research at the integration of other migrants group in the Netherlands, ethnographic research at homemaking processes and the role of social relations in this is scarce. This study thus contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon of homemaking from an ethnographic point of view. Furthermore it contributes to the discussion about the relation between homemaking and social relations.

Homemaking can be placed in the broader debate on migration. The process of homemaking is an important part of the integration in a ‘new’ country. It is a concept through which it is possible to understand how migrants use their homeland experiences in constructing a new life in another country (Espiritu, 2003:2). Social relations are an important part of this homemaking process (Massey, 1992; Easthope, 2004) and thus important to understand when looking at homemaking. It is also very interesting to look at the role of social relations in homemaking because the social life within the Netherlands differs so much from that in Latin-American countries. In this research I focus on three key concepts; namely home, homemaking and social relations. To understand the homemaking processes of Latin-American women it is necessary to know what home is. These two concepts can thus not be seen separately. I will now introduce these two concepts and relate them to social relations to get a better understanding of the framework in which this research takes place.

‘Home’ is a contested concept within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, psychology, human geography, history, architecture and philosophy (Easthope, 2004:134; Mallett, 2004:62). Nowadays scholars claim that ‘home’ is a multi-dimensional concept and in this view the physical dwelling is only one aspect of home (Mallett, 2004:68). Next to this spatial element of home, there are also the social and the psychological element which are important in studies on ‘home’ and in

¹ A part out of the ‘Latina monologue’ of Lyla, a Brazilian woman - Eindhoven, 8 March 2009

² The names of the women in this thesis are all pseudonyms

the homemaking of Latin-American women in the Netherlands. These three elements are noticeable when looking at the different approaches that exist in the literature on 'home'.

Four main perspectives on 'home' can be distinguished out of the literature. Saunders and Williams see home as a 'socio-spatial system' that is a fusion of the house - which is the spatial unit - and the household - which is the social unit. They define home as "the physical setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced" (1988:82). According to them it is necessary to develop a complex view of home that takes into account the interaction between place and social relationships (Saunders and Williams, 1988).

The second approach is called the 'psycho-spatial approach' and looks at one's psychological experiences of home (Easthope, 2004). Home can be seen in this approach as a haven or as a place where one feels ontological secure (Mallett, 2004:70). The home is understood as a place that offers "freedom and control, security and scope for creativity and regeneration" (Mallett, 2004:71). This place does not automatically refer to house, because 'house' can also be associated with for example violence or sexual abuse (Mallett, 2004:72).

The third approach of 'home' is the 'emotional warehouse' outlined by Gurney (2000). He underlines the importance of emotions in understanding home. He describes home as "an emotional warehouse" (2000:34). Gurney thinks emotions - like love, intimacy, family, anger, depression - are important in the construction of the meaning of home. In his view home and being at home is 'a matter of affect or feeling' (Mallett, 2004:79). This approach differs from the psycho-spatial approach in its focus on emotions. In the psycho-spatial approach it is only about the feeling of security that people have in a certain place or with certain people. The emotive approach however, focuses also on other emotions.

The fourth and final approach is of Somerville, who has combined the above mentioned three approaches. He thinks that the approaches in themselves are insufficient to explain the concept of home because they all just focus on one small part of the concept (1992, 1997). According to Somerville it is important to take in mind what home means to different people and to try to explain these differences. He thinks this is important to understand the many differences that exist between people and the different meanings they give to home (1992, 1997).

Although home is thus seen in different ways, I agree with Somerville that all of the approaches focus on small parts of the concept of 'home'. Out of the four approaches, I distinguish three elements of home in my research; namely a spatial, a social and a psychological element, which all play a role in the homemaking processes of Latin-American women in the Netherlands. Furthermore like Somerville, I think it is important to take into account the differences between the women and their homemaking processes. Past and present experiences play an important role in this. According to Gorashi "being at home is linked to a domain where the past and the present are mediated through present choices and networks" (Gorashi, 2003:133). Different personal migration histories of the Latin-American women, but also their present experiences influence their homemaking processes and are looked at in this research.

The three elements of home distinguished out of the literature are evident in the lives of the women and consist out of their houses (spatial element), their social relations inside and

outside the households (social element) and their feelings and emotions that home can bring along (psychological element). Homemaking is defined as “the process by which diverse subjects imagine and make themselves at home in various geographic locations” (Espiritu, 2003:2). Latin-American women enter this process when they migrate. After this migration they do not feel at home in their new setting, but also feel a distance to their old setting. The women search for a replacement of their old home and automatically insert the process of homemaking (Espiritu, 2003:2). Many authors have written about this process by using the theory of space and place, because the ability to make space into place is central to the process of homemaking (Kline, 2008:12). In this theory place can refer to home, as home can be seen as a particular type of place (Easthope, 2004:137).

Homemaking is about giving meaning to a space. Space is “a construct with spatial coordinates or boundaries with which a landscape is set apart from others based on assumed commonalities or differences”. Place more often refers to a ‘lived’ space instead of an ‘empty’ space (Sanabria, 2007:20). Places can be understood as ‘nodal points within networks of social relations that have a particular significance for a person or group of people’ (Easthope, 2004:137). By Doreen Massey the process of making place out of space, which refers to the homemaking process, is seen as a social construct in which individuals actively play an important role and make places by giving space a meaning (1995).

Latin-American women thus are able to influence their homemaking processes themselves and have agency in this process. “Agency is the capacity of human beings to affect their own life chances and those of others and to play a role in the formation of the social realities in which they participate” (Barfield, 1997:4). According to Castles migrants are not just “isolated individuals who react to market stimuli and bureaucratic rules, but social beings who seek to achieve better outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities through actively shaping the migratory process” (2004:209). In their homemaking processes, the Latin-American women can choose which cultural characteristics they want to retain or to reject (Kline, 2008:16). By looking at homemaking it is thus important to look at how the women use the agency they have in this process. Nevertheless, Dutch society can also influence this process. The society that receives the migrant can make or not make for a certain extent a home for migrants through inclusion or exclusion (Espiritu, 2003). To take the influence of past and present experiences of the women and their agency in the homemaking process into account, I look at the greater socio-cultural system of Latin-American female migrants in this research. The social relations of the women are an important part of this.

Social relations are important means in the construction of place or home (Easthope, 2004; Massey, 1992; Saunders & Williams, 1988). As elaborated on earlier in this introduction social relations inside and outside the household are an important part of ‘home’. Massey and Easthope both state that social relations help construct, maintain and develop home (Massey, 1992; Easthope, 2004). Also Latin-American women use their social relations in trying to make themselves at home in the Netherlands. To understand their homemaking processes it is necessary to look at how they use these social relations.

In the social networks and social capital literature social relationships are generally seen as social ties, which can consist out of any type of social relationship in any context, between two members of a network of any kind. These social ties can be on the same level of commitment, but the relationship can also be dissimilar (Van der Gaag, 2005:23). There is also a difference in the strength of the relationships (Van der Gaag, 2005:24). The one relationship can be more intense than the other. This means that different relationships also influence the lives of the Latin-American women and their homemaking processes in another way.

In migration studies namely a lot is written about the role of social networks in the reasons for migration (Levitt, 2001; Fog Olwig, 2003). Portes and Brown however, explain how migration not only depends on social networks, but also creates them (Portes, 1995:22; Brown, 2002:8). First it is seen as a network-creating process because it develops a web of contacts in and between places of origin and destination. Second it is a network-dependent process because "the volume and direction of migration are affected by information, ideas, and resources embedded in networks that link family, friends, and neighbours" (Brown, 2002:8). This network-dependent and network-creating process of migration is visible in the lives of the Latin-American women in the Netherlands as well as they all know people in the Netherlands before their migration and build social networks after their migration.

People participate in diverse social relations with families; local communities; institutions of religions, etc. (Madsen & Van Naerssen, 2003:62). For Latin-American women these are with their families in the Netherlands, their families in the countries of origin, Latin-Americans in the Netherlands and Dutch people. These relations consist out of the past and the present (Ghorashi, 2003) and span several societies (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002:10). For Latin-American women in this research this means relations of before and after their migration and relations in Latin-American and in the Netherlands.

Migrants and also Latin-American female migrants in the Netherlands, often search for communities within the country they moved to, where the members share a common country of origin or a shared identity (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002:10; Ahmed, 1999:336). Like most migrants, the women also remain strong social ties with their parents and family in the country of origin. Globalization intensified these ties because the "time-space compression, internet and e-mail have brought 'home' within easy reach wherever one stays in the world" (Madsen & Van Naerssen, 2003:68). Nevertheless, the longer migrants live and work in their new country and society, they will develop their identities on the basis of dual attachments to both countries: the country of origin and the country they migrated to (Madsen & Van Naerssen, 2003: 68).

To be able to understand the homemaking processes of Latin-American women in the Netherlands it is thus necessary to look at the different relationships the women have inside and outside the house, from before and after their migration and that span several societies. While social relations are an important part of the homemaking process of Latin-American women it is necessary to look at the broader socio-cultural systems of the women to understand the whole process with all its aspects and influences. The context in which this research takes place is important for a better understanding of these homemaking processes.

Context of research population

Two-third of the Latin-American migrants in the Netherlands is female. In 2008 there were 27.236³ Latin-American female migrants of the first generation⁴ living in the Netherlands. The majority of them come from Brazil, Colombia and the Dominican Republic. Mainly within the groups from these three countries and from Peru we can speak of feminized migration (Cordaid, 2007:11). The diversity within the total group of Latin-American women is big, because of the different countries they come from and their different histories of migration, which causes their unique homemaking processes.

Latin-Americans migrate for different reasons. Earlier migration streams from out Latin America were caused in the 1970s by the dictatorial regimes and the violence in Latin America⁵. Nowadays most Latin-Americans come to the Netherlands to start a family here, to become au pair, to do an internship, to study or to work⁶. The major reason for the women to come to the Netherlands is to marry a Dutch man and start a new life in the Netherlands. This trend is also noticeable within the group of Latin-American women in this research of which ninety percent marries a Dutch man. The amount of women that comes here to do domestic work however is growing. Most of them are here only for a couple of years to send money to their family. Though I know of the existence of Latin-American women that work in the sex industry in the Netherlands, they are not the focus of my research.⁷ Namely because they often only stay here for a couple of years and thus do not start a new life in the Netherlands. In this research I focused on the women who came to the Netherlands with the intention to build a new life here.

To understand the homemaking processes of Latin-American women it is important to look at the structures that shape these processes and the agency women have in it. It is therefore necessary to look at the past, by looking at the women's personal migration histories and at the present by understanding how their lives look like now and how Dutch society and its attitude towards migrants influences their homemaking processes. These past and present experiences, together with the agency women use, shape their homemaking process and needs to be studied. To understand the context in which the Latin-American women have to be studied in this research a short introduction of the changes in Dutch immigration and integration policies and how it influenced the thought about migrants is provided in this introduction. This can be seen as part of the present experiences of Latin-American women.

Since the 1960s the Netherlands has a positive immigration deficit which is rising. However, in the 1960s and 1970s migration was only minimally regulated in the Netherlands. The central idea in this time was that "the Netherlands was not -and should not be- an immigration country"

³ www.cbs.nl - visited on June 16th 2009 - the number does not cover Suriname, the Dutch Antilles, Aruba, Belize, Guyana, French Guyana and the Caribbean Islands, with the exception of Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

⁴ I follow the definition of the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (CBS), which defines the first generation migrants as people who themselves were born in another country and who have at least one parent that is born in a foreign country as well.

⁵ <http://www.noticias.nl/search/article.php?id=1365> - visited on June 16th 2009

⁶ www.cbs.nl - visited on June 16th 2009

⁷ More information on Latin-American prostitutes in the Netherlands can be found in the study of Janssen. She studied Latin-American women in the European prostitution. At the base of thirty personal histories, this study provides a description of the lives and experiences of Latin-American women who work in the prostitution in the Netherlands and other European countries. (M.L.P.C. Janssen, 2007 *'Reizende Sekswerkers. Latijns-Amerikaanse vrouwen in de Europese prostitutie*)

(Bruquetas-Callejo et al., 2007:4). The migrants in this time were seen as guests, which imply that they should return (Gorashi, 2003:148). It took till the 1980s that presence of long term immigrants was recognised. In this decade integration policies were implemented together with more restrictive immigration policies (Bruquetas-Callejo, 2007:4). In the beginning of the 1990s criticism on the policies of the 1980s was growing. In 1994 there was adopted a new integration policy. This policy focused on the economic activation of individual migrants, on good-citizenship and self-responsibility. It was also in this year that the "*inburgeringscursus*" was implemented (Bruquetas-Callejo, 2007: 17-18). This is a course with an exam about the Dutch language and culture which is obligated for the majority of migrants and also for the Latin-American women who come to the Netherlands.

A series of events in the years after, like the 9/11 attacks in the USA, the death of Pim Fortuyn, and the murder on Theo van Gogh, had their effects on Dutch society and politics. According to many Dutch citizens and politicians the integration and immigration policies of the last decades had failed and this image reinforced a new policy discourse. Namely the tension between the processes of immigration, participation and the regulations of the social constitutional state are the motive for a constantly debate about the right discourse. From 2000 there is a focus in the debates on returning. The concentration of the debates in the Netherlands around returning of migrants to their countries excludes any kind of integration (Gorashi, 2003:148). In the Netherlands there is an "unwillingness to accept and welcome" the long-term stay of migrants. Because of this attitude of Dutch society with regard to migrants, migrants feel that they do not belong to Dutch society (Gorashi, 2003:149). In this thesis I will take into account and further discuss this influence that Dutch society has on the lives of Latin-American women in the Netherlands.

Methodology

Based on the literature and the context described above I formulated the following central question: *How to describe and understand the ways in which Latin-American female migrants use their social relations in their process of homemaking?* I divided this question into two themes on which I focused during my fieldwork. First of all I am interested how the homemaking processes of Latin-American women are shaped. I therefore looked at their past and present experiences and the agency women have in the process of homemaking. Furthermore I focused on the role of the spatial, social and psychological element in how the women try to make themselves at home.

In total, I had thirty-eight in-depth interviews with thirty-three Latin-American women, from fourteen different countries. With two of these women I did a full life story interview. With another ten women I had a focus group meeting in which different topics in small groups were discussed. The women varied in age of twenty-one to sixty-four and were living in the Netherlands since two months to thirty-three years. I got in contact with these women through different organisations which focus on Latin-Americans in the Netherlands, through visiting cultural activities,

through different contacts I already had and made during the research and through my voluntary work for *Casa Migrante*⁸ in Amsterdam.

Through participant observation, I visited Latin-American women in their houses throughout different places in the Netherlands. I spend time there, talking with them, cooking and eating together and watch photographs of their country of origin, family and friends. I also participated in some other activities outside the house like shopping, visiting a concert of a Latin-American band and by visiting a woman at her work.

Past experiences play an important role in the homemaking processes of Latin-American women, as discussed earlier (Gorashi, 2003). To be able to understand the role that the past plays in the homemaking process I used "history-in-person" (Holland et al., 2001; Holland & Lave, 2001). Someone's "history-in-person is the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in present" (Holland et al., 2001; 18). By telling the personal migration histories of the women, their history-in-person will become visible and it is possible to understand the choices the women make on the base of their past and present experiences.

Chapter outline

To understand how the homemaking process of Latin-American women in the Netherlands is shaped, in chapter two I will elaborate on past and present experiences of the women and their agency in the homemaking process. On the basis of "history-in-person" I will describe the personal migration histories of the women and their present experiences will be discussed by elaborating on the influence of Dutch society on their homemaking processes. Furthermore I will discuss the agency the women have in the process of homemaking and the ways in which their past and present experiences influence the use of it. This chapter will help to provide a better understanding of the concept of homemaking and the ways in which different factors in the past and present experiences and the agency of the women shape this process.

Chapter three and four are about how Latin-American women in the Netherlands try to make themselves at home. I will discuss what home means to the women and how they try to make themselves at home in relation to the psychological and spatial element of home. The social element, which consists of the social relation inside and outside the household, will be discussed in a separate chapter. In this fourth chapter I will look at the different social relations that the women have, the division of these relations in space and time and the importance of these relations to the women. Chapter three and four together will provide a better understanding of the complexity of the concept of home and the relation between feeling good and home.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will provide an answer on the central question of this research and make clear how this research contributes to a better understanding of the concepts of home and homemaking in relation to social relations.

⁸ *Casa Migrante* is an organisation in Amsterdam with free ingress for Spanish speaking migrants in the Netherlands. There is a possibility to follow Dutch or English classes and the organisation helps migrants with problems they face in daily life.

2. How the process of homemaking is shaped

It is the 8th of March and I am at the celebration of the 'international women day' in Eindhoven. Fourteen women of the *Centro Latinoamericano de Orientación (CLO)*⁹ tell their stories about their migration from Latin-America to the Netherlands. I am affected by the beautiful, but also impressive stories of the women. I listen to Silvia who tells about her migration history and her life in the Netherlands: *"I am Silvia and I come from Colombia. Ten years ago, in 1998, I lived in Colombia en planned to go to the beautiful mountains of my country to walk and camp there for the weekend. Then my phone rang, it was my boss, she had a foreign visitor and asked me to accompany him to the mountains. So, I went together with my friends and the foreigner, a Dutch man, to the mountains. (...) That is how I met Bert. Three years later in 2001, I came because of love to the Netherlands to build a new life together with Bert. I took with me a suitcase full of expectations and salsa music. I left behind my mother, family, colleagues, my dog and a successful career. After almost eight years I reached again a good level of life by study and working hard. It cost me a lot of difficulty and tears. But now I have a good job again, loving friends and I can travel a lot and have fun with my partner. Still, I would like to hear more often in Dutch society: "What kind of job do you have?" instead of "Do you like it better that you may live in the Netherlands instead of in the poverty in your country?"*¹⁰

The process of homemaking of Latin-American women is shaped by past and present experiences and the agency women have in this process. In this chapter I will look at these past and present experiences of Latin-American women I met, to understand how their homemaking process in the Netherlands is shaped. By means of revealing "history-in-person" (Holland & Lave, 2001; Holland et al., 2001) I will discuss how past experiences of the women influence their homemaking processes. Their present experiences will be discussed by looking at their lives in Dutch society. These past and present experiences together make how women act and practice their agency in their homemaking processes (Barfield, 1997; Gorashi, 2003; Holland et al., 2001; Holland & Lave, 2001).

2.1 Past experiences

Me: "Why did you come to the Netherlands?"

Rosita: "Because I got to know a Dutch man"

We laugh

*Rosita: "Yes, yes, like all of the other Latin-American women I came to the Netherlands because of love. I never thought of going to the Netherlands before. When you live in Peru and you look at the map, you think: The Netherlands? Why the Netherlands? And thus you never go to the Netherlands. But I got to know my Dutch husband in Peru."*¹¹

Like Rosita all of the women have their own reasons for migration to the Netherlands. The reasons Latin-American women have for their migration, but also the broader migration histories of the women are important to create a framework through which we can understand the homemaking processes of the women. These histories influence the choices the women make in the present. By telling the personal stories of the women I spoke to, different factors which influence the homemaking processes will become visible. The migration histories of the women are about their background and the reasons they have to migrate.

Background in the country of origin plays an important role in the migration to and the homemaking process in the Netherlands of the Latin-American women. Looking at the background of the women I spoke to, the majority comes from middle class families in their country of origin. For

⁹ *Centro Latinoamericana de Orientación* is an organisation who has as its goal to improve the lives of Latin-American women in Eindhoven by giving them a place to share their language and culture and to make sure that the family of the women understands them.

¹⁰ 'Latina monologue' of Silvia - 8 March 2009

¹¹ Interview with Rosita - 8 April 2009

many women this background decides whether it is possible to come to the Netherlands or not. The women who migrated to work in the Netherlands had this possibility because they belonged to the middle class. When they would have belonged to the lower class, they would have never had the opportunity to migrate to Europe, because a lack of money and of education. For the women who came to marry a Dutch man their background is often crucial in their migration as well. First, some women met their husband while travelling, which is only possible because they had the money to travel. Other women met their lovers at their work in their country of origin. Without having money and a good education they would not have been able to get a job where they would meet people from all over the world.

There is a relation between the backgrounds of the women and their reason of migration. The women who migrated to work or as political refugees all belonged to the lower middle class, while the majority of the women who came because of love, belonged to the higher middle class. Belonging to the higher middle class, still does not mean having a lot of money, but often enough money to go to university and to finish studies. The lower middle class is described by Monica:

“Living in the lower middle class means that you are not as poor as the people of the lower class who live in the slums, but you are not rich either. I could not go to university because I had to work, otherwise there would not have been enough money for my family. Still, I finished my secondary school, when I would have belonged to the lower class, this would not have been possible. We had just enough money to pay our food and the rent of the house. We had to work hard for it.”¹²

As is evident in the story of Monica, people of the lower middle class more often are not in the position to finish university, because they have to work to be able to eat and pay the rent. That is why the majority of the women - the ones who migrated for love - often are higher educated than the women who migrated to work or as political refugee. Still, all women had the opportunity to finish secondary school.

In their country of origin the women all studied or had a job. The fact that the majority of the women I spoke to is higher educated is in contrast with the image in the Netherlands of immigrants as being ‘stupid and poor’. In the literature we see that namely marriage migration is often seen as an attempt of unskilled women in the south to escape the poverty (Riaño, 2003:3). Riaño however states that many female migrants are in fact highly skilled and that their migration is principally not motivated by economic reasons (Riaño, 2003:1). She did research at the migration of skilled Latin-American women to Switzerland. What she saw is that marriages are playing a decisive role in women’s migration (Riaño, 2003:2), which is also true for the Latin-American women in the Netherlands I spoke to.

The majority of the Latin-American women in the Netherlands I met, migrated for reasons of love. Ninety percent of them met a Dutch man and decided to live with him in the Netherlands. The other women I spoke to migrated to work here or were political refugees in the 1970s and 1980s. The reasons behind the migration of the women is often more complex than it looks like. The women all have their personal stories in which different factors play a role in the decision to migrate. In this paragraph I will look at the three different reasons women in this research

¹² Interview with Monica - 26 May 2009

mentioned for their migration to the Netherlands and the stories behind these reasons to get to know the women better and to understand the role that different reasons can play in the homemaking process.

The few women I met who migrated for political reasons all are here for more than twenty-five years. Three come from Chile and one comes from El Salvador. All of them migrated because the Netherlands granted political asylum to one of their family members who were political prisoners. Rosa and Isabel are two sisters, whose father was a political prisoner in Chile during the regime of Pinochet. Rosa tells about their migration to the Netherlands:

*"My father was political active in Chile before and during the regime of Pinochet as a Mapuche Indian. When Pinochet came to power in 1973, my father was in a resistance movement of farmers. He printed pamphlets and asked people to demonstrate. He got arrested and had to spend his whole life in prison or could choose to be banned to another country. It was a hard decision for him, because his country is very important to him. He chose to move to another country. From out the Netherlands there was a delegation that came to Chile and looked which prisoners could come to the Netherlands. My father and his family could come to the Netherlands. When we arrived in the Netherlands my parents choose to live in Delfzijl, where the nature remembered them a bit of Chile. The embassy helped us a lot with our migration to the Netherlands, but also with starting a new life in the Netherlands."*¹³

As the story of Rosa shows it is hard for political refugees to leave their country, knowing that it is not possible to go back. The fact that political refugees are banned from their country against their will has influence on their homemaking processes. Isabel explains:

*"The people who are here for political reasons do not want to go to the Netherlands, but they have to. They do not want to learn Dutch, but they have to. They want to go back to their country, but they cannot. They cannot even visit their family."*¹⁴

The fact that the people themselves do not want to migrate, makes it more difficult for them to make themselves at home. For some women this result in living in their own build communities, without having a lot of contact with Dutch people.

Alisa is one of these women. She migrated in 1976 from Chile to the Netherlands because her husband was a political prisoner. She was very happy, because their life in Chile was very difficult. Still, she really held on to Chile, to her language and her culture in the Netherlands. For Alisa her language and culture are her home. She only had contact with other people from Chile in the Netherlands, because the contact made her feel at home. The fact that she was always in this group did not make her wanted to integrate in Dutch society. After a couple of years, when she and her husband separated and she moved to another city, she had more to do with Dutch society and its people. It was difficult for her to deal with this and she had to make herself at home in the Netherlands. Her homemaking process is influenced by the fact that she came to the Netherlands against her will. Even after more than thirty years, she feels in between two countries. Her language and culture and family are in Chile, but her children and sister are in the Netherlands. Though all Latin-American women in this research feel in between two countries, in contrast with Alisa, most of them come with the purpose to start a new life and make themselves at home.

¹³ Interview with Rosa - 25 February 2009

¹⁴ Interview with Rosa - 25 February 2009

As opposed to the political refugees, the Latin-American women who come to the Netherlands to work, want to be there and made this choice themselves. The three women I spoke to who migrated to work in the Netherlands all hoped for a better future. They are here only since two months to three years and all had family members living in the Netherlands or someone they knew who told them about the Netherlands.

*"It was not possible for me to study because I had no money and I had to take care for my child. Now my husband and child are in the Dominican Republic. I hope that they can migrate to the Netherlands as well. Here we have much more opportunities for our future. I want a better life for my family, but I do not want to be rich."*¹⁵

Monica wants to work in the Netherlands so that her husband and child can come to the Netherlands as well and they will have more opportunities than in the Dominican Republic. She came to the Netherlands because her mother and some of her brothers and sisters live already in the Netherlands for eleven years. If she can stay and if her husband and child can come to the Netherlands is uncertain. The other women who migrated for work also face or faced uncertainty.

Patricia stayed here illegal for two years and was sent back by the police to Brazil. With the help of her Dutch boyfriend and after a stay of a couple of months in Brazil she now finally has a residence permit. Another woman, Mireira, only has a working contract for a year in the Netherlands, after that she does not know what she will do and where she will go. While these women all migrated to start a new life, the first months they live in uncertainty because they do not know if they might stay. This is of influence on their homemaking process, for example for Monica who cannot work at this moment. Till she gets a residence permit it is forbidden to work, which makes it more difficult to get in contact with other Dutch people and to learn the Dutch language. Also not knowing what will happen makes that the women could act in another way than they would when they knew that they could start a new life in the Netherlands. At this moment they have an attitude of expectation and use less agency in their homemaking processes.

The women who come to the Netherlands to live with their Dutch lovers have again whole different migration histories than the women described above. Besides that they choose to start a new life in the Netherlands with their Dutch lovers, they also do not live in uncertainty about their residence permit. Still, it is not easy to get the Dutch nationality and to leave a whole life behind in the country of origin.

Mariana comes from *Tucuman*, a small city in Argentina, 1300 kilometres North of Buenos Aires. She lived there her whole life and her parents still do. Both her parents worked when she was younger. Her father was a graphologist and her mother is teacher. Now her father does not work anymore because he has a problem with his heart. Her mother works sixty hours a week to be able to pay all the bills. Mariana did law studies in the city centre of *Tucuman*. She was a good student and always received good grades. She had plans to marry with a Argentinean man and when he broke up with her she was devastated. She mentioned that she wanted to go to Israel and her mother stimulated her to go. Although her parents did not have a lot of money, her mother made sure that she could go to Israel for a year to work in a kibbutz. Nobody of the family could have known how this experience would change the life of Mariana. To live in the kibbutz was quite a shock for Mariana. Men and women slept together in the same building and there were a lot of love romances going on. However, she got used to it and thought of it as quite a relief that it was possible to be open about things as relationships and sex. She met Arnold, a Dutch guy who she liked very much. They got a relationship and after their stay in

¹⁵ Interview with Monica - 26 May 2009

Israel she went with Arnold to the Netherlands to meet his family. After three months she went back to Argentina. After finishing his studies Arnold went to Argentina to look for a job. After nine months he still did not find anything. He told Mariana that he would like to go back to the Netherlands to find a job there. She decided to go with him. For her it was a logical decision. She wanted to be with him.¹⁶

Like Mariana the majority of the Latin-American women I met came to the Netherlands for love. Migration is not something that these women expected to happen in their lives. All these women met a Dutch man and decided - all with different motives - to come and start a new life with him in the Netherlands. The ways in which they met are very distinct from each other:

"I was with a friend in Cuzco for a short vacation. Michel was also in Cuzco, while he was travelling through Peru alone. I met him and we spent five days together. After these five days he wanted to meet my family and my daughter. We went to Lima together and he stayed with me some weeks. We knew that we wanted to be together. He only wanted to be with me in Peru and I wanted to be with him in the Netherlands. Finally we choose to start a new life in the Netherlands."¹⁷

"I met my boyfriend in Peru. A friend of mine is married with Simon, a Dutch man. Jeroen, who is a friend of Simon came to visit them in Peru. That is how we met. After his visit we stayed in contact through mail and telephone. After three months he came back. After travelling through Peru I went with him to the Netherlands and started a Dutch language course."¹⁸

"When I was younger I went to Paris to work as an au-pair. When a friend from Guatemala came to visit me we travelled with the Orient Express through Europe. On the train from Greece to Turkey, I met John. It was love at first sight. After the trip I stayed a month with John and his family in the Netherlands. This was difficult. His parents were not that nice to me. Still after a year we married and I came to live with John in the Netherlands. While we also lived in Guatemala for a couple of years, we now again live in the Netherlands because of the safety."¹⁹

Through these short stories of Belicia, Maribel and Adriana we see that the women get to know their husband in many different ways. Another important way through which many women meet is through the work of their Dutch partners or through their work for an international company. Maria for example worked for the KLM²⁰ in Guatemala City and met her husband when he was in Guatemala for his work. Irena met her husband while she was dancing with her friends in a bar in Lima. He worked in Lima for a period of three months. In this time they had a lot of contact and finally she went to the Netherlands to live with him.

Different ways in which people meet and the differences between the women themselves also bring other factors and motives for migration. While a Dutch lover is the reason to go to the Netherlands, it is not the, or the only, reason for the women to migrate. Other factors, in special safety, are often important in the decision to migrate as is evident in the story of Adriana. Safety can also be an important reason to stay in the Netherlands.

"The most important reason that we still live in the Netherlands is because of the safety. In Guatemala it is not safe enough to live with children from a foreigner. People will think you are rich and it is even more dangerous. But when it would be safe in Guatemala we would go immediately to Guatemala to live there."²¹

¹⁶ Interview with Mariana - 24 March and 14 May 2009

¹⁷ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

¹⁸ Interviews with Maribel - 11 March 2009, 28 March 2009 & 20 April 2009

¹⁹ Interviews with Adriana - 1 May 2009 & 26 May 2009

²⁰ KLM is short for *Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij*, which is the Royal Dutch Airlines Company

²¹ Interviews with Maria - 16 February 2009 & 20 April 2009

Especially when the women have children they want them to grow up in a safe and secure environment and they cannot feel comfortable when this is not the case. These women do not only seek this in no violence, but also in a good future for themselves and their children. The women have the feeling that their children have more opportunities for a better future in the Netherlands than they do in their country of origin.

"I am in the Netherlands because of the future of my children, for their safety. In the Netherlands everything is arranged and when they have difficulties with learning, there are other possibilities to help them. Besides that there are a lot of jobs in the Netherlands, there is always something you can do."²²

Safety and security are a crucial factor in homemaking as safety is a part of home (Mallett, 2004). Feeling safe and knowing their children are safe is very important for the women to be able to make themselves at home.

Also other factors can be part of the cause to migrate. While there are the stories of women who fell in love and in a rush decided to go with their lovers to the Netherlands, in contrast there are much more complicated stories as well.

I meet Solana at the Central Station in Utrecht. We sit down at one of the restaurants and order something to drink. She starts to tell about her life and her decision to come to the Netherlands. Solana came to the Netherlands together with her Dutch boyfriend four years ago. The reason she left Puerto Rico was not love. For a couple of years Solana and her boyfriend had a relationship while she was living in Puerto Rico. For both of them this worked out fine, because he worked as a sailor and stayed in Puerto Rico every three months when he did not have to work. But then her boyfriend got cancer and a decision must be made where he would be treated. Because his family lives in the Netherlands and because of the better treatment they had there, they decided to live in the Netherlands. It was thus never their first choice to go to the Netherlands and start a new life there. It was difficult for Solana to make herself at home besides she had to deal with her boyfriend having cancer.²³

The story of Solana shows that stories of migration are almost never as simple as they look like at first sight.

Migration because of love and because of work can not be seen separately (Piper & Roces, 2003). According to Piper & Roces this is first because marriage is often a result of work-related migration and second because of the women entering the labour force after marriage migration (Piper & Roces, 2003:1-2). For most of the Latin-American women who came to the Netherlands for love, economic reasons did not play a role. However, I have to agree with Piper and Roces that they cannot be seen strictly separated. This is illustratively:

Patricia came to the Netherlands in 2006 to work here, but she did not have the papers to stay here legal. She met a Dutch man and lived together with him. While she was 'illegal' staying in the Netherlands, the police found her and she had to leave the country. It took her four months in Brazil to get all the papers ready to be able to go back to the Netherlands. Her Dutch boyfriend helped her with this procedure. Now they live together again and are expecting their first baby.²⁴

The story of Rosalia is different. She met her husband in Colombia and decided to live with him in the Netherlands. At first sight it does not look like there are economic reasons involved. However, when I talk to her daughter she tells me that besides love, other reasons like a better

²² Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

²³ Interview with Solana - 22 April 2009

²⁴ Interview with Patricia - 31 March 2009

life for her children, and thus economic reasons as well, might have been a motive as well to migrate.²⁵

When we look at the story of Rosalia work and love are both reasons for migration. Out of Patricia's story becomes clear that she migrated for work reasons, but now is staying in the Netherlands also because of love reasons.

When we now look back at the story of Mariana who migrated from Argentina, we see that she migrated because her husband could not find a job in Argentina and found one in the Netherlands. Not only the work of the women should thus be mentioned, also the jobs of the men are often an important reason to come to the Netherlands. As Mariana mentions:

"In the Netherlands you have certain rights when you have a job. You have contracts for indefinite time. In Argentina you do not have that. My mother has a contract of a year, but every year she has to prove herself again to not be replaced by new people with better diplomas than she has. In Argentina it is always uncertain and if you loose your job it is really difficult to find a new one."²⁶

Like Mariana there are other women who tried to live in their country of origin with their Dutch partner. For all of them this did not work out. This was because their husbands could not find work or because the women and their husbands did not feel safe.

2.2 Present experiences

In the middle of the conversation she leaves the room. She walks to her purse that is in the hall and she takes something out of it. With a big smile she walks back and shows me her passport. Her brand new Dutch passport. It took her three years to get this and she seems more than happy with it. She says that now she really feels Dutch and her whole family - her husband and children - are the same. She had to be in the Netherlands and married with her husband for three years to get this passport. She also had to do the "*inburgeringscursus*" and pass the exam. She tells me that she has the luck of getting here before the new law, which makes it more difficult to come to the Netherlands and become a Dutch citizen.²⁷

As we can see at the above reaction of Maria, it can mean a lot to a Latin-American woman to become an official Dutch citizen and to receive a Dutch passport. In the last decennia there have been a lot of changes in the immigration and integration policies in the Netherlands (Bruquetas-Callejo, 2007; Gorashi, 2003) which made it more difficult for Latin-American women to migrate to the Netherlands and to receive the Dutch nationality. These restrictions were attended by a more negative attitude towards immigrants in Dutch society in the last decades. Whereas the women who came to the Netherlands thirty years ago were seen as exotic and were friendly welcomed by the government and society, now migrants - including Latin-American women - are considered a problem.

As described in the introduction migration in the Netherlands has been considered as a temporary phenomenon (Ghorashi, 2003). According to Gorashi this dominant discourse in Dutch society is the cause of the 'othering' of immigrants (Gorashi, 2003:22). In her research at Iranian women in the Netherlands she found that in spite of the best efforts of migrants in the Netherlands, "they were still considered as 'others' who do not really belong" (2003:22). The majority of Latin-

²⁵ Interview with Rosalia - 8 April 2009

²⁶ Interview with Mariana - 24 March & 14 May 2009

²⁷ Interview with Maria - 18 March 2009

American women I spoke to in the Netherlands also had the feeling they were seen as 'the other'. Even after more than ten years of living in the Netherlands the women have the idea that they have to prove themselves and their skills everyday. The prejudices that exist in Dutch society influence the homemaking processes of the women by making it more difficult for them to feel good and welcome in Dutch society. Besides the hurt that this causes, it also makes it more difficult for them to find their ways in Dutch society.

The women that are here less than fifteen years often experience a lot of prejudices not only on the streets, but also by government officials. Like the Iranian women in the Netherlands described by Gorashi, they are shocked as well by this treatment (Gorashi, 2003:169):

"I did not like the "inburgeringscursus" at all. It looks like a lot of teachers do not want to be there and they make sure you feel that. We were belittled by our teacher. I thought it was awful. I was treated like a young child."²⁸

Not only government officials treat the women this way, the women are also insulted by organisations, like for example employment agencies:

"When I went looking for a job, I got all this insulting questions of diverse employment agencies. If I tell them I come from the Dominican Republic, they ask me if I went to primary school and if I can read and write. If I tell them that I went to university and finished my studies, they act very surprised, like it is impossible that a migrant would be that smart."²⁹

According to Gorashi this kind of acting upon migrant women as stupid and as 'the other' is for a certain part shaped by "dominant images of femininity in Dutch society". Gorashi explains that according to these images Dutch women are seen as modern and emancipated, while migrant women are seen as oppressed and traditional (2003:185). The majority of the Latin-American women mention that they have experience with prejudices in Dutch society of them being 'stupid and poor'.

"Sometimes people start talking to my husband about me. That is so humiliating. Like I cannot speak or something. They are very surprised when they find out I speak Dutch, that I was not poor in my country and that I went to university. Sometimes they even ask if I was poor and if I went to school."³⁰

The danger of this 'othering' by Dutch society is that migrant women might create a very generalized and stereotyped image of the Dutch (Gorashi, 2003:185). Some of the Latin-American women interviewed also had this generalized and stereotyped image of Dutch people. They often use the words 'they' referring to Dutch people, and 'us' referring to Latin-American women. They could also be very fierce towards Dutch people and talk about them in generalized terms. In contrast, most women still can see differences within Dutch society.

The women also face other difficulties in Dutch society that influence their homemaking processes. A conversation between Beatriz and her husband after she just arrived in the Netherlands shows that even in the smallest things women are confronted with a country that they do not understand yet.

²⁸ Interviews with Mariana - 24 March 2009 & 14 May 2009

²⁹ Conversation at a Latin-American concert with a woman from the Dominican Republic - 30 April 2009

³⁰ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

*"Come, let's go do the shopping!"
"I don't leave the house when it rains like this!"
"Then we will not eat this month." ³¹*

When the women come to the Netherlands they are confronted with a country and a language that they do not understand. Before their migration they often had their own job, their own house, their family and their friends. In the Netherlands they have no life of their own, but have to build everything from the start. This is difficult when limited in this by not knowing the language and the culture. It makes it for example difficult to find a job. While in the first months the women cannot do a lot in the Netherlands because all procedures to become a Dutch citizen have to be started, also in the time after they have difficulties finding a job. They often have to ask for money, which is difficult after living an independent life before. Emotionally heavy is that the women do not know anything about the country and the rules and have to ask everything. Also for the signing of papers of insurances and other things they are dependent of their husbands or other people.

Despite the fact that finding a job is very difficult, the majority of the women find a job after a couple of years. The women work in health care, school teaching, nursery, in jewellery, in graphical design, in the administration, as secretary, as cleaning woman or are active as volunteer in organisations with a focus on Latin-Americans in the Netherlands. Another part of the women is still looking for a job and some do not have a job because they want to be at home for their husband and children. The women who do have a job mention that it is difficult to find a job on their level. Besides the fact that the Dutch language is difficult, the education they had in their countries of origin often is not officially recognised in the Netherlands. This means that on the Dutch labour market they are seen as unskilled. That the women are working underneath their level or cannot find a job can influence their homemaking process because it makes them insecure or not happy with their lives.

Marisa comes from Mexico and was a psychologist there. At the moment she does not has a job. She would like to work but explains that it is hard to find a job as a migrant. Sitting at home does not make her very happy. She likes to be independent, like she was in Mexico and she wants to be busy again. That is why she now also applies at volunteer work.³²

While Marisa is not insecure, a lot of women have to deal with feelings of insecurity because the difficulties they have with the Dutch language, finding a job or being dependent.

All women deal with the described difficulties in different ways, which are influenced by their personal migration histories (past experiences) and by the agency they practice in their homemaking process. Examples of the role that past experiences and agency play are many. The women who went to university and who had jobs in their country as manager and psychologist deal with prejudices, but also with other difficulties they face, in another way than women do who did not have such jobs. When they get to deal with prejudices they do not care a lot about what is said about them, they rather try to weaken what is said about them:

³¹ Interview with Beatriz - May 22 2009

³² Interview with Marisa - 23 March 2009

"A lot of people think that migrant women do not speak the Dutch language or only talk to people from their own country. I always want to weaken this kind of prejudices. When my son went to school, I made an invitation for all the mothers of the children he played with and invited them at my home. Since then we regularly meet to have coffee and talk."³³

Also other women who were very independent before they came to the Netherlands use their agency more and react directly to the difficulties they face. An example comes from Irena:

"It was difficult to come here and to be totally dependent on my husband. I was 29 and used to taking care of myself and my child. Now I was financially and emotionally dependent. That was hard. I bought some books for young children to learn. Furthermore I followed language courses for five years. After that I did a study for financial automation and administration and an internship at the municipality of Hoorn. After this internship I applied for a job and got hired. Besides my job I went to school in the evenings and finished a secretary training. I have been working now for seventeen years and did all kind of trainings besides it. I had different functions and now I am secretary for a head of department. At this moment I follow a study for management assistant."³⁴

Like Irena, there are many more Latin-American women I spoke to who are really active in making sure that they feel more at home in the Netherlands.

It seems that the women who choose to work in the Netherlands are more secure and react different on difficulties than women who do not have a job. The Latin-American women I met who did not have a job and choose to stay home with their children, have more problems to feel at home in the Netherlands. They act in a different way than the women described above. Instead of using their agency and make certain choices which could change their situation, they choose not to, like in the example of Maria:

"I do not feel really at home at this moment in the Netherlands. I have to integrate more. In a couple of years when my children are more grown up, I have more time for myself. Then I want to integrate more, learn Dutch better and apply for a job again."³⁵

Noteworthy is that Maria knows she does not feel at home because she has to integrate more in Dutch society. She chooses not to do this, through which her situation does not change and she does not feel at home in the Netherlands.

The stories of Latin-American women interviewed confirm with the literature on the role that past experiences play in present practice. Important to note is that the way in which the women use their agency also depends on the attitude and personality of the women, which is influenced by the past as well. Some women are more negative than others and often this has to do with not using the agency necessary to change their lives and especially the contact they have. Practicing agency and being more active in the homemaking process thus makes that women become happier and more content with their lives in the Netherlands. In spite of the agency of the women however, we must not forget that the society that receives the migrant can make or not make for a certain extent a home for this migrants through inclusion or exclusion (Espiritu, 2003),

³³ Interview with Marisa - 23 March 2009

³⁴ Interviews with Irena - 3 March 2009 & 29 May 2009

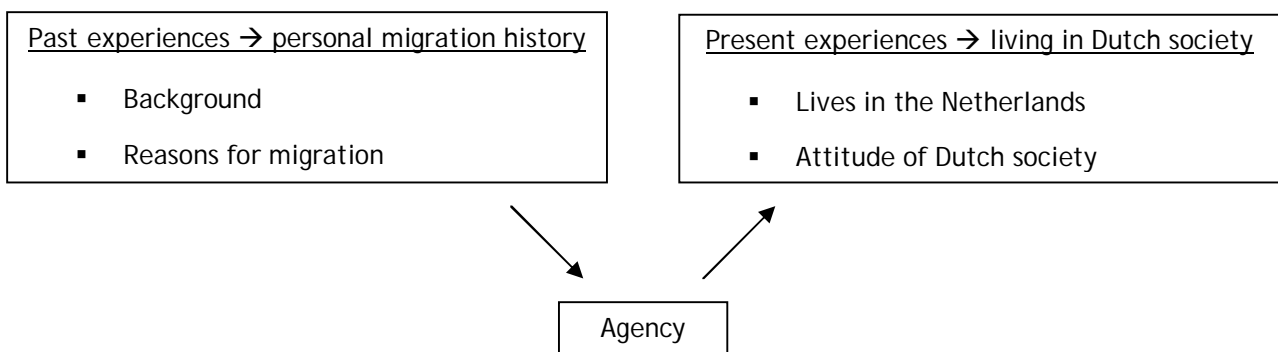
³⁵ Interviews with Maria - 16 February 2009 & 18 March 2009

2.3 Conclusion

The homemaking processes of Latin-American women in the Netherlands are shaped by their personal migration histories, by Dutch society and the agency women practice. Homemaking turns out to be a complex concept which is influenced by many factors within these past and present experiences of Latin-American women. The present experiences in Dutch society exists namely out of difficulties that the women have to face and on which the women react differently. Especially the 'othering' of Dutch society makes it difficult for women to feel at home because they do not feel they belong in Dutch society. Gorashi (2003) and Holland & Lave (2001) stated that past experiences influence how people react on present experiences. This is also noticeable in the homemaking processes of Latin-American women.

How the women react on present experiences and use their agency is influenced by the past experiences of the women within their personal migration histories. In the following scheme a drawing is made of the relation between the different aspects that shape the homemaking process of Latin-American women in the Netherlands.

The homemaking process of Latin-American women in the Netherlands



3. Trying to make a home

"I invested a lot of energy in finding my place in this society. I found my place thanks to my adaptability and perseverance. In the beginning the language was not that easy to understand and the habits neither. I still do not like peanut butter and liquorice. In the capacity of stability and safety I feel better here than in Argentina, but I miss the easy way of communicating of the Argentinean people. I live here, with a piece of my heart and mind in Argentina. There are my roots and a lot of the people I love."³⁶

"Most of us Latin-American women feel sometimes at home and sometimes not. You are always in between the people you love and will never feel completely at home all the time. That is the law of immigrants!"³⁷

A lot of the women define the good feeling they get when they are together with their families, by having or practicing cultural stuff inside their houses or by sharing their language and culture with other Latin-Americans in the Netherlands, as home. The majority of these practices described have to do with Latin-America, its people, language and culture. While feeling at home at the moments of these practices and feeling good by it, the women still feel in between two countries and do not completely feel at home in the Netherlands. The question comes up if homemaking for the women really exists out of keeping in contact with their family and their roots and getting a good feeling out of it or if it is more complex than that. Together with the next chapter on social relations, I will show that home is a complex concept that holds more than feeling good.

As described in the introduction nowadays home is seen in the literature as a multi-dimensional concept (Mallett, 2004:68). Out of the different approaches in the literature, I distinguished a psychological, a spatial and a social element, which are also evident in the homemaking processes of Latin-American women in the Netherlands. In this chapter I will focus on how the women make themselves at home and the role of the psychological and spatial element in this. In the first paragraph I will discuss in more detail how women define their homes and the different feelings and emotions that home brings along, which refers to the psychological element distinguished out of the literature. In the second paragraph I will discuss how the women try to make themselves at home and to which level they succeed in this. The spatial element, how the women use their houses to make themselves at home, will be discussed in this part of the chapter.

3.1 Homes of Latin-American women in the Netherlands

"I do not feel at home in the Netherlands, but I feel at home when I am together with family who are important to me. My life is here, but my mind is always in Peru with my family and friends there. I feel a lot better than I did in the beginning, though. I get in contact with more people and that makes me feel good. I hope that with the time I feel more and more at home in the Netherlands, but I do not think it is possible to feel a 100% at home here. My ideal home is here in my house with my husband and children, but I would rather like to be with my family from Peru as well. I do not have to live around the corner, but it would be nice to see them more regularly. The most ideal home, the home in my dreams, would be to get all my family and friends from Peru to the Netherlands."³⁸

When Latin-American women define their home they directly refer to home as a feeling they get at certain moments and especially when they are together with their family.

³⁶ A part out of the 'Latina monologue' of Mariana, an Argentinean woman - Eindhoven, 8 March 2009

³⁷ Interview with Ana Maria - 11 March 2009

³⁸ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

*"Home is when I am with my husband and children. When they are not with me, and when I am not with them, we are nothing, everything is incomplete then."*³⁹

Husbands and children are named first when asking the women at their definition of home. They are the most important persons the women need to be able to feel at home. The majority of the women stated that the place where they were was not that important to feel at home, as long as they were together with their husband and children. That their husband and children are the most important thing to feel home is logical when we look back at the migration histories described in the previous chapter. The majority of the women come to the Netherlands to marry their Dutch lovers and they give up their whole lives in their countries of origin to be with him. Their husband and children are often the only thing they have when they arrive in the Netherlands.

Still, the ideal home of the majority of the women would be together with both, their families in the Netherlands and in their countries of origin. Therefore they are in search of a way to stay in contact with their family in the country of origin and stay close to them:

*"I want to know everything about my family and friends in Peru and what they do. I have a lot of contact with them through telephone. Especially with my father and sister I speak every two days. Also with other family members I have weekly contact through internet."*⁴⁰

Like for Belicia, the relations with family are important for the women to be able to feel at home. Because they cannot be together it is never possible to feel completely at home. Family in the country of origin is mentioned by the women as very important part of their lives. In the literature on home a relation is described between the real and the ideal home. According to Tucker "most people spend their lives in search of home, at the gap between the natural home and the particular ideal home where they would be fully fulfilled" (Tucker, 1994:184). By finding ways to have their families as close as possible the women are trying to fill this gap between their real and their ideal homes.

While the women name their family first when talking about home, also language and culture are important in the definition of home of the women.

*"Sometimes I do not feel at home in the Netherlands because it is not my language and culture. Next to my family, my language and culture are my home. When I am together with other people from Chile I get this feeling of being at home. After 33 years I do not need this contact anymore to feel good, but it is important to me, because it is something that is mine. The Dutch language and culture is not."*⁴¹

Language and culture play an important role for Alisa in defining home. Also for other women this is named more than once in their definition of home. At the one hand sharing the mother tongue and the own culture can be important to feel at home for the moment. At the other hand it is important because it is something that is part of the women themselves and their identity. In describing their feelings women get when they are together with family or share their language and culture, they use the terms of feeling good and feeling home interchangeable.

According to Latin-American women I met, home is a feeling which they get when they are together with family and when they share their language and culture. The feeling they get is the

³⁹ Interviews with Maria - 16 February 2009 & 18 March 2009

⁴⁰ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

⁴¹ Interview with Alisa - 9 February 2009

psychological element of their homemaking processes. As discussed in the literature on home, this can be feelings of safety, but also all other emotions and feelings that come along when people feel at home. It already became clear that these feelings are good, but what exact feelings do the Latin-American women have when feeling at home?

"I feel at home when I feel physical, emotional and psychological fine. I get this feeling when being with my family"⁴²

"Feeling home is feeling fine. It is a feeling and a sphere. Something I get when I am with my family."⁴³

"Being in harmony and in balance is what makes that I feel at home"⁴⁴

"Isn't feeling good the same as feeling at home?"⁴⁵

"Feeling at home is feeling safe, feeling good and having a social life and good contact with your family"⁴⁶

Feeling good, feeling fine, being in harmony and feeling safe are the feelings Latin-American women I met, describe when they feel at home. Many women, like Ana, even spoke about feeling good as being the same as feeling home and use the terms interchangeable. While the two are described as the same by the women there is a tension between the two.

While the women state that they do feel good in the Netherlands at the same time they say that they do not feel at home in the Netherlands. By mentioning this it becomes clear that home is not the same as feeling good, but that it is much more complex. While at the moments Latin-American women are together with their families or they share their language and culture they feel at home, they do not feel at home in the Netherlands. Although contact with their families make that the women are able to feel good in the Netherlands, more is necessary to make them feel at home. Especially the 'othering' by Dutch society is what makes it difficult for the women to feel part of society.

"Home is a feeling of belonging and being a part of something."⁴⁷

A sense of belonging to Dutch society is thus needed to be able to feel at home for the women.

3.2 Trying to feel at home

While family and the language and culture of the country of origin are named first in the definition of home of Latin-American women, adaptation to a certain extent of the culture of the 'new' country is also important in the process of homemaking (Kline, 2008). To make themselves at home in the Netherlands, contact with Dutch people is necessary according the women to learn the Dutch language and to understand Dutch society. Also speaking the Dutch language and working outside the houses is by the majority of the women seen as crucial in the ability to feel at home in the

⁴² Interview with Marisa - 23 March 2009

⁴³ Interview with Damaris - 8 April 2009

⁴⁴ Citation of Carmen during the focus group meeting in Maastricht - 22 May 2009

⁴⁵ Interviews with Ana - 16 February 2009 & 20 April 2009

⁴⁶ Citation of three women during the focus group meeting in Maastricht - 22 May 2009

⁴⁷ Interviews with Irena - 3 March 2009 & 29 May 2009

Netherlands or not. Speaking and understanding the Dutch language and working are important to the women to make themselves at home because it makes them more independent and be capable of starting a new life. They also contribute to the relations women have with Dutch people. I will elaborate further on the importance of these relations with Dutch people in the homemaking process in the next chapter on social relations. In this paragraph I will discuss the role of the spatial element of home in the homemaking processes of Latin-American women.

The spatial element of home plays an important role in the homemaking of Latin-American women in the Netherlands. Their houses are important means in which the women have and practice their cultural stuff.

Adriana is a 37 year old woman from Guatemala, who lives in Almere with her husband and two children. She lives in a corner house of different linked houses in a neighbourhood with a lot of children. It is a big neighbourhood with many similar looking houses. Adriana has got good contact with her neighbours. Her children play with the neighbour's children and the girl from the other side of the street regularly watches her children when she is not at home. She likes to live in Almere, where a lot of other Latin-American women live as well.⁴⁸

Like Adriana, the majority of the Latin-American women I spoke to, live in a city. Most of them come from Amsterdam, Almere, Eindhoven en Maastricht. Only a few of the women live in villages. The neighbourhoods in which the women live differ from each other, but most of the women are living in a multicultural neighbourhood. Some of them think of this as important for their children to learn that everybody is the same, others did not chose on purpose to live in a multicultural neighbourhood.

Inside the house of Adriana there are many influences and elements of Guatemala. In the living room there are a table and a bench from wood in all different kind of bright colours and with beautiful carved work. Furthermore there are paintings on the wall and many small sculptures from, for example typical Guatemalan 'chicken-busses'. In the corner where the children often play I find many games in the Spanish language that Adriana brought from Guatemala. Also in the sleeping rooms of the children there are many elements from Guatemala like a saint on the wall, many Guatemalan books, photos from the family in Guatemala and a typical Guatemalan xylophone. The majority of the furniture here is also from Guatemala and was brought to the Netherlands by ship. Photos are very important for Adriana. I find them everywhere in the house and she also shows me the many photo books she has from when she was living in Guatemala. Adriana is very proud to show me everything from her country and the photos of the time she used to live there. She likes to have a house which is a mixture between Guatemala and the Netherlands. The elements of Guatemala are very important to her, because they show who she is and what she likes.⁴⁹



Figure 1 Elements in the house of Adriana

Like Adriana, almost all of the Latin-American women I spoke to, have some elements of their country of origin in their houses to make themselves at home or to remind them of who they are.

⁴⁸ Interviews with Adriana - 1 & 26 May 2009

⁴⁹ Interviews with Adriana - 1 & 26 May 2009

An element that Adriana did not show, but what the majority of the women have, is music from their country of origin. For Monica and Mireira for example, who are in the Netherlands only since a few months, Dominican music is very important. When they talk about 'their' music and dancing they lift up and tell with a big smile, that when you do not like the music and the dancing it is impossible that you are a Latina. Especially in the first months after their migration, women listen to music from their country of origin a lot inside their houses to feel at home for the moment. When the women hear the music it feels like they are back in their country of origin again of before their migration.

Most women, in contrast with Adriana, do not have furniture or other big things from their countries of origin in their houses. The elements that the women have are often small, like little sculptures, key rings or glasses. In most of the cases these elements are standing in an open closet somewhere in the living room. In many houses of the women there are also a lot of elements on the wall, like paintings and photographs. The women often show who is on the pictures and tell the stories behind the pictures. Some of the women have bigger elements like closets or tapestries from their country of origin, but this are only the women who just like Adriana lived in their country of origin with their Dutch husband. Only Susana, a woman from Guatemala did not have elements of Guatemala at all, because she did not think of it as important. She states that she did not have typical stuff in Guatemala as well, so why would she here. For her 'cultural stuff' from her country of origin was thus not important to her at all. To other women however these elements can be important.

Latin-American women I met use the typical things they brought from their country of origin, but also a certain style of decorating, to make themselves feel at home in their own houses. They make the house more their own with the cultural stuff from their country like sculptures, furniture and music. The house itself is not important for the women to feel at home, but the things inside it are, because they make that the women feel at home when they are in their houses. They also try to make themselves at home by cooking typical food from their countries of origin.⁵⁰

Adriana invited me to come over with dinner. She shows me all the different food she got from Guatemala. Every time when somebody she knows visits Guatemala she asks them to bring some packages with them with typical Guatemalan food, like: *sopa de frijoles*, *tamarillos* and *pollo con arroz*. She often cooks Guatemalan food, because it makes her feel good and the smell and taste of it remind her of Guatemala.⁵¹

Like for Adriana, also for many other Latin-American women in the Netherlands, typical food reminds them of their country of origin. Adriana tells me it makes her feel at home to cook the typical food. To smell it and taste it brings her back to Guatemala. Besides it reminds women of their country of origin and gives them the feeling of home for a while, it also makes the women happy to share this food with other.

Irena invited me for a Peruvian lunch while we talk about her life in Peru and in the Netherlands. It is obvious that she is proud at her country when she shows me what she makes and how the

⁵⁰ In the literature a lot is written about food and culture. Counihan & Van Esterik collected different articles about food and culture in their book *'Food and Culture: a reader'* (Counihan, C. & Penny van Esterik, 1997) Two out of the many other authors who wrote about this subject are: Anderson, E.N.(2005) in *'Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture'* and Williams-Ferson, Psyche A. (2006) in *'Building houses out of Chicken legs: Black Women, Food & Power'*

⁵¹ Interviews with Adriana - 1 & 26 May 2009

food is prepared. She really enjoys cooking for me and sharing the stories of the food culture in her country.⁵²

Also the people with who the women are eating can be important to create a sphere in which the women feel at home. An example of this comes from Damaris who feels at home when she invites a lot of friends and cooks something typical for them.

*"Not only the food, but also the whole sphere of being together with a lot of people and eat together reminds me of Colombia and makes me feel at home"*⁵³

Many women like to create a sphere together with other people which reminds them of their country of origin. At the moments the women create this sphere they feel at home. They do this namely with their husbands and children and with other Latin-Americans in the Netherlands. About these relations I will tell more in the chapter four.

While different elements and practices inside the house can give women the feeling of being at home, the house itself is not often named by the women when talking about home and homemaking.

*"Home has for me nothing to do with house. I could feel at home in an awful house. It has thus nothing to do with feeling home."*⁵⁴

The quotation of Adriana shows that the physical structure of house itself does not have to play a role at all in the definition of home the women give. Still, different women name the safety they experience when being in their homes. This safety is also evident in the literature on home in the psycho-spatial approach in which home is seen as a haven or a place where one feels secure (Easthope, 2004; Mallett, 2004). By using the different means described above the women to create a sphere of safety in their houses which makes them feel at home.

While the different ways described above help the women to feel at home inside their houses and at the moments they practice cultural stuff, it does not make them feel at home in Dutch society. Next to the contact the women have with their family and sharing their language and culture with other Latin-Americans, also the spatial element makes them feel good in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the social relations with Dutch people and integration within Dutch society, as is shortly described by the women in the beginning of this paragraph, are as well necessary to feel at home in the Netherlands. All these things together make the homemaking processes of the women, but this process is influenced by the past and present experiences and the agency the women practice in this process.

Important to note here is that another factor which is important in the homemaking process of the women is time. The longer Latin-American women live in the Netherlands, the more a cultural mix develops between Dutch culture and the culture of the country of origin. Women get more attached as well to certain Dutch cultural habits and to the Netherlands itself as a country.

*"The Dutch people are not as "cold" as they pretend to be. We like to live in the Netherlands"*⁵⁵

⁵² Interview with Irena - 29 May 2009

⁵³ Interview with Damaris - 8 April 2009

⁵⁴ Interview with Adriana - 1 May 2009

⁵⁵ A part out of the 'Latina monologue' of Amalia, a woman from Venezuela - Eindhoven, 8 March 2009

"I am the biggest fan of *Sinterklaas*⁵⁶ and I like the 'down-to-earth' mentality of the Dutch as I made my own as well"⁵⁷

"Also by eating *haring* and *speculaas*⁵⁸ are thing through which I make myself at home in the Netherlands"⁵⁹

"I think it is important that my children grow up in the Netherlands where man and woman are the same. I think it is important that the children and the housekeeping are of the two together instead of the *machismo* in Peru"⁶⁰

These citations show that with the time women start to feel more at home in the Netherlands and also start to feel more attached to Dutch culture. This corresponds with the literature on migration. According to Madsen & Van Naerssen, the longer migrants live and work in their new country and society, they will develop their identities on basis of dual attachments to both countries (Madsen & Van Naerssen, 2003: 68).

When now looking back at the research that Ghorashi did at Iranian women in the Netherlands, there is a big difference noticeable. While it maybe never possible for Latin-American women to feel a hundred percent at home in the Netherlands, they do not want to go back to their countries like Iranian women and neither feel very bad in the Netherlands. There are two reasons why Latin-American women are able to feel better in the Netherlands than Iranian women while living in the same society. First, middle-east women in the Netherlands are even more stereotyped than other migrant women in the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2003:171). Second, many Latin-American women have a Dutch husband. According to Gorashi this causes that they are linked to the "real Dutch" which is the only way to feel belonging to and secure in Dutch context (Ghorashi, 2003:229). While the majority of the women in this research do not feel they belong to Dutch society, there is an obvious difference with the women in the research of Gorashi who with the time feel worse in the Netherlands. Latin-American women in the Netherlands feel good and why they are hampered in their homemaking process by different difficulties they face, with the time they feel more and more at home.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter showed that home is a much more complex concept than it looks like at first sight. Although Latin-American women first define home as feeling good, there is a difference between the two which becomes visible when looking at their homemaking processes. While Latin-American women feel good in the Netherlands, they do not feel at home by only holding on to their Latin-American contacts and cultures. Adaptation to a certain extent of Dutch cultural habits and Dutch society is needed to be able to feel at home (Kline, 2008) Home not only consists out of a good feeling, but a deeper feeling -a sense of belonging- is necessary to feel at home. Integration in Dutch society is needed to create this feeling of belonging. The women do have agency in this process and practice it dependent on their history-in-person which helps them to feel good in the

⁵⁶ *Sinterklaas* is the central figure in the equal named yearly children's feast which is a tradition in the Netherlands and is celebrated at 5 December.

⁵⁷ A part out of the 'Latina monologue' of Mercedes, a woman from Mexico - Eindhoven, 8 March 2009

⁵⁸ *Haring* and *speculaas* are both two typical Dutch delicacies

⁵⁹ Citation of Beatriz during the focus group meeting in Maastricht - 22 May 2009

⁶⁰ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

Netherlands. They are hampered however to feel at home in Dutch society because they are seen as the 'other' (Ghorashi, 2003). While with the time women start to feel more and more at home it stays difficult for them to integrate in Dutch society and have strong contacts with Dutch people. In order to be able to understand the whole process of homemaking I will now take a closer look at the social relations of the Latin-American women which are an important means to make themselves at home.

4. Social Relations

Social relations are important means through which Latin-American women in the Netherlands try to make themselves at home. The different social relations of the women have other intensities and influence their homemaking processes in different ways (Van der Gaag, 2005). As discussed in the introduction, these social relations consist out of the past and present (Gorashi, 2003) and span several societies (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002). This is also the case for Latin-American women in the Netherlands. Their relations consist out of relations before and after their migration and relations in the Netherlands and in Latin-America. In describing the social relations of the Latin-American women spoken to, I will use this structure to understand the different relationships and their meaning to the women. First I will now shortly discuss how the daily social life of the women looks like and what the importance is to them of social relations in general.

4.1 Social relations of Latin-American women

Five days a week Maribel works at a child care facility. Together with her colleague she takes care of about fifteen children from five and six years old after they went to school. All the contact she has at her work is in Dutch. I watch her working and am really amazed by how she handles all these children that speak Dutch so fast, while she is only here since two-and-a-half-years. Her colleague tells me that Maribel really wants to understand them. While her Dutch is not perfect, it is good and the children understand her. Maribel followed many Dutch language courses. At this moment she still has Dutch lessons in the mornings. She does not visit a lot of Latin-American cultural activities, but she visits regularly "*Centro Cultural Hispanohablantes*"⁶¹ who organise evenings with Latin-Americans and Dutch students to learn from each other and each others language. Because her friends do not live in Amsterdam, she only sees them once a month. In the weekends she likes to go out together with her Dutch boyfriend with their boat at the canals in Amsterdam.⁶²

Like Maribel, the majority of the Latin-American women I spoke have a job. During the week their social life is therefore mostly with colleagues, who are often Dutch. The women who do not have a job often are at home with their children and sometimes meet with neighbours or other mothers from the schools of their children. Less than half of all the women are active in an organisation that focuses on Latin-Americans in the Netherlands, but the majority of all women does regularly visit the activities organised by these organisations or the embassy. In their free time most of the women regularly meet with their friends. In general this is about once a week with one or a particular group of friends. Most women spend their weekend with their family and sometimes visit friends or go to a party.

All social relations the women have are important for their well-being and in the construction, maintenance and development of their homes (Massey, 1992; Easthope, 2004). According to the women themselves they are important to feel good in the Netherlands and to be able to feel at home.

⁶¹ *Centro Cultural Hispanohablantes* is an organisation in Amsterdam which has as its goal to improve the quality of life of Spanish speaking migrants and to support their integration in Dutch society. The organisation organises a lot of activities, in special for women who had a good profession in their country of origin to improve their self confidence and stimulate their own initiatives.

⁶² Observation during visit at the work of Maribel - 20 April 2009

"Your life and how happy you are is decided by the people around you, your family and friends."⁶³

"When I came to the Netherlands my first purpose was to build a social network in the Netherlands. To have a social life is necessary for me to be able to feel home. I think it is really important for all Latin-American women here. Especially those with children, because they do not have their family here to support them. With a social life I tried to absorb this."⁶⁴

Latin-American women, like Nieves and Adriana, feel better knowing they have family and friends around them, where they can rely on. According to Adriana it is necessary for her to have a social life to be able to feel at home.

Again we come across the tension between feeling good and feeling home. A lot of women use the terms interchangeable, but as became clear in the previous chapter, there is a difference between the two. In the next paragraphs on the different social relations of the women I will look at what the importance of the relations of the women is, to understand in which way they relate to feeling good and feeling home.

4.2 Contact with family members

Mariana feels good when she is together with her husband. She feels at home then. Still, it is not possible for her to feel a hundred percent at home because her she misses her family in Argentina too much. She thinks that it will stay that way, especially with really nice or not nice moments in her life. In spite of the fact that she might never feel a hundred percent at home, she wants to stay in the Netherlands. She built up a new life here and has her husband and child here. She feels good.⁶⁵

Contact of Latin-American women in the Netherlands with their family consists in most cases out of two parts: the contact with their husband and their children in the Netherlands and the contact with their families in the country of origin. In this the contact with their husband and children consist out of the present, whereas the contact with their family in the country of origin consists out of the past. Just like they are divided over time, they are also divided over space. The relations with family are divided over the Netherlands and the country of origin. Their two most important relations bring together their lives from before and after their migration, but at the same time are the reason why it is impossible for them to feel a hundred percent at home in the Netherlands. They are always in between two countries, which are both their countries, with in both countries people they love.

While all social relations are important for the women's well being, especially the contact with family is important to Latin-American women to be able to feel at home. Their husband and children in the Netherlands are often named as the most important thing they have in live. When the women are together with them they feel at home and they need this relation and the contact with their family in the country of origin to feel good in the Netherlands.

"I need to know how my family is doing to be able to feel good. If I would not have contact with them it would not be possible to build a life here"⁶⁶

⁶³ Interview with Nieves - 12 March 2009

⁶⁴ Interviews with Adriana - 1 May 2009 & 26 May 2009

⁶⁵ Interviews with Mariana - 24 March 2009 & 14 May 2009

⁶⁶ Interview with Marisa - 23 March 2009

Like Marisa, all women I spoke to do have and need contact with their families in the country of origin. Also the literature on family relationships affirms this importance of the family in Latin-American cultures. Raymond et al. investigated family relationships within various ethnic groups and concluded that Latinos attributed significantly more importance to their family relationships than other groups did. They also found that family and other social relations were highly correlated with psychological well-being for Latinos. Good relationships with the family however had the most positive affect on their well-being. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995:113).

24 years ago Irena moved from Peru to the Netherlands together with her ten year old son to live with her Dutch boyfriend. She met her Dutch boyfriend, who is now her husband, in Peru while going out with a colleague. He temporarily worked in Peru and in the few months he was in Peru they got a relationship. When Peter had to leave to the Netherlands he promised to get her to the Netherlands within one year. She did not believe him. After ten months however, Peter had organised everything for her to come to the Netherlands. Irena decided to have a three months period unpaid off of her work and went to the Netherlands. Finally she stayed in the Netherlands and started a new life with her husband and her son.⁶⁷

Like Irena, a big majority of the Latin-American women live together with their Dutch husbands. Most of these women have children who live with them. Some other women have children who are older and are already living on their own. About a quarter of the women do not or not yet have children.

It was very hard for Irena to come to the Netherlands and be emotionally and financially dependent of her husband. She was 29 and used to take care of herself and her child. Now she did not make money on her own and that was difficult.⁶⁶

As stated earlier, most women were living in their country of origin a very independent life. When they come to the Netherlands it is, just like it was for Irena, difficult to be dependent. Many women mentioned that this dependency caused some problems in their relationship.

"There were moments that I longed to be in Peru again with my mother. Especially when I had fights with my husband. In the beginning we really had some problems in our relationship. Sometimes it is difficult to live together with someone from a whole other culture and to be so dependent. You cannot make you own money, you do not know the language and you do not understand many of Dutch society. In Peru I would have ended the relationship, but here you go on, you do not have anything else here. What should you do then?"⁶⁸

The story of Sofia shows that living together with the man you moved for to the other side of the world is not always that romantic as it looks like. Especially in the beginning the relationships of the women face some difficulties because of cultural differences and because they make the women less independent than before. For the women it is very important that their relationship with their husbands is good and that there is trust in the relation. Because their husband is in many cases the only thing that brought the women to the Netherlands this relationship is very important to be able to feel at home.

"In the evenings we are together: me, my husband and my two children. We eat together. That is very important for me. It is a moment that we are together and we discuss what everybody has done. In the weekends we always do something with the family. We go to a amusement park, to the beach or we watch a movie together. These are the moments when I feel

⁶⁷ Interviews with Irena - 3 April 2009 & 29 May 2009

⁶⁸ Interview with Sofia - 22 May 2009

completely happy and at home. To know that my husband and children are doing fine is important for me to feel good myself."⁶⁹

The majority of the Latin-American women think of it as very important to eat together and to spend time with their husband and children. Like Maria, in the weekends the women often spend time with their families. When they have children they regularly visit birthday parties of other Latin-American friends or their children. The women really enjoy to celebrate the birthdays of their children in the way they are used to in the country of origin, which is often with *piñatas*⁷⁰, a lot of food, music and dancing. These moments when the women are with their husbands and children they feel at home. Knowing that their husbands and children are doing fine, makes it possible for them to feel good in the Netherlands.

Latin-American women also need to have contact with their family in the countries of origin to feel good in the Netherlands.

Mariana tells about the contact she has with her family. Especially with her mother she has a lot of contact. Everyday she writes her mother a long e-mail to tell everything she did that day. Her mother does the same and sometimes she sends even more than one e-mail at a day. Next to this they talk on the phone once a month. Now that Mariana is pregnant they call more often because her mother is more worried about her. I notice it is difficult for Mariana to talk about her family, because she misses them a lot. Especially when she tells about her father and that he is really sick she becomes very emotional. The contact with her family is very important to Mariana. Also with her sister she has a lot of contact on the phone. It is difficult that they are not close to her. Having contact and knowing how her family is doing is important to Mariana to be able to feel good in the Netherlands.⁷¹

Like Mariana, most contact that the women have is with their parents, and especially with their mothers, who is for the majority of the women the most important person in their lives. The majority of the women have more than once a week contact with their parents, mostly through telephone. They share their experiences. This is for many women the way to be close with their parents, even if they are far away. Also the contact with other family members, like sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins, is important to the women. The contact with them is a bit less than with the parents, but still from once a week to once a month. Most of this contact is through e-mail and chat.

The women who came to the Netherlands more than ten years ago, did not have a lot of contact with their families when they just arrived here because they did not have internet and telephone calls were very expensive at that time.

*"Thirteen years ago I came to the Netherlands to be with my Dutch husband. It was hard, especially because I did not have a lot of contact with my family. Internet did not exist at that time and the contact was namely through postcards. Telephone calls were very expensive. I paid five guilders per minute. There was no time to say a lot, but every week I called my mother for five minutes to hear her voice. I got pregnant and that was even more difficult. With the baby at my arms I stared at the mirror because I felt so alone. There were a lot of people, but my family was not there! Now it is totally different. I call with my mother for hours on the telephone. That helps to feel good now. Back then however, it was very hard."*⁷²

⁶⁹ Interviews with Maria - 16 February 2009 & 20 April 2009

⁷⁰ Piñatas is a bright coloured figure, made of 'papier mâché' filled with sweets. Original they are used with Christmas and birthday parties of children in Mexico. Nowadays they are used as well in many other Latin-American countries.

⁷¹ Interviews with Mariana - 24 March 2009 & 14 May 2009

⁷² Interview with Nieves - 12 March 2009

Many of the women found it difficult having little contact with their family and state that it makes a big difference to have more contact with your family. Nowadays, like Nieves, they have contact much more than before. According to them this also makes them feel better in the Netherlands and while not having contact with their families made it impossible to feel at home, the contact they have now makes that it is possible to make themselves at home in the Netherlands. This contact with the family stays important for the women notwithstanding the time they are in the Netherlands.

Also the contact of their children with the family in the country of origin is important for Latin-American women. The women want their children to know their family. Most of the women find it difficult that their children do not have a lot of contact with their family, while they think of it as important. Therefore their children often have daily or weekly contact with the families of the women through chat or telephone. Besides that the women feel their children have to know their family in Latin America, some of the women also want their children to learn about the Latin-American way of getting along with family instead of the more detached Dutch way. Together with their husbands and children most women also visit their family in the country of origin about once a year.

In some cases it is difficult for the family members to understand the women and the way they changed. Different expectations and opinions can lead to some arguing and misunderstandings. It is difficult for the women to see that their own family members do not understand what the women go through when migrating. The families at times do not understand the ways in which the women change through their new lives in the Netherlands.

"The contact with my mother is very difficult. She does not understand me and how hard it can be to leave your own country and start a new life in the Netherlands. She thinks I am a bad wife and mother because my husband helps with the bringing-up of our children and the housekeeping. Because of the bad things she said to me I do not talk with her anymore on the phone. We were always arguing about how I do things here in the Netherlands."⁷³

Although no other women do not have contact with a family member anymore, they notice they change and alienate in a certain way from their culture and their family. Still, the women are often glad with these changes they went through because they value some new habits as better. These changes often have to do with, like in the case of Belicia, gender relations, but also with structure, like having agendas or be more punctual. After they have been back in their country of origin once they often notice that they have changed and that they like to go back to their lives in the Netherlands at the end of their vacation. It makes that they are more happy with their lives in the Netherlands and more at home to a certain extent because they feel a connection with Dutch culture.

To the women the contact with their family is necessary and logical. They want to know how their family is doing. It is the way to be close to their family, even if they are far away. Together with their husbands and children, this contact makes that they feel good in the Netherlands. They do not feel at home however in the Netherlands only by this contact. The contact with family members makes that they feel at home the moment when they are together with them.

⁷³ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

4.3 Contact with Latin-Americans in the Netherlands

Latin-American women in the Netherlands feel often in between two countries: their country of origin and the Netherlands. Like other migrants they often search for communities within the country they moved to, where the members share a common country of origin or a shared identity (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002:10; Ahmed, 1999:336). The women feel that they have changed since they have come here and they notice this when they are in the country of origin or when they have contact with their family.

The first time Marisa went back to Mexico she was shocked by the traffic. It was a chaos. She saw it as something really dangerous. According to her it should not be possible to drive without a drivers licence. While she drove a car in Mexico a couple of years ago, she now did not want to drive in Mexico anymore. She got used to the structured traffic in the Netherlands. Her family did not understand anything of her. What was her problem? In the past she used to drive her as well, and now she thought of it as ridiculous?⁷⁴

Like the example of Marisa there are many. The women make some customs in the Netherlands their own, without really noticing and they alienate in a certain way from their country and culture. On the other they are the 'others' in Dutch society. Other Latinas in the Netherlands share this experience of migration and of starting a new life in the Netherlands.

*"I like it to speak in my own language, but more important my Latin-American friends understand my background. They know where I come from and what I have been through by migrating to the Netherlands. They are going through the same process. That is why these relations are so important, I can share my experiences and they know what I mean."*⁷⁵

By looking at this citation of Marisa it becomes clear that the relations Latin-American women have with each other in the Netherlands exist out of past and present experiences and span several societies because they are about the Netherlands as well as Latin-America. Having regard to the differences between them, Latin-American women share for a big part a same past together of living in a Latin-American country. In the Netherlands they share also present experiences in starting a new life in a 'new' country. The contact still spans two societies because while the contacts are in the Netherlands and experiences of living in the Netherlands are shared, the women also share together their language and culture of the country of origin. These two experiences cannot be shared with anybody else and that is why these contacts are so important to the women.

All women have more Latin-American friends than Dutch ones. Especially in the first years the women are in the Netherlands contact with other *Latinas* helps them to feel good. To be able to speak their own language without barriers and sharing their culture is important, namely because the Dutch culture is in many ways so different and distant from theirs. While the culture in Latin America is different between the countries, especially within the social life there are a lot of comparisons between them. It is exactly this part of the culture that is so different from the Dutch one. In Latin America the social life is much more out on the streets. According to the women much more people greet each other and everyone is interested in one another.

⁷⁴ Interview with Marisa - 23 March 2009

⁷⁵ Interview with Marisa - 23 March 2009

*"In Peru no appointment has to be made and when you like to drink something with your friends there is always somebody who wants to watch your children. Here everything is scheduled and a spontaneous date is impossible"*⁷⁶

Many women assent to the citation of Ana Maria and they name especially the spontaneity as a big difference. Like some women said: "Social contact and relations are easier in Latin America".

Latin-American women get to know each other through the *inburgeringscursus*, Dutch language courses, churches, cultural activities and at the schools of their children. Also the embassy can be important to get in contact with other women from the same country. The women who live in a city easier get in contact with other Latin-Americans, because there are more Latin-Americans living in the cities and there are more organisations that focus on them and organise activities where women can meet each other. The majority of the Latin-American women gets to know a couple of *Latinas* through above named means and after that get in contact with others through these contacts. Most women do not directly make a difference between different nationalities within their contact with Latinas in the Netherlands. Still, not all women feel that they share the same culture with *Latinas* from other countries than their own. Especially the women from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Peru have namely contact with women from their own countries. According to them their own culture is different from the other ones in Latin America. All the women have contact with other Latinas though. The women have a lot of Latin-American acquaintances, with whom they meet at cultural activities. In most cases they have a few good friends with which they meet regularly.

Although in their daily social lives most women have more contact with Dutch people, they spend their quality time with Latin-American women. The activities women undertake have to do with sharing their experiences and their language and cultural habits.

*"Together with my Colombian and Mexican friends I can talk for hours and hours. When we come together at each others houses we always cook a typical dish from one of our countries. We understand each other and it is funny that when we are together only we understand each other and other people do not."*⁷⁷

*"Regularly I organise a party together with my Latin-American friends. We eat and dance together, like we did before our migration"*⁷⁸

*"Together with my Guatemalan friends we like to celebrate the birthdays of our children the ways in which we used to in Guatemala when we were kids. We make a piñata that the children break by hitting it with a stick. We prepare a lot of typical Guatemala food and there is a lot of music and dancing."*⁷⁹

*"The contact with other El Salvadorians is very important to me. We talk together, eat together and share our experiences. We help each other to understand Dutch society and learn about the cultural habits here."*⁸⁰

The moments Latin-American women are together and undertake these activities they feel at home. Furthermore they are important to feel good in Dutch society because they make it possible to share the past and present experiences and combine together their two countries, with which they cannot do with other people.

⁷⁶ Interview with Ana Maria - 11 March 2009

⁷⁷ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

⁷⁸ Citation of Alma at the focus group meeting at Maastricht - 22 May 2009

⁷⁹ Interviews with Maria - 16 February 2009 & 18 March 2009

⁸⁰ Interview with Zarita - 27 April 2009

4.4 Contact with Dutch people

Irena has a lot of Dutch acquaintances. Only Mirjam who she plays tennis with she calls a friend. However, they do not talk about personal things and they meet namely on the tennis court. They also go bicycling or out to have dinner, but they never visit each other at their houses. Irena has the idea that while she likes to get in contact with different cultures, Dutch people think different from her. *"We do never completely understand each other."* That is why it is difficult to become friends, even after twenty years. With other Peruvian women she shares her culture and it is easier to become friends they know how to get along with each other.⁸¹

While Latin-American women have a lot of contact with Dutch people in their daily lives - in the neighbourhood, at their work, their family in law, friends from their partners and other mothers at the schools of their children - they do almost never become friends with them. One reason for this, the attitude of Dutch society with regard to migrants, is already discussed. Also the individualism of Dutch society, the language and cultural differences, working outside the house, having children, insecurity and time are factors which influence these relations and which I will discuss in this paragraph. First I will discuss the importance of these relations as the little contact women have with Dutch people is in contrast with the importance Latin-American women attach to it.

*"Having contact with Dutch people is the only way through which it is possible to really understand the Dutch people and the Dutch culture"*⁸²

Many women assent to the citation of Rosa and believe contact with Dutch people is an indispensable part of the homemaking process.

I already noticed that adaptation to a certain extent of the culture of the 'new' country is crucial in the homemaking processes of Latin-American women in the Netherlands. An important means to do this, next to adaptation of some 'cultural stuff', is through social relations with Dutch people.

*"Some contacts with other Latinas are to share our language and culture, other contacts with the Dutch are to learn the Dutch language and learn about the new culture."*⁸³

For the women Dutch friends, but also acquaintances like neighbours and colleagues are important to them. These relations all together help them to feel better in Dutch society because they inform the women about Dutch culture and habits and make that the women feel more a part of Dutch society. Although it is easy for the women to have some superficial contacts, the women are hindered in more strong contacts with Dutch people. To understand the contact women have with Dutch people it is important to look at all the factors that negatively or positively influence this contact.

Together with ten Latin-American women I sit in a living room of one of them, drinking *maté*⁸⁴. We discussed different topics and are now talking about how the women try to make themselves at home. Different women think that learning the Dutch language is very important to feel at home in the Netherlands. While it costs time to feel at home, learning the Dutch language is necessary to be able to feel at home, says one of the women. Other women agree and tell that it is important because it makes it easier to find a job and it is easier to get in contact with and understand Dutch people and Dutch society.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Interviews with Irene - 3 April 2009 & 29 May 2009

⁸² Interview with Rosa - 25 February 2009

⁸³ Interview with Dyrena - 19 February 2009

⁸⁴ *Maté* is the national drink of Argentina. It is an infusion served with a metal straw from a shared hollow calabash gourd.

⁸⁵ Focus group meeting in Maastricht - 22 May 2009

Learning the Dutch language is according to many Latin-American women spoken to, necessary to get in contact with Dutch people and making themselves at home in the Netherlands. Speaking Dutch helps the women to find a job, to get in contact with Dutch people everywhere they go, to communicate with the family in law and to understand the Dutch people and society. While all women think of it as important to speak the Dutch language to feel more at home, there are differences between the women how good their Dutch is. Namely the women who are higher educated, followed education in the Netherlands and have jobs in which they have to speak Dutch, speak the language better than women who are lower educated, do not have jobs or have jobs in which they do not have to speak Dutch. This has also to do with the agency women practice, which as became clear in chapter three, often also depends on the education and jobs women have. The women who speak Dutch better again practice more agency in the search for Dutch contacts and are often the ones who also have some Dutch friends. They often feel more at home in the Netherlands in contrast with women who speak little Dutch.

Working outside the house is another factor which influences the contact women have with Dutch people and their feeling of being at home. While not all Latin-American women have a job, the majority has and need it to feel good. Especially the women who did university and had a good job in their country of origin, like manager or psychologist, find it important to work or be active outside the house.

“For me it is important to have a job, to be able to develop my skills, get in contact with Dutch people, but also to have a certain importance for Dutch society. Together this makes that I feel more a part of society and more at home in the Netherlands.”⁸⁶

Through their jobs women get in contact with other Dutch people but also develop their skills which makes that they feel more a part of Dutch society. In the beginning women have to get used to the different way of getting along with colleagues then they used to in Latin-America. Many women tell that they used to go out with their colleagues after work and would become friends with them as well. This is not the case with the women and their colleagues in the Netherlands. While the women have in general good contact with them, the contact is more like acquaintances. The women work together with them and sometimes in their lunch breaks go out to eat something together with their colleagues. They do not meet them after work though.

Another factor which influences the contact with Dutch people negatively is the individualism of the Dutch people and the attitude of Dutch society towards migrants. In chapter two I already concluded that prejudices that exist in Dutch society make it more difficult for the women to feel welcome in Dutch society. This makes it for many of the women impossible to feel at home in Dutch society. The differences between the hospitality of the people in their countries of origin and the individualism and prejudices in Dutch society can influence the homemaking processes of the women.

“When we moved I had this weird experience. In our new neighbourhood people would come to us. They never started talking to me, but always to my husband. At my husband they asked questions about me, till he said that I could talk for myself as well. This woman thought that I

⁸⁶ Interview with Paula - 14 May 2009

could not speak Dutch; she even asked me if I was poor in Peru. When I told her I went to university she reacted very surprised. That is what happens all the time. Dutch people think that I was poor and that I did not go to school. They think I came here to live a financially better life, while I had a job and a bigger house in Peru than I have now."⁸⁷

*"The first time I talked to my neighbour I was surprised. She just stood there in the doorstep and she did not invite me in. I thought of it as rude. In Guatemala it would be an insult when you are not invited in. Now I understand that this is the way in which Dutch people associate with their neighbours. I still cannot get used to it and hold on to the hospitality of my country."*⁸⁸

*"The contact with Dutch people in the neighbourhood is difficult because they often think that I do not speak Dutch. A month ago I was at the playground with my children. There was another child on the swing turning around. I told her not to do that because it is very dangerous. When the swing stops turning they can fall very hard off the swing. But she kept on doing it and fell. The mother of the child came to her child and I explained what happened. She said to me that she thought that I could not speak Dutch and that she was surprised. Now we have a lot more contact and talk to each other more often."*⁸⁹

Most women agree with these stories and do not have a lot of contact with their Dutch neighbours besides some greeting and short conversations. In contrast many of them do have contact with other migrants in the neighbourhoods that are not from Latin-America. According to the women this is namely because they share the experience of being a migrant in the Netherlands or because their cultures have certain similarities, especially in hospitality. These experiences of contact with Dutch people show that it is difficult to get in contact with them because of the different way of getting along with each other and the prejudices towards migrants in Dutch society. It makes that the women have the feeling they do not belong to Dutch society. The women are by many of the Dutch people seen as 'the other'. The danger of this 'othering' by Dutch society is that migrant women create a very generalized and stereotyped image of the Dutch as well (Gorashi, 2003:185). This makes it even more difficult for the women and Dutch people to get in contact with each other and for the women to make themselves at home.

Together with the individualism and prejudices in Dutch society differences in language and culture make it difficult for Latin-American women to have friendships with Dutch women. The women have the feeling that in the contact with Dutch people, they never understand each other completely because of the different ways of getting along with each other. While with Latin-American women they share cultural stuff like music, dancing, cooking extensively and the same way of celebrating birthdays and other feast-days, with Dutch people women have the feeling -especially in the first years- that they do not share anything. Furthermore, in the contact with Dutch people they always speak in a language that is not theirs and this makes tight friendships, especially within the first years almost impossible.

An example of a cultural difference in the association between Latin-America and the Netherlands is the relationship the women have with their doctor. A lot of Latin-American women have a personal relationship with their doctor in Latin-America.

"We decided to marry in the Netherlands when I just arrived here. I was busy with the preparations and made a list of people who should come to our wedding. I also wanted to invite my dentist, the doctor and my gynaecologist at the wedding, till my husband told me that that

⁸⁷ Interviews with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

⁸⁸ Interviews with Maria - 16 February 2009 & 18 March 2009

⁸⁹ Interview with Belicia - 7 May 2009

*was not normal in the Netherlands. For me it was logical, I would have done the same in Peru.*⁹⁰

This example shows how big cultural differences can be and the misunderstandings they can cause between people from different countries. Other differences women name have to do with spontaneity. The contact with Latinas is according to them much more open and spontaneous, while the contact with the Dutch is more detached and less spontaneous. Cultural differences make it for the women more difficult to completely understand each other and for the women this is an important thing in having friendships. Time however can influence the gap between the cultural differences and make it easier to become friends. I will elaborate on this later on in this paragraph.

Having children is another factor that influences the contact Latin-American women have with Dutch people. While at the one hand having children can negatively influence the contact with Dutch people when women choose to stay at home for their children and do not work, at the other hand it can positively influence the contacts when the women get in contact with other parents for example at the schools of their children. In addition this is influenced by the agency that the women use in this. Some of the women I spoke to find it difficult to get in contact with other mothers at the schools of their children. One of these women told that she had the feeling other mothers were speaking about her and never came to her to talk. This is in contrast with the story of Marisa who did not wait for other mothers to come to her but invited all of them at their house:

*"I think a lot of Latin-American women do not feel secure about them speaking Dutch and that is why they do not get in contact with Dutch people. I do not have that. I am not afraid to make mistakes. When my son went to primary school I wanted to know the parents of the children he played with. I made an invitation and invited all the mothers at my house. They were very surprised, because it is not really a "Dutch thing" to do, but we have very good contact now. We regularly meet to have coffee and we talk a lot."*⁹¹

Marisa is not afraid to speak Dutch and to make the first move to get in contact with other Dutch people. Unfortunately not all of the women share this attitude, what makes it more difficult for them to get in contact with Dutch people and to make themselves at home in Dutch society.

I already described the contact women have with colleagues and neighbours. Another important contact with Dutch people is the family in law of many women who are together with a Dutch man. This contact is influenced by the attitude of the families towards the women. This again influences the homemaking processes of the women by feeling welcome or not. Also the expectations of the women do play a role in this.

*"I do not understand anything of the relation between my husband and his parents. My husband only talks to or visits his mother once a month. Incredible! My mother is the most important person in this world! She is my best friend and it would be impossible to only talk to her once a month. Impossible!"*⁹²

Out of the reaction of Maria becomes clear how difficult it is for Latin-American women to understand the ways in which many Dutch people have contact with their families. To *Latinos* the family often is significantly more important than it is to other groups (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995:113). Because the families in Latin America are often very strong, the women also

⁹⁰ Interview with Belicia - 25 February 2009 & 7 May 2009

⁹¹ Interview with Marisa - 23 March 2009

⁹² Interview with Maria - 16 February 2009

expect their relationship with the family of their partners to be strong. In the majority of the cases this is not true at all. The women are very surprised when they find out that their husband often has little contact with his family and only visits his parents once a week or even once a month. For the women this is difficult to understand. It is difficult for the women to feel welcome in the family in law because of the different way of getting along with each other, but also because some parents would not accept their sons to marry with a foreign girl. Mariana tells me about her family in law:

*"When I came to the Netherlands to be with Arnold, his parents would not accept me. They did not want their daughter in law to be foreign and even told Arnold that they would pay for the ticket to send me back to Argentina. Now that I am pregnant they seek more contact and think that I forgot about the things they said a couple of years ago. But I will never forget what they said, that is impossible."*⁹³

Like Mariana other women as well do not have a lot of contact with their family in law. Some of the women however, do have good contact with their family in law and mention this as very important for them to feel at home in the Netherlands. For the other women it is difficult that they do not have family in the Netherlands to rely on. It makes it more difficult to feel welcome and to feel home.

In contrast with the many women who do not have strong contact with Dutch people, there are also women who do have good experiences with Dutch people. Namely the women who are here since a longer period remain better contacts with Dutch people. Rosa who came to the Netherlands thirty years ago explains:

*"I got to know the Dutch people in another way. When I came here foreigners were seen as exotic and the people were really interested in me. I therefore never had problems with Dutch people and got to know them as really friendly and helpful. Besides this I did not have a lot of contact with other Latin-Americans. I thought of it as important to learn the Dutch language and to have contact with Dutch people. It is the only way through which it is possible to learn the Dutch language and culture completely. The women who came to the Netherlands later often complain about the Dutch people. I can understand this because Dutch society is hardened, but I got to know the Dutch people in another way and therefore have no problems in having contact with them."*⁹⁴

Rosa got to know the Dutch people and Dutch society in another time and another way and therefore has less problems with getting in contact with them and become friends. While she came to the Netherlands before migrants were seen as a problem, for the women who came later time is an important factor in getting better contacts with Dutch people. The longer Latin-American women live in the Netherlands the more friendships they build with Dutch people.

*"It cost me years to understand the way in which Dutch people get along with each other. I now have two Dutch friends. With them I maybe do not share the same background, but we try to share our cultures together. I make them dance a bit more and react a bit more spontaneous and they teach me how to be direct and say what I think. While the Dutch friendships are planned, they are honest and for live. The relationships with Latinas are spontaneous, but not always punctual and there is a lot of gossiping about each other."*⁹⁵

Also according to other women time influences the relations women have with Dutch people. While it is difficult to become friends, many of the women admit that once you are friends with Dutch

⁹³ Interview with Mariana - 14 May 2009

⁹⁴ Interview with Rosa - 25 February 2009

⁹⁵ Citation of Lidia during the focus group meeting in Maastricht - 22 May 2009

women it is for life. Friendships of the women with Dutch people differ from the ones with Latin-Americans because the women do not share a common background or culture. Some women, like Lidia, also try to share their culture with their Dutch friends. At the other hand there are women who do completely other things with their Dutch friends like going to the cinema and out for dinner.

Noticeable is that many women through the contact with Dutch people try to feel part of Dutch society and feel a sense of belonging. While their contacts with acquaintances, like colleagues or neighbours is important to them to learn about the Dutch language and Dutch culture, these contacts also can make them feel like the 'other' because of the individualism and prejudices. Dutch friendships are therefore important to feel a part of Dutch society and get a sense of belonging. Especially in the first years it is difficult to create these friendships. While time has its influence, the contact is also influenced by different factors described in this paragraph. The impact of these factors is influenced by the agency the women use which depends on their history-in-person. Still, as long as the women have the feeling they are the 'other' in Dutch society, it is impossible to feel at home in the Netherlands.

4.5 Conclusion

All social relations are important in the construction, maintenance and the development of home (Massey, 1992; Easthope, 2004). Different social relations of Latin-American women in the Netherlands all have their own importance to Latin-American women and their homemaking processes. The contact with their family is the most important to feel good in the Netherlands and necessary to be able to feel at home. At the moment they are together with their family they feel at home, even as at the moments they share their language and culture with other Latin-Americans. These relations are also important for the women because the women share the same experience of migration, estranging from the country of origin and being the 'other' in Dutch society. Sharing their experiences is necessary for the women to feel good and get the feeling of belonging they miss in Dutch society. The relations with Dutch people are according to the women very important to get the feeling they belong to Dutch society and to feel at home but the women are hampered in this by many different factors of which the attitude of Dutch society towards the migrants and the difference in language and culture are the most important ones. The impact of these factors is influenced by the agency the women practice which depends on the women's history-in-person.

5. Conclusion

In this study I sought to provide an in-dept analysis of the relation between home, homemaking and social relations in the lives of Latin-American female migrants in the Netherlands. Homemaking is the “process by which diverse subjects imagine and make themselves at home in various geographic locations”. It is a concept through which it is possible to understand how migrants use their homeland experiences in constructing a new life in another country (Espiritu, 2003:2). I formulated the following central question that has guided the research: How to describe and understand the ways in which Latin-American female migrants use their social relations in their process of homemaking? I divided this question into two themes on which I focused during my fieldwork: 1) the relation between past and present experiences and agency in the homemaking processes of Latin-American women and 2) the functioning of the spatial, social and psychological element of home in the process of homemaking of the women. These questions are based on the assumptions that looking at one’s history-in-person is necessary to understand their homemaking process, Latin-American women can actively influence this process by using their agency and that social relations are important means through which migrants construct their new homes.

By means of revealing history-in-person (Holland & Lave, 2001) chapter two showed that homemaking is a complex concept which is influenced by many factors within the past and present experiences and by the agency Latin-American women practice. Past experiences influence how people react on present experiences (Hollands & Lave, 2001; Gorashi, 2003). This was noticeable in the lives of Latin-American women as well. Depending on their personal migration histories they used their agency differently in reacting on present experiences they face in Dutch society. Especially higher educated women with jobs in the Netherlands are more active in their homemaking processes. In spite of the agency that women have in the process, this chapter showed that we must not forget that the society that receives the migrant can make or not make for a certain extent a home for this migrants through inclusion or exclusion (Espiritu, 2003). Especially the ‘othering’ in Dutch society makes it difficult for the women to feel at home because they get the feeling they do not belong to Dutch society.

Chapter three presented that home is a much more complex concept than it looks like at first sight. Home is not just a good feeling, but a sense of belonging is necessary to be able to feel at home. The concept of home does not only consist out of the three elements distinguished out of the literature, but also combines past and present and the country of origin to the ‘new’ country. The tension between feeling good and home is showed in this chapter when looking at how Latin-American women try to make themselves at home. Women define their homes as a good feeling they get through practices that have to do with Latin-America, its people, its language and its culture. While they need this practices and especially the contact with their family in the country of origin to make them feel good in the Netherlands, it does not make them at home in the Netherlands. Integration in Dutch society is also needed to create a feeling of belonging and to feel at home. The women use - dependent on their history-in-person - their agency in this process which

makes that they can feel good. Feeling home however is hampered by Dutch society who sees migrants as 'others' through which it is impossible to feel completely at home.

The dominant discourse in the Netherlands of migration as a temporary phenomenon has caused the 'othering' of immigrants (Gorashi, 2003). Because of this 'othering' Latin-American women do not feel welcome in the Netherlands. They have the idea they have to prove themselves and their skills everyday again because of the prejudices about them as 'stupid and poor'. Most Latin-American women - depending on their history-in-person - use their agency to try and weaken this prejudices that exist about them. The women who do this often feel more at home than the women who do not use their agency and are less active in their homemaking process. This shows that history-in-person has its influence on the homemaking processes of Latin-American women by influencing their agency and the choices they make in their lives.

All social relations are important in the construction, maintenance and the development of home (Massey, 1992; Easthope, 2004). The fourth chapter of this thesis showed that the different social relations of Latin-American women in the Netherlands all play their own role in the homemaking process. Some of these relations are necessary for the women to feel good others are necessary to feel at home. Together all these relations decide whether it is possible for Latin-American women to feel at home. The contact with their families is the most important to feel good in the Netherlands and is necessary to be able to feel at home. Sharing their language and culture together with other Latin-American women in the Netherlands is important for the women to feel at home at the moments they do this. But these relations are also important for the women because the women share the same experience of migration and being the 'other' in Dutch society. Sharing these experiences is necessary for the women to feel good and get the feeling of belonging they miss in Dutch society. The relations with Dutch people are according to the women very important to get the feeling they belong to Dutch society and to feel at home but the women are hampered in this by many different factors of which the attitude of Dutch society towards the migrants and the difference in language and culture are the most important ones. The impact of these factors is influenced by the agency the women practice which depends again on the women's history-in-person.

In spite of the difficulties that women face in Dutch society they choose to live in the Netherlands and feel good about them having started a new life there. They are very strong women who choose to make something of their lives even if it is not possible to feel completely at home in the Netherlands because of them being separated from their families and because of the feeling they do not completely belong to Dutch society. The longer the Latin-American women are in the Netherlands the easier it is to make a cultural mix within their houses, their cultural habits and their social relations between the Netherlands and their country of origin in Latin-America and the more they feel at home. Still not one of the women feels completely at home. What is it that makes the concept of home so complex and different from feeling good? And which role do the social relations play in this?

Through the stories of Latin-American women in the Netherlands it became clear that past experiences from the country of origin (history-in-person) influences the agency that is used to

react on present experiences in the 'new' society. While the receiving society can make or not make for a certain extent a home for migrants through inclusion or exclusion (Espiritu, 2003) the migrants themselves can use their agency in trying to make themselves at home through social relations (social element) and 'cultural stuff' (spatial element) that combines past and present and their country of origin with their 'new' country. In the Netherlands however a tension between the agency and the attitude of 'new' society is visible which hampers the homemaking process. The success of the homemaking process is thus not something that is one-sided only from the migrant, but depends as well on the 'new' society.

By studying the relation between homemaking and social relations it turned out that different social relations play different roles in the homemaking process, but a combination of them is needed to be able to construct a home. However, home is a much more complex concept than only a feeling that migrants get by using the social and spatial element of home in trying to make themselves at home. Not only the psychological, spatial and social element turned out to construct home, it is also important that these elements combine past and present and the country of origin and the 'new' country with each other. This thesis has proven that home is more than just a good feeling and can be seen as a deeper feeling in which social relations -which combine past and present and the country of origin with the 'new' country- are the most important means through which this feeling can be obtained, but that also the cultural stuff in and practiced inside the houses helps create this feeling.

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