

Cherished possessions, home-making practices and aging in care homes in Kerala, India

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the material and imaginary aspects of emotions embedded in cherished possessions contribute to home-making practices at the scale of a formal care setting for older adults in a non-western context. This study examines three types of care homes with residents from different socioeconomic backgrounds in the state of Kerala, India. Data include in-depth interviews, observations, and photography with older adults in care homes. We identify three types of cherished possessions that are embodied with different roles and emotional qualities: first, religious artifacts that signify a sense of security in day-to-day life; second, possessions embedded with memories of past life events that elicit pride and a sense of continuity; and, third, possessions linked to memories of family members and pets, which reflect efforts to create a sense of co-presence. This paper contributes to a new dialogue on how empirical research on home-making practices can enrich and sustain the emotional well-being of older adults living in care homes.

1. Introduction

Various studies have shown that cherished possessions promote a sense of continuity, comfort, and security that enables older adults to stay connected with their past (Nord, 2013; Sherman and Dacher, 2005; van Hoof et al., 2016). Being surrounded by material possessions can evoke positive emotions and contribute to domesticity and a homely atmosphere (Falk et al., 2012; Klaassens and Meijering, 2015). Smaller possessions in particular may be imbued with intense significance by people who are limited in the objects they can take with them when moving (Walsh, 2006). The cherishing of possessions evokes emotions through which older adults seek to sustain memories of people and places. In this study, we define cherished possessions as the objects older adults take with them to a care home, as these possessions are embedded with different meanings, multiple emotions, and memories that enable them to turn their new home into an integrated domestic space (Rose, 2003). These possessions elicit feelings of spatial proximity that reflect family togetherness (Rose, 2004), belonging, domesticity, and intimacy (Walsh, 2006). Emotional geographers have largely focused on emotional experiences and expressions when studying the well-being of older people in relation to places (Smith, 2009; Varley, 2008). Research on older adults living in care homes has tended to focus on issues of home, belonging, and home-making practices, but has paid less attention to the role of possessions. This is one of the first studies to examine the home-making practices of older adults in a non-

western setting.

Of the states in India, Kerala has the most rapidly aging population and the highest life expectancy. A decade ago, Kerala already had the second highest number of institutional care homes for older adults (HelpAge India, 2009). As Indian society continues to undergo socio-economic and other demographic changes, the demand for institutional geriatric care services is expected to grow (Irudaya Rajan, 2002; Jamuna, 2003). Here, care homes are generally perceived as places where older adults are left after being forgotten by family members while studies on care homes in India have largely focused on poverty alleviation and basic services (Liebig, 2003). How cherished possessions aid the home-making process to influence the subjective well-being of older adults in care homes has seldom been addressed in the Indian cultural context. This study attempts to identify the different types of cherished possessions older adults have, and how they engage with these possessions. Specifically, we seek to determine the emotional qualities of these cherished possessions that help in the home-making process, and thus promote emotional well-being. This study was conducted in three care homes with residents of different socioeconomic backgrounds. Care homes can be considered to be non-normative dwelling spaces that accommodate unrelated strangers. As the rules, regulations, and resources of these three care homes vary, the types of cherished possessions the residents have, and how they engage with these possessions, are also likely to vary.

Most studies on material culture and meaning in later adulthood

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have focused on western countries (Kroger and Adair, 2008; Meijering and Lager, 2014; Nord, 2013; van Hoof et al., 2016). This study shows that material culture and the emotional qualities of home and home-making in the realm of emotional geography are important for the Indian cultural context as well. In the next section, we review the literature on emotional geography and the role of cherished possessions in home-making practices. In the following sections, we present our methodology, our results, and a discussion of our results.

2. Emotional geography and role of cherished possessions in home-making practices

The literature on *emotional geographies* has emphasized the importance of taking into account emotional engagement, emotional experiences, and expression when examining the well-being of people in relation to places (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Wood and Smith, 2004). The well-being of a person is highly determined by their sense of belongingness associated with home (Cooney, 2012; Falk et al., 2012; Giuliani, 2003), a central place capable of providing a person with comfort, safety, and security. Feeling at home has a positive effect on the well-being of older adults because it fosters a sense of autonomy, self-confidence, and social integration (Meijering and Lager, 2014; Smith, 2009). In fact, according to Blunt and Varley (2004), “Home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life” (p.3). Cooney (2012) observed that the ability to maintain one's own identity, to continue a familiar routine, and to talk about the past contributes to feeling a sense of home. Blunt and Dowling (2006) further described three potential components of critical geographies of home that are not mutually exclusive. In the first component, *home as material and imaginative*, home is perceived as a material dwelling as well as a set of meanings shaped by emotions and feelings of belonging. The second component is *the nexus between home, power, and identity*; this implies that a person's role and identity are constantly (re)produced and articulated through power relations. The third component is home as *multi-scalar and open* which suggests that home can exist at different scales, ranging from the body and the household to the city, nation, and globe. In a care home, where unrelated people live together, the sense of belonging, imaginaries of home, and home-making practices may also stretch to a different scale.

In a non-normative dwelling, home-making practices which involve different material possessions may reflect different aspects of the residents' multi-faceted identities such as sexuality, heritage, family, connections, and spiritual beliefs. As a result, the maintenance of materiality can help to reconcile diverse dimensions of their multi-faceted selves (Gorman-Murray, 2007). In his review of multi-disciplinary work on masculinity and domesticity, Gorman-Murray (2008) focused on two theoretical terms: domestic masculinity and masculine domesticity. Domestic masculinity refers to how the identities of men are formed through domestic ideals and home-making practices. Masculine domesticity refers to how home-making practices refashion the dominant discourse of home (p. 369). The home-making practices of older men in care homes may also include domestic possessions that redefine the dominant discourse of home which defines their role as breadwinners. Nonetheless, because the work of Gorman-Murray have been largely focused on the western context, it is necessary to critically examine how it can be adapted to the non-western experience. For older adults, moving to a care home is often associated with acute distress and a loss of identity. Citing her own father's experiences, Varley (2008) explained how the loss of home and the dearth of personal material culture in care homes causes residents to experience severe distress and a loss of identity. By contrast, the material culture of home supports individual and collective narratives of identity, and promotes a sense of place (van Hoof et al., 2016; Varley, 2008).

Home-making is a continuous process involving adaptation and modification. Meijering and Lager (2014) observed that when living

arrangements change, older adults try to recreate home in their new setting by retaining some of the material possessions that remind them of the ambience of their previous home. Blunt (2003) noted, in a study on an Anglo-Indian settlement in India, that productive nostalgia—an attachment to different places oriented towards the past, present, and future—was reflected in the residents' home-making practices. It thus appears that the well-being of older adults in care homes is determined by their level of attachment to the place where they live and the sense of home it provides.

The material world plays a significant role in shaping cultural processes through cultural norms, values, and practices (Miller, 1998). Things or materials have the power of vitality which acts as an agent or a force with trajectories and propensities (Bennett, 2010). van Hoof et al. (2016) observed that the sense of home is embedded within personal experiences and emotions, and that the emotional well-being of older adults is enhanced when they are able to keep those personal belongings which hold the most sentimental value for them. In a study on the possessions of older adults in assisted living facilities, Nord (2013) noted that these possessions were of three types: representations of who they were; memorabilia; and mundane objects. Objects of personal representation are linked to the role and position of an older adult across their life span. Memorabilia are associated with happiness and sadness while mundane objects are the possessions required for daily life (Nord, 2013 pp.138–139). As they can perform roles that go beyond utilitarian purposes, possessions do not have to have a functional value. Kroger and Adair (2008) also observed that cherished possessions take on symbolic value in later life as they are the containers which hold the remnants of an individual's life course; they are symbolically linked to the person's social status, cherished relationships, family across generations, past events, the self in previous life phases, and past historical eras. The emotional investments made in material possessions and the subsequent symbolification of these possessions are articulated through personalization, extension, and embodiment (Cristoforetti et al., 2011; Rubinstein, 1989).

In the Indian cultural context, it is generally understood that adult children have a familial duty to care for elderly parents at home (Liebig, 2003). When older adults move to a care home, the emotional relationship with their children may change. Friendship and intimacy are important sources of support and informal care because each involves exchanges of care and emotional investment. Emotional care and friendship can be greatly facilitated through co-presence (Bowlby, 2011). Emotions of missing and longing can motivate people to construct shared co-presence. Baldassar (2008) explained the construction of four types of shared co-presence: virtual; proxy; physical; and imagined. Shared virtual presence is constructed mainly through communication technologies such as skype and video calling. Co-presence by proxy is articulated through objects such as photographs. Physical presence is resolved through bodily presence. Imagined co-presences are reflected in activities such as prayers that serve as a constant reminder of missing kin (p. 264). In a care home, traditional inter-generational care exchanges between people are replaced by shared memories captured in photographs. These pictures can help older people build a sense of co-presence through collective and embodied history. Moreover, sharing experiences and memories with care home neighbors can help older people constitute a personal community based on trust and knowledge of each other and can facilitate a space for shared co-presence (Spencer and Pahl, 2006).

Photographs can be used to imagine the presence of other people and to evoke memories of shared experiences. Thus, in care homes, images and memories can be used to support the momentum of care exchanges between older adults and family members or friends (Alinejad, 2019; Madianou, 2016). When people move, their possessions may become more important to them; This is especially the case when those possessions metaphorically represent their sole link to their relationship with, and memories of, a particular person. Bringing such cherished possessions to a new place can be seen as a strategy people

use to ensure the consistency and security of their existence in the new place (Marcoux, 2001).

Additionally, as cultures and norms are changing, the role of material culture in home-making practices is likely to differ from place to place. A study on migrant settlements in Goa, India showed that home-making processes are embedded in cultural practices (Bailey et al., 2008). For older adults who live in a care home, the process of identification and the expectations about the concept of home are entrenched in their cultural schemas. In turn, schemas are internalized through culture. For D'Ándrade (1992), "A schema is a conceptual structure which makes possible the identification of objects and events" (p. 28). Schemas can help people identify and interpret objects or events with minimal clues. If the physical atmosphere of a living space is not culturally appropriate, older adults may try to recreate home through their cultural behaviors for example by modifying the physical elements and introducing new components to improve ambience (Seo and Mazumdar, 2011) or by conceptualizing home as a place of worship. Based on a study of migrant Hindus in southern California, Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2009) observed that as well as affecting homes in physical ways, religion can help to create a sacred ambience and ethos by way of material possessions which can, in turn, manifest multi-layered experiences of religion and place. Thus, our key focus in this study is on how possessions contribute to the emotional well-being of older adults in care homes in Kerala, India through the concepts of co-presence, cultural schemas and home-making.

3. Methodology

This investigation centered on Kottayam District in Kerala. Of the Indian states, Kerala has the most rapidly aging population; according to the 2011 census, adults aged 60 or older made up 12.6 percent of the state's inhabitants (Registrar General of India, 2011). As the state has relatively low fertility rates and high rates of migration of young adults, there is a growing need for care facilities that support the well-being of the older adult population. Kottayam District has a large number of care homes of various types and a large proportion of district residents (43.6%) are Christians who belong to various denominations (Zachariah, 2016).

We used data from a qualitative study conducted in 2015 at three older adult care homes: Prasanthi Bhavan, a welfare-based home for the poor; Trinity, a retirement home administered by Catholic nuns; and Sahya, a for-profit and secular retirement home for the upper-middle-class. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were used for each care home and for the research participants. In the next sections, we outline the methods used to obtain rich data including in-depth interviews, observation and photographs.

4. In-depth interviews

Between April and December 2015, we interviewed 37 older adults and four caregivers to collect information about the life histories and life experiences associated with different places and home-making practices of older adults living in care homes (see Table 1). An interview guide was prepared in English and subsequently translated into Malayalam (the local language). Research participants were asked the

following questions: Did you bring any personal possessions to your new home? Which possessions did you bring? Why did you bring these possessions with you? How are these possessions linked to you? In Trinity and Sahya, interviews were conducted in the personal rooms of the older adults. In Prasanthi Bhavan, research participants shared rooms so interviews were conducted in communal spaces in order to protect their privacy. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours; interviews were conducted up to the point of data saturation.

5. Observation

Based on the assumption that interviews alone could not fully capture the role of material culture in the care settings, information was also collected through observation. Observation as a research method provides us with a deeper understanding of both the care home and of the intimate and personal spaces occupied by older adults (van Hoof et al., 2016). Observations of the physical settings of the care homes, the material possessions used by the older adults, the ways the older adults engaged with different material possessions, and the activities of the older adults helped to contextualize the information shared in interviews. These observations were noted in a field diary during the fieldwork and were incorporated into explanations of the participants' context.

6. Photographs

Alternative data collection techniques can be used to gather evidence on the practices of research participants, to facilitate productive exchanges about the reasons for the practices, and to enrich the information being collected (Hitchings, 2012). The main aim of photography in this study was to enrich narratives about the wide range of cherished possessions used by the older adults in their personal living spaces. Important objects were first discussed during interviews. Upon consent of the owner, a photograph of the object was taken in order to support narratives from the interviews.

7. Participant recruitment

Participants taking part in this study were recruited with the prior permission of all three care homes. Before starting the first interview, the researchers made three visits to each care home in order to build a rapport with the older adults. We later sought informed consent from the participants. We did not recruit participants who were sick and bedridden as they could not give consent. Each participant was informed about the research before his or her participation.

Prasanthi Bhavan operates in a rented, two-story building. Admission to Prasanthi Bhavan is based on the severity of an older adult's poverty and destitution. Three older women share a single room on the ground floor, while the older men live in a dormitory-type facility on the first floor. The rules of the care home state that residents are not permitted to keep personal belongings with monetary value, such as gold or mobile phones.

Most of the residents of Trinity, the faith-based care home, are middle-class. This three-story retirement home is managed by a

Table 1
General profile of care homes and older adults.

Care homes	Female	Male	Religion	Employment status of older adults before reaching care home
Prasanthi Bhavan	10	5	Hindu 14 Christain 1	Daily wage worker/unemployed
Trinity	8	4	Christain 12	Retired employees/pensioners
Sahya	6	4	Christain 10	Return international migrants, retired employees/pensioners
Total	24	13	Hindu 14 Christain 23	

Catholic group led by nuns. Within the retirement home is a separate chapel where daily services are held. Each older adult has his or her own separate room with an attached bathroom and toilet facilities.

Sahya is a for-profit care home. Most of its residents are upper-middle-class older adults who returned to Kerala in retirement after living abroad or in other parts of India. This care home accommodates both able-bodied and non-able-bodied older adults, as it provides nursing care facilities. The residents have access to a range of amenities, including a library, elevators, internet service, vehicles, air-conditioned rooms, and gardens. Trained staff specializing in tasks such as nursing care, cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening, and security are deployed in each department.

8. Data analysis and presentation

The interviews were conducted in Malayalam and were later translated into English. ATLAS.ti.7, a qualitative software package, was used for data management and analysis. Following the principles of grounded theory, we employed two main cycles of coding (Hennink et al., 2011). In the first cycle, primary codes were developed both inductively and deductively. In the second cycle, code families, such as the material possessions brought to the care home, and the emotions and meanings associated with the possessions, were further developed (see Table 2). In this paper, our empirical data are presented in the form of narratives by older adults from different care homes. To allow for the greatest possible diversity of perspectives, each of the selected examples is unique and so highlights different aspects of emotions and material culture revealed in the study.

9. Results

This results section is organized according to: 1) the roles of the different types of material possessions cherished by the older adults; and 2) how these possessions were taken care of in the three different care homes. The data suggest that there were three types of cherished possessions: religious possessions; possessions linked to past life events; and possessions linked to memories of family members. In the following section, we describe how the older adults engaged with these possessions. The gendered and socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants, and the rules and regulations of the care homes, also determined how the older adults engaged with their cherished possessions.

10. Religious possessions

Older adults brought different kinds of religious possessions from their previous homes to the care homes. These included holy texts, rosaries, Japamalas (a string of prayer beads), and pictures of Jesus Christ and Hindu Gods. This makes sense as the 2011 census shows that the population of Kerala is nearly 55 percent Hindu and around 18 percent Christian (Registrar General of India, 2011).

One research participant, Mathew, lives in Trinity. There are many religious possessions in his room including a Bible, a rosary, images of Jesus Christ, and a Palm Sunday leaf. Mathew has pasted printed verses from the Bible on the walls of his room. Mathew used to teach religion at Sunday school in church and currently provides counselling for

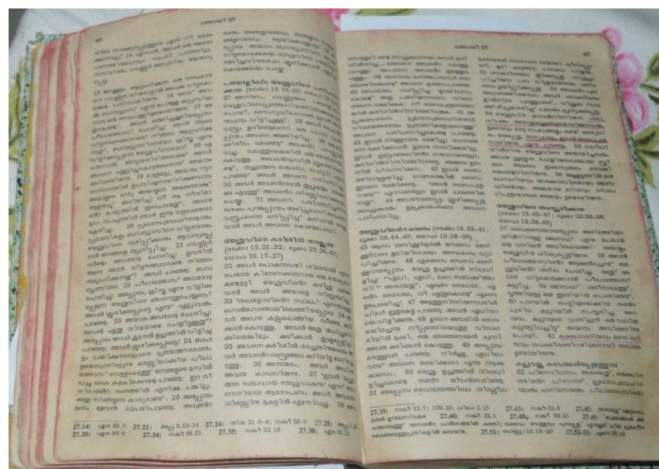


Fig. 1. The Holy Bible, religious possession : Setting direction for day-to-day life.

youths in nearby Catholic institutions. Mathew stated:

This is my Bible, from back in 1978. Malayalam. I've marked certain lines. I read it daily, just before I'm off to Holy Mass. Before I open the Bible, I'll say, "God, please tell me what should I do today". And I tell Him, "I'm thankful for receiving a good day. I surrender this day unto your hands. Help me to do good deeds". That's how I start my day. (Male, 77 years).

Admission to Trinity is restricted to older adults who are Christians; residents are required to attend three daily prayer services held in the home's small chapel. Thus, most of the older adults who choose to move into Trinity want to lead a spiritual life. As the above quote illustrates, leading a religious life is very important to Mathew. His copy of the Bible (see Fig. 1), as a representation of his past life and as a mundane object (Nord, 2013), determines the direction of his day-to-day life. His youth counselling classes are based on the Bible. Mathew's interactions with people within and outside of Trinity also reflect the role of the Bible in his daily life. As suggested by D'Andrade (1992), leading a religious life can be considered to be part of a cultural schema, designed to secure comfort and safety. This schema motivates Mathew to lead a religious life based on the Holy Bible.

Sarojani, a Hindu, moved to Prasanthi Bhavan after being neglected by her son and daughter-in-law. She is hoping to resolve her family problems and eventually return home. Sarojani is a devotee of the goddess of the Valliyamkavu temple which is situated in the Idukki District. Aligning with her faith, Sarojani always wears the japamala she obtained from her temple. Used by devotees to help them ward off evil and lead peaceful lives, japamalas are garlands made with rudraksha beads or seeds of the holy Elaecarpus ganitrus tree (see Fig. 2). When asked about this important possession, Sarojani stated:

This (her japamala) is precious to me. I got this japamala from Valliyamkavu. The Valliyamkavu Amma (a deity of the temple Valliyamkavu) is very powerful. I am a very loyal devotee of Valliyamkavu Amma. It's a kandaka shani (a personal misfortune in life

Table 2
Themes on cherished possessions and emotions associated with possessions.

Theme	Codes
Material possessions brought to care homes	Religious possessions, possessions linked with memories of working life, possessions linked with incidents happened in past life, possession linked with memories of deceased family members, possessions linked with family members, possessions linked with memories of pet.
Meaning and emotions associated with Possessions	Attachment, story behind possessions, happiness, sorrow, distress, pride, symbolic meaning, co-presence, conflict, unfulfilled aspirations, loss of possessions,

Source: Data from researcher.



Fig. 2. Japamala: Sense of security and hope for better future.

as per Hindu horoscope) for me. I do believe the gods Ganapathi, Saraswati and Mahavishnu are part of this japamala. This is important. What more do we need than Gods' grace? Every day I pray with this japamala, especially when I am stressed. (Female, 75 years)

Sarojani believes that her misfortunes and family difficulties can be explained by her Hindu horoscope based on her birth star. She uses the japamala, to pray to three gods: Saraswathi, the goddess of wisdom; Ganapathi, a remover of obstacles; and Mahavishnu, the god of present life. She believes that by wearing her japamala and praying with it, her issues with her son and daughter-in-law will be resolved; they will eventually come to see her and take her home. For Sarojani, the japamala provides her with a sense of security and hope for a better future.

Religious possessions, which are relatively easy to move or carry from one place to another, help to modify the physical environment (Seo and Mazumdar, 2011) and create a sacred ambience and ethos (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2009). Older adults living in care homes tend to have more time to pray than before as they have fewer caregiving responsibilities. For older adults, praying brings a sense of security and hope. The rosary is a very common religious possession among older Catholics, as it enables them to perform different kinds of prayers. Older adults reported using different kinds of rosaries for different prayers, as they pray not only for themselves and their family, but for the poor and needy people of the world. By praying for others, the older adults are able to connect to the outside world and hope for the well-being of others, especially the poor and the needy. Through prayer, older adults create spaces for an imagined co-presence (Bowlby, 2011); they remember the people who are close to them, while also praying for the less fortunate. Baldassar (2008) explained that this kind of co-presence is articulated through the imagination. Religious possessions like a rosary or a Bible play a central role in the process of articulating co-presence through the imagination. Our empirical material shows that religion and religious practices can play a stronger role in the lives of older adults when they are living in care homes, as these settings can be perceived as isolating and lonely. Thus, the emotional geography of care homes needs to give equal importance to the practices of their older adult residents.

10.1. Possessions linked to past moments in life

Older adults also had cherished possessions connected with their pasts, and especially with their working lives. Each of these possessions can be linked to a certain period or a particular event that happened in the life of the possessor. Some of these possessions were memorabilia (Nord, 2013) that are not used for their intrinsic purpose but instead reminded the older adult of emotional moments in the past. Making memories and accumulating possessions are ongoing processes in the life of an older adult that help with creating a sense of continuity with the past. Thus, the loss of these possessions can cause distress for an older adult.

At the time of data collection, Kuruvila lived in Sahya after spending most of his 35-year working life outside of Kerala. He retired from an Indian Government ordnance factory in Tamil Nadu. When asked about his most cherished possessions, Kuruvila stated:

In ordnance factory we had a system. At the time of retirement each and every staff member would get a walking stick and a torch. I lost my torch. Now only this walking stick remains. This stick is made from the carpentry section (of the factory). Before I came to this place, I was in Dubai with my son and his family. Before I left for Dubai, I gave this stick to one of my neighbors. Actually, he asked me, so I gave it to him. After few months I returned to Kerala. After some days I started to think of my stick. I don't want to lose it ... It's not about money. It's all about love and the memories of my friends and the place I worked ... My 35 years of service. Finally, I got it back. For him it's just an ordinary stick. But for me it's the memory of my 35 years of service. It's a token of love. (Male, 80 years)

For Kuruvila, his walking stick (see Fig. 3) embodies the symbolic value of his working life. It reminds him of his workplace and of the time he spent with former colleagues. This productive nostalgia (Blunt, 2003) helps him constitute a sense of comfort and continuity in a new setting. Kuruvila's story shows that the degree to which a person is attached to a possession is often not fully understood until it is lost or misplaced. Shared experiences and memories related to places and people are encapsulated in materials through which friendships are



Fig. 3. Walking Stick: Token of love and memory of work-life.



Fig. 4. Shoe polish brush: Sense of pride.

commemorated (Bowlby, 2011). Kuruvila's experience is unique, as he has moved between different living arrangements: first living with his spouse; then living with a son and his family; and, finally, living in the care home. His attachment to his possessions has also changed with every move he made. For Kuruvila, the loss of possessions has been a source of distress in his life. By recovering his walking stick, Kuruvila was able to re-connect with an object that symbolizes his past life and his self-identity. This evokes strong emotions such as pride, love, and nostalgia.

John and his wife Komalam reside in Sahya. They came to Sahya from Hyderabad where John was running his business. When they moved to the care home, they brought two items: a black-and-white photograph of John dressed in a navy uniform and an old shoe polish brush (see Fig. 4). John explained:

I joined the navy during the British time; I was in Karachi (Pakistan). We youngsters revolted against the British, and therefore, we were to be arrested. We escaped from there. They issued an arrest warrant and sent it to my house in Kerala. If I was caught, I would have been arrested and punished. For some time, I was in a hide-out and lived under a fake name, Vasudevan Nair ... In reality, I am a freedom fighter. Nobody knows it. But unfortunately, see, we don't have enough proof of it. My wife is trying to find some proof of it. She wants me to be officially recognized by the government as a freedom fighter. I don't have much to show about those days except this photo and old navy shoe polish brush. (Male, 90 years)

For Kuruvila and John, these possessions reflect memories of their working lives and their gendered roles (breadwinner/freedom fighter). For more than 70 years, John has kept the photo and the brush as mementos of his proudest moment: his unrecognized participation in the Indian independence struggle. John's emotional investment, pride, and sadness about not being recognized are reflected in material culture through personalization, extensions, and embodiment (Cristoforetti et al., 2011).

Generally, the older adults taking part in this research reported cherishing different types of possessions linked to the past, including gifts, mementos, and photographs as well as specific items including a

floor mat, a walking stick, and a brush to polish shoes. These possessions are cherished because they are embedded with love, nostalgia, memory, a sense of pride, and the recognition that has been bestowed on the older adults by their families and employers.

10.2. Possessions linked with memories of family members and pets

Photographs of family members and pets play a significant role in the realm of the material culture. Memories associated with deceased family members—including children, husbands, wives, and parents—are embedded in the objects brought to the care home. For the older adults, such possessions are symbolic representations of their deceased family members, and so help them to connect with their past (Kroger and Adair, 2008). Photographs are symbolic possessions embedded with memories of family members (Rose, 2004; Sherman and Dacher, 2005) that can help older adults create a sense of continuity in a new residential setting. This was described by Remani, a resident of Prasanthi Bhavan who was neglected by her husband. Afraid he would continue to abuse her, she decided to leave home after her younger son died. She took with her a few holy books and an identity card of her son. She recalled:

I had a son. He passed away few years back. I took his identity card when I came here. It has his photo on it. I keep this card inside the holy book ... I have two or three holy books with me which I brought from my home. I pray with these books every day, morning and evening. Now I know every line by heart. (Female, 64 years)

Depending on the context, emotional qualities embedded in material culture can evoke both happiness and sadness. van Hoof et al. (2016) observed that the sentimental value of possessions can promote the well-being of older adults in care homes. According to Hinduism, *moksha*, or liberation from rebirth, is the ultimate aim of a person's life. In order to attain *moksha*, a person must go through four stages: *Brahmachaya*, the student stage; *Grihasta*, the householder stage, *Vanaprasta*, the hermit stage; and *Sanyasa*, the wandering ascetic stage. Remani's son was unmarried and died at the age of 26 before entering to the *Grihasta* stage. She keeps his identity card inside a holy text to help her son attain *moksha*. Faith and praying with a holy text are everyday rituals motivated by the cultural schema (D'Ándrade, 1992) of *moksha*. The older adults in this study remember family members who have passed away through prayer. They also cherish different kinds of possessions related to deceased family members including photographs, Bibles, images of gods, and furniture used by family members. Although some of these possessions are associated with sorrow, cherishing these possessions while living in a retirement home can reflect the efforts of an older adult to stay close to the memories of deceased family members through symbolic representations embedded with love, memories, and nostalgia.

Possessions, including photographs and gifts, linked to the memories of non-co-residing family members were also cherished. These possessions create a sense of co-presence (Bailey et al., 2008) through symbolic representation that fosters feelings of closeness with family members such as children and grandchildren who live abroad or are otherwise far away. In addition, as pets are not permitted in the care homes, some of the older adults keep photographs of their pets to create this sense of co-presence.

After her husband's death, Omana chose to move to Sahya. She still has her own house in the Idukki District where her dog Yoshi is staying.

My Yoshi, I miss him a lot. I wanted to keep him here with me. But how is it possible? Before I moved to this place, I was in High Range. I have a house there and few acres of estate. I have a servant to take care of all of these things. Now Yoshi is with him. It's not me, my granddaughters, they are in the US, they named him Yoshi. They got this name from a Japanese game. Yoshi means saviour ... I feel so bad because I go there once in or twice in two months. He will die soon. Now he is twelve years



Fig. 5. Yoshi: Remembering pet and creating co-presence.

old. When he was young, if I am not at home for one or two days, he used to get angry. He will not come to me even after I reach home. After a while he comes to me and sits on my lap. Now he is getting very old. Even though he is old he recognizes me when he hears my car horn. He walks slowly towards me. I lift him up. Then I spend one or two days with my Yoshi. (Female, 78 years)

The bond between older adults and pets promotes positive mental health which enables older adults to experience comfort and safety, social inclusion and participation, as well as a purposeful routine and meaningful role in life (Hui Gan et al., 2019). Pet attachment support will help to reduce loneliness among older women (Krause-Parello, 2012). Omana keeps a framed photo of Yoshi in her room in Sahya which reflects her love and affection for him (see Fig. 5). As she knows Yoshi is old and will die soon, this photo represents mixed feelings; love and compassion sit alongside sorrow. Omana is creating the (co-) presence (Baldassar, 2008; Bowlby, 2011) of her beloved pet through proxy symbolic representation.

10.3. How do the older adults engage with material possessions?

The older adults in this study have different ways of engaging with their possessions. Some of these possessions are openly displayed, while others are more personal and so are hidden from public view. Possessions that are used daily, such as rosary beads and religious texts, are often kept on a table close to the bed for easy access.

Possessions such as images of gods, the holy cross, family photographs, gifts, and crafts are often hung on the walls of rooms. Photographs may also be placed on tables, shelves, refrigerators, or televisions. These possessions are displayed in a highly decorative manner and are very visible. Holton (2017) pointed out that decorating places with objects is an emotional place-making activity that promotes homeliness in institutional settings. This enables older adults to manage their self-identity, family relations, and self-esteem (Walsh, 2011; Woodward, 2001). When moving to a new residence, these photographs help older adults introduce their non-resident family members to other older adults and caregivers in the care home. Moreover, displaying family photos creates an atmosphere conducive to discussing their family when other older adults visit them. Thus, in addition to fostering a sense of family togetherness (Rose, 2004), these visible photographs can help an older adult build a personal community (Spencer and Pahl, 2006) in a new place. Shared possessions therefore help to develop social capital that contributes to creating a homely environment in the care facilities.

Some of the older women reported that they preserved cherished

possessions in religious texts. Possessions linked to the memories of deceased children are often secured and memorialized in this way. For example, Alphonsa, a 72-year-old resident of Sahya, was expelled from her church when she married Jacob, a non-Catholic Christian who was a member and a leader of an atheist organization. According to Alphonsa, Jacob's mother—a religious woman—was very worried about her son. The day after the marriage, Jacob's mother gave Alphonsa a Holy Bible as an attempt to encourage the presence of the Bible in her son's family. For the last 45 years, Alphonsa has kept the Bible with her. She also keeps a photo of her son, who died at nine months of age, in this Bible. Thus, for Alphonsa, the functional value of this Bible is less important than the certain difficult moments of her past which it represents. Her Bible symbolizes the conflicts, beliefs, and memories, such as disagreements between her husband and mother-in-law regarding their religious beliefs, and the conflict between Alphonsa and her parental church about marrying a non-Catholic. In addition, the Bible is linked to Alphonsa's memories of her mother-in-law and her arrival in a new home as a young bride. Munt (2012) has argued that faith and spirituality provide personal resilience through religious symbols, such as the Bible, images of Christ, or the cross. According to Hart et al. (2007), resilience is an act of engaging in positive behavior in the face of adversity. For an older adult, the act of keeping an image of a deceased child in the pages of a religious text can be seen as an act of resilience against the devastation of losing a child.

Depending on the memories and emotions associated with a particular possession, the older adult may be more or less willing to display it. Alphonsa and Remani prefer to keep the photographs of their deceased sons in religious texts that are not visible to others. Moreover, the rules and regulations of care homes may push older adults to avoid displaying their cherished possessions. Such rules and regulations can greatly discourage emotional expression among the residents. For example, Maheswari, a widow, has been living in Prasanthi Bhavan for the last nine years. When she moved, she brought a hanging lamp with her (see Fig. 6). Maheswari and her husband had a plan to build a new home. Maheswari's husband bought her this lamp to put in their new home, but the home was never built. She stated:

Now my husband is no more, we don't have children. And I am here in this place. Not even once have I lit the lamp. No... I am not going to light it in the future either. What is the point? Let it be here with me as a memory of my unbuilt home and husband. (Female, 82 years)

This example from the data illustrates that cherished possessions can also be associated with sorrows and unfulfilled ambitions. The hanging lamp that Maheswari cherished is embedded with memories of her husband and their unfulfilled dreams of building a new home. This lamp represents Maheswari's and her husband's hope of having a home that would provide them with security, a higher-level schema (D'Ándrade, 1992). Thus, building a home is motivated by a desire to attain the cultural schema of security. Not all of the older people's possessions represent pride and happiness; some represent unfulfilled desires in life. Nonetheless, the cherished possessions linked to these

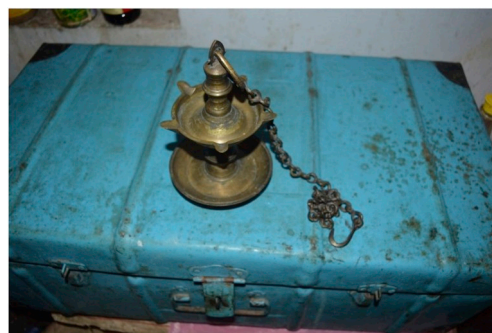


Fig. 6. The Lamp: Memory of an unfulfilled dream.

memories give the owner a sense of comfort and connection when moving to a new place (Kroger and Adair, 2008). Maheswari explained:

Here in this old age home nobody knows about it. Even my roommates or matron do not know. I kept the lamp in a cover and put it in an iron trunk box and placed it safely in the Almirah. (cupboard) Sometimes, when I am alone in the room, I take the lamp out of the Almirah for a while to look at it. And very soon I wrap it back up and replace it again in the Almirah. (Female, 82 years)

This shows how the characteristics of a place, such as the rules and regulations of a care home, also shape how older adults engage with their cherished possessions. Care home rules such as at Prasanthi Bhavan state that older adults cannot keep personal material possessions that hold monetary value such as mobile phones and gold ornaments. This rule is largely due to the lack of security and the fear of theft or abuse of the older adults living in the care home. As a result, welfare-based care homes with minimal resources and a lack of private space make it difficult for older adults to store and engage with their possessions.

11. Conclusion: Cherished possessions, emotions, and the well-being of older adults

This study, conducted in the state of Kerala, India in three different types of care homes, included older people from different socio-economic backgrounds. We collected rich ethnographic data on the lived experiences of these older adults through in-depth interviews, observations, and photography. In this paper, we attempted to answer the following questions: 1) How are possessions emotionally relevant for older people, and how do they shape material spaces in care homes? and 2) How do rules and regulations enforced by the care home influence how older people engage with their possessions? Theoretically, this study has focused on how the material and the imaginary aspects of emotions embedded in cherished possessions can contribute to home-making practices at the scale of a formal care setting for older adults in a non-western context. We have explored the different types of cherished possessions embedded with different emotional qualities that older adults bring with them to care homes, and have looked at how these possessions influence the home-making practices of these older adults.

Having cherished possessions can evoke memories and emotions including a sense of happiness, co-presence, love, nostalgia, pride, hope, security, and a sense of connectedness with the past. These links with the past are not just forms of nostalgia; acts of remembering, re-collecting, and memorializing can play an integral role in the mental well-being of older adults. In line with Nord (2013), our study found that cherished possessions evoke both happiness and sorrow. While religious possessions help to create an imagined sense of co-presence and resilience when moving to a new setting (Hart et al., 2007; Munt, 2012), items such as family photographs can become shared possessions that help to create a sense of co-presence (Baldassar, 2008; Bowlby, 2011). They can also spur opportunities to develop personal community (Spencer and Pahl, 2006), peer-to-peer relationships, and social capital within a new formal care setting. The gender roles associated with the past lives of older people are also evident through their cherished possessions. While older men (e.g., Kuruvila and John) have possessions associated with their masculine identities (Gorman-Murray, 2008), older women have personal possessions associated with the care roles expected of their gender (e.g., Alphonsa and Remani). Cherished possessions that are nostalgic in nature (Blunt, 2003) can help older adults experience a sense of pride and continuity in life (van Hoof et al., 2016). The vitality endorsed emotional qualities associated with these possessions greatly influence the home-making practices of domesticity in formal care settings (Bennett, 2010). Through this study, we have explored the various home-making practices and the ways these possessions are used. We argue that cultural practices motivated by

schemas are reflected in home-making practices.

This study additionally shows that the emotional expressions of research participants are more or less governed by the rules and regulations of the care homes with poorer adults unable to cherish their possessions in the same ways as wealthier care home residents. These rules and regulations shape how the older adults engage with their cherished possessions. For example, care homes catering to middle- and upper-middle-class residents are more accommodating and provide more private space for residents to install and display their personal possessions. However, in welfare-based care homes, there is no provision of private space, and the rules are far more stringent with regard to personal possessions. Thus, poorer older adults who depend on care homes to survive have fewer opportunities and less space to engage with their possessions. Based on our data, we recommend that care homes relax these rules and encourage home-making practices through the inclusion of possessions, as doing so would make aging a less stressful experience in institutional settings.

In the context of India, care homes for older adults are not seen in a very positive light as these facilities are perceived as places where older adults are left after being forgotten by their families. Most of the studies on care homes and the well-being of older adults have largely focused on care facilities, poverty alleviation, and the services that care homes offer (HelpAge India, 2009; Liebig, 2003). Furthermore, the reproduction of familial aspects of emotion have largely been ignored in the Indian context. While the findings of this study do not have immediate benefits for the participants, they demonstrate the importance of cherished possessions to the emotional well-being of older adults living in care homes in Kerala, the most rapidly aging Indian state in the country.

Funding sources

Funding: This work was supported by Ubbo Emmius Scholarship from University of Groningen and Prof. V.K.R.V. Rao Fellowship from Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru.

The field work was supported by the Indian-European research networking grant: Ageing and well-being in a globalising world (NWO 465-11-009), funded by NWO-ESRC-ICSSR. The participating institutions include University of Groningen, The Netherlands; Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru; Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum; Population Research Centre, and the University of Southampton, United Kingdom. The writing of the paper was supported by Dr. T. M. A. Pai Endowed Chair in Qualitative Methods, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the study participants for sharing their experiences of home making process in care homes and to the managing staffs and care takers of the three care homes for their fruitful cooperation and assistance in making this study possible. We are also grateful to the stakeholders of the study NWO,ESRC,ICSSR, University of Groningen, The Netherlands and Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore for funding grants to carry out the study. We wish to thank participants for their feedback at the 6th International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Emotional Geographies held at California State University, Long Beach on June 14-16, 2017.

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