Life courses of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom
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Chapter 3

‘Movement is a constant feature in my life’: Contextualising migration processes of highly skilled Indians

This chapter is a slightly modified version of:
Chapter 3

Abstract

Migration can be seen as a process rather than an event. In this article, we argue for a focus on the whole migration process within the contexts that shape the events before, during and after the move. In order to gain insights into the complexities of migration behaviour and to link experiences throughout the migration process, we adopt a biographic approach that embeds the specific migration decisions in the life course contexts of the migrants. Based on 47 biographic in-depth interviews with highly skilled Indians in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, our findings show that international geographical mobility has become a normative part of professional careers of highly skilled Indians and it is employed as a strategy for enhancing competitiveness on both domestic and international labour markets. Self-actualisation, rather than economic motives, appears to be the major driver for migration. Migration experiences add to the different forms of migrant capital. By drawing from this capital, the joining spouses are no longer passive movers but active agents in the migration process. Migrant capital is, however, conditioned by the policies which govern migration at the state level and which can determine future migration decisions. Furthermore, migration plans largely depend of the life course stages of migrants and their linked movers. Taking a holistic migration process approach provides the lens for understanding the migration paths of the highly skilled and for contextualising migration decisions within the life courses of individuals and their significant others.

Keywords: high-skilled migration, migrant biographies, migration process, Indians, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom
3.1 Introduction

Migration is a process, rather than an isolated event. To gain a complete understanding of this process we need to look beyond intentions and decisions to explore the contexts and life course trajectories that shape the migration paths of individuals. There is a large body of literature (e.g., Duncan and Newman, 1976; Landale and Guest, 1985; Gardner et al., 1986; De Jong, 2000; Heering et al., 2004; Van Dalen and Henkens, 2007) focusing on migration intentions and links to eventual migration behaviour. However, in this article we make the case for a more detailed view of migration. We argue for a focus on the whole migration process with due attention to the contexts that shape the events before, during and after the move. We explore and contextualise the migration processes of highly skilled migrants as their skill set is in demand and can result in repeated mobility.

Highly skilled migrants are generally considered to be those with tertiary education or equivalent work experience (Iredale, 2001) and skilled migration is therefore often studied in the economic context, where human capital is one of the most important resources for preparing the highly skilled for migration. However, Balazand and Williams (2004) advocate for ‘total human capital’ approach, which goes beyond formal education and qualifications to include a broader set of competences and to emphasise individual biographies in particular contexts. Based on in-depth empirical study, this article aims to examine which resources highly skilled Indians in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom use for migration and how they shape their migration paths. In a further step, we contextualise the migration path within the life courses of highly skilled migrants to account for previous and future life course events and stages upon which migration decisions depend. The migrant life course highlights cultural, social, economic and institutional processes in multiple geographical settings (Kobayashi and Preston, 2007).

We investigate the ways in which migrants shape their migration paths, and the different factors that play a role in forming those paths. In the next sections, we examine the literature on different elements that constitute the migration process. Thereafter, we provide a background on the migration of high-skilled Indians to the Netherlands and the UK, explain the biographical approach and our data collection procedures, and finally discuss the results as situated in the literature. We argue that the culture of migration plays a central role for highly skilled Indians, for instance, by means of enforcing a migration norm or enabling access to professional networks abroad. Migration experiences add to the different forms of migrant capital, which are necessary resources for self-actualisation as one of the major migration motives, increasingly so for co-migrating spouses. However, particularly in times of economic crisis, institutional settings can pose a restriction to the advancement of migrant capital and, in combination with life course events, determine future migration paths. Taking a holistic migration process approach provides a lens for understanding the migration paths of the highly
skilled and for contextualising migration decisions within the life courses of individuals and their significant others.

3.2 Migration process: background

In this article we operationalise migration process to include migration decisions, migration histories, human and cultural capital, access to social and professional networks, the policies that govern migration and the manner in which life course and gender shape the migration path.

Migration decision-making is a transition, which is formed over time and during other processes, such as development of a professional career or family formation. Various migration theories have focused only on the migration decision itself, however, our aim is to examine the whole migration process between two migration decisions. Among the many models and theories that examine migration decision-making, Kley and Mulder (2010) provide a framework to reflect the migration decision-making process, consisting of phases of considering, planning and realising migration. On the other hand, De Jong’s (2000) general model of migration decision-making centrally assumes that the migration path is structured by previous migration decisions, which in turn shape the subsequent migration decisions through the experiences gained during migration. Other studies on both internal and international migration (Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Boyle et al., 1998; Kley, 2011; Mavroudi and Warren, 2013) confirm that previous migration experience increases the likelihood of subsequent migration. In this study, we illustrate how previous migration experiences of the highly skilled not only lead to new migration accounts but also to career advancement. King and Skeldon (2010) emphasise that both internal and international migration form an integrated system, where the neglect of one leads to a partial interpretation of the total picture. Internal migration is often a conditioning factor for subsequent international migration (Çaro et al., 2013). In this study the biographies also capture this conditioning factor as part of the migrant capital.

Throughout the migration process individuals and families strategise to gather different types of capital and access different networks. ‘Skilling’ or accumulating human capital could be seen as a strategy towards migration. Studies have consistently shown that the higher education one has, the more likely they are to migrate (e.g., Boyle et al., 1998; Massey et al., 1998; Van Dalen and Henkens, 2007). In addition to the directly measurable human capital, migrants can draw from an indirect set of characteristics, or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which consists of transferable skills, such as command of English language, and of shared practices, such as common history. Nohl et al. (2006) show how highly skilled migrants in Germany utilise the cultural capital in different stages of migration, especially in terms of (non-)recognition of certain skills. In addition to the cultural capital migrants bring with them from the home country, they actively create new forms of cultural capital in the country of residence (Erel, 2010). Migration
Contextualising migration processes

is also facilitated by social capital, or the actual or potential resources stemming from belonging to a social network (Bourdieu, 1986). For migrants, social networks enhance migration through knowledge of and contacts in the destination, as well as through providing practical help in the new country, particularly in finding jobs (Vertovec, 2002; Harvey, 2011). It follows that social networks can be of crucial value to migrants for the improvement of their position, at least in the early stages of migration process, i.e., when making the decision to migrate, and settling in the new society. Both cultural and social capital are intrinsic to the development of the individual as they provide the tools for self-actualisation, one of the central themes in this article. Furthermore, we will use the interconnections between different types of capital to illustrate how they together constellate migrant capital.

These different forms of capital can only be utilised for migration if favourable immigration policies are in place in the destination countries. Immigration policies act as either facilitating or restricting agents through the mechanisms of admission criteria, accreditation of qualifications, residence issues or spouse migration (Iredale, 2005). Not all individuals, however, receive the same opportunities in the migration process. Gender certainly plays a role in the differentiation of the migration process. The sectors that international migrant women typically occupy are highly regulated by state (Raghuram, 2004a; Iredale, 2005) and female migrants particularly are found to encounter post-migration deskilling challenges (Kofman, 2012). Furthermore, the ‘trailing wife’ effect persists irrespective of the skill level of the female partner (Ackers, 2004). Comparison with non-migrant professionals has led to the same conclusions: wives by and large scale back on their career, particularly when starting parenting (Becker and Moen, 1999). As migration decisions are often made within a household, positive migration outcomes – particularly for female partners – rely on both professional career and family life (Willis and Yeoh, 2000), but also on prevailing social values and supportive institutions (González Ramos and Vergés Bosch, 2013). This is especially salient for the professions where ‘mobility is an expectation and a strategy’ (Kofman, 2012, 80), such as academic jobs. Thus different capitals, social and professional networks and institutional regimes form the context in which various migration processes are carried out to co-create different cultures of migration.

The migration process, including decision-making, is dependent on the life courses and events of both the primary mover and his or her linked movers (Mulder and Wagner, 1993; Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999). The life course serves as a broad basis for situating migration decisions and behaviour, and it embeds individual lives into social structures (Mayer, 2004). For example, Ley and Kobayashi (2005) documented how immigrants from Hong Kong in Canada strategically migrate during various life stages: they generally return to Hong Kong early or mid-career for economic reasons and retire in Canada due to higher levels of quality of life. However, Ley and Kobayashi (2005) use the term ‘life
cycle’, which assumes a predetermined set of events in a predetermined sequence which all individuals undergo. We base our research on ‘life course’ concept, which allows for diversity in the pattern of events and sequences, leaving space for personalised migration paths. Any analysis of the migration process should therefore also focus on other life course events, such as graduation from tertiary education, changes in labour market status, union formation or dissolution, childbirth. In order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of migration behaviour and to link experiences throughout the migration process, we adopt a biographic approach that embeds the specific migration decisions in the life course contexts of the migrants.

3.3 Migration of high-skilled Indians to the Netherlands and the UK

Although there is a large body of literature documenting the gains brought by highly skilled migrants to the host country, immigration policies in many countries are steadily becoming more selective even in admitting the highly skilled. When introducing the government’s new immigration policies, the Immigration Minister of the UK, Damian Green, stated: ‘We want the brightest and best workers to come to the UK, make a strong contribution to our economy while they are here, and then return home’ (UKBA, 2011).

There have been many definitions and terminologies to classify skills and skilled migrants both at national and international level, as well as to include or exclude certain groups of skilled workers (see Iredale, 2001; Ackers, 2005; Kofman and Raghuram, 2005). In this article we use the definitions of highly skilled migrants in the Netherlands and the UK as given by the country-specific policies (see Table 3.1).

India is one of the world’s largest exporters of high-skilled labour, especially of people with tertiary education in engineering, IT or medicine (Khadria, 2004). In the OECD countries, India together with China accounts for a large part of skilled migration (OECD, 2012), for instance, India is among the top 10 countries of origin for immigrant doctors and nurses (Dumont and Zurn, 2007). More than four per cent of Indians with higher education leave the country to live abroad (Bhargava et al., 2011).

This study focuses on the Netherlands and the UK as destination countries to examine different background settings in terms of migration history from India and institutional context. While the Netherlands has emerged as a destination for Indian migrants only during the past decade, the UK has long been a migration destination for them due to past colonial links (see also Khadria, 2006, 2008).
### Table 3.1 Comparison of high-skilled migration programmes in the Netherlands and United Kingdom, 2002-2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Launching</td>
<td>• 2004: Knowledge migrant (kennismigrant) visa</td>
<td>• 2002: Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2002: Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP)</td>
<td>• 2008: Tier 1 (General Highly Skilled): not linked to a specific employment contract.</td>
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<td>• 2008: Tier 1 (solely for applicant): UK Investor,</td>
<td>• 2011: Tier 1 (solely for applicant): UK Investor,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prospective Entrepreneur, Exceptional Talent,</td>
<td>Prospective Entrepreneur, Exceptional Talent,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Post-Study Work; Tier 2 (sponsored): Work Permit, Intra-Company Transfers (ICT)</td>
<td>Post-Study Work; Tier 2 (sponsored): Work Permit, Intra-Company Transfers (ICT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for</td>
<td>• Minimum prospective salary:</td>
<td>• Since 2008 points-based:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>application</td>
<td>• indexed yearly and in 2011:</td>
<td>• qualifications, English skills, available maintenance funds, prospective earnings, level of demand, UK work experience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• €50,619 (30 years and above),</td>
<td>• Right to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) after five years (until 2006: after six years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>€37,121 (below 30 years) or</td>
<td>• Dependant visa for spouse and children.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• €26,605 (graduated from a Dutch university not more than a year ago)</td>
<td>• Exempted from the civic integration requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>• Work permit not required</td>
<td>• An annual cap of 20,700 non-EEA nationals set to work as skilled professionals. This excludes the ICT route, but with increased salary threshold</td>
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<tr>
<td>offered</td>
<td>• Residence permit is issued for the duration of employment contract, maximum five years</td>
<td>• A cap of 1,000 for the Exceptional Talent category; job offer not required but an endorsement from a ‘competent body’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 30 per cent of the earnings are tax free</td>
<td>• Plans to further restrict immigration rules and settlement criteria, such as removing the link between temporary and permanent migration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dependant visa for spouse and children.</td>
<td>• 2012 Post-Study Work category closed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exempted from the civic integration requirement</td>
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(Adapted from various sources, including Cerna, 2011; IND, 2012; INDIAC, 2009; Home Office, 2012; OECD, 2012; UKBA, 2011)
The largest community of Indians in the EU resides in the UK (Khadria, 2008). The two countries also differ in terms of origins and levels of success of the highly skilled visa schemes. In Table 3.1, we compare these policies developed and implemented by the Netherlands and the UK. In the Netherlands, the EU Blue Card was introduced in 2011 as a parallel option at the EU level to the national knowledge migrant scheme, however, there were very few applications in the first year due to higher salary and qualifications requirements (EMN, 2013).

In the Netherlands, the knowledge migrant visa scheme was launched in 2004 (see Table 3.1); approximately 30,000 applications were received up to 2011 (INDIAC, 2009; IND, 2012). In 2011, approximately 2000 applicants (or 34 per cent of the total number) for the knowledge migrant visa were Indians, making them the largest national group (IND, 2012). These migrants were mainly employed in the IT and other business sectors (INDIAC, 2009).

The UK launched its Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP) in 2002, which went through major changes in and after 2008 (see Table 3.1). In 2011, approximately 39,000 (or 34.9 per cent of the total number) Tier 1 visas were issued to Indian nationals (Salt, 2012). Over the period of 2009–2011, roughly one third of Tier 1 visa issues were for dependants (Salt, 2012). As in the Netherlands, the majority of the highly skilled migrants are working in information and communication sector, but also in scientific, technical and financial sectors (Salt, 2012).

India and China are projected to remain the largest pools of highly skilled migrants in the world (Nicolaas, 2009), however, these and other Asian fast-growing economies are increasingly competing to keep their high-skilled workforce and to attract high-skilled (return) migrants (OECD, 2012).

3.4 Research approach

3.4.1. Biographical approach

We adopt a biographical approach as it allows for understanding of the migration processes from the perspective of the migrants. By giving participants the opportunity to describe their migration process, this qualitative approach can produce rich data which cannot be obtained through quantitative surveys. Earlier studies have established the usefulness of a biographical approach in researching highly skilled migrants (Liversage, 2009; Kõu et al., 2010; Bornat et al., 2011). The biographical approach is linked to the life course as this approach emphasises the social embeddedness of individuals and the influence of these interconnections on the decision-making process (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993; Findlay and Li, 1997; Ni Laoire, 2008). The individual narratives underline the ‘role of the teller in constructing her/his own life narrative, through a process of selection, ordering and giving meaning to particular events and stories’ (Ni Laoire,
Following a person’s migration path enables one to track changes in the individual’s migrant status, and to embed the person within the policy discourse (Ho, 2011), which is important in explaining the implications of the institutional setting. The biographical approach also captures how the migration path develops through the life course. Courgeau (1985) uses the term ‘triple biography’ to refer to the connection between an individual’s spatial life path, family history, and career path relating to study or employment. The biographical approach in this article helps us to situate the various migration paths of highly skilled Indians in the Netherlands and the UK.

### 3.4.2 Data

Biographic in-depth interviews were used as research tools. The first part of the interview employed biographic-narrative interview method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001). The first sub-session of a BNIM interview consists of one question only, namely, a ‘single question aimed at inducing a narrative’ (SQUIN). The SQUIN gives the participant a chance to tell his or her life story from scratch, thereby assigning value to the experiences and events he or she considers important enough to relate (Wengraf, 2001). In the SQUIN designed for this research, participants were asked to tell their life story from the period when they still lived in India – or before they moved abroad – until the present. In the second phase of the interview, the necessary details of the narrated biography were specified by the principal researcher. In the final round, any relevant topics not covered in the life story were brought up by the researcher in an effort to obtain a full picture of the life story of the participant. The participants were asked to reflect on their past and current education, employment, household and migration paths, as well as on their future plans regarding these domains. After responding to questions about life events and domains, participants were probed for the role of various structural factors, such as social networks, immigration policies and labour market opportunities, in shaping their migration path.

The results discussed in this article are drawn from 47 semi-structured biographic interviews carried out between June 2010 and August 2011. In spring and summer 2011, during the main data collection period, several policy changes to immigration rules were implemented or were expected to come into effect, particularly in the UK (see also Table 3.1). These changes directly influenced the migration experiences and plans of the participants.

Participants were sought among highly skilled Indians (and their dependants) aged 25–40 who had been living in the Netherlands or the UK for at least 1 year prior to the interview, or who intended to remain for at least 1 year. The vast majority of participants were holders of a knowledge migrant visa in the Netherlands, or of a Highly Skilled Migrant Programme or Tier-1 visa in the UK. Ethical approval for this study was sought at University of Groningen in the Netherlands and University of Southampton in the UK.
The starting points for the recruitment of participants were several personal contacts, followed by the use of the snowball sampling technique through different points of entry. In both countries, the fieldwork sites included a major hub (Amsterdam and London areas) and high R&D-intensity cities (Groningen in northern Netherlands, Eindhoven in the south, and Southampton in southern England). Interviews were conducted with 36 men and 11 women. Of the 47 participants, 35 were in a relationship, engaged or married, and 14 had a child or children. The average ages of the participants were 29.3 years in the Netherlands and 32.8 years in the UK, and the respective average residential durations were 3.3 and 5.4 years. 5 Out of 6 married women were on the dependant visa. One married male was initially the principal applicant, but later became the dependant of his wife when his HSMP visa expired and she was offered one through her work.

The interview transcriptions were analysed using the qualitative data software MAXQDA. The first cycle of coding involved identifying both inductive and deductive codes. In the second cycle, the codes were grouped together in code families. A thick description was made based on the code families and their relationships, which resulted in the identification of three overarching themes of the migration process outlined in the following sections.

3.5 Findings: migration paths of high-skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and the UK

Our data illustrate three themes which together direct the migration process of high-skilled Indians in the Netherlands and UK. ‘Culture of migration’ represents the migration norm among highly skilled in India, which provides the context for a migration path. The norm is informed by various migration resources, such as different types of migrant capital and individual migration history. However, mobility is always conditioned by immigration policies in the host countries.

‘Self-actualisation’ is reflected in migration motivations, expectations and experiences of being a highly skilled migrant. International experiences and opportunities are perceived to offer personal development and more importantly, migration is used as a career improvement strategy. Contrary to general literature on migration and gender, we find that rather than losing out in their professional life, the co-migrating spouses also make use of the benefits migration offers for pursuing a career.

Future life course events and transitions of the migrant and their significant others are crucial for understanding the ‘future migration plans’ – return migration, onward migration or settlement. The plans reflect the fulfilment and evaluation of expectations and experiences during the migration process and considerations of future opportunities.

The migration paths created and negotiated throughout this migration process as seen in the biographical interviews are presented in the following sections.
3.5.1 Culture of migration

Migration norm implicitly emerged as one of the most grounded drivers for migration when the participants reflected upon their migration expectations and experiences. A migration norm is, to a large extent, created by the migration experiences of others. Drawing on De Jong (2000), who refers to the migration norm in the context of family, our results indicated that the norm extends to social and professional networks. Members of networks set an example by moving abroad. These experienced migrants then share their practical knowledge by providing local contacts, assisting in their job search, and helping by building the reputation of Indian students or employees, thus reducing the costs of migration for the future migrants (cf. Massey et al., 1993). In particular, the professional experiences and networks abroad of an individual’s supervisors at university or colleagues encouraged mobility. Even if the foreign experiences of others did not influence the migration decision directly, reports of these experiences tended to create a general expectation that the highly skilled will (temporarily) migrate. Studies by Kandel and Massey (2002) and Ali (2007) on Mexican and Indian migrants, respectively, have summarised this phenomenon as a ‘culture of migration’, or as ‘those ideas, practices and cultural artefacts that reinforce the celebration of migration and migrants’ (Ali, 2007, 39). In the Philippines, the culture of migration is reflected in professions, such as domestic work or nursing, that by and large lead to international migration (Asis, 2006). In India, where science and technology is the most popular field of study (OECD, 2012), engineering and ICT are considered the most prevalent migration-triggering pathways (Khadria, 2004), creating a sector of education industry geared towards exporting skilled workers. In a culture of migration, social and economic mobility is gained through migration, building on the expansion of networks and increasingly non-local resources (Heering et al., 2004). Migration norm thus builds on different types of migration capital of not only the (prospective) migrants, but also of the people in their lives.

However, it should be noted that none of the migrants interviewed in this study claimed that the norm of migration was imposed upon them. Although conforming to the norm seemed to be a predetermined part of a high-skilled person’s path, the participants were nonetheless intrinsically motivated to follow that path and to explore other countries in the hope of having better opportunities in life.

I think amongst the high dreams of life by the urban Indian definition, going abroad and studying or working or, and eventually getting settled there is one of the most common, had always been. (Deepa, 27, UK).

The members of social and professional networks and their local contacts had directly or indirectly guided the participants to the path of migration by providing information or sharing their know-how on the place of destination and its professional opportunities. The knowledge, experience and contacts derived from the participants’
networks facilitated their move abroad and helped them to settle in the destination country. The participants also reported using particularly the Indian diaspora as a source of professional networking and knowledge sharing, completely apart from their common Indian background. Thus the importance of the diaspora may rather lie in information and skills than in cultural and social commonalities. This is in line with Saxenian (2006) who demonstrates that high-skilled Indian and Chinese migrants in Silicon Valley have strategically used diasporic networks to their benefits on the labour market. For example, Amit (30, UK) explained how former colleagues from India, who had migrated to London before him, became instrumental in finding a job in the UK. Knowing those people was his ‘biggest asset, biggest tool’ as they provided him with valuable inside information on a particular labour market sector in London. It is noteworthy that Amit had moved between various cities in India and had established the network of those former colleagues in a multitude of places. The same held for many other participants who cited individual migration history as an important resource for migration. Supporting King and Skeldon’s (2010) call to link internal and international migration, we find that participants’ experiences with internal migration were incorporated in the international migration decision-making process, and gave them the momentum to move abroad. This takes place by means of tapping the contacts from social and professional networks in order to access information on job opportunities, or by means of drawing on migrant capital gathered during previous movements in order to advance a professional career at the next destination.

Most of these internal moves had been to or between various large cities, and often involved crossing the borders of national states of India. The participants recognised that the migrant capital and experiences gained during internal relocations had prepared them for international relocation. Being mobile and the ability to adapt to different settings gave the participants advantageous skills for adjusting to new (work) cultures abroad.

A few drew parallels between India and Europe: the different states in India are considered as different countries in Europe, each with their own language, culture, traditions, climate and institutional systems.

_I grew up in various parts of India. My parents moved a lot. A big chunk of my childhood was in a smaller state called Assam which is in the East and I grew up in the capital city of Assam and we moved to Delhi when I was 13. Which was a very big move, in two ways. Because, culturally sort of moving to a different country, that’s how it felt … It took a lot of adjustment. I think in a lot of ways that has made later adjustments in moving to other places easier. The dry run, so to speak. I did my later schooling and my undergraduate in Mumbai. [ - - - ] My father took early retirement and they moved to Kolkata and I moved to Bangalore for my MA. After I was just applying for grad school. Just for fun. But I got into a graduate school in the US, so … sort of moved. [ - - - ] Movement is a very … sort_
of constant feature in my life [laughs]. I've moved a lot, this is the first year that I've just stayed put, so … it feels good. (Aruna, 32, UK).

Prior international education or work experience in particular was a major advantage when applying for positions abroad. Half of the participants in both countries had already lived in at least one foreign country. Their previous experiences abroad, as cultural capital, were considered very helpful when settling in the new country from a personal perspective (e.g., being familiar with Western culture), but especially in terms of furthering their careers (e.g., professional or academic experience in a Western country was very advantageous when applying for a first position in the current country of residence).

When you want to study in Europe or do a job in Europe and you are already saying I have European degree, it makes a lot difference, I would say. Lot. Because … some of my friends also, they tried in Netherlands, after they finished their master's [in India], but it was not that good response. Unless they want to do a PhD, then it’s, yeah, Holland welcomes lot of PhD students from outside. But if you are directly coming for a job in Holland and say I have master’s from India, it's … the chance is not that good. I think most of the Indians come here for a job, they are either … a company from India sends them or … or they are outsourced. (Abishek, 28, NL).

Although migration norm, access to networks and individual migration history facilitate international migration, the culture of migration can be constrained externally by the institutional context. We acknowledge that compared to other migrant groups, highly skilled migrants are relatively more welcomed by the current immigration regimes as professional workers are needed. The individual behaviour thus should be situated in respective policies considering immigration laws and specific mechanisms of labour market, as well as the host society context. For instance, in the UK, different visa categories for highly skilled migrants allow them to apply for certain types of jobs (see also Table 3.1). Several participants gave instances of companies which were reluctant to invest time and money in applying for a work permit for the migrant. Applying for (Tier 2) visa sponsorship is a complex process for the employer and particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises are found to be reluctant due to the accompanying costs (Desiderio and Schuster, 2013). Thus, having a visa—and, moreover, the right type of visa—is often a prerequisite for eligibility for a job in the first place.

Another difficulty, again predominantly faced by the participants in the UK, proved to be the requirement of previous work experience in the country. As concluded by Duleep and Regets (1996), migrants can utilise their previous work experience only if the qualifications can be transferred to the country of residence. Moreover, preference is often given to skills acquired in ‘Western’ countries (Iredale, 2001). Participants reported that due to the lack of this experience or of a similar form of international human capital they eventually started working for UK-based Indian companies.
Institutional factors on the EU level add to the competition: employers are required to give preference to local citizens, followed by other EU citizens, and only then third-country nationals. Particularly the participants in the UK pointed out that higher expectations and standards are more frequently applied to migrants by employers and, furthermore, unsympathetic perceptions about migrant workers in the host society give the impression their efforts are not valued. Even if on the one hand, states design policies to attract foreign talents to contribute to their economies, on the other hand, hostile public opinion towards migrants still creates a negative background (OECD, 2012). The following two quotes present the experiences of difficulties faced during job search as well as the discouraging attitudes towards migrants:

*Mostly the companies here, they want people who have prior UK-experience. When … don’t have that, it’s very difficult for you to get into UK-market… I had visa restrictions, in the sense that they knew I’m on a temporary visa. They look for people who have access to the Europe … So it was real challenge to get a job here. I had five years of experience back in India, but … The companies here, the people here were not considering that experience as an experience.* (Prakas, 31, UK).

*I applied for every company in this country. People don’t want to give you a chance. Because you are a migrant, companies don’t want to apply for work permit. At the same time there is a big shortage of people on the labour market, and the cream of UK graduates is going to banking, nothing is supporting industry. I haven’t been a burden to this country at all. I never received any benefits from UK, not even job seeker allowance. Now I’m only eligible for NHS, but I go there only a couple of times a year and then still pay. I paid so many taxes and received nothing back—no benefits, no subsidies.* (Mukesh, 29, UK; quotes based on interview notes due to non-consent for recording).

### 3.5.2 Self-actualisation through migration

‘Self-actualisation’ represents the motivational part of migration process. As a major goal for migration, the participants seemed to attach particular importance to becoming an international person. Also Tzeng (2010) has shown that overseas experience can be a mandatory part of the resumes of professionals. ‘International exposure’ was perceived by participants as widening their horizons, and to be valuable not only in terms of professional, but also personal development. The participants made similar observations about ‘opportunities’, based on their own expectations or others’ experiences abroad, and reflecting a general understanding that ‘people will always want to migrate to better themselves’ (King, 2012, 148). The underlying assumption here was that the stayers lose out on development or ‘opportunities’ to progress.
I also wanted to have international exposure and... Partly for two reasons. One, that’s for personal interests, and secondly, for career also. [---] It will have exposure, international, because you can deal with people in various continents and countries. But ...as a person, yes. I mean, to have that experience and live and, you know ...adapt and make the most of my working life, you know. Experience different cultures and different ... It’s more important for me. (Vinod, 41, NL).

The highly skilled migrants used migration as a strategy to improve their future career opportunities in India and or in another country. This was mostly done for two purposes. First, the goal was to build a career and obtain work experience that is competitive in the global labour market, in order to be ‘much more flexible in moving across the world’ (Nikhil, 32, NL). Beaverstock (2002) came to a similar conclusion in his study on British expatriates in Singapore, finding that the global–local knowledge networks and other social practices of expatriates were among the key elements in the accumulation and transfer of financial knowledge. The participants in our study mentioned an alternative strategy, in which they sought international employment or academic experience in order to improve their career prospects when returning to India after living abroad for a couple of years. According to the participants, international experience in both the corporate and the academic sectors, which could help them work more effectively with foreign business partners, clients or collaborators, was crucial for their prospects upon returning to India. The cultural capital gained abroad is (re)utilised to gain and attract more foreign investment by positioning the highly-skilled as interlocutors between two (business) cultures. Thus, the participants use the international opportunities gained by migration for the benefit of their future career and well-being.

In contrast to other labour migrants, the participants indicated that the decision to move to the Netherlands or the UK was less dependent on higher prospective earnings. Learning new skills and having access to diverse opportunities, experiences and professional challenges were valued more highly than earning more money. Similar results were reported in a survey carried out among knowledge migrants in the Netherlands (Berkhout, Smid, and Volkerink, 2010). Due to the growing economy, swift globalisation and increasing job opportunities for the highly skilled in India, some participants perceived that they would be financially better off in India. The short-term economic offsets were perceived to lead to long-term human, social and cultural capital gains.

And again, when I say upward trend [in getting better jobs], it’s not about money, when I say upward trend, it’s not about power that I have in the academic system, it’s about doing the work I want to do. (Shaili, 32, UK).

A few participants reported that they moved abroad solely for economic reasons. In most cases, economic benefits were of great relevance to those pursuing a PhD. The
relatively higher value fellowships abroad made it possible for the migrant to financially support their spouse, thus in some cases leading to getting married sooner than otherwise planned. Again, migration provides means for gathering economic capital and securing well-being for the (future) family.

As discussed earlier, linked movers are also part of migration process. Among the female participants, joining a spouse was a common reason given for migration. This suggests there is a gendered dimension to the migration of the highly skilled. Because married men are often the main movers, while married women tend to be the joining spouses, the skills of the female partner and her prospects for employment tend to be disregarded in the literature (Kofman et al., 2000; Lee and Piper, 2003; Kofman and Raghuram, 2005) or neglected by immigration laws that do not grant them access to settlement services (Iredale, 2005). Earlier research on high-skilled Indian female migrants has established a cumulative disadvantage emerging from the combined inequalities caused by immigration policies, labour market and household experiences (Purkayastha, 2005). However, the married female co-migrants of this study rarely perceived migration as a loss for them. Often they expected to gain new experiences, to ‘see the world’, have ‘international exposure’ and use the ‘opportunities’ to pursue postgraduate studies or advance their professional careers. Thus, in a way spousal migration can be considered a migration strategy. Nearly all dependant wives were either studying or working in the country of residence, suggesting self-actualisation occurred not only for the main migrant, but also for the linked mover.

He [husband] thought that, for me also, it would be good to move to the Netherlands because I had a background in finance. So when the financial markets in Netherlands are quite advanced and sophisticated so he thought it will be great if I could get an opportunity with it. (Ritika, 29, NL, dependant visa).

Deriving from the motivations for migration process, self-actualisation occurred through the realisation of one’s intellectual potential, living financially and emotionally independent of parents or fulfilling a lifelong dream to live in a Western country. For example, recently married participants viewed the stay abroad as a prolonged ‘honeymoon’, particularly for the women. As reported by participants, patrilocality in India provides little space for the newly wedded to get to know and to get used to each other in a private setting. Since the in-laws often have considerable power in both household matters and more personal decisions, couples generally have limited choices; a situation that some of the participants said they or their spouses do not appreciate. This lack of independence was sometimes seen as a hindrance to return migration. In this context, independence was talked about not only in terms of parents and extended family, but also when referring to the larger community and their opinions, attitudes and tendency to gossip.
If she [wife] had a choice again, she would prefer to stay here. [---] You know, it will be a lot more independent here whereas there obviously the in-laws are close by, so she, they will have bit of influence and all that so … She will, you know, she prefers to live here, without any any sort of … you know, a bit away from the family. (Harish, 41, UK).

A possible explanation here is that the high-skilled women do not follow the traditional Indian path of becoming a housewife in an extended family, because their values and norms have become different due to education, career and migration. A growing independence from the family could thus be seen as one of the drivers behind migration, which is enforced by Western lifestyle.

3.5.3 Planning future migration

This section reflects on the future migration path, either in terms of continuing the migration process or putting it (temporarily) on hold. The life course approach is the conceptual link that aids in understanding future migration decisions, as life course transitions and stages of migrants and their linked movers determine the migration path to a large extent. Our results show that the main linkages between life course plans and migration plans involve family formation and care for and by significant others. Return migration is closely linked to family life, whereas onward migration is often based on career advancement goals, including those of the spouse. Settlement intentions generally stem from a desire to further improve and stabilise the well-being of the family. Whereas the culture of migration and self-actualisation are to a large extent centred around gathering migrant capital and thus could be experienced in a similar manner by a lot of highly skilled migrants, the divergence crystallises when making future migration plans, because life course aspirations and preferences are more individualised.

Although future migration is tied to life course choices of the migrants and their significant others at the individual level, immigration policies and labour markets may limit entry and stay structurally. Future migration plans link aspirations and life course stages with the increasing migrant capital, providing a scheme for following step(s) in the migration process.

The fulfilment of or difficulties in realising individual migration goals can trigger the next move (Cerase, 1974). When expectations are met, the subsequent decisions are often dependent on the life course stage. The different options—return migration, onward migration or settlement—are presented here through case studies. Case studies provide a compelling format for presenting core research findings, and are developed to show the typical experiences of participants (Hennink et al., 2011).
Chapter 3

Return migration

Aravind is in his late 20s and has been living in the Netherlands for four years. He came to the country to obtain a master's degree and after graduation, as planned, stayed to start a job. Soon after the research interview he got married. The couple plan to work in the Netherlands for a few years to enjoy ‘international exposure’. Thereafter they want to return to India to have their first child, as well as to be close to their families. Aravind appreciates the attachment to his parents and wants to be able to take care of them in their old age: ‘I cannot imagine my parents at the age of 70s and 60s, walking on their road alone, buying their food alone. It’s impossible.’

Care-giving and care-receiving were one of the main reasons cited for return migration, connecting the migration paths of the highly skilled with other domains of life course and their significant others. Participants valued the close-knit family system and saw family members as both people who can provide care (for children) and those who need care. Earlier research on highly skilled Indian migrants has offered similar observations regarding return migration: family-considerations and culture are major contributors to the decision to return (Harvey, 2009); intergenerational care and family structure specifically play a role (Varrel, 2011). The schooling of children became a major issue linked to a long-term migration plan, as the family would expect to settle (semi-)permanently where the children attend school in the preferred education system and cultural environment. Thus the education path of the children is one of the key life course choices determining the future migration decisions of highly skilled Indian migrants.

On the other hand, emigration plans arose in response to external factors, such as the institutional setting. Many participants in the UK became increasingly concerned about the high-skilled migrant visa schemes, which had changed frequently in recent years. This has led to a great deal of dissatisfaction and hesitation among migrants about whether their visas will be extended, transformed into another visa type, or become subject to retrospective restrictions (see also Table 3.1). People who have been expecting to receive permanent residence might not receive it due to the new shifts in immigration policies, which could disrupt their further plans in life and might cause them to leave the country earlier than anticipated. Furthermore, and consistent with the findings of Mavroudi and Warren (2013), the frequently changing immigration rules in the UK have created a degree of uncertainty among many migrants about their future legal status, and have prevented them from making long-term plans or commitments in the country,
such as buying property with the intention to settle. Even the highly skilled are thus vulnerable to restrictive immigration regimes and increasingly perceive that they are welcome to stay only temporarily, contribute to the economy and are then expected to leave. Smith and King (2012) note that over the long term, the restrictive immigration policies will also bring changes to the labour market. A large majority of the participants stated they intended to live in the Netherlands or the UK for ‘a couple of more years’, and would then return to India; however, many of these participants also suggested that those ‘couple of more years’ were constantly being extended.

Onward migration

Nikhil is in his early 30s and moved to the Netherlands with his wife and their child about a year ago. After graduating with an engineering degree in India, he worked there and in several other Asian countries for many years. Throughout his career Nikhil has been oriented towards becoming a ‘global person’ who is internationally mobile to be able to explore the world, make the best of his career, and earn good money. For that end, he complemented his qualifications with an MBA in France. He plans to move to the USA in a couple of years for new challenges: ‘Basically it’s about getting a lot of experience. [In] a global corporation or a global operation with knowing the local understanding of the thing. You [companies] need people who have this kind of understanding.’

Throughout the interview, Nikhil emphasised the crucial role of global mobility in this career progression. For him and other participants who intended to move to other foreign countries, migration is a life style and life course choice, which is dominated by the life course events and transitions in the employment path. Whereas earlier research has established that single people are more likely to migrate (Boyle et al., 2008; Whisler et al., 2008), our findings indicate that having a spouse and/or children is not necessarily hindering migration, but they actively make use of (professional) benefits that co-migrating can offer.

The differentiation between migration destinations as illustrated by Nikhil has also been observed in the multi-stage migration pattern among Filipino domestic helpers (Paul, 2011), with the migration path typically starting in the Gulf countries, which offer relatively low status and wages. The path then continues to ‘higher level’ countries in South-East Asia, which are in turn used as stepping stones to destination countries in the West, where the working conditions are considered to be the best (Paul, 2011). Although the migration of low-skilled differs from that of high-skilled workers, it can be
argued that gathering the required capital in different countries in order to gain access to the desired destination is relevant in the general context of migration. The USA was consistently mentioned as an ultimate destination among the participants of this study, because, as put by Vijay (24, NL): ‘… it’s a land where anything can happen, the country of opportunity’. This preferential status is a reflection of the cultural norm which sees the USA as end destination of a ‘successful’ migration project.

Some participants who planned to migrate to a next foreign country preferred to first obtain permanent legal status in the current country in order to facilitate swift mobility. The free movement of people and labour within the EU gives (former) third-country nationals, with the citizenship of one of the EU member states, the same rights as EU nationals to live and work in any other EU country. However, obtaining citizenship in either the Netherlands or the UK is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive, reflecting anti-immigrant policies and politics during the times of economic crisis.

Settlement
Shashi is in his late 30s. He moved to the USA from India in the end of 1990s to work in IT-consulting. His wife joined him soon and two children were born in the later years. In his constant self-development and making sure his skills are in demand, Nikhil decided to do an MBA in the UK, where the family moved about five years ago. He has continued to work for the same company and although he is sceptical about the changes in highly skilled migrant visa schemes, the family has decided to settle down in the UK for the near future to provide good schooling for their children. At the same time, he is still very flexible: ‘Good thing about UK citizenship is that I can work anywhere in the EU.’

A few participants stated they had definite intentions to settle, more often in the UK. When reasoning their plans, the participants indicated they were familiar with the country and culture, they had a stable job, or they wanted to sustain and invest in profitable social and professional networks. The decision to stay often meant that the participant had also settled in terms of life course, both in their employment and family formation paths.

Obtaining permanent legal status is the main prerequisite for settlement. Participants who lacked this status or had difficulties obtaining it often had negative perceptions about the country, and questioned the role of highly skilled migrants in that society. When asked about schooling for their (future) children, participants cited practical considerations for later life, weighing them independently of their preference for a particular school system, as EU citizenship automatically makes students eligible for significantly lower tuition fees. Hence, participants seemed to apply for citizenship as a
pragmatic decision based on practical benefits, rather than as a decision associated with an emotional attachment to the host society.

3.6 Discussion and conclusion: paths in the migration process

Our data help visualise how culture of migration, self-actualisation and future migration plans constitute the migration process of highly skilled Indians in the Netherlands and United Kingdom. The emic perspective, gained through the biographical approach, helps us in understanding the diverse expectations of migrants, and how they access and utilise both professional and personal resources to structure and individualise their migration paths.

Although much of the migration literature focuses on human capital as a key to new opportunities, this study emphasises that social capital is equally important. Because adequate education and work experiences were often insufficient for successful migration, specific knowledge of the target labour market and direct contacts with potential employers were often gained through the networks. Thus, social networks were used as spatial strategies for gathering human, financial and social capital through migration (Ho, 2011).

This study specifically illustrates that individuals often use migration as a strategy to improve both domestic and international future career prospects. This strategy increased their skill set and better positioned them in the competitive labour market. Our findings are in line with Roos (2013, 150) who notes that for many highly skilled Indians, ‘international migration has become a routine pathway for learning and knowledge acquisition, as well as a method of gaining international exposure and cultural knowledge’. International geographical mobility thus becomes a normative part of professional careers of the highly skilled. In communities with such culture of migration, migration is embedded in the behaviour of individuals and the values of the community (Massey et al., 1998). However, it is the interaction between the culture of migration and institutional setting which determines where migration can take place. Whereas the migration process of highly skilled Indians to the Netherlands and the UK showed convergence in most of the aspects, the migration experiences in the two countries differed mainly in terms of institutional context. Considerably more participants claimed they planned to stay in the UK than in the Netherlands, as the former offers a broader variety of labour market opportunities. Despite the more welcoming Dutch immigration policy, the Netherlands as a new migration destination for high-skilled Indians seems to be considered as an escalator region (Fielding, 1992) which is able to attract qualified people to the region and facilitate their upward mobility only temporarily.

Taking a social and cultural capital perspective, we find advancing one’s career, learning new skills, other living arrangements and lifestyles were some of the motives for migration for the highly skilled in this study. One of the key contributions of this study
is the observation that the financial benefits accompanying migration are salient, but they generally are not the starting point in a migration decision for the interviewed high-skilled Indians. It is rather the importance of non-economic motives in addition to, not instead of, economic motives (Halfacree, 2004) that drive Indian professionals abroad. A related key finding is the enhancement of migrant capital of the linked movers. The stereotype of the trailing wife who is portrayed to gain less from migration does not seem to apply to this group of women. Although they may not receive the same labour market opportunities as in the home country, the co-migrating women need not be positioned as losers in the high-skilled migration process, but rather as active agents who seek and utilise professional opportunities (cf Hiller and McCaig, 2007). This finding is further strengthened by a favourable institutional setting (Iredale, 2005) where high-skilled migrant visa schemes encourage spouses to participate in the local labour market.

The embedding of the migration process in life course events and transitions – such as union formation and parental care – highlights the heterogeneity in motives and outcomes of high-skilled migration. As discussed earlier, also the life courses of significant others play a central role in making future migration decisions. The variety of the individual life courses is related to the cultural norms and obligations that migrants abide by. As Fielding (1992, 201) puts it, migration is ‘culturally produced, culturally expressed, and cultural in its effects’.

This article also provides rich material from the biographies to better understand the concept of migrant capital and the importance of including the linkages between internal and international migration. Internal migration puts the individual into so-called ‘migration mode’, in which they learn to adjust to new places and build resilience for subsequent moves. During international migration, the individual collects relevant capital for the moves that follow. This migrant capital is, however, conditioned by the institutional regimes that govern migration at the state level. Although the highly skilled migrant visa schemes were not shown to be of defining importance in the initial migration decision phase, it appears that the institutional setting determines future migration decisions, particularly for the participants in the UK where frequent changes to immigration policies were taking place. Immigration policies could therefore be better targeted if the context of migration decisions were anticipated and viewed in terms of accommodating migrants as individuals, not as mere labour force. Research from a migrant perspective thus helps to shed light on how the state intersects with the lives of highly skilled migrants (Mavroudi and Warren, 2013).

Using biographical methods, we could see the central role that migration plays in the lives of highly skilled Indians. To understand high-skilled migration beyond the utility maximisation of human capital, we need to focus on the lives of migrants, their migration expectations and lived experiences at each destination.