Life courses of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom
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Chapter 6
Conclusions
6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to gain insights into how the interdependencies of education, employment, and household trajectories shape the migration trajectories in particular and the life courses in general of high-skilled Indian migrants and their significant others. This research contributes to the existing literature on high-skilled migration (e.g., Ackers, 2005; Beaverstock, 1996; Harvey, 2011; Iredale, 2001; Kofman, 2012; Koser and Salt, 1997; Mahroum, 2001; Raghuram, 2004a; Salt, 1997) by applying the life course perspective. The life course approach is a tool that has enabled us to view high-skilled migration not only in terms of labour market outcomes, but also with regard to other domains of life. We focused on the interdependencies between the parallel careers of migration, education, employment, and household. Furthermore, we have highlighted the influence of significant others, as well as of cultural and institutional contexts, in structuring the migration trajectories of individuals. In order to examine the complexities of migration behaviour and to link people's experiences throughout the migration process, we have adopted a biographic approach that embeds individuals' specific migration decisions in their respective life course contexts.

6.2 Summary of the main findings

Each empirical chapter of this dissertation focuses on a dimension of the life course of highly skilled migrants: the application of the life course approach to high-skilled migration (Chapter 2), the migration process (Chapter 3), linked lives (Chapter 4), and gender (Chapter 5). Taken together, these dimensions provide answers to the main research question: How are the migration motivations, decisions, and experiences of highly skilled Indians in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom shaped by life course interdependencies, significant others, and cultural and institutional contexts? The main research question and the sub-questions are answered in the following.

6.2.1 Applying the life course approach to high-skilled migration

Chapter 2 sets out a theoretical and empirical basis for linking the life course approach to high-skilled migration. It serves as a base for the subsequent chapters by deductively defining the topics to be addressed. This chapter poses the following research question: How do highly skilled migrants construct their life courses with regard to education, employment, household, and migration trajectories?

Our conceptual framework builds on the four central life course approach themes proposed by Elder (1975, 1994): namely, lives in time and space, timing of lives, linked lives, and human agency. In order to study migration decision-making, we situate these themes in a wider setting of factors that can either facilitate or hinder migration. Mulder and Hooimeijer (1999) differentiate between factors that stem from the individual or household (the micro context) and factors that are created externally (the macro
Conclusions

The micro-context factors are the resources and the restrictions that shape the life courses of individuals and their significant others, while the macro-context factors are the opportunities and the constraints that are derived from the social context (Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999). Additionally, we consider social and organisational networks as meso-context factors.

As a frequently occurring example of life course interdependencies, we point out that ‘skilling’, or completing extensive (post-)graduate studies and gaining professional experience, leads to the postponement of certain life course events, such as entry into the labour market, union formation, and family formation.

The findings reveal that the events in different life course trajectories are less likely to take place simultaneously for women than for men: i.e., among women a specific trajectory tends to be in the foreground at each stage of life, whereas among men there tends to be more interaction between different trajectories. The women in our study said they had chosen to dedicate themselves to postgraduate studies or obtaining a PhD degree before getting married, while few of the men reported that they were concerned about completing their education before marriage. As the women are expected to take care of the family, they have less time in their life course to focus on finalising their studies or on establishing a professional career.

Particularly the implications of an arranged marriage, a prevailing norm in the Indian culture, for both union and family formation highlight the importance of timing in life course transitions. Furthermore, the middle-class Indian context seems to promote a culture of migration (cf. Massey et al., 1993), making studying and/or working abroad a widespread norm for the highly skilled. The roles of these and other macro- and meso-context factors are discussed in Chapter 3. The findings suggest that future migration plans are not economically determined, but are instead dependent on other domains of life, such as education or the family. This chapter shows the importance of the linked lives mechanism, which is elaborated in Chapter 4, where the focus is on the resources and the restrictions drawn from micro-context factors.

Chapter 2 also underlines the gender division in the life course of migrants. All female participants who were high-skilled migrant dependants were engaged in the labour market or in postgraduate education10, and the male participants did not anticipate that their (future) wife would become a traditional housewife only. Hence, the women were not tied movers of the kind described by Mincer (1978). However, the life course patterns of men and women are often quite different in terms of the timing of events and the direction of the causality between parallel careers. In a similar vein, Smith (2004) has argued that the term ‘tied movers’ is a biased concept related to employment

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10 With the exception of one woman who was a stay-home mother at the time of the interview, but had completed a second postgraduate education in the host country prior to that, and was looking to re-enter the labour market.
status that defines economic inactivity and part-time work as negative outcomes for the labour market. Even if a woman enters a country through the family migration route, she should not be seen simply as a follower of the male migrant (cf. Kofman, 2004). We show that female spouses do not sacrifice, but strategise: they use the education- and employment-related opportunities that migration creates (cf. Liversage, 2009). Chapter 5 specifically investigates the gender issues within high-skilled migration.

6.2.2 The migration process

Chapter 3 provides a detailed picture of the migration process of the highly skilled. We look at a combination of perspectives and experiences before, during, and after migration, as well as future migration plans; and are thus covering more than just one fixed point in time. We answer several research questions in this chapter: What resources do highly skilled migrants use for migration? How is migration decision-making embedded in the life course context? How does the institutional setting modify migration expectations and experiences in different stages of the migration process?

We show how the culture of migration manifests itself in the professional sphere: high-skilled Indians use migration as a career strategy for enhancing their competitiveness on both the domestic and the international labour markets. Given that half of the participants had already lived in at least one foreign country before arriving in their current country of residence, prior international education or work experience turned out to be the most relevant migration resource. Migration experiences, together with human, social, and cultural capital, constitute migrant capital. This migrant capital is an important resource for self-actualisation, which represented a primary migration motive for nearly all of the participants. We point out that social capital is at least as important as human capital: whereas the human capital brings one to the door, it is often the social capital that opens the door. While education and skills are a prerequisite for obtaining a job, our participants highlighted the instrumentality of social networks in sharing information about relevant job opportunities. It is interesting to note that the high-skilled Indians draw upon professional networks rather than on the diaspora. Information about foreign labour markets is thus acquired mainly through (former) colleagues, whereas the diaspora, or the nationality-based network, is accessed mainly for cultural activities and a sense of belonging while away from homeland, not for migration decision-making.

Our findings suggest that the life course is not a one-way process, and that the sequences of events and stages can vary greatly. Therefore, the patterns of the life course should be seen in the context of previous life course events and decisions. These results reflect the findings of Ryan and Mulholland (2014), who observed among high-skilled French migrants in London that the mobility of migrants is often dependent on their life course stage: young, single, and childless people are more likely to move; whereas at later ages settling down with the family becomes a priority, and thus the costs of onward
Conclusions

Immigration policies can either facilitate or restrict the migration process, and may thus influence or even determine migration decisions. We found for both the Netherlands and the UK that the migration policies had not been of decisive importance when the participants initially chose the country of destination, but that the policy changes that took place during the fieldwork—such as the setting of an annual cap for the number of visas for the highly skilled, or the removal of the link between permanent and temporary migration—were of major concern to the participants in terms of their future migration or settlement plans, particularly in the UK.

Migrant capital can be effectively gathered and mobilised only if immigration policies are favourable, especially as they relate to accompanying spouses. Thus, high-skilled migration visa schemes should be accommodating to migrants as individuals, not merely as workers.

6.2.3 Linked lives and the life course

Chapter 4 tackles the role of linked lives. Specifically, it seeks to answer the research question: How do significant others shape the life courses of Indian highly skilled migrants in general, and migration trajectories in particular?

Drawing on the family migration literature (e.g., Bailey and Boyle, 2004; Cooke, 2008a; Mulder, 2007), we acknowledge that migration is not just an individual or household phenomenon. Thus, we go beyond the nuclear family and add another layer: namely, the extended family, which is specific for the Indian context. As individuals tend to be closely attached to their family in the Indian cultural context, the parents play a large role in directing the household formation paths of their children, particularly in terms of arranging marriage (Gopalkrishnan and Babacan, 2007). The participants reported that their parents tend to make strong suggestions or to pressure them to meet particular expectations regarding certain transitions in their education and employment paths. For example, some of the participants reported having been pressured to earn an engineering degree, which ultimately opened up migration paths. The spouse may have also changed an individual’s migration path based on his or her own education- or employment-related aspirations and experiences. The female spouse tends to adapt to the destination decision of the primary male mover at the beginning of the migration path, whereas at later stages the spouse has an equal contribution in the decision. Children also shape the migration path: the participants indicated that they became less interested in continuing to migrate after having children, and that they intended to either return to India or to settle in the host country by the time children went to school.

The notion of linked lives thus implies that specific people channel the life paths of highly skilled migrants in specific stages, whereby specific relationships within the path interdependencies are important. Migration decision-making often depends on the
life course stages of the linked lives, with the most frequent pattern being caregiving by and for the parents. This supports the argument that in addition to providing spousal benefits, migration policies should provide long-term parental visas for family members who assist with child care.

### 6.2.4 A gender perspective on high-skilled migration

Chapter 5 investigates the gendered experiences of high-skilled female migrants. It addresses the question: In what ways do gender norms shape the migration experiences of highly skilled Indian women? Although women are the focus of this chapter, we also provide men’s opinions about and experiences of gender and migration.

As illustrated in Chapter 4, migration can be a pathway towards individualism. The migrants live far away from their (extended) families and cultural background, which creates space for more autonomous decision-making. However, the migrants’ parents may continue to exert pressure on them to comply with cultural norms, as the parents still live in the home country, and in turn face pressure from others in the community to adhere to norms. Chapter 5 confirms these findings, and also shows that, particularly for women, migration can represent an opportunity for non-compliance with normative life course paths, parental pressure, and patriarchal norms. The main findings suggest that (migrant) women are able to ‘compensate’ for singlehood by establishing a successful professional career. Whereas in Western societies modernity and traditions are generally regarded as opposing, we found that high-skilled migrant women seek a balance between adhering to cultural norms and fulfilling their personal aspirations.

Furthermore, this chapter exemplifies how gender roles and dynamics can be modified through the migration process (cf. Ryan et al., 2009). For instance, we find that when migrants adopt the norms of Western societies, women no longer feel the need to be the primary caretakers of children. By sharing the care responsibilities with their husbands, these female migrants are able to re-enter the labour market if they wish to do so.

### 6.3 Discussion and contributions of this research

Based on the key conclusions discussed in the previous section, we will present the recurrent and the overarching themes that emerged throughout the chapters, and underline our contributions to the migration literature. Overall, the strength of this study lies in our presentation of the perspectives of migrants and of their life courses. By examining these micro-level experiences, perceptions, and opinions, we were able to gain new insights into high-skilled migration.
6.3.1 The non-economic reasoning behind an economic issue

Whereas high-skilled migration is often discussed and presented only in an economic context, and in terms of migrants’ financial contributions to host societies or their personal returns on investments in human capital, the findings from our qualitative study support taking a much broader perspective. We combined the literature streams on high-skilled migration, life course, family migration, and migration and gender to provide an integral view on migration. Using this approach, we were able to show that for our research participants, financial gain was often a secondary motivation for migration, and was certainly not the only one. Highly skilled individuals tend to value professional and personal development, gaining intercultural experience and new perspectives on life, and building up social networks. Thus, it is important to see the human beings behind the professional skills and the migrant status.

These findings parallel the work of many migration scholars who have observed that human capital theory alone does not fully explain migration behaviour, as the theory is gender-neutral and does not take the role of the family sufficiently into consideration (Boyle, Graham and Yeoh, 2003; Boucher, 2007; Cooke, 2008a). For example, Bretell (2003), Gardner and Osella (2003) and Harvey (2011) have advocated viewing migration as more than just an economic strategy. Robinson and Carey (2000) call for ‘peopling skilled international migration’ in order to recognise these migrants not only in terms of their capacity for economic productivity, but also as ‘people living within a social, cultural and historical context’ (103).

This viewpoint can be applied not only to actual migration behaviour, but to migration intentions as well. Interestingly, when talking about their future migration plans, return migration seemed to be the default option for a large share of the participants. Although the main reasons cited were closeness to family and a desire to return to their original cultural setting, many also said they see the rapidly developing Indian economy as providing opportunities, especially for people with international experience. Thus, Western countries could be considered as escalator regions for establishing a successful career in India. However, the time frame of the participants’ return migration plans varied. Harish (41 years, UK) summarised this phenomenon: ‘If you ask an Indian, they will always say: “We would like to go back, but it is in two years’ time”. So we have this standing joke that it is actually x plus two years. That two years is constant, but the x keeps changing’.

Based on the existing literature and our findings, we suggest integrating the economic and non-economic migration theories, as these are not contradictory, but complementary bodies of theoretical and empirical knowledge that together can further migration studies.
6.3.2 The life course matters

As we have emphasised throughout the various chapters of this dissertation, migration cannot be seen in isolation, but should instead be viewed in combination with other life course trajectories, such as education, employment, and family. Moreover, the life course of an individual is not isolated, but is embedded in the life courses of his or her significant others. Our analysis of these components—throughout the migration process, not just at one point in time—provides a more detailed understanding of migration decision-making and behaviour.

Our conceptual framework and empirical findings support the observation of Clark and Davies Withers (2007) that applying the life course approach to migration allows us to examine the ‘link between life events and the intersection of these events with spatial outcomes’ (592). Courgeau (1985) postulates that space occupies a central position as an interconnected dimension of the life cycle. We retain the use of the concept ‘life course’, as it accounts for variation in the sequence and the timing of the events and transitions, and thus allows for flexibility and different outcomes.

Our findings also indicate that for highly skilled Indians, migration is a way of structuring the life course. We underlined the linkages between internal and international migration: by means of internal migration, people acquire the know-how needed for adjusting to new places, and subsequently use those experiences as a basis for managing international moves. In line with previous studies (Beaverstock, 1996; Kofman, 2012; Roos, 2013; Salt, 1988), we argue that migration has become a normative part of their education and/or employment trajectory, as well as a means to accumulate international professional experience for career advancement, in which each move is a part of a larger scheme. In addition, migration is regarded as an opportunity for individuals to gain independence from their parents; financially and, more importantly, emotionally. Our study thus highlights migration as a strategy for achieving individualism.

An important contribution of this dissertation is our finding that within the life course, linked lives matter. We have illustrated how migration decisions are often shaped by the implications of (the life course stages of) the linked lives, the most dominant examples being care-giving and care-receiving by and for the parents. Our analysis emphasises the remarkably large role of the extended—not just the nuclear—family in individuals’ migration intentions and behaviour. With this emphasis we contribute to reducing the imbalance in the family migration literature, in which a disproportionately strong focus lies on household structure rather than on family processes (De Jong and Roempke Graefe, 2008). In line with Raghuram (2004a), we have demonstrated how migration is not just a result of macro-level factors, such as labour market processes and migration policies, but builds on micro-level components, such as individual objectives and household decision-making. Likewise, we further the knowledge on tied migrants that lies at the intersections of high-skilled migration and family migration. Whereas
none of the married women among our participants were primary movers, none of them indicated that they had lost out on their personal ambitions due to tied migration. Instead, they used migration as an opportunity to advance their educational and/or professional careers, and thus actively transformed the seemingly disadvantageous situation to their advantage. In addition to that, women can utilise migration as a means to put their labour market activities on hold temporarily in order to focus on child care (Kofman and Raghuram, 2005).

In identifying new ways of how migration influences demographic change, Findlay and Wahba (2013) enlist the challenges that migration creates for the traditional care patterns across the life course. The complexities and implications of care in a globalised world have been widely addressed in the literature (e.g., Baldassar and Merla, 2014, Kofman and Raghuram, 2009; Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo, 2009; Yeates, 2012), discussing the multiple and diverse stakeholders, relationships, processes, and localities involved. Whereas none of our participants was a professional care worker and none of them noted that they used professional care services, the issue of informal care emerged throughout the interviews. Many participants had made migration plans or actual arrangements to receive care from their parents in raising their child(ren) or to provide care to their ageing parents. Attending to Raghuram’s (2012) call to regard not only care provision but also absence of certain actors following migration, we have shown how this absence and particular cultural norms, such as the participation of multiple generations and extended families in childcare, trigger migration. Considering migration related to care-giving or care-receiving further adds to one of the central arguments of the dissertation, namely, that high-skilled migration is not primarily driven by economic motives (cf. Baldassar, 2007).

6.3.3 Migration changes norms

The salience of cultural norms, particularly those regarding age and gender, has emerged from each individual chapter. The phenomenon of cultural and psychological changes resulting from intercultural contact is known as acculturation, and it refers to adjustments in the customs and values at the group level, as well as to adjustments in behaviour and attitudes at the individual level (Berry et al., 2006). Whereas Indian norms are important in migrants’ lives even from a distance, the highly skilled migrants in our study adjusted their values and behaviour to Western norms to a certain extent, especially in terms of their living arrangements and family patterns. Although the share of young married women in nuclear households in India substantially increased between 1992 and 2006, the majority of women were still living in patrilocal families (Allendorf, 2012). Our results show that migration is associated with a decrease in patrilocality, as the participants who intend to return to India indicated that they plan to live in a nuclear household as they had done in Europe, although preferably near parents. By means of
migration, these and other social norms, such as norms on the timing of union and family formation, are transformed to a certain extent by the highly skilled.

However, it is important to stress that we do not suggest a dichotomy of following or not following certain Indian norms, but illustrate a number of ways of how different norms are combined and negotiated. We have shown how participants created flexibility for parental pressure in terms of different life course trajectories, for instance, by independently choosing to study or work abroad, and then ‘compensating’ this autonomy by agreeing to their marriage being arranged by parents. With regard to gender issues, we emphasised the opportunities to realise professional aspirations that migration offers particularly to women, both during and after migration, and the ways in which women are active agents in the migration process. Women pursuing professional careers also navigate between cultural norms and personal aspirations. This resonates with the ideas of Belliappa (2013), who showcases how Indian women working in the IT industry in Bangalore have more autonomy within the family, however, this does not necessarily imply increased independence from the family. Radhakrishnan (2009) observes the blurred boundaries between modernity and tradition, individualistic and collectivistic values, concluding that although women working in the Indian IT sector gain higher status due to their professional careers, they are still more respected for prioritising family over work than for pursuing these careers. Similarly, our findings show that even though the participants had negotiated more independence from their parents and their extended family members, close family ties still remained central in their lives. Indian (migrant) families are thus increasingly balancing or choosing between ‘traditional notions of family-making and modern desires of individual growth’ (Sharangpani, 2010, 252), or between ‘status attainment through gender performance’ and ‘status attainment through the performance of modernity’ (Desai and Andrist, 2010, 682).

We argue that migration offers opportunities for emancipation to women, as they are able to break free from the traditional housewife role, and can pursue a professional career outside of the home. Women can thus actively transform traditions as a result of their increased access to education and their employment opportunities through migration (cf. Samuel, 2010).

6.3.4 Differences between the institutional settings

The Netherlands and the UK, the destination countries of this study, differ in terms of their (high-skilled) migration histories and migration volumes. The UK is a much more popular destination than the Netherlands among Indians, as it is English-speaking and has an established Indian community. However, many of the participants in the Netherlands reported that this ‘unknown’ and small country provided better opportunities and more straightforward visa requirements. Some also claimed that they had deliberately chosen the Netherlands in order to explore a new destination, instead of
joining the vast majority of Indians who migrate to the USA or the UK.

Although some of the participants in the Netherlands, particularly those who arrived in the early stages of the knowledge migrant visa, reported having encountered problems with bureaucracy, we conclude that the participants in the Netherlands were generally much more satisfied with their host country’s migration policies than the participants in the UK. In the UK, migration policies have changed frequently, have become much more restrictive, and have even been implemented retroactively. These developments led some of the participants to report feeling undervalued and unwelcome. As Mukesh (29 years, UK) said, he is ‘always in the state of uncertainty’ due to the many changes in the immigration and settlement rules, and therefore cannot make long-term plans. While the topic was not raised by the participants in the UK, several of the participants in the Netherlands indicated that the absence of a long-term parental visa might lead them to leave the country if their parents were not able to stay for longer periods of time in order to help with child care.

Internal migration had occurred far more frequently among the participants in the UK than in the Netherlands. This mainly had to do with the size of the labour market and larger prevalence of temporary employment conditions in the UK.

The extent of public discussions on the issue of highly skilled migrants also differs between the two countries. Whereas in the Netherlands these migrants seem to be less visible, in the UK the political changes are echoed in the sometimes rancorous public debate that surrounds the topic11.

Nevertheless, despite these differences, it is clear that the experiences of the participants in the two countries are surprisingly similar. Whereas we initially expected to find that comparing the institutional contexts of the Netherlands and the UK would provide new insights, we found no major differences, despite the different starting points of policy implementation and the different sizes of the Indian community in each host country.

6.3.5 Methodological insights

The strengths of the qualitative research methods are demonstrated in this dissertation: i.e., examining selected aspects in detail and looking more deeply at the contexts in which these phenomena take place. Although the semi-structured biographic

11 At the time of writing, April 2016, yet another change in the immigration rules relating to the highly skilled in the UK was about to take place. All Tier 2 visa holders who have been residing in the country for less than 10 years are required to earn at least £35,000 a year to be permitted to settle permanently. Skilled non-EU migrants earning less than that amount will not be eligible to apply for ‘indefinite leave to remain’, and will thus have to leave the country. In addition to the affected migrants, British citizens have protested against the implementation of this rule. Josh Harbord, who started a petition to scrap the £35,000 threshold, reasoned that he does not ‘… want to live in a country that values people’s incomes over people’s contributions to the society’ (The Guardian, 12 March 2016).
interviews conducted for this study primarily underline the very diverse migration experiences, perceptions, and expectations of the individual participants; these detailed accounts led us to identify distinctive patterns, and, more importantly, to reveal the variation in migration behaviour. Our findings emphasise that there is no average highly skilled Indian migrant, and that this group is very diverse.

Smith (2004) advocates a qualitative research agenda on family migration, and claims that ‘nuanced understandings of when, how and why processes and outcomes of family migration differ geographically, temporally, socially and culturally will be established’ (269). The biographical approach relates migration to an individual’s past, present, and future biography (Ni Laoire, 2008). Narratives provide an individual’s point of view, allowing for the observation of the patterns and the subjective experiences of the migration process (Bretell, 2003), and giving the individual an opportunity to set the agenda for the research interview (Allen, 2000).

We have added the element of the structuring of the interview through the life course in order to explore migration decisions, behaviour, and experiences from a holistic perspective. The new way of visualising parallel careers proved to be a useful and organised method for presenting an individual’s life course events within the parallel careers of education, employment, migration, and household; and including the parallel careers of a spouse, where applicable (see Figures 2.1 and 3.1 as examples of these visualisations) 12.

6.4 Implications for policy

In line with its policy of promoting the free movement of labour, the EU has increasingly been inviting highly skilled third-country nationals to join its labour force. The Netherlands, for instance, tries to attract foreign talent by offering incentives to these migrants, such as a 30 per cent discount on income tax. Migration policies are otherwise largely focused on maximising the financial utility of highly skilled migrants for the benefit of the host country’s economy. However, it is also crucial to take into account the opinions and the needs of the people for whom these policies are designed: the migrants. The findings of this dissertation present solid evidence from migrants, and underline the importance of considering their perspective, not only in terms of their contributions to the tax system, business revenue, and R&D; but also in terms of their well-being and migration plans. Migration policies matter because they have a direct impact on the lives and practices of migrants (Vertovec, 2007; Kõu and Bailey, 2014). However, the insights from this study reveal some discrepancies between policy aims and lived experiences. Some of the participants also expressed concerns about negative public

12 Other possibilities for visualising life course trajectories include, for example, sequence analyses and optimal matching to determine clusters of typical trajectories, as presented by Caarls and De Valk (2015).
perceptions about migrants, such as the beliefs that migrants are a threat to the labour market and to the welfare system. Thus, even these highly skilled migrants reported having heard complaints that they are taking away jobs from native-born citizens and are burdening taxpayers. Contrary to common beliefs, research in OECD countries has established that the state benefits which immigrants receive do not exceed the tax and social contributions paid by them, thus immigrants have a neutral impact on public expenditures (OECD, 2014). The fear of migrants tapping into public funds has become an increasingly pressing issue around the globe, as views on migration are coloured by the humanitarian crisis surrounding the refugees from the Middle East. Given the current climate around immigration policies, it might be even more crucial than in the past to consider the voices of migrants, as doing so could help policy-makers and the general public gain a better understanding of migration processes and of migrants. Likewise, the diversity in terms of nationality, age, and gender within migrant groups should be considered (cf. Kofman, 2014).

6.4.1 Migration policies are for migrants (too)

During and after the data collection period of this study, a number of major policy changes were about to take place or had just been announced that led the participants to say they were seriously concerned about their legal status, settlement prospects, and life course plans in general. Especially in the UK, significant restrictions on immigration rules were implemented for highly skilled migrants. The new immigration rules in the UK are aimed at attracting migrants who make economic contributions for short periods of time and then leave, and thus do not settle. Many of the participants said they disagreed with this policy direction, and that they intended to leave the country for another one where their skills and overall contributions to society are valued over the longer run. Although the circulatory nature of high-skilled migration suggests that these migrants often do not intend to settle permanently, migration rules should not be unwelcoming, particularly if migrants' contributions to the economy are much needed by the host country. Governments are interested in maintaining flexibility, and therefore aim to secure the short-term benefits of migration (Iredale, 1999). However, in searching for a compromise between permanent and temporary migration, it is important to keep in mind that restrictive policies make a country less attractive for highly skilled migrants.

High-skilled migration policies designed in a calculating manner evoke negative responses among migrants, and are likely to push them away rather than pull them towards the country. Policy-makers should realise that in order to create attractive conditions for international talent and to help alleviate the consequences of the ageing of the local labour force, it is necessary to treat highly skilled migrants not merely as economic contributors, but as individuals with their specific life paths embedded in a socio-cultural context. Equally important is the issue concerning the retaining of highly
skilled migrants in the country, instead of rotating them on a short-term basis. For instance, abolishing the one-year post-study visa to find employment in the UK seems to be costly for both the state and the migrant. In that case, the state has spent money educating the migrant, but will not receive employment tax revenues in return; while the migrant may face difficulties in paying back the tuition fee loans.

Based on the abovementioned observations, we can conclude that immigration policies often seem to be designed mainly from the perspective of the narrow interests of the government in power, even though those policies affect the lives of real people, too. Therefore, involving (future) migrants in policy-making and taking their actual expectations and experiences into account when crafting policies would be beneficial for both sides, and should lead to better policy outcomes. Instead of more regulation, there should be more sustainable governance. Policy-makers need to draw upon more localised information and narratives from individuals when drafting laws that will directly influence the lives of many people.

### 6.4.2 The welfare of the migrants

Given our finding that migration decision-making also depends on the life courses of the significant others of the migrants, as well as on their cultural backgrounds, the conceptualisation of family in high-skilled migration policies should be revisited. Because of the cultural differences in family relationships, policy-makers need to consider family constellations that differ from the nuclear family, which is dominant in European societies (cf. Kofman, 2004). The giving and receiving of care between Indian migrants and their parents are crucial resources, particularly in terms of nurturing (grand)children. Many of the participants stated that they would like to raise their children in an Indian cultural setting, and together with family members. Thus, when they are living in Europe, they want their parents to be able to stay with them for longer periods of time in order to assist in childrearing. In addition, having a grandparent help with child care could make it possible for the female migrant to (re-)enter the labour market. The migration policies in the Netherlands and the UK, like elsewhere in the EU, are geared towards the nuclear family, and thus do not acknowledge the role of grandparents in the migration process and in labour market participation.

Although both countries have made efforts to reduce the amount of bureaucracy involved in applying for or extending a high-skilled migrant visa, there is still considerable room for improvement. The participants found the variety of high-skilled migrant visa types in the UK confusing, and that they felt it was unfair that the holders of a certain type of visa were in a more advantageous position than others. Thus, there should be clear, uniform, and stable visa requirements; and the bureaucracy should be reduced to minimum. At the same time, there should be room for dealing with non-standard cases.
Our findings show that intergenerational proximity and care play major roles in the participants’ return migration plans. Although the Indian Ministry of Non-resident Indians assists Indians in returning and re-adjusting to their home country, further institutional help might facilitate the return migration of the Indian highly skilled. Among the main concerns raised by our participants was the scarcity of mechanisms for facilitating work-life balance for women, such as the availability of formal child care or part-time employment opportunities. Likewise, stronger welfare schemes for elderly care would make it easier for women to participate in the labour market.

6.5 Limitations of this study and suggestions for further research

This dissertation has demonstrated the usefulness of linking a qualitative approach to the life course framework and high-skilled migration, an approach which could be taken forward in future research, while bearing in mind the weaknesses of the current study.

As mentioned in Section 1.3, our reliance mainly on the snowball sampling technique following our limited success in recruiting participants through various channels could have led to a certain bias in the range of research participants, despite our efforts to find sufficient entry points to new participant networks. In the Dutch group, this meant that a slightly disproportionately large representation of PhD researchers (seven out of 22 participants), whereas medical professionals were not represented at all. Likewise, we could recruit only a few multi-national company transferees, even though they make up an important category among the highly skilled migrants. However, the rotations of such professionals typically last for less than a year, the required length of residential duration in this study. Their shorter stay could lead to a stronger focus on the work domain and less to the life course on the whole. The sample size itself could be seen as problematic for Chapter 5 (primary focus on 11 female participants), and to a lesser extent for Chapter 2 (based on 22 participants). Furthermore, literature suggests that women’s lives are differently influenced when they migrate together with their husbands or alone (Caarls and Mazzucato, 2015), but having only six married women in our sample did not provide enough data to observe these differences. To compensate for the relatively low number of female participants—the main focus of Chapter 5—their experiences are complemented by perceptions of the 36 male participants to provide a fuller perspective on gender issues in high-skilled migration. Moreover, the gender ratio in our study reflects that

13 On the other hand, in the Dutch academic system, PhD candidates are considered research employees and not students, so they can be categorised under the research and science field, rather than as tertiary education students. Likewise, the first groups of Indian medical staff (such as operating room nurses) did not arrive in the Netherlands until after the data collection period of this study.
of the global high-skilled migration, where about three in every four highly skilled migrants are males. While being careful with making generalisations in Chapter 5, we still argue that it provides valuable insights on the topic.

Methodologically, the chosen research instrument could have been experienced as hampering by some participants. Following the principles of the biographic-narrative interview method (BNIM), the participants were asked to tell their life stories from the time they were still living in India, up to the current point in time. Instead of continuing with the interview according to the BNIM structure (i.e., inducing specific narratives about certain events), we proceeded with an in-depth interview guide that we built on the experiences and the topics mentioned by the participants in telling their life stories. Although most of the participants described their life stories surprisingly extensively, a few were not comfortable with having to elaborate on their stories without any further guidelines. In the latter cases, only the topics from the in-depth interview guide were used; thus, some specific parts of these participants’ life courses may not have emerged in the course of the interview.

Whereas one of the key arguments of this study is that migration should be viewed as a process and not just as a one-off event, because of limitations of time and resources our data collection was limited to just one interview per participant. To track whether the future migration intentions and other life course plans sketched out in the initial interview have been realised, or whether the individual’s life course has taken another direction, it would be very helpful to conduct one or more follow-up interviews. Longitudinal research would provide us with more precise insights over a long time span of an individual’s life. Similarly, studying return migrants would result in a detailed retrospective picture of how their migration plans had evolved, and whether their migration intentions were realised. The return migrants’ migration experiences could then be evaluated in terms of the potential advantages and disadvantages of their international experiences and the implications of these experiences in India, the potential changes in their family relationships and/or living arrangements, and their success in (re)conforming to Indian norms and/or in combining or substituting these norms with Western norms.

Another potentially fruitful direction is diversifying the study population. Women as principal migrants within a couple, or more migrants with children, could be included to provide even more variety in the life course patterns. Likewise, the spouse and the parents of the migrant could be interviewed to investigate the linked life courses in greater detail. Although one of the key findings of this dissertation is the importance of linked lives in the migration decision-making processes of highly skilled migrants, the experiences of these linked movers or stayers are not directly included in the findings; instead, they are only reflected through the perspective of the interviewed migrant. In case we would have explicitly adopted a transnationalist perspective, we should have studied the migrants in their multiple contexts for a full understanding of their experiences (Levitt, DeWind, and
Vertovec, 2003), but the resources of data collection for this dissertation were restricted to destination countries only.

The perspectives of other stakeholders could also be considered: e.g., migration policy-makers, managers/recruiters at multi-national companies, or employees at expat centres. In geographical terms, future studies would benefit from including more destination and origin countries in order to explore other potential similarities or differences in socio-cultural, institutional, or spatial contexts; and to determine whether the largely similar findings in the Dutch and the UK cases studied in this research are applicable in other institutional settings as well.

An issue that was not addressed in this study was the participants’ backgrounds in India. Apart from their gender, marital status, and occupation, the participants were treated as a homogeneous group, and their geographical or religious backgrounds were not taken into account. Having more insight into these characteristics would be valuable when examining the similarities and the differences among Indian highly skilled migrants.

Finally, various theoretical layers could be added to the research on the life courses of highly skilled migrants. Concepts such as transnationalism, integration, or migrant well-being could better account for the significant others left behind, and for the embeddedness and the practices of migrants in more than one society.

\[14\text{ In addition to these, urban-rural background was discussed in the interviews.}\]