

Everyday geographies of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands

Exploring the relationship between place attachment and wellbeing of older people



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The figure on the cover page has been made by me in order to present the research findings to the people who participated in my research. It has a special meaning to me as well as to the members of the senior cohousing community in which I conducted my research. It is framed and put on the wall of the communal living room by one of the members of the community; a place where I feel very welcomed..

Acknowledgements

In 2009, after a long summer in the library I finished my master thesis in Cultural Geography. It was a big relieve to think that this sometimes distressing process was over and I *never* had to write a master thesis in my life again. Well, hereby I present you my second master thesis. After a week of enjoying my graduation in August 2009, I felt that I wanted to learn more. I wanted to learn more about doing research, I wanted more theoretical knowledge. That is why I started the Research Master in Regional Studies in 2009. Again, I experienced some distressing moments, but overall I can look back at the past two years with great satisfaction of what I have accomplished. And I can look forward to start my life as a PhD candidate!

First of all, I want to thank the people of the senior cohousing community for their warm welcome and their interest in my research. From the Faculty of Spatial Sciences I want to thank my supervisors Dr. Bettina van Hoven and Dr. Louise Meijering. Louise, thank you for having the confidence in me and offering me the opportunities to evolve myself in my research competences. Bettina, thank you for your comments on my research, which made me more critical towards my own thinking. And thank you for supporting me together with Dr. Aleid Brouwer in the writing of my PhD proposal! I also want to thank Prof. Philip McCann, the current coordinator of the Research Master, for the supportive and informal environment he created amongst the student and staff of the faculty. I enjoyed the ReMa-diners and social gatherings.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background of research

This master thesis consists of two articles that are submitted to two peer-reviewed international academic journals. The two articles are the product of a qualitative research that I conducted in 2010 for the course 'Individual Research Training' (IRT). The aim of this research was *to gain insight into the relation between place attachment and self-perceived well-being of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands*. Data was gathered through semi-structured qualitative in-depth life history interviews. These interviews consisted of two parts. In the first part, attachments to places from the past and the migration experience were discussed. In the second part, attachment to everyday places were discussed, with emphasis on the home, the senior cohousing community and the neighbourhood in which the participants currently are living. Through the interviews valuable insights were gained into experiences and feelings in everyday places. On the basis of this project, I carried out a follow up research in June 2011, with three people who also participated in 2010. In this project, the photovoice method was used and the participants were interviewed on the basis of the pictures they made. This project resulted in more knowledge on the relationship between place attachment and wellbeing.

1.2 Chapter overview

CHAPTER 2 contains the article *'Places that matter: place attachment and wellbeing of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands'*. This article discusses how the participants derive their self-perceived wellbeing from the attachment to different places. The focus lies on the spatial scales of the cohousing community, the neighbourhood and the home. CHAPTER 3 contains the article *'Home-making of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands'*. By focusing on home-making more insight is gained into how the place attachments of the participants have evolved. The articles are included in this master thesis in the way they were submitted to the journals. In CHAPTER 4, the photovoice project is discussed. The final chapter, CHAPTER 5, contains a discussion.

2 Place attachment and wellbeing of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands

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Places that matter: place attachment and wellbeing of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands

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Abstract: It has been argued that attachment to place increases wellbeing in old age (Wiles *et al.*, 2009). Feeling 'in place' can increase an older person's wellbeing. For older migrants it can be a challenge to live in-between cultures. The objective of the article is to explore how older Antillean migrants derive a sense of wellbeing from attachment to their everyday places. We do so by drawing on in-depth interviews and a photography project with Antilleans who live in a senior cohousing community in a city in the Northern Netherlands. Based on the study, we conclude that the cohousing community acted as a central setting of experience from which the participants explored their wider surroundings and developed new attachments in the neighbourhood.

Keywords: ageing, place attachment, wellbeing, Antillean migrants, the Netherlands, senior cohousing community.

"I missed my own home when I was there [Antilleans], my surroundings here [in the Netherlands]. When I sat in the airplane to go back [to the Netherlands], I always was happy. I go to my own home then. When I entered my home, oh lovely, you were home. It's more your own environment, your own stuff, your own, that is what you miss when you are there." ¹ (Kiyana)

Introduction

For older migrants it can be a challenge to live in-between cultures. After moving, many migrants are not financially secured and cannot afford to live in wealthy, well-maintained and well-serviced neighbourhoods. In a study on older immigrants from developing countries to a North-American inner city, Becker (2003), discussed how these groups negotiated risks encountered by living in deteriorating neighbourhoods which implied poor housing, higher crime rates, less safety and poorer public services. Becker found that although these environmental factors affected older people's physical health, some people sacrificed material comforts of living in order to live in close proximity with other elders, their church and community and social services because these elements constituted a sense of home and belonging to them. Having a support-network within a migrant community can alleviate some negative consequences of one's housing situation as the community can help migrants deal with a broad range of affairs they face, from social and mental to

¹ All quotes from the interviews were translated from Dutch into English as accurately as possible.

administrative ones (Bolzman, Fibbi and Vial, 2006). Phinney *et al.* (2001) argue that being able to retain a secure ethnic identity and integration into the host society enhance migrant wellbeing. To live in a place where they have the opportunity to meet 'their own people', where they can buy food from their home country, and where they can engage with the local, non-migrant, community, could enable older migrants to cope with living in-between cultures and experience wellbeing (see also Daatland and Biggs, 2006).

In this article, we explore how older Antillean migrants in a city in the Northern Netherlands, have actively shaped the context of their ageing in a senior cohousing community. The Netherlands Antilles, former colonies of the Netherlands, are islands in the Caribbean. Because the islands are still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Antilleans have the Dutch nationality and therefore can migrate relatively easily to the Netherlands (Fassmann and Munz, 1992). Since the 1950s, there has been a steady flow of Antillean migrants to the Netherlands, resulting in 138,420 Antilleans living in the Netherlands on January 1 2010, of whom 4,803 were aged 65 and above (CBS Netherlands, 2010). Many Antilleans move to the Netherlands as they are attracted by better employment, education and welfare opportunities (Merz *et al.*, 2009). In addition to work and schooling, some Antilleans come to the Netherlands to join their adult children (Merz *et al.*, 2009). In spite of the perceived opportunities for a better life, Antilleans attain a relatively marginal position in Dutch society, as they are, for instance, relatively often unemployed (Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes, 2006) and often reside in less prosperous neighbourhoods. In spite of this marginal position, the majority of older Antilleans has established a sense of belonging to the Netherlands and desires to age here, whilst at the same time maintain affective ties with the Antilles (Schellingerhout, 2004). In studies on how migrant elders cope with living in-between cultures and how this affects their well-being, a place-based perspective remains scarce (for an exemption see Becker, 2003). This article addresses migrant wellbeing by focusing on the importance of experiences in everyday places.

In the following section we briefly outline the role of place and a sense of attachment to this for older migrants' wellbeing. After introducing the research setting and participants, we discuss the self-perceived wellbeing and place attachment of older Antillean immigrants in the Netherlands. The conclusions and discussion make up the final section of the article.

The role of place for older migrants' wellbeing

When addressing the importance of place for older migrants' wellbeing, an important body of literature to consult is that on place attachment, where the link between characteristics of place and wellbeing has been most explicit (see, for example Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992; Smith, 2009; Wiles *et al.*, 2009). Place attachment is seen as "a set of feelings about a geographic location that emotionally binds a person to that place as a function of its role as a setting for experience" (Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992, p.139). Attachment encompasses ties to places as such, and to the people present in those places. In relation to ageing and wellbeing, the place attachment literature highlights the locations 'home' and 'neighbourhood' as significant places. We address both, briefly, in the following.

The spatial scale of the home has been noted as key location for forming a positive self-image² as it is the central setting for important life events and milestones (Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992). The home contains many treasured moments and memories, many of which are represented through objects, such as pictures, souvenirs and mementos (see also Bih, 1992; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2009; Dayaratne and Kellett, 2008). The care for and arrangement of such objects are an important part of identity formation and help preserve a sense of continuity, perhaps especially for migrants (Buitelaar, 2007). In addition, the home environment is usually the most familiar and the setting where rules of access and conduct can be established. In particular for older people, research has demonstrated, it is advantageous for their wellbeing to remain in their own home and a familiar environment. Smith (2009), for example, found that feelings of independence, autonomy and control that can be developed and exercised here have a positive influence on older people's wellbeing. In addition, Rioux (2005) noted that receiving guests in the home and acting as a host(ess) enables older people to display their independence to others and to demonstrate that they are in control over who they grant access. However, someone's attachment to the home can be reduced and wellbeing be diminished when one loses their sense of autonomy and control over the home (Percival, 2002). Reduced mobility or health impairments can reduce someone's ability to manage of household tasks and result in reliance on the provision of care. Milligan (2009), for example, describes when the home becomes the site of care, the presence of care providers can be experienced as an intrusion into one's private life, which can create negative feelings of discomfort and dependence.

At the spatial scale of the neighbourhood, the availability and accessibility of everyday amenities plays an important role to older people their wellbeing. Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992) and Peace, Holland and Kellaher (2006) claimed that social involvement in the neighbourhood plays a key role in older people's experienced wellbeing. To know people and to be known by them can provide feelings of safety and belonging. Services and amenities in the neighbourhood provide an environment for social interactions. Wellbeing can be significantly impacted by the way in which the built environment is laid out as the height or width of sidewalks can impair people's mobility when they are using walkers, scooters or wheelchairs. In addition, older people can be relatively more affected by the closure of local shops if they served as informal meeting points (see, for example Young, Russell and Powers, 2004). Such physical or social barriers can suggest to older people that they do not belong in the public spaces of the neighbourhood (Young, Russell and Powers, 2004).

In the case of this article, we wish to highlight another location as important to older people's wellbeing, the senior cohousing community. In a cohousing community, people own or rent a private home and share common spaces, such as a meeting room and/or garden (Fromm and De Jong, 2009). A cohousing community can have its own building but the homes of the members can also be located in a building where people who do not belong to the community live. Senior cohousing communities in the Netherlands are for people who are 50 years or older (LVGO, 2010). The residents themselves are in control of

² Although the spatial scale of the home is often related to positive experiences in many studies, the home can also be a place associated with negative experiences such as domestic violence and oppression (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). For most people, the home is a place that possesses positive as well as negative meanings see (Manzo, 2005).

the rules of access and codes of conduct and usually one of the residents is the initiator of the cohousing community (Stavenuiter and Van Dongen, 2008).

People who move to a senior cohousing community often seek companionship and mutual support that they miss in their neighbourhoods, or they wish to live with people with a similar lifestyle. A cohousing community can be a source of wellbeing for older people as it reduces loneliness (Choi, 2004). Living in a cohousing community provides a context in which common interests can be shared and activities can be undertaken. Furthermore, through being with people from the same cohort, one can share memories of the past and similar life experiences (Smith, 2009). McHugh and Larson-Keagy (2005) argue that sharing similar life experiences is a benefit of age-restricted communities as it provides older people with a sense of belonging. For older migrants, living in a cohousing community with other people from the same home country can be of particular importance for their wellbeing, as language and culture can be shared (Fromm and De Jong, 2009; Davidson, Warren and Maynard 2005).

A senior cohousing community in the Northern Netherlands

It must be noted, that the city, in general, facilitates frequent bus services in all neighbourhoods and all neighbourhoods have a range of shops, or shopping centres, as well as health and other everyday services. The Antillean cohousing community is situated in the heart of the neighbourhood, with shops, a health centre, a community centre, a library and the weekly farmers' market across the street. The neighbourhood is characterised by the participants as a 'green' neighbourhood with 'lots of parks' and bordering the countryside. Currently, almost one third of the population of the neighbourhood is between the age of 45-65, which means that in the next decades the neighbourhood will be 'greying'.

The Antillean cohousing community was established in 2003 after which it received much media attention identifying the community as role model for others (FGW, 2006). In 1996, a number of older people in the city with a Surinam and Antillean cultural background expressed that they wished to grow old together. Because cultural differences between the two groups initially impeded progress, a spokesperson familiar with both cultures, Kiyana, was appointed. She was involved in consultations with a social housing corporation on behalf of the community's future residents, and later became the community coordinator. In the process of planning the cohousing community, the housing corporation also involved an organisation for people with mental impairments and a group of Dutch seniors in the consultations. As a result, a pre-existing apartment building (former student accommodation) was remodelled in order to accommodate all three groups and their particular requirements. Twenty of the apartments in the building were assigned to the cohousing community, one of which became a shared apartment including a living room to socialise and have coffee or tea. In addition to the apartments, there is a service centre with a restaurant³ on the ground floor of the building. In order to integrate the different groups of residents, an activity committee was founded by the coordinator of the cohousing community and two of the Dutch seniors. The committee organises activities such as an Easter brunch and a barbeque in the summer. Furthermore, there is a daily coffee morning and a card club that meets twice a week (personal conversation with Kiyana).

Research approach

³ The service centre was developed for the mentally impaired residents. Their diner gets served here, but the other residents of the apartment building can also order diner and make use of the space.

In this qualitative study, eight older migrants from the Netherlands Antilles from the aforementioned cohousing community were interviewed, and three of the participants participated in the follow up photovoice project (see Ponzetti, 2003). Access to members of the community was gained by contacting Kiyana. Table 1 gives an overview of key characteristics of the participants to this research.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital status	Reasons for move to the Netherlands ⁴	Years spent in the Netherlands
Teagle	Male	65-70	Married	Economic prospects	20-30
Jennifer	Female	65-70	Married	Joining partner	20-30
Kiyana	Female	70-75	Single/divorced	Education/economic prospects	40-50
Margriet ⁵	Female	65-70	Married	Joining partner/children's education	30-40
Melvin	Male	70-75	Single/divorced	Economic prospects	20-30
Omaira	Female	70-75	Single/divorced	Joining children	5-10
Joanie	Female	80-85	Single/divorced	Education/ joining sibling	20-30
Shudeska	Female	50-55	Single/divorced	Joining children	0-5

Except for Joanie (2005) and Shudeska (2009), the participants all moved to the apartment building in 2003. Before the move, the future residents participated in a weekend in which, through role play and activities, they got to know each other and learned about living in a cohousing community.

The interviews evolved around three themes: the respondents' memories of their life on the Antilles, their migration experiences, and their life in the Netherlands⁶. We were particularly interested in how the participants had become attached to the cohousing community and neighbourhood, and how they experienced wellbeing in these places. The interviews were conducted in Dutch and were recorded in order to transcribe them subsequently. The transcripts were coded and analysed using a grounded theory approach (see Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). Confidentiality was promised and therefore pseudonyms are given to all participants and personal information such as names of family members and addresses are removed from the quotes in this article.

In a follow up project (photovoice), participants were asked to take photos in their everyday lives of objects/situations that contributed to their self-perceived wellbeing. The photos were taken without the interference of a researcher. In-depth interviews were held after the photos were printed, in which the participants could explain the meaning of the pictures to the interviewer. The participants in the photovoice project helped us gain more

⁴ Some participants moved back and forth the Netherlands and the Antilles several times during their lives. Therefore, we included several reasons for moving to the Netherlands.

⁵This participant did not live in the retirement community, but was a regular visitor and identified with the community.

⁶ In these three sections there was probed for meaningful places and people, home-making practices, sense of belonging and self-perceived wellbeing in place.

detailed and varied insights in their sense of belonging and wellbeing by discussing photographs of important locations and activities that they themselves had taken.

The role of different places for older Antilleans' wellbeing

In this section, we describe how attachments of older Antillean migrants to their everyday places influence their self-perceived wellbeing. The cohousing community provided a space, at least to some extent, for migrants to benefit from the qualities of both cultures. The shared space within the community helped preserve valued attributes from their home culture, whilst shared, mixed spaces in the apartment building helped them weigh cultural experiences and re-evaluate each in relation to the other. In so doing, they opened up to Dutch culture, broke down stereotypes and even chose some elements of Dutch culture over their Antillean culture. In the remainder of the article, we illustrate this by briefly discussing the participants' experiences in the space of the cohousing community, the neighbourhood and their private apartments.

The senior cohousing community

During the interviews, the participants talked about the difficulties of adapting to Dutch culture and the perceived differences between themselves and Dutch older people. Although one barrier is the difference in language, at first the participants spoke largely Papiamentu⁷, they also described the Dutch as less friendly and cheerful than people with an Antillean background. The cohousing community then provided an important context for sharing common behaviour, memories from the past and similar experiences during group meetings (see also Bolzman, Fibbi and Vial, 2006; McHugh and Larson-Keagy, 2005). The participants talked about the cohousing community as a safe haven in which they can express and maintain their Antillean identity. Margriet explained:

“I go back to my roots. Together, we dig up stories about people, [...] the Antilles, the old days. For instance, when I say, do you remember these long sticks, blue and beige? That was soap to wash your clothes. But it was sold in pieces, so you could buy half of it, or a smaller part. [...] We had scales to weigh everything. A pound of sugar, a pound, everything was packed into bags. And some things like peanuts, they were not weighed. You would have a special box, when you fill it up, it costs that much. [...] With people your own age, you can just chat about such crazy things.”

It is important to note that the members of the cohousing community valued the familiarity and support of the group but did not exclude themselves from Dutch society. Instead, the cohousing community proved to be a place that facilitated their social integration as it became a useful starting point. The coordinator of the community played an important role in the beginning, whilst the other communities present in the apartment building, particularly the Dutch older people, turned out to be of ongoing importance. Omaira, for example, joined the card club and the coffee mornings. Through interaction with Dutch seniors, she became more familiar with Dutch culture and consequently more out-going and confident in social contacts beyond the cohousing community. Omaira said:

“If your opinion doesn't match with someone else's opinion, [the Dutch seniors] remain good friends, good neighbours. (...). You have to get used to that, with us [on Curacao] you don't voice your opinion so easily. Sometimes you have your opinion,

⁷ Papiamentu is a Creole language based on Portuguese and influenced by Spanish (Britannica, 2009).

but you don't express your opinion. Because maybe you are afraid of hurting someone. And then you keep your opinion to yourself, but you have an opinion. (...) I learned that from [the Dutch seniors], that you can voice your opinion. And they respect your opinion. I really like that about them."

Kiyana, the coordinator of the community, felt that she too had contributed to the wellbeing of the community members. She had involved the members in activities in the apartment building and the neighbourhood and supported them in practical and social matters. Through these communal activities, she said, the participants became more confident in exploring their proximate environment on their own. Kiyana explained:

"Most of them, they were a bit timid. Timid towards the Dutch people, that is how I got to know them [...] they have opened up to what is happening around them. You can't come here and take Curacao with you, there is more. You are in the Netherlands, and the Netherlands is [a] big [country]. So enjoy it. Take something of it. (...) Look, now they are having conversations with you [interviewer], in the past that maybe wasn't possible."

As the participants opened up and explored the neighbourhood on their own, they all found their own places in which they could expand their social life and where they felt well.

Places in the neighbourhood

The safe and familiar environment of the cohousing community enabled the participants to explore their wider surroundings. Most of the participants became acquainted with the neighbourhood when they moved into the cohousing community. They all had to get used to their new environment and gradually grew attached to places in the neighbourhood as they became aware of the opportunities these places offered them. At least to some extent, the respondents' neighbourhood was advantageous for them since the availability of food products from the Antilles in the local supermarkets and market⁸ enabled them to maintain connected with important aspects of everyday life and living in their home country. Furthermore, they valued the 'greenness' of the neighbourhood which they enjoyed by taking walks. The natural environment also acted as a reminder of what most of them described as the 'beautiful nature' of their home country.

Although they all valued amenities located in the immediate vicinity of the apartment building for their closeness, the social environment provided experiences that participants named as significant to their wellbeing. For Joanie, the market played an important role. In all the places she had lived in the past, finding and visiting the local farmers' market had become an important part of developing a sense of belonging. In the interview, but even more in her photo series, she described the 'market atmosphere' and how she could wander around, observe daily life and have a chat with the market traders. She describes most of the Dutch traders on the market as extraordinary as she finds their friendliness, helpfulness and openness a contrast to 'the Dutch'. Figure 1 shows Joanie at her favourite market stall, the flower stall, where she experiences this friendliness and helpfulness in particular. The market became a means through which she could develop

⁸ The availability of Antillean food products can be contributed to the relatively large community of Antillean people living in the neighbourhood. Compared to the city's average of 1%, around 4.5% of the population of the neighbourhood is of Antillean descent (ONS, 2011).

attachment to the neighbourhood. Visiting the market provided a bridge as well as a sense of continuity; it made her feel 'in place'.

Figure 1 Joanie at her favourite market stall (Source: Joanie)



Teagle had similarly positive experiences with regular visits to the local store. However, his interview also reveals what might be called a milestone for his sense of belonging. He explained:

“[People say to me:] ‘Sir, I have known you since I was a little girl, little boy. You come to our shop for fifteen years’. When I enter the shop, they know me. [...] Next year I live here for thirty years. I live at one place.”

Teagle felt he had become a part of the neighbourhood and a sense of place *for others*. The exchange in the shop had confirmed his sense of belonging and his recognised belongingness to the neighbourhood boosted his self-esteem and wellbeing.

A place of their own: the home

In the shared spaces of the cohousing community, as well as the public places in the neighbourhood, the participants have to conduct a lot of identity work to demonstrate they are either Antillean, Dutch or a bit of both. Therefore, the retreat to private, unsupervised spaces can form a relief. The participants drew a sense of wellbeing from their homes, as they could do the things they wanted to do without depending on others. Indeed, being independent was a key theme that ran throughout all interviews, albeit with different examples given by the participants.

In the interviews the participants highlight that they particularly valued their homes because they were *not* like the ones in the Antilles where it would be common, for example, to share one's home with the extended family. Although Omaira, for example, honoured Antillean family tradition by helping out her children when in need (see also Merz *et al.*, 2009), she had become used to the more individualised Dutch way of life, and was glad when both she and her children had found their own place. She described:

"My daughter came here to study, and she lived with [my son and his family] for some time. And then she got pregnant, and I came to live with them too [to care for the baby]. Then we were living there, all of us in one house. And one by one, we left the house. [...] So now, everyone's in place <laughter>. We have found our places, everyone is in place, everyone is doing their own things now, and yes we enjoy it."

Finding a home within the cohousing community helped her establish this independence without losing her cultural context and a sense of extended family due to the presence of like-minded others.

Kiyana and Joanie related their sense of self to their home. Joanie saw her modern interior as symbolic of how youthful she felt: "I am a young oldie" and Kiyana described her home as a place where she could be herself. She enjoyed to retreat in her own place and experience the peaceful feeling she derived from being there. Whilst Joanie valued the view of her own apartment ("When I'm sitting on the couch and I don't have anything to do, I feel happy, because it is just as I wanted it to be"), Kiyana highlights the view outside. The view over the neighbourhood from her window, had a restorative quality for her (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). The views of the trees and other vegetation instilled a sense of freedom and rest (see Figure 2). Being at home also prepared Kiyana for her role as hostess of the cohousing community, that addressed her more active and social self.

Figure 2 Kiyana's balcony, where she enjoys the view and dreams away with a cup of tea (Source: Kiyana)



Whilst the participants valued their independence, their attachment to and wellbeing in their homes would not have been possible without the interdependence of children, family members, friends and especially the members of the cohousing community. Although most of the participants were in relatively good health and were still mobile, support from the community members in doing chores and grocery shopping for each other, enabled them to lead a comfortable independent life in their own house (White and Groves, 1997). They all worried about having to move into a care home when their health would deteriorate, which they perceived as a loss of control over their daily lives (Peace, Holland and Kellaheer, 2006). Furthermore, ageing in a care home frightened them as they described it as a place dominated by Dutch older people in which they would not experience the sense of belonging the cohousing community provides.

Conclusions and discussion

Attachment to place contributes to older people's wellbeing: they derived a sense of autonomy, control, self-confidence and social identity from it. In the case of migrants, it also results in a feeling of being culturally grounded. In this article, we discussed how the participants derive a sense of wellbeing from their everyday places: the cohousing community, places in the neighbourhood and the home. The cohousing community acted as a central setting of experience as it enabled them to keep connected to their home country. The sharing of Antillean practices and memories of the home country surrounded the participants with familiarity. The safe environment of the cohousing community allowed them to explore their wider surroundings. Over time, they grew attached to different places in the neighbourhood, which they valued particularly for their social contexts. As the

participants valued the social environment of the cohousing community and places in the neighbourhood, the home place acted as a place of retreat from their busy social lives. They valued their independence that the home represented.

It must be noted that, while experiencing attachment to their everyday places, the participants also remained embedded in the places they left behind. They had a high level of knowledge of the Antilles, identified as Antilleans, and experienced a sense of belonging to the Antilles. This 'in-betweenness' did not impair their self-perceived wellbeing as their own home in the Netherlands had become the place that they longed for when being away. However, their wellbeing could be jeopardised if they were not able to travel anymore and could not physically be in and experience the places they attach to.

This study provided in-depth knowledge into the meanings that the participants attached to their everyday places. However, as some had difficulties with expressing themselves in the Dutch language and the interviewers had to get used to the participants word use and accents, stories may have been misinterpreted. Furthermore, as we discussed the self-perceived wellbeing of the participants, the validity of the research outcomes could be strengthened by developing a better understanding of the meanings the concept holds for the participants (for an example of developing a cultural sensitive measure of wellbeing see Ingersoll-Dayton, 2011).

With this study, we have contributed to migrant perspectives within the body of research on 'ageing in place'. Place attachment literature in this field still seems to be predominantly focused on the importance of temporal depth that marks place attachment for older people (Milligan, 2009). However, the life histories of migrants *and* of new generations of older people are generally characterised by more mobility in residential locations than previous cohorts. Further research should therefore investigate how different pathways/mobilities change the nature of place attachment and wellbeing for older people (for a theoretical exploration of the changing nature of belonging and identity in old age, see Phillipson, 2007). The focus on senior cohousing communities could be of particular interest, as this way of living is gaining in popularity in Western European countries and constitutes one of the many dimensions of 'ageing in place' (Phillipson, 2007).

In this study, the cohousing community played a pivotal role in the development of attachment to the everyday places of the participants through promoting social integration. This made it possible for the participants to live an active and social life that made them feel well. As active ageing has increased in importance in policy-terms in the past decennia, due to the expectation of self-reliance by governments, special attention should be directed to older migrants who often retain marginalised positions in society.

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3 Home-making of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands

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Home-making of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands

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Abstract

A group of 138,420 immigrants from the Netherlands Antilles, a former colony, live in the Netherlands (CBS 2011). Currently, the group of migrants at or above retirement age is increasing. For them, the question of where they want to grow old becomes relevant. It is important for people to age in a place where they feel at home, as it has been argued that attachment to place increases well-being in old age. It is of particular interest to study migrant home-making, as the migration experience adds an extra layer to the process.

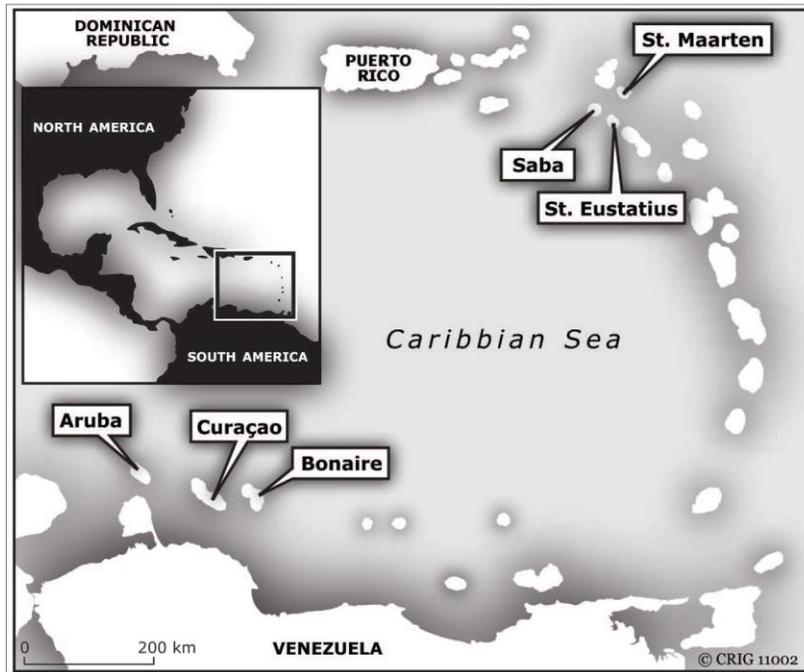
Central questions that we address in the article are 1) how do older Antillean migrants make a home in the Netherlands? 2) how does attachment to the home place affect the experienced well-being of older Antillean migrants? We draw on qualitative life-history interviews with Antillean older people, who live in a retirement community. Homemaking is studied as a material and symbolic process, through discussing the different experiences, memories and significant objects that make up the home place.

Keywords: home-making, well-being, Antillean migrants, the Netherlands, qualitative methods

Introduction

The Netherlands Antilles are a group of islands in the Caribbean, and consist of the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao off the Venezuelan coast, and Saba, Saint Eustatius, and Saint Maarten, southeast of the Virgin Islands (see Figure 1). The Antilles are former colonies of the Netherlands, and part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands¹. People can migrate relatively easily between the Antilles and the Netherlands, also since Antilleans have the Dutch nationality (Fassmann and Münz 1992). On January 1 2010, 138.420 Antilleans were living in the Netherlands, 4,803 of whom were aged 65 years and above (CBS 2011).

Figure 1: The location of the Dutch Antilles



Many Antilleans have come to the Netherlands to increase their life chances and those of their children, through better employment, education and welfare opportunities (Merz *et al.* 2009). More specifically, older Antilleans may be family-oriented international movers, meaning they move to the Netherlands to join their children, after having retired on the Antilles (see Schellingerhout 2004; Warnes *et al.* 2004). Because of the colonial history, immigrants from the Netherlands Antilles are usually familiar with the Dutch language and culture before they arrive (Zorlu and Hartog 2002; Merz *et al.* 2009). However, as a group, they have a marginal position in Dutch society, with relatively high unemployment rates, and low incomes. This applies to both the group as a whole, and to Antilleans aged 55 years and older (see, for example, Schellingerhout 2004; Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes 2006).

In this article we explore the relations between home-making and well-being of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands. Central questions are: 1) how do older Antillean migrants make a home in the Netherlands? 2) how does attachment to the home place affect the experienced well-being of older Antillean migrants? The article begins with a theoretical framework in which home-making is discussed in the contexts of well-being, migration, and ageing. Then, the research methods are outlined. Subsequently, we discuss the results, focusing on the experienced cultural differences between the Antilles and the Netherlands, and the participants' engagement in home-making in relation to their well-being. The article ends with concluding remarks.

Home-making in relation to ageing, well-being and migration

People are continually involved in creating a feeling of being at home. Feeling at home (or not at home) can exist at a variety of spatial scales: for instance, a room, house, neighbourhood, park, or country. In this article we focus on how people make their house

and immediate living environment into a home. We assess how these homemaking practices are embedded in and influenced by a broader cultural context.

Making a home

When observing a house and its immediate living environment, we learn about its inhabitants. The home place is inscribed with the identities of its inhabitants, which can be read through, for instance, its location, exterior, interior design, furniture, and decoration. A home is an extension of the personalities of the people who inhabit it (Dayaratne and Kellett 2008). It is continuously created, adapted and modified, and therefore it can be argued that being completely at home can never be realized. In the ongoing process of (re)creating a home place, people build connections to a significant place, ground their personal experiences, and embed their personal identities in it. Feeling at home is said to have a positive effect on people's well-being (Rioux 2005; Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992; Smith 2009; Wiles *et al.* 2009). Through feeling connected to their home, people experience a sense of autonomy, control over their everyday lives, increased self-confidence and social integration (Rivlin and Moore 2001). One of the ways in which attachment to the home comes to the fore is through emotional ties with personal possessions.

People personalize their homes through decorating it with a variety of significant objects/possessions such as paintings, musical instruments, cupboards, rugs, clocks, jewellery, and photographs. In the context of this article we focus on the emotional attachment of people to the personal possessions they keep in their home, regardless of any material value. The emotional value of an object is expressed through resistance to sell it, or its 'pricelessness' (Belk 1992). In the literature on homemaking, place attachment and possessions, a distinction is made between the symbolic meaning of the relation with other people, and the symbolic meaning of the relation with specific places and cultures (see, for example, Belk 1992; Shenk, Kuwahara and Zablotsky 2004). Both meanings may be represented through the same object. Objects that are most commonly associated with other people are, for instance, photographs, and received gifts or heirlooms (Shenk, Kuwahara and Zablotsky 2004). Such personal possessions represent (part of) the network of which the person is part, and evoke feelings of being loved and cared about. The objects can be seen as extensions of a person and add to the making of the home as a social place (Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992). Even though they may be far away in real life, significant others are literally with a person through their representation in a photo or memento (Rechavi 2009). Meaningful places are most often visually represented through objects such as paintings or photographs.

Culturally embedded homes of migrants

For migrants, being aware of and understanding the host society is important in being able to make a home there. Command of the current language is a key factor in becoming at home in a place (see, for example, Drozdowski 2007; Meijering and van Hoven 2003). Not being able to communicate effectively with other people or to understand official information, is highly impairing for functioning in any society, and thus, poor language skills may negatively influence well-being. Ip, Lui and Chui (2007), for instance, described the poor English language skills of older Chinese immigrants in Australia as a direct cause of their social isolation. Also, social conventions about how to interact with other people differ between societies. Migrant older adults may stick to familiar ways of trying to establish social contacts, but these may be misunderstood by the host population. Becker (2003)

stressed that understanding the complexity and wealth of social relationships of older migrants is vital, in order to be able to understand what keeps them in place.

It has been argued that people in all cultures are committed to home-making, or creating a place where they can be themselves (Dayaratne and Kellett 2008). However, homemaking is a cultural process, which means that broad, culturally defined rules for what a home should look like exist. Individuals match these rules to their personal preferences regarding room function, furniture, decoration and objects, thus creating homes that are distinctly individual but culturally embedded (Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992). The cultural embeddedness of home-making makes the process especially interesting in the context of migration. Belonging to two (or more) cultures, migrants may choose elements from all these cultures to make their home. In the literature on (older) migrants and place making, various culturally specific elements have been described as important. Objects that are most explicitly associated with significant places or cultures are, for instance, souvenirs or memorabilia, paintings, books, food, music, jewellery, and religious objects. Belk (1992) described how Indian migrants in the United States decorated their homes with Indian artefacts, sometimes devoting entire rooms to them. He argued that the immigrant homes were more intensively decorated than those of Indians who had stayed in India. Through these decorations, they maintained a sense of cultural continuity, stability and connection to their cultural roots. For migrants, it seems to be important to create a secure sense of home in a new society through decoration. At the same time, however, migrants probably take over elements from their host-culture when making their homes.

Home-making and well-being of older people

The house is argued to become increasingly important with age, as decreasing physical mobility makes it less easy to venture outside (see, for example, Andrews and Phillips 2005; Rioux 2005; Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992; Smith 2009; Wiles *et al.* 2009). As older people are likely to spend more time at home, the objects present become more important for them. In line with this, older people tend to value objects increasingly for the memories and relations to other people they represent, rather than for their material value. In later life, significant objects provide a sense of stability through their continuous presence in the home place (Belk 1992). Objects being removed, or being moved, may be experienced as disruptive. Similarly, changes to the exterior of the house, or to its immediate environment, may result in feelings of disorientation. Although the home is an important place for older people, there has not been much research on the relationship between their sense of home, and the well-being they experience. After describing the methodology applied in this study, we continue to discuss our results on the home-making and well-being of Antillean migrants.

Methodology

In this qualitative study, eight older² migrants from Aruba and Curaçao, the largest islands of the Antilles, were interviewed. We interviewed people who were involved in a retirement community for Antillean, Aruban and Surinam older people. In the interviews, the participants were asked to tell their life-histories and we probed them with questions on home-making and self-reported well-being. We chose to adopt a qualitative approach, to gain deep insight into the experiences of the participants themselves (rather than measuring well-being or quality of life in ageing research through mixed or quantitative methods, such as by Ingersoll-Dayton 2011). Access to the community was gained by the second author, who established contact with its founding member and current coordinator. The coordinator invited her to a social community meeting, in which she introduced herself,

explained details of the research, and asked for collaboration. One interview was carried out by the first author, the rest by the second author. The participants and some of their characteristics are recorded in Table 1. All names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants

Name	Gender	Age	Marital status	Reasons for move to the Netherlands	Years spent in the Netherlands
Teagle	Male	65-70	Married	Economic prospects	20-30
Jennifer	Female	65-70	Married	Joining partner	20-30
Kiyana	Female	70-75	Single/divorced	Education/economic prospects	40-50
Margriet ³	Female	65-70	Married	Joining partner/children's education	30-40
Melvin	Male	70-75	Single/divorced	Economic prospects	20-30
Omaira	Female	70-75	Single/divorced	Joining children	5-10
Joanie	Female	80-85	Single/divorced	Education/ joining sibling	20-30
Shudeska	Female	50-55	Single/divorced	Joining children	0-5

There were many differences between the researchers (female, aged 25 and 30, and Dutch) and the participants. Language turned out to play a particularly important role in the interviews. The interviews were carried out in Dutch, the second language of the participants. As “languages are highly metaphorical, mythical, poetic and full of hidden meanings, riddles, and assumptions” (O’Leary 2009: 33), the sometimes limited command of the Dutch language of the participants may have resulted in loss of meaning or misinterpretation by the researchers. Being confronted with interviewers who were fluent in Dutch seemed to make some participants feel self-conscious and insecure about their language skills. In addition, we had to get used to the accents and word use of the participants. When transcribing the interviews, some expressions or phrases could not be understood, and were left out of the analysis. In the next section, language is discussed in more detail as a cultural difference between the Antilles and the Netherlands.

Trying to make a home in the Netherlands

In this section we describe how Antillean migrants attempt to make a home in the Dutch culture. Two cultural differences that were discussed in the section on migrant homemaking seemed to have a particular effect on the sense of home and well-being of the participants: language and social structure.

Language

The first language of most of the participants is Papiamentu, a Creole language based on Portuguese and influenced by Spanish (Britannica 2009). They learned Dutch in primary and high school. Often, they were allowed to speak only Dutch in school. Most participants said that having learnt Dutch back home had enhanced their integration in the Netherlands. However, the Dutch they had learned in school turned out to be different than the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands, as the following quote exemplifies:

“She said to me: woman, don’t howl. And you know, howling you have heard, you’ve learned it in school, dogs howl. And then I said between my tears: I don’t howl, I cry! That’s the way I became acquainted with Dutch dialects.” (Joanie)⁴

Dutch words and sayings are used and interpreted differently on the Antilles and in the Netherlands. Some participants had difficulties with learning Dutch, and felt insecure when speaking it. They were constantly aware that they were unable to speak as fluently as a native speaker:

“But you can also sense it when someone [says] something fluidly in a language. You listen how I pronounce the word, *you listen how I pronounce the word*. You don’t see insecurity.” (Teagle)⁵

Experiencing insecurity when speaking Dutch may have been a factor in preventing some of the participants from feeling at home in the Netherlands. Not being able to function independently because of difficulties with the language can be frustrating, and a barrier in home-making (see, for example, Drozdowski 2007; Meijering and van Hoven 2003).

Social structures: warm and cold people

The participants indicated that they valued being part of the social group of Antilleans, because they feel known and loved among them. Kiyana expressed this as follows:

“When I am [on Curaçao], I enjoy it that the people are so warm, so cordial and warm. [...] The people are like a warm blanket around you. I always enjoy it. [...] And upon coming back, I miss the warmth, the cordiality of the people.” (Kiyana)

The warmth of people as described here can be related to notions of individualism and collectivism as described by other authors. Generally, it has been found that Antillean immigrants have more collectivistic and family oriented values than the Dutch, who cherish individual autonomy (Merz *et al.* 2009). As a result of these differences, it was difficult for some of the participants to build up social contacts with the Dutch:

“Our culture is very different. For example, when I hear an ambulance, and it stops here and collects someone over there, I would check who it is, and I would ask her husband or wife how he or she is. But here, they don’t appreciate that. There used to live a couple over there, I used to greet them when I saw them. And then he fell ill, and was admitted to the hospital. I asked her how he was, and I asked another neighbour. And one day, the neighbour said that he had passed away, so I went to see her. And she did not appreciate it, but asked me what I was coming to take from her.” (Margriet)

Omaira told us that she visited the widowed woman again, and got a similar response from her, after which she expressed that her lack of social relations with her neighbours and other Dutch people exerted a negative influence on her well-being:

“So, and then you start to think, you will never become one [with the Dutch]. You will remain a foreigner, a stranger.” (Margriet)

She related her failures to establish contact to the self-centeredness of the Dutch people she met. Similar experiences were described by other participants.

Several of the participants associated the relatively cold climate of the Netherlands with the 'coldness' of the Dutch people, and the tropical climate of the Antilles with the positive and outgoing nature of the Antilleans:

"And you can see the difference, during summer, everybody is happy, everybody greets you in the street. That is something I have noticed. During the dark [winter] days, people are dark too, they complain. But we are always, I mean, yes we have a more [...] cheerful nature."
(Omaira)

While missing the warmth of the Antillean climate and people, the participants had to be ingenious in finding ways to make their home in the Netherlands, which we discuss in the next section.

Giving meaning to the house

Significant objects

Most participants stressed that they came to the Netherlands with only a suitcase filled with clothes, and few memorabilia. Those who came to the Netherlands during the 1960s and 70s were dependent on relatives back home to send them the typically Antillean products that they missed. They were supplied with, for instance, Antillean food, jewellery, religious items and hair care products:

"I: You told me that you often received packages from Curaçao. What was usually in those?
J: Well, good stuff. There are certain delicacies made there, of which my mum thought, [I'll send them to Joanie]. Delicacies that I couldn't get in the Netherlands, that [she knew] I longed for. [...] Cans with good food, or plantane. [...] Sent with love." (Joanie)

"I: When you came to the Netherlands, did you bring stuff from Curaçao, to make you feel at home here?
K: [...] What did my mum give me? Yes, care products, in fact, like hair care products. Look, we have this kind of curly hair. You know how to care for it on Curaçao, there's a lot of stuff that helps to manage that kind of hair. [She gave me] that stuff." (Kiyana)

The participants both stressed that their mothers sent them the things they missed. The products that they received not only reminded them of their home place, but also of the people at home, who sent them their favourite products as a symbol of their love. A sense of home can be created through decorating it with significant objects. These objects serve as reminders of favourite places and people. The participants decorated their personal homes with pictures and paintings depicting places on the Antilles. These images remind them both of the Antillean landscape in general, and of personal experiences 'back home'. For instance, one of the participants showed us the picture of a bridge on Curaçao in her living room, and talked about her own experiences while crossing it:

"And this is the Emma-bridge on Curaçao, the famous pontoon bridge. You can't find a bridge like that anywhere else in the world. And it is still there, the traffic can't cross it anymore, it has become a footbridge. [...] I lived on this side, this side of the bridge. [...] I have walked a lot over the bridge, and I have driven my car over it. In the past, you could cross it by car."
(Kiyana)

Besides a reminder of a specific place on Curaçao, the bridge is also a personal marker for Kiyana. She had to cross the bridge by car for her work as a nurse, but had difficulties with driving its slope. As a result, she got stuck on the bridge several times, and her husband forbade her to continue using the car. However, she practised with her brother until she got better at driving. Through continuing her driving, she managed to keep her work and independence. The picture of the bridge evoked these complex memories with her, and can be seen as a symbol of her home island, as well as of her status as an independent woman. All participants had pictures in their living rooms of family members, such as (grand) children. The photographs act as guides through the participants' memories, and help them to connect with the represented people, thus increasing their well-being:

"When I am with my family, with my children, you see, there they all are, I love that <she points to the pictures>. All my grandchildren. That makes me feel happy." (Omaira)

She talks about her children and grandchildren as if she is literally with them when looking at their pictures. This illustrates the importance of family relations for the participants, as will be discussed in the next section.

Home-making through people

For the participants in this study, home-making turned out to be something highly defined by the presence of significant others, especially their children. Put simply, they want to live where their children are:

"So my son went to the Netherlands, to get a good education, yes? And two years after my son, my daughter also went. So at that moment, I was alone on Curaçao. That situation was not good for me, my family consists of three persons, my daughter, my son and I, and at that moment both children lived in the Netherlands [...] Yes of course, of course, I miss Curaçao a lot, a lot. But my children live here, that is very important." (Shudeska)

"M: I cannot live that far away from my children [...] a 19 hour flight, no.

I: Where your children live...

M: That's where I want to be. I do want to go [back to Curaçao], but I cannot take them all with me, I can't. So I'll just stay here." (Margriet)

Both Shudeska and Margriet said they stayed in the Netherlands because of their children. The significance of children in the social network of older Antilleans in the Netherlands has also been stressed by two reports (see Meulenkamp *et al.* 2010; Schellingerhout 2004). In addition, similar results have been found in other contexts. Becker (2003), for instance, studied older immigrants in the United States, and found that Filipino Americans in particular expressed the wish to live with their (grand) children (in their homeland, however). Although life on the Philippines was likely to involve more physical hardship, they attached a higher value to the social contact with their relatives. The positive relation between well-being and maintaining a house close to significant others has also been described by Peace, Holland and Kellaher (2005). On the Antilles, it would be common for older people to live with their adult children, whereas in the Netherlands, older people would prefer to continue to live independently, as long as possible, before moving to an institution. The participants seem to have internalised the Dutch ideas that family members are independent from each other, and support egalitarian relations within and between generations. This contrasts with findings from Merz *et al.* (2009), who argued that immigrant communities, such as the Antillean community, generally highly value family

traditions, support, and solidarity. They indicated that older kin members in particular have an important say in family life compared to the Dutch, where acceptance of guidance by older family members is much lower because of a stronger emphasis on the autonomy of the individual. Such values were not expressed by the participants in this study. Rather, they seemed to focus on sharing their Antillean social and cultural values within their peer group of older Antilleans in the Netherlands. It is possible that the participants chose to live in a retirement community because that facilitates their independence, and functions as a 'surrogate family' at the same time. It is possible that Antilleans who do not live in a retirement community may cherish their traditional family ties more, but that was not studied in this research.

For social interaction with people their own age, the participants enjoy interacting with people from a similar cultural background, both inside and outside the retirement community. This is in line with findings by Schellingerhout (2004) and Meulenkamp *et al.* (2010), who found that social contacts within the own cultural group enhance the quality of life of older Antilleans in the Netherlands. Our participants share their memories of the Antilles with each other:

M: I go back to my roots. Together, we dig up stories about people, my children will have heard those stories from me, but they did not share the experiences.

I: Of...?

M: The Antilles, the old days. For instance, when I say, do you remember these long sticks, blue and beige? That was soap to wash your clothes. But it was sold in pieces, so you could buy half of it, or a smaller part. My children will not, they cannot remember what such a thing looked like. And we had scales to weigh everything. A pound of sugar, a pound, everything was packed into bags. And some things like peanuts, they were not weighed. You would have a special box, when you fill it up, it costs that much. The children were not raised with that, so. With people your own age, you can just chat about such crazy things."
(Margriet)

Through contacts with their peers, the participants relive life on the Antilles, and return to the home of their youth. However, when they return to the Antilles for holidays, they miss their 'own' lives in the Netherlands: they miss their home.

Conclusions

Home is an important place for many older people: they derive a sense of well-being from it. Living in a comfortable home contributes to their sense of autonomy, control, self-confidence and social identity. In the case of migrants, it also results in a feeling of being culturally grounded. In the context of our study on older Antilleans in the Netherlands, it turned out that decorating the home with significant objects was important in home-making. Paintings and photographs reminding of specific places on the Antilles, as well as photographs of family members such as ancestors, children and grandchildren, evoked strong feelings of home and belonging. Also, the participants feel at home in the Netherlands in social respect, through social networks consisting of (grand)children, sometimes siblings, and fellow Antilleans.

While making a home in the Netherlands, the participants derive an important part of their well-being from connecting with the Antilles, their place of origin. A comparable sense of longing by older Antilleans in the Netherlands has been described by Meulenkamp *et al.* (2010). In other contexts, similar findings have been reported, for instance by Bolzman, Fibbi and Vial (2006), who studied older Italian and Spanish migrants in

Switzerland. Thus, living between cultures provides a risk for older people, as it may decrease their quality of life and well-being (Peace, Holland and Kellaher 2005).

In this article, we attempted to contribute to the discussion on home-making in the context of ageing, well-being and migration. The component of migration has served to study the meaning of home while keeping in mind its culturally based nature. As the current study is of limited scope, it would be interesting to explore this cultural dimension further. Also, the discussion about older people and their relations to place could be extended to other spatial scales. Although some studies have been carried out, the body (Mowl, Pain and Talbot 2000; Nair 2005), rooms within the house and garden (Percival 2002), residential home (Andrews 2005), neighbourhood (Peace, Holland and Kellaher 2005; Smith 2009), village and town are spatial scales that deserve further attention. Perhaps even more importantly, the more general theoretical discussion on attachment to places in relation to old age seems worthwhile to be explored. For instance, the tripartite framework of place attachment as proposed by Scannell and Gifford (2010) could be adapted for the attachment of older people to place.

Notes

¹ Aruba, Curaçao and Saint Martin have a 'status aparte' within the kingdom of the Netherlands. This means that they function as separate countries and have a high degree of independence. Aruba obtained 'status aparte' in 1986, the other two islands more recently in October 2010. The other three islands, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius and Saba have become special Dutch municipalities in October 2010, and fall under Dutch law.

² Although being 'old' is probably more associated with lifestyle than with age, we chose to interview people in their third age, meaning those aged between 65 and 85 (the young-old). The third age is associated with a life of leisure, as people are retired and still healthy enough to travel, have hobbies, socialise and care for grandchildren, for instance (Weeks 2005). One participant was not yet 65, but she was a member of the retirement community and her views were relevant: she had gone through processes of migration and home-making similar to the other community members.

³ This participant did not live in the retirement community, but was a regular visitor and identified with the community.

⁴ All quotes from the interviews were translated from Dutch into English as accurately as possible.

⁵ The part in italics was spoken in English by the participant.

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The reviewer comments were received on the 23th of June 2011.

Dear Louise Meijering and Debbie Lager,

RE: AGE 10-0062 Home making of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands

Thank you for submitting your interesting and original paper to Ageing & Society. We have now received two reviewers' evaluations (copies attached). Both suggest that your paper addresses a unique and interesting aspect of migration and home-making.

I have read your paper and the reports and find myself in agreement with the reviewers. The manuscript is original and examines an important topic that would be of interest to our readers. Both reviewers, however, indicate that improvements to the paper would be required to bring it up to the standard required by the journal. I will not attempt to summarize their detailed comments but would draw your attention to two issues. First, more discussion is required in the methods section of the paper, particularly in relation to sampling, data collection and analysis. You indicate that the sample was derived from a retirement community. It would be helpful to have details of how that community was selected and the impact of selecting that community. Also in your notes it is indicated that one participant was a visitor rather than a resident of that community, however you did not discuss this, nor the implications of including this individual in your paper. Further detail is required about when the data was collected and the interview questions that were used to probe the participants about home-making and self-reported well-being. You mention that you analysed the data yet there is no discussion of the process adopted.

Second, the findings and conclusion section could be expanded to include discussion of how the migrants experience of home-making changed over the years. It is unclear whether living between two cultures changed over the life course or whether home-making had become important over the later stage of life. I would urge you to consider these, and the other points raised by the reviewers.

I would highlight one further point that was not raised by the reviewers. Throughout the findings section you are rather tentative and use terms such as 'seemed,' 'may have,' and 'it is possible.' The use of these terms leaves the reader wondering if you are speculating about the meaning of the data or if the findings you report are derived from the data. I would encourage you to review the presentation of the findings to address this issue.

I invite you to prepare a revision of the paper that takes into account the reviewers' and my comments. Your references were presented to a high standard. Thank you for your effort. If you do decide to resubmit, there are the following style requirements that I would request that you address:

- Please include a statement in the methods section of the paper concerning the ethical approval process that you acquired to carry out this study
- Please confirm that you are using pseudonyms to maintain the participants anonymity
- Please indicate if it is possible to include the actual number of years that the participants had lived in the Netherlands

- There are grammatical and syntax errors throughout the paper such as page 2, second paragraph 'have come' (came would be more appropriate), third paragraph 'relations' (relationship would be appropriate). Editing the paper would enhance its accessibility to the reader.

To summarize I do hope that you will wish to make revisions to your paper and I encourage you to do so. I would suggest that this paper would be of interest to our readership. If you do re-submit, please add a short note that summarizes the changes that you have made to your paper. Thank you again for sending your original paper to Ageing & Society.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Glenda Cook
Associate Editor, Ageing & Society

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1
Comments to the Author

The subject matter of the paper under review is both interesting and timely, particularly when major Western societies are going through a rapid process of ageing and it is increasingly important to understand how older migrants are reconfiguring their liveworlds. In this context, this paper has made an original contribution to allow readers in get to know more about the experiences of home-making of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands. However, the paper also disappoints because somehow it fails to highlight how the older migrants' experiences of home-making have changed over the years since their settlement in the Netherlands, and therefore how different life course can impact on their home-making, especially in terms of their changing emotional and physical needs, priorities, and reflections on the meanings of their lives and past experiences, factors that are important in shaping and reshaping home-making, remains unexplored. For example, in its conclusion, the paper indicated that decorating the home with significant objects was important for these older migrants in their home-making. But was it important for them to do the same thing when they were young? Likewise, when the paper concluded that living between cultures had provided a risk for these older people and could lower their quality of life and well-being, one could also ask the same question, has it always been difficult living between two cultures? Furthermore, the paper also lacks imagination -- while it describes on a superficial level what the older migrants considered important in their current home-making, it never probed deeper to explain why those aspects had become important in their current life stage. For example, if photographs of their grandchildren were important, why? Was it because of the way they saw family relations differently because of ageing and more aware of their mortality? What about transnational ties? How did transnationalism affect the way they see themselves, their identity and their emotion? Does it make them more nostalgic? Does it make them easier to make their homes closer to their cultural roots? In other words, the paper could have done a lot more by probing deeper into the liveworlds of these older migrants in their current as well as in their earlier life stages.

Reviewer: 2
Comments to the Author

Its a good paper that investigates a unique yet interesting migration and home-making scenario. A few changes need to be made (many of which are additions) in order to bring the paper up to a publishable standard.

Introduction/literature review:

Although the research is focused on artefacts and objects that help make home, the authors could describe the other facets of place - such as people/family, shared history and identity- that also contribute significantly, in greater detail. The authors have already drawn on geographical studies, and more information might be found in this work (for example in the work of Christine Milligan, Malcolm Cutchin and others). There are two more recent reviews of "geographical gerontology" that may help; Andrews et al (2007) in Social Science and Medicine, and Andrews et al (2009) in Geography Compass

Method:

This section is solid but would benefit from further discussion of the consequence of all the respondents coming from one retirement community (and further explanation of what such a community is).

We also need more information on data analysis; both in terms of the analytical approach and more practically in terms of data management.

The authors also need to discuss steps taken to insure the reliability/credibility of the findings.

Finally, we need a short discussion of, if not generalizability, the potential 'transferability' of the findings to other situations and contexts.

Analysis:

This is fine and insightful. However, the authors could focus a little more on the specific issues that are unique to these particular migrants from this particular place. What makes them different from other migrants?

Conclusions:

The authors need to discuss in more detail how the findings might inform/increase what we know about migrants experiences more generally. Also, what does the study add to geographical gerontology (the geography of aging) and other disciplines.

4 Towards a participatory approach: using photovoice

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the methodology sections of both articles, the limited command of the Dutch language of some of the participants could have made them feel self-conscious or insecure. This could have prevented them from fully expressing themselves and as researchers we also may have misinterpreted or missed out on what they wanted to tell us. To gain more knowledge on the relationship between place attachment and wellbeing in the everyday places of the participants, I felt that a participatory approach would be more appropriate to use as it could empower the participants by giving them more self-confidence in talking about themselves and their everyday lives. In this chapter, I discuss the participatory approach and the photovoice method that I have used in this project.

4.2 A participatory approach and photovoice

A participatory approach ideally enables participants to be involved in all aspects of the research process (Blair & Minkler, 2009). Through participation in a research project, empowerment can be reached as participants can address their own issues and concerns and can develop and practice new skills (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010). According to McIntyre (2003), participatory research lets people reflect on their daily lives in order to engage them in an action that is of benefit to them. An example of such action is a photovoice project conducted by Novek et al. (2011). The researchers let the participants prioritise issues that needed change in their environment to make their communities age-friendly. These issues were presented to local policy makers, whereby the pictures acted as 'evidence'. By using a participatory approach power imbalances between researcher(s) and participants can also be evened (Blair & Minkler, 2009), as the research is not done on people but in collaboration with them. Although I did not involve the participants in the research process and it was not my goal to engage them in any action because of the limited time I had, the project did empower them. Throughout this chapter their empowerment will be discussed.

I chose to use photovoice, as this seemed to be the most suitable method to use with participants with limited Dutch language skills. Photovoice is a method in which participants take pictures in their everyday places of things that matter to them, without the presence of the researcher. In the case of this project, I literally wanted to give those participants a voice, by expressing themselves to me through images. I asked them to make pictures in their everyday lives that made them feel well. In-depth interviews were held after the pictures were printed, in which the participants could explain the meaning of the pictures to me. The nature of the interview was instead of the first project, participant-led.

Initially four of the previous participants agreed to participate and there was one new participant. However, one of the participants got hay fever during the time of the project and did not feel well to make pictures. This person would help one of the other participants with making pictures, because of poor eyesight. Because of the limited time span, the person with poor eyesight was therefore also not able to participate in the project. The persons that actually participated were Kiyana, Omaira and Joanie. For them to participate and be enthusiastic about this project, was the result of the rapport I established not only with them

but with all the people in the cohousing community. In the next section, I address the rapport building process with the community.

4.3 Building rapport and giving back to the community

According to Blair and Minkler (2009) building a relationship of trust with the participants should always be a goal of participatory research. Building rapport with your participants is always part of doing qualitative research. However, the rapport that was built in order to carry out the photovoice project was the result of the genuine interest that I showed in the community for over a year. To present the results of the first project, I made a poster presentation that is showed on the front page of this master thesis. During the presentation of the poster the respondents showed much enthusiasm about the way I visualised the results. After finishing the project I kept them up to date on the articles I was writing and I sent them a postcard in which I thanked them for their participation and hospitality.

Coming back after a year for the photovoice project, I felt that all of the members of the community, not only the participants, felt more comfortable in my presence. A year before, they did not interacted with me at the coffee mornings and spoke Papiamentu with each other (except for the coordinator). This year (2011) they were talking Dutch and involved me in their conversations. The contact I kept with them in itself, turned out to be empowering, as they were confident in expressing themselves without worrying about their Dutch language skills.

*Figure 4.1 Community member that framed the research poster
(Source: Kiyana)*



One of the members that did not want to participate in both my projects, framed the poster and hung it on the wall of the communal living room (on the poster I showed the home country of this member, although she did not participated and was the only person in the community from this country). This action showed that the members of the community that did not participated in my research also felt involved and valued my interest in them. Kiyana, the coordinator of the community, affirmed this by making a picture in the photovoice project from the community member that framed the poster (see FIGURE 4.1) and telling me the following:

K: The way that you handled it. I mean, you let them know, always, what you were doing with the interviews. And what they liked so much, that is, how should I call it?

I: The little poster?

K: The poster <laughter>. Well you must have seen their response! I thought, wow! <laughter>. They liked it SO MUCH⁹. And Miss X was full of joy and she surprised me by framing the poster and bringing it back [to the communal living room] <laughter>.

(...)

K: It <the picture of Miss X with the research poster on the background> is to show you how happy she was.

(Kiyana)

This example shows that I built rapport with the whole community. I realised, when doing research in a community, those that are not involved in the project should not feel excluded as it could diminish their belonging to the community and change their relationship with other community members. This should be considered in the ethics of doing research within a community, especially in a community with disempowered people, such as ethnic minorities.

4.4 Revealing different aspects of experiences in- place

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, I wanted to gain more knowledge on the relationship between place attachment and wellbeing in the everyday places of the participants. When probing for experiences in the neighbourhood during the interviews in the first project, it seemed hard for most participants to recall detailed everyday life experiences, as they may be too 'mundane' to think about. The following quote exemplifies why detailed experiences in places can be lost in a 'standard' interview setting:

"When producing knowledge about place (experiences) in a 'standard' interview setting, respondents are asked to recall memories and imaginations of places without visual, audible, olfactory or tactile stimuli. As a result, some small details, or 'layers' of place (experience) may be lost to the production of knowledge." (Trell & Van Hoven, 2010)

The photo led in-depth interviews, laid bare other layers of place that did not come to the fore in the 'standard' in-depth interviews. In the in-depth interviews experiences in the neighbourhood related mostly to single events of general valuations. TABLE 4.1 gives two examples of the different knowledge that is produced in the in-depth interview and the photovoice interview. The examples show that in the in-depth interview Omaira and Joanie talked about what they were doing in the neighbourhood. In the photovoice interview it was easier for them to talk about their experiences through showing me the pictures of what they were doing (i.e. 'giving me proof'). For me it was also easier to probe on experiences in-place, as I could instantly see where they were going, what they were doing and with whom they were interacting.

⁹ Text in captions was said with extra emphasis.

Table 4.1 Experiences in the neighbourhood: comparison of knowledge production in the two projects.

	In-depth interview 2010	Photovoice interview 2011
Omaira	<p>“We kook there every Tuesday morning [weekly multi-cultural cooking activity in the neighbourhood centre]. Together with other women from different cultures. (...). We are all talking and one of us cooks. That’s an activity that I’m doing.”</p>	<p>“You become a team. If you weren’t there [they ask]: where were you? You weren’t there. ‘I had an appointment, that’s why I didn’t come’. They know when I wasn’t there. “</p> 
Joanie	<p>“Everything is close to my home. (...) Soon, when they finished [building] the shopping centre I don’t have to go to the city centre anymore. The bus stop is here and all the activities I do are here”.</p>	<p>“(…) I love to stroll over the market. Walking around you know. I love to loos time on the market”.</p> 

Furthermore, the time the participants had for taking pictures (two weeks) allowed them to reflect on their experiences in everyday life. For Omaira the photovoice project turned out to be a positive experience of which she took pride. By seeing all the things she undertook in her everyday life, she became aware of what all the things she actually was doing. She was proud of her everyday life and told me that she is going to make an album with all the pictures from the project and show it to her grand-children, stating ‘grandma’s activities’. The fact that Omaira only became aware of her everyday life through the photovoice project, shows that this method not only reveals more and other detailed experiences in place but also can let participants take pride in their everyday lives.

The photovoice project also seemed to be an empowering experience to the participants as they were in charge of what they wanted to show me. Joanie, Omaira and Kiyana all represented themselves in a different way to me and this also offered me insight in their identities. Kiyana, for instance, took almost all her pictures in her home and the cohousing community because I am familiar with these places. The pictures of the cohousing community revealed that she saw herself as a hostess of the community, that could help members to integrate in the Dutch society. In contrast to Kiyana, Joanie took pictures of the places that I was not familiar with, as she wanted to show her 'own' life instead of places/activities related to the cohousing community.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the photovoice project I conducted in June 2011. I argued that it would not have been possible to conduct this project without the trust that I established with the community members throughout the past year. Photovoice gave the participants a voice by letting them determine what to discuss, this turned out to be an empowering experience as it provided them with self-confidence. The photovoice interviews revealed different aspects of experiences in-place and offered insight into the identity of the participants. Because of the limited time I could not involve the participants in any action. For future photovoice projects it would be interesting to design a photo exhibition together with the participants in, for instance, the neighbourhood centre. To show the local community their experiences in-place, can be an empowering experience (McIntyre, 2003), especially for those who feel less confident in expressing themselves in the Dutch language.

5 Discussion

In this master thesis I explored the relationship between place attachment and well-being of older people, by looking at the everyday places of older Antillean migrants in the Netherlands. In CHAPTER 2 the self-perceived well-being in relation to attachment to the cohousing community, the neighbourhood and the home, were discussed. In CHAPTER 3 we discussed the homemaking processes of the participants. In this chapter, some theoretical and methodological issues concerning the relation between place attachment and wellbeing are discussed.

First of all, the term 'wellbeing' turned out to be a rather complicated concept to define. The concept of wellbeing contains a "bewilderingly diverse family of concepts and approaches, partly reflecting different contexts, purposes, and foci of attention" (Gasper, 2004, p.1). In qualitative research, the risk exists that wellbeing becomes a container concept, used for describing a broad range of feelings of which some do not constitute what the participants themselves experience as well-being. Therefore, in qualitative research, more attention should be paid to what the term wellbeing actually constitutes. Instead of using and developing universal measurements and indicators to assess wellbeing, I advocate that the concept should be developed by participants themselves. Although Ingersoll-Dayton's (2011) purpose was to establish a measure for wellbeing through a mixed-method approach, this research stresses that in order to use the concept it has to be culturally grounded. Through focus-group and in-depth interviews, participants determined in their own words what wellbeing constituted for them. It turned out that the Thai participants' wellbeing concept focused on relationships, which contrasted with Western notions of wellbeing wherein the focus lies on individual autonomy (Ingersoll-Dayton, 2011). It would be useful to discuss the definition of the concept as well as the appropriate word use to discuss the concept, before addressing wellbeing in in-depth interviews, photovoice projects as well as other qualitative methods. This could strengthen the validity of qualitative research that uses wellbeing. Furthermore, culturally as well as spatially grounded concepts of wellbeing developed by the participants themselves, could contribute to action that can be undertaken in participatory research.

There are some other concepts that could strengthen the knowledge on the relationship between place attachment and wellbeing. A concept that has not been addressed in this thesis is place identity. This concept is bound up with place attachment. Place attachment provides one with a feeling of belonging and part of one's identity is found in attachments to places (Taylor, 2001). By studying the attachments of older people to their everyday places (both the physical and social dimension) we can find out more about how they construct their identity in relation to place. Positive place attachments can evoke a positive self-image and influence wellbeing. For future research it would be of interest to further explore the relation between place attachment, place identity and wellbeing.

The concept of place attachment itself can also be elaborated in order to make it suitable for older people. Cutchin (2001) offers an interesting contribution to the concept of place attachment for older people. He argues that place attachments are not only found in memories of the past, but are constituted through future expectations of place experiences as well (Cutchin, 2001). If an older person expects to be in a wheelchair or ill health in the future, (s)he can act up on this by adapting the home, for example. In this way (s)he can stay

connected to place. Using this future dimension of place attachment in research on older people can provides us with a better understanding of the relation between people and place. For research with older migrants the concept 'myth of return' would be of particular interest to use, as it is argued to influence the meaning of home for migrants (Leavey, Sembhi, & Livingston, 2004). The wishful belief to return to the home country is believed to have a positive influence on the well-being of migrants as it can ease emotional distress when they feel homesick (Cohen & Gold, 1997).

In CHAPTER 3 we already argued that other spatial scales deserve further attention in the research on older people and their relations to place. Through the photovoice project I already gained more understanding of the meaning of specific places in the neighbourhood. However, in order to understand experiences in place it is also important to understand the macro-environments in which daily life is embedded. These macro-environments can be regional, national or international (Keating, 2008). In doing research with older people, policy environments on housing, care and well-being for the elderly, deserve further attention. For example, in the Netherlands the WMO (Social Support Act) aims to improve the self-reliance of vulnerable people such as frail older people. This law is based on the presumption that people first have to try organise their own housing and care and if this does not work out they have to ask the municipality for help. However, not all people have the skills and knowledge on how they can organise care and appropriate housing, such as elderly migrants (Mertens & Van der Zwet, 2009). Elderly migrants make relatively little use of facilities to adapt their homes (for example a heightened toilet seat) as they sometimes not know they can get financial support for this (Heygele, 2009). Not being comfortable in place can deteriorate attachment to the home and reduce wellbeing. Also, the conditions of immigration that elderly migrants have faced, deserve further attention in understanding the relations between place attachment and wellbeing (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007).

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