



FROM HERE TO THERE:

reflections on disorientation and reinhabiting home

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PREFACE

When my grandmother fell ill, being hospitalized was the best option. With a heavy heart, I would video call with her. She missed her food, her soap operas and her hammock (she does not own a bed), she told me. As her health improved, she returned home. Recently, I too returned home and could finally visit her. We sat together: me on a chair, and her on her hammock. The same way we did when I was growing up, we watched old soap operas together. Stories of love, betrayals, full of adventures and twists she already knows by heart. She kindly updated me on the plots, talking to me as the episodes went on, and interacting with the characters other times, as if she was part of these stories.

This object, the hammock, is known to me as a *rede*. Literally, a *rede* means a mesh, net, web. It is present in my memories for as long as I can remember. Using it as a swing as a child. The beautiful colors and patterns, the intricate trims that decorated it. The way of folding it, making it hang by one anchor during the day. The anchors, present in bedrooms, living rooms, backyards of the houses I grew up in - hammock reminders. The special knot to make the lanyards shorter. My mother patiently showing to me how to make the knot. Me still not knowing it. Feeling caring hands move its lanyards as I swung in it about to sleep, about to dream. The movement, the colors, the care.

The *rede* inspires me: this object-space, carrier of so many meanings. This work is, then, also a *rede*. One made of memories, objects and feelings that are not only mine. It is an archive, weaved by me and other women who, like me, have left Brazil and now rebuild their homes here in the Netherlands.

A *rede* is never static. It folds during the day and unfolds during the night. It is malleable, taking the shape of the body that lies in it. Like this, it is my body being enfolded by it, at the same that I give it shape and volume. I position my body and experiences in this net, in which I am also entangled.

In this *rede* I find comfort. It is made with beautiful colors, my colors. And as it swings from here to there, it leads me to dream. Beautiful dreams of today, yesterday and tomorrow. Dreams of how spaces can nurture, welcome, care.

So, I say welcome, take a seat. Let me tell you about stories I now know by heart.

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INTRODUCTION

The *rede* is an object of indigenous origin, used long before the European invasions. From this violent contact, its uses and ways of making were modified. Layers of colonial influence were woven into it throughout time. Hundreds of years later, this object comes to me as a symbol of care. That is not to say that those layers are no longer there. They are. The skin of the bodies that come to lay in it might feel a sting from time to time, some more than others.

The *rede* was chosen by me as an allegory due to its strong connection to the theme of inhabitation, embodiment, affect and home for me. Home is a central concept in this work, which I understand as a lived experience, of intimately inhabiting space at the same time that one leaks into it (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 89). Home as a second skin, which allows the subject to be touched and touch the world (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 89). What better object to represent home than one that enfolds and nests so closely the body that comes to lay in it?

I feel connected to these topics as I have been experiencing processes of disorientation and reorientation after having moved from Brazil to the Netherlands, that is: after leaving home and the familiar and redirecting my path here. It is then important to reflect on inhabitation: on how bodies extend themselves in space and how this process creates new folds in both body and space. And as a compass, I consider the paths that were walked by me and other women. And how this movement – migrating – ignites different processes of reorientation, in which memory and the orientation towards past familiar objects and spaces play important roles.

Ahmed (*Strange Encounters* 93), when talking about migrations, argues: “we need to understand estrangement in a way which emphasizes how the histories of movement of people across borders make a difference to the spatiality and temporality of estrangement.” I intentionally maintain myself and am precise about the estrangements I experience here. This is a form of care for myself and respect for the multiplicity of migration narratives. And as I do this, I let my body extend over this space; these pages. I let my body give shape and volume to the layers I come across, pointing where it stings and where I find comfort.

This work is a *rede* in which I remember, hear, archive and share stories, memories and ways of being. “When your history is not documented—by archives, the media, or simply the existence of others around you who can pass down histories and stories—it’s hard to build your sense of identity” (Hadi). Like this, creating a type of archive, made possible from contact with other bodies, becomes important. It is my way of **giving voice to estrangements, feelings and experiences** that are mine and of other women who share, in part, similar origin points. It is my way **to speak and to listen, to find comfort in memories and stories**. It is also my way to **explore other forms of coming into contact and building knowledge**. And to **keep on dreaming about how else I can find care, comfort and myself in space**.

For this, I talked to other Brazilian women who reside in the Netherlands about the challenges and joys of walking a new path, of building a new home. The fragments of these conversations were arranged and rearranged by me, as I felt and played with their connections. They orientated my writing and my reflection about how I position myself within these experiences. The groups of fragments became the chapters of this work:

- *The box and the things*: where I explain my methodology and understanding of the importance of things and space to embodied experiences;
- *The homes and the paths*: where I talk further about the experience of reinhabiting home and the different disorientation and reorientation processes present in this;
- *The women and the layers*: where I introduce the importance of an intersectional view to analyze inhabitations;
- *The people and the love*: where I continue talking about reverberations of gender and race; and
- *The here and there*; with closing thoughts.

Fragments of the conversations are included at the beginning of each chapter. In addition to this, a selection of fragments is included in the appendices, where they are divided per chapter.¹

¹ These fragments serve to ground the reflections and references to them are made throughout the text via hyperlinks. More fragments can be found in a separate file, where they are divided per chapter again and include fragments more related to my practice work. [To access this document, click here.](#)

THE BOX AND THE THINGS

Tudo que eu botei aí, passou um filme aqui na minha cabeça... Tudo, tudo que eu peguei passou o filme.

Everything I put there, it was like a movie here in my head... Everything, everything I touched was like a movie.

—Luana

Se eu te falar... Que tudo que tu me mostrou aí, não é que eu sinto falta, mas tipo... Da minha memória, da minha avó também. Da minha mãe. Minha mãe tinha um tamborete, um tamboretezinho que ela sentava, aí ela botava o ralador de coco. Aí a gente ficava sentado ao redor, só esperando a quenga. (risos) Pra comer com a colher. Aí ela fazia tapioca, com coco. Aí às vezes eu metia a mão, e ela dizia “tira a mão daí”. E do pano de café... Nossa, mulher. Agora tu me trouxe muita memória, muita memória, muita memória mesmo. Muita lembrança.

And I tell you... That everything you showed me there, it's not that I miss it, but like... It's of my memory, of my grandmother too... Of my mother... My mother had a stool, a little stool that she would sit on, then she would put the tool to scrape the coconut. Then we would sit around, just waiting for the coconut leftover. (laughs) To eat with a spoon. Then she made **tapioca**, with coconut. Then, sometimes, I put my hand in, and she would say “take your hand away”. And the coffee cloth... Wow, **mulher**. Now you brought me a lot of memory, a lot of memory. Lots of remembrance.

—Flora

THE BOX AND THE THINGS

I wondered about the best way to approach the theme of inhabitation and an at-homeness feeling. And the answer was so close to me, as I was already submerged in it. The answer was in the spaces I have been and am part of. Spaces do not function as containers for bodies, but rather bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 53). And, at the same time, bodily existence floods over into things, appropriates them, infuses them with the breath of life (Jager 219). To think of inhabitation in this way means to be able no longer to make such a radical distinction between flesh and matter, between bodies and mere things (Jager 219).

I then wondered: what is my home made of? What is part of me? Objects, so many, filled my thoughts. Objects of today and yesterday. Memories of long ago; of feelings, flavors, scents, colors so dear to me. As I remember something, I remember how I gained access to it: remembering is a certain manner of being body (Merleau Ponty qtd. in Morris 118). Echoes of other embodiments.

Like the *rede*, object carrier of bodies, things and meanings; I collected in a box other objects that, in a way, carry me. A box of things, a box of home, a box of me. A house number, a student bus card, the scent of my grandmother, the tool to scrape coconuts, the sweets given to children at birthday parties, and so many more.

Rizvi (92) talks about reclaiming herself in her research process as a form of care and of recognizing the larger world within which she was entangled. Collecting personal objects that are so meaningful to me and memorizing my orientation towards them gives me hints to understanding what “trails behind me” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 132). They point to how I orientate and direct my (re)-inhabitation here. And this is too a valid source of knowledge.

In this caring/feeling/researching process, I recognize the world I am entangled in. Spaces extend to bodies (and vice-versa) differently. And then I wonder: how do other bodies extend in this space? Bodies that, in theory, share a similar origin point. How do they experience home here? Which disorientation and reorientation processes do they face?

There is, in fact, a giddiness related to life itself: disorientation and reorientations are always present to some degree, given the movements of life. But for bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social, bodily movement is not so easy (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 139). Ahmed and Fanon (*Queer Phenomenology* 139) explain that the success or failure of some bodies in extending themselves is not a measure of competence, but of privilege. It led me to question the layers, present and past, which ground my inhabitation possibilities here, and how these could relate to those of other women.

To help me on this path, nine women kindly shared their homes, memories and time with me, as I sat down to hear their voices. Women of different ages, from 28 to 50 years old. Eight of them from Fortaleza, the same city as me, and one

from Salvador. All residing now in the Netherlands, some for months, some for many years. Most of them contacted me after a post of mine on a Facebook group directed at Brazilians residing in the Netherlands, in which I invited people to individually have a conversation moment. This was not targeted at women, but it was with them I found availability and comfort.

During the interviews, conversations of one to two hours, we exchanged experiences. The box, my box of home, accompanied me in these moments, and it was my way of showing myself to them. A semi-structured format was thought of, which was barely needed. The conversations flew through.

It was also the methodology I found to access their orientations toward objects, the familiarities, the memories and their meanings of home. I explained: this is *my* box, but what would *your* box look like? And we continued.

It was based on photo elicitation as methodology, which is grounded on the understanding that images have the ability to prod latent memory, to stimulate and release emotional statements (Collier qtd. in Harper 14). But this was quickly transformed into rather, an *object elicitation*, as “we behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence” (Pallasmaa 69). To use solely images would be to ignore the embodied multisensory experience that is to be (in) space.

THE HOMES AND THE PATHS

Olha, que pergunta interessante... Se sentir em casa. Assim, claro que eu me sentia em casa. É porque essa definição de se sentir em casa é muito... Não, nem eu sei, eu tou tentando pensar o que é se sentir em casa. Eu não sei. Não sei se eu já tou contaminada pelos meses que eu tou aqui. Obviamente, que eu me sentia em casa. Pra mim, o que é se sentir em casa... Eu conhecia os lugares, nada pra mim era mistério. O jeito que você compra uma coisa, o jeito que você negocia, o jeito que as pessoas se comunicam, os comportamentos das pessoas. Se você tá no ônibus, não precisa muita coisa pra você perceber que uma pessoa tá achando ruim alguma coisa. Ou que... Não precisa, você simplesmente sabe. É uma coisa natural, tipo a língua. Você simplesmente sabe, tá ali. Então nesse ponto eu me sentia em casa.

Look, what an interesting question... To feel at home. Well, of course I felt at home. It's because this definition of feeling at home is very... No, I don't even know, I'm trying to think what it's like to feel at home. I don't know. I don't know if I'm already contaminated by the months I've been here. Obviously, I felt at home. For me, what does it mean to feel at home... I knew the places, nothing was a mystery to me. The way you buy something, the way you negotiate, the way people communicate, people's behavior. If you're on the bus, it doesn't take much for you to realize that someone is thinking something is bad. Or that... No need, you just know. It's a natural thing, like the language. You just know, it's there. So, like that I felt at home.

—Cíntia

THE HOMES AND THE PATHS

When addressing *home*, I do not consider it a place of origin, but rather a question of affect: “being-at-home as a matter of how one feels or how one might fail to feel” (Ahmed *Stranger Encounters* 89). Considering that the locality intrudes the senses, defining what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers; being-at-home involves a mutual inhabitation between body and spaces (Ahmed *Stranger Encounters* 89). And after moving, in this new locality, I am invaded by other sensations, some of which are unfamiliar, not (yet) intimate to me.

Orientations are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places, or the alignment between body and space (Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology* 7). Familiarity then plays an important role, as it gives the body the capacity to be orientated in this way or in that. Orientations are about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, while disorientation refers to the failure of this extension (Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology* 11). After moving here, it becomes clear I have left home, exactly because I sometimes feel my body fail to extend over space. This also happened in Fortaleza, but here this occurs often and in different ways. As Cíntia mentions ([see subheading](#)), nothing there was a mystery. Familiarity was present in multiple contexts, simply being there. Ahmed (*Strange Encounters* 92) describes the acts of remembering by migrant bodies as a discomfort, a failure to fully inhabit the present or present space. Like this, migration is a process of estrangement, a process of becoming estranged from that which was inhabited as home (Ahmed *Strange Encounters* 92). After migrating, defining home as well as the criteria used to define it can become a challenge, as Cíntia describes ([see Appendix C.1](#)). Factors that previously defined this composition of home, like familiarity with the language, fluently moving through spaces, and proximity to loved ones are lost.

The past offers sense precisely by not being all-active in the present, by being a weight that passively carries on past activity in the present (Morris 117). Familiarity, which was once a passive weight in another land and time, now points to not only a spatial but also a temporal dislocation. A here and there, both in space and time. A *rede* that never stops swinging. This movement is sometimes calming, as it rocks my body and it leads me to dream: to delight myself with the memory of what once was. But it can too be nauseating. Will it ever stop? Am I both here and there? Or am I neither here nor there?

The way this *rede* moves, the way we move, the way bodies extend over space is not natural, not a given: what bodies “tend to do” are effects of histories rather than being originary (Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology* 56). It is important to think then: what histories do our bodies carry?

THE WOMEN AND THE LAYERS

Olha, como eu trabalhava na área de beleza, eu trabalhava nos camarotes. Eu pude ver isso. Foi também uma experiência muito grande pra mim. Eu sou de família humilde, então a realidade financeira é o que não te deixa em casa. É você estar num patamar e ir prum outro mundo. Como aqui, como essa mudança. Você estar num bairro periférico, e ir prum bairro nobre. Então eu ia atender, eu saía do meu bairro e ia atender num bairro nobre. Então, o porteiro que era do meu bairro, quando eu chegava no bairro nobre, tinha um olhar diferenciado, né? Tá entendendo? Então, isso no nosso país a gente não se sente em casa, nesses momentos. Ou então quando você entra numa loja, num shopping de grife e você é tratado diferente. E por pessoas que eram da periferia, mas que estão num local diferenciado. Então isso é o que te faz não se sentir em casa, que não era pra acontecer.

Look, since I worked in the beauty industry, I worked in VIP carnival locations. I could see it. It was also a great experience for me. I come from a humble family, so the financial reality is what doesn't make you feel at home. It's you being on a level and going to another world. Like here, like this change. You are in a peripheral neighborhood, and you go to an upscale neighborhood. So I would attend, I would leave my neighborhood and go to an upscale neighborhood. So, the doorman who was from my neighborhood, when I arrived in the upscale neighborhood, he had a different look, right? Do you understand? So, in our country, we don't feel at home at these times. Or when you enter a store, in a fancy mall and you are treated differently. And by people who were from the periphery, but who are in a different place. So that's what makes you not feel at home, which shouldn't happen.

—Rosana

Porque eu sou mulher, aí tenho vontade de fazer coisas só com mulheres. Que não vá homem no meio. Tipo assim, sair, olhar as lojas, ou então no verão eu faço barbecue. E eu digo, não tem negócio de levar homem não, os homens ficam em casa. É coisa de mulher. Aí faço barbecue, comida, bebida. Aí começa fofoca, é aquela coisa. (risos) Eu gosto...

Because I'm a woman, then I want to do things only with women. Let no man get in the way. Like going out, looking at the stores, or in the summer I barbecue. And I say, there's no business taking a man, men stay at home. It's a woman thing. Then I barbecue, eat, drink. That's when gossip starts, it's that thing. (laughs) I like it.

—Maria

THE WOMEN AND THE LAYERS

It is important to consider the space where bodies move, but also the bodies that are part of spaces. It is a mutual relation, in which both space and bodies take shape; as spaces acquire the “skin” of the bodies that inhabit them, at the same time that bodies become orientated when they are occupied in time and space (Ahmed *A phenomenology of whiteness* 152). This process of becoming orientated depends also on an inherited reachability of some objects: what is passed and received upon arrival (Ahmed *A phenomenology of whiteness* 154).

I talked about the *rede* and the layers of colonial influence pierced to it, which altered its ways of making. Moreover, the act of lying down in it, or occupying a space, the contact with these layers is felt differently on different skins, on different bodies. Talking about whiteness, Ahmed (*A phenomenology of whiteness* 150) describes it as an ongoing and unfinished history, orientating bodies in certain directions, affecting how they extend over space. It is, therefore, not an ontological given but materially lived and felt by some more than others. Rosana talks about her experience ([see subheading](#)) in positioning her body in certain spaces as an obstacle to feeling at home. Those were not considered – to others – meant for her. She was seen as a stranger, crossing a border in her own city. Ahmed (*Strange Encounters* 54) describes strange bodies as those that are temporarily assimilated as the unassimilable within the encounter. To see her in a fancy mall, or expensive carnival locations was unassimilable to some, even those who resided in the same neighborhood as her. Puwar (8) notes that social spaces are not blank, open for any body, but rather certain types of bodies that are tacitly designated as being the ‘natural’ occupants of specific positions. And for others, as not being the *somatic norm*, they become trespassers, space invaders, out of place (Puwar 8).

This *somatic norm* is not always perceived; it trails behind. In this sense, spaces are orientated ‘around’ whiteness, insofar as it is not seen. But whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or those who get used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it (Ahmed *A phenomenology of whiteness* 157).

As I look at my own inheritances in regard to whiteness, I realize how I may not always have seen it, even not being it. My body is not quite, but *sometimes* close to this “familiar” body, to this *somatic norm*. Again, here and there; or neither here, nor there.

Lorde (116) argues that a pretense to homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* does not exist in reality. It is important to understand then the influence of intersectionality on bodily movement in space and reachability. We accumulate behinds, just as what is behind is an effect of past accumulations (Ahmed *A phenomenology of whiteness* 160). Just as gender is not an ontological given either. Butler (523) explains gender as what the body becomes through a series of acts, which are renewed, revised, and consolidated throughout time. Different acts such as those described by Maria ([see subheading](#)), like being around other women, gossiping and going shopping. She describes those as

women's things, from which she draws pleasure. In this logic, the fact that she is a woman explains the liking, and the liking reifies her as a woman. The authors of gender are compelled to believe in its necessity and naturalness, as they also become entranced by their own fictions (Butler 522). That is not to say one may not find pleasure, comfort or happiness in these acts through which gender is put. In fact, my experience and many of the fragments of the conversations here point to, at times, gendered spaces and objects as carriers of comfort, social relief and connection.

THE PEOPLE AND THE LOVE

Essa coisa da culinária fala muito ao coração. E a gente conversa sobre isso com outras brasileiras e elas falam a mesma coisa. Nossa, como há o afeto com a nossa comida. Eu fiz semana passada o bolo de cenoura com cobertura de chocolate, porque tipo eu queria aquela casa com o bolinho que você tem por alguns dias com o café. É uma bobagem, mas eu queria... Eu peguei a receitinha, minha amiga veio de novo pra gente fazer.

This cooking thing speaks a lot to the heart. And we talk about it with other **brasileiras** and they say the same thing. Wow, how much affection there is in our food. Last week I made the carrot cake with chocolate frosting, because I kind of wanted that house with the cake you have for a few days with your coffee. It's silly, but I wanted it... I got the recipe, my **amiga** came over again so we could make it.

—Adélia

Eu ficava me perguntado com relação ao racismo, né? Porque no Brasil a gente sofre tanto, né?(...) Eu tinha esse receio por ser um país de população considerada branca. Eu tinha essa preocupação, mas também não foquei. Mas eu achava que poderia sofrer bastante. Mas não acontece, não aconteceu. Totalmente diferente. Em relação a isso eu não tenho preocupação. Eu acho que tem uma aceitação muito boa, eu acho que até tem uma admiração.

I kept asking myself about racism, right? Because in Brazil we suffer so much, right? (...) I had this fear because this is a country with a population considered white. I had that concern, but I didn't focus on it either. But I thought I could suffer a lot. But it doesn't happen, it didn't happen. Totally different. I have no concerns about that. I think it has a very good acceptance; I think there is even admiration.

—Rosana

THE PEOPLE AND THE LOVE

“Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (Butler 531). This continuous construction of gender is part of directing what is ahead and reachable to bodies. Reachability is an effect of the habitual, in the sense that what is reachable depends on what bodies continuously “take in” (Ahmed *Queer phenomenology* 131). During the interviews, cooking specific (northeastern-)Brazilian dishes was seen as part of daily life, as well as a necessity in order to feel at home and connect with others. There is a need to be resourceful and improvise in order to have access to such ingredients ([see Appendices E.1, E.2, E.3](#)). And, even though impractical, this process was easily described.

There is, of course, the sensory power of food in order to echo memories, what Adélia describes as [“the affection we have with our food”](#). And I think about how special it is to visit my aunt and taste the beans she makes especially for me. Or the delicious food from my childhood. But when I think of it, it is always an aunt, my (great-)grandmother, my mother. Food and the care linked to it were always associated with women for me. It is also visible in the interview fragments how most of the tender memories are associated with a female caregiver. The kitchen and markets were and still are gendered spaces, that which is reachable to these bodies. Again, this reachability is not natural; neither cooking nor providing care are exclusively feminine. But it is what keeps being consolidated, continuously, directing what bodies tend toward.

Also this is evident in the prevalence of women moving here to the Netherlands. 68% of the Brazilian population in the Netherlands is female (Van Meeteren and Pereira 7). It was noted that Dutch native men largely marry women from Eastern Europe, South-East Asia or Latin America (Leekers and Kulu-Glasgow qtd. in Roggeveen and Meeteren 8). To think of this phenomenon, one must look again at the layers of colonialism woven throughout time. Cavas and Jardim (81) talk about how, in the colonies as well as in the metropolises, black and indigenous women were not even considered human, but beasts or savages, as well as hypersexualized in relation to the western white woman. These signs of racial otherness became important in the construction of an idea of a transgressive female sexuality (Cavas and Jardim 81). This objectification of female bodies from colonized countries was rooted then but its effects are still felt, serving too to explain the demographic composition of Brazilians in the Netherlands.

This reflection is interesting to help me think about the entangled, multiple layers that guide my bodily extension through space. Experienced by me and also reported during the interviews, was a certain gentleness and excitement from people when hearing we are from Brazil. People interviewed mentioned experiencing racism in Brazil, Portugal and Italy ([see Appendices E.4 and E.5](#)), but never here in the Netherlands. On the contrary, despite the Dutch being mentioned as closed, private people, they were also described as extremely polite and kind. It is important to have an intersectional view to approach this. For example, all the people interviewed are currently legal migrants or already

have Dutch citizenship. This points to a specific class demographic, which is also the closer circle of people around me. Additionally, the presence of Brazilian migrants is not seen as a national problem, in comparison to other more numerous groups in the Netherlands². Furthermore, there is a stereotypical view of Brazil, reinforced by mediatic representations (see [Appendix E.7](#)), which paint an image of a happy land, with football, carnival and hypersexualized women. I believe these factors, in combination with a colonially inherited objectification and hypersexualization of Brazilian women led to this (specifically for them) sensation of an absence of racism. A sensation that comes from comparison to experiences in other locations (which Rosana, Flora, Amélia and Maria talk about), but that is not to say that the effects of racism are not present, orientating behaviors and feelings. But rather, are to be understood within a different frame.

A very concrete example of this in the Dutch context are the *integration* tests, which point to a level of commitment, responsibility of some who move here. This series of tests (*inburgeringsexamen*) on the Dutch language and Dutch culture are mandatory in order to extend residency permits in some cases. Wekker (55) explains how this policy was earlier based on holding on to one's cultural identity, which was facilitated by subsidies for self-organizations and cultural activities. But has changed into an undiluted policy preference for assimilation (Wekker 56). This can be connected to Rosana's desire (see [Appendix E.8](#)), or perhaps necessity, to empty herself of her values, of who she was, in order to assimilate the new.

Luana (see [Appendix E.9](#)) talks about the importance of disconnecting from Brazil, "because you are *here*" and "you live *here*". Right after, she explains how she has not returned to Brazil for 17 years and missed her mother's funeral 7 years ago. She goes then on to describe her mother and tender moments together. This fragment shows how much ambivalence and pain there can be in this reinhabiting process. The disconnection from Brazil is seen as necessary, but at the same time is a cause of great pain: not being present in a loved one's funeral rites. And, at the same time, talking about Brazil, touching Brazilian objects and memories is done with great affection and tenderness.

Another example is the competitive atmosphere that is created within Brazilian circles. As Antônia describes (see [Appendix E.10](#)), different factors influence this. She mentions the knowledge of language(s), experience in the Netherlands, as well as place of origin in Brazil. The first two factors point to this *skill* to integrate and the last to complex socio-historical-economical layers related to the Brazilian context. Therefore, integrating is felt as individual responsibility, something to be conquered, which can be also perceived in Rosana's current perception of home (see [Appendix E.11](#)). And as Flora has described (see [Appendix E.12](#)), to have passed these *integration* tests becomes a matter of pride, a proof that she was capable within a Brazilian circle in which she felt belittled.

² See [Appendix E.6](#), in which Adélia compares her experience with the one of her partner, who is born in the Netherlands and has a Turkish background.

As I talk about (re)orientations, I talk about a reconfiguration of an embodied self. But I then wonder about the costs of this process, as well as the pressures that are felt differently on each body, on each skin. The scattering of references: the loss of home and all that it encompasses, and the attempts to reconstruct it. This process includes being tested, in a very literal way through integration exams, but also through the daily challenges of reorientation, sometimes reinforced even by other Brazilians. All of this might point and guide us to what would seem like an easier route: to assimilate, to empty oneself, to be reborn. But is it even possible? And more: is it desirable?

THE HERE AND THERE

E, mulher, dormir de rede. Até hoje quando eu vou pra Fortaleza, no meu quarto, tá lá. Minha mãe diz: “tá aqui, minha filha, sua rede”.

And, mulher, to sleep in a rede. Even today, when I go to Fortaleza, in my room, it's there. My mother says “here it is, my daughter, your rede”.

—Flora

Por muito tempo eu me questionava se vale a pena perder todos esses momentos. Porque querendo ou não, a gente perde. Só que com o passar do tempo, terapia e muitas coisas, a gente vê que faz parte do processo da vida. Que a gente não tem como estar em todos os lugares, pertencer a todos os lugares, estar com todas as pessoas. A gente vai perder alguma coisa. Não tem como estar com tudo.

For a long time I wondered if all these moments were worth losing. Because like it or not, we lose. But over time, therapy and many things, we see that it is part of the process of life. That we cannot be everywhere, belong everywhere, be with everyone. We are going to lose something. There's no way to be with everything.

—Amélia

THE HERE AND THERE

I prepared myself for these encounters by gathering objects, flavors, scents, old paths. Object elicitation: or simply feeling the life in the ordinary. And through these ordinaries, I could see so much unfold ahead of me. Amélia ([see subheading](#)) talks about the impossibility to be everywhere, with everyone. There is no concrete possibility to be *here* and *there*. But as it seems, to fill life with certain ordinaries is a way to be a little more *there*, when desired. What was once just there, now is something needed, searched for ([see Appendices F.1, F.4](#)), despite impracticality.

For me, to lose/leave home based on choice (due to a relationship and as a possibility to redirect my professional life) has made me, at times, take for granted all the disorientation and pain involved in this process. Cíntia ([see Appendix F.5](#)) talks about the difficulty of not feeling like herself, or the idea of who she was. Like this, to move was to feel shaken from familiarities (places, food, language etc) and also from a stable idea of an embodied self. A self that, in a way, is now *here* and *there*. Or what Antônia describes as a *double life* ([see Appendix F.6](#)).

I too felt myself directed to the seemingly easier route of assimilation. As I live in the Netherlands, as I am married to a Dutch man, as I try (so hard) to learn Dutch. And then I want to be more *here* and I feel myself more *here*. But it is at these times that I feel myself swing even more violently back to a *there*. And I know that there is something on my skin, in my history that will never make it possible for me to assimilate.

As I talked to these other women, I see how gentle to one's heart it can be to know that a *rede* might be there waiting to be hung ([see subheading](#)). Or to be welcomed with *bolo mole* by someone who had never met me before, but felt in her heart to help me with my project. And then I know that there is something on my skin, in my history that does not make me want to assimilate.

In the entanglement that composes and grounds the inhabitation for each of these women, for each of us, we keep on finding different ways to extend over space, to rebuild home here. With ambivalent feelings of wanting to belong, to forget, to remember, I keep on searching for my ways. Like by claiming this space, this research, in the ways I know. Archiving to extend over space, in ways that nurture me. Giving ground and voice to estrangements – mine and of other women. And letting this *rede* unfold, grow with memories, and feel it swing

from *here* to *there*.

POSTFACE

When I moved to this new house, there was an ugly wallpaper. I peeled it away, and under it, there was a grey wall. But I do not like grey. I bought yellow paint and I painted it over. The yellow was the same yellow as the walls at my mother's house, my house. *Amarelo mostarda*. I looked at the blank, fresh yellow wall and I said: that is me on the wall.

To write about this, *like this*, has been to paint these pages yellow.

I continue my practice work doing the same. Representing memories: objects, scents, stories. I let this *rede* swing a bit more to *there*: the homes of yesterday and their traces today and *here*. I invite people to swing on this *rede*.

A FINAL NOTE

I am aware that a series of relevant topics that emerged in the interviews was not covered here. For example, labor possibilities; cis and trans heterosexual relationship effects to inhabitation (and financial aspects related to this); some socio-geographic-economic questions that are particular to Brazil and their reverberations here; other questions related to language; etc.

The choice to focus on these specific interview fragments came from the overlapping possibilities, as connections were noticed in different interviews. And most of all, due to the word count limitations.

Nevertheless, these are reflections that stay with me. And the representation of memories, the *rede*, continues in my practice work.

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APPENDIX A

Material used during interviews



Box exterior



Bag used to carry the box to interviews



Box content

- 1- Coconut scraper
- 2- Soap
- 3- Student bus pass
- 4- Hammock anchor
- 5- Tool for cooking
- 6- Plastic table and chair miniature

- 7- Hair clips
- 8- Leite de rosas
- 9- Clay sculpture
- 10- Seashells
- 11- Illustration on tile
- 12- Coffee cloth
- 13- House number

- 14- Dishcloth
- 15- Book 'Auto da Compadecida'
- 16- Mirror

And more



Bag gifted to the women interviewed, containing sweets from Brazil



- 1- Nucita (chocolate sweet)
- 2- Pop (lollipop)
- 3- Chocolate balls
- 4- Goiabinha (guava sweet)
- 5- Popcorn
- 6- 7belo (strawberry sweet)

APPENDIX B

Selection of interview fragments related to the chapter *THE BOX AND THE THINGS*

1. When I went to move, I started to pack my things and I was like 'Wow, my whole life in a few boxes'. Holy shit. And my whole life was clothes, shoes, half a dozen books, papers. And I was like, 'Oh my God, that's it'. Then he said 'don't worry, your life is going to need a lot more boxes'. But it was difficult. I'm still in the acceptance process. (Amélia)
2. And this year we went to Brazil and I brought eight bags. I brought a lot, my set of cookware, my set of knives, my appliances. I brought a lot. I brought my bed quilt things, all from Brazil. And other things I had to let go of because it was a lot. (Antônia)
3. We didn't want to bring too much stuff because we didn't know how it was going to be. But today I would pack differently, I would have brought more things. I would have brought more emotional memory, more family memory. I should have asked my mom to make a table set for me, so I could put it on the table and feel like she's there a little bit. But I brought a little rosary. (Cíntia)
4. I realize the importance of little things that remind us of something that is meaningful, I would say... Currently, I don't have that many. (Adélia)

APPENDIX C

Selection of interview fragments related to the chapter *THE HOME AND THE PATHS*

1. But moving to such a different country makes you open a hole in your head that is an endless hole. There is no home. This year I'm here, but I may not be anymore. I might have to go back to Brazil, I might move to another country. We might just not like Amsterdam any more. [...] You create this feeling of detachment, which messes with the feeling of what home is and your feeling of not belonging. You end up reducing your criteria of what a home is a bit. Before, for me to consider home, I had to have... I had to speak the language, I had to have my family, my friends, I had to know the names of all the streets. So now my feeling of what a home is comes down to me having my husband, a place of our own, even if it's rented and a city where I can walk around and manage to pay my bills and earn money to travel. (Cíntia)
2. Sometimes I mark places, sometimes I call my husband. And I can go. I want to go alone, I want my freedom. I already take a bus, I go to distant cities. I learned how to use the metro too. I take the bus and go everywhere now. Several locations nearby. (Rosana)
3. In Fortaleza, I certainly feel at home. I feel at home because my whole family is from Fortaleza, only my aunt moved to Campinas. I know the city. So, it gives me a feeling that... Funny, for me, knowing where things are, becoming familiar with it, it seems that it's part of me feeling myself

in that environment. Here, when I started to understand where is what and such... Also in terms of cities, provinces... It seemed that I understood more about Holland. (Adélia)

4. I arrived at the end of June last year. Pretty recent then. I still stop and stare like this, dazzled by the city. I haven't had time to get used to it yet. I don't know if you get used to it, actually. It's so different from anything we've ever seen. (Cíntia)
5. I remember one fact. I came to a bike shop, just change a pair of shorts. When I came back, I remember that I use Google Maps a lot. It sounds silly, but I use Google a lot, and I use Google Maps at home. And I thought 'wow, no, now I know the way home'. When I say 'from home' then I was like 'wow, it's my house'. I do not recognize. And it was the first time that I was alone, with myself I was like 'wow, this is my house'. How crazy I say I'm going home, I'm going home. Since I moved, I used to say 'my boyfriend's house'. And I spoke to my boyfriend's house for almost three years. (Adélia)

APPENDIX D

Selection of interview fragments related to the chapter *THE WOMEN AND THE LAYERS*

1. In fact, I came... It wasn't a choice, I came because my partner works here. He already resides here. We met and it was his option here. It was more because of my relationship. Nothing was scheduled. It was a very different thing, because there was no researching, there was no focus on living in Holland. I had no idea. So it gets more surreal. It was for love. (Rosana)
2. To be honest, I had zero expectations and it was like, well, trying, because my dream in life has always been to get married, have kids, all that stuff. And I said 'I can't find that here in Fortaleza, I can't find it, it seems that life doesn't happen here'. So, I'm going to get out of that zone and my friend she was like super happy in her relationship then it ended she found another guy and he gave her a wonderful life. I was like well, I'm going to try it seems a lot easier, a lot more approachable the men there. Then I go. So, my real goal was to find a relationship. I wanted this. I got it after many years. but that was really it: I wanted to build a family and I didn't see the possibility of that in Brazil. (Amélia)
3. It's a city where people are a little superficial about what's important, what's not. Minding other people's lives. It's still a very sexist society. And here we don't have that. It's more chill. And as a woman in the job market, I think it's better for you to be here, developing your career here, than there. It's much fairer. Maybe it's not, maybe it's my illusion. But that's my view. (Vitória)
4. First, I don't need a passport. I'm Dutch. I speak Dutch, I speak English, I speak German. Why am I going to be lying to a man. That's it, that's why you see sometimes that I go out. I just don't bring men here, but I kiss them. (laughs) (Maria)

5. There are many brasileiras here. As I am a manicurist, there is the group... There are many, like 30. But there are many brasileiras that we do not see, because time is tight. [...] It's more brasileiras, I've never seen a man here. (Flora)

APPENDIX E

Selection of interview fragments related to the chapter *THE PEOPLE AND THE LOVE*

1. I shop at Finalmente Brasil, which is close by, you can walk there. But you can also buy online. There's Little Brazil, Empório Brasil. There are so many. But I buy tapioca. Most days my breakfast is tapioca, egg and cheese. This is breakfast. Bread doesn't work for me. (Vitória)
2. I always bring food. And whenever a friend comes I always order food. I always order calabresa, I order queijo coalho. Green beans, paçoquita, which I love. These things like that. Farofa... Flour I already found here several, so I stopped asking, but in general these things. Yesterday we even had baião, with meat, and mandioca. Macaxeira we find in the oriental, there are little packets like this with bark and without bark. I can find flour at the African near the Media Markt. I always buy beans from the Turks. Raw beans, they always have. Cheese similar to coalho, which we close our eyes like this and we can pretend it's the [inaudible], which we use to bake. It looks a bit like coalho. It is good. I have palm oil, which I found at the African. I wanted to make vatapá, so I found dendê. It's not that hard to find these things. Couscous is something they don't sell anymore. I can only find it there in Amsterdam. (Amélia)
3. Here, all brasileiras know where to buy tapioca gum, the tapioca thingie for dadinho, pão de queijo. So, sometimes we get together to do it. Me and a friend of mine, in particular, two of them, actually three... We get together more. In fact, I didn't know how to make pão de queijo in Brazil. I learned with the need here, because there I only bought it ready. (Adélia)
4. I'll make a comparison... I lived in Italy for a year and then came here. Because I had seen it from there too, because my sister lives there. I worked there with her and she got me a visa. And in Italy I suffered discrimination, I suffered there. You see my color, right? They called me a *nega* there. Person di colore, spoke like that, right. That regazza, that dark colored girl. I felt discriminated against there, here not. I've lived here for six years, on the street, in the supermarket, at my son's school. [...] People are very polite. I, at least, for the six years that I've lived here, I haven't seen any person being racist towards me. Because we are called buiteland, right? One who comes from outside... I think it's a beautiful name, buiteland. (laughs) Because in Italy they call it an immigrant or [inaudible], then I don't like it. But, now, buiteland... You came from outside. As for them, they are gringos, when they arrive in Brazil. But here I never had, I never suffered racism. On the contrary. (Flora)
5. And Italian people are very similar to Brazilians, but in a slightly worse way, because they are extremely, they are really rude. Italian people are

very difficult to get along with and here I think that people, despite everything, are kind of, let's say they try to at least pretend to be polite. No, people here are more educated, that's a fact. Despite the direct, this is not bad manners. Not there, they were really rude. It was very difficult to live with Italians. So it's another reality. It's like Portuguese, Portuguese much worse. Portuguese still has the extreme prejudice factor. (Amélia)

6. I think it's more disguised, it's more embedded, you know? They have a lot of prejudice, it's so much that they characterize many people, like 'Oh this person is like that'. They have a lot of prejudice against other ethnicities, and that's a fact, but especially with Moroccans, Turks and other parts like that. With us, I think it's a little more disguised, I don't know if it's because we're women, I don't know. But there is, of course. (Amélia) [...] They are super excited about Brazil. Now with my boyfriend... My boyfriend is Turkish by blood, he was born in Holland. His parents were born here and grew up here, but they come from Turkey. So, he speaks Dutch impeccably, but when they read his name "xxxx" they're like 'Oh, where is he from?' and things like this. Then people say 'Ah, but a Turk...' I've even heard people say that he was going to hit me because he was a Turk. (Amélia)
7. When you say Brazil, everyone smiles wide. Everyone likes Brazil. At least the people I had contact with. They associate it with the beach, carnival and football, most of them. Or when I go to the supermarket and say I'm from Brazil, then you see how they react. Then it gets comfortable. Makes me feel good. (Rosana)
8. I've learned a lot by trying to find places. I got a bike here, I didn't ride there. We had traffic, we had other habits to go to work. Then I go along the paths, the places are very similar. So, even with the GPS, as you don't know the names of the streets, then I get nervous, I don't want to use the map, you know? Then I end up getting lost, sometimes I'm very close to home, but I end up getting lost. It's super funny, but I usually do these activities like this. And I have developed. It's like a birth again, every day. It's like a zero. It is after 48 years you are born again, reborn. Then I try to empty myself of what I was, to see everything new. I try to empty myself every day. (Rosana)
9. You live here, you are here, you have to live your life. You can look at things, but don't get hung up on things from Brazil. Because you're here. Every time they go 'Ah, I miss Brazil, I want to go back'... I've been here 17 years and never went back. My mother passed away and I didn't go to her funeral because when I went to buy it, the ticket was only for 3 days later. I thought 'I'm not going to see her buried already'. I apologized to my family and they understood. But my mother came here for three months. Those were the best three months of my life, those months she spent here. It's been 7 years, I think. It was not easy. I miss her so much. She was so creative, and when I was creative too, she was so surprised.
10. And I realized that when Brazilians (this happens to me, I don't know if it happens to other people), that they compete. They like to compete, as if they were, as if they were better than me. For example, 'ah, how many

years have you been here?' Then I said I just arrived, six months. Then: 'ah, just arrived. I've been living here for years, I've been living here for ten years. 'Do you speak English?' No, I can't speak fluent English. 'Oh, I don't believe it. Wow, I speak very well.' This way they spoke, made me very sad. Always wanting to let me down. Or always wanting to be more than my level. Like, she arrived now, she doesn't know anything. He doesn't even know how to speak English. Making fun of me. But to me this is nothing, to me it means nothing. (Antônia)

11. In my house, I feel at home. Outside, I feel in a place where I need adaptation. And that mostly depends on me. (Rosana)
12. Then I had to take the tests, three tests, there in São Paulo, Brazil. I had to wait eight weeks for the result to come out. The average is 6 there. As I had never spoken this Dutch, I didn't know the language. I didn't research anything, right? I came like this, just crazy, that's it. But then I studied here, I studied there. But then, thank God, I passed on the first try! (laughs) Mulher, I cried, I cried with joy. Because I met other brasileiras here [...] Many of them just wanted to chat, and my focus was on studying. Then there was one of them who said: 'Ah, you will never make it. It's no use studying, you'll never learn that language.' Then I thought 'I'll show her that I'll pass'. Because she took the test, this brasileira, she took the test three times and failed. [...] She tried three times, failed three times, failed. I did it, I passed it, I showed it to her. She was kind of awkward then, because she didn't know what I was going to do the tests. But that's how it is. So, I did it, and what they most ask for is culture, right? For us to learn about the culture. (Flora)

APPENDIX F

Selection of interview fragments related to the chapter *THE HERE AND THERE*

1. My Brazilian moments I try to put them in everyday life and that gives a different feeling. It seems that sometimes I need them. It is part of my routine, something that in Brazil... I didn't have to go to someone's house to make a pão de queijo. But now I try to create this... (Adélia)
2. Here we are starting from scratch. Because whoever comes here has to start from scratch. When it comes to the language difficulty, people. (Antônia)
3. It has been, in fact still is, a very painful process... Everything. Everything is painful. (Cíntia)
4. I realize that here I have a lot of social need. I already had it in Brazil, but I didn't understand it so clearly. Meanwhile here not, because I have to insert it. And it makes a difference. And even more important than what it would be in Brazil... because I was already... I wasn't away, I wasn't adapting. This thing of being taken from something you are already familiar with, you have roots, everything there makes sense to you. And you're placed in another environment where things are new. (Adélia)

5. This issue of identity for me was the worst. It's a very big difficulty for me not to feel myself, sometimes because I can't be myself. Or at least the idea I had of who I was. (Cíntia)
6. It's very difficult to have a double life. Because whether I like it or not, there is a part of me there in Brazil, which still calls me. You can't completely disconnect. It's hard, very hard. (Antônia)