

# Writing Home

National identity in expatriates'  
letters, 1978-2009.



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Master Thesis History of Society

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## ***Preface***

The subject of expatriation immediately drew my attention when I first came across with it. Strangely enough, being an expatriate myself this academic year made me feel emotionally connected with all the expatriates around the world.

Since my school years, I have always dreamt to study abroad. However, the decision to leave my own country, even for a limited period of time, was not an easy one. Had it not been for specific people to enlighten the burden in weary times, and support me through ups and downs, my master studies would not have been as successful as I consider them to be now.

My deepest gratitude goes to the person who from the 25<sup>th</sup> of August until the 1<sup>st</sup> of June of this academic year was family for me and offered me all the assistance that a student in a foreign country would ever dream of. Taso, I need to thank you for bringing food to me the very first day I arrived in the Netherlands; for showing me around Rotterdam, and for sharing with me your experience as a post-graduate student, as well as your technical skills on how to use Word and prepare PowerPoint presentations. Thank you for helping me with Dutch bureaucracy! I also would like to thank you for sewing my clothes (!) and cooking for me. But above all I want to thank you for the unique moments we shared and for having been the only person in my life that I felt as family after my real one.

A word of thanks is the least I can do for my thesis' supervisor, Dr. Marijke Huisman, whose literature suggestions, critical comments, and devotion to detail have helped me tremendously in completing this project. Dr. Huisman, without you this thesis would simply not have been what it is now.

I also would like to thank the coordinator of this master program, Dr. Bregje van Eekelen, whose classes have always cheered me up, and who showed her faith in me in various ways.

Furthermore, I wish to thank a number of people for many different reasons. I owe my gratitude to Mrs. Sophie Philippakopoulou for accepting me to work in her office, providing me this way with the financial means to move abroad. I also would like to thank my close friend Eirini for her constant support

throughout this year. My Eirini, your tenderness and sense of humor have always saved the day.

A big thank you goes to my sister for standing by me from the other side of the world (I also thank you, inventor of Skype!) during the last - very difficult for me - month of my stay in the Netherlands. This month became less horrible also because of the support I received from my everlasting friends Eliza and Diana, as well as from the new friends I made in Rotterdam, Amelie, Elsbeth, Gianni, Anastasia and Olga. Thank you, guys.

Additionally, I need to thank the kindest person I have ever met. Philippe, your loving thought is an oasis for my occasionally troubled mind. I deeply thank you for having remained in my life; your presence makes it more beautiful.

The last words of this note are for my mother, who does not speak English. Please, allow me to write the following sentence in my native language. Μαμά, η αγάπη σου είναι το μοναδικό στήριγμα μου. Δεν υπάρχουν λόγια να σε ευχαριστήσω για όσα έχεις κάνει για εμένα. (Mom, your unconditional love is what keeps me going in life. There are no words to thank you for everything that you have ever done for me.)

Readers of this thesis, I also thank you for holding this booklet in your hands now. I hope you enjoy reading it as much I enjoyed writing it.

Mara Sfountouri

Athens, August 2013.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Expatriation due to professional reasons, meaning working or studying in a foreign country for a specific period of time, is not a modern phenomenon. People have always moved to other countries in the quest of a better (career) future. As Paul Kelly characteristically wrote 'all of human history has seen the movement of people across the face of the earth.'<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1980's though, it is an undisputable fact that the practice of expatriation had grown due to the phenomenon of globalization. As Morley, Heraty and Collings state, current era is characterized by the ongoing and rapid globalization of business.<sup>2</sup> As an extension of this statement, Norwood and Stai underline that expatriation within the confines of international business has impacted the world and continues to do so.<sup>3</sup> The expatriates belong to an expanding group of people who can be characterized as 'transnational'. This term refers to people who have the freedom, legally and economically, to move across borders and between cultures, doing business on their way.<sup>4</sup>

However, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that an expatriate is not an immigrant. The expatriates can be seen as a specific group of immigrants but what differentiates them from the latter is that the expatriates intend to leave their homeland temporarily. As Michiel Haijink stated, citing the words the director of the Expatriate Archive Center in The Hague used in an interview conducted by him: 'Once the expat decides to take up permanent residence, he or she becomes an immigrant in our eyes and from that moment their experiences are no longer relevant to us'.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the expatriates should not be dealt as typical immigrants in academic studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kelly, 'Introduction: Between culture and equality', in Paul Kelly (ed.), *Multiculturalism reconsidered* (Cambridge 2002) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Morley, Noreen Heraty, and David G Collings., *New directions in expatriate research* (Basingstoke 2006) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Norwood, Bethany Stai, 'Expatriation and international business'. *Academy for Studies in International Business* (Orlando 2011) 29.

<sup>4</sup> Westwood, Sallie, *Trans-nationalism and the politics of belonging* (Routledge 2000) 2.

<sup>5</sup> Michiel Haijink, 'The Expatriate Archive Centre: a second home for expats', <http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/expatriate-archive-centre-second-homeexpats>. (11-10-2009).

Migration history is indeed a flourishing field in contemporary historiography. To provide an example, Gert Oostindie in the book *Dutch colonialism, migration and cultural heritage* focuses on migration, which has defined, as he claims, what people came to regard as cultural heritage today. The author, in order to illustrate his point of view, makes a special reference to the research program 'Migration and culture in the Dutch colonial world', which started in 2007 and was funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The main aim of this program was to broaden people's perspective on migration and to help reflect on a comprehensive and comparative approach to the field of shared cultural heritage.

In the discussion about migration history, the expatriates remain under-explored. Although a number of current scientific works concentrate on the growing phenomenon of expatriation, and many sociologists and anthropologists intensively study the specific issue, it can be easily understood that so far these studies have dealt with expatriation in association with the job market's dynamics. A great example is *New directions in expatriate research*, a book edited by Michael J. Morley, Noreen Heraty and David G. Collings, which aims to develop an in-depth understanding of international human resource management and its associated activities. A historical perspective though is absent from the existing expatriation literature.

At this point I think it is essential to clarify that in my historical thesis I am not interested in dealing with expatriation as a part of today's globalizing job arena. Inevitably, this larger public framework throws a specific light on my subject and it can be seen as the general social background of my thesis. My main purpose though is to write about expatriation from the perspective of national identity. More specifically, what I aim to study is how the expatriate experience influences the national identity of the expatriates. Towards this, I analyze the personal correspondence of two expatriate families whose archives cover the period 1978-2009. But before outlining the aims, sources and methods of my research, in the forthcoming section I present the theoretical framework for the study of national identity within globalization times.



## 1.1 Historiographical review

### Globalization and national identity

Globalization, which is defined as the mobility of goods, information and people, has never been so noticeable as it has become in the end of twentieth and beginning of twenty-first century. Modernity implies mobility and this mobility transforms the world in profound ways. Mass migration not only caused enormous changes in the population of the countries of the western world, but also brought on changes in these countries' self-understanding. Jan Willem Duyvendak in the book *The politics of home: Belonging and nostalgia in western Europe and the United States* writes about globalization in relation to the 'feeling of 'home'. Home is defined by the author as a fixed place where people belong, a place which is theirs; and feeling 'at home' is an important emotion for all. The author also stresses that 'feeling at home' has become a dominant theme in public and political domain as a reaction to migration and globalization. In many countries, he elaborates, the presence of immigrants is seen as a threat to social cohesion; a threat to the natives' national 'homes'. These people feel that their homes are stolen by the newcomers. This crisis of home, as the author describes it, leads to a lack of a sense of belonging and drives people to a search for an identity. On both sides of the Atlantic, people desperately search for 'national identity', a search that is manifested in the construction of national canons, symbols, icons, practices and stories.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of national identity, which was traditionally defined in terms of common origin, ethnicity, or cultural ties<sup>7</sup>, has been studied by a great number of scholars throughout the years and causes several academic debates. In 1983, an innovative perspective was taken by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin of and spread of nationalism*. For him nationalism should not be merely seen as a political ideology. He claims that one should treat nationalism "as if it belonged with

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The politics of home: Belonging and nostalgia in western Europe and the United States* (New York 2011).

<sup>7</sup> M. Nenad, 'Nationalism', *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/nationalism/> (no publishing date)

'kinship' and 'religion', rather than with 'liberalism' and 'fascism'".<sup>8</sup> Anderson's definition of the 'nation' is: 'it (the nation) is an imagined community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'.<sup>9</sup>

As the author stresses, the birth of the kind of the imagined community that is the nation was to a great extent caused by the boom of print capitalism in the eighteenth century, in the form of newspapers and novels.<sup>10</sup> These two provided a sense of 'simultaneity', 'linkage' and 'community' between the members of a given nation, even if one knew well that they would never meet or even hear of their fellow-citizens. This notion of 'ourness' that the means of print capitalism provided to people, created also a sense of 'continuity' with the nation's past and determined what individuals should remember or forget as members of this nation.<sup>11</sup> The rise of nationalism caused changes also at an individual level, making people look different at their personal lives. Birth certificates, diaries, letters, medical records etc., provided individuals with a 'continuity' with their past, saving their memories from oblivion.<sup>12</sup> This historical development was the core of Arianne Baggerman's study 'Lost time: Temporal discipline and historical awareness in nineteenth-century Dutch egodocuments'. In this article the author stated that the egodocuments, i.e. diaries, are characterized by an unbridled passion to order one's experiences, which can be interpreted as a fight against oblivion.<sup>13</sup>

In relation to my research topic, Benedict Anderson's theory that the nation should be considered as something related to kinship encourages me to argue that it is then very interesting to study family archives in the light of national identity.

Anderson published his book in 1983, at a time when nationalist movements came to the fore in South East Asia resulting in unprecedented

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<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London 1983) 15.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*..

<sup>13</sup> Arianne Baggerman, 'Lost time: Temporal discipline and historical awareness in nineteenth – century Dutch egodocuments' pdf, in Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekekr and Michael Mascuch (eds.), *Controlling time and shaping the self. Developments in autobiographical writing since the sixteenth century* (Leiden 2011) 468.

wars between the revolutionary Marxist regimes of Vietnam, Cambodia and China. His book immediately became a classic in academia, in part because a new wave of nationalism triggered by the dismantling of USSR in 1991 stimulated the research of nationalism and national identities. A second wave of nationalism has been witnessed in the new millennium due to the processes of globalization and migration, which induced the disintegration of the 'nation' and national identity, as Jan Willem Duyvendak argues.

Duyvendak claims that it is surprising to what extent a rise in national feelings is notable in societies that have perceived 'themselves' as being post-national for decades. Even in the - considered to be - most progressive countries of the world, such as the Netherlands, the most heated political and social debates nowadays revolve around questions of national identity, national values, citizenship exams for newcomers, et cetera.<sup>14</sup>

Frank Lechner, however, does not share Duyvendak's opinion upon the destructive effects of globalization. In the article 'Redefining national identity: Dutch evidence on global patterns', he aims to challenge claims about the erosion of national identity due to globalization.<sup>15</sup>

Lechner argues that the decline of the sovereignty of the states is overstated since the power of the state - in terms of decision-making - remains great. What the author infers is that the fortune of national identity is more complex than what the erosion scenario implies.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, globalization could not be seen as a single scenario too, claims the author. Though globalization makes nations renegotiate their place in the world, they (nations) are more likely to draw on global standards and institutions. In other words, globalization is considered by Lechner as ill-defined since for him globalization is also what the actors make of it. In order to make his readers understand this notion, the author proposes them to think of globalization as an interactive process with exogenous forces being locally reinterpreted and reshaped.<sup>17</sup> National identities, continues the writer, will be redefined but they will not lose

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<sup>14</sup> Duyvendak, *The politics of home*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> F. Lechner, 'Redefining national identity: Dutch evidence on global patterns', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 48 (2007) 355.

<sup>16</sup> Lechner, 'Redefining national identity', 356.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem.*

their place in the global scene. As designated by the author's studies on people's attitudes towards globalization in relation to national identity, nations have a future in globalization and national communities will renegotiate their identities within the constraints of the world polity. In other words, Lechner claims that national identity takes at present the form of a reflexive discourse.

The reflexivity of national identity has also been discussed by Barbara Henkes, but from a different perspective: the family. She writes that it has been assumed that the geographical distance due to mobility or migration would undermine 'the family'. However, studies have shown that the opposite seems to be the case, since the increased distance leaves more space for imagination. Thus, the family is seen by Henkes as an imagined community.<sup>18</sup> What concerns the author is to show how 'the family' is done or undone and how it is negotiated through other agencies of identification, such as the nation.<sup>19</sup>

Her case study is a transnational family with members in the Netherlands and Germany, whose correspondence took place from 1920 to 1949. As Henkes describes in her article, the family made efforts to overcome or avoid their political and national differences. All this time, even when the Netherlands was occupied by the Germans during the Second World War, relatives on both sides, apart from their own national identification, tried to bridge the distance between them and find elements that could unify them.<sup>20</sup> From Henkes' study on migrant letters, it becomes clear that the national identity of the members of transnational families turns into a reflexive discourse within their private contact.

All in all, Benedict Anderson's argument on the imagined and constructed community of the nation brought an entirely new perspective on how the national identities are viewed. It has become clear that the national identities can no longer be understood as 'natural' entities based on common

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<sup>18</sup> Barbara Henkes, 'Letter-Writing and the construction of a transnational family: A private correspondence between the Netherlands and Germany, 1920-1949' in Marijke Huisman, Anneke Ribberink, Monica Soeting and Alfred Hornung (eds.), *Life writing matters in Europe* (Heidelberg 2012) 178.

<sup>19</sup> Henkes, 'Letter-writing and the construction of a transnational family', 179.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem..

origin, ethnicity and cultural ties, as illustrated in the beginning of this subsection, but - following also Lechner's and Henkes' lines - as constructions and reflexive practices produced in discourse. The forthcoming subsection explores further the procedures of community and national identity construction.

### **Belonging: time and place**

The construction of an imagined community involves various factors. As Benedict Anderson has pointed out, history education and the process of 'forgetting' is one of them. The author takes nineteenth-century France as his example and speaks about a historiographical campaign deployed by the state through its school system, with the purpose to remind every young French of a series of antique slaughters, such as 'the night of Saint Bartholomew' and 'the Midi massacre', which had by the nineteenth century already been inscribed as 'family history'. Anderson states that the method of having to 'have forgotten' tragedies of which one needs to be constantly 'reminded' turned out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies all over the world.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, thoughts on the sense of 'belonging' and 'togetherness', which underline the perception of the nation as an imagined community, have been articulated by the historians Eviatar Zerubavel and Wolf Kansteiner through the lens of memory.

Zerubavel, in the book *Time maps*, introduced the concept 'mnemonic community', which refers to families, ethnic groups and nations. The author examines the ways entire communities, and not just individuals, remember the past.<sup>22</sup> He elaborates on how the members of these communities collectively share memories of an allegedly common past. As he explicitly states: 'a community's collective memory includes only those memories shared by its members as a group. As such, it invokes a common past that they all seem to recall.'<sup>23</sup> Zerubavel brings out terms, such as 'mnemonic traditions',

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<sup>21</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London-New York 2006) 201.

<sup>22</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time maps: collective memory and the social shape of the past* (Chicago 2003) 2.

<sup>23</sup> Zerubavel, *Time maps*, 4.

'commemoration' and 'social nature of human memory', which all refer to a sense of being a member of a particular community, which determines what and how an individual remembers, as it is eminently manifested within nations. Last, all these terms used by Zerubavel point to the constructed and practiced nature of identity: traditions have to be upheld and commemorations have to be performed on a repeated basis. In other words, national identity is something that has to be performed through memory practice in and by a particular community.

With this train of thought, Kansteiner, in the article 'Finding meaning in memory: A Methodological critique of collective memory studies', claims that collective memory originates from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are placed in the life-worlds of individuals who participate in the communal life. Collective memory is based in a given society and its group of signs and symbols, and it exists on the level of families, professions, ethnic and regional groups, social classes and nations. This, explains the author, indicates that people are always part of a variety of mnemonic communities, and that collective remembering can be explored in private settings as well as in the public sphere. On any level, he concludes, collective memory works by including individual experiences under cultural schemes that make them comprehensible and meaningful.<sup>24</sup>

Duyvendak also turns the subject to the uprooting experience of migration. As he argues, the immigrants are displaced between worlds, living between a lost past and a fluid present.<sup>25</sup> McKinley and Murray continued this thought by writing that the expatriates have to balance their life between the known and the unknown.<sup>26</sup> In this state of life, memory is the reason that the expatriates still feel a part of the community of their 'lost' homeland. Haijink sets his focus on the celebration of festivals and the performance of rituals in preserving the imagined community of the nation. As he writes: 'when immigrating, everyone clings to their own national identity. People celebrate

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<sup>24</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding meaning in memory: A methodological critique of collective memory studies' *History and Theory* 41 (2002) 188-189.

<sup>25</sup> Duyvendak, *The politics of home*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> McKinley Susan, Murray Linda, 'Living with change' in Jo Parfitt (ed.), *The source book: An expatriate social history, 1927-2007* (Den Haag 2008) 001.

their own festivals and look for food and sweets from their own country. You see that with all nationalities...It is striking how far some of the expatriates go to find something in the host country that is similar to their homeland.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the expatriates adopt all the devices mentioned by Zerubavel to practice the 'mnemonic community'. Briefly, it is exactly what Mrs. Rosita Ants, archivist of the Expatriate Archive Center, mentioned in a private conversation: the expatriates, albeit being in a foreign country, they feel closer to their own nationality than ever.

However, as McKinley and Murray claim, adjustment appears to be unavoidable with a move. Expatriates eventually have to accept the fact that they live in a new culture and in the course of time they become more and more accustomed to viewing their home country through another culture's eyes.<sup>28</sup> This process affirms Lechner's and Henkes' argument that the notion of national identity is becoming a reflexive discourse in cases of globalization and migration.

Having highlighted the significance of shared memory in preserving the imagined community of the nation, the relation between memory and place is another point that needs to be stressed. Eviatar Zerubavel clearly designated the nature of this relation. He argued that despite the fact that memory is a mental act, people often try to ground it in some tangible reality. One of the most effective ways to bridge the gap between noncontiguous points in history 'is by establishing a connection that allows them to almost literally touch one another.'<sup>29</sup> The constancy of place, as he claims, is a formidable basis for establishing a sense of sameness. Even as people undergo dramatic changes both individually and collectively, their physical surroundings usually remain relatively stable.

I would add here that in the case of the expatriates the physical surroundings naturally do not remain the same. What remains unchanged though in their minds is the physical environment of their 'lost' homeland. As

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<sup>27</sup> Michiel Haijtinck, 'The Expatriate Archive Centre: a second home for expats', <http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/expatriate-archive-centre-second-homeexpats> (11-10-2009).

<sup>28</sup> McKinley and Murray, 'Living with change', 002.

<sup>29</sup> Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 39-42.

Zerubavel explains, a place constitutes a reliable locus of memories and often serves as major foci of personal as well as group nostalgia. For example, places such as historic buildings, neighborhoods and ruins from the past constitute the national heritage of a nation and are carefully preserved to establish a historical continuity with what seems to be an irrecoverable past. A place provides a sense of permanence and helps promote the highly reassuring conservative illusion that nothing fundamental has really changed.<sup>30</sup> In my view, the same reassuring 'illusion' is offered to the expatriates by the certainty that no matter how far they go nothing has fundamentally changed, since their homeland remains a stable place - at least in their thoughts – which is always there for them to return.

The strong relation between memory and place is also expressed through homesickness, a feeling which, in the case of the immigrants and the expatriates, arises from the fact that they do not have a fixed place. Jan-Willem Duyvendak defined this feeling as the sense of longing for another place, referring to a spatial/geographical separation, while van Tilburg, Vingerhoets and van Heck described it as a state of distress for those who have left their house and home and find themselves in a new, unfamiliar environment.<sup>31</sup>

Solrun Williksen and Niggel Rapport, editors of the book *Reveries of home: Nostalgia, authenticity and the performance of place* have extensively discussed the several manifestations of 'place' in the lives of the immigrants. For the authors, home is the achievement of a nostalgic mood. As they argue, the immigrants, who move between homes and who form homes in movement, do not necessarily sacrifice identification with places. It is rather that place is not taken for granted, it is not singular and it is not once-and-for-all. That is the reason for the emphasis on 'emplacement', the way in which the place of identity, of self and society, is continually generated by acts of home-making.<sup>32</sup>

In this frame, the authors introduce in their book essays which emphasize on the power of items, such as souvenirs from home or even one's

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<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>31</sup> M. A. L. Van Tilburg, A. J. J. M. Vingerhoets, G. L. Van Heck, 'Homesickness: a review of the literature' *Psychological medicine* 26 (1996) 899.

<sup>32</sup> Solrun Williksen and Niggel Rapport, Introduction in Williksen and Rapport (eds.), *Reveries of home: Nostalgia, authenticity and the performance of place* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2010) 3-4.



land property, in triggering and sustaining the nostalgia of a certain place, and they elaborate on how these items of the 'nation' provide physical and emotional accommodation at times of dispersion and dissolution.<sup>33</sup> As several authors make clear in their contributions to the book, the saturation of nostalgia can be felt to different extents, in different objects and at different times.<sup>34</sup>

Maria Amelia Viteri in 'Nostalgia, food and belonging: Ecuadorians in New York City' concentrates on the feeling of nostalgia as a part of a migrant's everyday life. This feeling, says the author, is lived, imagined, invented and re-invented in many different ways. Viteri explores elements related to food, nostalgia, identities, symbols, nationhood and migration and re-thinks notions of space and the continuum of transnational identities. To start with, the author states that nostalgia is not a given content as its form, meanings and effects change with the context, depending on where the speaker stands in the present. The impossibility of a return to one's homeland, says Viteri, permeates the lives of immigrants across the globe. The immigrants' re-enactment of rituals, the re-creation of places and the circulation of 'nostalgia food products' define alternative ways of belonging to their homeland as well as to new land.<sup>35</sup>

The author adds that when one's safe and stable connection to the collectivity and the homeland becomes threatened, then this connection becomes articulated and reflexive. She also takes a closer look to the way nostalgia in relation to food manifests itself in a multitude of national identities. From this point of view, Viteri claims that food has been conceptualized as a nostalgic enactment of identity, as a celebration of a diasporic community's resilience and as an opportunity to bring history and memory together under difficult circumstances. Food acts as a signifier in the way Ecuadorians - since the author takes them as her study case - re-define their own national identity.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the author writes that a 'still picture' remains in our mind from the time we leave our country. This still picture, she says, stays close,

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<sup>33</sup> Williksen and Rapport, Introduction in *Reveries of home*, 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> Maria Amelia Viteri, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging: Ecuadorians in New York City' in Sarah Albiez et al (eds.), *Ethnicity, belonging and citizenship* (Madrid 2011) 221.

<sup>36</sup> Viteri, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging', 222.

immovable and unchangeable until the day we return. Nostalgia, argues Viteri, sets in motion this dialectic of closeness and distancing, and traditional food and drinks, as part of the nostalgic mood, achieve, even if momentarily, a 'return' to the lost homeland.<sup>37</sup>

All in all, in a world characterized by the mobility of people that the fast-forward dynamics of globalization put forward, identity seems connected to memory. From national symbols, such as the colors of the flag, to traditional dishes, nostalgia works as a magnifier lens<sup>38</sup> and defines the way people remember, feel and express themselves.

All the theories presented so far come to underline one thing: the significance of the sense of belonging for human beings. A few other scholars explicitly affirm the above observation in their studies. Carol E. Kelley in the book *Accidental immigrants and the search for home: Women, cultural identity, and community* portrays the lives of four women and claims that the backgrounds of the four accidental immigrants provide an 'insight into the lives of any immigrant from any setting: that they have had the opportunity to choose their homes does not eliminate the compelling human need to belong and to feel at home.'<sup>39</sup>

Liisa Malkki in the article 'National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees' rethinks 'the question of roots' and states that the necessity to study further the concept of 'rootedness' stems from the fact that 'to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.'<sup>40</sup>

Finally, David Fitzgerald in his article 'Colonies of the little motherland: Membership, space, and time in Mexican migrant hometown associations' added an interesting perspective to the theme of 'belonging' through the prism of technology. According to the author, the new transportation and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Carol E. Kelley, *Accidental immigrants and the search for home: Women, cultural identity, and community* (Philadelphia 2013) 3.

<sup>40</sup> L. Malkki, 'National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees', *Cultural anthropology* 7 (2008) 24.

communication technologies stretch the limits of space and time and constitute the driving forces which allow migrants to belong to a single community anchored in multiple, distant geographic localities.<sup>41</sup>

### **A historiographical gap**

Up to this point, several articulations of the immigrant life have been witnessed. The concept of national identity has been problematized due to the processes of migration and globalization, which define national identity as a constructed notion, a reflexive discourse. Within this framework, the migrants have been demonstrated as interesting study objects in relation to the subject of national identity because of the fact that they have moved out of the 'nation' and the limits of their spatially fixed 'mnemonic community'. In addition, 'belonging' has been established as a human need, therefore the feelings of nostalgia and homesickness have been dealt as important aspects of the immigrant life. Both feelings have been presented as factors that makes people who live abroad get attached to materials, such as souvenirs from home or a family compound (Williksen and Rapport), and traditional food (Viteri), which all serve as a means to 'return' to and recreate the lost homelands. The theories of the authors that have been cited so far also have raised the idea that through the processes of letter-writing and nostalgia/homesickness, the national identity of the immigrant people is being negotiated and re-defined. (Henkes and Fitzgerald)

It is essential to underline that the previously mentioned studies deal with immigrants. However, my research topic concerns the expatriates, and as it has been stated at a former point of this chapter, an expatriate is not an immigrant whatsoever. But, finding literature for my theme proved to be a difficult task, since the existing literature on national identity concerns either the natives of a country or the immigrants. The studies which do discuss the issue of the expatriates concentrate on the contribution of the expatriates in the globalizing job market or the expatriates' citizenship status after having lived

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<sup>41</sup> D. Fitzgerald, 'Colonies of the little motherland: membership, space, and time in Mexican migrant hometown associations', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50 (2008) 145.

abroad for a considerable amount of time.<sup>42</sup> It is remarkable that heretofore I have not come across with any study that deals with the expatriates in the light of national identity.

Hence, there is a historiographical gap that my research aims to cover. The way I intend to do that is discussed below in detail.

### **1.3 Research questions, sources and methods**

My Master Thesis' purpose is to explore the ways two expatriate families identify with their homeland while living abroad in the period 1978-2009. More specifically, I aim to discover how these expatriates' national identity is being negotiated and (re)adapted when they live far away from their own country, as this procedure is expressed through the practice of letter-writing. I also investigate what the role of homesickness and nostalgia is within this process, and how these feelings are (not) affected by the introduction of new communication technologies in the course of the 1990's (final decade of the twentieth century-start of the twenty-first century). For instance, is the second family (correspondence 1990-2009) less nostalgic and/or homesick about 'home'?

In order to increase knowledge on the case of the expatriates I have decided to formulate my main research question as follows: *How is the national identity of two expatriate families being expressed through their private correspondences and how did their national identifications change during this period (1978-2009)?*

In order to answer my main research question, I have used five sub-questions:

1. How do the expatriate families identify with their homeland?
2. What do they feel nostalgic about?
3. What are they homesick about?

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<sup>42</sup> An example is Nancy Green's articles 'Expatriation, Expatriates and Expats: the American Transformation of a Concept', *The American Historical Review* 114 (2009) 307-328, and 'The politics of exit: Reversing the immigration paradigm' *The journal of modern history* 77 (2005) 263 – 289.

4. How is 'writing home' a strategy to cope with nostalgia and homesickness?
5. Did the advent of new means of communication, i.e. fax machines and later the internet, cause changes in the ways the expatriate families identify with their home country? For instance, is the second family (correspondence 1990-2009) less nostalgic and/or homesick about 'home'?

For the purpose of my research I have studied approximately five hundred letters written by two expatriate families, all carefully collected and stored in the Expatriate Archive Center in The Hague. The specific families have been chosen due to the fact that English is the language of their correspondence. Dutch speaking families were not an option for me, since I do not read Dutch.

The first family archive is of an American family that lived and worked in Zambia and Cameroon. The family is constituted by a husband, a wife and a child, and their correspondence took place from 1978 to 1983. The child of the family was born while the family was living in Cameroon. Both parents were brilliant academics, who held various teaching positions in countries of Africa, Europe and America, published several scientific articles and gave numerous presentations around the world. The husband was also the headmaster of a number of schools in Africa and Europe. The wife was the one who donated the archive to the Expatriate Archive Center, and it contains letters from life their pre-life in the U.S.A. and their time in Africa.

The second family has Australian origins and its archive contains correspondence from the period 1990-2009. The family consists of a husband, a wife and two children that lived in the UK, Norway and The Netherlands. The husband is a chemical engineer who occupied several positions in the Shell Company during his successful career, while the wife was an early childhood educator, who later became co-founder of the Expatriate Archive Center. The two children were both born in Australia in the early 80's. The main correspondence of this archive is between the wife of the family and her

parents back in Australia, and refers to various aspects of the life in the three previously mentioned countries.

The nature of my research required employing qualitative research methods considering that the main task was the textual analysis of the letters of the expatriates. For the textual analysis of these letters the methods I was taught in the course of Dr. Karin Willemse, 'Text and context, from source to science' proved of use. Particularly, the scrutiny of the so-called 'narratives of self'<sup>43</sup> for finding words and points which delineate the context in which a specific text was written, and simultaneously reveal the variety of identities that a writer/narrator is constituted of, was a general tactic I followed while reading the letters.

The exact method I employed while reading my sources and my main scheme of analysis was determined by the five sub-questions of my thesis. Specifically, in every letter I read I documented the parts that were indicative for my five questions. Later I regrouped these parts according to the five themes of my scheme. It should be noted that especially for the first section of each of my empirical chapters I used a scheme of analysis inspired by the term 'items of home' introduced by Solrun Williksen and Niggel Raport. Based on this, I analyzed and separated the relevant data I found in my sources into 'material items of home', 'immaterial items of home', 'humans from home' and 'theoretical ways of identification with home'. The exact function of the particular scheme of analysis is presented in more detail in the forthcoming chapters.

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<sup>43</sup> Dr. Karin Willemse, *Course guide: Text and Context, from source to science* (Rotterdam 2012) 4.

## **1.4 Design of the thesis**

This introductory chapter of this thesis is followed by two empirical chapters. Both of them follow the same structure: Each is divided in five sections, where my research questions are addressed. With the material found in the archives of the American and the Australian family, the five sections of the empirical chapters answer one by one the above mentioned questions, and contain a number of quotations from the correspondence of the two families to build my argument and illustrate my points. The fourth chapter of my thesis discusses the similarities and the differences found between the two expatriate families, and tries to map a historical development between the early 70's and early 00's. The comparative chapter is also structured according to the five different questions mentioned before. The conclusion of the thesis naturally includes the final remarks of my research. Simultaneously, I try to move a step further from the literature that already exists by depicting how 'my' expatriates saw and felt 'home' in terms of national identity. Moreover, I outline some ideas for further research into the fascinating world of the expatriates.

## **2. COUNTRY ROADS. Americans in Africa, 1978-1983.**

The white American teacher couple, Rick and Cathleen S., having worked for several years in Columbus, Indiana, USA, decided in 1978 to apply for finding two teaching positions somewhere else in the world. The plain reason for this decision was their burning desire to gain more experiences and learn new things by living and teaching in different countries of the world. In general, they wanted to lead an adventurous life, off the beaten path. After getting their first new teaching position in an international school in Lusaka, Zambia, they left USA in 1979. Two years later they were offered another, more profitable teaching position in Cameroon, so they moved there.

This chapter explores the ways the two American expatriates expressed their sense of national identity through their correspondence back home. To let the reader get a first idea about the content of the American couple's correspondence, their archive is mainly constituted by typed letters and postcards sent mostly to Kathleen's mother, and rarely to some close friends, as well as few newsletters sent to multiple receivers, such as friends and relatives. Returning to the aims of the chapter, it further answers how the feelings of nostalgia and homesickness influenced the identification with the homeland process while the couple was experiencing their adventures and new lifestyle in Africa. Finally, it deals with the practice of letter-writing as a strategy to cope with this kind of feelings, and it also examines the role of technology within this framework. The following section starts the exploration by examining the ways the Americans identified with their homeland within their daily life in the two African countries.

### **2.1 National identity: 'I am product of this country.'**

Rick S., a while before leaving U.S.A, was stating 'I am 28 years and product of this country'<sup>44</sup> in an interview conducted by the local newspaper of Columbus, Indiana, due to the couple's impending move. The goal of this section is to examine whether the couple's future life and attitude in Africa proved Rick's statement.

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<sup>44</sup> Greg Hoard, 'Time for change', *Viva the Republic*, 16 July 1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.1.1.01.03.



The theory that led the way of my research was devised by the anthropologists Solrun Williksen and Nigel Rapport. As it has been mentioned in the introduction chapter of this thesis, the two authors spoke about 'acts of homemaking' and 'items from home' or 'items of nation', as a way to provide physical and emotional accommodation when people live away from their motherland. The American TV movies and ball games can serve as a first example in the correspondence of the American expatriates.

From Yaoundé in Cameroon, Rick writes to his mother in-law that he and Kathleen bought as a present for themselves 'a television and videotape recorder'<sup>45</sup>. 'Since there are no movies in English in town (...) we are a bit limited in "easy" entertainment'<sup>46</sup>, he continues, meaning by 'easy entertainment', the entertainment that one can find in the living-room of their own house. The American Embassy has a collection of movies, he explains, 'but there are times when we come home tired from school or shopping and just want to be entertained at home.'<sup>47</sup> For that reason he asked Kathleen's mother to keep her ears open for anyone who might have a recorder. 'We'd be glad to pay for the tape and postage for an occasional ball game or such. The tapes can be sent in an envelope like you used for the books you sent.'<sup>48</sup> What we see here is that they were willing even to pay for a spectacle that would come straight from home, since as they thought, this could provide them with the entertainment they missed when staying in their house in Yaoundé.

Another 'item from home' that was needed during the stay in Africa was a sports magazine. 'My "Sports Illustrated" comes in the mail'<sup>49</sup>, writes Rick to his mom in-law, informing her that he is a subscriber of this magazine. Rick was a tennis athlete himself (he was also teaching tennis in the schools he worked), and he had a great interest in sports of all kind. He occasionally dedicated entire paragraphs in his letters commenting on the U.S.A. sports scene, showing that he was really well aware of what was going on at home

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from Rick S. to Kathleen's mother, 10-12-1981, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1 437 2 3 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Rick S. to Kathleen's mother, 29-11-1983, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1 437 2 4 2.

sports-wise, and how important this information was for him. The following quotation is an example of his well-informed comments: 'Seems like New Orleans still might have a shot, but a long one. Miami looks pretty solid, but several of the division races are still close and far from over.'<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, in the American's correspondence, apart from the 'items from home' we also come across with the 'humans from home', paraphrasing Williksen and Rapport's term. To elaborate, the other Americans that Rick and Kathleen met in Zambia and Cameroon were also a source of emotional accommodation for the couple.

From Zambia, in a letter where they were writing to Kathleen's mother about the difficulties they face in the country - as it will be described in the following section of this chapter - they consoled her in the end by saying: 'We have already met some great and generous friends and we are quite happy with life in general so far.'<sup>51</sup> Friends here are the ones who make a challenging life in a poor country a bit happier. In that sense, it is noteworthy that most of the people that Rick and Kathleen mentioned in their correspondence as friends, acquaintances and people they trusted when needed come from U.S.A.

To provide some examples, when Rick's mother died, Kathleen wrote to her mother: 'It's strange--of the other American couples here, who are about our age, both the men lost their mothers while living in Africa'<sup>52</sup>, showing that they shared their personal experiences with their American friends, finding comfort in their similar misfortunes while being away from home. In addition, most of the people they knew were met in the American embassy and they used to call them 'American embassy folks.'<sup>53</sup> The American embassy was in general a benchmark throughout the couple's correspondence. With some of the people they met there they were close enough to baby-sit for their children:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 20-11-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.11

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 17-10-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0052.1.2.03.06.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Rick and Kathleen S. to Kathleen's mother, 20-9-1980, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0052.1.2.03.30.

'Next week we'll be baby-sitting for the two American girls whom we sat for once before.'<sup>54</sup>

In their trips they also preferred to hang out with Americans: 'In Dar, we stayed with some very fine American folks we'd met a few weeks previously at the conference in Moshi.'<sup>55</sup> Finally, from another trip to Malawi Kathleen writes: 'A crown came off of my tooth. I got it fixed (...) by an American dentist'<sup>56</sup>; and when she was about to give birth to her child in Cameroon she was a bit afraid of the quality of the hospitals in a third-world country; however, this is what she wrote to her mom about some other acquaintance of hers, who delivered their babies in Cameroon: 'Each mother is American. Each mother has expressed satisfaction with the doctor and the hospital and that gives me confidence.'<sup>57</sup>

The last two quotations make apparent that an American's expertise and opinion is trusted in dire straits. And all the quotations cited within this subsection, indicate, in my opinion, the identification with the homeland through the association with the people from the homeland. But a paradox is also highlighted: Although the Americans were seeking for an adventurous life in Africa, they actually socialized mostly with other expatriates. They did not mingle with the native, black population in terms of friendships, something that could give them way more alternative experiences. Last, the fact that the Americans did not socialize with the black population of the countries they lived in, brings to surface, in my opinion, another element: their awareness of the differences between the black and the white race. The forthcoming section of this chapter will pore over this aspect.

From the material 'items from home', and the people from home as means to identify with the homeland, we now move to more theoretical ways of identification. I say theoretical because, as it will be shown later, they are

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<sup>54</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>55</sup> Newsletter from Rick and Kathleen, 11-1980, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.33.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Rick and Kathleen S. to Kathleen's mother, 12-1-1980, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0052.1.2.03.16.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 26-12-1981, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1 437 2 3 7.

products of the mind. The American landscape functions as a first example of this 'theoretical' identification with the homeland.

Rick and Kathleen travelled a lot around the African continent when they were on holidays from work. Sightseeing around Africa was a continuous source of comparisons between the American scenery and that of the new places. Solrun Williksen and Niggel Rapport have emphasized in their study on the role of things from home, such as souvenirs and even one's land property, in triggering and sustaining the nostalgia of a certain place.<sup>58</sup> In this case, we may not deal with the sight of someone's property, but we come across with the nostalgic thoughts about the homeland that a similar to homeland's landscape can evoke.

For instance, from Cape Town Kathleen writes to her mother: 'Cape Town reminded us of San Francisco with its coastline and its hills. (...) The atmosphere of Cape Town is like that of San Francisco, too: sophisticated, cosmopolitan, accepting, exciting'<sup>59</sup>, and from the diamond mining city of Kimberley in South Africa: 'Kimberley remains pretty much a one-horse town in the middle of the desert, like some Dodge City, or Lead, South Dakota, in the middle of Africa.'<sup>60</sup> In rural Kenya they came across with the spectacular sight - as they described it - of running herds consisted of thousands of animals, which reminded her 'of what the American plains must have looked like in the heyday of the bison.'<sup>61</sup> From Mombasa they write: 'Mombasa is a port city on the east coast of Kenya, where lies the warm Indian Ocean. Soon, the landscape began to look like Florida and a mid-afternoon shower and the increased humidity completed the illusion'<sup>62</sup>, while from the area around the lake Naruku, Nairobi, they sent:

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<sup>58</sup> Solrun Williksen, Niggel Rapport, introduction in *Reveries of home: Nostalgia, authenticity and the performance of place* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2010) 11-12.

<sup>59</sup> Newsletter from Rick and Kathleen, 11-1980, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.33.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem.

'Along the way we drove through huge ranches, much reminiscent of the American west, where fences stretched for miles. (Of course, we don't usually see wild giraffes running around on American ranches, as we did here, but it was otherwise similar.'<sup>63</sup>

The way I perceive it, all the comparisons in the correspondence of the American couple, have been made 'on the spot'; they seem to be the first thought of the authors of the letters when they saw a new sight, and it is noteworthy that all of them have a positive connotation in relation to America. Nevertheless, not all comparisons are positive. The newsletter of the couple from South Africa starts with the following lines:

'Déjà vu--you know that feeling that you've already seen something, that you've been somewhere before, as if in a dream? Well, that's the feeling we had after a few days in the Republic: of South Africa. We found it to be a country so like America that it was astounding. The cars, roads, buildings, stores, fashions, etc.-all could easily have been from Anytown, U.S.A.'<sup>64</sup>

But then the comparison turns to a criticism against the America of the past:

'And yet the déjà vu goes deeper: for we soon had the eerie feeling that this was the U.S. of twenty-five years ago, that somehow we had wandered back to what things were like in America in the 1950's. People's attitudes towards race, the economic affluence, the booming economy, the conspicuous consumption, a "We're right, they're wrong" attitude towards the rest of the world.'<sup>65</sup>

In my point of my view, the similar to America's scenery of South Africa brought to surface negative thoughts about the American society of the past. This ascertainment is important due to the fact that the identification with the homeland through the element of scenery this time, did not only induce nostalgia, as Williksen and Rapport claim that the sight of 'items from home' does. The last quotation speaks of identification with the homeland, since it compares the native country with another one, but it introduces a new way of identifying; not through positive feelings about the homeland, but through a

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<sup>63</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>64</sup> Newsletter from Rick and Kathleen, 12-2-1981, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.40.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem.

negative acknowledgement about the past of the motherland. However, there is always the other side of the coin. Someone could distinguish in this comparison between current South Africa and the America of the past, a latent pride about the social progress of the US in the last decades. I wish to leave that to the judgment of the reader. One way or another though, we are dealing with a manifestation of national identity and identification with the homeland.

Having spoken about the progress in the American society in the previous paragraph, by keep examining closely the correspondence of the expatriate couple, we encounter another comparison, this time through the formation of parallels between the history of the home country with that of the new land. Kathleen wrote in one of her first letters from Zambia:

'A fellow American pointed out last week that we're right where it's at in terms of history being made, etc. I've felt strong parallels all along between the developing African countries and America during the Industrial Revolution. That's a very exciting point to consider, you must admit.'<sup>66</sup>

It is obvious that the glorious history of the relatively young nation of U.S.A. was the source of inspiration for Kathleen to make the previous comparison. The specific phrase though, apart from the identification with the history of the native country, it implies a connection with the new nation as well, and the hope to develop as successfully as the home country.

Furthermore, politics is another subject that is important to stay updated about. Naturally, the information needed could be provided by the local American embassy via oral conversations, so Rick and Kathleen did not need to subscribe to a newspaper from home, as Rick had to do with sports. Here is an example of Kathleen's critical thoughts about the political scene of the America of the 80's:

'I think everyone hopes Reagan can help the country before it is too late. We may not all be Republicans and we may not all think he's the greatest, but the general consensus of the Americans here is supportive (...) I don't know anyone who is firmly convinced that he was the best man for the job, etc., but we all hope he can do it.'

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<sup>66</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 20-11-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.11

After these wishful thoughts she ends up with a more pessimist statement:

'His foreign policies scare hell out of me. He seems to have a very naive approach to foreign policy--a sort of good-guy/bad-guy point of view which is an oversimplification of the world as it stands now. If he can just keep his trap shut, perhaps he won't do too much damage, but he is rather a bull in a china shop and his ideas about American supremacy seem about 30 years out of date.'<sup>67</sup>

Kathleen is apparently well aware of the political situation in U.S.A. and her concerned thoughts prove her interest in the future of the homeland. It is noteworthy that although the letter is sent from a country where the family had problems to face (Zambia), the problems of the home country are not pushed aside, but they serve as a reason to identify with home.

Even the educational system of the home country is something to identify with. As it was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Rick and Kathleen were teachers. They cared a lot about their careers and before moving to a new country the image of the school that they were going to work in the new country was in the middle of the decision (to go/not to go) discussions. That was the case when they were thinking to move from Zambia to Cameroon. In a long list of the advantages and disadvantages of each school, the school of Cameroon - although not so international as the school in Zambia, which was a big advantage for the couple - won because 'It is primarily American in thrust and is nurtured by the American Embassy.'<sup>68</sup> To my eye, that is important for the couple because almost all of their teaching experience was gained in U.S.A., therefore they would feel 'safer' to teach based on the methods of the American educational system.

By the same token, when Kathleen's son, Preston, was already 1 year old, she wrote in one of her letters to her mother that during lunchtime she leaves from school and drives her son and his nanny to the American Club,

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<sup>67</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 21-4-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.47.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 31-3-1981, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.44.

which 'shares the same grounds as the school.'<sup>69</sup> It becomes evident that the American educational principles are significant for the couple and that she also wants her son to grow up with the American values. In my opinion, a clear instance of the identification with the motherland and an expression of national identity.

Last but not least, the material 'items from home' that we analyzed in the beginning of this section as means to identify with the motherland, can also take the form of 'immaterial' items of home in the American couple's correspondence. The national holidays of the native country can be seen as an 'immaterial' item of nation and the celebration of these holidays while living so far away from the homeland is a distinct way of identifying with it. As the director of the Expatriate Archive Centre, Elske van Holk-van Eysinga brought to notice in an online interview: 'When immigrating, everyone clings to their own national identity. People celebrate their own festivals and look for food and sweets from their own country.'<sup>70</sup> The American expatriate couple was not an exception.

From Lusaka, Zambia Kathleen writes her mother: 'The American Embassy here had a little Thanksgiving wingding for us com-patriots.'<sup>71</sup>, and from Yaoundé, Cameroon she talks to her about a Christmas festivity that the school she works prepares for its students. She writes characteristically: 'Holidays are pretty important when you can't be at home with your family, so we're just going to do the best we can.'<sup>72</sup> As far as I am concerned, the desire to celebrate the national holidays of your homeland and to seek the company of your compatriots, since you cannot be with your beloved ones who are far away from you, signifies an expression of national identity, a manifestation of still feeling a part of your 'lost' home, as imposed by feelings of nostalgia for the home country. As Maria Amelia Viteri stressed in her brilliant study 'the

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<sup>69</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 3-2-1983, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1 437 2 3 31.

<sup>70</sup> M. Haijink, 'The Expatriate Archive Centre: a second home for expats' <http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/expatriate-archive-centre-second-home-expats>. (11-10-2009)

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 26-11-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.12.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 26-11-1982, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1 437 2 3 28.



immigrants' re-enactment of rituals define alternative ways of belonging to their homeland.'<sup>73</sup>

Finally, music can be considered as a characteristic 'immaterial' item of the nation. Kathleen expressed her connection with this 'item' by writing to her mother that she was able to find an American 'Sears Silverstone' guitar and continue her practice on guitar-playing, which was one of her favorite hobbies. She also wrote: 'I conduct a folk-singing club at school every Monday afternoon. This consists of about 15 girls and I sitting around and singing songs like "Country Roads" and "Blowing in the Wind."<sup>74</sup>

By reading this, we realize that Kathleen decided to organize a music group which would give her the opportunity to teach the students of the international school she worked how to sing folk music, and make them familiar with America's traditional music. The songs that she mentioned in her letter singing to her students' group are very popular folk songs by the American artists John Denver and Bob Dylan respectively, with beautiful, deep lyrics. Even more, the song 'Country Roads' has a clear, nostalgic content. To share my thoughts with you, the lyrics of the refrain of this song are: 'Country roads take me home, to the place I belong, West Virginia, mountain mama, take me home country roads.' In my view Kathleen's willingness to organize a group of students with the purpose to teach them American traditional folk music, and her picture singing a song with the lyrics mentioned before, illustrate an 'act of homemaking' – to speak with Williksen and Rapport's terms. It is a way for Kathleen to sustain her identity and it constitutes a part of the identification process with the mother country.

This section was an insight to the numerous ways that the American expatriates identified with their homeland while living in Africa. After scrutinizing the correspondence of the couple we have concluded that the identification process with the homeland was actualized through 'acts of homemaking' and the 'items of home'. But what we have not questioned yet is

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<sup>73</sup> Viteri, Maria Amelia, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging: Ecuadorians in New York City', in Sarah Albiez et al (eds.) *Ethnicity, belonging and citizenship* (Madrid 2011) 221.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Rick and Kathleen S. to Kathleen's mother, 17-10-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.06.

what the powers which caused the identification with the native country were in the particular correspondence. More specifically, which were the feelings who necessitated the need of 'home' when living far away from it, as manifested through the items from home and acts of home-making? In this framework, the following section starts the research by examining the role of the feeling of homesickness, and investigates under which circumstances this feeling comes to surface and in what forms.

## **2.2 Homesickness: The lost freedom of movement**

Homesickness is defined as the sense of longing for another place and it refers to a spatial/geographical separation.<sup>75</sup> It remains to be seen how and to what extent the American couple experienced it while living in the African countries.

To start with, it may sound as self-evident, but the life in the couple's first posting, Zambia, was not easy for them. Frequently enough, there are parts in their letters, which describe the difficult aspects of life in this African country. Their words speak for themselves. They write that their house had 'burglar bars on all the windows.' That was necessary, they explain 'because the Zambian burglars have been known to roll people right off their beds and steal their sheets right out from under them.'<sup>76</sup> Regarding their movement to Zambia they say: 'Our belongings arrived last week. One box was completely split open. Many small things were missing.'<sup>77</sup> For this reason they ask Kathleen's mother not to mail them 'anything but letters for the moment, since we'll have to give you instructions on how to disguise anything someone might want to steal.'<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, as the coming quotations show, shopping was also troublesome in terms of personal safety: 'The stores are always crowded and pickpockets are a problem'<sup>79</sup>, but also food-wise: 'One store doesn't have more

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<sup>75</sup> Jan-Willem Duyvendak, *The politics of home. Belonging and nostalgia in Western Europe and the US* (New York 2011) 123.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her friends Don and Leslie, 17-9-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.03.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem.

than a handful of the things on your list anyway. You do get to go to a lot of stores that way and that certainly is fun. Sometimes it takes you three hours to do a week's shopping!<sup>80</sup> And more eloquently:

'There are many products that simply do not exist in Zambia. (...) Other things are sporadically unavailable for six months at a time. (...) You buy huge quantities of such items when they are available and store them away for the times when famine strikes. (...) You find yourself stopping people on the streets and saying, "Where did you get that?" and then rushing to the store hoping it isn't sold out yet. To get items that are periodically scarce you have to "queue up", a British euphemism for standing in line for two to three hours.'<sup>81</sup>

The prices of the products were another problem: 'Most things here are extremely expensive'<sup>82</sup>, they write. Even the water was a source of trouble: 'The water here varies in quality. Last week it smelled and tasted vile, so we boiled all our water for drinking and for ice. This week it has so much chlorine the bath smells like a swimming pool.'<sup>83</sup>

All these adversities, from not being able to find enough food to have your mailed things from home stolen - although do not explicitly state so - they do contain a negative comparison with the comforts of the life in America. In my opinion, this is exactly what is being missed when facing the hard reality of the daily life in Zambia. As expected though, our subjects, Kathleen and Rick, with their adventurous spirit, see this kind of life as a challenge; they maintain their 'sunny outlook'<sup>84</sup> and try 'to approach life here with tolerance and a sense of humor.'<sup>85</sup> Kathleen also reassures her worried mother that they generally feel quite happy with their life, since they have also made some great friends - as it has been mentioned in the previous section - , and that sometimes they are pinching themselves they are in Africa.<sup>86</sup> Finally she writes: 'If I seem to

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<sup>80</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 20-11-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.11

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem..

emphasize the negative, it is because some things that are so different from home just happen to be different in a negative way.<sup>87</sup>

In my point of view, the negative difference of the different things in Zambia reveals what the two expatriates feel homesick about: the comfortable life of their own country. But it also encloses a general truth about the expatriates, and particularly the 'volunteer expatriates' as in the case of the American family: Being homesick about certain things in my homeland does not mean that I cannot appreciate my new life, even the challenges included.

Nevertheless, finding yourself being constantly exposed to difficult conditions can decrease, as time goes by, the initial tolerance and patience. By a trip to the neighbor to Zambia Malawi, the huge difference that they saw between the life in the two countries made the American couple realize even more the hard situation in Zambia: The 'high population density in the cities', the streets which 'are always crowded by Africans who are poor, unemployed, and often not too friendly to their rich white brothers' and also 'crowded with thieves and pickpockets'; car theft, which 'is as common as car break-ins and house burglaries', as well as residences which 'are surrounded by high cement walls whose tops are lined with jagged glass or barbed wire.'<sup>88</sup> All these end up in feelings of discontent and make homesickness much more obvious.

Before proceeding to the illustration of this point, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the words 'rich, white brothers' that the Americans used in a former quotation, and analyze on the awareness of racial difference, as promised in the preceding section. The specific words reveal, in my opinion, a general attitude of the American couple. They craved to live an alternative life in Africa, but – subconsciously, can one argue - a life as experienced by a privileged, white American, whose salary can ensure, for instance, the luxury to travel around Africa when wanted. The problems they faced in Zambia are seen by 'a distance'. It is the poor black population who under the specific social circumstances of their country sees them as 'white and rich', and is being hostile to them. Therefore, all they decide to do is not to mingle with this

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<sup>87</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>88</sup> Newsletter from Rick and Kathleen, 28-1-1980, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.17.

population, bitterly understanding – as they perceive it – the differences between the two races.

Back to the feeling of homesickness as a result of a sense of general discontent about the host country, after a trip to Malawi writes the couple: ‘In Malawi, we felt at home. We were lucky enough to stay with some friends of friends who were most gracious and their neighborhood strongly resembled suburban American, where one lawn joins the other, where children can safely run down the street to Johnny’s, and, where you can take a walk after dinner and be greeted by your neighbors who very likely will be doing the same thing. This kind of freedom of movement is not present in Lusaka. It is too dangerous to go out walking at night here. You might get mugged.’<sup>89</sup> We realize here that the lost freedom of movement in Zambia makes the couple seek for an environment which is similar to home, as America was called in the previous nostalgic – even lyrical, as far the beginning of the quotation is concerned – lines.

Before moving to the concluding part of this section, it would be interesting to say that when the family moved to Cameroon they found a whole different situation. Cameroon as a country was much richer than Zambia and the people were feeling a lot safer living in this environment. There the longing for home remained. I’m eager to get home’<sup>90</sup> and ‘Only five weeks to go! Can’t wait!’<sup>91</sup>, writes Kathleen to her mother from Yaoundé, in the summer of 1982 waiting for holidays to come. Nevertheless, here we deal with an anticipated feeling of missing home after a three-year absence, and not with homesickness as experienced by the couple in Zambia.

In this section we have discovered the important role of homesickness within the Americans’ identification process with their homeland. The next section is dedicated to investigating the power of nostalgia in sustaining the identification with the homeland while living far away from it, and answers the question what exactly the American expatriates were nostalgic about.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 3-4-1982, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1 437 2 3 17.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 6-5-1982, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1 437 2 3 19.

### 2.3 Nostalgia: 'I love you dearly and miss you more.'

There are plenty who by reading the last paragraph would probably think: But what is the difference between homesickness and nostalgia? Jan-Willem Duyvendak makes a clear distinction between these two terms. He states that homesickness, as it has already been mentioned, is the sense of longing for another place and it refers to a spatial separation, while nostalgia has a temporal dimension, and refers to a separation with the happy times of one's past.<sup>92</sup> More specifically, nostalgia is defined as a feeling of loss, lack and longing. It is a craving for the 'good old days'; a mourning over things that have taken place in the past. It is therefore a feeling which maintains a temporal separation.<sup>93</sup> We may conclude then that homesickness refers to space while nostalgia is related to time. It is logical nonetheless to claim that the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia intertwine. Time and space intertwine in real life, meaning that they are always intertwined in people's mind and in the way they remember and preserve their memories.

Concentrating on the feeling of nostalgia now, Maria Amelia Viteri, in her important study upon immigrants, argues that the feeling of nostalgia is part of an immigrant's life. It is a feeling which works as a magnifier lens and determines the way people identify with their distant homeland, as well as the way they feel and express themselves when living away from home.<sup>94</sup> Her work was an inspiration for me to research the relationship between 'home' and nostalgia in my own sources.

To begin with, in the correspondence of the American family, nostalgia, this time-dimensional feeling of lack and longing is manifested through a person and the happy memories associated with this particular person, the mother of Kathleen S. Both Rick and Kathleen feel very close to Kathleen's mother and write to her very often. Especially Kathleen is clearly very attached to her mother. In her letters she is always very affectionate and expresses her love and longing. For instance, just a while before she and her husband leave

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<sup>92</sup> Jan-Willem Duyvendak, *The politics of home. Belonging and nostalgia in Western Europe and the US* (New York 2011) 123.

<sup>93</sup> Duyvendak, *The politics of home*, 123

<sup>94</sup> Viteri, Maria Amelia, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging: Ecuadorians in New York City', in Sarah Albiez et al (eds.) *Ethnicity, belonging and citizenship* (Madrid 2011) 221-233.

the country for good, and actually a few days before they were supposed to visit mother in her homeland in Florida on Christmas Day, Kathleen writes to her: ‘ I can’t wait to play your piano. Can’t wait to see you. There’s always so much I want to share. We ought to call each other more often. I’m eagerly waiting your promised epistle.’<sup>95</sup> To my eye, apart from the explicit desire to see mother, the anticipation to play the mother’s piano is associated with happy memories of the past. One could easily imagine the picture of mother and daughter playing the piano together, enjoying themselves.

After having arrived in Africa, most of the times Kathleen sent her mother long, enthusiastic letters full of details, describing every aspect of her new life. But almost every letter ended with a phrase like: ‘I love you dearly and miss you more’<sup>96</sup>, showing how much mother is missed in the new country. Rick also expressed his longing for the woman that he also called mom, by writing to her on Christmas Day in 1979, ‘We miss you and think of you at this time,’<sup>97</sup> most likely thinking Christmas celebrations of the past which they had as a family.

The couple, while working in Zambia and Cameroon, could not wait for holidays to come so that they could travel around the – what they called – ‘National Geographic Land’<sup>98</sup> and ‘Tarzanland’<sup>99</sup> or even visit neighbor countries. Especially the references to “National Geographic” and “Tarzan” suggest that the couple has not fully realized that they live in a different country, rather than a real life “fairytale” world. Trips within the new lands and experiencing entirely new things were actually one of the main reasons that they decided to leave USA, as mentioned in the introduction of the chapter. So, travelling around Africa fulfilled the Americans’ dream. Even then though, when they were doing what they expected most, Kathleen’s mother and - as

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<sup>95</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 28-11-1978, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.1.1.01.03.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 17-10-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.06

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Rick S. to Kathleen’s mother, 25-12-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.14.

<sup>98</sup> Letter from Rick S. to Kathleen’s mother, 25-12-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.14

<sup>99</sup> Newsletter from Rick and Kathleen, 16-6-1981, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.50.

following quotations will show - interesting conversations upon favorite subjects that they probably had all together in the past, were on their minds. 'I miss you- thought of you constantly on the trip'<sup>100</sup>, and 'I must tell you that Rick and I thought of you so much during our tripping. Many times we both remarked that we wished you could be along with us. With your interest in sociology and anthropology and the natural world, we would have had a ball'<sup>101</sup>, writes the couple to Kathleen's mother after having returned from a trip around Zambia that time to their house in Lusaka.

By thinking deeper, an interesting thought might arise: mother as a figure is present in the linguistic parallel between 'mother' and 'nation', via the term 'motherland'. Interestingly enough, the association between mother and motherland has been studied by the philologist Sabrina Brancato, whose inspiration was the Caribbean novelist Jamaica Kincaid's works on the relationship between mother-daughter-homeland. Among others, Brancato, citing Kincaid's words, writes in her book: 'The Caribbean Sea is so big, and so blue, and so deep, and so warm, and so unpredictable, and so inviting, and so dangerous, and so beautiful. This is exactly the way I feel about the women in my own family.'<sup>102</sup> By the biographical elements that the author provides about Jamaica Kincaid, it becomes known that the only woman in her close family was her mother. Therefore, what we come across here is an explicit association between the seas of the homeland and the mother. Kincaid states that the way she feels about her homeland is the exact way that she feels about her own mother. Thus, in the correspondence of the American expatriates the deep connection with the mother could also be seen from a different - even surprising - angle: as a connection with the motherland

To conclude with, thus far, the feelings of nostalgia and homesickness were of central importance, since they have been introduced as compelling reasons of keep identifying with the homeland while living abroad, as appeared in the correspondence of the American couple. The following section moves a

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<sup>100</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 8-9-1980, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.29.

<sup>101</sup> Letter from Rick and Kathleen S. to Kathleen's mother, 12-1-1980, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.16.

<sup>102</sup> Sabrina Brancato, *Mother/Motherland in the works of Jamaica Kincaid* (Barcelona 2001) 22.



step further by examining the practice of letter-writing itself as a strategy to cope with nostalgia and homesickness.

## **2.4 Letter-writing: 'Keep those cards and letters coming in'**

As it has been mentioned at a former point, Rick and Kathleen were very close to Kathleen's mom and they used to send her long detailed letters about their new experiences in Africa. Especially Kathleen was very keen on corresponding with her beloved mother, about who was feeling very nostalgic, as shown in the previous section of this chapter. As a general remark, it should be noted that very often she closed her letters by writing 'drop me a line soon' and 'write soon', motivating her mother to write her as frequently as possible. She also thanked her mother very often for keep writing to her. Apart from the mother, the couple exchanged few letters with some close friends.

To start providing some examples, when the couple has first arrived in Zambia, Kathleen wrote to her relatives, Don and Leslie: 'Right now while we are adjusting like crazy, we really need some nice supportive letters.'<sup>103</sup> These lines reveal that the letters from the homeland are seen as a consolation within the frustrating period of adjusting in an entirely different from home environment, and that the couple really needs their relatives to keep writing them in order to draw strength from their words. Furthermore, in another letter of the couple, after Kathleen having said her mother that she misses her a lot, they wrote to her: 'Keep those cards and letters coming in (...) (they) are our only links with the real world.'<sup>104</sup> This quotation does not only speak of a need for letters as a way for the couple to get support from home, but it also raises the letters to being the bridges which connect them with the world. 'Home' is characterized as the real world, giving the impression that the Americans feel sometimes even isolated in a completely foreign environment where life is nothing like the couple was used to. The specific quotation enhances also the impression that the American couple felt living in a 'dream world' in Africa, as analyzed at a former point of this chapter.

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<sup>103</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to Don and Leslie, 17-9-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.03

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Rick and Kathleen S. to her mother, 17-9-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.06.

The thirst for communication with the homeland is clear also in more humorous sentences like the 'write, write, write!'<sup>105</sup>, written by Kathleen after a few weeks spent in Lusaka. At this point, it should be stated that the correspondence with home remained very frequent even when the couple has settled down in Zambia, and later in Cameroon. But naturally as time went by the need for communication was not described as a 'matter of life or death', as within the first months of the couple's stay in Africa.

Except for letters, the American couple sent altogether eight newsletters to multiple recipients, whose main characteristic was the thorough details of the life in Zambia and Cameroon, and the trips around the continent of Africa. It is remarkable that the events mentioned in these newsletters appear in chronological order, strongly resembling pages of a diary. In my view, these newsletters, apart from fulfilling the couple's wish to inform the friends from home about the unique experiences gained in Africa, they are also a method to keep Rick and Kathleen's thoughts in order. It is a way to preserve their sense of identity within the jumble of the new social stimuli.

To sum up, thus far, the letters have been demonstrated as a means to combat the strong feeling of nostalgia for the mother, by providing a sense through writing of being closer to her. They have also offered consolation in times of frustration while adjusting in a totally strange environment, and they have served as the connecting bridges with the so-described 'real world' of the homeland, when life in the remote African country generated the feeling of homesickness. In one sentence, the practice of writing home 'safeguarded a sense of identity and strengthened the idea of kinship and belonging'<sup>106</sup> to the homeland, in times when this feeling was probably most needed.

## **2.5 The Americans and the technology**

The concluding parts of the empirical chapters of this thesis is dedicated to answering whether the advent of new means of communication causes

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<sup>105</sup> Letter from Kathleen S. to her mother, 1-10-1979, Expatriate Archive Centre, Rick and Kathleen S. archive, 1.0054.1.2.03.04.

<sup>106</sup> Barbara Henkes, 'Letter-Writing and the construction of a transnational family: A private correspondence between the Netherlands and Germany, 1920-1949' in *Life writing matters in Europe* (Heidelberg 2012) 177.

changes on the way the expatriate families communicated with their beloved ones back home and the ways they identified with their home country. However, the time that the correspondence of the American family took place (1978-1983) does not make the specific archive capable of providing any relevant answers, since fax machines and the commercial internet had not made their appearance yet. In this context, the expression of national identity and the identification with the native country was a stable process in the Americans' correspondence. Technology did not add up to a sort of evolution in the way the Americans stayed connected with their distant home.

Nevertheless, I believe that it would be an omission not to mention how advanced the Americans were in terms of technology, in comparison with the time their correspondence came about. To illustrate my point of view, I will set forth the most striking examples. The majority of the letters were typed in typewriters and both Rick and Kathleen were very careful even about the ribbons they used in order their writings to look as legible as possible. When the letters were not typed it was because the typewriter was not possible to be transferred (trips etc.) or because it was to be repaired, as Kathleen explained once to her mother. They also encouraged Kathleen's mom to buy a typewriter to make her life easier. Additionally, they kept sending home slides (!) from their trips; and finally, they used to send newsletters to multiple receivers through post, a practice which is so commonly used nowadays via e-mails.

All the above mentioned make me curious about the possibilities of research that the Americans would have to offer, if they had in their hands in the beginning of the 80's the technological means we have in the current era.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The particular chapter initially explored all the ways through which the American expatriates expressed their national identity within their daily life in the two African countries. As it has been mentioned, Rick S., before leaving U.S.A., was stating out loud that he is a product of his country. The goal of the first section of this chapter was to answer whether his and his wife's life in the African continent affirmed his pre-departure statement.

Within that section we have watched them identifying with their motherland and communicating their national identity through 'items from home' and 'acts of home-making', as Williksen Rapport and Niggel Rapport illustrated in their work. The list started with material items of home, such as video-tapes of American TV movies and ball games, as well as a sports magazine, in sustaining the needed connection with the homeland. Then, we studied the association with the people from the homeland as a way to establish a feeling of familiarity in social acquaintances and a sense of security in dire straits. Next, we investigated more 'theoretical' ways of identifying with the motherland, by making frequent comparisons between the landscape and the history of home with those of the host country. Afterwards, we examined the need of staying well-informed of the political current events of your country, as well as the identification with the educational principles and moral values of the motherland. Subsequently, we dealt with 'immaterial' items from home and we realized the importance of celebrating the national holidays of your own country in preserving the feeling of belonging to your distant home. Finally, we regarded music, and the singing of traditional, nostalgic songs as an act of home-making.

Hence, the answer we extracted from the couple's correspondence to the question whether Rick was precise when stating that he is a product of his country is 'yes'. Despite the couple's adventurous and daring spirits, their American identity was present throughout their life in the new countries.

Throughout the second section of this chapter, we have observed that the difficult social circumstances in Zambia made the American expatriates feel sometimes uncomfortable in the new country and this situation triggered the feeling of homesickness. This feeling, which was caused by a number of reasons, from the scarcity of food to the dangerous streets and the sense of non-safety brought about negative comparisons in favor of the motherland. Through these comparisons the identification with the native country was clearly observed. Especially when the initial general sense of non-safety became in the course of time an unpleasant reality of being deprived of your freedom of movement, 'home' was seen as a lost heaven. In other words,

homesickness seems to be a powerful feeling, which served as a significant causing factor of identifying with the home country.

The third section of this chapter examined whether feelings of nostalgia influenced the American couple's identification with their homeland while living in Africa. It has been observed that throughout their correspondence there were no references about being nostalgic for happy moments of the past in the USA, as nostalgia encloses a temporal dimension. If Rick and Kathleen were longing about something associated with their past at home, that was Kathleen's mother and the moments shared with her. Therefore we cannot conclude that the two expatriates' sense and expression of national identity was being reinforced by feelings of nostalgia for the homeland. However, we could decipher that for the couple, and especially for Kathleen, her mother was what was 'home' for her. This association between 'mother' and 'motherland' was illustrated in Brancato's study on Jamaica Kincaid's work, which made us realize that It is perhaps possible to speak of identification with the homeland through the figure of the mother. All in all, nostalgia in this correspondence might not induce a distinct identification with USA as a country, but it certainly maintained the identification with what was home for the people involved: the mother.

The next section dealt with the practice of letter-writing, and to what extent it was a tactic to cope with the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia. There the letters were demonstrated as a means to fight the nostalgia for the mother by feeling through writing closer to her, as consolation within frustrating times while adjusting in a strange environment, and as the connection with the 'real world' of the home country, when life in the remote Africa resulted in homesickness.

The fifth and last section of this chapter intended to answer whether new means of communication changed the way the American expatriate family communicated with 'home' and the ways they identified with their homeland. Nevertheless, the fact that fax-machines and the internet had not appeared when the correspondence of the American family took place, made the particular archive incapable of providing any answers upon this subject.

Inevitably then, technology did not alter anyhow the Americans' expression of national identity and the way they identified with their native country.

### **3. DIVIDED INTO TWO HEMISPHERES. Australians in Europe, 1990-2009.**

In 1990, Greg and Glenda L., an Australian couple with two young children, Christopher and Jacinta, were leading a happy life in Melbourne, Australia. Greg was working for the company of Shell, whose employees were committed to change postings every three to four years, mainly to different countries of the world. At this year he was announced that his first posting would be in Surrey, UK. The whole family moved to England and the adventure began. In 1992 the family moved to Greg's new posting in Stavanger, Norway and in 1996 Greg, along with his family, was transferred to The Hague, the Netherlands. The year of 1999 finds the family back to the UK, but this time in Buckinghamshire. In 2003 they returned to The Hague in the Netherlands and 2009 was the year of the family's repatriation.

This chapter follows the family in all their trips through the correspondence that Glenda, the pen of the family as she describes herself, kept all these years with her beloved ones all the around the world, and mostly with her parents back home.

The correspondence of the Australian family comprises a large number of hand-written letters and postcards, as well as some personal notes. After the family got familiar with the world of personal computers, Glenda started sending e-mails to multiple recipients around the world, mainly other expatriate friends but also relatives at home. She also sent faxes when she wanted to share a quick note with them. The archive of the Australian family is indeed a very big one and offers great possibilities for analysis.

This chapter follows the same structure as the previous chapter about the American expatriates. It starts by examining the ways the Australian family continued to express their national identity and kept identifying with their homeland while living in all the previously mentioned countries. Then, it provides answers on what the Australian expatriates were homesick and what they were feeling nostalgic about, and it explores the role that the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia played within the identification process with the

home country. Consequently, it investigates how the practice of letter-writing was a method to deal with nostalgia and homesickness. Finally, it studies whether new means of communication influenced the way the Australian expatriates identified with their native country, since the Australian family's correspondence occurred in the 90's and 00's, when new communication technologies flourished.

### **3.1 Identification with the homeland: 'That is what makes Australia unique for us.'**

The first section of this chapter discovers the ways that the Australian family identified with their homeland and expressed their sense of national identity while having to move and live in so many different, diverse countries.

In the beginning, it must be said that the family was used to this 'mobile' way of living. Apart from some quarrels occurred within the family when the children reached adolescence - a period in which changing school and lose all your friends may feel like an unbearable thing to go through – , in general, all the members of the family enjoyed this type of living and in the end they adjusted in every single country pretty well. Especially Glenda, who is the main author of the family's correspondence, as it has been already mentioned, had an adventurous spirit and enthusiasm about life. These qualities of hers made her see the frequent moves of her family with an optimism and a wish to get as much possible from every new country, by travelling around and participating in various local social events.

It should be noted though that the reason for the family's ability to enjoy this transient lifestyle could also be found in the fact that the expatriates belong to a group of people who can be characterized as 'transnational'. They are this type of people who have the economic freedom to move across borders and between cultures<sup>107</sup>, enjoying holidays wherever they wanted, being able to return to the home country when desired, and altogether enjoying the pleasures of their privileged lifestyle. However, even within this lifestyle, the

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<sup>107</sup> Sallie Westwood, *Trans-nationalism and the politics of belonging* (Routledge 2000) 2.



expatriates remain displaced between two different worlds, that of the host country and the homeland. The Australian expatriates' correspondence, which we examine now, will be illuminating in understanding how important is the identification with the homeland while living a new life abroad.

In the previous chapter, we followed a scheme of analysis based on Niggel Rapport and Solrun Williksen's argument about the 'items of home' and 'acts of homemaking', as a way to provide physical and emotional accommodation when people live away from their motherland. There it has been concluded that the identification with the home country is sustained through the 'material items of home', such as movie tapes and magazines, the 'immaterial items of home', like the national holidays as well as the singing of traditional songs, the 'humans from home', compatriots found in the new countries, and via 'theoretical ways of identification', such as comparisons in a variety of aspects between the host and the home country. This scheme of analysis will be implemented in this chapter too.

To start with, in the correspondence of the Australian family we come constantly across with theoretical ways of identification. I call them 'theoretical' because, to my eye, they are products of the mind. To elaborate, Australia is demonstrated within the Australian expatriates' correspondence as the ultimate standard. From The Hague, the Netherlands Glenda writes to her grandparents:

'As always, stories from both Greg's and my childhood are often shared to illustrate a point, or to bring awareness of differences between growing up today on the other side of the world and our experiences of life in country Australia. Values and social mores are interwoven into these conversations and we see that despite a generation, a vastly different world, and a vastly different lifestyle to us, the values we instill in our children are those you instilled in us.'<sup>108</sup>

We realize that for Greg and Glenda was essential to raise their children with the Australian morals and values, no matter how far away they were growing up from their homeland. As a result, the kids developed a very strong

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<sup>108</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her grandparents, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.3.32.

attachment with Australia, as Glenda describes it in her writings. From Norway Glenda writes to her parents and grandparents: 'Home for now is in Norway. But for all of us, and especially for C. and J. it is very important to identify as being Australian.'<sup>109</sup>, and in another letter: 'We have just found out a show on T.V. about Australian animals – rather Americanised but the children gravitate towards everything that shows a glimpse of Aus.'<sup>110</sup> In a letter before the anticipated holidays to Australia she writes: 'The kids remind me each day that it is barely 3 weeks until we come to Australia. They are very excited to be coming "home" again...especially Christopher. It always amazes me how strong their links remain with Aus.'<sup>111</sup>

Her words are being proven in a poem that her son, Christopher, wrote about himself at school. In the last verse of the poem that Glenda kept in her archive, he writes: 'I am an Australian, war hating, shark fearing, right-handed teenager, task accepting, adventuresome, self-dependant (sic), proud person. I am Chris'<sup>112</sup>, and he finishes his poem with a drawing of the Australian flag. Finally, Glenda presents her children as willing to return to their country of origin when they were at their 20's. As she writes about her son and then about her daughter: 'At 20 – now he knows the advantages and opportunities of living across cultures but also was adamant (as is Jacinta) to return to their passport countries to experience and understand life there.'<sup>113</sup>

In my view, all the above quotations reveal that Glenda L. is very proud of her children's 'Australian' upbringing and considers this as an achievement made by her and her husband. It is a clear expression of national identity and identification with the homeland, as imposed by a true appreciation and respect to the motherland.

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<sup>109</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents and grandparents, 26-11-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.24.

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, the date is not provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.36d.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents and sisters, 28-5-97, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.28f.

<sup>112</sup> Poem written by Christopher L., no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.6d.

<sup>113</sup> Personal notes of Glenda, the date is not provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.11c.

The fact that Australia was a benchmark for the Australian expatriates throughout their life abroad is also highlighted by another way of 'theoretical' identification: the praising of the Australian culture. There are a few references which illustrate how highly Glenda thought about the culture of her country. In a postcard from holidays to Undara, Australia, she writes: 'We took a day tour with a guide. She was brilliant (...) sharing her knowledge of geology and nature. Great Australian culture for all of us'<sup>114</sup>, and in another card sent back from Norway again, she says that the family is 'quite excited to be returning home to you all; to Australian food and culture.'<sup>115</sup>

Glenda's admiration to the culture of her motherland is illustrated even more evidently through a comparison with the Irish culture, after some holidays spent in Ireland. This is what she wrote to her father after her trip: 'I think it is the Irish people, their openness, friendliness, honest and genuine nature that makes it such a special place to visit. We could see many similarities between their culture and the Australian.'<sup>116</sup> The previous quotations make clear to me that for the Australian expatriate, even after so many years of travelling, after so many cultural experiences gained within the life in the new countries, the culture of the homeland remains the standard to compare all the other cultures with. The Australian culture remains irreplaceable, at least in Glenda's mind, and it is a reason to identify with the home country wherever in the world the family might be.

Speaking of comparisons, we now move to landscape, as a 'theoretical' way of identifying with the homeland while living far away from it. Like in the Americans' correspondence, also in this correspondence the comparisons between the landscape of a new country and that of the native land are frequent. To provide some characteristic examples, from the ski resort of Geilo, Norway, Glenda writes to her parents: 'We were on the top of the mtn. Above the tree line – absolutely no wind and blue blue skies. It is a wonderful feeling –

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<sup>114</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her mother, 25-6, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.11.

<sup>115</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her father, 10-4, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.79d.

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her father, 6-8-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.15.

like walking in the Gramps with only the beauty of nature around you'<sup>117</sup>, and in a letter about a deserted beach in Oman: 'The water was as clean and as warm as Cape Tribulation.'<sup>118</sup> From some holidays in Portugal, and in a more expressive way: 'The countryside is very much like Australia – dry – lots of oranges and grapes growing and summer fruit (strawberries etc.)'<sup>119</sup>, and from a trip to Monaco: 'Dad, it is sunny and warm here – a little like the Gold Coast in Australia with lots of eucalyptus growing.'<sup>120</sup>

Trying to analyze Glenda's sentences carefully, we ought to pay attention to the words 'wonderful feeling', 'beauty of nature', 'sunny', 'clean' and 'warm' that she uses when she makes a comparison with Australia's landscape. It is also noteworthy that all the comparisons in relation to the landscape of Australia are made within joyful moments of her new life; they are not simple observations about a noticed similarity, they are comparisons triggered always by the sight of something that evokes pleasant feelings. In my opinion, Glenda's way of comparing a place with another one in her native country, and the time that these comparisons occur, speak of an admiration to the motherland, whose natural environment can be remembered only when seeing something equally beautiful.

The 'theoretical' ways of identification in the Australian family's correspondence are not only the results of appreciation and admiration for the homeland, as showed within the preceding paragraphs, but it is found also in more practical issues, such as the awareness of the political situation of the native country. From Norway Glenda wishes her parents 'happy Voting Day on the 13th!'<sup>121</sup>, and in a card from the Netherlands she writes: 'Great to hear about the change of government in Australia. Greg had a long talk (...) on the

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<sup>117</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 8-3, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.38d.

<sup>118</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 11-11-97, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.39f.

<sup>119</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her parents, 10-4-91, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.008.

<sup>120</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her father, 21-5-91, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.010.

<sup>121</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 8-3-96, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.4d

election. Let's hope it brings improvement/honesty in our country.<sup>122</sup> Apparently, the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the Australian expatriates does not constitute a reason for stop caring about the political developments in their home country. Through Glenda's letter we understand that they were concerned about the prosperity of their native country and stayed tuned with its political scene while living abroad.

In this train of thought, we will now proceed from the 'theoretical' ways of identification with the homeland to the 'immaterial' items of home, as means to sustain the connection with the distant home. As illustrated within the last chapter based on the American family's correspondence, the national holidays of the home country can serve as an example of an 'immaterial' item of home. The celebration of national holidays was not absent neither in the Australian expatriates' correspondence. 'Happy Australia Day!'<sup>123</sup> writes Glenda from Norway to her family on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, Australia's national day; and in another letter few years earlier: 'tomorrow is Aust. Day – as you probably know! – We are meeting a few Aussies for coffee and cake - there are only 3 4 couples here – tomorrow night, so that will be nice.'<sup>124</sup> It becomes apparent that the new environment does not make the family forget their country's customs and festivals. The need to get together and celebrate with other compatriots on the national day of their country stays alive. In my view, we witness an act of homemaking, which manifests 'the compelling human need to belong and to feel at home'<sup>125</sup>, even when home lies tens of thousands kilometers away.

But if the national holidays are considered an 'immaterial' item of home, why not the national team as well? There are plenty of references to Australia's national team within the correspondence of the Australian family. For instance, in the winter of 1994 the family was preparing to attend the Winter Olympics

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<sup>122</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her parents, 3-3-96, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.4d.

<sup>123</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents and relatives, 26-1, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.55d.

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 25-11, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.35d.

<sup>125</sup> Carol E. Kelley, *Accidental immigrants and the search for home. Women, Cultural identity, and community* (Philadelphia 2013) 3.

held that year in Norway. This is what Glenda was writing during that time to her family back in Australia: 'We will barrack for the Aussie hope Diane. – I think we see her event next week. We have packed our flags and our thermals.'<sup>126</sup> After the end of the Olympic Games she wrote: 'We barracked hard for the Aussies last night and saw them win bronze at speed skating. C+J made special placards to wave so I hope we were on T.V. at home'<sup>127</sup>. She also sent a photo from the medals ceremony, so that her parents can 'feel' the atmosphere of the Olympics.

We realize here that the environment of living did not affect the preferences of the Australians sports-wise. They kept supporting the Australian's national team fiercely when that was possible. To my eye, through this support to their country's team the Australian expatriates were able to express their national identity; tell the world that notwithstanding all the new countries of living, they are and still feel Australians.

The 'items of home' also have a material essence in the Australian family's correspondence. Food can serve as the first example of such material items of home. From Norway, Glenda writes to her parents that she and her husband participated in the World Petroleum Congress and that they 'went to a reception for the Melbourne lobby and were treated to some scrum Aussie food. – Kings Brie and other cheeses, king prawns, oysters – Fosters! and dried fruit'<sup>128</sup>, showing how much she has missed real Australian food. In the same tone, she writes from The Hague that they can finally 'buy emu and kangaroo steaks over here'<sup>129</sup>, and they can have a proper Australian barbeque; while Pavlova, a traditional Australian and New Zealander sweet<sup>130</sup>, was mentioned in a number of letters, since Glenda was preparing it very often for her family and, in some special occasions, for her friends. In my view, 'the food acts as a signifier in the way [the Australian expatriates] re-define their

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<sup>126</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents and relatives, 16-2-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.37.

<sup>127</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her parents, 26-2-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.35d.

<sup>128</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 2-6-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.18.

<sup>129</sup> E-mail from Glenda to multiple receivers, 5-4-98, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.8.

<sup>130</sup> Wikipedia, 'Pavlova (food)' [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pavlova\\_\(food\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pavlova_(food)) (26-5-2013)

own national identity<sup>131</sup> while living a life abroad. The inevitable scarcity of typical Australian food in the other countries of the world where they lived made them realize their attachment to the food of their own country. At a former point of this chapter Glenda was stating that the family was happy to return to Australian food and culture. When an actual trip is not possible, traditional Australian 'food achieved, even if momentarily, a 'return' to the lost homeland.'<sup>132</sup>

However, in the correspondence of the Australian family the connection to the food of the homeland was not expressed only through cooking Australian food or a sense of contentment when Australian goods were found in the host countries. Sometimes Glenda was asking her parents to bring over food from Australia, when they were supposed to travel from Down Under to visit their children and grandchildren. In the ordering list though there was not only food, but also several Australian products. These products constitute the second material item of home that the Australian family identified with while living in foreign lands. Their orders consisted of almost everything, from alcohol, cosmetics, and tomato sauce (!)<sup>133</sup>, to Australian pecans and Aussie T-shirts, socks and caps.<sup>134</sup> Newspapers<sup>135</sup> and music tapes<sup>136</sup> from home were also wanted items.

I am inclined to believe, that albeit trivial these products might look to us now, and even though someone would logically argue that some of them could be easily found anywhere else in the world, they were obviously needed by the expatriate family. As it has been said, such items of the nation 'define alternative ways of belonging to the homeland'<sup>137</sup> and have the power to

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<sup>131</sup> Viteri, Maria Amelia, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging: Ecuadorians in New York City', in Sarah Albiez et al (eds.) *Ethnicity, belonging and citizenship* (Madrid 2011) 222.

<sup>132</sup> Viteri, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging', 231.

<sup>133</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 9-9-96, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.9e.

<sup>134</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.9.

<sup>135</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 9-9-96, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.9e.

<sup>136</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 13-5-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.56d.

<sup>137</sup> Viteri, Maria Amelia, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging: Ecuadorians in New York City', in Sarah Albiez et al (eds.) *Ethnicity, belonging and citizenship* (Madrid 2011) 221.

'provide physical and emotional accommodation at times of dispersion and dissolution'<sup>138</sup>, as experienced by those who live so far away from their native land.

The final means of identification with the motherland - as appeared in the Australian's correspondence - which we examine in this section is the 'humans from home'. The number of times that Glenda mentioned other Australians in her correspondence is really remarkable. Exaggerating a bit, by reading her correspondence, someone might get the impression that she had a kind of obligation to inform her parents about every single encounter she had with another Australian, either in a trip of hers, in a social event or within her husband's professional circles.

To illustrate my point of view on how often Glenda mentioned her acquaintances with other Australians, I cite her words, as written in a letter from Stavanger, Norway: 'I think I have now met all the Australians that live here.'<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, the encounters with other Australians were not only accidental; the family sought for the company of other compatriots. From the Netherlands this time, Glenda writes to her parents: 'Sat. night we entertained again – we invited Joe and Sally F. and kids for dinner. They are Australians – been here 3 months. We all got on really well together'<sup>140</sup>, and on Christmas Day '96: 'We were all so excited to share Christmas with special friends and I'm sure they also felt glad to be spending Christmas in familiar surroundings with fellow Australians'<sup>141</sup> In addition, when her mother's visit was approaching she wrote to her: 'I met an Eng. lady married to an Aussie. Her husband's mum is coming about the same time – thought we may organize a get together!'<sup>142</sup> Christopher was happy too, as Glenda claims, when an Australian was in his close circle: 'Children received notifications of what classes they are this year

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<sup>138</sup> Solrun Williksen, Niggel Rapport, introduction in *Reveries of home: Nostalgia, authenticity and the performance of place* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2010) 11-12.

<sup>139</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 17-11-92, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.07.15.

<sup>140</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 9-9-96, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.9e.

<sup>141</sup> E-mail from Glenda L. to multiple receivers, 5-1-97, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.1f

<sup>142</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 10-3, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.34d.



(...) He was pleased to be with another Australian who was in 4b last year'<sup>143</sup>, she wrote.

Although all the members of the Australian family were very social and, as their correspondence reveals, they hung out with people of all nationalities, the foregoing quotations showed that the company – and even the mere acquaintance – of other Australians was always a subject to talk about, and it was something that brought joy to them. In my opinion, the joy that the Australian expatriates derived from their being around other compatriots stresses the familiar feeling that someone might have when they know that they are surrounded by people that share the same background. Within these circles, where the homeland is the common denominator, people can feel cheerful, relaxed and secure.

Concluding with, in this section we have worked on the several ways that the Australian expatriates expressed their national identity and identified with their homeland, as their correspondence revealed to us. The forthcoming section is dedicated to studying the feeling of homesickness and its role within the identification with the motherland process.

### **3.2 'I felt quite homesick.'**

To remind readers, homesickness has already been defined as the sense of longing for another place and concerns a spatial/geographical separation. Even more specifically, it refers to a 'state of distress among those who have left their house and home and find themselves in a new and unfamiliar environment.'<sup>144</sup> Within this context, what was the Australian expatriate family homesick about in their own new environments? And most importantly, how the identification with their homeland was a result of this feeling?

To begin with, while reading the Australian family's correspondence, I came to realize that most of the times that a longing for home - as a spatial

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<sup>143</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 18-8, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.9.

<sup>144</sup> M. A. L. Van Tilburg, A. J. J. M. Vingerhoets, G. L. Van Heck, 'Homesickness: a review of the literature' *Psychological medicine* 26 (1996) 899.

environment - was being noticed, the specific part of the given writing was either followed or preceded by a reference to Australia's weather. Before citing any examples from the correspondence of the family, it should be said that - as we all probably know - Australia is considered to be one of the sunniest countries on earth. Specifically, Australia's ratio of sunny days is almost equal to the two thirds of the year.<sup>145</sup> I guess that the weather of the three postings of the family, UK, Norway and the Netherlands, it needs no introduction.

For instance, Glenda writes from Norway: 'With so much snow around (...) we all marvelled when the sun shone a little last Sunday!! Our 4 weeks in Australia will get us through the winter quite well now.'<sup>146</sup> By the last sentence she means that the holidays in sunny Australia recharged the family's batteries and this would help them cope with the cold Norwegian winter. In another letter from cold Norway she writes to her parents: 'I heard from Jen yesterday and she sent some photos of you and the kids – blue, blue sky!'<sup>147</sup> What drew Glenda's attention mostly in the pictures was the blue Australian sky, since she did not make any other comments about these photos. To my eye, she noticed in the pictures what she was missing more about Australia: the fine weather. The forthcoming quotations support this point of view. From UK she writes: 'I miss greatly the warmth of Australia – of family and friends'<sup>148</sup>, and from Norway she says her parents: 'I miss you both – and the beans, apricots, mangoes and sunshine!'<sup>149</sup>

It becomes clear that the cold weather of the north European countries generates the feeling of homesickness for the sunny native land. As Glenda

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<sup>145</sup> Current Results, 'Average Sunshine a Year in Australia's Cities  
<http://www.currentresults.com/Weather/Australia/Cities/sunshine-annual-average.php> (26-5-2013)

<sup>146</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents and relatives, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.55d.

<sup>147</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.30d.

<sup>148</sup> E-mail from Glenda L. to multiple recipients, 25-12-02, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.05.007.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 22-1-95, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.5b.

explicitly writes to her parents: 'Thank you for your letter. I felt quite homesick while reading it and began to wish we were coming home for Christmas.'<sup>150</sup>

It should also be noted that apart from the homesickness that we distinguish in the foregoing quotations, we can also comprehend better now how time and space intertwine in people's mind and in the way they remember, as explained briefly in the third section of the last chapter. To elaborate, it has been clarified that the feeling of homesickness refers to the longing of a place and concerns a spatial separation with this particular place. The previous quotations speak of a longing for a place and its certain natural characteristics, such as the fine weather. However, in these quotations, the homesickness that is generated through the comparisons between the depressing weather of the host country and that of the warm homeland is accompanied with references to specific people and how they are missed too. That is to say that space, the spatial environment of the motherland and its natural characteristics like the weather, intertwine with the memory of certain people, with whom the writer of the correspondence lived together in this spatial environment in the past. Therefore, the above mentioned quotations may serve as an example of how space and time are intertwined within the people's memories.

Furthermore, the feeling of homesickness, triggered to a large extent by the bad weather in the new countries, was crystallized into a special form of identification with the homeland in the Australians' correspondence. To explain, throughout the years of the family's compulsory – due to Greg's work – stay in foreign lands, the possibility for the family to return home anytime was open. For example, this is what Glenda was writing already in the family's first year abroad: 'We did hear a rumour that we may only be here for another 12mths – there is a possible job (marketing) in Sydney – it is all here say and I won't get too carried away yet.'<sup>151</sup> Although Glenda's hopes were eventually dashed, the family did not stop craving their return to the native country and make plans for when this day will finally occur.

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<sup>150</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 18-9-91, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.020.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 18-9-91, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.020.

Interestingly enough, the adults of the family were even looking for buying a house in Australia when still living overseas. There were few times that Glenda asked her father to tackle the specific subject and keep her updated on the real estate market back home. When the family finally returned to their native land, after having bought their own property, their house was described as ‘the culmination of many years work and dreams, overseen from places often far from Australia’<sup>152</sup>, and also as ‘our first permanent home in Australia since we left 13 years ago.’<sup>153</sup> In my opinion, what we deal here with is a strong identification with the distant homeland, as demonstrated through the expatriates’ continuing wish and efforts to finally own a home in Australia, as well as their absolute certainty throughout all the years they lived away from it, that their motherland will be the place to settle down after the end of their adventures.

Finally, after apprehending that homesickness was a compelling reason for identifying with the motherland, we now proceed to examining the feeling of nostalgia as a reason behind this identification process

### **3.3 Nostalgia: ‘When I was little’**

It has already been made clear that nostalgia refers to a separation with the happy times of one’s past. It is therefore a craving for the ‘good old days’ and has a temporal dimension. The latter constitutes the actual difference with homesickness, which has a geographical dimension. That said, we need to answer on what the Australian expatriates were nostalgic about, and how this influenced the identification with their homeland.

Reading the Australian family’s correspondence through a ‘temporal’ lens, as the definition of nostalgia requires, we come across with a number of relevant findings. Starting with, Glenda, through her correspondence, appears to think that her childhood was the backbone of her life. As she wrote in some personal notes of hers: ‘Who I am today very much is related to my

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<sup>152</sup> Debbie Haines’ article based on Glenda’s interview, 31-12-05, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family’s archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.08.20.

<sup>153</sup> E-mail from Glenda L. to multiple recipients, 25-12-02, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family’s archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.05.007.

childhood.<sup>154</sup> Memories of this determinant - as Glenda describes it - childhood emerge in her correspondence frequently enough. As an example of how these memories emerge, in a postcard to her grandmother she wrote: 'This card reminded me of the cards I used to find in your drawer when I was little.'<sup>155</sup>

Memories 'of when she was little' are evoked when cooking. 'I spent all Saturday after I spoke to you making pastry for a pastie and lots of sausage rolls, so you were constantly in my thoughts'<sup>156</sup>, Glenda wrote to her grandma in another postcard, and in another one and in a more explicit way: 'I am making a choc. self saucing pud for dessert tonight (...) As I cook all these goodies the memories come back to when we ate them as kids.'<sup>157</sup> But also within a slightly different context: 'I bought some rabbit yesterday Dad and I am trying very hard to re-create how you used to cook it...let me know your recipe when next you write'<sup>158</sup>

Extrapolating meaning from these sentences, one could arrive at the following conclusions. Initially, we can say that indeed very much of what Glenda is today is related to her childhood, as she stated in the beginning of this paragraph. This is evident in the fact that she, as a wife and mother, chooses to cook for her family the same things that her own family used to cook for her when she was a kid. In addition, as we 'heard' her saying, while trying to re-create her childhood's food, memories of her beloved relatives awake. These memories inevitably bring with them memories of the 'good old days' spent with her family. In my opinion, in these memories of a happy past the feeling of nostalgia comes into view.

Within the process of cooking traditional dishes of her family, Glenda not only remembers her beloved relatives back home and the happy moments she has shared with them within their common past, but she is also being nostalgic

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<sup>154</sup> Glenda L.'s notes, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.08.

<sup>155</sup> Postcard from Glenda to her grandmother, 30-8, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.019.

<sup>156</sup> Postcard from Glenda to her grandmother, 28-10, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.003.

<sup>157</sup> Letter from Glenda to her father, 23-11, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.003.

<sup>158</sup> Letter from Glenda to her father, 16-1-92, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.031.

about them. Paraphrasing Viteri's term 'circulation of nostalgia food products'<sup>159</sup>, which as she argues may define alternative ways for the immigrants to belong to their homeland, in the Australian family's correspondence we can speak of 'nostalgia food cooking'. Food as nostalgia can be conceptualized as a nostalgic enactment of identity<sup>160</sup>, and Glenda's case does not seem to be an exception to this concept. Cooking food in the way her father and grandmother used to cook it for her when she was a child is a manifestation of nostalgia for a happy childhood, but also for the people involved in it as well.

In the first section of this chapter we have treated the cooking of traditional Australian food as a momentary return to the faraway homeland and a way of identifying with it. In this section we have added one more reason of this identification with the motherland: the nostalgia for the happy childhood spent there and the beloved people who formed it as it now exists in Glenda's memories.

The references to the beloved ones back home continue to make the time-dimensional feeling of nostalgia visible in the Australian expatriates' correspondence. 'Thinking of you both at Easter time'<sup>161</sup> writes Glenda to her parents from Norway, and in another letter only to her father, after a visit of her sisters: 'I miss my sisters. We have had such a special time together; getting to know each other again, finding lots of similarities in our lives, sharing confidences.'<sup>162</sup> The absence of the family, as depicted in these sentences, make Glenda write to her grandmother: 'We often wish we lived closer to you and our family.'<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Viteri, Maria Amelia, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging: Ecuadorians in New York City', in Sarah Albiez et al (eds.) *Ethnicity, belonging and citizenship* (Madrid 2011) 221.

<sup>160</sup> Viteri, 'Nostalgia, food and belonging', 222.

<sup>161</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her parents, 22-3, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.32d.

<sup>162</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her father, 18-4-96, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.2e.

<sup>163</sup> Postcard from Glenda L. to her grandmother, 21-5-96, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.26d.

To my eye, the preceding quotes speak clearly of nostalgia for the times spent with the above mentioned people. They speak of family get-togethers during holidays, such as the Easter; they speak of carefree moments shared between siblings; they speak of the feeling of being home and how much this is missed when living so far away. That is why the mere sight of an Australian pub brings about such a nostalgic mood. The pub was found during a business trip to Portugal and this is what Glenda wrote afterwards: 'It was quite nostalgic for us to return there - all Aussies in the bar - Aussie steaks! - and food and music, scenery etc.'<sup>164</sup> In my view, the Australian 'atmosphere' found all of a sudden in a random pub generated a nostalgic feeling about all these things that the Australian expatriates missed while living away from their country, as well as a need to return to the 'real' Australian atmosphere found only back in Australia.

Summing up the above, having unfolded how the Australian expatriates identified with their homeland while living overseas, and realized what the role of the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia was within this process, we now proceed in exploring the practice of letter-writing as a tactic to deal with the formerly mentioned feelings.

### **3.4 Letter-writing and the finding of roots**

The size of the Australian family's correspondence archive speaks for itself regarding the power of letter-writing in coping with homesickness and nostalgia. Throughout all the years the Australian family spent abroad, Glenda sent in average a letter/postcard/e-mail every one and a half weeks. Additionally, she sent postcards and letters literally from every place of the world that she had visited.

Up to this point, I think that the reader of this thesis has got a good idea of the content of the Australian expatriates' correspondence. From my side, as the reader of the entire archive, it needs to be underlined that every single aspect of the family's new life overseas, every detail of it, is included in these writings. Details that might not fit to be introduced within the scope of this

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<sup>164</sup> Letter from Glenda to her parents, 24-1, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.033

thesis, but they certainly provide a clear picture concerning the need of the Australians to communicate with home. In my opinion, the frequency and the content of the Australian family's correspondence emphasize their desire to stay in close touch with their beloved ones back home. By reading these writings, one could get the impression that the writer struggles to make the recipients a real part of the family's new life. But they also reflect the family's efforts to alleviate the distance, to alleviate the occasional feeling of remoteness and stay somehow a part of their old life back home.

Nevertheless, for the Australian expatriates, 'writing home' did not function only as a means to handle the sense of remoteness and the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia; it served as a 'diary' as well. This arises from the following words of Glenda to her mother: 'I'm wondering Mum if you can save my letters to you – it will be a form of diary for me to keep, esp. as I am rather slack in writing in my diary on a regular basis.'<sup>165</sup> Having read this sentence is not easy not to make connections with Arianne Baggerman's arguments in the discussion of the rise of Dutch egodocuments in the nineteenth-century.<sup>166</sup>

According to the author, the egodocuments, i.e. diaries, are characterized by an unbridled passion to order one's experiences<sup>167</sup>, which can be interpreted as a fight against oblivion and a beacon within times of radical changes.<sup>168</sup> In my view, Glenda's request to her mother to save her letters indicates a passion, as Baggerman claims, to keep her experiences in order within a period of time full of new experiences and different stimuli, where 'oblivion' can easily come due to the jumble of all this new information. Furthermore, Glenda's urge to keep a sort of diary through her letters back home 'can proceed from the need to cement a perceived break between past

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<sup>165</sup> Letter from Glenda to her parents, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.04.017

<sup>166</sup> Arianne Baggerman, 'Lost time: Temporal discipline and historical awareness in nineteenth – century Dutch egodocuments', in Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekekr and Michael Mascuch (eds.), *Controlling time and shaping the self. Developments in autobiographical writing since the sixteenth century* (Leiden 2011) 462.

<sup>167</sup> Arianne Baggerman, 'Lost time') 466.

<sup>168</sup> Ibidem..



and present,<sup>169</sup> in other words, a break between her life back home and the new life in foreign countries.

Last but not least, Glenda could not have been more descriptive in illuminating us about the significant position that the practice of letter-writing held within her expatriate life. As she very eloquently wrote: ‘...I woke up this morning to write this letter. It brings me back to myself again and helps draw the balance in my identity of who I am and where my roots are.’<sup>170</sup> Apparently, there is no need to extrapolate meaning from this quotation. It is crystal clear that the letter-writing was vital for Glenda to stay in touch with her inner self while living a transit life filled with constant changes. As she says, letter-writing helped her find the balance in her identity; it gave her the opportunity to reflect on herself and shape her own individuality<sup>171</sup> within this mobile lifestyle. It also offered her the chance to re-discover each time where her roots are. This can be considered as a valuable contribution of letter-writing, since ‘to be rooted’ has been characterized as the most important need of the human soul.<sup>172</sup> To my eye, the latter is also related to the feelings of nostalgia and homesickness, which - as we have seen so far – occur within the sense of uprootedness that the transitional lifestyle may induce. Within this framework, if the practice of letter-writing is a way for the Australian expatriate to define where her roots are, then it is also a method to fight homesickness and nostalgia.

### **3.5 Technology: ‘Touch base’**

The last section of this chapter examines whether the advent of new communication technologies in the 90’s, which coincide with the time that the Australian family’s correspondence occurred, changed the way that the family identified with their homeland. For instance, a question that needs to be

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<sup>169</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>170</sup> Letter from Glenda to her sister and family, 1-11-98, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family’s archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.20.

<sup>171</sup> Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekker and Michael Mascuch, ‘Introduction’ in Arianne Baggerman, Rudolf Dekekr and Michael Mascuch (eds.), *Controlling time and shaping the self. Developments in autobiographical writing since the sixteenth century* (Leiden 2011) 5.

<sup>172</sup> L. Malkki, ‘National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees’, *Cultural anthropology* 7 (2008) 24

addressed in this section is: Was the family less nostalgic about home after they started using the internet?

Primarily, it is noteworthy that the family's relationship with the emerging communication technologies, and particularly the internet, was very good from the beginning. This was most probably necessitated by the fact that the family was trying to 'resolve living between two hemispheres'<sup>173</sup>, and technology offered the opportunity of closer and more instant communication with the beloved ones back home, but also all around the world. As Glenda wrote once to her parents: 'Sometimes I really need to touch base with you all to find out news immediately and not have to wait for a letter to arrive.'<sup>174</sup> For this reason, Glenda says that after 'technology became more sophisticated (...) my weekly letters have started being typed up on a computer'<sup>175</sup>, and were sent via an e-mail or a fax. 'Dear everyone who I can email, fax and send by snail mail'<sup>176</sup> was writing Glenda in one of her typed letters / e-mails.

As Glenda mentions, Greg, on his several business trips, also 'began writing regular faxes to the children sharing the cultures and experiences in his work life, encouraging them to write back and share their stories.'<sup>177</sup> The children were also at ease with technology. Especially Christopher, as Glenda writes about him: '...currently is hooked into internet on the computer. His knowledge on usage is far a long way in front of Greg's (or mine).'<sup>178</sup>

Even Glenda's and Greg's parents were technologically developed. As Glenda notes: 'Both our parents had now fax machines which allowed us to keep in touch on a regular base.'<sup>179</sup> The family acquired a scanner as well so

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<sup>173</sup> E-mail from Glenda to multiple recipients, 23-11/ 5-12-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.08.15.

<sup>174</sup> E-mail from Glenda to her parents, 17-9-95, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.18b.

<sup>175</sup> Glenda's personal notes, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.1.03.

<sup>176</sup> E-mail from Glenda to multiple recipients, 5-4-98, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.8.

<sup>177</sup> Glenda's personal notes, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.1.03.

<sup>178</sup> Letter from Glenda to her father, 25-5, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.22d.

<sup>179</sup> Glenda's personal notes, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.1.03.

that Glenda could include pictures in her typed letters, and also a printer in order to be able to print faxes and e-mails and keep them in her personal archive. In the course of the 00's, the communication technologies became more and more advanced, reaching today's era of video calling. When Jacinta left her parents' house in The Hague to return to Australia to study in the University of Melbourne, parents and daughter started communicating via telephone and Skype. As Glenda wrote: 'I love our lively bi weekly conversations. Telephoning and skypeing is a great way for us to connect.'<sup>180</sup>

That said, the question which arises is: has the extensive use of technology made the family less homesick and nostalgic in the course of time? A simple look to the references in the sections of this chapter about homesickness and nostalgia could provide us with the answer; an adequate number of quotations who spoke about the craving for the homeland and the beloved people back there, have been taken from the e-mails and faxes that Glenda sent to her relatives and friends throughout the years she and her family lived abroad. To provide a solid example, the sentence 'I miss greatly the warmth of Australia – of family and friends'<sup>181</sup>, cited in the homesickness section of this chapter, was taken from an e-mail of Glenda sent in 2002. This kind of quotations have contributed to the support of my theory and established the feelings of nostalgia and homesickness as parts of the life away from home.

In addition, the introduction of new methods of communication did not change the frequency of the family's correspondence. To elaborate, the sending of conventional letters, but also faxes and e-mails, carried on along with the practice of video calling. Hence, it can be inferred that the new, more intimate ways of communication did not affect the Australian expatriate family's identification with the homeland and their expression of national identity. The connection with the motherland remained intact long after the introduction of the family to new communication technologies.

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<sup>180</sup> E-mail from Glenda to multiple recipients, 19-11-07, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.08.19.

<sup>181</sup> E-mail from Glenda L. to multiple recipients, 25-12-02, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.1.05.007.

Having mentioned this, it should also be stressed that the identification with the native land did not alter within the passage of time and the moving to different countries. To explain, the course of time did not decrease the Australian's longing for their homeland, and in every country they lived in they continued to express their national identity - to a greater or lesser extent - at the same degree. For instance, the period of stay within a country where the family managed to adjust easily and feel gradually comfortable living in it, did not make the Australian expatriates identify less with their native land. Returning to the subject of technology, the only thing that one could say that the new communication technology altered is the style of Glenda's writing. More specifically, when Glenda started sending e-mails or faxes she did not always address the recipients of her correspondence with their names, but preferred a more general 'dear everyone' in the beginning of her writing.<sup>182</sup> In that sense, one could infer that her correspondence became slightly less 'personal' after she became proficient in using new ways of communication.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In the opening section of this chapter we studied all the ways the Australian expatriates identified with their homeland while living overseas, as appeared in the correspondence with their relatives back home. First, we watched them identify with their native country in a 'theoretical' level. The Australian morals and values were seen as the best guides for the education of the young members of the family, while the Australian culture was something to be admired and to compare all the other cultures with. The theoretical identification with the homeland continued with the frequent comparisons between the landscape of the host countries and that of the native land. That was another way to enunciate the admiration to the native land, this time in terms of its natural beauty, which was being remembered only when seeing a landscape equally pretty in a new country. Finally, the need to stay tuned with the political affairs of the motherland when leading a cosmopolitan lifestyle overseas was the last way of 'theoretical' identification with the homeland.

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<sup>182</sup> E-mail from Glenda to multiple recipients, 5-4-98, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.3.8

Moving further, we examined the 'immaterial' items of home as a medium to identify with the home country. Within this framework, we found out that the celebration of the national holidays of the native land when living away from it covered the important need to belong and to feel at home, even when the 'real' home was very far away. The support of the national team of the home country was another 'immaterial item of home', through which the expatriates we study were able to articulate their own national identity within the new environment. Moreover, the 'material' items of home facilitated the identification process with the native land. Traditional Australian food offered a momentary return to the distant homeland, and daily Australian products provided physical and emotional accommodation at a time of dispersion, as the life in foreign lands can be portrayed. Last, the connection to the homeland was manifested through the 'humans' of home, who were always mentioned as something special in the correspondence of the family, and whose company brought up feelings of familiarity and joy, even within the pleasant for the Australians multicultural environment they were living in.

To conclude with, for all the above mentioned reasons, during the entire period of time that they spent overseas, Australia stayed for the Australian expatriates the place of their hearts, the 'place of love.'<sup>183</sup> To use Glenda L.'s words: 'Simple things like hearing an Australian accent around you, people you don't know saying hello to you and talking with you... that is what makes Australia unique for us.'<sup>184</sup> This is what she wrote after her family's summer holidays spent with her parents, a trip which she described it as: 'the highlight of our year.'<sup>185</sup> And these trips back to Australia were the highlight of the year throughout all this time they had to spend abroad simply because they provided them with the so much needed 'dose of Australiana.'<sup>186</sup>

Within the second section of the chapter we explored how homesickness contributed to the identification of the Australian expatriates with

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<sup>183</sup> L. Malkki, 'National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees', *Cultural anthropology* 7 (2008) 30..

<sup>184</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, 10-12-95, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.24b.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Letter from Glenda L. to her parents, and grandparents 26-11-94, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.24.

their homeland while living in Europe. Our study has indicated that the gloomy weather of the northern European countries was a main factor for the appearance of the feeling of homesickness for the sunny homeland. We have also discovered that the warmth of the native country in terms of the weather intertwine with the 'warmth' of the beloved people back home within the expatriates' memories. This sense of homesickness, as experienced by the Australian expatriate family, resulted in a very distinct way of identification with the motherland. During all the years of their stay overseas, the adults of the family, Glenda and Greg, were seeking to buy a property back in Australia, what would be their final home, as they used to call it. This means, in my view, that the feeling of homesickness for the motherland was intense enough to make the expatriate family's return to it really nonnegotiable.

The previous paragraphs have investigated what the Australian expatriates were nostalgic about throughout their life in foreign countries and how this nostalgia was an underlying reason for the identification with the homeland. Our exploration showed that nostalgia, a feeling inextricably linked with past times, was displayed in the Australian family's correspondence through two channels. First, the nostalgia for a happy childhood and the people found in it, as demonstrated through the re-creation of the traditional food that loving figures of this childhood, such as the father and the grandmother, used to cook for the writer of the correspondence. Second, the nostalgic feeling for all the beloved people back home and the joyful moments associated with them, which are deeply missed when living in the other side of the world, and are even more remembered when - for instance - meeting compatriots in a festive mood in a traditional pub. To sum up, both exhibitions of nostalgia sustained the identification with the motherland and - as in the case of the feeling of homesickness - fed the need to finally return to it.

The aim of the fourth section of this chapter was to provide an answer on whether the practice of letter-writing was a tactic developed by the Australian family, and particularly by Glenda - who, as we very well know by now, was the writer of their correspondence and the one who put the thoughts and experiences of all the members of the family on paper - to deal with the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia that the life away from home entailed.

The considerable size of the Australian archive and the detailing content of it illustrated that the expatriates were in serious need to stay in touch with their family back in the homeland, and this way to banish the occasionally frustrating feelings of nostalgia and homesickness. Furthermore, the particular correspondence showed that the practice of writing home was not merely a medium to fight homesickness and nostalgia; it was also a sort of 'diary keeping', which facilitated the keeping of order of all the new experiences gained by living in foreign environments, and cemented the gap between the 'old' and the 'new' life. Finally, 'writing home' provided a balance in the writer's identity and fulfilled the crucial need of 'being rooted'.

The last section investigated whether the new communication technologies, such as the fax and the internet, which made their appearance in the early 90's, influenced the way the Australian expatriates articulated their national identity and identified with their homeland while living overseas. Our exploration has indicated that albeit the family's competence in using advanced communication technologies, and their exposure to more intimate ways of communication like the e-mails and video calling, did not induce a change in the identification process with their motherland. As the quotations retrieved from a number of e-mails have shown, the Australian expatriates' homesickness and nostalgia for the native land remained unchanged throughout the years they had to live in foreign lands and long after their introduction to new means of communication.

Additionally, the more instant ways of communication did not alter the frequency of the family's correspondence. For instance, the 'easiness' that the practice of video calling brought about in communicating with the beloved people back home did not make Glenda write less to them. Thus, it is safe to conclude that in the Australian expatriates' case the new communication technologies did not serve as a substitute of everything that their homeland meant for them while living, as Glenda wrote, away from everyone and everything they love.<sup>187</sup>; it was more of a means to facilitate the connection with the motherland while constantly moving to different places of the world. As

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<sup>187</sup> Letter from Glenda to her father, no date provided, Expatriate Archive Centre, Australian family's archive, number 1.0003.1.2.2.16d.

David Fitzgerland very explicitly wrote, new communication technologies stretch the limits of space and time and allow migrants to belong to a single community anchored in multiple, distant geographic localities.<sup>188</sup> His argument made me shape the opinion that the new communication technologies were used by the Australian expatriates as a way to maintain the feeling that they were still part of the community of their homeland, apart from the enormous distance which was separating them from it.

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<sup>188</sup> D. Fitzgerald, 'Colonies of the little motherland: membership, space, and time in Mexican migrant hometown associations', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50 (2008) 145.



## **4. COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE TWO FAMILIES**

The scope of this chapter is to investigate the differences and similarities between the ways the two expatriate families experienced their life overseas, as expressed in their correspondence with their beloved ones back home, having as a guideline again the five questions the five questions which determined the structure of the preceding empirical chapters.

### **4.1 Identification with the homeland**

The first section of this chapter compares the way the two expatriate families identified with their native land while living overseas. Within the foregoing chapters we have witnessed that the identification with the motherland was sustained through 'theoretical ways of identification', the 'material items of home', the 'immaterial items of home' and the 'humans from home'. Regarding the first category, both families were eager to stay tuned with the political affairs of their homeland, showing that even within their cosmopolitan lifestyle of working and travelling around the world, they were interested in the future and prosperity of their native country. Moreover, both of the families identified with their homeland by making frequent comparisons between the landscape of their motherland and that of the host country.

Speaking about comparisons, the American family compared the industrial history of U.S.A. with that of the African countries they stayed in. In my view, the specific fact illustrates that the Americans have historicized the vision of their country, an element that did not appear in the case of the Australian family. Through these comparisons, an admiration for the glorious history of the relatively young American nation came into surface.

Another common characteristic between the two correspondences was the identification with the educational principles of the mother country. As we saw, both the American and the Australian family wanted to raise the children with the principles of their own country. The Americans, as teachers, emphasized more on the actual educational system of their homeland, while the Australians considered the general social mores of their country the best values to instill in their children. Last, the Australian family thought very highly

of the culture of their native country and for them it was a standard to compare all the other cultures they came across with. The American family, admittedly in a more moderate way, developed a similar attitude by making frequent references to the cultural activities organized by the American embassy or by praising the cozy atmosphere of the American neighborhoods.

The second way of identifying with the homeland in the correspondence of the two expatriate families was the 'material items of home'. The American couple was attached to tapes of movies and ball games, as well as a sports magazine from home, whereas the Australian family strongly identified with the traditional Australian food and the typical Australian products.,

Furthermore, the expatriate families identified with their motherlands through the 'immaterial items of home'. In my opinion, - inspired by the writings of the two families - such 'immaterial items' can be considered the national holidays, the traditional music and the national sports team of the homeland. As it became apparent in the families' correspondences, both of them sought to celebrate the national holidays of their native countries, as a means to maintain the important feeling of belonging to their distant homes. Concerning the Americans, Kathleen, the wife of the family expressed her national identity by teaching her students traditional, folk American music and by singing songs with a nostalgic content about her homeland, whereas the Australians supported fiercely the Australian national sports team wherever in the world they might be, articulating this way their own national identity.

Finally, the identification with the motherland and the expression of national identity was manifested in the correspondence of both expatriate families via the 'humans of home'. The association with other compatriots brought a feeling of familiarity and joy to all the expatriates, from both families. Even further though, for the Americans, hanging around with other Americans, provided a sense of security in dire straits, meaning the strange situations they had to face while living in the so different from the western world African countries. As their correspondence revealed to us, an American's expertise and opinion was always trusted within these difficult for them circumstances. A

similar characteristic naturally did not emerge in the correspondence of the Australians, since they lived in countries with a more comfortable lifestyle.

Approaching the end of this section, a general remark - and at the same time a similarity between the two studied families - regarding the way the two families identified with their homeland should be made. As clarified in the chapter dedicated to the American family's correspondence, the American expatriates did not mingle socially with the native black population of the African countries they lived in, thus relating clearly to the dominant, white, Anglo-Saxon version of the American culture. The correspondence of the Australian family gives the same impression. Their version of Australia is also 'white', since they do not make any references to the aboriginal population of the country, concentrating only to the culture and customs of the white community of the country.

To sum up, all the formerly mentioned ways of identification, the 'theoretical ways', the 'material items of home', the 'immaterial items of home' and the 'humans of home' - to remind readers, all of them being paraphrases of the Williksen and Rapport's term 'items of nation' - provided, as the same authors argued, physical and emotional accommodation within the uprooting experience of expatriation and facilitated the connection with the faraway motherland.

## **4.2 Homesickness and nostalgia**

The feeling of homesickness - the longing for a particular place - has been established as a compelling reason for the maintenance of the identification process with the homeland in the two case studies of this thesis.

On the one hand, the American expatriates lived under challenging social circumstances in the African country of Zambia. They had to deal with various adversities, such as the scarcity of food and the serious criminality because of the very poor native population of the country. All these led to a general feeling of non-safety and a sense of lack of freedom. Under these conditions, the feeling of homesickness for the wealthy and safe homeland was

generated, and remained the same until the family moved from Zambia to Cameroon.

On the other hand, the Australian family had to move from their sunny homeland to the countries of northern Europe, where the weather is known to be gloomy. Especially for those who are not accustomed to it, like the Australians, the weather can also be depressing. As we have observed, this was a triggering reason to make them feel homesick about their country, whose fine weather was a source of happiness for them – as their correspondence revealed - when they still lived there. Moreover, by reading these writings, we realized that the warmth of their native land was intertwined in the family's memories with the 'warmth' of the beloved people back home, who were deeply missed while having to live far away from them. This feeling of homesickness, as discovered in the correspondence of the Australian family, led to a special way of identification with the motherland: throughout all the years they spent overseas they were seeking to buy a house in Australia for when they would finally return there. In other words, being homesick about their homeland resulted in an absolute certainty that this would be the final place to settle down.

All in all, either because of the objective difficulties faced in the new countries, as in the case of the Americans, or because of the longing for the warmth of the weather and the people in the motherland, as seen in the correspondence of the Australians, the feeling of homesickness is associated with the expatriate life and maintains the linking bonds with the homeland.

Moreover, the research of this thesis has shown that aside to homesickness, the feeling of nostalgia played a pivotal role in the identification with the homeland process for the expatriates. Nostalgia has been defined as the craving for the happy days of one's past and it is evident in the correspondence of both expatriate families. The reasons for the appearance of nostalgia in the families' writings though are – as stated in the previous section about homesickness – entirely different.

In the American family's correspondence nostalgia was present as a longing for the loving figure of the mother and the happy moments shared with

her in the past. It has therefore been concluded that the national identity of the American couple was not reinforced by the feeling of nostalgia for the homeland. However, with the help of Brancato's study on Kincaid's works about the different meanings that the figure of the mother can take, as analyzed in the second chapter, we were able to see this attachment of the American couple to their mother from a different angle: as a possible connection to the motherland.

The Australians, as mentioned above, was another case. There, the feeling of nostalgia was directed to the happy childhood spent in the homeland, a childhood which molded Glenda's personality. As a result of this feeling, she sought to recreate for her family the traditional food that dear figures of this childhood, such as her father and grandmother, used to cook for her. Nostalgia about the homeland was also encountered in the Australians' correspondence through the frequent references to the carefree moments spent with their really beloved ones back home, whose memory – as we saw – could become even stronger when randomly meeting compatriots celebrating in a traditional pub. Especially for the Australian family, the feeling of nostalgia combined with the feeling of homesickness, led to an unquenched desire to finally return home, after the end of their mandatory stay in foreign lands due to work.

To conclude with, in this section about nostalgia, the differences between the two studied families are more apparent than in any other section of this comparative chapter. The feeling of nostalgia obviously highlighted the national identity of the Australian expatriates and propelled the identification with their motherland, while the nostalgia discerned in the Americans' correspondence was aimed at the figure of the mother and the happy moments shared with her in the past, thus not signifying a clear-cut identification with the native land.

#### **4.4 The practice of letter-writing and the role of technology**

For both families the practice of 'writing home' was a beacon throughout all the years of their expatriate life. It was a sort of strategy to cope with the feelings of

homesickness and nostalgia and fulfilled the important need to stay in touch with everyone and everything that was loved back home.

Beginning with the American expatriates, letter-writing helped the couple to fight the feeling of nostalgia for their dear mother and offered a sense of being closer to her via the frequent, detailing letters. The receiving letters have also provided consolation to the family while they were trying to adjust to the new, very strange to them environments, and they served as the connecting bridges to the 'real world', as the couple described U.S.A. while leading a so dissimilar from home life in Africa. Last, the huge newsletters that the couple sent home, describing their trips around the continent of Africa, could be seen as the chronicle of their adventures, resembling also the pages of a careful diary.

The practice of letter-writing was also for Glenda - the writer of the Australian family - a form of diary keeping, as we read in one of her letters. The letters perceived as a diary, which includes all the new experiences of the expatriate life, and keeps them in order, was the main similarity between the Australian and the American family. Besides that, the Australians, and particularly Glenda, 'used' letter-writing in a different way. In contrast with the Americans who regarded 'writing home' as their connection with the real world, she saw letter-writing as the connecting bridge to her inner self. As she said, writing her thoughts on a paper provided her with a sense of balance in her identity and covered the significant for her need to know where her roots are. That said, a last point that needs to be made is that the considerable size of the Australian's archive spoke for itself about the desire of the family to stay in close contact with their beloved ones at home and underlines the very important position that letter-writing held in the Australian expatriate's life.

The last question addressed in the preceding chapters was whether the use of new communication technology changed the way the expatriates identified with their native land while living abroad, and whether the more direct methods of communication, such as the faxes and video-calling, made them feel less homesick and nostalgic about their motherland and their beloved ones back home.

Unluckily, the archive of the American family could not constitute a source of relevant to the subject findings, since in the time this correspondence took place - from 1978 to 1983 - new communication technologies had not appeared yet. On the contrary, the Australian family's archive, which coincide with the advent of the commercial internet in the 90's, was enlightening in understanding the role of technology within the expatriate life. The study of their writings has indicated that notwithstanding the family's competence in sending faxes and e-mails, as well as using instant ways of communication such as video-calling, the connection with their motherland remained a stable procedure throughout the years. For instance, quite a few quotations talking about nostalgia and homesickness were retrieved for the purposes of this thesis from the e-mails and faxes that Glenda used to send back home.

Furthermore, the extensive use of the advanced methods of communication that the internet had to offer did not denote a change on the frequency of the family's correspondence. Glenda continued writing detailing letters to her relatives and friends, while at the same time she was able to stay in touch with them via faxes and video calling. Hence, it can be said that for the Australians the new communication technologies served more as a means to facilitate the identification with their distant homeland, rather than a factor that could alter this process.

Raising a final point, this 'convenience' that the advanced communication technology provided to the Australians in staying in touch with their homeland, facilitating simultaneously the identification with it, was not a 'privilege' enjoyed by the American family as well, due to – as stressed at a former point of this section – the time that their correspondence occurred. To my eye, this is a main difference between the two families when thoroughly examining all the ways through which the identification with their homelands was sustained.

## 5. CONCLUSION

After the completion of the empirical research and the illustration of the similarities and differences found in the correspondence of the two expatriate families, we have now come to the final part of this thesis where general results need to be drawn.

In the introductory chapter it was emphasized that the expatriates' expression of national identity while living away from their homeland is a subject that has been slightly touched upon in the academic studies. The existing literature deals with expatriation as a common phenomenon of the today's globalizing world of business - in which people move constantly to other countries due to working reasons - and concentrates on the expatriates' contribution to the shaping of the dynamics of the modern job arena.

The notion of national identity on the other side is extensively discussed in academic works. The worldwide process of globalization, accompanied with large-scale immigration, has made historians, anthropologists and sociologists study either the way the native populations experience the previously mentioned social phenomena within the boundaries of their own country, or how the immigrants' sense of national identity gets affected by moving to another - foreign to them - country. The case of immigrants has also given me the chance to raise the point that an expatriate must not be seen as an immigrant, since the expatriates intend to leave their country for a limited period of time, whereas immigrants leave their native land permanently. Thus, expatriating - either for working or even studying reasons - can be regarded as a practice which exemplifies the globalizing world of today's era. For this reason, the study of the expatriates' sense of national identity within this globalizing world seemed to me not only a very interesting research topic, but also a necessary subject to be discussed from a historical perspective.

Towards the increase of knowledge on the expatriate's case of study, the primary sources of my research have proved to be more than enlightening. The correspondence of the two expatriate families, as stored in the family archives of the Expatriate Archive Centre in The Hague, left no questions about the expatriates' manifestation of national identity while living overseas.



The thorough study of my sources has also indicated that the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia go hand in hand with the expatriate life and reinforce the expatriates' expression of national identity. Within this framework, I decided to formulate my main research question as follows: *How is the national identity of two expatriate families being expressed through their private correspondences and how did their national identifications change during this period (1978-2009)?*

As far as the first part of the question is concerned, we discovered that the expatriates articulated their national identity and identified with their motherlands in various ways. First, via 'theoretical ways of identification': They showed great interest in staying well-informed about the political scene of their homeland and made regular comparisons between the landscape of their native land and that of the host country. Comparisons have also been made between the national history of the motherland and that of the new country, praising this way the successful past of the homeland. Moreover, although living in foreign countries, the expatriate families sought to raise their children with the educational principles, mores and values of their homeland, safeguarding this way the retention of their own culture.

Second, the identification with the motherland was facilitated by the 'material items of home'. Throughout the years they spent abroad, the expatriate families kept asking their relatives to send them specific things from home, as well as food products in order to cook traditional recipes of their native land.

Third, the national identity of the expatriates was expressed through the 'immaterial items of home'. The celebration of the national holidays of the homeland proved to be very important for the expatriates in maintaining the sense of belonging to their faraway homes. Singing songs with a nostalgic content about the homeland and supporting in international games the national sports team of the native land was another way of identifying with the home country.

Last, the expatriates' national identity was articulated through the 'humans from home'. That is to say that the expatriates asked for the company

of their compatriots while living in foreign lands, which provided them with a feeling of familiarity, understanding and joy, as well as a sense of security within hard times.

The - extensively discussed in this thesis - feelings of homesickness (the longing of a particular place) and nostalgia (a craving of the happy moments of one's past) have been certified as powerful factors in sustaining the identification process with the homeland. Concerning homesickness, as the correspondence of the two expatriate families informed us, it is a feeling that can be generated either by the difficult social situation found in the host country or by the depressing - so different from the homeland - weather. These previous facts made the families see their own country either as a 'lost' safe heaven or it cultivated the desire to return to their motherland at all costs. With respect to the feeling of nostalgia, it emerged in the correspondences of the two expatriate families as a longing for her carefree childhood, as well as a craving for the joyful moments spent with beloved relatives and friends back in the homeland. It also made its appearance as a longing for the dear figure of the mother and the happy moments spent with her in the past.

The second part of the research question concerned the changes on the national identifications of the two expatriate families in the period 1978-2009, related to the advent of new communication technologies in the 90's. The goal was to discover whether the expatriates became less homesick and nostalgic about their motherland due to the instant ways of communication that these technologies had to offer. The Australian family's correspondence showed us that the extensive use of direct ways of communication did not cause a change in the way the Australian expatriates identified with their motherland. A number of e-mails and faxes kept expressing the expatriate family's nostalgia and homesickness, while the frequency of writing back home remained the same. Thus, it has been concluded that innovative communication technologies did not alter the Australian expatriates' identification with their homeland; instead, it served more as a medium which facilitated their connection with home.

Last, this thesis intended to answer whether the practice of letter-writing served as a strategy to cope with the feelings of homesickness and nostalgia.

Within this framework, the reflexive nature of national identity, as argued by Henkes and Lechner, became apparent. The correspondence of the two expatriate families provided us with a lucid answer on how 'writing home' functioned as a tactic to fight the nostalgia for the mother and feel closer to her through writing, as well as the best way to cover the so important need to stay in close touch with the beloved ones back home. It also served as a sort of diary-keeping for the expatriates, helping them to keep their thoughts in order, while living in foreign countries and being bombarded by whole new experiences. Furthermore, the letters from home offered comfort while adjusting in the strange environment of new countries, and were the 'connecting bridge' to the 'real world', as the Americans said, while living in remote Africa. For Glenda, the pen of the Australian family, letter-writing was also a method to stay connected with her inner self, since writing was a source of balance in her identity, which offered her a sense of rootedness.

All in all, the expatriates' letters support the idea of the 'imagined community' of the nation, which is highly related to 'kinship', as illustrated by Benedict Anderson in the introduction of this thesis. The correspondence of the expatriates with their 'kinsmen' back home was the channel through which the expatriates' national identity was being expressed and preserved throughout the years. Anderson emphasized on the products of print capitalism in the eighteenth century, i.e. newspapers and novels, which created a sense of community and linkage between the citizens of a country, and sustained the 'imagined community' of the nation. In my view, the hand-written and typed letters of the expatriates facilitated the same sense of belonging to the community of the distant homeland and maintained the linkage between the members of the transnational families, sustaining this way the 'imagined community' of the family, as highlighted by Barbara Henkes.

In addition, Eviatar Zerubavel and Wulf Kansteiner stressed the socio-cultural construction of identity through collective memory, as it is eminently manifested within nations. According to the authors, mnemonic traditions and commemorations have to be performed in order to produce the sense of being a member of a particular community. The expatriates' letters came to prove this constructed nature of national identity. As we have witnessed, the

expatriate families sought to celebrate the national holidays of their homelands and recreated the traditional food or sang traditional songs of their country, so that to retain their own national identity while living far away from their native lands.

The scope of this thesis was to bring to light the practice of expatriation within globalization times in relation to the highly debated topic of national identity. Within this framework, it has been illustrated that the expatriates belong to this group of people who have the financial and legal means to move across borders and between cultures according to their own career ambitions, being able to lead a cosmopolitan lifestyle by travelling around the world, while at the same time they know that repatriation – the return to their homeland – will certainly occur in the future. Nevertheless, the research of my thesis has indicated that, even within the above described lifestyle, the powers which keep the expatriates connected with their homeland remain very strong.

The correspondence of the two expatriate families has demonstrated that the identification with the motherland is a long-lasting process, which goes hand in hand with the expatriate life and manifests itself in a variety of ways. In my opinion, this should suffice to let the subject of expatriation enter the large discussion about national identity and open new horizons of research for the scholars who, up to this point, have focused mostly on the case studies of the immigrants and the native population of several countries, which undergo changes due to globalization and immigration. This observation brings this thesis to its end. Apparently, the need for additional research does not stop here.

The particular thesis aspired to give the initial impetus to a further exploration upon the subject of expatriation. The investigation made for the purposes of this thesis was limited to two expatriate families, coming from and living in specific countries, at a certain period of time (late twentieth-early twenty-first century). The investigational scope could be extended to a larger number of expatriates, coming from other countries, moving to other places, within a different period of time. Other subjects could also be studied. For

instance, the two particular correspondences brought to notice the role of women in keeping the transnational families connected, since the majority of the letters were written by the women of the expatriate families. One might also find interesting to study how the children of the expatriate families experience their lives abroad, whose voice was absent in the specific correspondences. In conclusion, further research in other directions could build on the outcomes of this thesis and broaden the picture about the practice of expatriation.

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