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Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/ambiances/4669
DOI: 10.4000/ambiances.4669
ISSN: 2266-839X

Publisher:
Direction Générale des Patrimoines - DAPA - MCC, UMR 1563 - Ambiances Architectures Urbanités (AAU)

Electronic reference
Cecil Marie Schou Pallesen, “The permeable and the pervasive: Approaching an understanding of atmospheres of home among Tanzanian Indians”, Ambiances [Online], 9 | 2023, Online since 15 December 2023, connection on 15 December 2023. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/ambiances/4669, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/ambiances.4669

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Introduction

1 Moshi, Tanzania, 5 a.m. Outside it is dark, the apartment is lit by a single fluorescent tube creating a green, cold light. In its stillness the apartment seems quiet, but there is a constant sound of cars passing on the street outside, which mixes with the sound of calls to prayer from the mosques. Bhavisha and Dhanesh walk around slowly, preparing for prayer in the Jain temple. They shower, put on white clothes, pack a few things in a bag woven from yellow and red plastic wires. Leaving the house without speaking, they drive through the town to the temple, where they perform the pooja ritual. There are only a few other Jains left in Moshi, so Bhavisha and Dhanesh come every morning and clean the deities, grind the sandalwood, sing and light the ghee lamps before returning to their home for breakfast and then work.

2 For Bhavisha and Dhanesh, most days are the same. They wake up early, go to the temple, return home, have breakfast. Then Dhanesh opens his shop on the ground floor while Bhavisha stays in the apartment above where she prepares food and looks after the house. At noon, their son and daughter-in-law come for lunch. In the evening, Bhavisha and Dhanesh play cards. It is a quiet, steady life. But underneath the tranquillity, a fundamental ambiguity underlies the lives of Bhavisha, Dhanesh and many other people of Indian origin living in Tanzania. They belong, but they do not
belong. They feel at home, but they do not feel at home. Tanzania is their home, but Tanzania is not their home. They are locals but they are also strangers.

This way of belonging has been the focus of the ethnographic fieldwork that I have carried out in Tanzania since 2012, and in this article, I explore how it unfolds in the atmospheres of home in a family of Indian origin in Tanzania. I draw on the work of Hermann Schmitz, who argued that “(d)welling is cultivation of the emotions in an enclosed space” (Schmitz, 2012, 2016, p. 9) and on Tim Ingold’s theory of meshwork: that we inhabit a world of entanglement where everything is connected through interwoven lines (Ingold, 2022). Studying the relation between dwelling and longing for enclosure, as well as the permeable and the pervasive, I argue, is a way to approach an understanding of the intimate politics of what it means to create and sustain a home as a marginalised but resourceful migrant minority. What is allowed to enter the home, and what enters anyway, and what causes certain things to enter, are parts of the shaping of the atmospheres of a home: the sounds, the lights, the smells, the people, their emotions. The comfort of what the inhabitants prefer to keep in their home, and the discomfort and anxiety of what they would rather leave out. In this way, the study of atmospheres in a migrant home allows us to try to grasp how it feels to belong and not belong at the same time, how it feels to have a home which incorporates the homely as well as the non-homely.

In the article, I use data from fieldwork with several different families of Indian background living in Moshi. My analysis is informed by my fieldwork over the last 11 years (a total of 18 months in 2012-2013, 2015, 2016, 2020, 2021-22), but I zoom in specifically on the home of Dhanesh and Bhavisha, whom I have known since 2012 and with whom I have developed a close personal relationship. During my latest fieldwork, six months in 2021-2022, I collected data for an exhibition in Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus, Denmark, called Home. My colleagues and I worked explicitly with the concept of atmosphere in the research as well as the production phase, and I worked together with Dhanesh and Bhavisha to collect artefacts and sounds, and to film and photograph for the exhibition. This is why I chose to write extensively about their case in this article. In addition to participant observation and semi-structured and unstructured interviews, my latest fieldwork thus consisted of several co-creation methods (Estalella, Criado, 2018; Marcus, 2013). In this article, I have included photographs and short film clips which in different stages of my work, the research and collection phase as well as the analytical phase, have enabled me to approach a focus and an understanding. Orienting myself in the home of Dhanesh and Bhavisha through a camera lens and a sound recorder has sharpened my awareness of movements, colours, light, soundscapes etc. But Dhanesh and Bhavisha also helped to direct my focus by suggesting things and situations to film and objects to collect and bring home for the exhibition.

Working with atmospheres as part of ethnographic fieldwork demands sensitivity and is to some extent a subtle endeavour (Schroer, Schmitt, 2018). It requires attention to detail and a willingness to register how emotions and sensations take place in one’s own body and how the connectedness of people, feelings, things, places, sounds and light unfold. I am continuously exploring and learning. My data are a mix of things that my interlocutors told me, ambiances that I felt in specific situations, feelings I had, body language and facial expressions that I noted, words used, laughter, tears, conversations, smells, sounds. Sometimes I was “in it” myself while helping Bhavisha in the kitchen; sometimes I was observing and sensing behind the camera or in-between
Throughout my fieldwork in Tanzania, the ambivalence has been obvious to me; the ways in which Tanzanian Indians have settled firmly and at the same time are on their way onwards. The way they see Tanzania as a home yet see themselves as vulnerable citizens belonging less solidly than African Tanzanians. In my work in Dhanesh and Bavisha’s home, the meeting between and coexistence of the homely and the non-homely disclosed itself to me as a central theme throughout my work with them and my work with footage and sound recordings after I left Tanzania. I enjoyed the calm, safe ambience of Bhavisha’s cooking, chatting and singing during the daytime, and I experienced the constant and overwhelming noise from the street during the night, where the mosquito net was the only barrier between outside and inside. But I also watched my footage of interviews with Bhavisha and Dhanesh again and again. The two different atmospheres in and of the home – the homely and the non-homely, and the permeability that allows the non-homely to enter – imposed themselves again and again during and after my fieldwork. It became obvious to me that not only did the two atmospheres and feelings co-exist, but they were both important parts of the home that Dhanesh and Bavisha knew and lived in.

This article seeks to show how atmospheres and (non-)belonging are related and entangled. Studying sounds, lights, materiality, feelings, tastes, and smells, it tries to understand what constitutes the emotional and physical experience of being at home – and its opposite – in a minority migrant community. The article investigates how emotions and trauma and the inherent history of a house, as well as daily housework, bringing ‘liveliness’ to the home and upholding traditions, foster different aspects of atmospheres of home. These atmospheres are in part created intentionally and in part arise in more subtle, unconscious and external ways. The atmospheres of home in Dhanesh’s and Bhavisha’s house have different emotional and material qualities and exist simultaneously. They are atmospheres of belonging and non-belonging, and they are not opposites as such.
In Dylan Trigg’s words, atmospheres are “affective phenomena, which are grasped pre-reflectively, manifest spatially, felt corporeally, and conceived as semi-autonomous and indeterminate entities” (Trigg, 2020, p. 3). Atmospheres are ambiguous in their nature: they are powerful and can be both deeply affective and effective, and at the same time they are diffuse and intangible. We can sense them, but we cannot touch them or catch them. They direct the ways in which we perceive certain situations, but rarely are we aware of the ways in which atmospheres are central to our perception of the world. We sense an atmosphere in a given space before we identify the subjects and objects in it (Böhme, 2017), but it is not an easy task, either to ‘collect’ or to describe an atmosphere (De Matteis, Bille, Griffero et al., 2019).

According to Hermann Schmitz, emotions are not private or isolated; they are “atmospheres poured out spatially that move the felt (not the material) body” (Schmitz, Müllan, Slaby, 2011, p. 247). Likewise, Gernot Böhme wrote that atmosphere is an “indeterminate spatially extended quality of feeling” (Böhme, 1993, p. 117-118). Schmitz distinguishes between “feeling (Fühlen) as undergoing an emotion and the emotion itself (Gefühl) as an atmospheric force that is either felt or merely perceived” (Nörenberg, 2020, p. 216). Hence, atmospheres are fundamental to our being-in-the-world. We are part of the atmospheres, and they are part of us. I follow Tim Ingold, who writes that “to perceive the environment is not to look back on the things to be found in it, or to discern their congealed shapes and layouts, but to join with them in the material flows and movements contributing to their – and our – ongoing formation” (Ingold, 2022, p. 109). To study atmospheres is to study social life in a holistic perspective; the attunements of spaces, bodies and air, the “meshwork of entangled lines
of life, growth and movement” (Ingold, 2022, p. 79). To study atmospheres of home is to
take seriously the ways in which we are connected to and share experiences and
emotions with the world, and that the connectedness defines our abilities to feel that
we belong.

Home has traditionally been studied by Western scholars as congruent with house or
shelter, but it is necessary that we broaden our perspective and view home as more
than merely a place (Mallet, 2004; Matta, de Suremain, Crenn, 2020, p. 2-3). At the same
time, it is crucial to approach home as not only an experience of safety, comfort and
peace. Home can also be unsettling, conflicted, alienating and unsafe (Gudeman, 2020,
p. x; Lenhard, Samanani. 2020, p. 4). For migrant populations, home is often processual
and between movement and rootedness, former and present places (Ralph, Staeheli,
2010, p. 3, 7).

Though Schmitz writes that emotions are “atmospheres in an area-less space”
(Schmitz, 2012, 2016, p. 6), dwelling demands a level of enclosure:

“Since [emotions], as has been shown, are aimed at claiming totally the space of
experienced presence with area-less occupation, for the purpose of dwelling, in the
first instance such a space must be delimited, so that they do not escape from the
person's control. This purpose is served by the enclosing which separates the home
from that which is outside, but which belongs with it as a contrast. Dwelling is
cultivation of the emotions in an enclosed space” (Schmitz, 2012, 2016, p. 9).

Thus, according to Schmitz, dwelling, understood as habitation – the place one lives in –
must be delimited in order to be experienced as a home. Of course, there are no
universal rules about the size or materiality of such a place. Home can be a landscape, a
song, a meal (Abarca, 2020; Basso, 1996). But it seems plausible that the contrast
between the homely and the non-homely is exactly what turns a dwelling into a home
(see for instance Bille, 2015, who describes how light is used to underline the difference
between the cozy and secure and the opposite, or Sou, Webber, 2023, who write about
how unfamiliar sounds, tastes and smells enter a home after a natural disaster and
interrupt the homely – and thus also underline what the homely actually is.) There
must be something that is not home for home to be constituted. For Tanzanian Indians,
the impermanence experienced since Tanzanian independence has made home
ambivalent, because belonging and non-belonging, safety and uncertainty are
interwoven. The dwelling, in the form of the house, is to a large degree equivalent to
home, but it is simultaneously equivalent to the unhomely. Home is guarded by
permeable walls and driven by an anxiety about losing 'who we are'. The atmospheres
of the home hence arise in the border zones between home and the outside, between
what constitutes the home and what threatens it.
A large part of the Indian minority in Tanzania are descendants of the people who left Gujarat in around 1900 in search of better living conditions in East Africa (Morris, 1956, p. 195; Oonk, 2007, p. 11; Gregory, 1993, p. 6). Following the old trade routes across the Indian Ocean, they settled in Zanzibar and on the East African coast (Burton, 2013, p. 8; Bertz, 2015, p. 17). They built houses and established businesses and became part of British East Africa’s colonial society, which was characterised by a hierarchical apartheid system with clear dividing lines between the British, the Asians and the Africans (Pandurang, 2009, p. 51; Sakarai, 1981, p. 5; Aminzade, 2013, p. 339). While people from the Indian communities were given certain advantages under colonial rule that helped them build their businesses in towns and cities, the British also restricted their possibilities for buying land and establishing small-scale businesses in rural areas (Heilman, 1998, p. 381). Many Tanzanian Indians thus became landlords, and Indian house-owners were known for only renting out houses and rooms to other Indians and not to wananchi (‘indigenous’) (Brennan, 2012, p. 198). Due to a serious shortage of accommodation in towns and cities, “(l)andlordism had been diagnosed as the principal evil of urban capitalism” (ibid., p. 190). At the time of independence in 1961, President Julius Nyerere proclaimed that private ownership of land conflicted with the idea of Ujamaa, ‘familyhood’, which was the name and centre of his socialist visions of the new nation (Aminzade, 2013, p. 148). There was “no room for land parasites,” he stated (Nyerere, Ujamaa; Tanganyika Standard, 16 April 1962, cited in Brennan, 2012, p. 187).
1971 and 1972, following the 1967 Arusha Declaration, thousands of buildings and companies, primarily owned by people of Indian origin but regardless of their Tanzanian citizenship, were nationalised, confiscated by the authorities, as part of the process of *Africanisation* (Aminzade, 2013, p. 136).

During my fieldwork, nationalisation and its consequences proved to be central issues in many conversations I had with Tanzanian Indians; the loss had become a communal trauma. The wish to reclaim power and *Africanise* was obviously widespread on the continent in the 1960s and ’70s (Cheeseman, Bertrand, Husaini, 2019; Aiyar, 2014). Because Indians had played a role between British and Africans during colonial rule, and were landlords, brokers and a business elite, they were “reviled for their unassimilability, and therefore vulnerable to scapegoating” (Brennan, 2012, p. 8). In Uganda, Idi Amin expelled Asians with ninety days’ notice (Adams, Bristow, 1979). The anger towards Indians resulted in Nyerere’s government refusing to welcome Indian refugees from Uganda (Brennan, 2012, p. 192). It was a time when the Indians felt hostility from the countries they had invested in, and many people from the Indian communities left East Africa in the years following independence and nationalisation.

My Tanzanian Indian interlocutors in Moshi all stayed behind when family members and friends left Tanzania. Many of them have been looking after the families’ lost properties. And many of them have been fighting for decades to reclaim ownership of the houses. They lead quiet lives; they are self-sufficient and wish to avoid conflicts. But they feel they have been mistreated, and that they deserved better. “Why are we always treated as strangers?” Mohammed, a Tanzanian Indian Sunni in his early 50s asked. He was frustrated about being addressed as *mhindi* (Kiswahili for ‘Indian’) and being asked for extra bribes because of his ethnic background. He wanted to be seen as a *Tanzanian*. At the same time, the vast majority of Tanzanian Indians do not want their children to marry Africans. “Our cultures are too different,” Mohammed’s wife Noora told me. “It gets too complicated.” In most Tanzanian Indian families and religious communities, a person who marries an African will be excommunicated. The Tanzanian Indians want to be part of the nation, but only to a certain degree.²

The Indians who stayed in Tanzania have felt it necessary to keep what they call ‘a foot in the door’, a practice of securing different citizehnships within each family, so that they will be able to leave if it becomes too precarious (Pallesen, 2017). Both past events and the visions of the future create a certain ambiguity among the dramatically shrinking Indian minority I work with. “We are nowhere,” Dhara, a 72-year-old Jain, told me one day. She really wanted to move to London, but she also knew that there, she would be called ‘*paki*’. Indian Tanzanians have lived their whole life in Tanzania, and this is where they grew up, went to school, raised their children, worked and took part in their religious community. This is where they know how to live the Indian way: to go to the temple, to cook Gujarati dishes, to speak Gujarati, to live in extended families and uphold community values – endogamy, amongst others. This is also where they know how things work, and where they have a network. But at the same time, this is where they feel they live *in the right way* but are seen as arrogant and disloyal citizens. This ambivalence forms a fundamental tension in the Indians’ lives. And even though they have ‘a foot in the door’, they have nowhere else in the world they know the way they know Tanzania.
The ambivalent way of belonging creates a feeling among the Indians of being vulnerable, and it makes them anxious. But at the same time, living with ‘a foot in the door’ is a privilege that is only available to a very few African Tanzanians: being able to go to Europe on visits, being able to get a British education, being able to leave. Hence, the ambivalence is also about being on the way but not being on the way, getting ready to move but staying – or the opposite.

In my work with the atmospheres of home, I have followed two parallel traces: the processes and emotions related to the nationalised houses and the fight to get them back, and the daily practices in the homes where a certain kind of Indianness is performed, perceived and practised. The histories of the houses and the legal cases are interwoven with everyday life in the pursuit of peace and safety and in the quest to define ‘who we are’. The identity is expressed in atmospheres of the home – through cooking, decorations, sounds, language, smells, tastes, body language and activities. But at the same time, an ambiguity of this identity is experienced in the way in which the atmospheres are a composite of what is wanted in the home and what imposes itself from the outside but is unwelcome. Dust, smells, noise, people, the feelings of undefined or defined threats, the National Housing Corporation, an Indian-hostile politics, among others: elements that threaten the purity and peace of the home, or even its existence.
The fight for the house

In Moshi, the town centre is characterised by two-storey houses built by Indians in the 1940s and '50s. Many of them have names on their façades: Patel, Kambhaita, Jaffer, Kanji. But many of them also have other marks: the light pink colour in which many nationalised houses are painted by the National Housing Corporation. The logo of the National Housing Corporation (NHC). Names that have been removed, and on some buildings, big signs covering the names. Façades that have been painted in bright colours to attract customers to the shops, to indicate that this is a modern place. For the Indians who lost property, it is painful to see their families' houses being transformed, names being removed, and houses that decay because the NHC does not repair or renovate. Some of them live in their nationalised houses and pay rent to the NHC every month, sometimes large amounts of shillings.
Dhanesh and Bhavisha live in a house built by Dhanesh’s mother in 1959 and nationalised by the state in 1972. There is a long history of contestation, of fights with the NHC, of moving in and moving out, of house rents being raised and of belongings being confiscated and given back. Aged 83, Dhanesh’s greatest wish is to regain ownership so that he can sell the house and share what he sees as being rightfully his family’s with his brothers and children. Getting back the house is on his mind every day, always. When he sits at the dining table reading the newspaper after lunch, he looks for news about the NHC, about corruption, and about politicians who might be able to help him. When he walks down the stairs outside the house to get down to the backyard and his shop, he examines the paint that has peeled off the wall and the damaged concrete that the NHC has not managed to repair. When he stands behind his desk in the shop, he tells customers about the legacy of his family: the business that they built up and all the workers for whom they managed to build houses. This is a way to convince the world that he and his family are eligible as citizens in Tanzania. With rights. “We have to bear it,” Dhanesh said to me. “I have hope. I still don’t give up. As my friends tell me, the Bible says ‘Keep on knocking at the doors’.” When he said ‘keep on knocking at the doors’, he burst into tears. This is a deeply important and emotional thing for him.

Gravity

An atmosphere, Kathleen Stewart writes, is “an attunement of the senses, of labor, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through the times” (Stewart, 2011, p. 452). With his actions, emotions and focus, Dhanesh himself creates an atmosphere of seriousness and gravity. His emotions are “poured out over a wide area” (Kazig referring to Schmitz, 2016, p. 1). The atmosphere is enforced by the heavy padlocks on
the lattice doors and the big posters on the wall, with pictures of Dhanesh’s meetings with important people and his parents’ Tanzanian citizenship. There is something to look after, something to protect. I felt the gravity. The house had escaped from Dhanesh’s control, and his quiet despair filled the rooms to varying degrees. When I spent time with Dhanesh in the home or in the shop, I naturally felt like moving slowly, speaking quietly, not laughing loudly. I listened to Dhanesh’s low voice, I looked at the sadness in his eyes. I saw him looking at the picture of his father. I felt sadness as a tightness in my chest. Dhanesh’s body was attuned to the world with a sense of dignity; he was adamant that he belonged to the house, and the house belonged to him. His feelings spread as atmospheres of gravity. He lit the ghee lamp in front of the photo of his father at his small altar in the shop every morning, a gesture that underlined the purpose of his life: to honour the legacy of his family and its properties. The shop had a light smell of incense, and among many other things on the desk, there was a sign made by Dhanesh himself, saying Kazi Iendelee, which was President Samia Suluhu Hassan’s motto: Work continues. With the sign, Dhanesh stated his loyalty to Tanzania and its leader, but in a subtle way also signalled that he did not give up.

While the solemn atmosphere often felt overwhelming, I also experienced how it sometimes suddenly lightened. Dhanesh would tell a joke, invite me to eat some sugarcane, tell me about his son’s business. Sometimes I was surprised by the abrupt change; I did not catch his joke because I was expecting him to tell me something serious. But there were instances of sparkle in his eyes and thankfulness for Bhavisha’s food, jokes about him getting old, spontaneous initiatives. The light and easy existed alongside concerns and sadness. But the desire for what Schmitz terms an enclosed space, for safe and firm walls, was there all the time.

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Liveliness/at home at a distance

When Bhavisha and Dhanesh got married, Bhavisha moved into the house of Dhanesh’s parents. Here they lived with Dhanesh’s brothers and their partners and children. When Bhavisha talks about that period, it is a story of joy, community, cooperation, and a peaceful kind of chaos: “Life was really nice. There were four brothers, the wives, the children, my mother-in-law and my father-in-law. We had so many guests at that time coming from outside and staying with us. So it was really lively!” Today, almost all family members have migrated abroad. They live in Kenya and the UK. Bhavisha said: “We had never thought things would be like this. I just thought: we are a joint family, it will be so nice, the children will grow up, and we will all stay together and enjoy life and everything. But things change. We have to accept that.” Only one out of the three children, Mokshit, is still in Moshi. He is married to Rushita, a woman from India, whom he met online, and they run the family business together. Mokshit and Rushita make Bhavisha and Dhanesh’s home lively every day at noon when they come to have lunch. “We really like it,” Bhavisha told me. “If they are not coming, my husband gets a little sad. He says: are they coming? Or are they not coming? Then I say: they are not coming. If we want them, we just say: Today you come to eat here! Okay, they agree.”
Against a backdrop of traffic noise from the street, the sounds of the household fill the house the whole day long. Bhavisha grinds her own flour on the stone grinder that her mother brought from India in the 1920s. She sorts beans and washes vegetables. Boils the tea. Bakes the _rotis_. She does a lot of sewing. Often there is chanting music playing on the CD player. Or there is a Hindi soap on the TV. The clock plays the chimes of Big Ben in London every hour. The house hosts an abundance of things: religious artifacts and posters, souvenirs from travels, glass bead decorations made by Bhavisha’s mother, lots of food in the larder, kitchenware and family photos. The wind blowing through the apartment makes small, light things flutter: the decorations hanging in the doorway, papers on the dresser, the calendar hanging on the wall. In a way, there is a lively atmosphere in the home. It is easy to hear and smell and see that people are living here. For Bhavisha, however, liveliness means people inhabiting a house and filling it with voices and activities and joy. “Home is where my family is,” she says. But apart from two hours every day, her family is not in her house. She must accept that _home_ is not always possible in the ways she dreams of it. Instead of a lively atmosphere, there is a sense of something lost; people who left, a void. The atmosphere of home also entails silence and longing when the liveliness is unattainable. But every afternoon, Bhavisha talks with her daughter Jinali in Leicester on a video call. Often, both women are working in their kitchen while they are together online. Bhavisha and Dhanesh are also active in several WhatsApp groups with family members abroad. The 4G connection enables a certain kind of liveliness and a feeling of being together despite the long distances. In this way, the atmosphere of home is reinstalled through social media and video calls. To return to Schmitz, the emotions are by no means restricted to the subjective space; they are poured out over long distances, they are stretched, they are shared in WhatsApp groups. Despite this area-lessness, however, the longing for a home, to which the outside and non-homely is a clear contrast, does not fade. And the
love for and contact with family members in Tanzania and abroad is in fact enforcing this: it is a small, intimate and closed group of people who take part in video calls and chat groups, and the relations confirm the ‘we’ and its opposite.

Food, belonging, and the atmosphere of home

Bhavisha loves to cook. Cooking and meals are the centre around which daily life circles. Bhavisha reads about Gujarati and Jain food in her books, she learns about the effects of different spices and other ingredients, and she honours her Gujarati background by continuing to develop her cooking with old recipes. “All things in my home are important. But the most important is my larder, where I keep all the things I use for cooking. Gram flour, wheat flour, cumin powder, chili powder, turmeric and sugar. And so many other things! I like it very much,” she told me. It is also a great joy for her to make sure that her family gets healthy food. She knows that Dhanesh needs raw onions and garlic, and that it is good for Mokshit to have carrot juice with ginger. She and Rushita make sure to eat yoghurt because they need vitamin B.

Illustration 7: A small fraction of Bhavisha’s food stores

Meredith E. Abarca focuses on the body in the study of food and home, and writes that

“The centrality of the body in defining our culinary subjectivity, the necessity of feeding such a body - for basic survival, but also with food filled with material and symbolic cultural, historical, and social significances – makes the body the apparatus through which we think of how we are at home in the world. It is the body’s ability to digest foods that embodied histories of trans-border crossings that provide the possibility of re-imagining our dwellings even in periods of transitions.
and migrations due to a variety of geopolitical and socioeconomic realities”
(Abarca, 2020, p. xviii)

28 Bhavisha feels the food with her hands. She puts her hand down in the big jar with lentils, she rolls out the chapatis, she churns the butter with a wooden spoon. She cuts the papaya, sorts the baobab fruits and rinses the ginger roots. These sensory experiences in daily activities are embodiments of values and the dream of home. Bhavisha is not just cooking; every day, she is also producing belonging, and she keeps memories of ‘who we are’ alive in the practices. While embodying home, her feelings become atmospheres of home and belonging that become entangled with and affect the materiality of the house, its inhabitants and visitors. During my fieldwork, she would tell me about her recipes, about the properties of certain vegetables and spices, and she would tell me about how much she loved cooking. On her birthday, her daughter-in-law and I tried to convince her to let us cook for her, but she refused. Instead, she cooked her favourite: a sweet dish with cardamon. She told me to film while she cooked, and she told me about the different stages in the recipe. When she finished, she tasted the dish, closed her eyes and said to herself: “Perfect!” and smiled. This was a dish she had been taught how to cook by her mother. She used her grinder for the cardamon, and she told me proudly, with a big smile on her face, that it was an old Gujarati recipe. Spending time in the kitchen and in the home with Bhavisha was comforting. I felt a sincere peace in her way of being in the world. There was never any doubt about how things should be done; she trusted herself and her ancestors, and she knew exactly what she wanted, but she was humble and ascetic and driven by Jain values of nonviolence and nonattachment. We talked about meditation, fasting and prayer. But we also talked about the development of Tanzanian society and what Bhavisha saw as a sad and unjust change for Tanzanian Indians. However, it seemed Bhavisha had chosen, or perhaps accepted, her role as the caretaker of values and traditions, the one who upheld home as it should be. This was her task, and she was proud to create spaces for her family to thrive amidst the chaos of ownership of the house, the crumbling concrete and the history of contestation.3 Her thorough way of doing things and the sentiment with which she inhabited the apartment were contagious. The sounds, smells and tastes of Bhavisha’s work were homely, and with her chores she created an atmosphere of home that did not at the outset seem contested or split. It was a wholesome endeavour. She filled the space and the bodies with an atmosphere of home.

29 The meals were constructed in a careful way that anchors the family in the world (Abarca, 2020, p. xiii) in their own Indian, Gujarati, Jain way. Not only did all meals contain a conscious variety of vegetables and spices, but they were also emotional rituals that began with a prayer recited by Bhavisha or Rushita, and that adhered to the same form day after day. The family sat around the dining table, on fixed seats, and they shared news and stories. Rushita helped Bhavisha to serve the food; Mokshit seemed to enjoy not doing anything other than eating. I took part in the meals, and I sensed the togetherness of the situation: the agreed humour, the agreed way of talking. The respect and the experience of a strong ‘us’. The way the food was enjoyed, the wind from the fan, the sound of the traffic outside, the calmness of the room. The liveliness in contrast to the silence when Rushita and Mokshit returned to their work. But also the common awareness of their vulnerability as minority.

30 An atmosphere establishes “the context from which specific shared emotions, together with their corresponding expressions, emerge” and “a shared affective ground, which
is measurable and bounded by its affective rather than geometric properties”, Dylan Trigg writes (Trigg, 2020, p. 4). The activities related to food bring the family together socially, but they also give them common experiences of taste, smell, a feeling in the body. Food manifests the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Matta, de Suremain, Crenn, 2020, p. 4; Douglas, 1984), and the atmospheres vibrating in shared meals contribute to the creation of a common story of ‘what we do’ and ‘who we are’. In the shared affective ground (Trigg, 2022), emotions are cultivated in an enclosed space (Schmitz, 2012, 2016, p. 9), and the enclosed space is confirmed as – enclosed. The atmosphere of the homely, of ‘us’, of tradition, the everyday, the well-known, is distinct from its opponent: the outside, the unknown, flux (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2022, p. 200).

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Bhavisha knows where to get the good and clean vegetables, lentils and spices in Moshi, and she is very picky. She does not want any dirt or insects, dudas, to enter her house, so she only buys food from people she knows. Several times a week, an old African Tanzanian woman comes to Bhavisha’s door with a big basket filled with fruit and vegetables. She sits down on the concrete stairs outside the main door and presents her goods while Bhavisha sits on a stool on the other side of the doorway and picks whatever she wants. The boundaries between the home and the outside are enforced in meetings like these every day. Bhavisha and Dhanesh value being able to control who and what enters their house. This is a big part of what makes their house a home, and it is a big part of being an Indian in Tanzania. Only a few select people and things are allowed to pass the threshold of Bhavisha and Dhanesh’s house. If the boundaries are not respected, and if traditions are not sustained, they ‘lose their culture’, which is a common expression among Tanzanian Indians.
Permeability: crossing the thresholds of home

Dhanesh and Bhavisha’s house is protected with gates, window grilles, several padlocks and a barking dog. They told me to be very careful when walking or driving around in town, and one evening, when I was dropped by a friend in front of Dhanesh and Bhavisha’s house, Dhanesh stood waiting with his dog on a leash. He wanted me to be safe, and he did not feel the street was safe for me. The house was a safe place. But because of the history of nationalisation and confiscation as well as the NHC’s reluctance to renovate the houses in their custody, Dhanesh is alert: the walls of the house are not impermeable, there is a porosity in the house itself, and in the Indians’ presence in Tanzania, that creates a feeling of vulnerability and alertness.

Sound, for example, is a materiality that is difficult to stop entering. According to Thibaud,

“(s)ound may tend to be impossible to delimit, slipping through all sorts of envelopes, but it nevertheless plays a part in territorial configuration: when certain sounds are identified with particular spaces, when certain sonic actions are only possible in specific places, when the forms of reverberation and other acoustic qualities constitute the signature of such and such an environment. These are all ways of affirming the capacity of sound to turn a space into a territory” (Thibaud, 2017, p. 230-231).

The traffic noise that all day drowns out the sounds of the home – the sewing machine, the boiling chai, voices, TV, music on the CD player –, the call to prayer from the mosques competing with the chanting and the Hindi soaps: these are symbolic of the way in which Dhanesh and Bhavisha are overwhelmed by the world outside their house. How the Indian communities are shrinking, how entrepreneurial African Tanzanians are taking over the market, how the properties owned or formerly owned
by Indians are now covered in new, colourful paintwork and garish advertisements. The territory and the dwellings of Dhanesh and Bhavisha, and of their fellow Tanzanian Indians, are under pressure – just like the sonic territory, which day and night is challenged by the outside. People shouting, music from huge speakers, honking horns all transgress the boundaries of home. Tanzanian Indians’ status as a marginalised minority is materialised in the ambiguous atmospheres arising in and out of the border zones and boundaries of the home; the anxious stubbornness, the thorough way of inhabiting the house.

36 The atmosphere of the home incarnates the boundaries between home and outside, and the pervasion of the outside into the home. The smell of Bhavisha’s cooking and the smell of dust, bonfires and exhaust from the vehicles. The abundance of personal things and the experience that these things can be confiscated. The padlocks on the doors and the awareness that the NHC can cut the lattice door and break in. The heavy concrete walls, and the knowledge that concrete can crumble if not taken care of. And meanwhile, the clock plays the sound of Big Ben every fifteen minutes, breaking the hour into quarters, counting, noticing the time passing, reminding the inhabitants of other destinations, other destinies.

37 In her ethnography of Manggarai, Indonesia, Catherine Allerton relates how permeability is an essential feature of the houses in the village in which she worked. The ability of sounds, smells, voices and people to pass through the woven reed walls is what makes a house “a locally valued place” (Allerton, 2012, p. 50). This is not as such the case in the house of Bhavisha and Dhanesh. For them, impermeability and enclosure is the ideal and what makes a house a valued place of dwelling. But since vulnerability and a state of emergency have been part of everyday life for fifty years, the permeable home has become the home. The permeability interweaves with the quest for enclosure and peace in the creation of homely atmospheres. The homely encompasses the non-homely, so to speak. The lack of enclosure and the ensuing emotional stress has been normal for Dhanesh and Bhavisha for decades; they dwell in the co-existence of homely and non-homely, in the fact that their dwelling is not a delimited space.

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**Conclusion**

39 While the home of Dhanesh and Bhavisha seems peaceful and ‘homely’ in its richness of things, memories, traditions and, not least, home-cooked meals enjoyed around the dining table, it is also inhabited in a stubborn, rebellious and sorrowful way. The peace that Bhavisha values must be maintained every day for them to persist, because the values are challenged from several sides. ‘The outside’ imposes itself in different ways; it is pervasive. The permeability and vulnerability of the house is present in the atmospheres of home:

“(…) the exterior becomes a resource for the perpetuation of the atmospheric interior. The outside is not actually excluded but drained and manipulated into the position of the subaltern” (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2022, p. 201).
Referring to Michael Jackson’s *Being at home in the world*, Mallet states that “(h)ome is lived in the tension between the given and the chosen, then and now, here and there” (Mallet, 2004, p. 80). These tensions of home are good to think with when trying to understand the ambivalence and non-closure of Bhavisha and Dhanesh’s home. There are things they can control, things they must accept, things they need to fight. There are how things used to be and how things will be, and both past and future are part of the dispositions of the present. There is Moshi and Tanzania, where they have both lived their whole lives, and there is Kenya and UK where their family reside and where Bhavisha and Dhanesh have visited many times. There are visits and WhatsApp groups and virtual calls. Their life world is stretched out in this complex framework. And concretely, there are doors and windows that mark the boundaries of the house, and, to some extent, the home. The doors with padlocks keep unwanted intruders out, but they cannot prevent the National Housing Corporation from entering. The nets in the window frames block the mosquitos but not the dust and the noise from the street. The lack of closure is at once accepted and contested. The atmosphere of home is interwoven with it all; and it all constitutes the meshwork of the atmosphere of home.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


NOTES

1. Home – among nomads, refugees, seafarers, and migrants opened at Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus, Denmark in October 2022 and was exhibited until May 2023.

2. Amongst the many reasons for this desired position are religious values, quests for cultural purity, and migration and colonial history.

ABSTRACTS

What does it mean to be at home when your sense of belonging is ambivalent? What is home if the physical frames of what you call home are contested? And is it possible to grasp an atmosphere of a home’s firm, yet vulnerable qualities? For Tanzanian Indians, on whom this article focuses, the immediate boundaries of their dwelling are solid and materialised in heavy wooden doors and massive metal lattice doors with padlocks. The outside is kept at a distance but constantly imposes itself in different forms of materiality. Behind this lurks the anxiety sparked by the nationalisation of Indian houses that took place after Independence: many Tanzanian Indians are still fighting to regain ownership of their houses. Exploring experiences of permeability of the home, the article shows how different measures are taken by the inhabitants to prevent certain things entering the home, while openness to others is essential to creating a feeling of home. Permeability conveys and enables certain atmospheres of belonging and non-belonging. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in an Indian migrant community in Tanzania and working with subtle details of everyday sensory and material practices in the home, the article explores how studying the atmosphere of home through permeability and the pervasive allows a closer understanding of the intimate politics of what it means to create and sustain a feeling of home as a marginalised but resourceful migrant minority.

Que veut dire le chez-soi dans une situation où le sentiment d’appartenance est ambivalent ? Que devient le foyer si le cadre physique de ce que l’on appelle sa maison est contesté ? Est-il possible de saisir l’ambiance des qualités persistantes mais vulnérables du chez-soi ? Pour les Indiens de Tanzanie, sujets de cet article, les limites immédiates de la demeure sont matérialisées par de lourdes portes en bois et des treillis métalliques verrouillés. Le dehors est tenu à distance mais ne cesse de s’imposer sous diverses formes matérielles. Une anxiété sous-jacente perdure depuis la nationalisation des maisons indiennes après l’indépendance : de nombreux Indiens de Tanzanie luttent toujours pour redevenir propriétaires de leurs maisons. Cet article s’intéresse à l’expérience de la perméabilité du foyer, analysant diverses mesures prises par les habitants pour empêcher certaines choses d’entrer dans leur maison, alors même que l’ouverture à l’autre est essentielle au sentiment du chez-soi. Puisant dans des recherches au sein de la communauté migrante indienne en Tanzanie, l’article porte son attention sur les subtils détails sensoriels et matériels des pratiques quotidiennes du foyer et applique les notions de perméabilité et de pénétrant pour interroger ce qui peut constituer une ambiance du chez-soi. Il tente ainsi de mieux saisir la politique intime et les enjeux, pour une minorité migrante marginalisée mais ingénieuse, de la création et du maintien d’un sentiment de chez-soi.

INDEX

Keywords: East Africa, home, minority, migration, atmosphere, materiality, indian diaspora
Mots-clés: Afrique de l'est, chez-soi, minorité, migration, atmosphère, culture matérielle, diaspora indienne
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