

‘I am like a snail; I carry home with me.’

**An exploration on how children experience home
in a temporary situation**



Master Thesis

Visual Anthropology, Media and Documentary Practices

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster

by

Maaïke Noijons

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Matriculation number:

Note: This is the web version of my thesis. I removed two links to videos and anonymized four photos from the original.

All the children and their parents that I interviewed gave me permission to mention the first name and age of the children as well as the place they live in, just left or will move to. Children, with their parents, also gave me verbal consent to use the photos and the videos shown in this thesis.

All the illustrating photos and videos are taken or made by the participating children. I did not edit these.

Summary

In this master's thesis I look at whether and how expat children experience the temporary aspect of their home. Their parents pursue an international career that involves moving from country to country every few years. Expat children lead a nomadic life. The children I worked with generally move every four years. With such a move, not only their house or apartment changes, but also the surroundings, the school - and very often their friends. With the participating expat children, I discussed themes as how they experience home; what home means; and whether a child has any influence on feeling at home.

My research aim is not to analyze the advantages or disadvantages of a steady childhood over a nomadic one. This research is more like an exploration of how children in a temporary situation, expat children in this case, see home in the circumstances they live. I do not talk *about* children, but I talk *with* children. This could be different from an adult expat child reflecting on her childhood. 'Although we were all children once, or are children now, childhood is still in many ways closed to adults', according to MacDougall (2020: 19).

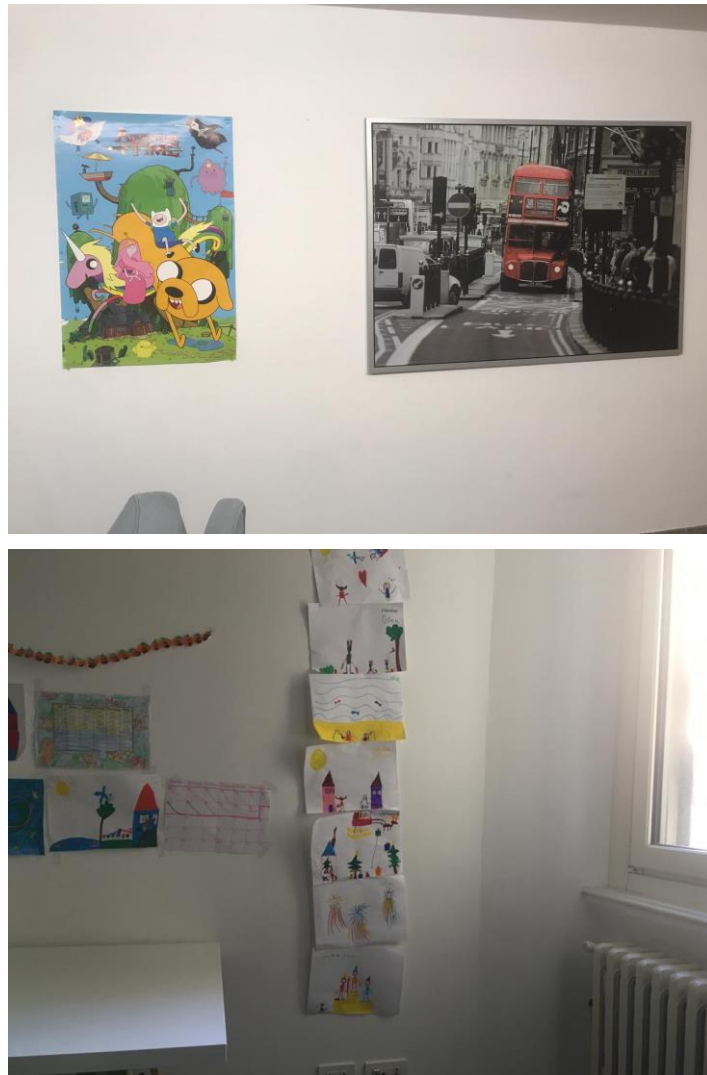
Expat children carry their home with them. They cling on to specific objects. With these around them, they can recreate their home in a new situation. Important in that is that the children can sort these objects themselves prior to a move. The final act in feeling at home in the new place is when they have found friends in the place they live. While their peers that do not lead a nomadic life grow an attachment to their surroundings over the years, this is not necessarily the case with expat children. It depends very much on whether the children speak the language spoken in the host country.

Expat children differ from geographically mobile adults (within the country) in that the children see no reason for not making a home as soon as possible whereas the adults sometimes have difficulty doing that.

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PAIRING #1 – SHOW ME YOUR WALL AND I TELL YOU WHO YOU ARE.

Introduction

Writing about a topic related to *home* is a challenge. Type in 'home' in google and one will get about 25.080.000.000 hits (June 18, 2021). Diverse results turn up: a map of the surroundings; a link to the site of an estate agent; an add for a decoration store and a magazine; a link to a YouTube video featuring Michael Buble singing his song 'home'. Magazines, literature, arts, academic research, in so many disciplines the topic of home is and has been a source of inspiration and a topic to delve into. It has so many aspects and can be interpreted in many ways. Take the Webster dictionary, it offers six definitions.

One aspect of home is the feeling of home. A theme that can gain importance when one is thinking about relocating. When people move house, they do this for a reason, whatever that might be. They might be happy about it or sad, but in many cases, it is their

decision. Children who move house, however, have no choice. They must adapt to the choices others make for them.

This thesis is about children and how they experience home. The focus is on children who lead a nomadic life, who move on a regular basis and must start again and again. How do they cope with that? Where does the term home come in? And with no influence on the decision to relocate, has a child some influence on feeling itself somewhere at home?

Preparing for my research coincided with preparing for the move of my family (two children, 12 and 13 years old) from Germany to the Netherlands, due in July 2021. Out of personal and research interest I read *the* support book on expat children: children who spend a significant part of their first eighteen years of life accompanying parent(s) into a country or countries that are different from at least one parent's passport country(ies) due to a parent's choice of work or advanced training¹. I learned that the formerly known expat child is also known as third culture kid (TCK). This helped in framing my research. I noticed that there is a lot of talking *about* children but not so much *with* children. Further, the numerous TED talks of adult TCKs on their nomadic childhood is a reflection on this type of childhood. Both in books as in TED Talks a lot of emphasis is on saying goodbyes and the difficulty describing what home is, but there both in the book and in the talks, the 'now' of the child is not being addressed. I decided to listen to the children who are dealing with this situation of starting over in a new country or who are slowly preparing to leave their current home as a relocation is due.

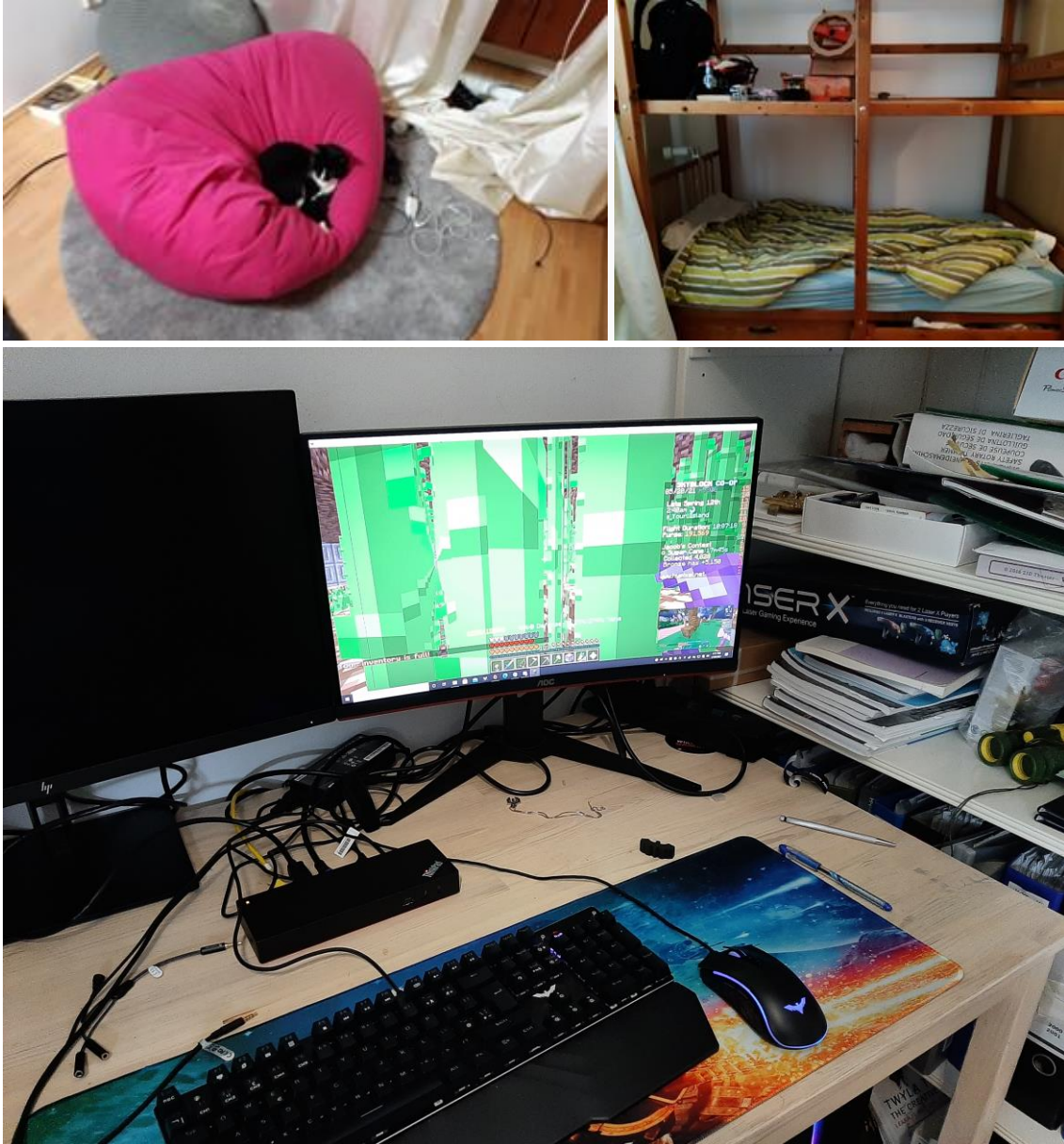
This thesis will not analyze the advantages or disadvantages of a steady childhood over a nomadic one nor is it a reflecting on a childhood. This is more like an exploration of how children in a temporary situation, expat children, feel about home and create one. In this thesis I do not talk about children, but with children. As adults, in many respects we seem to have forgotten what it was being a child. Children lead their lives and not everything of that is open to or understandable for adults, even though children must rely heavily on adults (McDougall, 2020). This alone makes it worth to ask and listen.

Now, June 2021, looking back on months of planned and ad hoc conversations, in real person or via the telephone, video calling, text messages, voice messages, receiving photos and videos, it has been an interesting and special journey. There were physical

¹ Definition of a Third Culture Kid, taken from: Third Culture Kids, Growing up among worlds, David Pollock, Ruth E. van Reken, and Michael V. Pollock (2017: 404).

distances between some of the participants and me, sometimes due to geographical distance as well as strict Covid 19 regulations.

Some children decided on sending in a series of photos as the starting point of a conversation, like these of Jelmer.



JELMER'S DEPICTION OF HOME.

In almost all conversations I found that what made children feel at home were aspects like:

- Pets/family members
- (Specific) objects
- Rituals
- Friends

The elements through which they had influence on their feeling at home were:

- Sorting objects / wat comes, what stays
- Decorating one's room

Further up in this thesis, I will delve deeper into my finding.

Chapter 1 offers a context: what does one need to know as a foundation to follow this exploration. The question I started my exploration with is *'do children create a home in a temporary situation, and if so, how?'* I will look at (the concept of) home as it turns up in research, literature, and the arts. Next, I will look at the social actors involved in my exploration.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review regarding academic research already done, regarding TCKs, Children and place, and on families and temporary home. I hope to make clear where my exploration fits in.

Research methods and my choice of these will be described in chapter 3, methodology.

Chapter 4 discusses the fieldwork, with two cases as examples.

Chapter 5 deals with the findings of my fieldwork, and I will interweave this with the relevant literature.

Chapter 6 provides a reflection on my fieldwork, the methods, and on myself as a researcher and as a participant.

The closing consists of a short summery of what this exploration was about; the presentation of my conclusion and offers options for further research regarding this topic.



PAIRING #2 - PARENTS THINK ONLY THEY KNOW WHAT A GOOD CHILDREN'S BOOK IS.

1. The Concept of Home and how it is experienced

This thesis is an exploration of what children, who move house regularly, consider home. In this chapter I will look closer at the concept of home. I will look at how this concept has evolved through history; how home can have a meaning (by looking at how artists are being inspired by home) and I will briefly look at the children who move house regularly and point out the group I will do my research with.

Before I start, there are a few terms that turn up regularly in this thesis that I would like to define:

Expat children – children whose parents pursue an international career. The parents are either employed by an international company, organization or the army who rotates its employees to new countries every so many years, or the parents design their own career plan and own relocations. Most of their childhood, the expat children do not live in their passport country. Expat children fit under the umbrella term of the Third Culture Kids (see definition below).

Move house – Moving from one house or apartment to the other. In the case of my participants (see definition below), this means that generally every four years furniture and belongings are being packed and sent to the new place where the children with their family will continue to live for the next several years.

Participants – The children who cooperated with me while I was conducting my fieldwork and with whom I discussed topics related to their nomadic childhood.

Place attachment – the cognitive-emotional bond that individuals develop towards places. (**Footnote:** Scannel and Gifford, 2014: 3).

Relocation - Moving to a new place to set up home. Sometimes this is incited by the parent's employer, sometimes this is incited by the parents of my protagonists.

Third Culture Kid - Children who spend a significant part of their first eighteen years of life accompanying parent(s) into a country or countries that are different from at least one parent's passport country(ies) due to a parent's choice of work or advanced training.²

1.1 The concept of home

Home is like a mythical term. It seems that for everything humans write, draw, invent, discuss, research or breath, a link with *home* is involved. A myth like that of Gilgamesh as found on clay tablets that were written on 1200 BCE, may be as the oldest existing piece of written literature there is. On Tablet XI, home is mentioned: the whispering voice tells Gilgamesh to seek another home. Another famous hero is Odysseus, who lives through many adventures before finally arriving, home. This epos is written somewhere around 700 BCE.

According to novelist John Berger, the word home used to mean the center of the world (2005). Home was the very spot where two lines where crossing: horizontal was the line representing traffic of the world, vertical was the line that would connect the gods up and death down. At this crossing one would be closest to the gods and with the dead and, at the same time, one would be at the starting point and returning point of the journeys on earth (2005:56). In the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold, we find such lines as well: different lines coming together in one place. Ingold explains that it is not the knot that contains life. 'These lines are bound together in the knot, but they are not bound by it. To the contrary, they trail beyond it, only to become caught up with other lines in other knots. Together they make up what I have called a meshwork. Every place, then, is a knot in the meshwork, and the threads from which it is traced are lines of wayfaring' (2007: 103-104).

Ingold explains that the word 'place' has evolved in meaning from a moment of rest along a path of movement, to a central point where different elements come together: life, growth, and activity (2007: 99). The person who is to be found at this point may not be the only one in this place, as he might encounter others, coming from and going on different

² Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock: 2017

routes. 'If we add their trails to the picture, it becomes a good deal more convoluted. The place now has the appearance of a complex knot.' (2007: 103-104)

A home or a place consists of more than just the four walls, the people that live in it and the lines they 'draw'. So much becomes clear when one prepares for a relocation: sorting stuff and packing the boxes with what should come to the next place. 'Minimally, places gather things in their midst - where "things" connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts' (Casey 1996: 24). Casey suggests place is both central to what Maurice Merleau-Ponty has called our way of 'being in the world', in that we are always 'emplaced', and that place has what he calls a 'gathering power' (1996: 44).

Moore (2000) has been looking at the concept of home in academic research within psychology as well as in literature. In this, she cites Benjamin's definition of home: 'The home is that spatially localized, temporally defined, significant and autonomous physical frame and conceptual system for the ordering, transformation and interpretation of the physical and abstract aspects of domestic daily life at several simultaneous spatio-temporal scales, normally activated by the connection to a person or community such as a nuclear family' (Benjamin 1995, cited in Moore 2000). Moore notices that this definition does not reflect the shared cultural significance that home also has or how it is significant. The difficulty in finding a definition is partly in the many layers its meaning (2000: 208).

The idea of home as the center of the world has changed over the course of many years (Berger, 2005; Ingold 2007; Moore 2000). People now are more mobile than in the early days and do not stay at the same place from birth to death. People move places within the country as well as between countries. Almost everywhere where people go, new places to live are being built. Berger calls these 'improvised' homes. To him, the mortar which holds the improvised 'home' together – even for a child – is memory. 'Within it, visible, tangible mementoes are arranged – photos, trophies, souvenirs – but the roof and four walls which safeguard the lives within, these are invisible, intangible and biographical.' (2005:64)

Moore describes how in literary texts until the 17th and 18th centuries home would be the country, the native village, the birthplace. Afterwards, it became the actual house where one was born. And even in the 19th century and later, home became the place one lived (2000: 208, 209). To mark the difference between home and a house, Moore mentions five attributes: centrality, continuity, privacy, self expression / personal identity, and social relationships (Tognoli 1987, cited in Moore 2000). In her extensive overview of the studies regarding home, Moore puts forward that certain aspects of this topic lack a focus, for example the temporal aspect of home (2000: 210).

Both the theory of place attachment as place identity have developed from home studies. The difference between them is that place identity is concerned with a place being part of one's identity. According to Bonnes & Secciaroli (1995, cited in Moore 2000), the theory of place attachment is the attachment bond with places.

To Gordon Jack (2000), a place exists on several scales. It ranges from a particular part of the house or garden in which a person lives; through the streets, shops and other facilities and landmarks of the local neighbourhood or town in which they grow up; out to the wider countryside, region, and nation of residence (or origin). 'When people talk about where they 'feel at home', they might be referring to any or all these levels, capturing the special meaning of different places for the individual, typically based on the experiences and memories associated with them, rather than their physical properties (Tuan, 1974, 1977, cited in Jack 2010).'

1.2 The influence of home on artists

In his work of 2010 Jack mentions that 'feel at home' has mostly to do with experiences and memories attached to places, makes clear it 'home' is about emotions. These emotions one sees clear in works of art. It is interesting to see how contemporary artists deal with home and the attached emotions. Cornelia Parker manages with Transitional Object (Psycho Barn), 2016 to evoke some eery feelings of home, even the discomfort of what home can be. In Transitional Object (Psycho Barn) 2016, the artist Cornelia Parker used the materials of an old barn to rebuild the hotel of Alfred Hitchcock's film Psycho. Vajiko Chachkhiani manages to do something similar with his Living Dog among Dead Lions, 2017. In this work, he dismantled a hut in the Georgian countryside and put it up again at the Venice Biennale (2017). One could look inside and see the hut decorated. This helped to transmit the feeling of home. As the artist installed an irrigation system on the inside, the interior would slowly decay. This, too, helped in bringing this house alive, even though it was shown as an exhibition piece. It is interesting that both these artists had no history with the building they put on show before they dismantled it. Nevertheless, it feels like a personal work.

Other artists bring in autobiographic elements when working on their memories on home or their feeling of home. It gives the audience a very intimate insight of artists' (early) lives. In the series Predecessors (2013), Njideka Akunyili Crosby shows painted worlds of her family, her own home, her grandmother's home. The way she depicts the posture of the bodies and how she chose the objects painted, the paintings seem reliable scenes of daily life. It is as if watching through the keyhole. It is for the viewer to decide whether to feel comfortable with that or not.

Some artists recreate the house they grew up in, such as Mike Kelley's work *Mobile Homestead* (2010). It is an exact replica of the house he grew up in, an artwork, now in use as a cultural centre in Detroit, the city he grew in and the city in which the original version of this house can be found. In the work *Bridging Home* (2018), Korean artist Do Ho Suh rebuilt a traditional Korean space, he once lived in and placed it in a slightly uneven position on a bridge in London, his so-called adopted home.

An artist does not necessarily have to rebuild the exact ancestral home to be able to convey the feelings of her childhood and to reflect on home and childhood. In example *Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands)*, 1990-1993 of Louise Bourgeois, we see a grim flashback to the ancestral home and the childhood spent in there, even though one sees no house as such. The outer frame of the artwork is of man's height. It is almost a cubicle, a steel-structured frame with glass panels. Through some of the glass panels one gets to glimpse inside, it is very sparsely decorated. Even without knowing the details of this autobiographic work, looking inside evokes an uncomfortable feeling regarding life in the childhood home of Bourgeois.

Bringing in the tiniest details is something one sees happening in the design of video games of the last decade. The possibilities for the designers are enormous. In this medium, many creators get inspired by the topic home as well. In these games, the single-player games, the player takes up the role of the protagonist of the story. In this role, she visits the family home either where his family lives (*Gone Home*, 2013) or where the protagonist grew up (*What happened to Edith Finch*, 2017 or *The suicide of Rachel Forster*, 2020). In the latter, as player, one visits the childhood home of the protagonist. She returns to that house, walks around in the 'familiar' hall, living room, kitchen, with its apparently unchanged furniture and objects. One reads or hears the remarks on the memories this sight evokes. She walks up to the old bedroom. The bed is unmade, as if the protagonist just got out of it, the desk cluttered with stuff, a light switched on, a cupboard with a drawer half open. Slightly battered posters on the walls, a sign of how long those posters have been hanging there. She walks over to the desk to find little notes, school reports, old pencils, drawing and all the stuff that has accumulated over the years. The creators very convincingly create the feeling that one has entered its own childhood bedroom and with the memories of the protagonist that the player reads or hears, personal memories of one's childhood bedroom seep in as well.

1.3 Children and temporary homes

For a large group of adults who grew up in Western middle class/upper class families, the situation as depicted in the artworks or video games could be a realistic one. In the

years after they left their elderly home, they could return there. It would be a visit not only to their parents, but the house or apartment itself would become a personal museum of a childhood, a personal museum of a childhood home. What emotions are being evoked when one returns to the old kitchen, the hallway or maybe that specific spot at the top of the stairs. What memories of specific moments in come up when seeing, feeling or smelling the familiar again? Is one home again? The visit may even include the old bedroom with everything in place as one left it behind. A trip down memory lane? It might be as in the video games, with on the wall a pinboard, on it reminders of school trips, photos turned yellow of one's best friends, birthday wish lists. The contents of the drawers of the desk hiding first attempts of writing as well as a cheat sheet for biology, and maybe even a secret stash of sweets now turned into concrete. Such a space can give an overview of a childhood: with all the important and not so important stuff from different periods, with things that were worth keeping and things that are still there because they have never been given a thought.

Not everyone has such a museum of childhood. Sometimes, the ancestral house with memories attached will still be there, but the former bedroom has been changed into a guest room or crafting room. Then, of course, there are children who have never spent more than a few years (some even less) in one place. Children that move from place to place, with or without their family, must set up camp again and again. For them, once they leave their parents, there is or there will be no physical personal museum of childhood home to visit, at least not one that covers the time span of a childhood. What does home means for a child growing up in a middle-class family, leading a 'nomadic' life, whose surroundings change regularly? Is there a homey feeling and does a child has some influence on that? Can the bedroom turn into being more than something like a hotel room?

This exploration is on the lives of expat children. These children move every three to five years, internationally, due to the professional career of their educated parents. Expat children are not the only children who lead a nomadic life. Children in foster care and refugee children also have experience in changing places regularly. Moving is generally categorized as a stressful event. Children in foster care or refugee children carry even more with them when they move from one place to another: traumatic experiences like being taken away from parents; having survived an escape from a warzone country; and / or living with traumatized parents in shelters.

Every one of these children is worth looking at. The reason I concentrate in this exploration on expat children is because all my interactions with children for this exploration took place between October 2020 and March 2021, this was during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, there are strict regulations in Germany (the country I live in and conduct the research in) regarding physically meeting people. State regulated institutions stripped down the possibility of visits to the minimum to protect the inhabitants and workers, meaning that research visits to these places were on hold. This meant that working inside the refugee shelters was not possible, or so sporadically, due to the moments the regulations were a bit softened that there was no consistency making the risk of not being able to finish fieldwork too big. Also meeting in people's houses was at times difficult. Due to the traumas foster children carry with them, I did not feel like discussing this sensitive topic in video calls.



PAIRING #3 - DESPITE ALL THE TROUBLES THEY BRING, SIBLINGS DO HELP MAKING A HOME A HOME.

2 The literature review

Chapter 2 provides a **Literature review** on TCKs, specifically expat children; on Children and place; and on families and temporary home. I will conclude with explaining how my research fits in.

2.1 Third Culture Kids

Expat children are grouped under the collective name Third Culture Kids (TCKs). Much research has been carried out on TCKs and on expat children as a separate group. The first research started in the fifties of the 20th century when Hill Useem, creator of this term, worked in India as a sociologist doing research on how Americans lived and worked in India. She noticed how the children of these Americans - who worked in the military or in the missionary, aid workers or diplomatic service - created a third culture out of the culture of their parents (first culture) and the culture of the country they lived in (second

culture). Since that first research international migration flows are not the same anymore as international migration is no longer limited to mainly North Americans and Northwest Europeans. This results in a big increase of TCKs as children of refugees and children of cheap labour migrants also fall under the name TCK as they as well deal with culture differences between the culture of their parents and the culture of the land they now live. Also, the group of the expat children has grown since Hill Useem came up with the term as more companies than in the fifties sent employees abroad for a temporary period.

Part of the focus of the research on TCKs is on the home and the feeling of being lost in the world. continued Hill Useem's research. The handbook *Third Culture Kids – growing up among worlds*, by David Pollock, Ruth E. Van Reken and Michael V. Pollock is a continuation of Hill Useem's research. The authors try to prepare parents and professionals working with expat families for the different phases a relocation consists of. Information of the authors is alternated with testimonies and insights of Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs), researchers and professionals about the life of an expat child and all the practical and emotional challenges (feeling lost, losing a sense of self) that go with it. To deal with the emotional challenges the authors acknowledge the difficulty of parting from a place and provide advice on how to facilitate this. By quoting experienced expats the authors try to provide a realistic framework to help the starting expat realise that unpacking the boxes in a new place is not the same as psychologically arriving at the destination.

Other research on revolves around the question of what home is. Grown-up expat children, Adult Third Culture Kids (ACKs), are very communicative. They write about their experiences in research papers and talk about them in TEDx-talks. In the talks as well as in the research papers, the topic that is mostly addressed is what home is for them, as adults now, and how to deal with the question where one is from. It is clear, there is not one answer (DeMarco 2020; Alyksyeyeva, 2018). Colomer (2020) even suggests that when feeling homelessness, airports take over the role as a stability or a constant in the lives of TCKs. Airports can function as a 'home', she discovers after reading about and talking and doing surveys with ATCKs. This group has a sense of cultural dispossession (2020: 158). In most cases home is transformed into an 'intangible materiality' (2020:163).

A review on studies of children's sense of place reveals (Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014), reveals that children's sense of place is mostly related to children's place attachment. The difference between adults and children is that for children their age has an influence on their attachment to place. In their attachment to place, children are being influenced at three levels: individual/family, community, and society cultural (Jack, 2010).

Growing older, children's radius of movement becomes wider. As an example, the physical environment is of great importance for children of 9 - 12 years old as they start to depend on this physical environment for their emotional self-regulation (Korpela, 1989 cited in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014).

2.2 Children and home & children and place.

Jack (2015) places the topic of attachment back at the regional level. It is surprising to him that in welfare policy place is not considered in when housing children that are taken into care. Where race or religion is being looked into by welfare workers, the meaning of place seems to be missing on that checklist. This, even though place can confirm much needed feelings of security and belonging (2015: 423).

Other research on children and place is focused as well geographical attachment to place. In their article, Avriel-Avni, Zion and Spektor-Levy (2010) address the sense of attachment that a group of students feel towards their place of residence, a very isolated small city, and their perception of this place as a home. The focus of the researchers is looking whether the perception of home affects the extent of their personal responsibility and willingness to actively participate in sustainable management of the environment. For the researchers, the home is not limited to the building one lives in, it also includes sites that become places through dwelling activity and way of thinking (2010: 119).

Even though a place can be a particular part of the house, the research with regards of children and place concentrates around the geographical side of place, the surroundings (Jack, 2010, 2015; Avriel-Avni, Zion and Spektor-Levy, 2010; Briggs, Stedman, and Krasny, 2014).

It is important to understand more about how children relate to place. 'It is the problematic tendency of the place-based education literature to romanticize place as bounded and static, rather than fluid and constantly changing in the highly mobile modern age (Hooks 2009; Stedman and Ardoin 2013 in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014:164). Children defined as TCKs, can have a sense of place that is not only connected to where they live, but also connected to the place their parents come from, when the children have been brought up with that cultural identity (Hay, 1998 in Adams, 2013). In addition to this, it is of great importance that once one knows the significance of place that this is being taken into account. Still too often, the focus at welfare is on the socio-emotional aspects. With the knowledge one has now, one should also take place into account (Jack, 2010).

According to Lewicka, research in general regarding place attachment is a topic in which little empirical progress has been made in comparison to what was already known three

decades ago (2011: 226). Most published studies have a purely exploratory character, no matter how strongly their authors attempt to specify their 'study objectives'. The main progress seems to have been made in measurement tools. Over the years, sense of place and place attachment have not lost their importance for human beings. On the contrary, it may even have grown more important. 'How to reconcile the need for close emotional ties to specific places with the fluidity of the contemporary world is a real challenge' (2011: 226).

2.3 Families and a temporary home

Research of Allen (2008) on geographically mobile families revealed that adults can have several places they call home. Somethings making distinctions, pointing out an order, between home with a capital h and home with a small h. Further, home can be a physical object as well as an abstract term. Allen noticed that not only did people see home in different places at the same time, but they could also talk about home at different moments of time. People could see home as the place where one would live, or the place where one grew up or the place one would like to live in the future.

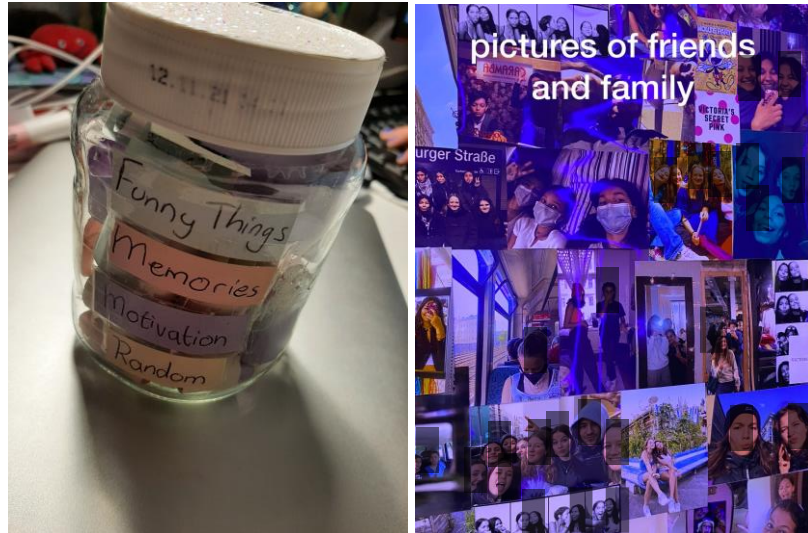
Another influence on what home can be for people depends on the perspective of their specific family role. If they talked as the children, they once were, home would be different from when they were to look at home as parents. Allen's research on challenges faced by geographically mobile families made her find out that informants defined home as being the center of (a) feelings of comfort, familiarity, and safety; (b) meaningful people and things; (c) significant events, memories and routines; (d) intimate social and spatial knowledge rooted in place; and (e) an optimal fit between one's self-identity, expectations for a home a place, and the built environment (p89). All these definitions have in common that they embrace important processes, knowledge, things, events, meaning and people.

Some of Allen's respondents did not dare to embrace their new place/space as their home as they remained mentally, physically or emotionally engaged with another place. Investing in the current space was risky to them because it could potentially threaten ties to other home places located in the past, present, or future. This becomes even harder, Allen found out, when one knows one will not stay where they now live forever.

Allen says that with her findings, help for families with a background as refugees or transnational or immigration can be improved by discussing that you can make home in the new place, without saying goodbye to the other home. Find a way to embrace the inherent betweenness of having a place that is 'home' and one that is 'more home'.

2.4 My research

All the research mentioned above is relevant for my study: My research differs in the fact that I will work *with* expat children and not talk *about* them. With them I look at how they perceive home in the present. There will always be an element of reflection as I will discuss with the participants how they prepared on the previous move.



PAIRING #4 - HAVING YOUR OWN SPACE IS REALLY IMPORTANT, BUT NOTHING BEATS HAVING FRIENDS.

3 Methodology

In this chapter I describe in more detail the topic I wish to discuss with my participants. I will define the methods I would like to use in my fieldwork and my choice for these methods. I will also refer to the auto-ethnographic element this research has and how this comes back in a method.

This thesis is about how expat children experience home. These children lead a nomadic life as they move house internationally on a regular basis. Do these children have associations with the word 'home' and if they do, what are these? And, as children are not the once taking the final decision to relocate, do they have some influence regarding 'home'?

My global research question is: **do expat children experience home and if they do, how?**

The questions below, in no specific order, are a starting point:

- What comes up when you hear the word 'home'?
- What makes home *home*?
- What does home consist of?
- In the house or apartment, you live in, is there a room that feels more or less like home than others?
- What has an influence on whether you feel more or less at home in a specific room or place in the house?
- What happens when you move? Does that have influence on home?

- What do you think, does home works different for those with a nomadic childhood?
what
- Even though it is probably the parents who pick the new house, do you have some influence on making it your home?
- If so, is it important to do so?
- Growing older, has the idea of home changed?
- Do the senses play a role in feeling or recognizing home (smell, taste, hearing, touch, sight)?

3.1 Methods

There are many definitions and interpretations of the word home (DeMarco 2020; Alyksy-eyeye, 2018, Allen 2008). For this study, it is not important to first agree with the participants on what is home, before we work together. I want to know what they can tell me about this theme, either in words or in photos or film.

The methods I would like to use in my fieldwork are:

- a. *Photo/video elicitation*
- b. *Walking with video*
- c. *Semi-structured interviews*
- d. *Mapping*
- e. *Auto-ethnographic element*
- f. *Participant observation*

In the following I will go through all these methods in detail.

a. *Photo/video elicitation*

My fieldwork research will start with by asking my participants to either take some photos of what for them depicts home or make me a Tok-tok-video (Footnote: a video of around 15 seconds, named after the platform that hosts videos of this length) on this topic and send it to me. After looking at the photos or watching the video, I would like to talk with the children. It is important to realize that the photos or the video are not meant to be the end result of the research but that they are a way to find the information I need for my research (Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014).

In working with children, it is particularly important to be aware of the power imbalance as I am an adult, and they are children (Thomas and O’Kane: 1998). Therefore, the child should be able to decide on whether she wants to cooperate with me (Kellet, 2011). Using photo/video elicitation gives some extra power to the participant. It can help reduce the negative power relation between the adult as an interviewer and the child as the

interviewee (Gabhainn and Sixsmith, 2006, in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014). A decrease in the power balance could help in establishing a conversation in which there is room to share memories and jokes instead of having a formal interview.

Thanks to this method, the participants also can experience the power as they themselves decide what to shoot (Collier, 1957 in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014; Allan, 2012). In the digital era, there is even a next level of power control as the participant can look at the material and then decide what she sends in. I hope, this also helps the participant to stay in a comfort zone by creating some distance between the researcher and the participant. I will not be in the room when a 14-year-old may decide to photograph a stuffed animal in her bed. That might make it easier to photograph the toy than when I am around.

Photo elicitation is a way to have the conversation starting and flowing. It helps to break down the abstract elements in my questions. (Beckley and colleagues: 2007, in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014). Would the question 'what does home mean for you, in this nomadic life you lead' really work? Also, photo-elicitation is a 'user-friendly' way collect information if the participants might not have the words or ideas available to discuss abstract ideas (Mandleco 2013 cited in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014). In discussing the topic with me, the child can use photos or videos as these help recalling memories attached to the object (Harper, 2002; Lutherova, 2010).

b. Semi-structured interviews

Instead of conducting formal interviews, I will try to make the interviews with children feel more like conversations. Because there is a power imbalance with myself being an adult and the protagonists being children, by avoiding to formally interview them, I hope to avoid a school situation.

During the introduction of my project and myself, it is obvious that I will be talking, mostly. Once I have the photos or video and I hope to be the one listening when the participant talks me through these. This could turn out into a fairly normal conversation: she is showing the photo and talking and me responding to something she is saying or pointing out on the photo. I have my set of questions to which I hope to get answers. Only at the end of the conversation, I will double check to see whether all topics on the set have been discussed.

Another positive element of using photos and videos to discuss my topic is that the participant and I do not necessarily have to look at each other all the time. We can also look at the photos or videos while talking. I hope this will help bringing some informality in the interview set-up.

c. Walking with video

Even though I live in Duesseldorf, my participants do not necessarily need to live in the vicinity. With the Covid-19 regulations, I cannot be sure that I can even visit those living close by. If that would be the case, I hope that, once I have seen the photos and videos, the participant can take me on a tour through the place while we discuss the material, she sent in. This might have an added value in helping me to create an understanding for their environment (Pink, 2007).

d. Mapping

'Making a map means making choices about what's important to you'. This quote I found in a favorite book of my 11-year-old daughter, the *Ghosts of the Greenglas House* by Kate Milford (2017: 368, 369). It triggered my attention. I can ask my participants to make a map of what they see as home sometime after they made the photos or video. Would that map relate to the photos or video they sent in, or would it add a new dimension to the question?

e. Auto-ethnographic element

There is an auto-ethnographic element in this research. Summer 2021 my children (12 and 13) will move from Duesseldorf to Amsterdam. It will be their fourth move. Although my children are not the typical expat children as they have only been moving between Germany and the Netherlands, they are familiar with all aspects of an international relocation. I am keeping a field diary on what I see and hear of my children preparing for this upcoming move.

f. Participatory observation

The advantage of participatory observation is that one can get closer to people, with the hope that they are more comfortable, and one can observe them and record information about their lives' (Bernard, 2006). I specifically like the fact that by doing something together, one talks more freely. This part of the fieldwork is something I can only do at my own place, due to the Covid-19 regulations. I can see myself in the background helping and talking with my children, while they sort their clothes and personal belongings in preparation for the move.



Pairing #5 - Scent can be interpreted very differently.

4 Fieldwork

This chapter describes my fieldwork. I discuss how I entered the research field and what the structure of the fieldwork was. I present two case to show how my fieldwork was carried out.

4.1 Entering the field

Entering the field consisted of several elements:

- a. *Time frame, location and networks*
- b. *Gatekeepers*
- c. *Power balance*
- d. *Global structure of the work with participants*
- e. *Explaining my research*
- f. *Receiving and discussing the material*
- g. *Further conversations*

Below I will go through al these elements in detail.

a. *Time frame, location and networks*

I carried out my field work between October 2020 and March 2021. Entering the research field during a pandemic meant I had to think about how to approach potential participants. I live in Düsseldorf, a city with two international schools and some international women clubs, but I decided not to approach these for getting in touch with potential participants. I feared that with Covid-19 restrictions already in place, my project would only be delayed

when I would depend on organizations. Therefore, I decided to look for participants in my own expat network. I have built this network over the last three years, as my children attend the British international school in Duisburg/Düsseldorf and my husband works for an international firm.

b. Gatekeepers

To get in touch with potential participants, children under eighteen, I needed to approach the gatekeepers, the parents, mostly the mothers. I explained my topic and my fieldwork idea to them in person or via WhatsApp, email or Messenger. Everyone I addressed responded positive. Some of the parents explicitly mentioned that even though they try to organize a relocation as smoothly as possible and check with the child whether she is adapting well to the new situation, they had never really given any thought about what it is for their child that makes home 'home'. All the approached parents immediately said that they would cooperate. I then asked them to discuss this with their children as it was especially important to me that the child agrees on participating and not merely obeys the parent. One mother I approached returned to me and apologized, telling her children did not to participate.

In total, 21 children, aged between 4 and 15 years old, agreed to work with me. 19 of them did work with me. They had the following nationalities: Australian (2); British (2); Italian (3); Dutch (4); Canadian (5); German/Sudanese (1), American (2).

The gatekeepers stayed in sight during the whole fieldwork. Appointments for a video call or a visit, I arranged with the parents, and it was mostly the parents who sent me the photos or video material. With children younger than ten, the mother would stay in the same room as the child during the conversation (in person or via video). The two American sisters, 12 and 14, asked their mother to stay with them.

c. Power balance

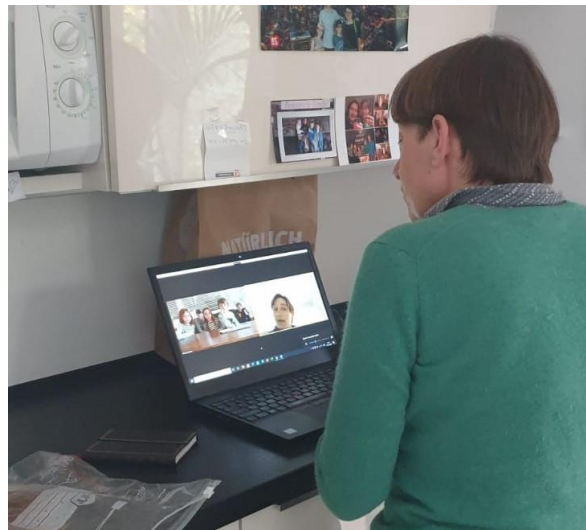
As the idea of this research topic was forming in my head, I was conscious of the power imbalance: I am an adult, my participants are not. Some participants do not know me, others know me as Jikke's 'mum' or Jelmer's 'mum'. There was a possibility was that the children would categorize me as a mother (someone with power). Therefore, as I described in the chapter on methodology, I was keen on using a method where the participant could somehow feel to be in control over what she would share with me. The participants did all the preparations in their own surroundings and the interviews took place there as well. This would hopefully lead to a more equal power balance. Had I worked with the children in school, it might have worked out differently as school is a place where the child is a pupil who must obey to instructions. In my introduction to the children, I

explicitly mentioned that I considered them the expert on my topic and therefore needed to know their perspective. Further, I promised them anonymity. Both parents and children allowed me to use the first name of the child, to mention the nationality and to share the visual material.

d. Global structure of the work with participants

After a child agreed to participate with me, the set-up of the fieldwork would be:

- Explain my research and asking to make some photos or a Tok-tok-video. I did this in person or via video, in one case via a text message (depending on what I could arrange with the mother).
- Receive the visual material.
- Discuss the visual material and the topic in minimum one and mostly two to three talks, depending on whether I could make more appointments with the mother.



INTRODUCING MY RESEARCH TOPIC TO PARTICIPANTS.

e. Explaining my research

I could explain my research, either in person or via video, to almost all the children who agreed to participate. I told them that I was curious to know whether they felt at home in the house they lived in and if they did, what it is that makes them feel at home. I would then explain to them that I was interested in knowing about their experiences because they move to a new house on a regular base, so they also know what it is like when the house is totally empty, and you do not know the surroundings. I asked them if they could walk around their house and photograph examples of what it is that makes home home to or see how they could catch that in a video. Very often children, especially those under ten, would immediately respond to questions I posed in my introduction.

They would start talking about rooms in the house or people and pets they shared the house with. Other children would only respond with 'ok'.

Some children said they were not sure whether they understood what I meant with home. With them, I tried to think aloud about what it could be that makes one feel at home. I asked questions like: 'Does feeling at home has something to do with stuff/objects/items or is it more about people or maybe more about certain places in the house?' By doing that there was a risk of directing them to my stream of thoughts. I decided that posing these questions to myself, instead of giving them examples ('it could be a stuffed animal or your bed or your sister'), I would minimize this risk. At the time, this appeared to be a successful solution as these children would then start to talk. Then, I could also ask them to take photos or make a video of what they just told me or of new things that might come up.

I gave a disposable camera to work with to the smaller children living close to where I live, which they loved. The older children had their mobile phones.

f. Receiving and discussing the material

I would then wait for their photos or videos. In some cases, the mothers sent them within days or a week. Sometimes they arrived after two weeks. If I had not received anything by then, I sent a reminder. This helped. In a few cases I sent a second and last reminder. In the end I received materials from nineteen children. Two children (or their parents) never responded, even though they agreed working with me. One was a Serbian/American girl, the other a Dutch boy. Although no reason was given, the children had in common that they had recently moved.

I discussed the materials either at the child's house or in a video call (in one case a phone call). With most children above 10, I was alone, sometimes the parent was within hearing distance.

A talk took between 30 and 45 minutes. If the child had taken photos, we looked at them together and I would ask them with what photo they wanted to start to describe. If they did not know where to start, I would pick out a photo and ask them to describe what I saw. Mostly that was enough for them to take over. I only interrupted to either ask for a detail.

Most of the talks took place in the bedrooms of the children. In these cases, it was the mother or the child (with permission of the mother) suggesting this. In three households (four children in total), I did not see the bedroom. Looking back, three of these four children did not much like their bedroom. Two siblings said they hoped the new house would

have nice bedrooms as 'here the walls were stupid' (the roof was slanted). One child had just moved houses and his parents had stored everything elsewhere, not only his furniture, but also his toys. Of one child I did not see the room, because I discussed her video in WhatsApp calls.

Fourteen children sent in photos. Some children focused solely on toys. Others also took photos of pets, siblings or parents. Most children photographed one item, a few would also take a photo of their room or a cupboard and by that displaying more items. Five children sent in short videos. Three of these were like a tour, showing the elements, of what they felt was home. Two siblings both sent in a video in which they talk about what home means to them and not show.

In most cases a conversation lasted between twenty to thirty minutes. If it went on longer, I would end it to prevent to arrive at a moment where the child would be exhausted. In cases like this, I asked the child whether we could continue our conversation at another moment. I would finish a talk by asking whether I could return with some questions if needed. All the children said yes.

g. Extra conversations

After this round of talks, I focused on the children who were ten years and older and who remembered packing to prepare for the move to their current house. I sent a request for a new appointment to the children or the mothers. In cases where I communicated directly with the children, I sent the mothers a text telling them that, as agreed, I had contacted their child.

In the next conversation I wanted to focus either on things the participant had said before or on what other participants had told me. I sometimes asked them to send me some photos of elements of our previous conversation. This was the case for children who had mentioned that their bedroom was the most important element in what they see as home. I also asked children to draw a map of their room, focusing on what it is that makes that room home.

Three families did not respond to the request for a follow-up. They did not give me a reason. I sent one reminder.

With eleven of the participants, I had more at least two longer talks. Some would send, on my request, more material or I would ask them to do other assignments.

4.2 Case study

Several topics came up during my conversations with the children. To give an idea of what we discussed, I will present two cases. Renske is fifteen, Dutch and she lives in Oslo, Norway. Harry is thirteen, British and lives in Duesseldorf, Germany.

4.2.1 Renske, 15 years old and lives in Oslo

She is Dutch and previously lived in the Netherlands and Germany. August 2019, she moved to Norway. A relocation is planned either this Summer or the next. Between November 2020 and March 2021, I spoke about four times with Renske. The language of communication was English. I met Renske when she still lived close by, in Duesseldorf. She went to the same school as my children and every now and then, she would accompany my children on the tram from school back home.

In one of the Zoom meetings, I have with her, we are wondering out loud what her bedroom tells us about her. Her first idea is that most people would consider this a nice and cozy room. She does not think it is immediately clear whether it is a boy or a girl room. 'There is nothing really gender-specific. Or maybe there is, looking more closely. Like the decoration for the horse I ride, hanging from the wardrobe. Although boys can ride horses, too. Or the string of lights I decorated the windowsill with. I think only girls would do something like that.' She admits immediately that she does not know if that is true. She has never seen a bedroom of a teenage boy.

'A person might even think I am organized, an empty desk, with all these whiteboards on the wall. And creative, with all the coloring pencils neatly stacked in a pen holder.' If people examine the room closer, I ask Renske, what would the person learn then? Renske starts to laugh out loud. 'Well, that depends how close the examination gets. When you examine the coloring pencils, you will find out that they have hardly been used. When you open drawers and cupboards, you will find a big mess.' The confirmation of whether it is a boy or a girl room, will be found in the wardrobe. 'Dresses and girls' underwear. But before you get to that drawer, I imagine the photos on the pin board of girls together hint at this being a girl's bedroom.'



RENSKE'S ATTEMPT TO COMBINE CHEESE AND A TRAMPOLINE.

Because we both talk using Zoom on our laptops, we can look at Renske's photos on our phones. On one of them I recognize a trampoline, but that is about it. She explains that the greyish blur in the foreground on the left is a piece of cheese. 'Hmm, come to think of it, maybe not so logic,' she says. In her mind, however, it was a particularly good solution for not sending into many photos and at the same time making sure that I would see the most important things of her life that she says make home home. 'The trampoline is in the garden and it's a place where my sister (12 years) and I just hang out on. We hop on it, we walk our rounds on it, chatting, laughing. This feels good. This is just very relaxing. I won't go there alone, always with my sister.' Renske explains that the cheese on the photo is not there because she eats the cheese on the trampoline, but it also symbolizes spending time with family, like being on the trampoline with her sister. With her family members, she shares the joy of eating the cheese. It is not just about the taste but also about the moment. On Fridays, around 17.30, the family gathers and the '*borrel*' starts. *Borrel* is a Dutch word meaning a moment to meet up for an alcoholic drink, very often combined with something savory. In her family, Renske tells, her parents have their beer and wine, the children have some water or lemonade. On the table there is chips, there are some peanuts and there is cheese. 'Now in Oslo, the cheese has become even more important than in Duesseldorf. It is so difficult to get good cheese here. In Duesseldorf we could easily go to the Netherlands and buy it. Here, we buy the cheese at the most expensive supermarket and still it is not perfect. Due to Covid-19 we haven't been

in the Netherlands for a while and have not had visitors from there, so we can't sneak cheese into the country.'

Moving to a new country, Renske says, is scary, so it is nice when some things stay the way they were. Traditions like the 'borrel' with her family or playing board games together. She was happy that the furniture came with them, she explains, you bring home with you to the next place you live. This time her parents did not take the old dining table with them, and Renske was surprised to notice how much she missed it, even though there really was not anything special about it.

Before Renske sent in her pictures, she had mentioned to me that her parents, her sister and the dog were what make home a home. When I saw the pictures, I noticed that she did not send in pictures of her parents or sister, but she did of Sammie, the dog. 'I think I did this because he also comes into my room to stay. He is not only part of the family, but he is also part of me, in my bedroom.' The bedroom is a space that has grown more and more important to Renske over the last 1.5 years. 'Maybe it is because in this house, everything is on the same level. In the previous house my bedroom was on the first floor. Up there, during the day, I felt so far away from everybody.



RENSKE'S TREASURE BOX AND ITS CONTENT.

In our Zoom meetings, Renske and I discuss leaving a house and moving into a new house. In every meeting we pick up on something she had said previously. Before they moved to their current house, Renske had already seen it. The advantage of knowing which room her future bedroom would become, was that she could start planning how to organize it. 'In the end, I ended up doing it all differently, because when I was actually in

the room with my furniture things seemed different from how I thought it to be.’ She is very happy how she and her mother managed to arrange the furniture.

Renske could bring everything from her room in Duesseldorf to Oslo, furniture, books, decoration, on the condition that she would tidy up and sort things before packing. ‘The easiest things to get rid of are clothes that are too small and old crafting that I don’t really like,’ Renske laughs. Then there are things like old comics. Things that are nice, but that you do not use or read anymore. When you find a new destination, making other people happy, Renske explains, it is much easier to get rid of these. Then the hardest part comes, she says. It is all these little things, small pieces of paper and little objects. ‘It’s really hard to explain why the one is more important than the other. For example, look at this little box and what’s inside!’ The view on my screen becomes shaky and blurry. I recognize a bed, then a window and finally, when the shaking stops and the view is focused again, Renske has lifted the laptop and turned it up to the shelf above the desk. She points at a little purple box with white dots. ‘I like this box a lot. It looks like a treasure box. But when I look into it, are these real treasures? There is an old, flat coin, I found on a street in Italy, some registration notes on house points I earned at the previous school. All of it may not be so special, but apparently not unspecial (sic) enough to throw them away.’



RENSKE'S ROOM, TIDIED UP FOR THE PHOTO.

In our Zoom meetings we also discuss at what point a bedroom becomes a personal space. What is needed for a room to become a place you want to spend time and feel

comfortable? It is clear from listening to Renske that this does not happen in a split second, it is more like a process. 'When we saw this house for the very first time, it was full of stuff belonging to someone else. I couldn't imagine ever feeling at home here.' A few months later when they arrived in Oslo, the house was empty, and they had to wait for the container with their belongings to arrive. When the furniture and boxes arrived, the arranging and unpacking could start. 'It's not like that at that moment it becomes my room, that it feels like my room. I mean, it is nice to see my desk again, and to be able to sit at it. When the shelves are secured to the wall, above the desk, it is nice, it brings in an atmosphere. The same goes for hanging up the lamp or placing the bed. But I think it is like, like when all of that is in place, only then the real making of home starts. You know, when you put all the little things in place: the treasure box on the shelf, the clock above the bed. Photos on the pinboard. Then it becomes my room, my home and then I start to like it. The last step is making friends. When I have made these in the new place, then it really is home.'

Focusing on what the room makes home, I ask Renske what she would take if she had five minutes to select five items from her room if she had to start over. She does not like the assignment. 'Only five things?' She sighs. Because we talk on Zoom and she sits in front of her camera, I see her face scanning the room, moving from left to right, up and down. She then picks up her laptop so she can take me through her room while selecting these five things. The first three items she names quickly, starting with Ollie, the oldest stuffed animal she has. 'Look, he almost falls apart. It's supposed to be an elephant, but he now misses his trunk.' She mentions her treasure box again, but this time allowing me, via the camera, to peek inside. Renske had already told me about the Italian coin and the house points, but now I get to see a small stone she once found plus two receipts. What is so special about the receipts, I ask. Is it about the guarantee? Renske starts to laugh. 'No, I can't really explain why I want to keep them. I think, they remind me of the joy I had when I purchased the product.'

She picks up the laptop again and points the camera to the wall. 'You see that clock? I inherited it of my old grandparents, no, my great grand parents.' After they died, Renske and the other great grand children could pick out something small. 'I just like the clock. It is translucent, you can see the wall behind it. The clock is ticking, but not so loud that it disturbs me. So funny, even though it is attached very firmly to the wall, I did manage to get it off the wall while sleeping. No idea what I was dreaming about.'



SAMMIE, THE FIFTH MEMBER OF RENSKÉ'S HOUSEHOLD.

The last two things to select are the hardest according to Renske. She picks up the laptop and makes a sharp turn towards the portrait of the deceased cat Coco. Renske shows the four tiles that together make one cat. But then, and she turns the laptop another 180 degrees, she shows the trophies she won with dog Sammie. 'I think I go for this one. We jumped without making mistakes. This is really for the two of us, no team involved. We got first.' The last item she wants to take is a strategic choice. It is her pinboard. She shows the board with lots of stuff pinned on it, it is difficult to make out the details, photos, notes, formulars. 'If I pick this one, then I will have my friends with me, you see, photos, letters. And here is a funny photo with Stink. That is the nickname of Sammie, because he often eats smelly things or rolls around in smelly things. There is some school on it. See, the sustainability goals of the UN, we discussed in class. But there is also the future on the board. My notes on a visit to a university.' The five items she picked out came from her bedroom. Does that make the bedroom the most important room of the house? Renske is clear on that. That, she says totally depends on her mood or on the activity of the moment. 'My bedroom really is my space and I feel safe in it, but when playing board games or enjoying the 'borrel', the living room definitely is the best place to be.'

I ask her whether it is important to make something out of the new situation when you move. Renske needs some time to think about this. 'You know, when we arrived here, we knew we would stay here for at least two years. That makes it worth to try to make

something out of it. Otherwise, I wouldn't feel safe and not so much at home while we are living here.'

4.2.2 Harry, 13 years old and lives in Duesseldorf

Harry is British. He previously lived United Kingdom, Belgium and the United Kingdom again. He lives in Germany since August 2017. Relocation is planned this Summer or the next. I know Harry, because he is a schoolfriend of my son and I am friends with his mother.

The first time I visit Harry, his mother will accompany me to his bedroom. Before she does that, she calls up to Harry to warn him I will be there in five minutes. She tells me, she hopes that push him to tidy up his room. She was the one suggesting that I could have a chat with Harry in his own room. Harry agreed. Harry and I know each other a little bit, but we never really talked more than five minutes and we never were alone together.

Harry awaits me, very formally, standing next to his desk. His hand touching the desk as if looking for some stability. He is a 13-year-old boy, thick blond hair with a tiny curl in it. He offers me a seat at his sofa. His mother disappears immediately once she sees the room is nice and clean. While I walk around the back of the sofa to take my seat, I look around. The room looks familiar as I recognize some details from the pictures Harry sent me. I am surprised to be in such a cozy room where I see so many personal belongings. So far, I have only been in the kitchen and the living room of this house, and these rooms contain hardly any personal belongings.



HARRY'S SHELVES WITH BOOKS, TREASURES AND MEMENTOES.

Harry's room is about twenty-five square meters. In it are a bed, sofa and a desk. Against the walls, there are shelves and a cupboards. On it are books, nature treasures and souvenirs. Harry tells me he decorated the room himself and decided where the furniture had to come. The sofa is the latest addition. 'It was in the cellar, and I asked if I could have it in my room', Harry explains. Now, with online school, Harry divides his time between sitting at the desk and sitting on the sofa. According to his mother, it is about the only exercise he gets, apart from being forced down to have lunch or dinner. 'The bedroom is the place I probably enjoy the most,' he says. It has not always been like that. 'Earlier, I did not have so many treasures in my bedroom as I collect them over time. So, in England, the most important place might have been more like the living room.'

When moving from Belgium to the United Kingdom, it was his mother packing all the stuff and deciding on what would go or not. The next relocation was from the United Kingdom to Duesseldorf, Germany. By then Harry was 10 years old and decided himself. Not everything went into his current bedroom. He threw away stuff he did not use anymore or that was broken, because it is then it is not important anymore. While talking, he reconsiders what he just said. 'It's not always like that. Sometimes, when something breaks and if it is a special item, it calls up more memories when broken. You remember it as "then I broke it". There is more of a personality to it.' He likes objects to have a story to it. 'Then I can tell more about it. Or, when it's the skulls my uncle gave me, I can tell his stories.'



BIG BEAR, THE ONLY STUFFED ANIMAL THAT IS STILL ALLOWED IN HARRY'S ROOM.

Harry tries to explain how he makes choices while sorting. 'It's not so much based on whether you use it a lot or not, I guess, it's more whether, how much I value it or don't. I might not use it, but it might hold memories.' This could be old toys, stuffed animals or posters of former favorite shows. These are hard to throw away, Harry says. He does not want to have them in his bedroom anymore, but they should not go. Lucky for Harry, the current house is big enough and these items can be stored. The exception is Big Bear. Harry points out Big Bear, sitting at the end of his bed. A stuffed animal, about 50 centimeters high, it has lost his color and the fabric is worn. It is the only stuffed animal in his room. The rest ended up in a cupboard. 'But this one, I have had since I was born, I think, so obviously I value him most.'



HARRY LIKES OBJECTS WITH A STORY ATTACHED TO IT.

I ask him whether the material an object is made of is of importance, whether plastic will go any way and natural stuff stays? 'Sometimes, but not always. It depends, again, on what it is. Although, the most precious things are mostly not made of plastic.'

Looking around, I hardly see plastic. The only thing I spot is a fan, a souvenir bought in Venice. The rest of the objects with which he has decorated his room are books. They are neatly stacked on shelves. Well read by the look of the worn backs. Then there are the objects found in nature. These are spread over the room: on a cupboard; on shelves; on his desk. Every direction I look, I see something precious. There is an antler, some minerals and stones. There is a collection of skulls. Harry identifies them: 'a badger, a cow, sheep and a camel.' Most of them are exhibited as decoration, to look pretty. The more robust items, he placed on his desk. 'Like an antler. It is nice to have it there. I can touch it, play around with it. It's a distraction while doing schoolwork.'

At another moment we meet, I ask Harry what five items he would pick if they would move in five minutes. What would he absolutely need if he went to a new place in order to feel comfortable, at home? He takes some time to think and to look around. When he picks them out, it is as if he has sorted his stuff in categories and has picked something out of every category. 'I do it unconsciously, I think, without realizing. Selecting is like categorizing. You need something of each category.' The tablet falls under relaxing; a book is something to focus on; a treasure from nature is something that holds memories; Big Bear is something comforting; and a link to childhood would be a poster or a birthday card someone has written him once.



FOR HARRY, THE TABLET FALLS INTO THE CATEGORY RELAXING.

At the time of the fieldwork, Harry did not know yet whether he would be relocated in the summer. Every three to five years they move. Generally, the family will hear about it two or three months earlier. 'That's about the time we have to prepare and come to terms with it. I do not think I quite mind it, that we have so little time to get used to the idea as I am used to moving. Maybe the good thing about not knowing is that you don't spend a long time feeling sad of having to say goodbye instead of enjoying the time you have together.' He says that even though he does not like leaving his friends, normally saying goodbye is a more happy than sad moment. 'It would be more like that I am happy I met you that that I am sad that I am leaving.' He thinks, it is still like that, even now that he has grown older. Keeping in contact is now easier as he now has his own devices. 'Like my tablet is really important now. Earlier, it would be the device to play games on, I would play on it in the living room. Now, I use it to chat with friends, so now I can also use it to keep in touch with people. The tablet is always in my room.'

So far, Harry has moved to a new house about every four years. Even though that decision is taken for him, Harry says he has some influence on making himself feel at home. 'That's what the bedroom is for. It is a space that I can decorate. I can have it how I want it.' It is worth the effort to make something out of his bedroom. 'Without decorating it, it would not be a bedroom, it would not be home. It would be like a hotel, which is nice. But after some time that it would become blank or boring.'



PAIRING #6 - SILLY THINGS CAN ALSO BE IMPORTANT.

5 Findings and analysis

This chapter discusses the findings of my fieldwork and refers to the relevant literature. There are five topics that stood out and that I would like to discuss:

1. What is home
2. Phases one goes through before one feels at home
3. Control on feeling at home
4. Elements influencing feeling of being at home
5. Influence of surroundings.

Below I will go through these topics in detail.

5.1 What is home

The starting point of my exploration was to ask the participating expat children to video or photograph what home is to them. There are many definitions and interpretations of the word home (DeMarco 2020; Alyksyeyeva, 2018, Allen 2008). The participant's definition of home became clear through the photos and videos; through my conversations with them; and through what I saw during visits to their house, either on video or in person. The photos and videos I received, depicted or symbolized:

- Pets
- Family members
- Objects for habitual use (desk, bed, tv, etc)
- Specific objects (toys, books, souvenirs, etc)
- Rituals
- Friends

The conversations that followed after I received the photos or the video's made much clear of what was on the photos or in the video and what the meaning of it was to the participating children. The children gave many examples of what was home to them. On the above topics, I will mention a few to give an idea. There are pets, like Sammie, Buddy and Poes, that play a prominent role in the lives of the children and make the children feel at home. In two cases even the ashes of deceased pets are moved as well in order to feel complete as a family.

There hardly any photos of parents or siblings. Most children explained in these follow-up conversations that they did not take a photo of their parents and/or siblings, because they assumed that it was obvious that they were needed to feel at home. The children who did show me their siblings had taken a photo directly of their sibling or they had taken a photo of an existing image of their brother or sister.



MANY PARTICIPANTS HAD A SIBLING, BUT NOT MANY PHOTOGRAPHED THEM.

90 % of the photos depicted objects. There were objects that seemed very ordinary and replaceable, ordered from a catalogue, like a bed, a table, a desk or a car. Others looked special, objects one does not immediately find in a warehouse, like a skull, a treasure box or a baby comb.

Some children talked about family rituals that made them feel at home. In that case they made a photo or a video clip of an object that symbolized the ritual. In the conversation that followed, these children explained that the photo was about the ritual and not so much about the depicted table or the games.

When I asked the children what home meant to them, when they felt at home, the answers varied considerably. Tongoli (1987) mentions attributes of what home consists of: centrality, continuity, privacy, self expression / personal identity, and social relationships

(in Moore, 2000). I will start with combining these attributes with my findings. For a few being at home means that you are not on a holiday and therefore you see objects, or you can play with objects which would not be possible when you are on a holiday. They gave examples like seeing both the family cars; being able to play with the costumes; playing with the laptop that never leaves the room. Several children mentioned their bedroom as that is the place where they can decide how to decorate it and as a space where they can do what they want. One child explicitly said that at home he could walk wherever he wanted without being told off. For him, there is a sense of freedom attached to home. The children with a pet would mention that home was being with the pet, whether it is cuddling or playing with it or seeking comfort of it. Social relationships are a big part of how a child feels at home. They describe family with examples like a tradition on a Friday evening get together or a ritual like setting up the Christmas tree together. Friends are also particularly important. Most children mention that once they have friends in the new place they moved to, they really feel at home.



SOMETHING SO COMMON AS A TABLE CAN BE VERY IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO FEEL AT HOME.

5.2 Phases one goes through before one feels at home

Moore mentions that the temporary aspect of home has not yet been investigated enough (Moore, 2000). Expat children generally move every four years. This means that they pack their stuff and say goodbye to the old place and then unpack their belongings in the new place. They decorate the new room; get used to the new house; find their way in the new school; and they know that after four years the same ritual starts again. I was curious what if the temporary aspect of home plays a role for these children and if so, what kind of role.

The children ten years and older were able to explain to me that they do not have to build a new home from scratch with every move they make. One of them makes the comparison with a snail. She says she carries her home with her. Still, these children mention as well that even though they carry their home with them, they still must go through some phases to feel at home in the new place. It is not that they just unpack their stuff and continue their life as if nothing happened. For some, the first phase of getting used to the new house is seeing the house for the first time. Mostly this feels awkward. Either it is because the house is still full of other people's belongings (in the scouting period) or because it is completely empty. In both cases children mention it is hard to imagine that the new place will ever get a homey feeling even though they know their furniture and objects will arrive.



DECORATING THE ROOM WITH THE LITTLE ELEMENTS REALLY MAKES THE ROOM YOUR ROOM.

Once the truck or container with personal stuff and furniture arrives, a new phase starts. All children mention that even though they know their stuff has been packed and shipped, it is a relief to see the boxes arrive and especially see the first familiar items to be retrieved from them. 'Really, opening the boxes feels like Christmas', according to Raegan (14). With that a next phase starts. Most rooms in the house are furnished by the parents, but the child's bedroom is the domain of the child. At that moment most children continue the process that often already started in the old place: putting the new design they thought of into practice. For most children I spoke with the fun thing about moving is thinking about a new design for your new room. Once the boxes arrive, they can put their plan into action. The children who mentioned the importance of their bedroom as being a nice place to hang out, explain that there is a subtle difference between on one hand the big objects (like furniture) and the small objects (like a memento). They mention that it is the little elements they decide to bring to decorate their room with, that make the new room their room. In his research on objects and the mobility of them when owners

move to new dwellings, Marcoux acknowledges the importance of sorting stuff. '...to select for keeping what matters, those things will define the identity of the new place...', Marcoux (2001:79).



THE ABILITY TO FURNISH YOUR OWN ROOM MEANS A LOT.

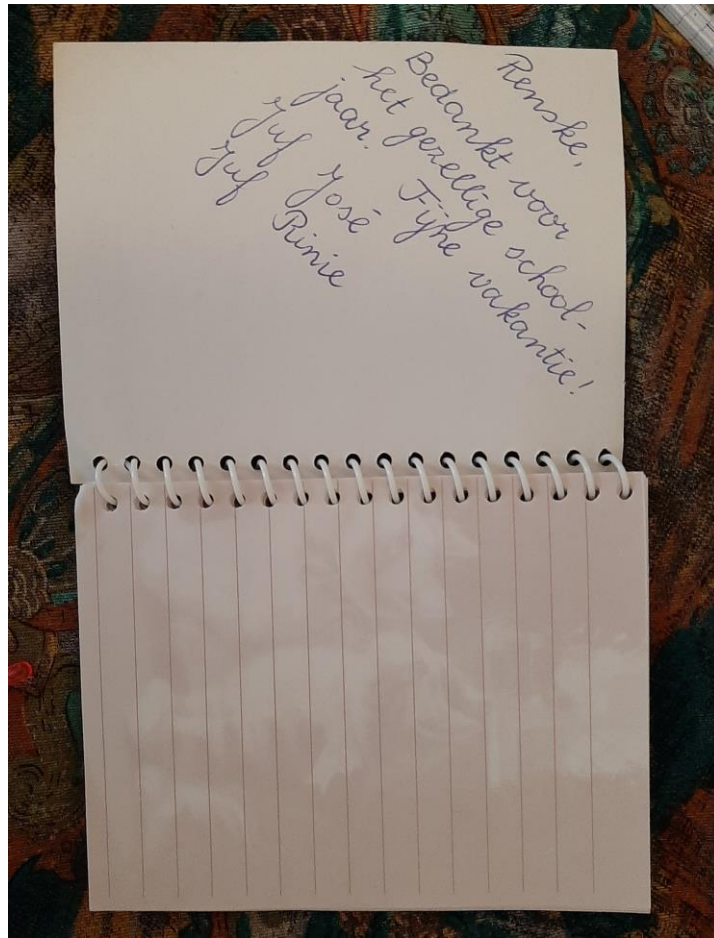
In her research on geographically mobile families, Allen focusses on the perspective of the adult. Allen points out that some adults find it hard to invest in or to embrace a new place out of fear for forgetting or of dishonouring the old place (Allen, 2008). This is the opposite of how the expat children I worked with dealt with a new situation. I spoke about this with those older than ten years as the younger ones did not understand this topic. My participants pointed out the importance of settling in and making an effort of feeling at home in the new place. They do not feel guilty when trying to adapt. They say, it is necessary to do so, because only when you accept the new situation and you adapt to it, you feel more relaxed and safer. The older children all have mobile phones full of precious photos and videos and contact data. These devices could be seen as a home as the elements on it bring comfort and children associate these with familiarity. Nevertheless, the children mention that a phone is not a home. A home is something physical as well where you should try making something nice out. 'Otherwise, your room will stay like a hotel room,' according to Harry (13).

5.3 Control on feeling at home

With major events like a relocation, a child has no say in deciding to move or to stay. I discussed with the children I worked with whether they have some control in the process of a relocation. The children described two moments where they can actively control their well-being. One is what I describe in the previous paragraph: deciding to settle in, deciding to make something out of the new situation, whether it is decorating one's room or

actively looking for new friends at the new school. The other moment where the children have some control is prior to moving, when the boxes must be packed. A way claiming control is sorting the stuff before packing the boxes. To Marcoux things, possessions as he calls them, take up an interesting position when one sees them in relation to mobilization. On one hand they are mobile as they will leave the current place in the end. On the other hand, the possessions are stable, as they are part of the person who is moving. There is a relation between them (Marcoux, 2001).

My interviews made clear that the mother does the sorting when the children are younger than ten years old. After that, the child decides what will come with them and what goes. Most children I spoke with could take what they wanted from the last location to the current. They all have their different sorting techniques. Some sort in categories as relaxing, memento and comfort and take something from each category. Others make overviews from most important to less important. Either way, it is all about deciding between things that matter to them and the things that they can live without. For example, in a stack of drawings, the least successful ones can go. With school assignments like craftwork children mention that new ones will be made, so the old ones are easier to throw away. Some stuff they outgrow, and they therefore do not take these with them to the next place, such as toys like a rocking horse or a set of plastic unicorns. Other stuff they might have outgrown, but they will not want to get rid of, like a cuddly stuffed animal or a gift they once got. In these cases, there are too many memories attached to the object. That makes the sorting difficult, the children say. The fact that someone selected something especially for you means more than the actual object. According to Marcoux, things can be useful, but at the same time can be mementoes as well. 'They take on their value from their association to important persons as well. Things become even more important when they constitute the sole link with a person' (2001: 72).



THE PERSONAL NOTE IN THIS NOTEBOOK MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO THROW IT AWAY.

When asked to make a list of five items children would always take with them most children would list at least one item they had in their possession for as long as they remember. Marcoux explains that some things are just there and have always been there and that gives them a certain value. The fact that it has survived several sorting processes can add value as well (Marcoux, 2001).

Not all the older children were able to sort themselves. When Luca (12) moved to Milan September 2020, his parents did the sorting. They did a bad job, Luca told me in a Zoom talk. 'They threw away part of my Yugioh card collection.'³ His mum overhearing this joined the conversation and explained that her son had so many cards that she threw away the ones that were torn and even a bit dirty. To Luca that is no excuse: 'A battered card doesn't automatically lose its value for me.' This goes for gifts as well. Objects can become more than what they are initially made for. According to Mauss an object can

³ Japanese collectible card game. With your deck of cards, you compete with your opponent.

also have a meaning attached to it, a spirit. 'A bond, created by things as things are a person as well' (1954:10).



LUCA SENT AN EXAMPLE OF A YUGIOH CARD DECK.

The topic of objects is being mentioned in *Third Culture Kids, growing up among world*. In an advice on how expat children could say farewell to a country when moving to a new one, the authors mention the importance of consciously select the personal belongings you want to bring to the new place and also consciously saying goodbye to the stuff you cannot bring. They further advise to take objects, the authors call them sacred, to the new place that depict or symbolize the country one just left. Only few of the children I spoke with were also included finding a new destination for the stuff they did not want to bring. To these children it meant a lot that their old comics did not need to be thrown away but found a new destination. Most children however left it to their parents to get rid of the stuff they would not take. The advice in the handbook to consciously say farewell to the country you leave by taking a sacred object that represents your stay in the old place, is something I did not encounter in my talks with my participants. Most children had objects related to a city or a country, but they were all remembrances of a holiday.



RIVKA WANTS HER SHELLS TO COME WITH HER WITH THE NEXT MOVE.

Half of the participants also showed me a category of meaningful objects that they had selected to go with them that were daily used objects, like a tv, a desk, a table, a bed. None of these items looked like antique or design. On the contrary, they looked very replaceable, furniture from a catalogue. Though, for my participants they are important to them, they define home. Povrzanović Frykma explains that feeling at home is also about being at home. The fact that one is at home has to do with being able to do things in a familiar manner. She explains that 'the possibility of keeping up a habitual practice is crucial to the experience of 'feeling at home''(2019: 36).



VERY COMMON AND REPLACEABLE OBJECTS CAN MEAN A LOT.

5.4 Elements influencing the feeling of being at home

There are several elements the children mention that have an impact on their feeling of being at home.

5.4.1 Rituals

Apart from bringing familiar objects when moving to a new house to help the new place to attain an identity (Marcoux, 2001) or making sure you can continue your habitual practice (Povrzanović Frykma, 2019), rituals also help in bringing familiarity to an unfamiliar new place. Several children mention specific rituals that take place in their house independently of where they live. Some have to do with occasions, like decorating the Christmas tree; the family get-together on Friday afternoons for a drink and a snack; or planned board-game moments. There are daily rituals as well. One family has a table setting that stays the same wherever they live. Wherever the table is, the table setting is clear.



PRESENTS ARE NICE, BUT DECORATING THE CHRISTMAS TREE IS VERY SPECIAL.

5.4.2 Pets

Another element that helps to not feel too lost at the new destination is a pet. I knew about the importance of a stuffed animal as a pacifier.



BUNBUN SLEEPS WHERE ELODIE SLEEPS.

During my personal visits and those on Zoom I have seen teddy bears, elephants, rabbits and many other cuddly animals. Some were still recognizable as what they should look like, others were nearing a state beyond repair. Half of the children I spoke with had a pet.



EVERYTHING MIGHT CHANGE ONCE YOU MOVE, BUT THE PET STAYS.

The fact that the pet responds to them makes the difference from a stuffed animal to a pet. It is reassuring to have familiar face around when elements like a school or neighbourhood are changing. In the situation where one is new and has not got any friends yet a

pet helps in feeling not too alone. The pet provides a friendly face, is always ready for a cuddle and very often also wants to play. It is because of this, one of the children said, that he took a photo of the dog and not of his fish. This same child has rearranged his room a bit during the Covid-19 home schooling situation, so his dog can join the home schooling as well, a substitute for the failing classmates. Apart from this, some of the children mention that a pet means home because it is something they do not bring on the holiday. One child was very practical and explained how having a dog helps to get to know the new neighbourhood as you must walk it, whether you like it or not.

5.4.3 Friends

In order to feel at home friends prove to play an important role. Children feel included when having friends. And as one child mentioned, even though you know you will move again, you will keep on making friends. Some children mention that their feeling for the house or apartment they live in also changes once they have friends. The fact of being able to have friends over or hang out in your room telephoning or chatting with friends gives a different, more positive atmosphere to the place. In general, friends add to the place where you live. Muna (15): 'Friends make you feel belong to the place you are at that moment.' With two children during my fieldwork, I could observe part of their transition. Both of them moved during the pandemic and started their new school online. In my first conversation they independently mentioned that due to this situation they had not yet been able to find friends and still focused on online contact with the friends in the former place. In a later conversation they both had been able to go to school and had found friends.



THE PINBOARD CONTAINS EVERYTHING: SCHOOL, FRIENDS, FUTURE.

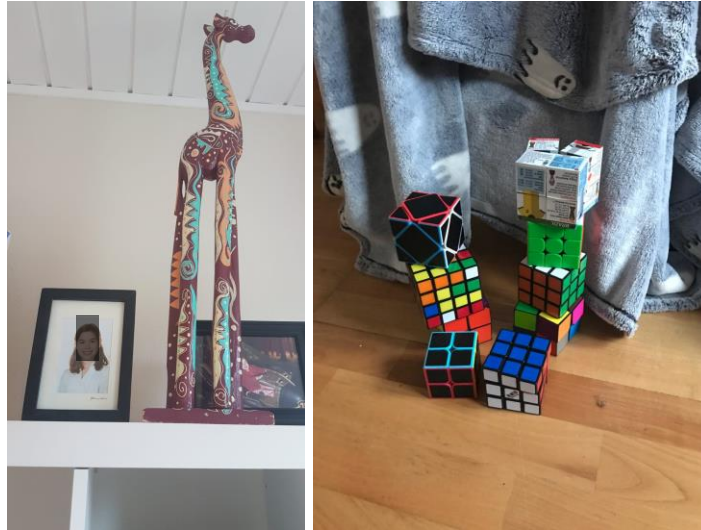
5.5 Influence of the surroundings

The focus of research done on children and place is on the relation between children and the surroundings they live in (Jack, 2010, 2015; Avriel-Avni, Zion and Ornit Spektor-Levy, 2010; Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014). My participants hardly have a connection to their surroundings. Home has to do with the place they live in and not where it is located. Apart from one family, they do not mention any other place in the world as home, for example the country their parents grew up. The children of this particular family talk about a home where they live and a home where they go to for a holiday (the place their grand parents live). Near the end of my fieldwork, the children of another family started to talk about home when talking about the new place they would move to. These Canadian twins (13) have hardly lived in Canada. Now they knew they were going back, they started calling Canada home.

A review of studies of children's sense of place reveals (Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014), that children's sense of place is mostly related to children's place attachment. Avriel-Avni, Zion and Spektor-Levy (2010) confirm this in saying that when there is place attachment, the home is not limited to the building one lives in, it also includes sites that become places through dwelling activity and way of thinking. The children I spoke with have hardly developed a sense of place with regards to the place they currently live in. Apart from one participant who also sees friends outside the house, the participants do not interact with their geographical surroundings. It seems that my participants are attached to the place they live, because their stuff and loved ones are there, not because they have a special relationship with the surroundings. Colomer did research on how airports can evoke a home coming feeling for ATCKs taking into account their very nomadic childhood. Colomer mentions that for ATCKs home is transformed into an 'intangible materiality' (2020:163).

A place exists on a number of scales. The first scale is the meaning of a certain part of the house or the garden; the next scale is the neighbourhood or town; a further scale would be a wider area like the region or nation. In general, the older a child the larger the geographical scale gets. (Jack, 2010). My participants stick to this first housebound scale. This also goes for those entering puberty. Only one participant, she is 15, sees friends outside her place or school. She says it is because so many people speak English in the new place she lives. 'Otherwise, I would have to learn a new language and that would have been difficult for me.' With many of the other children older than eleven years, only when they have a friend over then they will start to explore the neighbourhood. According to some of my participants, this lack of exploration drive has to do with the language. They say German surroundings are too complicated as they only learn a little

German in school and that is not enough to feel comfortable while walking in the neighbourhood. All children I spoke with in the surroundings of Duesseldorf are being brought to school and picked up. The children live far away from each other and will only see each other at school or at arranged playdates.



PAIRING #7 - IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT FINISH OFF THE DECORATING OF A ROOM.

6 Reflection

In this chapter, I reflect on my activities during this research process. I discuss starting my research; finding sources; bringing literature and fieldwork together; and my own role in the process.

6.1 Starting up

The biggest impact Covid-19 had on my research was on deciding the topic. Before the pandemic really took off, I had already planned the research for a thesis. This was to take place in a German prison I had been volunteering for eight years. The social services at this prison supported my idea to do research on how prisoners create a home in a temporary situation. By the time I wanted to start with my research the pandemic stopped all custodial institutions allowing outsiders to coming in for research, among other activities.

I am interested in making home in a situation that is temporary. I looked for possibilities to keep to that topic and find a different group to do the research on. Due to Covid 19 that meant to find a group where I was not depended on institutions for a way in. My focus turned to children whose geographical address is temporary. There are several groups that would qualify here. Initially I researched the possibility to write my thesis about foster children. I talked to a befriended foster mother and two of her foster children. In these three calls I heard so many heart-breaking stories that I decided that this topic is not suitable to discuss on telephone or in Zoom conversations.

I started looking at my personal situation. My husband and I, with our children, have moved every four to five years. I had some talks with my children to learn what makes home to them and the influence they have on feeling at home. I decided to opt for working with expat children for my thesis as these conversations were so interesting. I talked with some expat mothers and noticed that everyone, myself included, is trying her best in organizing a smooth transition, but that we all do not really know what it exactly is that makes a place home for our children.

I next wanted to see what research was done on this topic. For this I consulted JSTOR, a digital library of academic journals, books and primary sources. I was surprised that even though there is a lot of research done on expat children, it was mostly about 'belonging' and reflections on the youth of an expat child. I missed the practical angle on this topic, the 'now' that a child lives in.

6.2 Finding sources

Looking back on the months I did my research, I would like to make a comment on how I proceeded while forming a group of children to work with.

The families I cooperated with came from my own network (area Duesseldorf). I did not contact the international schools or the international clubs in Duesseldorf to find families as I was afraid that by doing so my research would be subject to how the Covid-19 situation developed. In my enthusiasm to find children and parents willing to cooperate, I did not pay enough attention to whether this group of children is a representation of expat children in general. The handbook (Footnote: Third Culture Kids, growing up among worlds) on expat children mentions that the time expat referred only to Western people was over. Though, when I look at 'my group of respondents', I find that they come from (mostly) western middle-class families. A Western middle-class experience of home has a clear separation between the private of the home and the outdoor world that is open to all (Boccagini and Brighenti, 2015). They mention that most research on home in social sciences is based on the typical this Western experience on such in Mallet (2004) and Hollow (2012). I read this article when I was almost finished with the fieldwork. I was reminded of my participant Mathew (13), who told me that home means that he is in a place where he can walk into every room without being told off.

My familiarity with most of the parents I worked with helped in gaining the trust of parents and children. Most of the families I worked with I know from the school our children attend. Either I know these families personally or the family knew another participating family. Apart from one family, all parents encouraged their children to show me the bedrooms without a parent being there. I enjoyed being taken or being directed to those

rooms and to get a view into their room, life and thoughts. A children's bedroom is a sacred space and I thought it was an honor to be allowed in. Little elements in all these different rooms reminded me of the space I once had. This inspired me for my visual project. At the time I did not think anything of it, being alone with a child in a room, but looking back, I do think that I would not do this when I would not know the parents and the children.

Working with children has its limitations. Before I started, I realized that I needed the gatekeepers, the parents, to gain access to the children or to get permission to ask their children. I somewhat naively did not realize at that point that the gatekeepers would stay in sight during the whole of the fieldwork. After obtaining the permission to talk with their children, I also needed them to arrange appointments for a video call or a visit and to receive the photo or video material.

Even though parents and children promised to send in the material within two weeks or 'soon', this did not always happen, and I had to send reminders. This can be a burden for the parent (Drew et al., 2010, quoted in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny 2014). I realise that the families lead a busy life like myself. Therefore, I sent no more than two reminders. It meant that I did not hear from some families (a Canadian, a Serbian/American and a Dutch family) who originally said they would cooperate. Also, an American and an Italian family did not respond to my request for a second conversation. I do not know why as they never got back to me.

I knew that part of the conversations would be held online, either due to Covid-19 regulations or because the children lived too far away. I was afraid that a videocall would end up in a formal interview because one looks at each other constantly. I wanted to avoid a formal interview as in my experience looser talks bring up more information. I was surprised to see how informal the talks on Zoom turned out. Maybe I was lucky that the children I spoke with were relaxed or maybe the children are so used to talking on screens that they were so comfortable doing this. With four children I had longer sessions online. Thanks to this advanced communication technology I could even have tours in through their room. Three of them took me, picking up the laptop and showing me around. One of them did not, but he did not like his room.

Another positive side of the advanced communication technology was my contact with Rivka (12), living in Oslo. She liked to participate, and she sent in two photos, but she was too shy to talk to me about these on Zoom. Instead, she sent me voice messages via WhatsApp to elaborate what was on the photo. Fact is, that after that, she sent in more material without me asking for it and we even had a video call.

I am happy that I used photo elicitation as a method. It was a friendly opener to a conversation because I could start by complementing the child on her photos or video. Instead of constantly at each other, we could also look at the photos or the video.



DISCUSSING THE PHOTO MATERIAL THAT THE GIRLS MADE FOR ME.

There were also some difficulties with using this method. Medleco (2013) discusses that some young research participants may be unable to adequately describe their photo choices, as they are shy or uncomfortable about doing so (in Briggs, Stedman and Krasny, 2014). I experienced this as well. Some of the young participants (younger than eight years), had forgotten why they took a specific picture. One of them had photographed an arts-and-crafts work, but she did not know whether it depicted home or whether she wanted to take it with her when moving to a new house.

Overall, I am satisfied with how I conducted my fieldwork, but there are two important aspects I should try and improve. One is that I must be braver in doing things outside my comfort zone. When preparing the fieldwork, I decided on using walking with video. Pink mentions filming a tour in helping to create an understanding for the environment (Pink, 2007). In the end I did not do it, because I was too shy to ask for permission. I felt so lucky to be invited by some of the children to their bedroom that I feared they would ask me to leave their room if I used video.

The other thing I must improve is stop making decisions for other people. In two cases two children who originally said they wanted to participate, walking with video in a distance would have been a great way to explore the building up from home. Both moved only weeks before I spoke with them first. After an initial confirmation both Angela (14, moved to Austria) and Chris (12, moved to Nigeria), they did not get back to me. Instead

of sending a reminder I could have phoned to ask whether I could help with my request or whether something was not clear. The same goes for the messages I sent to some parents. When they did not respond, I sent a new text message. In the end I left them alone, deciding they were too busy. I should have called them instead of deciding for them.

6.3 Bringing literature and my fieldwork together

Generally, previous research on expat children is concerned with questions like 'Where is home' or 'Where does one belong' and the sad feelings these questions can evoke. I wanted to do research on the more practical side of leaving a place and starting anew and dealing with that. During my fieldwork, topics came up that I did not read about before. This caused a dilemma: with every other topic that came up, a new world of research literature opened. Introducing new literature in my thesis proved itself extremely useful, because it explained what children told me. On the other hand, I wondered how much new literature to bring in? I had to find a balance in this and dare to stop to prevent myself to become too distracted.

6.4 Ethnographic self-reflection

My fieldwork coincided with my own preparing for a relocation. This helped because I could see at home what the children, I worked with had to deal with. It also helped with my first talk to contacts with parents as I deal with the same sort of life as they lead.

As I prepared the fieldwork, the idea was to record the progress of my own children in our own relocation parallel to doing the fieldwork. I could then use these records as relevant data in my thesis. In the end I did not do so. This was because I wanted my children to say their goodbyes to their home when the time had come for that. I did not want them to be reminded of this on such a regular base months before the move, only because I am working on a thesis. I wanted them to enjoy what was now.



PAIRING #8 - SOMETIMES YOU WIN, SOMETIMES YOU LOSE.

7 Closing

My research aim was not to analyze the advantages or disadvantages of a steady childhood over a nomadic one or the other way around. This research has been more like an exploration of how children in a temporary situation, expat children in this case, see home in the circumstances they live. I have not talked *about* children, but I have talked *with* children. In this my research differs from existing research on expat children. Such research mostly consists of reflections on experiences of adult expat children of the consequences of leading an expat childhood. Even though reflections are particularly important, it is also interesting to look at their present and how they experience it. 'Although we were all children once, or are children now, childhood is still in many ways closed to adults', according to MacDougall (2020: 19).

A total of nineteen expat children worked with me, age ranging between five and fifteen. Six of them I met on Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp, the rest I could visit at their house. I used photo elicitation as a method. This means that the children would make photos of or a video on what it is that makes home for them home. This material we discussed. With most children older than ten years I spoke several times.

7.1 Conclusions

In this thesis I looked at whether and how expat children experience the temporary aspect of their home. Their parents pursue an international career that involves moving from country to country every few years. These expat children lead a nomadic life. The children I worked with generally move every four years. With such a move, not only their

house or apartment changes, but also the surroundings, the school - and very often their friends. With the expat children who participated in the photo and video elicitation, I discussed themes as how they experience home; what home means; and whether a child has any influence on making or finding a home.

I would like to focus on five elements related to how the expat children engage with home:

7.1.1 Expat children carry their home with them

Before I started the fieldwork my assumption was that the expat children had to create a home in every new place they go to as so many elements in their life change. This turned out to be different. The participating expat children told me they do not create a home in every place they go. They carry with them the elements that home consists of. Even though the children bring home with them, they all mention the different phases they go through before they truly feel at home in the new place.

7.1.2 Expat children cling to specific objects

One element that I hardly found in the literature on expat children but that turned up in all conversations with the participating children is the importance of objects in homemaking. For me it was surprising to learn that a special object does not necessarily need to be beautiful, exotic or rare. Ordinary and easily replaceable objects can be incredibly special to the children as well. These very ordinary objects that were shown to me were more like utensils. To the children it meant a lot that the table you have dinner or the desk you do your homework do not change. The routine stays. This makes that the new situation (as in living in a new country) is not completely new.

7.1.3 The importance of sorting their stuff themselves

Sorting their stuff themselves is of influence on the homemaking. Children older than twelve sort their own stuff prior to moving. Even though parents might mean well, they should stay out of the sorting process. The children have noticeably clear ideas on what they want to take with them and what not. They also have their own ways to sort. For many of them, it is the decorating with the little elements that make the new room their room. Therefore, it is important to them that they decide on what to bring. Marcoux: ‘...to select for keeping what matters, those things will define the identity of the new place...’ (2001:79).

7.1.4 Home has little to do with the geographical surroundings of expat children

The child's relation to its geographical surroundings is different from their peers who live their childhood in the same surroundings. Generally growing up means that step by step a child expands her horizon. This does not necessarily relate to the participating children. They mention that the language of the host country plays a big role in whether they interact with their surroundings or not. The children I spoke with in Germany do not explore their surroundings, they mention they find the German language too difficult to feel well. The child in Hongkong does and explains that the city is so international that English is widely spoken. Further I noticed that of the children I spoke with that attend the British school Duisburg/Duesseldorf almost none live close to school and all of them live far apart from each other. They can not meet-up after school without their parent's help.

7.1.5 Having friends in the place you live makes the place home

Much on the research on home is focused on adults. Children can be different. Where some adults might not dare to invest in home, this is no option for children. Children do their best to quickly feel at home, they say. On one hand this has to do with making sure your bedroom does not look like a hotel room. On the other hand, it is finding new friends that make the transition to the new place complete. Even though many of the children are still in touch with friends in the former city they lived in, they all feel a need to find friends to physical hang out with. From twelve years old, all participating children have their own phone and tablet or computer. With these they can stay in touch with contacts and the photos and videos stored on these devices can evoke all sorts of feelings and memories. All the same, the children mention the phone has not become their home. A home must be physical as well.

7.2 Documenting the present

Most of the existing research on expat children is based on the reflections of former expat children. This research evolves around the question of belonging. Former expat children mention that an introductory question as 'where are you from' might sound simple, but is hard to answer, because they lived in so many places. It is interesting that this problem is something that apparently develops over time, maybe starting when living on one's own. The expat children I worked with did not mention this problem. I tried to discuss this with them, but I failed. The children did not understand what I meant. This could be to do with the fact that the children I spoke with go to international schools and have children in class who lead a similar nomadic life. Every year on the last day of school tears are

shed because friends leave. In the beginning of the schoolyear new friendships start because new pupils come in. My participating children get the question of where they are from, but their answer is their nationality, whether they have lived in that country or not. The other children in class will also answer like that and that is the end of the conversation.

It might be that only once a expat childhood is over, and the former expat child encounters people who have led a steadier childhood that she realizes that her upbringing has been different. The expat children I spoke with are not focused on the city or country they live or lived. They do not give it any thought. It could very well be that only when they reach adulthood that they realize the kind of childhood they had and that at that moment the possession of objects that symbolize the places they have lived in play a role. Maybe therefore the handbook on expat children (Footnote: Third Culture Kids, growing up among worlds) advice on collecting these objects for the children. The children I spoke with were not concerned with collecting evidence of their childhood. Further research could delve into this.

This exploration on the expat children consisted of many happy, interesting and funny conversations. The difficulty of belonging, that they might encounter when they are older, is not yet on their radar. The children talked about their childhood, their stuff and settling in with an ease and trust. I could not help but think back to the talks I had in the orientation phase deciding on a topic with a foster mother and her two foster children. Foster children also must get used to new surroundings on an (ir)regular base, but very often they cannot find comfort or support in their personal belongings. Sometimes they have to little time to pack everything they own, sometimes they are not allowed to take everything they would like, or possessions have disappeared in the foster home. The foster mother told me that when going to bed her foster children will leave none of their personal belongings in the living room. These need to be close by. Therefore, stuff they might have outgrown, cannot be stored in the basement. It must stay within reach. This even goes for the foster child that now lives four years with her. But as he spent the first six years of foster care in ten different households, he just needs his stuff around him. Even when that means he can use less space in his room. I would be interested in doing an exploration on how foster children manage to deal with the temporary aspect of home. The same would go for refugee children as they also lead a nomadic life. As these children live in such precarious circumstances, I need to find a way to do research making it also benefit them and not just enables me to satisfy my curiosity.

7.3 Help for my own relocation

Back to my personal situation. Parallel on doing the fieldwork was the organization of an upcoming relocation. By now, the stress levels have increased, and I cannot help myself scanning the apartment non-stop. I label items that come with us; I donate the clothes I did not touch in a year and throw plenty away. Now schools have reopened as the worst of the Covid-19 situation is over. Alone in the house, I find myself wandering of into the bedrooms of the children. As I start my sorting there Luca and the tragic loss of part of his card collection pop up in my head. I retreat, accepting the fact that even though I am a parent I do not necessarily know what my children want to keep. So, I let go of a ceramic figure with one leg clipped off. According to Harry (13) a broken object can very easily become more valuable than before, because the object gains the extra memory of the moment one broke it. I quietly retreat from the bedroom of the children, make myself a coffee and I put the sorting on their to do-list.



PAIRING #9 - IS A MESS REALLY A MESS?

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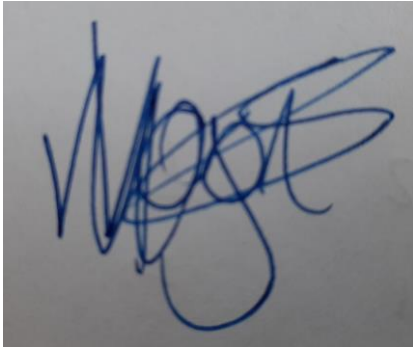
Statement in Lieu of an Oath

I hereby confirm, that I have written this thesis with the title

“ ‘I am a snail, I carry my home with me’

An exploration on how children experience home in a temporary situation”

on my own and that I have not used any other media or materials than the ones referred to in this essay/thesis

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and strokes, appearing to be a stylized name or set of initials.

Düsseldorf, July 10 2021

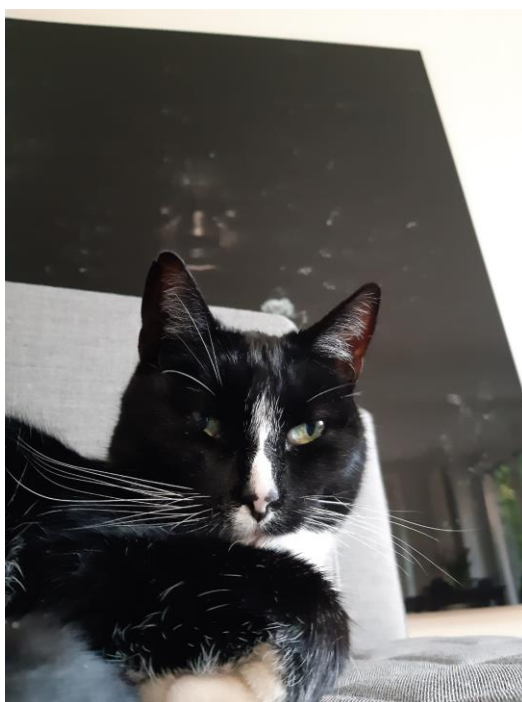
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I CUDDLED THE CAT, MY DAUGHTER PHOTOGRAPHED HER.