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More Vibes in India

Westerners in Search of a Better Life in Varanasi

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1.	INTRODUCTION	11
1.1	Backpacking as an Initiation Rite into Adulthood.....	11
1.2	The Westerners in Varanasi.....	13
1.3	Liminal or Liminoid?.....	14
1.4	Inside the Liminoid: What Is This Research About?.....	16
2.	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON LIFESTYLE MIGRATION.....	18
2.1	Migrants, Tourists and Lifestyle Migrants	18
2.2	Why, Who and Where: Explaining the Phenomenon	20
2.3	The Ambiguous Position of Lifestyle Migrants	25
2.4	Life on the Road: New Age Travellers	27
2.5	Bohemian Lifestyle Migrants	31
3.	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON COMMUNITY STUDIES	35
3.1	Location-based Communities	35
3.2	Symbolic and Imagined Communities.....	38
3.3	Interest-based Communities	40
3.4	Postmodern Communities.....	41
3.5	Communities in the Age of Globalisation and Transnationalism.....	43
3.6	Studying Communities	44
4.	TROUBLE IN THE FIELD: LEARNING TO BE A WESTERNER IN VARANASI	46
4.1	Discovering the phenomenon	46
4.2	The Very Beginning	47
4.3	Crying Alone	47
4.4	Failures and Breakthroughs	49
4.4.1	Act 1	50
4.4.2	Act 2	50
4.4.3	Act 3	51
4.4.4	Act 4	51
4.4.5	Act 5	52
4.5	Access at Any Cost.....	52
4.6	Hard Work, Hard Life and Strong Emotions	56
4.7	What about My Spouse?.....	57
4.8	An Immoral Western Woman.....	59
4.9	Back in the Field: The Second Part	61
4.10	My Position as a Finnish Woman Studying Westerners in India	62
4.11	The End.....	65
5.	THE RESEARCH PROCESS	67
5.1	Research Questions.....	67
5.2	When and How the Research Was Conducted	67

5.3	How the Interviews Were Conducted.....	68
5.4	Organising and Analysing the Data.....	70
5.5	Ethical Dilemmas.....	71
6.	SEEKING REFUGE FROM TIME AND PLACE.....	75
6.1	Big Bad West.....	76
6.2	Me, Myself and I.....	79
6.3	Situating the Criticism: Is It Really so Simple?.....	84
6.4	Situated Individualism.....	86
6.5	Economic Privileges.....	87
6.6	The Alternative Path: Ideals and Values.....	92
6.6.1	Time is Not Money.....	92
6.6.2	Authentic Living: Nature, Spirituality and Social Contacts.....	96
6.7	Conceptualising their Criticism and Ideals: Is It a Counterculture?.....	100
7.	WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS.....	104
7.1	The (In)significance of Locations.....	105
7.2	Transnational and Local Spaces and Places.....	107
7.3	Mobility in India.....	109
7.4	The Problem of Non-belonging or the Privilege of Selective Belonging?.....	112
7.5	Conceptualising the Lifestyle: Transnational or Translocal?.....	118
7.6	Conceptualising the Lifestyle: Bohemian Lifestyle Migrants.....	121
8.	LIFE IN VARANASI: EMPHASIS ON FRIENDS AND FUN.....	125
8.1	The Intense Social Life of the Westerners in Varanasi.....	125
8.1.1	Routines and Surprise Visits that are Not Surprising.....	125
8.1.2	Parties, Parties and More Parties.....	127
8.1.3	Row, Row, Row the Boat: Refreshing Swimming in the Ganges River.....	131
8.1.4	Very Long Nights: Concerts of Classical Indian Music.....	133
8.2	Central Locations.....	137
8.2.1	Tea, Gossip and Information: The Tea Stall by the Ganges River.....	137
8.2.2	The Living Room: Restaurant 'M'.....	139
8.2.3	All Roads Lead to Govinda's Shop.....	141
8.3	Practices, Rules and Boundaries.....	145
8.3.1	Issues of Sharing and Caring.....	145
8.3.2	'I'm not a tourist!'	147
8.4	Is there an us?.....	151
8.4.1	Definitely Yes, Definitely No.....	151
8.4.2	Insiders and Outsiders: Defining Us.....	152
8.4.3	The Making of a Community.....	157

9.	DIVISIONS IN PARADISE.....	162
9.1	Staying for Long.....	163
9.2	Music is Everything.....	164
9.2.1	Playing the Role of a Music Student	164
9.2.2	The Significance of a Correct Guru	168
9.2.3	Distinctions Based on Music	170
9.3	Women and Men: Same but Different.....	171
9.3.1	Female Musicians: A Contradiction in Terms?	171
9.3.2	Gendered Orientations	172
9.3.3	Gendered Activities and Roles	175
9.3.4	Sex in the City	177
9.3.5	Distinctions Based on Gender	180
9.4	Distinctions within the Community.....	181
10.	‘EVERYONE COMES BACK TO VARANASI!’: LEAVING AND RETURNING	183
10.1	Farewell parties.....	183
10.2	The Long Process of Leaving: Preparations, Postponements and Rituals.....	185
10.3	‘When Are You Coming Back?’	187
10.4	The Significance of Leaving and Returning: Reconstructing the Fluid Community.....	189
10.5	Conceptualising the Community	190
11.	WESTERN SPACE IN AN INDIAN ENVIRONMENT.....	192
11.1	Appreciating Indian Culture instead of Indian People.....	192
11.2	Indian Friends: A Contradiction in Terms.....	196
11.3	Defining the Self Against the Other	200
11.4	The West Becomes One: the (In)significance of Nationalities.....	205
11.5	Western Women in an Indian Environment	207
11.5.1	‘Hello Sexy!’.....	207
11.5.2	The Western Women’s Coping Strategies.....	209
11.5.3	Keeping the Boundaries Intact; the Duty of the Western Women.....	214
11.6	The Significance of the Western Space	216
12.	CONCLUSION	218
12.1	Bohemian Lifestyle Migrants on the Move	218
12.2	Does It Ever End?.....	221
12.3	A Community of ‘Lucky’ People	224
13.	POSTSCRIPT: NOW AND THEN – NOTHING EVER CHANGES	228
	Appendix 1.....	230
	Appendix 2.....	232
	Bibliography	234

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Westerners who spend long periods of time in the city of Varanasi in northern India year after year. They claim to have found 'more vibes' in India; that is, they view life as more interesting and meaningful there than it is in the West. The research elaborates on those vibrations and how the better life becomes a lived practice among the Westerners in Varanasi.

The research is ethnographic; the research methods include interviews and participant observation. Theoretically the research is situated within two major fields: lifestyle migration and community studies.

First of all, the study explores the ways in which the Westerners explain and locate their movements, including the reasons they offer for leaving their countries of origin as well as those motivating them to return repeatedly to Varanasi, a city in which they do not plan to settle permanently. This is a discourse of mobility that emphasises a desire to escape from the materialism and deadening routines of Western countries; asserts the importance of individuality in the sense of self-development and looks to Varanasi as a particular destination characterised as a spiritual and musical centre. The study defines the Westerners in Varanasi as bohemian lifestyle migrants, contributing to our understanding of the activities and ideological formation of lifestyle migrants. The study argues that lifestyle migration is not simply an act of moving from one country to another: it is a question of finding, or founding as it requires constant effort, a better quality of life abroad. The analysis shows that the Westerners in Varanasi are particular kinds of lifestyle migrants as they lead highly mobile lives moving between many different locales and countries.

Secondly, the research examines the significance of communality among the Westerners in Varanasi, where their lives are characterised by intense socialising with similar-minded people. The study describes their everyday lives and practices in Varanasi and analyses how communality is manifested and acted out among them, although on the other hand they also celebrate individuality. The research concludes that individuality and communality are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The study also shows that there are various kinds of divisions, distinctions, obligations and norms among the Westerners in Varanasi. Moreover, the analysis highlights the fact that the practices and values of the Westerners in Varanasi are very permanent although individuals' stays are temporary.

In addition, the study discusses issues of belonging and asks how the lives of the Westerners are located amongst the local population. The study also elaborates on Western privilege; the better life that the Westerners claim to have found materialises within the Western space of like-minded people in Varanasi and their interactions with local Indian people are rather limited.

This research shows that we need to pay careful attention to various kinds of mobilities that people are engaged in. Although the policies of many nation states do not seem to reflect an understanding of mobile lifestyles, such practices are increasingly common and lifestyle migration is an important form of transnational, non-elitist movement. Moreover, communality and the specific locations where it materialises can be very significant also for highly mobile people.

1. INTRODUCTION

‘In the West life is dull compared to here, where you get much more vibrations. Everything is more powerful and flavourful in India.’
(a Western interviewee in Varanasi)

When I was in my third year at the university, I decided to take a break from my studies and travel to India for eight months. During my trip, I stayed in the city of Varanasi for a few weeks and met many Westerners my age who had been in India several times for long periods. They reminded me of hippies, yet the hippie era had been over for decades. Their lifestyle fascinated me: it had never occurred to me that instead of continuing my studies at the university after secondary school, I could have chosen to hang out in India. I wrote a postcard to my friend in Finland: ‘I have found paradise!’ This book is about Western people living in that paradise.

1.1 Backpacking as an Initiation Rite into Adulthood

Scholars often explain backpacking as a self-imposed rite of passage (Graburn 1983, 13; Loker-Murphy et al. 1995, 827; Noy 2004, 81, 84; Caprioglio O’Reilly 2006, 998; Maoz 2007, 126; for a critical view, see Cohen 2004;). In many Western countries — by which I mean Europe, Israel, Australia and North America — a backpacking trip to an exotic destination has become an initiation rite into adulthood for (white) middle class youth (see Hutnyk 1996, ix-x, see also Munt 1994, 119). Such a trip is usually undertaken after secondary education, before graduating from a higher education institution, before committing to a career, or setting up a family¹. The trip is often understood in terms of personal growth (see Elsrud 2001, 605), but young backpackers may also be escaping or postponing decisions regarding adult life (Loker-Murphy et al. 1995, 825); that is, they are extending the carefree phase of youth (Caprioglio O’Reilly 2006, 1006). All in all, whether young people’s backpacking is understood

¹ It is also common to undertake a backpacking trip upon finishing one’s military service, especially in Israel.

as an escape, a suspension of maturing, or growth, it nevertheless is some sort of a temporary in-between stage.

When young people are backpacking, surviving without one's parents on a low budget often becomes a central issue. In the 1970s and 1980s such trips took place in the form of Interrail travel within Europe or young people went to work on a *kibbutz* in Israel, but nowadays, destinations are often further away; for example Australia, South America, South and South East Asia are very popular backpacking destinations. Various factors contribute to the increasing frequency and duration of such trips. Among other things, air fares have become cheaper and a growing number of youth take a break from their studies. Moreover, contemporary youth have few domestic responsibilities and often sufficient money at hand. (see e.g., Loker-Murphy et al. 1995, 827) Many also combine working and travelling (Amit 2006; 2007, 4-5).

India was already a popular travel destination in the colonial era (see e.g., Ghose 1998a, 1998b; Mohanty 2003), and in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it became a popular backpacking destination among hippies (see, e.g., Hall 1968; Alderson 1971; Wiles 1972; Mehta 1979; Odzer 1995; Tomory 1996; MacLean 2006; Saldanha 2007, 29). Thousands of backpackers tour India every year also today (see e.g., Hutnyk 1996; Wilson 1997; Hottola 1999; Maoz 2005). India attracts backpackers above all because of its 'exoticism' and cheapness. The backpacking infrastructure is well developed and there are numerous cheap hotels and Western restaurants in all popular travel destinations there. In addition, one can reach almost anywhere by inexpensive public transportation and English is widely spoken. However, despite these advantages, backpackers often understand a visit to India more as a duty and a challenge than a pleasurable experience due to India representing also poverty, filth and illness (see Wilson 1997, 55).

After their trip, most backpackers return to their home countries to continue their lives there. Some, however, enjoy India so much that they go to their countries of origin — or other Western countries — only in order to earn money, and they end up returning to India again and again. Instead of continuing backpacking, they often settle down in certain locations in India. For them, the stage that was supposed to be a temporary phase becomes a lot longer than initially planned, and the backpacking experience results in a lifestyle in which they spend long periods of time in India. They claim to have found 'more vibrations', that is, a better life² in India. This research focuses on a group of such people in the city of Varanasi in

² By more vibrations, the Westerners refer to both negative and positive vibrations in India, that is, both negative and positive aspects feel stronger and more powerful there, which results in an interesting and eventually also a more meaningful life.

northern India. Most of the people featuring in this research were once backpackers and now repeatedly return to Varanasi. They have chosen a lifestyle that does not include a permanent dwelling or a permanent job; in fact, they typically do not work at all for long periods. Such commitments would tie them to a particular place in the West, whereas they want to ‘enjoy life in India’. For many, the lifestyle has lasted for years, even for decades. Thus, not all the Western sojourners in Varanasi are young but they nevertheless engage in similar activities and share similar views.

1.2 The Westerners in Varanasi

Varanasi³ is a holy city of Hinduism situated on the banks of the holy river Ganges. It is one of the oldest living cities in the world, with a current population of over a million. Hindus believe Varanasi to be the home of the supreme god Shiva. Moreover, according to Hindus, if one dies there, one attains liberation from the cycle of rebirths, as a consequence of which many Hindus come to Varanasi when death is approaching them. Varanasi is also an important pilgrimage centre, which in turn attracts hundreds of beggars. Consequently, one is bound to see much suffering in Varanasi although at the same time, it is a city of devotion and joy. (Eck 1983)

Diane Eck, an indologist, writes that ‘it is precisely because Banaras [Varanasi] has become a symbol of traditional Hindu India that Western visitors have often found this city the most strikingly “foreign” of India’s cities’ (Eck 1983, 9). For many Westerners, Varanasi indeed represents a sign of Eastern otherness. However, most of the long-term Western sojourners are not there because of being attracted to Hinduism but because of their interest in classical Indian music. Varanasi is a centre of music in India and some of the most famous Indian musicians, for example Ravi Shankar and Bishmillah Khan, have lived there. Yet, it is by no means the only or the most important centre of classical Indian music although in the Westerners’ understanding it often appears as the most prominent one.

The long-term Western sojourners in Varanasi live in the same houses year after year and have all the necessary household utensils there. They come from Europe⁴, Israel, Canada and Australia, amounting to 200-300⁵ during the popular season which starts in October and ends in May⁶.

³ Varanasi is also known as Banaras/Benares or Kashi.

⁴ France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, etc.

⁵ It is impossible to know the exact number of Westerners in Varanasi as most of them do not register there officially.

They are predominately from middle class origin, and all of them are white (on the racial aspect of similar Westerners in Goa, see Saldanha 2007). I refer to these people as ‘Westerners’ due to the fact that in Varanasi differences between various Western nationalities seem to disappear when opposed with the ‘Indian other’⁷. Typically, the Westerners work for a few months in menial jobs or sell Indian textiles and handicrafts in markets and festivals in their countries of origin and then spend the rest of the year in India, living on the money they have earned in those temporary jobs. Most of them are twenty to thirty-five years old but some are forty to fifty, with men forming the majority. In Varanasi, they all live in one particular area within walking distance of each other, renting rooms or apartments in local houses. They typically live alone or with their partner if they have one but they never seem to share apartments with their friends although there may be several Westerners living on the same compound. Most Westerners in Varanasi play Indian instruments, some do yoga, meditation or charity work. In most cases, these activities have not been the initial reason for their coming to India but they are the reason — or at least are used as such — for their repeated and prolonged stays. All in all, a lot of time is spent socialising with friends.

1.3 Liminal or Liminoid?

The theoretical concept of liminality has been developed by Arnold van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1969). In van Gennep’s theory, the concept refers to the ritualistic transitory phase in rites of passage: it is the middle phase between separation from the old positions and incorporation into the new ones. By rites of passage, van Gennep means any rituals that are connected with change in place, space, social standing or age. Victor Turner has developed van Gennep’s ideas further. He has concentrated above all on the ambiguous in-between state of the liminal (see Turner 1969; 1974). The liminal ritual is a collective event which enables individuals to change their statuses — for example, becoming adults — without threatening the normal societal order of things. In Turner’s theory on the liminal, a central concept is *communitas*, by which he refers to the liminal space of anti-structure where individuals act on equal bases without roles and statuses. *Communitas* is thus characterised by invisibility and

⁶ The summer months are extremely hot and wet. Moreover, the kinds of jobs that they do in the West are more available during summer than winter.

⁷ The category of Westerners includes here also a few Japanese and South Korean people. They are individuals who are spending their time with the ‘Westerners’ instead of their fellow citizens, as is usually the case with these two nationalities in Varanasi.

anonymity. Each individual is socially *tabula rasa* as old statuses and roles are taken away in order to give space to the new ones. True *communitas* is always temporary: such a state cannot last for very long; the free relationships are sooner or later converted into norm-governed relationships. In other words, if the *communitas* lasts for long, it eventually develops its own new structure and thereby loses its spontaneous characteristic.

The liminal ritual is repeated always in the same form. Participation is a duty for every member of a certain group, and an individual cannot affect what happens in the liminal phase. The ultimate purpose of the liminal process is to support the existing societal structures as one returns to normality after the ritual that lasts for a certain well-defined time period: prolonging the phase would be dangerous as it would threaten the normal order of things. Turner (1969) defines the liminal when referring to traditional tribal agrarian societies. A decade later, he (1982) introduced the term liminoid to better describe modern societies⁸. In his understanding, liminoid not only refers to the in-between state in rites of passage but to any position outside or at the margins of everyday life.

Turner (1982) lists several differences between the liminal and the liminoid. Unlike in traditional societies, leisure is clearly separated from work in modern societies and it is in the sphere of leisure that the liminoid becomes possible. Since it belongs to the sphere of leisure, the liminoid is voluntary: only those individuals who choose to participate do so. Unlike the liminal, liminoid events are not cyclical but continuously generated. Liminoid phases are not about gaining new status: very often, the purpose is pleasure. In more abstract terms: the liminoid is the end and the liminal the means. Liminoid spaces are characterised by active doing, individuality, plurality and experimentation in opposition to the homogeneity and passive role of individuals in the liminal. Moreover, unlike the liminal, which supports existing structures, the liminoid is at the margins of the society and very often contains social critique of the 'normal order of things'.

Turner's theory can be used to analytically describe the position of the Western sojourners in Varanasi. Being in Varanasi is not a collective reoccurring ritual in the transition to adulthood but the Westerners nevertheless clearly occupy an ambiguous in-between state. As they have ended up in India voluntarily as individuals and they emphasise pleasure, the term liminoid seems to be more suitable than liminal. The distinction

⁸ Turner mentioned the hippie 'happenings' as an example of liminal *communitas* already in his earlier book. He argued that, for hippies, the *communitas* is an end whereas for the traditional societies, it is a means (Turner 1969, 112: 138-9). In his later book, however, he introduced the term liminoid to refer to modern societies.

between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies that Turner makes is in fact a bit old-fashioned in anthropology; contemporary anthropology does not believe that such a distinction is useful or even accurate. However, even if one criticises the distinction between traditional and modern societies, Turner’s theory is still useful, as his concepts of liminal and liminoid refer to similar but clearly different phenomenon. Therefore, the starting point of this research is that the Westerners occupy a liminoid space in Varanasi. They refuse to return and reintegrate into their countries of origin, instead choosing to stay ‘in-between’ and not integrate into Indian society either. However, instead of a temporary *communitas*, their lives in Varanasi are organised on a more permanent basis.

1.4 Inside the Liminoid: What Is This Research About?

In this book, I analyse life within the liminoid, that is, what happens among the Westerners in Varanasi and why they are there. The interview quotation at the very beginning of this book states that there are many more vibrations in India than there are in the West, that is, life is more interesting and meaningful there. In this book, I elaborate on those vibrations and how the better life becomes a lived practice among the Westerners in Varanasi.

This research is ethnographic; the research methods include interviews and participant observation. Theoretically my research is situated within two major fields. First of all, I locate the phenomenon of the Westerners’ search for more vibrations in Varanasi within the field of lifestyle migration. Secondly, as a major part of this research focuses on the question of whether the Westerners form a community in Varanasi, I draw on studies of community. After this introduction, the book continues with theoretical overviews of the two fields (chapters 2 and 3). I then tell my personal story of entering the field (chapter 4), also introducing the life of Westerners in Varanasi and discussing some characteristics of their lives there. My personal story is followed by a chapter in which I explain how this research was conducted (chapter 5). In chapter 6, the Westerners tell themselves why they are in Varanasi, what their lifestyle is about and how they justify it. In that chapter, I also ask whether the Westerners in Varanasi form a counterculture. Chapter 7 elaborates on the transnational setting of their lifestyle and analyses the phenomenon in terms of lifestyle migration. In chapter 8, I describe and analyse the everyday lives of the Westerners in Varanasi and I elaborate analytically on whether they form a community in Varanasi and if they do, how it comes into being. Chapter 9 discusses distinction mechanisms among the Westerners in Varanasi: in

particular I discuss their music studies and the significance of gender among them. In chapter 10, I analyse the significance of leaving and returning, that is, the temporary aspect of their lives in Varanasi. I also reflect on the phenomenon in terms of community theories. Chapter 11 is the last empirical chapter and it deals with how the Westerners are situated in the local environment in Varanasi. Chapter 12 is the conclusion and in chapter 13 (the postscript), I briefly situate the phenomenon in its historical context.

Although the setting of the actual case study is a distant location, this book tells about our era in the 'Western world' as well. It is also a story of transnational mobility and of a search for a better life. Globalisation is often talked about in macro-level terms; this study deals with a micro-level phenomenon that is nevertheless closely connected with globalisation. In other words, here the emphasis is on the local level although it is defined differently from the conventional understanding of the local as representing sedentary people born into a certain area.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON LIFESTYLE MIGRATION

2.1 Migrants, Tourists and Lifestyle Migrants

Migration studies are a vast research field. Usually, migrants are understood to be people from poor countries in search of better income opportunities in more affluent countries or they are assumed to be refugees. However, in recent years a different kind of migration phenomenon has caught researchers' attention: lifestyle migration (sometimes termed aspirational migration (see e.g., Oliver 2007)). Citizens of affluent industrialised nations who move to other countries in order to find a 'better quality of life' are referred to as lifestyle migrants. For example, British, German and Scandinavian people move to Spain, some Brits also move to rural France and some Americans move to Central America. Often, the better quality of life is understood in terms of life abroad being more relaxed and more meaningful in comparison to life in one's country of origin. Very often, such migration means moving from affluent countries to less affluent ones where living costs are cheaper. In this phenomenon, the boundaries between migration and tourism are blurred. In fact, many scholars nowadays place tourism and migration on the same continuum, where it is difficult to distinguish between temporary and permanent moves (see, e.g., Bell et al. 2000, 88; Gustafson 2002, 104, 899; O'Reilly 2003, 301).

One way to distinguish between various kinds of migrants is to differentiate consumption-led and production-led migration (O'Reilly 2003, 303; Bell et al. 2000, 94). The latter category includes migrants in search of better income opportunities; that is, they are active in the production sector, they are working, whereas lifestyle migrants are often primarily consumers instead of producers at their destinations. This characterisation of lifestyle migrants applies above all to retirement migration, which is a significant part of lifestyle migration (see, e.g., Williams et al. 2000; Gustafson 2001; 2002; 2008; Ackers et al. 2004; Casado- Díaz et al. 2004; Huber & O'Reilly 2004; Howard 2008). However, retirees are by no means the only people who move in order to improve their quality of life: young people and people of working age as well as entire families with children move too (see O'Reilly 2000; Benson

2007), that is, there are all kinds of lifestyle migrants. Many non-retired lifestyle migrants need to earn money at their destination, which means that they are not merely enjoying a life of leisure. Yet, they organise their life so that it is less pressurised than it used to be in their countries of origin.

The tendency to distinguish between poor migrants and affluent lifestyle migrants is deeply rooted in people's thinking and in state policies, although such a distinction is not always very appropriate at the level of people's experiences. Karen O'Reilly has written extensively on lifestyle migration. She notes that in the Spanish context, 'residential tourism' is used for the Europeans, while 'immigration' is used for the non-European migrants (O'Reilly 2003, 309). However, the 'residential tourists' share many characteristics and problems with the immigrants. Above all, lifestyle migrants are not necessarily well-off and not in a privileged position in comparison to locals in their everyday experiences in their new host societies. In fact, according to O'Reilly, lifestyle migrants often feel marginalised. Moreover, one cannot simply claim that 'conventional' migrants, who move for economic purposes, do not care about their quality of life. In fact, it is very difficult to distinguish among various factors that affect people's decisions to migrate and theories cannot cover all the motivations that different kinds of migrants have.

While it is complicated to distinguish between migrants and lifestyle migrants, it is even more difficult to distinguish between lifestyle migrants and tourists. In principle, the orientation of lifestyle migrants is different from tourists and they stay much longer. One way to distinguish between temporary tourists and permanent lifestyle migrants is official registration at the destination (Williams et al 2000, 18) since in principle, lifestyle migrants should register locally whereas tourists should not. However, this is a complex issue as many lifestyle migrants do not register. The reason is usually bureaucratic confusion, not their lack of willingness to do so. O'Reilly, who has studied British people living in Costa del Sol, Spain, points out that lifestyle migrants are often marginalised by circumstances created by official state policies and bureaucratic practices that seldom recognise their status (O'Reilly 2000, 142). The aim of lifestyle migrants is to have the best of both worlds (O'Reilly 2000, 157) but some succeed better than others. According to O'Reilly, many lifestyle migrants do not know what their best option for official registration would be and as a result, they end up doing nothing about it. Their reasoning is to avoid making a mistake but as a result, they fall into a limbo state (see O'Reilly 2007, 286).

Lifestyle migrants are thus different from tourists and economic migrants. Yet, lifestyle migrants are not a homogeneous category either. O'Reilly writes about the blurring categories and the difficulty of definitions. Some people 'migrate, oscillate, circulate or tour between their

home and host countries. Some retain a home in more than one place, some work in one place and live in another; others simply move, while others still simply visit.’ (O’Reilly 2007, 281) O’Reilly has categorised different kinds of lifestyle migrants in terms of their orientation to home. This categorisation includes full residents, returning residents, seasonal visitors and peripatetic visitors (O’Reilly 2000, 52-58). Elsewhere, she characterises lifestyle migrants as permanent, temporary or seasonal (O’Reilly 2003, 303). Such categorisations are useful conceptualisations although they cannot cover all variations in the phenomena.

Seasonal lifestyle migration refers to a pattern where a person regularly moves between two destinations: his/her ‘new’ and ‘old’ home country. Seasonal migration (Gustafson 2002, 907) or circular migration (Williams et al 2000, 7) indeed comprise patterns of movement that challenge the conventional understanding of difference between migration and tourism. Tourism is often defined as temporary and in terms of what it is not (work, home and so on), that is, as an inversion of the ‘normal’ (O’Reilly 2003, 305; Gustafson 2002, 900). Lifestyle migrants are not tourists as their stay is more permanent and their life in the destination country becomes ‘normal’, including everyday routines like shopping, cooking and cleaning. However, labelling them as migrants is also problematic as they are searching for a better quality of life instead of income or asylum. The picture becomes even more complicated when one considers the fact that, basically, temporary movement implies a return ‘home’ (see e.g., O’Reilly 2002, 181) but an increasing number of people do not have a permanent residence that they would call home (Bell et al. 2000, 91). Nevertheless, in spite of the troublesome definitions, lifestyle migration is a useful tool to conceptualise the phenomenon where citizens from affluent Western countries move abroad in search of a better quality of life.

2.2 Why, Who and Where: Explaining the Phenomenon

Lifestyle migration is motivated by a search for a better quality of life. A significant motivation for those who migrate is that the destinations often represent a slower pace of life and more authentic⁹ living. Very often, the whole project of lifestyle migration is an attempt to define what

⁹ The concept of authenticity has been widely discussed in the tourism literature (see, e.g., MacCannell 1973; Pearce & Moscardo 1986; Cohen 1988; Bruner 1989; Urry 1990; Harkin 1995; Selwyn 1996; Wang 1999; Noy 2004; see also Korpela 2010).

‘authentic’ living means (see e.g., Benson 2007). Typically, this authenticity is characterised as a ‘return to the past’, in terms of ‘genuine’ social contacts and living in close connection with nature. Lifestyle migration destinations typically have a pleasant climate too. Very often, lifestyle migrants move to areas that are also popular tourist destinations, the coast of Spain being the most obvious example. In fact, tourism often facilitates lifestyle migration ‘by constructing and marketing ideals’ (Benson et al. forthcoming). Significant pull factors in lifestyle migration are lower property prices, cheaper living costs and a good infrastructure developed for tourism (O’Reilly 2007, 281; Williams et al 2000). Nowadays, there are also an increasing number of one’s compatriots in many destinations, which makes moving easy because lifestyle migrants often form a community of their own (Waldren 1996, 200; O’Reilly 2000). Instead of relying on locals, they rely on each other — in their mother tongue — for help and advice.

Michaela Benson and Karen O’Reilly (forthcoming) suggest that one way to analyse lifestyle migrants is by employing a typology of destinations, as those tell a lot about the way of life the migrants are seeking. Their typology includes the residential tourist, the rural idyll, and bourgeois bohemianism. The residential tourists lead a life of leisure (typically at a coastal retreat), whereas those in search of a rural idyll search for a tranquil ‘authentic’ life in the countryside. The latter ones often conceptualise the countryside in terms to stepping back in time. Bourgeois bohemianism refers to lifestyle migrants who have bohemian (that is, spiritual, artistic or creative) aspirations that they realise in their lifestyle migration destination (see section 2.5).

Benson has studied British lifestyle migrants in rural France. In addition to pull factors, she pays attention to significant push factors in lifestyle migration. According to her, many lifestyle migrants move because of diminishing income opportunities, for example when they lose their jobs; some others escape pressurised working environments and retired lifestyle migrants often claim that old people are not valued in their societies of origin, whereas in the destinations they can grow old with dignity and continue being active (Benson 2007, 13-15).

Additional contributing factors for lifestyle migration are that income levels have increased in the affluent industrialised countries in recent decades and an increasing number of people have experience in living abroad (Williams et al. 2000, 31). Moreover, nowadays people have more opportunities to spend time abroad as careers have more discontinuities and people change jobs more frequently than in the past (Williams et al. 2000, 8). Huber and O’Reilly, however, argue that the most important contributing factor is that individual freedom of choice has become so important: people feel that they have a right, and even a duty, to

actively search for quality of life (Huber et al. 2004, 328). Moreover, by choosing a particular lifestyle, one is able to define one's self-identity, which is important as the self is often seen as a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible (Giddens 1991).

Elites have always been able to travel and to lead transnational lives, meaning lifestyles that include residence in several nation states, and there are several studies dealing with professional expatriates (see e.g., Amit 2001; 2002a; Amit-Talai 1998; Fechter 2007a; 2007b). Nowadays, however, people with middle incomes from affluent industrialised countries are increasingly starting to ask why only the rich should have the right to live in beautiful and warm countries (O'Reilly 2007, 285). Ulf Hannerz defines the term expatriate as 'people who have chosen to live abroad for some period, and who know when they are there that they can go home when it suits them' (Hannerz 1990, 243). In this sense, the term expatriate can be used to refer to lifestyle migrants, yet the term often contains an elitist flavour that does not characterise typical lifestyle migrants, who are typically of middle class origin (see Benson 2007, 32). Nevertheless, all lifestyle migrants are privileged actors in the sense that they have the financial resources to move — either they have savings or they sell their property or they get a pension — or the talents needed for setting up a small business venture in their new location. Above all, lifestyle migrants hold passports that allow them to move more or less freely. In Christine Geoffroy's words, they have the freedom to choose to reside in another country for awhile according to their life projects (Geoffroy 2007, 282), whereas 'ordinary' migrants usually cannot live in such a fluid way (Geoffroy 2007, 287).

Individuality is indeed a very central value among lifestyle migrants. Benson argues in her study of British lifestyle migrants in rural France that lifestyle migrants typically emphasise their individual agency: through their own actions they have been able to transform their lives (Benson 2007, 100). Her informants claim that their agency was limited in their countries of origin, above all because of pressurised working environments, and by moving away, they have gained agency and control over their own lives (Benson 2007, 27; 66; 88). O'Reilly points out that for many, moving abroad is also a chance to liberate themselves from the past. In other words, lifestyle migration means a fresh beginning: an opportunity to redefine oneself and even to find oneself. (O'Reilly 2000, 81; 112; Benson et al. 2009) Consequently, the past is usually not discussed among lifestyle migrants and one has to earn one's status among the lifestyle migrants instead of relying on past achievements (O'Reilly 2000, 81-82; 129-135; Benson 2007, 233-34). Anthony D'Andrea, who has studied a similar phenomenon in Ibiza and Goa, argues that the past becomes insignificant for those people because it is constructed under conditions that are imposed

on them, whereas in their present situation, they emphasise their own agency (D'Andrea 2007, 188-9).

The aim of lifestyle migrants is to improve their quality of life by leaving their country of origin. This obviously implies that there is something wrong with their lives in their home societies. O'Reilly and Benson both show that their informants say they have escaped a country that was failing them. For them, leaving Britain was not a big loss as they were unsatisfied with their experiences there and they saw their future prospects there in a negative light. Many also stress the particular negative events and circumstances in their lives that led to lifestyle migration. (O'Reilly 2007; Benson 2007) Very often lifestyle migrants share a discourse of 'bad' homelands, that is, they view their home societies in a negative light. They often understand their home societies to be spoilt by modernity, referring to the long working hours, pressurised working environments and high living costs, all of which prevent them from enjoying life. Such a negative image is clearly different from the image of economic migrants, who often preserve a romantic and idealised view of their homeland (O'Reilly 2000, 98-99). In similar terms, economic migrants often hold a myth of return whereas lifestyle migrants usually express no intention of returning to their countries of origin (O'Reilly 2000, 97; O'Reilly 2002, 182; Benson 2007, 91) but instead emphasise being content with the better life that they have found in the new destination. Above all, lifestyle migrants often appreciate the fact that in their new host country, they have more time and the pace of life is slower than it used to be in their countries of origin (O'Reilly 2002, 26). Even if they set up a small business venture in their new home, they typically emphasise being their own bosses, and thus able to control the work-life balance (see, e.g., O'Reilly 2000; Benson 2007). All in all, lifestyle migration is rationalised by comparing the bad life before and the good life after migration (Benson et al. forthcoming). The migration is also described as an escape from somewhere and something, to self-fulfilment and a new life (Benson et al. 2009).

When criticising their societies of origin, it also becomes important for many lifestyle migrants to distinguish themselves from their fellow-nationals, from those who have stayed in the home country that offers only bad alternatives (O'Reilly 2002, 183). However, instead of identifying with their new hosts, lifestyle migrants typically identify with other lifestyle migrants. Moreover, in spite of their residency abroad, lifestyle migrants typically retain a multitude of emotional, historical, familial and economic ties to their countries of origin (O'Reilly 2000, 160). They want the best of both worlds but often end up occupying a sort of in-between space: they are away from 'home' but they are not integrated into the new host society either (see O'Reilly 2007, 286).

The motivations of lifestyle migrants are often anti-urban and anti-modern; they believe they have found a more 'authentic' way of living far away from their countries of origin. Typically, they romanticise life in the destination, for example by celebrating the idea of a rural idyll and holistic, natural way of life (Benson 2007, 102). Lifestyle migrants often view their new home country also as exotic and backward (Gustafson 2002, 909; O'Reilly 2000), and they consider modernisation a threat to such romantic authenticity (Gustafson 2002, 912). In this process, they easily end up denying the agency and development of local people. Jacqueline Waldren (1996) has written about a community of lifestyle migrants¹⁰ in a small Mallorcan village. Her research covers a period of several decades and she argues that the foreigners easily forget that the paradise they construct requires locals to remain unchanged, 'backward' and 'traditional'. Waldren illustrates well that the locals in Mallorca do not agree with this role, which results in conflicts between locals and the lifestyle migrants residing in the village.

Lifestyle migrants often understand the authenticity that they appreciate in terms of their own past. Life in the new host country is often romanticised and understood in nostalgic terms: it represents life in their countries of origin in earlier times. In this process, they end up romanticising the past of their countries of origin and the present of their host country. This romantic 'past' is often a recollection that they themselves do not have experiences of. (O'Reilly 2000, 115; O'Reilly 2002, 183; see also Benson 2007, 85) Consequently, the 'traditional values and practices' that they appreciate are in fact a construction they make in the present (see O'Reilly 2002, 189), which can result in tension between reality and imagination (see Benson et al. 2009).

All in all, for lifestyle migrants 'tradition' represents authenticity. Benson writes that the British lifestyle migrants in rural France constantly search for authenticity. This authenticity takes place in their everyday lives, meaning, for example, drinking local wines or growing vegetables. Yet, authenticity forever escapes them so that there is always farther to go and they can never reach the final stage of 'true' authenticity (Benson 2007, 191). In this process, absolute authenticity is not as important as relative authenticity, that is, an effort to live in a more authentic way than one's fellow lifestyle migrants (Benson 2007, 231). Therefore, it is not enough to be different from one's fellow nationals who have stayed in the country of origin, but lifestyle migrants also want to distinguish themselves from their compatriots in their new home area, which usually happens by claiming to be more authentically 'local' than other lifestyle migrants.

¹⁰ Waldren does not use the term lifestyle migrant but nevertheless examines a similar phenomenon (see also Waldren 2009 and section 2.5 in this book).

However, although lifestyle migrants often distinguish themselves from other lifestyle migrants, they also need each other. In her research among British lifestyle migrants in Costa del Sol, O'Reilly shows the significance of a community of compatriots. She argues that within this community, the lifestyle migrants live out the positive values and practices that they attach to 'authentic' Spain, albeit remaining separate from the local Spanish community. (O'Reilly 2000, 143-158) Also Benson emphasises the importance of the sense of community that British lifestyle migrants have found in rural France (Benson 2007, 87). Such communal feelings gain particular significance due to the fact that face-to-face family networks of lifestyle migrants are usually lacking as they live abroad (Huber et al. 2004, 342). Meike Fechter has done research on expatriates in Indonesia and her informants characterise the expatriate communities using terms like 'bubble', 'bunker', 'blunker', 'ghetto', 'hothouse', and 'Disneyland' (Fechter 2007a, 151-152; Fechter 2007b, 37), thus illustrating the idea of isolated communities that foreigners, not only lifestyle migrants, abroad often form if they can afford it, that is, if their income is not dependent on the local population.

Not many studies have been published on lifestyle migration. Many existing ones focus on the phenomenon within Europe and very often on British nationals (see O'Reilly 2000; 2007; Benson 2007; Forsdick 2007; Geoffroy 2007; Puzzo 2007; Smallwood 2007) but lifestyle migrants also travel to and from other parts of the world (see Armbruster 2007 on Namibia; Wood 2007 & Howard 2008 on Thailand; Boustia Saigh 2007 on Morocco; McWatters 2008 on Latin America; Nudrali et al. 2009 on Turkey; Hoey 2009 on United States). Interestingly, although most migrants nowadays move from economically less developed to more developed countries, throughout modern history most international migrants have moved in the opposite direction, 'from colonising countries to subjected areas of the world' (Faist 2000, 25). Lifestyle migration to Asia or Africa is an interesting continuation of colonial practices, and India as an example is a popular travel destination (and consequently also a popular lifestyle migration destination) partly because of its colonial past. India's colonial past is thus not insignificant when investigating the contemporary Western presence in Varanasi (see Korpela 2010).

2.3 The Ambiguous Position of Lifestyle Migrants

Benson argues that lifestyle migrants in rural France (and in my understanding probably also in other areas) are in many ways in an ambiguous position: they are privileged modern actors who choose to

become 'traditional' and live on the periphery. In other words, they become marginal by choice (Benson 2007, 28; 131- 133; 158). However, although they consciously reject certain aspects of modernity, above all a hectic and pressurised life, their lifestyle is possible precisely because of modernity. In the case of lifestyle migration to France or Spain, the free movement of EU nationals within the European Union is a significant factor (Benson 2007, 120). Moreover, also the fast and relatively cheap transportation methods as well as the communication technologies that enable people to communicate in real time across wide geographical distances contribute to lifestyle migration. Benson also writes that lifestyle migrants are privileged and in an ambiguous position because they choose their particular 'simple' lifestyle and location whereas for most locals, the same 'simple' life is not a matter of voluntary choice but a necessity (Benson 2007, 57; 217).

Lifestyle migrants' ambiguity becomes visible also in the fact that they occupy a marginal space between tourists and local residents as well as between tourists and migrants (Gustafson 2002, 902; see also O'Reilly 2000, 142). Distinguishing oneself from tourists is important for lifestyle migrants and it becomes manifested in various ways in their everyday lives (O'Reilly 2000, 75; O'Reilly 2003, 307; Gustafson 2002, 910). Many lifestyle migrants put much effort in order to avoid becoming labelled as tourists. At the same time, they are frequently in contact with tourists; above all because they host their friends and relatives who visit them (O'Reilly 2000, 105). Moreover, they often live and spend time in the same areas as tourists since popular lifestyle migration destinations are often also popular tourist destinations. Consequently, they are frequently taken as tourists by locals although they firmly reject such categorisation themselves (Gustafson 2002, 904).

Per Gustafson has studied Swedish lifestyle migrants in Spain; he argues that lifestyle migrants distinguish themselves from tourists both temporally and spatially. They try to occupy a different space, for example, by visiting remote areas and they follow different time patterns than tourists; above all, their lives involve more routines. In addition, the distinction is seen in terms of activity and behaviour. For example, the lifestyle migrants do not spend their days on the beach nor do they wear summer clothes in winter. Moreover, lifestyle migrants are often keen to demonstrate their knowledge about local society (Gustafson 2002, 905-9) although at the same time, they are usually not willing to integrate with the local population. In fact, it is rather common that lifestyle migrants socialise only with each other; rather seldom do they have contact with locals (O'Reilly 2000, 102-105). Many lifestyle migrants claim to want to have more contact with locals but they find such contact extremely difficult to achieve (O'Reilly 2000, 150-158; Benson 2007, 44-55). A lack of language skills is a common reason for this but another distancing factor is

that the activities of lifestyle migrants and locals are usually very different. Whatever the reason for the lack of contact, it is common for lifestyle migrants to accuse other lifestyle migrants of not wanting to integrate into local life, whereas they typically define themselves as different (O'Reilly 2003, 313), which illustrates well that lifestyle migrants often try to act more 'authentic' than their fellow lifestyle migrants.

O'Reilly argues that full integration into the host society would in fact challenge the romanticised image that lifestyle migrants hold of it and therefore, they prefer to remain in their 'holiday space' (O'Reilly 2000, 157). Among the British lifestyle migrants in Spain, the holiday space becomes evident, for example, in the common practice of avoiding serious conversation topics (O'Reilly 2000, 105): one is there in order to enjoy life, not to discuss serious matters. The truth is, however, that although life in the new host country is often a life of leisure and a fresh beginning, it may also mean loneliness and insecurity (O'Reilly 2000, 16). However, such issues are not considered suitable discussion topics among lifestyle migrants as expressing such feelings would challenge their lifestyle choices.

Instead of admitting problems with their present situation, lifestyle migrants often put much emphasis on how good their life in the new home is (see e.g., Huber et al 2004, 338; O'Reilly 2002, 182). Such talk is a way to construct a positive identity but it may also be that preserving a positive image is important because of outsiders' reactions in their countries of origin (see e.g., O'Reilly 2000): attitudes towards lifestyle migration are not always very positive. Gustafson argues that by talking about the good life in the new home, lifestyle migrants often, implicitly or explicitly, defend themselves against the negative views that they believe people in their home societies hold of them (Gustafson 2002, 908). In particular, they often emphasise living a 'normal life' in their new home country, that is, they are not on constant holiday but cook, clean and shop like everyone else (Gustafson 2002, 909-913). In fact, a life of leisure is often considered problematic in modern Western societies. This accusation not only concerns lifestyle migrants; New Age travellers have also come under criticism.

2.4 Life on the Road: New Age Travellers

New Age travellers are a British phenomenon that has lately extended also to other European countries. It refers to a nomadic lifestyle of people living in buses, caravans and tents in the English countryside. The lifestyle started in connection with the free summer solstice festivals at

Stonehenge in the 1970s when an increasing number of young people rejected house dwelling and travelled in large vehicles from festival to festival during summers. The travelling has a clear seasonal pattern: in summer the Travellers move between various festivals, in winter they park their vehicles on a more permanent basis, forming temporary communities with each other (see e.g., Hetherington 1998b, 331). New Age travellers consider the countryside and nomadic lifestyle more 'authentic' than living in urban areas, which in their view is characterised by instrumentalism and needless everyday routines (Hetherington 1998a, 7; 1998b, 329-330; 2000). The lifestyle of New Age travellers has roots in the hippie counterculture and is closely linked to the environmentalist movement and the peace movement. The lifestyle has continued over three decades and is alive also today. Kevin Hetherington, who has written extensively on New Age travellers, points out that the idea of dropping out of society in order to live a life of freedom on the road is not new: historical examples include gentleman 'gypsies', sons of aristocrats and the German youth movement of Wandervogel (Hetherington 1998a, 11).

Mainstream British society has been very resentful towards New Age travellers. Conflicts between the mainstream society and the Travellers were common throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The free festivals of Stonehenge were quickly forbidden and new laws were passed in order to prevent the voluntary nomadic lifestyle. For example, claiming social security benefits has been made very difficult for the Travellers as eligibility for such benefits usually requires a permanent dwelling (Clark 1997, 131-134). Moreover, landowners regularly ask the police to evict Travellers who have parked on their land. Chris Rojek and Kevin Hetherington write about moral panic against the Travellers. Hetherington explains the panic by arguing that Travellers are out of place: they belong nowhere and not being defined in terms of place makes their status ambiguous (Hetherington 1992, 91). Rojek gives a simpler explanation: mainstream society views Travellers in negative terms because they do not have permanent jobs but instead seem to enjoy a leisured life (Rojek 1989, 22). Rojek quotes Margaret Thatcher in order to illustrate the attitude of mainstream society towards New Age travellers: 'They accept all the advantages of free society but refuse to rise to any of its responsibilities'. Rojek, however, questions the kind of freedom that is available: is it 'freedom to choose, or the freedom to be like everyone else?' (Rojek 1989, 28) All in all, whether lifestyle migrants or New Age travellers, mainstream society considers a life of pleasure problematic.

Outsiders often define New Age travellers as having dropped out of society but, according to Hetherington, the Travellers themselves view their lifestyle as an alternative; as a manifestation of a more natural, 'authentic' and meaningful way of living (Hetherington 1996, 41). Their discourse

emphasises individual freedom, self expression, as well as personal and spiritual growth (Hetherington 1998a, 11-12). The movement combines aspects of several traditions, beliefs and practices: for example, eastern mysticism, native American traditions, environmental and pacifist beliefs, 'gypsy' lifestyles, commune living, circus entertainment, Rastafarianism and Celtic paganism (Hetherington 1998a, 95). Travellers are by no means a homogenous group. Individuality is a central value and individuals are varyingly aware of the above-mentioned practices and express them according to their personal preferences. According to Hetherington, physical appearance, clothing in particular, plays an important role in expressing one's alternative identity (Hetherington 1998a, 95). The Traveller identity is expressed especially by looking dirty, having dreadlocks and by using 'ethnic' clothing. Nevertheless, Hetherington also writes that 'there is nothing singular about the Traveller identity': there are different identities, many of which change over time (Hetherington 1998b, 329). In other words, the emphasis on individual expression results in various identities.

While individual choice and identity are emphasised among New Age travellers, communal feelings are equally appreciated. Hetherington argues that feelings of belonging to a group of similar-minded people are central among the Travellers, and those feelings culminate in festivals (Hetherington 1998a, 46), where Travellers gather to enjoy the festival activities but also to express their identity and lifestyle. Hetherington defines New Age travellers as an elective community that has strong communal values and rules but to which one belongs through choice (Hetherington 1998a, 64). Therefore, both values of individuality and communality are central in the phenomenon. Hetherington emphasises that New Age travellers create an alternative space with similar-minded people (Hetherington 1998a, 85), and he points out that instead of community, 'neo-tribe' (see section 3.5) is a better word to describe the Travellers' groupings as they can break down very quickly (Hetherington 1992, 93) but they can also become rapidly reorganised. Sally Kendall has studied a Traveller community in Leeds and she points out an interesting characteristic of the Travellers' community: although the emphasis is on equality and self-expression, strict moral codes apply regarding women's sexuality, and gender roles are clearly defined and complementary (Kendall 1997, 80-1). Moreover, mainstream British society often criticises particularly harshly the female Travellers who have children, accusing the mothers of irresponsibility (see Lowe et al. 1993).

Who are the New Age travellers then? According to Hetherington, they predominantly come from middle class families, although there is an increasing number of people of working-class origin among them (Hetherington 1996, 34). The majority of Travellers are relatively young, in

their 20s, but there are also older Travellers who have been on the road for years, even for decades. Hetherington emphasises that becoming a Traveller always involves a choice (Hetherington 1996, 41): one is not forced to live on the road but consciously chooses the Traveller lifestyle.

Greg Martin has strongly criticised Hetherington's interpretations of New Age travellers. In Martin's view, Hetherington views the phenomenon in too rosy terms. Martin argues that young Travellers are often forced to take to the road in order to avoid unemployment and/or homelessness (Martin 2002, 723). In Hetherington's defence, it should be noted that he does acknowledge that poverty and homelessness may contribute to the choice of becoming a Traveller (Hetherington 1996, 41) but in Martin's view, Hetherington does not see how crucial these factors really are. Martin divides the Travellers in two generations. The older generation 'moved onto the road to escape what they saw as the exploitative nature of work in capitalist society and jobs that alienated them from their labour', which was possible in a time of relative economic prosperity when the 'voluntarily unemployed were afforded by the economy' (Martin 1998, 742). For the younger generation, however, the lifestyle is not that kind of a choice but rather a strategy for survival and a way to define themselves positively. In talking about survival, Martin refers to the fact that current laws in Britain make it very difficult for young people to claim social security benefits; they are expected to continue living with their parents, who are supposed to support them. If such parental support is not available, travelling may be the only available alternative for survival without being homeless. Moreover, the fact that many Travellers become self-employed by doing crafts or acting as entertainers, for example as musicians, is also a positive survival strategy. It is in fact very significant that the Traveller identity allows one a positive self-definition: one does not feel like a drop-out but can define oneself as an active agent making a rational lifestyle choice and living out true values that aim at a more 'authentic' and meaningful life. (Martin 1998, 747)

It is difficult to estimate how many New Age travellers there are in Britain but common estimates before the mid-1990s were between 8 000 to 10 000 (Hetherington 1992, 84; Clark 1997, 129). Since British mainstream society has been extremely resentful towards Travellers, many have moved to continental Europe and some also to India (see Dearling 1998). The phenomenon of New Age travellers can therefore lead to a sort of lifestyle migration.

2.5 Bohemian Lifestyle Migrants

Benson and O'Reilly suggest that one particular form of lifestyle migration is characterised by bohemian aspirations (Benson et al. forthcoming). The bohemian lifestyle migrants have moved abroad in search of a better life but conceptualise the more meaningful life in terms different from other kinds of lifestyle migrants as they embrace spiritual and artistic aspirations. So far, no study has used the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration. There are, however, a few studies that have investigated the phenomenon using different conceptualisations.

Jaqueline Waldren (1996) has studied an artistic expatriate group on the island of Mallorca for decades. She elaborates on the distinctions between insiders and outsiders, conceptualising the bohemian expatriates, who are artists, literary personalities or musicians, as long-term residents. Anthony D'Andrea (2006; 2007) has studied Western people who spend part of the year on the island of Ibiza and part of the year in Goa, India. They are involved in variations of New Age and techno practice¹¹, and D'Andrea conceptualises them as global nomads or as expressive expatriates. Pola Bousiou (2008) has studied people who have visited the Greek island of Mykonos for the past thirty-five years and who form an alternative community of dispersed friends. She has included only Greek nationals in her study but there are also people of other national origin on Mykonos. Bousiou defines those people as *Mykoniots d'election* or as nomads of Mykonos.

All the above-mentioned groups could, however, also be conceptualised as bohemian lifestyle migrants; those people have moved abroad in order to live a more meaningful life, they share certain countercultural, alternative, values and emphasise spiritual and artistic aspirations. In the following, I characterise bohemian lifestyle migrants relying mostly on the studies of D'Andrea and Bousiou because those are the two recent studies that I have encountered that investigate the phenomenon from perspectives that are fruitful also for the concept of bohemian lifestyle migration. In fact, D'Andrea argues that bohemian is not the correct term to describe his research subjects. He, however, is referring to the bohemian bourgeoisie as metropolitan elites (D'Andrea 2006, 99) whereas I define bohemians differently, that is, in terms of an alternative lifestyle that contains artistic and spiritual aspirations. In my understanding, the term bohemian is a useful concept although it can be problematic if defined in narrow terms.

¹¹ By techno practice D'Andrea refers to a range of electronic music genres, its ritual sites and subcultural components (e.g. fashion) (D'Andrea 2007, 21).

Western bohemians, especially artists, have lived abroad for decades, even centuries, but it seems that current bohemian lifestyle migration, at least in terms of locations, has its roots above all in the hippie era. For example Ibiza, Goa, Mykonos and Bali became popular among hippies and are also currently well-liked by bohemians (see e.g., Bousiou 2008, 6; D'Andrea 2006, 100): D'Andrea calls such places 'nodes of global countercultural circuit' (D'Andrea 2006, 105). As is typical of lifestyle migration destinations, the climate is pleasant and living costs cheap in those places (see e.g., D'Andrea 2007, 8). They are also popular tourist destinations, which contributes to them being defined as relaxed leisure spaces. However, those places are not just pleasant locations on the beach but are assigned with certain artistic and spiritual meanings by the bohemians sojourning there. Consequently, the romantic 'return to authenticity' to which lifestyle migrants typically aspire takes on artistic and spiritual meanings among bohemian lifestyle migrants.

Both Bousiou and D'Andrea use the concept of nomadism, thereby referring to the very mobile life of their research subjects, which indicates that current bohemian lifestyle migration is characterised by mobility. Bohemian lifestyle migrants often move between various locations, refusing permanency in their sojourns: 'today Mykonos or Bali, tomorrow somewhere else' (Bousiou 2008, 101). In other words, the more meaningful life that they claim to have found is not necessarily tied to one particular location but can materialise in various destinations. Such mobility, more precisely a circular movement among multiple locations associated with bohemian meanings, makes the bohemian lifestyle migrants somewhat different from many other lifestyle migrants whose movement is typically bi-polar. The bohemian lifestyle migrants thus occupy a space of mobility instead of sojourning permanently in a new location or 'commuting' between the 'old' and the 'new' home. Places are, however, far from insignificant in the phenomena that D'Andrea and Bousiou are studying. Although not born or not even permanently residing in Ibiza, Goa or Mykonos, bohemian lifestyle migrants often acquire identities based on particular places (Bousiou 2008, 26, 45). As Bauman conceptualises it, they are in but not of the places (Bauman 2003, 206 in Bousiou 2008, 56).

Individuality and autonomy are central in all lifestyle migration but among the bohemians those values take on particular meanings. Both D'Andrea and Bousiou argue that their research subjects constantly perform their alternative, distinctive, selves, and their self-development often takes the form of individualistic spiritualities (D'Andrea 2007, 193; Bousiou 2008, 130; 235). In fact, they often refute permanent practices: 'Yesterday I was into Tai Chi, today I am into Yoga, and tomorrow I may try Zen' (D'Andrea 2006, 116) Bohemian lifestyle migrants also seem to reject fixed identities; their migration does not result in a new self but in

constantly changing selves: for example, the research subjects of D'Andrea and Bousiou intentionally hold multiple subject positions and constantly varying identities (D'Andrea 2007, 6; 2006, 116; Bousiou 2008, 29, 228). Leaving the past behind and constructing a new, happier self is characteristic of all lifestyle migrants, as a consequence of which lifestyle migrants typically do not talk about serious matters with each other but maintain a positive 'front'. However, although elaborating on one's self is discouraged among many 'ordinary' lifestyle migrants, it seems to me that among bohemian lifestyle migrants it is appreciated and even expected.

In spite of their emphasis on individualism, above all in terms of being active agents who have improved their lives, lifestyle migrants usually appreciate the company of other lifestyle migrants. For the bohemians, however, it is not only a question of enjoying the company of similar-minded people but of creating an alternative — self-marginalised — space with them. They are, however, not searching for or even accepting a collective identity. For example the *Mykonians d'election* are never formulated as a group; they are individuals who refute belonging and communal commitment. Yet, at the same time, they do form a community through common practices, and they feel sensual solidarity to each other as they share a way of life. (Bousiou 2008 231-242) In addition to being conceptualised as alternative spaces, the communities of bohemian lifestyle migrants are different from those of many other lifestyle migrants because instead of consisting of only one's fellow nationals, they are very international, that is, members come from various nations; albeit the communities seldom include local people.

Lifestyle migrants typically reject the 'rat race' but bohemian lifestyle migrants often criticise capitalist economies altogether. Yet, like other lifestyle migrants, they are actually dependent on it, and as is the case with many other lifestyle migrants, the bohemians' sources of income are often tourism-related (D'Andrea 2007, 4-10). However, instead of participating in 'conventional tourism industry', they may utilise their artistic skills or their knowledge of certain New Age techniques of healing or spirituality; they may, for example, teach yoga, sell their art or provide services in New Age therapies (D'Andrea 2007, 23-31). They may also utilise their mobile lifestyles by selling in Europe goods which they have imported from, for example, India, Thailand or Bali.

D'Andrea argues that the expressive expatriates on Ibiza and Goa 'seek to evade state-market-morality regimes', which means that their aim is a holistic lifestyle in which labour, leisure and spirituality are balanced (D'Andrea 2007, 23). Both D'Andrea and Bousiou have studied people for whom the bohemian lifestyle is, at least currently, permanent. I, however, want to point out that there may well be also bohemian lifestyle migrants for whom the lifestyle is a part-time project: once they run out of money

they may return to a more conventional lifestyle for some time in order to earn money for another bohemian stint abroad. Thus, their lifestyle is not as holistic, that is, combining economic strategies, identity formation and mobility, as D'Andrea argues in regard to his research subjects in Ibiza and Goa (D'Andrea 2007, 23).

Bohemian lifestyle migrants in fact hold values that are very similar to those of New Age Travellers in Britain, who could be defined as bohemians as well. They all seek an alternative lifestyle in very similar terms and embrace individuality. However, at the same time they appreciate an intense social life with similar-minded people with whom they create 'an alternative space' in which they define life as more meaningful. The main difference between bohemian lifestyle migrants and New Age Travellers seems to be the transnational aspect of the lifestyle migrants' lifestyle. Another difference is that bohemian lifestyle migrants seem to be well able to take advantage of the financial possibilities that global economies offer, especially in terms of the tourism industry, whereas New Age travellers often hang on at the edge of survival.

In this study, I conceptualise the Westerners in Varanasi as lifestyle migrants. I discuss how they are similar to and different from many other lifestyle migrants and interpret them within the framework of bohemian lifestyle migration, thus also shedding light on a concept that has so far not been used in empirical research.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON COMMUNITY STUDIES

Since the founding of sociology and anthropology, scholars have believed that communities are under threat: first by modernisation, then by globalisation (see e.g., Dyck 2002, 106). In spite of such concerns, communities have nonetheless persisted and are significant even in our present age. People still seem to find communal belonging emotionally rewarding. Bauman writes that 'community, we feel, is always a good thing'. It is understood as a 'warm', cosy and comfortable place where we can relax and feel safe, and where all the members understand and trust each other (Bauman 2001, 1-3). Such a view of community portrays a lost paradise that we hope to repossess; in other words, the view is very romantic and idealised. Although in many people's understanding communities may be understood in such a romanticised way, many scholars have conceptualised communities in less romantic and more concrete terms. In fact, both the characteristics and conceptualisations of communities have changed over the years. In the following, I discuss some of those theoretical approaches to conceptualising communities.

3.1 Location-based Communities

One way to understand communities is to view them as location-based entities. In such an understanding, social networks are based on geographical proximity and a community consists of people who are in face-to-face interaction with each other. Rural communities are a central example of such communities. They are often viewed in nostalgic terms, defined as traditional, small and stable. Relationships are understood to be all-embracing, broadly inclusive, enduring and tied to particular locations where social control is tight. In rural communities, people are believed to share similar experiences and values, as a consequence of which they understand each other well and are emotionally attached to each other. Moreover, people are understood to be happy and to have comprehensive personal knowledge of each other. (see, e.g., Cohen 1985, 21-28; Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 6-7)

Anthropologists have traditionally studied location-based communities, understanding them as culturally defined groups. The first anthropological community studies focused on isolated local communities — or, more precisely, the anthropologists (wrongly) conceptualised them as isolated entities — that consisted of actual interacting people (Amit 2002b, 17) who were understood to share a common language, moralities, histories and traditions. In other words, location, culture and social ties were interconnected in their analysis and communities were defined as self-contained, internally coherent, all-inclusive packages with clearly defined borders (see Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 6).

Understanding communities as closed entities may be convenient but it fails to see their complexity. Paul Kennedy and Victor Roudometof argue that the image of separate and self-sufficient local entities has suited anthropologists well as it has enabled them to limit their research to easily comprehensible small groupings. The anthropologist has then been able to neatly illustrate the culture of a bounded site, that is, of a particular community. Such an approach, however, hides the encounters of members of communities with other communities and cultures as well as fractions within communities. In fact, the communities that anthropologists have studied have not been as closed entities as the researchers have claimed them to be; for example, contacts with other groups have been common. (Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 8-9) Such criticism has been posed, for example, by Frederick Barth, who, writing on ethnicity, argued already in 1969 that individuals' mobility and outside contacts are in fact crucial for maintaining group categories instead of being threats to them (Barth 1969).

While anthropologists have focused on the empirical forms of communities, classical sociologists have analysed communities as ideal types. The foremost example of this approach was developed by Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936), who made the famous distinction between *Gemeinschaft*/community and *Gesellschaft*/society (Tönnies 1887). *Gemeinschaft* means a community of intimacy and of close personal knowledge. Relationships in *Gemeinschaft* communities are enduring, face-to-face, close-knit and all-embracing. They are based on emotions and affection and depend on reciprocity, mutual trust and frequent interaction. *Gemeinschaft* communities are viewed as 'genuine', 'natural' and stable, and they are obviously location-based. *Gesellschaft* societies are in many ways opposite to *Gemeinschaft* communities. They are characterised by mechanical relationships, anonymity and individualism. Relationships in *Gesellschaft* societies are ego-focused, highly specific and often discontinuous. An individual has various relationships and s/he interacts within different social milieux for different purposes. In Tönnies's thinking, modernity replaces tradition and with it *Gemeinschaft* communities, which thus become viewed in nostalgic terms as belonging to

past rural circumstances. Such thinking, however, ignores the forms of community that develop in modernity: a rural environment is not the only location in which communities form.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) criticised Tönnies by arguing that communities do not disappear with modernisation but take on new forms (Durkheim 1893). Durkheim thus asks what kinds of communities and social integration can exist in modern societies. He uses the terms *mechanical* and *organic solidarity* in his theory on communities. *Mechanical solidarity* refers to small, agricultural villages where people share traditions, beliefs and activities. Integration is mechanical since there is no space for individual autonomy: collective norms and values are mechanically reproduced. *Organic solidarity* develops when people's lives become increasingly specialised: people are different and thus dependent on each other. Such a situation can be called an integration of difference. *Organic solidarity* is thus the basis for a new kind of community that develops with modernisation, especially with urbanisation. It is based on co-operation, pluralism and individualism. (see also Delanty 2003, 36-41)

Urban communities are obviously formed and conceptualised differently from rural ones. They are often geographically dispersed and in cities people can belong to various communities for specific reasons (see Cohen 1985, 21-28). However, people also appreciate communal belonging in urban circumstances. The *Chicago School* scholars argued in the 1920s and 1930s that although people in cities interact with various people within various contexts, they still consider certain close relationships particularly significant. The *Chicago School* approach (see e.g., Park & Burgess & McKenzie 1925; Wirth 1928; Lynd & Lynd 1929; Warner 1941) was also location-based, as those scholars studied neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods represented communities within cities and they were a convenient research unit as they could be understood as closed entities. However, the possibility and often also the reality of fluid boundaries became easily ignored (see e.g., Cohen 1985, 26). Nevertheless, studies showed that in such local communities, there were mutual interdependencies and common forms of life. Moreover, forms of social control existed and people felt communal belonging. (Delanty 2003, 55) These kinds of urban communities are understood to require face-to-face interaction, although relationships in them are not as all-encompassing as in rural communities (on urban anthropology, see e.g., Hannerz 1980).

Rural and urban communities are often understood as being in opposition as rural life is characterised by stability and familiarity whereas urbanisation means mobility, impermanence and insecurity. However, in both cases shared space and common experiences are central in the formation of communities; thus, communities are understood in very concrete terms. However, in today's world, if ever, such an a priori

distinction between rural and urban communities is not valid. Several studies have shown that there are various interconnections and interdependencies between rural and urban areas (see e.g., Sarmela 1979; Cohen and Atiemo Odhiambo 1989).

Nevertheless, even if the distinction between rural and urban communities is not very useful or even valid, there are nevertheless many location-based communities also in contemporary circumstances. However, there are also other kinds of communities, as becomes evident in the following.

3.2 Symbolic and Imagined Communities

Anthony Cohen is a well-known community scholar and his book *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) is a landmark in community studies. Cohen defines a community as comprising members that 'have something in common with each other which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups' (Cohen 1985, 12). He emphasises the significance of a community's boundaries. On the one hand, boundaries create a sense of belonging; on the other hand, they distinguish a group from 'outsiders'. Instead of physical location, Cohen emphasises the symbolic aspect of community, that is, according to him, community and its boundaries exist in people's minds. Consequently, people may attach very different meanings to a particular community and its symbols, although they share a feeling of belonging. In Cohen's view, researchers should investigate the various meanings people give to a community, its boundaries and practices instead of appearances and structures. The significant contribution of his theory is that it acknowledges that communities are not rigid structures but fluid and open to change. Moreover, his theory moves the emphasis away from location to meanings, boundaries and change.

Thus far in this chapter, my emphasis has been on small-scale, face-to-face communities. The term community can, however, also refer to ethnic and national entities that are large-scale groupings in which not all the members engage in face-to-face interaction with other members.

Benedict Anderson (1983) theorises on national communities by using the concept of 'imagined communities'. He places the roots of the notion of nation in the Americas at the end of the 18th century. According to him, nationalism provided a uniting ideology for people who started to move longer distances with the process of industrialisation. Print capitalism and the development of national languages together with mass education contributed to the spreading of unifying nationalistic ideas. Anderson

argues that nations are '*imagined*' because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members', yet, they do imagine communion (Anderson 1983, 6, italics in original). However, these imagined communities are not merely abstract: they are formed and maintained through concrete practices and their consequences are often very real.

Although Anderson wrote about nationalism, community scholars were quick to adopt his ideas, especially since they fit well the 'interpretative turn' in anthropology (Amit 2002c, 6-9). Anderson's contribution to community studies was to put the focus on the aspect of imagination, away from face-to-face interaction. The idea of imagined communities provided a framework for abandoning the view that saw communities as small, tangible, face-to-face entities situated in a particular location (Hannerz 1996, 92). The emphasis was put on community as an idea of collective identity, a categorical referent, instead of the actual social forms it takes (Amit 2002b, 4; Amit & Rapport 2002, 4). In other words, the emphasis was on how people imagine community, that is, on their collective consciousness, instead of on actual communal practices and interactions between the members. In fact, the term imagined community is often misunderstood by ignoring practices and consequences although Anderson himself does not define imagined communities in merely abstract terms but also emphasises real practices.

Understanding communities as symbolic or imagined entities has its dangers. Many scholars have pointed out that the maintenance of communities needs also actual practices (see e.g., Dyck 2002, 107; Amit 2002b, 24; Delanty 2003, 123). Vered Amit has written extensively on communities, and she emphasises that it is people and their actions that produce communities. She states that the idea of community arises with people whom one knows, with whom one has shared experiences, activities, places and/or histories (Amit 2002c, 18). When emphasis is put on practices, community is not a static notion but defined in the process of achieving it (Delanty 2003, 124). In other words, communities are actively made.

Instead of being mutually exclusive, the imagined and concrete aspects of communities are both significant in the construction of a community; the imagined aspects are realised in practices and interactions. The concept of imagination refers to the emotional aspects, which are often very significant, and usually, although not always, those feelings of belonging are felt to be rewarding. According to Amit, there are indeed strong emotions attributed to collective attachments especially in today's world, where social relationships are rarely very comprehensive or integral. Yet, Amit claims that imagining is not enough: without actual social relations, it is difficult to account for the emotive valence which is

attributed to the community (Amit 2002c, 17). In other words, both imagining and practices matter.

So far, I have defined communities as location-based (rural or urban), symbolic or imagined. There are also other ways to conceptualise communities, and although contemporary communities are not necessarily all-encompassing, essential, abiding and intimate, neither do they have to be merely symbolic or imagined (see e.g., Dyck 2002, 107). Communities can be both symbolic or imagined and intimate. Moreover, although they are not necessarily all-encompassing, they can nevertheless be very significant for the members. The approaches that I have discussed so far are useful tools to understand communities but they alone do not satisfactorily explain all contemporary communities.

3.3 Interest-based Communities

Nowadays, communities are not necessarily characteristically either urban or rural, that is, location-based. An increasing number of communities are interest-based and the aspect of choice has intensified. In other words, many communities are voluntary and based on a limited purpose. Moreover, each individual has multiple communal associations instead of one all-encompassing one. Material goals may be important but more often the emphasis is on the informational and cultural concerns of members (Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 11). Contemporary communities can be based on shared lifestyles (Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 21), a common activity (Amit 2002c, 15) or interest. Community can also be based on a social movement where people are united by a common commitment (Delanty 2003, 122): an extreme case of such communities are the utopian ones (see Delanty 2003, 11-20). All in all, a significant aspect in communities is the emotional attachment of the members towards the community; usually the members appreciate communal belonging but they may also feel constrained by it; in any case, they have some feelings towards their communal belonging.

The famous community scholar, Anthony Cohen, wrote an epilogue to Vered Amit's book *Realizing Community. Concepts, Social Relationships and Sentiments* (2002c). There he acknowledges that nowadays, people are associated with each other often only for limited purposes. He writes that "community" has become a way of designating that *something* is shared among a group of people at a time when we no longer assume that *anything* is necessarily shared.' (Cohen 2002, 168-9, italics in original). Accordingly, whereas earlier studies on communities often focused on difference and boundaries, now the emphasis is on

sameness and shared experiences (Amit 2002b, 59-60; Amit 2002c, 14). Several scholars argue that in contemporary circumstances, people's self-definition is based on their multiple attachments instead of distinctions arising from collectivities in which they are not members (Amit 2002c, 16; Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 15; Delanty 2003, 131). Some scholars even argue that boundaries of communities are losing significance now that there are countless collective identities to choose from (Kempny 2002, 63; Delanty 2003, 148). However, despite the fact that belonging in these new kinds of communities may be fragile, narrowly circumscribed in time and space and decidedly partial or situational, communities are still significant for people's self-understanding and emotional well-being (Dyck 2002, 107; Amit 2002c, 15-18; Amit 2002b, 24; Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 8). Moreover, although voluntary communities are increasingly significant, people still also belong to communities that they understand to be primordial, for example ethnic communities. In people's own understanding those latter communities may appear involuntary but in fact, there is always some aspect of choice in deciding which communal belonging one wants to emphasise and which not.

3.4 Postmodern Communities

In classical sociology, individualism was seen as a threat to communities whereas nowadays, individuality plays a very significant role in the construction of many communities as many of them are based on individual choice and individuals' search for identity and personal self-fulfilment through collective participation (Delanty 2003, 120-2; Amit 2002b, 16). In other words, at the same time that individualism is emphasised, at least in the affluent Western world, people search for communal belonging and seem to attach many positive values to communities. Although the two tendencies seem mutually exclusive, both of them play a role in many contemporary communities: communal belonging can answer certain needs of an individual, in particular in one's search for self-identity. Moreover, the 'old' communities were not as solid and all-encompassing as the early sociologists and anthropologists thought. Nevertheless, now fluidity and temporality are also taken into account in theoretical conceptions of communities.

Michel Maffesoli's (1996) theorising on post-modern communities is well known. His point of departure is the coexistence of individuation and communality in contemporary societies; according to Maffesoli, individuality is in fact realised and produced within communities. He believes that being together is a basic given and individuals cannot be

isolated, not even in the present era. In contemporary societies, he argues, each individual belongs to multiple overlapping groups, and one's identity is based on those various belongings. During a single day, each person participates in several temporary groupings: a sports club, office friends, hobbyists, fans, neighbourhood watch, etc. Maffesoli uses the term neo-tribe to describe those temporary collectivities. Neo-tribes are not necessarily fixed or long-living. They are often interest-based or based on the members' shared lifestyles or tastes. The emphasis is on that which unites rather than on that which separates. Neo-tribes do not have political, or in fact any kinds of, goals; instead, the emphasis is put on the mere fact of being together at a particular moment, and one is constantly switching from one group to another according to one's individual choice. Maffesoli's theory summarises many of the aspects of voluntary interest-based communities highlighted earlier in this chapter; above all the temporal and voluntary nature of communities. His particular emphasis is on the very fluid nature of many contemporary communities: he rejects any kind of permanence. Maffesoli's theorising is widely used in contemporary sociology and anthropology. However, a problem in his theory is that he denies the possibility of neo-tribes being political although there are many examples of radical politics in the new group formations as well (see e.g., Hetherington 1998a, 53; Weinzierl et al. 2003, 12-15; St John 2003, 77). Such examples include the anti-globalisation movement and the animal-liberation front.

Like Maffesoli, Amit also emphasises individual agency. She criticises anthropologists for continuing to theoretically privilege the collective over and against the personal and individual, since in the contemporary world the two are essentially intertwined (Amit 2002b, 16; see also Amit & Dyck 2006). For her, the crucial issue is how individuals form and maintain social connections which meet their needs (Rapport 2002, 173). Amit, however, does not think that communal relations are coldly calculated contracts but emphasises that they are embodied, sensual, and emotionally charged relationships (Amit 2002c, 16). In other words, even in post-modern societies, alienation and instrumentality are not as extreme as the early sociologists believed them to be already more than a hundred years ago. Instead, communities are still significant in people's lives as they offer much valued feelings of belonging, and may also even meet people's practical needs (see Delanty 2003, 144). Yet, combining an emphasis on individuality and the search for communal belonging is not an easy equation. Individuals use communities in order to satisfy certain needs and aspirations but there is also a danger that community suppresses their individual freedom (see Bauman 2001 4; 20-22). This contributes to the present tendency of communities to not be all-encompassing or permanent

since their members escape the long-term suppression of individual freedom.

3.5 Communities in the Age of Globalisation and Transnationalism

Globalisation is often talked about in rather abstract terms, referring to macro-level phenomena. It is, however, important to remember that there are actual individuals acting on the global arena and being affected by global processes. Smith and Guarnizo (1998) have drawn the well-known distinction between transnationalism from below and above. The latter refers to processes regarding nation states and the global economy whereas transnationalism from below refers to the social networks that people form across national boundaries. Transnationalism from above is often seen as a threat to 'traditional' communities whereas transnationalism from below can mean empowered local communities. For example, they may gain strength and awareness of themselves when they oppose the homogenising tendencies of globalisation from above. (see e.g., Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 18; Delanty 2003, 64) Thus, although globalisation has often been seen as a threat to communities, it might be that globalisation has given communities a new lease on life (Kennedy & Roudometof 2002, 24). First of all, local communities may flourish as a reaction to being suppressed by globalisation when they are suppressed by globalisation. Secondly, globalisation provides opportunities for new kinds of communities.

In the present era, the idea of a close-knit, stable and localised community has become challenged (Fog Olwig 2002, 125; see also Gray 2002, 38), and many researchers now question the view of community as consisting of a bounded group of culturally homogenous people resident in one locality (Kempny 2002, 63). Amit critically writes that the idea of imagined community seems very suitable for circumstances in the globalising world: by imagining belonging to a 'community' people are able to locate themselves within a world that never stands still (Amit 2002c, 9-12). The concept also helps researchers: Amit and Rapport argue that when anthropologists try to locate transnational or multi-sited ethnographic fields, they often cling to communities and collectivities (Amit & Rapport 2002, 3).

Transnational communities are often understood to be ethnic collectivities (Amit 2002b, 21; see also Al-Ali and Koser 2001, 10) where people from a certain ethnic group construct and maintain belonging to each other regardless of their physical location in various nation states. People often understand national and ethnic communities as primordially

given and eternal although they also need practices and actions in order to be maintained. Transnational processes can, however, result also in other kinds of collectivities: people can be united transnationally by shared beliefs, tastes or lifestyle or by a common activity or interest (Amit 2002, 15-17; see also Kennedy and Roudometof 2002, 2). Such communities have become increasingly common because travel is cheaper and easier than it was in earlier times and the new communication technologies enable fast communication across geographical distances (see Kennedy and Roudometof 2002, 24).

Nowadays, communities are not necessarily dependent on direct interpersonal relations tied to a particular location (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002, 18). Globalisation has resulted in the capacity to extend communal membership far beyond specific geographical locations. One may live in social isolation vis-à-vis people who are physically near whereas one may feel 'social nearness and closeness to others living thousands of miles away' (Kennedy and Roudometof 2002, 12). Yet, although communal ties can extend across borders, they are still not merely imagined but based on real interacting people and their concrete actions and relations (see e.g., Fog Olwig 2002, 124-127). Even many transnational communities are contextualised in very particular relationships, activities and physical locations (Amit 2002b, 62). Moreover, people do not necessarily feel rootless and homeless even if the communities to which they belong are no longer anchored to particular places (Kempny 2002, 62). Nevertheless, there are also locally formed communities that are affected by globalisation and transnational processes but where face-to-face interaction is still crucial.

3.6 Studying Communities

Amit claims that anthropologists have often taken community as an unexamined unit of analysis, as a location rather than as an object of research (Amit 2002b, 42). Communities, however, do not exist in themselves, do not possess their own energies, momentum or agency (Rapport and Amit 2002, 7) but require people and their actions. Therefore, according to Amit, communities should not be taken as ready-made social units upon which to hang analysis; expressions of community require investigation (Amit 2002b, 14), especially now when many communities are temporary, partial and fluid. Instead of taking community as a static notion or structure, it should be understood as achieved through ongoing practices (see Delanty 2003, 124). One approach is to ask what individuals

think and feel about their communal belonging and another approach is to investigate how communities are made and maintained.

Although communities require some sort of stability, they are not stagnant and fixed but changing (Amit & Rapport 2002, 8). Communal practices do not 'freeze in time' but are recreated and also changed when community members are engaged (or refuse to be engaged) with those practices. A community is always a matter of the ongoing negotiation of commonality, sharing and belonging as well as division, fractures and disagreement (Rapport 2002, 169; see also Smith 1998, 204, 226; Goldring 1992, 167, 174, 189). Thus communities do not simply exist; they are constructed and maintained, and they take on various forms and manifestations.

Moreover, power matters too. It should be kept in mind that communities do not just emerge but are always created, shaped and reproduced in hierarchies of power — both local and global. Taking communities as given entities hides aspects of power that nevertheless affect the communities to a great extent. Some communities are celebrated, others are suppressed: most do not attract outsiders' attention at all. Moreover, many individuals may nowadays have more to choose from in terms of communal belonging but not everyone has the same choices available: the (post)modern game of individual choice is more available to some than others. Above all, it is a game of (some) Western people.

In this study, I ask whether the Westerners in Varanasi form a community and I elaborate on how the different theoretical approaches to communities help to conceptualise and understand their lives in Varanasi.

4. TROUBLE IN THE FIELD: LEARNING TO BE A WESTERNER IN VARANASI

4.1 Discovering the phenomenon

This book is the outcome of a process that has lasted for over a decade. Choosing one's research topic is often intertwined with one's personal life, and so it is also in my case. As I describe in the introduction to this book, I encountered a group of Westerners in Varanasi when I was backpacking around India in 1995. I found the Westerners in Varanasi to be very interesting and exotic. They represented a lifestyle that I had not even dared to dream of and I admired their courage to be 'different'. They seemed to be free to do what they wanted; they did not have exams or timetables but seemed to be enjoying their lives to the fullest.

After returning to Finland, I could not forget my experiences in Varanasi because I had been so impressed by the people I had met there. I also felt attracted to the 'mystic' city of Varanasi. I wanted to get to know better the 'cool' Westerners who sojourn in Varanasi. A part of me even wanted to be like them although another part was not willing to give up my studies. When it was time to do my master's thesis, I returned to Varanasi and studied the views and experiences of young European women there (Korpela 1999). I went back to Varanasi a few times after that and eventually decided to carry out doctoral research on the Westerners there. I was particularly puzzled by a few comments some of my interviewees had made in the interviews I conducted for my master's thesis: they claimed to have found a new family in Varanasi. I wanted to know what they meant by such statements. In 2002-2003, I conducted anthropological fieldwork among the Westerners in Varanasi for about a year. The fieldwork consisted of two parts, the first one lasting for five months and the second one for seven months.

As a participant observer, I became intensively involved with the Westerners and experienced the life with them at a very personal level. However, I constantly had to negotiate my role as a researcher and as 'one of them', and my access to the Westerners' social scene was not as easy as I had assumed. Since the beginning of my research, I have been very aware

of my role as a woman in Varanasi. Sometimes, my gender was an advantage, at other times, a disadvantage¹². In this chapter, I tell my fieldwork story: I describe how I entered the field, what kind of a learning process the fieldwork was for me and what kind of ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway 1991) I gained during my stay. Insecurity, confusion and a wide spectrum of other emotions are part of any fieldwork. They may feel like a great burden — but also enjoyable — on a personal level. And one often gains valuable knowledge through such feelings. In this book, I discuss some of my personal experiences in terms of their theoretical relevance (see Okely 1992, 9). My story of entering the field and living in the field hints at many characteristics of the phenomenon that I investigate in this study. Those aspects are discussed in detail later in this book but this chapter already introduces the reader to certain themes. In addition to showing how I was positioned among the Westerners in Varanasi, this chapter also hints at how the Westerners are situated within the local setting.

4.2 The Very Beginning

It was -10° C when I boarded the airport bus in Finland in January 2002. In my backpack, I had a research plan, a list of interview questions, an empty diary, blank cassettes and a recorder. I was feeling excited and enthusiastic about my new role as an anthropologist. On the plane, I sat next to a middle-aged German woman who became terrified at the thought of me going to Varanasi. She had been to India a few times and according to her, Varanasi is a very difficult place for Western women. Instead of making me worried, her comment made me proud: I had survived in Varanasi before; I knew how to behave there. The anthropologist heroine was on her way...

4.3 Crying Alone

New Delhi is a cold and wet place in January and by the time I reached Varanasi after a 15-hour train trip, I had caught a bad cold. The first two weeks of my fieldwork, the anthropologist heroine was in bed! I felt devastated: instead of living the active life of a participant observer, I

¹² Anthropologists have written widely on their fieldwork experiences and on how their personality and gender have affected their fieldwork (see e.g. Golde 1986; Bell et al. 1993; Wolf 1996).

spent my days sleeping and coughing. I worried about missing several days of my precious fieldwork time (on delays in initiating one's fieldwork, see, e.g., Nader 1986, 103; Friedl 1986, 200). When I finally recovered, I was anxious to start my work, that is, to participate in the activities of the long-term Western sojourners. Since I had been to Varanasi several times prior to this fieldwork trip, I assumed it would be easy for me to get involved with the people whom I wanted to study. I quickly found out that I was wrong.

I thought I would meet at least some of the people whom I had known previously but, unfortunately, none of them were in Varanasi that winter: some of them came later in the spring, others had stopped coming. When I had been collecting material for my master's thesis, I had worked in a Western charity project from where I had also found most of my interviewees. The project had, however, ended during my years of absence and consequently I had to abandon my original plan for developing a network of contacts. In order to make new friends, I started to hang out at the tea stalls that are popular among the Westerners. To my great disappointment, this strategy did not work out very well. Either I was there at the wrong time and thus did not meet anyone or if I saw other Westerners, they did not pay any attention to me and I could not think of any way to approach them; especially since they were hardly ever alone but with their friends. I did not know how to start a conversation with strangers as I do not master the talent of small talk very well. A few times when I managed to get up enough courage to talk to someone, I quickly found out that the person was leaving the city that same day, and was therefore not at all the kind of long-term sojourner that I was looking for.

It also turned out to be a big disadvantage to be a woman moving about alone. My spouse was in Varanasi with me but he could not follow me to all my expeditions as he was busy with his own doctoral studies. I was used to the hassle from local men and knew how to avoid or ignore it but I was not prepared for the attention from Western men. Many Western men seemed to define me as sexually available. A few times, I felt uncomfortable with men's intentions when they tried to invite me to their apartments. I had to come up with all kinds of excuses for not visiting them but at the same time, I felt sad about maybe missing valuable contacts and information. In this context, it is obvious that what I experienced as a fieldworker caused very personal emotions. Luckily, later when the existence of my spouse became known, such attention diminished considerably (on the pressure female anthropologists face to have sexual relations during fieldwork, see Golde 1986, 1-18, 86; see also Bell 1993, 35; Hsiung 1996, 131).

After an incident in which I managed to make one man angry by refusing to go to his room to drink coffee, I decided to give up my efforts to

meet people at the tea stalls and instead, tried to get involved with people who lived in the same house as me. However, the other Western inhabitants¹³ — almost all of them men — knew my spouse and I became defined primarily as his partner, not as an individual person. In previous years, my spouse had made it clear that he was studying in India and did not want to be disturbed, and the residents of the house had learned to respect his privacy. The problem for me was that they applied this rule of privacy also to me. There I was, desperately waiting to be invited to dinners and other social gatherings but those invitations hardly ever came. Everyone assumed that my spouse and I wanted to be left alone and nobody seemed to think that they could invite me on my own, despite my eager efforts to explain this was the case. Moreover, I gradually found out that many people living in the house were envious of our apartment because it was bigger and nicer than the other apartments. Every now and then, our landlord told us how people kept asking him when we would leave and whether they could get the apartment.

4.4 Failures and Breakthroughs

Since I did not get the kind of material I was looking for in the house where I lived, I eventually returned to the tea stalls. I was feeling very frustrated during my first two months in the field since I did not have much contact with the people whom I wanted to study. I could not conduct interviews because I did not know whom to interview and I could not be a participant observer because I did not know when and where something worth observing was happening. However, I persistently kept on hanging out at the central tea stalls: I was observing albeit not participating. At this point, I felt ignored, lonely, and angry with myself and it was a very stressful time. Getting occasionally cheated by shopkeepers and having termites and rats in the apartment did not make the situation any easier. I even considered giving up the idea of doing a Ph.D.: I was already planning the e-mail that I would write to my supervisor explaining how I had failed in my research.

¹³ About twenty rooms were rented to Westerners; the only Indians living in the house were the family of the landlord.

4.4.1 Act 1

One day in February, someone knocked on my door. I was very happy to see that it was Celine¹⁴, a woman whom I had known four years earlier. She had been coming to Varanasi for several years, thus I was sure I could get to know many people with her help, especially because she seemed to know everyone. It took me almost two months to realise that Celine did not help me at all. Many times, I was with her when she met friends and acquaintances on the streets and by the river, but she never introduced me to anyone, as a result of which everyone ignored me. Moreover, she made me feel that I was not welcome to join in the activities of the Westerners that she participated in. I do not know why she behaved in this way: she seemed to define me as unwelcome as a friend; my role as a researcher was invisible at that time (see section 5.5). Nevertheless, I spent a lot of time and energy on her, hoping to meet people with her help and only after a long time did I realise that I was wasting my time. She would not help me, quite the opposite, as being with her prevented me from building contacts with others.

4.4.2 Act 2

In February I was at a tea stall where a Western woman was giving out leaflets about a ten-day yoga course. I got very excited: surely many Westerners would come to the course and I could get to know them. The course was, however, a disaster. First of all, the teacher was not able to do even the simplest poses himself and he preferred to talk about Hindu philosophy for hours. Moreover, to my great disappointment, there were not many participants in the course and those who came were fresh tourists who had come to Varanasi only for a few days. After the second day, I quit the course. I felt that I would not benefit from it in any way, neither in terms of yoga¹⁵ nor my research. However, the woman who had initially given me the advertisement about the course became one of my best friends in Varanasi later. Our friendship did not start until much after the course but it was the initial contact.

¹⁴ All the names used for Westerners in Varanasi are pseudonyms in this book.

¹⁵ I had been practicing yoga in Finland.

4.4.3 Act 3

At the beginning of March, there were concerts of classical Indian music that lasted for three nights. It seemed that all the Westerners of Varanasi suddenly appeared at the concerts and it was a good place to be seen, yet not to get into contact with strangers: I was still observing from outside although I desperately wanted to be more involved. In mid-March, I found out that there would be a concert where some Western musicians would ‘jam’ together with an Indian *tabla*¹⁶ player. I went to that concert and this time, I was in the right place at the right time. The modest restaurant where the concert took place was so full that not everyone could fit inside: there were more than a hundred Westerners there and they seemed to love the music, which was a kind of light jazz, the only Indian element being the *tabla*. As an anthropologist, I was interested in seeing how the audience used Indian concert customs: they garlanded the musicians¹⁷ and shouted a Sanskrit mantra¹⁸ used for praising exceptional persons, in this context the musicians. When the concert was over, many people stayed in the restaurant socialising with each other, and being there was the first breakthrough for me. I heard that in a few days, there would be a private concert organised by a wealthy Indian businessman who socialises a lot with Westerners. In fact, ‘every’ Westerner staying in Varanasi for any extended period knows him. I had heard about this man and his luxurious parties but I had never met him. Finally, I knew where to go and when.

4.4.4 Act 4

The concert took place on the roof of the businessman’s house. There was a stage where well-known local artists, who also teach many Westerners, played classical Indian music. More than a hundred Westerners were there. The concert lasted all night as is typical for concerts of classical Indian music, and in addition to the concert venue, there were a few rooms reserved for socialising. I left at six o’clock in the morning, as did many others, because I assumed the party was over at sunrise. I later heard that it had continued for two more hours and in the end, there had been *Sufi* music after which some people had become violent. The violent ending of the concert was widely talked about among the Westerners for a few weeks afterwards. As I could take part in these discussions, I was gradually

¹⁶ *Tabla*: A pair of Indian drums.

¹⁷ The intention of garlanding is to honor the receiver.

¹⁸ Hara, Hara, Mahadev.

starting to feel like an insider. After being at the concert, my status among the Westerners in Varanasi clearly changed. People recognised me and started to greet me and chat with me. I continued to go to the tea stalls and I was not so much of an outsider any more.

4.4.5 Act 5

One day in early April, at a popular tea stall, a Western woman kept staring at me. I had no idea who she was but it turned out that I had worked with her for a day in the charity project four years earlier. She remembered me although I did not recognise her. This was the final breakthrough for me: Fiona had been coming to Varanasi for about ten years and knowing her meant that there was no longer any doubt about me being ‘one of them’. Fiona started to invite me to parties she organised herself or knew about. I was finally at the centre of all the action. April and May were very busy months for me: at sunset, I would go by boat to swim with a group of Westerners. A few times a week, there was also a dinner gathering and/or music party in someone’s house, and I participated in almost all of them. Many Westerners greeted me the same way as they greeted the respected long-term sojourners: ‘*Mahadev*¹⁹’. This made me feel that I had become an insider among the Westerners in Varanasi. In addition to observing, I was finally also participating.

4.5 Access at Any Cost

Participating in certain central events and knowing Fiona were, however, not the only issues that eased my access to the social life of Westerners. When I was struggling to get involved with the Westerners, I realised that I had two disadvantages: my activities and my looks. First of all, among the Westerners, it is extremely important to have a ‘legitimate’ reason to stay in Varanasi, and usually this reason is studying classical Indian music. Doing social work, learning yoga, Sanskrit, Hindi or studying Hinduism are also valid reasons but music studies are definitely the most common. Having such a ‘legitimate’ reason is above all a means of distinguishing oneself from tourists who are only passing through. Every time I met a new person, they asked for my name, where I was from and what I was doing in Varanasi. At the beginning, I always answered by giving a short description of my research but it never seemed to satisfy the

¹⁹ *Mahadev*: Great god, Shiva.

questioners. However, I definitely needed a reason to stay as I was there for such a long time and, therefore, could not be defined as a short-term tourist. I realised that studying music might ease my access. I started to take singing lessons and indeed, this changed my status enormously. As a vocal student, I had a legitimate reason to stay in Varanasi and something to talk about with other Western music students. Although I had taken only a few lessons, I could talk about my practicing and the scales I was singing. As a woman, singing suited others' expectations of me particularly well: most Western women in Varanasi who are involved with music study singing or dancing, whereas men learn to play instruments (see section 9.2).

The other disadvantage was my clothes, and I ended up changing my wardrobe completely. During my previous stays in Varanasi, I had dressed in *saris* and ready-made *salwar kameezes*²⁰. I had wanted to dress the same as local women in order to show respect for their customs and in order to minimise harassment from local young men (on the sexual harassment that Western women face in India, see Hottola 1999; see also section 11.5). The Western women whom I was studying did not seem to feel a need to dress in ways similar to local women, yet the issue of clothing became important to me. Maybe my concern for dressing like a local woman has something to do with my anthropological education which has made me very conscious of respecting other cultures. Moreover, I definitely enjoyed the appreciative comments that I got from local men and women when I was dressed in local clothes (on a similar experience, see Berik 1996, 62). However, as I conducted the fieldwork, I faced a dilemma: should I show respect towards local cultures by following their style of dress or dress according to the fashion of the long-term Western sojourners whom I was studying? In this respect, my field research came down to a very material and corporeal level. I eventually ended up with a sort of a compromise: I chose to dress like the Westerners although my clothes were a bit more 'conservative' than theirs as I still wanted to please the locals as well.

Why was appropriate clothing so important then? As already became evident with regard to the significance of a legitimate reason to stay in Varanasi, the long-term Western sojourners want to distinguish themselves from short-term tourists and clothing is an important tool in this process. Therefore, I also had to differentiate myself from tourists in order to be considered a long-term sojourner. The fashion had, however, changed during the few years that I had been away from Varanasi and my old outfits were hopelessly old-fashioned. The Western women in Varanasi dress in similar ways although nobody ever defines any rules or styles aloud. In addition to differentiating themselves from tourists, the Western women

²⁰ *Salwar kameez*: a loose dress under which loose trousers are worn. In Varanasi, they are worn by girls and unmarried women; in some other parts of India, they are worn also by married women.

distinguish themselves from local women via clothing. The result is a peculiar combination of colourful ‘hippie’ clothes and Indian clothes²¹. Many Western women in Varanasi wear *salwar kameez* but the dresses are tighter and longer (or shorter) than those worn by Indian girls²² and the pants are tighter, or instead of pants, a *sari* petticoat is worn under the *kameez*. This latter style is actually rather awkward by local standards since it means that the woman is showing her underwear in public. Moreover, the Westerners seldom use *dupatta*, a scarf that covers one’s chest, which is an essential part of the *salwar kameez*.

Among the Western women, it is common to get clothes sewn by private tailors, and I also went to a tailor who made for me several outfits according to the fashion of the Westerners in Varanasi. My new looks definitely eased my access, which was manifested on the several occasions when people made positive comments on my clothing. With my clothes, I conveyed a message that I am a long-term sojourner. I was obviously happy that my research became easier when the Westerners appreciated my new looks but at the same time, I was feeling a bit embarrassed by my clothes when interacting with local people — not to mention the embarrassment of my Sanskrit-studying spouse²³.

Nevertheless, as I really liked my new outfits, I felt good that I had changed my clothing. I also felt comfortable with my singing lessons as I had dreamed of studying singing for years. Therefore, although I consciously changed my looks and behaviour, I did not become a stranger to myself. Obviously an anthropologist does not have to (or even should not) try to become the same as the people s/he is studying: participation does not mean ‘going native’. One uses oneself as a research instrument and even when adjusting to local norms, the researcher does not lose his/her individual agency (see, e.g., Johnson 1986, 177-8; Joseph 1996, 119). The modifications in my looks and activities eased my access to the social life of Westerners considerably and I therefore feel that it was

²¹ The fashion of backpackers in India is a very interesting phenomenon. There are thousands of tourist shops in India that sell hippie-style clothing to Westerners, and the same clothes are sold also in Western countries in shops called ‘Indian bazaars’. Those clothes are not worn by Indian people in India, yet for many Westerners, they represent ‘exotic’ India — defined in consumerist terms. Interestingly, when novice backpackers arrive in India, they often adopt the ‘hippie’ clothing within a few weeks. In Western countries, such clothes are usually used by youth of certain anti-consumerist subcultures. I am thankful to the students in my course ‘Women travellers in India’ at the University of Tampere in 2006 and 2008 who pointed out that clothes sold in ‘Indian bazaars’ are almost exclusively meant for women. The gendered aspect had not occurred to me before the course as also male backpackers wear such clothes in India.

²² Most mature local women in Varanasi wear *saris* and only unmarried girls dress in *salwar kameez*. The single Western women are anomalies, since they are too old to be unmarried, and those who have a partner should not dress as young unmarried girls (see also Vera-Sanso 1993, 162).

²³ Sanskrit is generally used and studied by the upper caste Hindus, and for them particularly there is a strict dress code.

important to go through with them. Moreover, adjusting gave me valuable information about certain norms among the Westerners. However, I was also very aware of my role as a researcher even when I changed my behaviour and looks to better fit the norms of the Westerners in Varanasi. Nevertheless, my stay in Varanasi was not a performance or a game and I truly felt at home there.

In addition to clothing, there are also other external signs that illustrate that one is a long-term sojourner in Varanasi. For example, it is important to have the correct kind of bag, which was a bit problematic for me since a proper bag was a cotton shoulder bag. I was, however, cycling a lot and often had my mini disc recorder with me; thus it would have been a lot more practical to use a rucksack, but it would have made me look like a tourist. Having a bicycle is an important sign of being a long-term sojourner and fulfilling this criterion was easy and very useful for me.

During my fieldwork, I started talking like the people I was studying, i.e. grammatically poor English sprinkled with Hindi expressions. I also realised that to some extent, I changed my gestures and behaviour, and all this was strongly gendered. It happened unconsciously but nevertheless, as a result I was acting in a different way at the end of my fieldwork than I had at the beginning of it. For example, I learned whom to greet and whom to ignore. In fact, I became unfriendly towards outsiders, that is, I adopted the very characteristic of the Westerners that had caused me so much trouble at the beginning of my fieldwork.

Certain rules and norms of the Westerners in Varanasi became painfully known to me when I was struggling to become involved with them. However, I got valuable information through my efforts, and the process of transforming from an outsider to an insider illustrates well many aspects of the life of the Westerners in Varanasi. At a personal level, I would have liked to skip the difficult experiences but as a researcher, they were useful (on this theme, see also Friedl 1986, 210). However, I must be careful to not make too far-reaching interpretations of my difficulties in becoming involved with the Westerners. I felt them so strongly because I desperately wanted to become a participant; the success of my research depended on my involvement with the people whom I was supposed to study. Other Westerners in Varanasi, however, have most likely not consciously tried to become insiders; they have ended up in the group without making as much effort as I did. Those who have not been easily accepted by the other Westerners have simply left; only I – as an anthropologist – had to stay even when I did not feel welcome. However, I later saw that also a few other people had trouble getting involved with the Westerners (see section 8.4.2). Thus, my experiences were not completely exceptional.

4.6 Hard Work, Hard Life and Strong Emotions

Having become an insider among the Westerners did not make my life easy. First of all, I was obsessed with being involved in every possible party and gathering, and I was constantly worried and feeling guilty about not being somewhere else. I did not especially select the events in which I participated but went to whatever gathering I heard about. I wanted to be invited everywhere and to be liked by everyone. I took it very personally when someone was not nice to me: I forgot that it is normal that not everyone likes everyone. I also forgot that one person can be only in one place at a time. When I think back now, I can see that forgetting these basic facts caused me a lot of unnecessary stress. I also forgot that a researcher is allowed to take breaks and rest. There were no weekends or nights off in my calendar in Varanasi, which was a mistake because towards the end of my fieldwork, I was feeling exhausted. Even if I sometimes took a day off, I felt guilty for not working, for maybe missing something relevant for my study. Therefore, I could maybe ease my physical tiredness but not the emotional one.

I participated in all kinds of social gatherings with the Westerners; I went to parties, picnics, concerts, boat trips on the Ganges River, etc. I also regularly visited people in their homes and just hung out with them. On a daily basis, I went to drink tea at sunset at the Westerners' favourite tea stalls on the river bank. My role among the Westerners was not so much that of a researcher but as 'one of them'. However, I often felt that I lived as an insider only every second day due to the fact that I needed time for writing my diary. For example, if there was a party that lasted until late at night, the other participants could sleep late the following morning and then continue to do whatever they wanted whereas I had to relive the party when I spent hours writing about it. In other words, I worked both in day- and nightshifts. In a few particularly socially active periods, I dictated my diaries to a mini-disc recorder but most of the time I wrote by hand or made the diary entries on a computer.

I lived with my spouse in a house that was about two kilometres away from the area where most of the Westerners whom I studied live. We chose our house because we knew the landlord from before and there was a beautiful view of the Ganges River from the apartment. Very rarely did any of those whom I was studying visit me, as they would have had to make a special effort to come to the neighbourhood. For one and a half months during the second spring of my fieldwork, I lived in the area where most of the Westerners live in a house where there are several apartments rented to Westerners. Living at some distance from the Westerners for most of the time had both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage was that I was able to have some peace and quiet for writing my diary and getting an

occasional break from my fieldwork. The disadvantage was that I had to cycle back and forth a lot, which was not very pleasant: the traffic in Varanasi is chaotic and in winter, it was sometimes raining whereas in spring, it was often extremely hot. Sometimes, I used cycle *rickshaws* but cycling myself was a lot faster and I was more independent, able to come and go as I pleased.

The fieldwork experience is a learning process drawing on all senses (see e.g., Okely 1992, 16; Rantatyrykkö 2005). The physical conditions are not easy in Varanasi. In winter, the temperature drops close to 0° C and in April-May, it rises to over 40° C. Living without hot water and with frequent long electricity outages is not easy for someone used to Western comforts, and these conditions caused me a lot of personal stress. Yet, the physical hardships and weather conditions affect the life of the Westerners a lot in Varanasi and therefore, it was important for me to live through all the hardships and seasons there and thus personally experience the severe conditions and their consequences. In many ways, I gathered embodied knowledge (see Okely 1992, 3) during my fieldwork as I felt the physical hardships of the life in Varanasi in my body and I was very conscious of my looks.

During my fieldwork, I lived through strong emotions. At times, I was sad, angry and frustrated, at times happy and excited. At times, I admired the people I was studying, at times I was irritated by them. All this is entangled in my field diary and affected the material I got. The difficulties I had in my 'entry into the field' affected my interpretations of the Westerners in Varanasi. At the beginning, my notes were written from my perspective as an outsider and this involves a lot of negative feelings and thus, also negative interpretations and critical remarks. When I became an insider, I was feeling happy and successful. At that time, my notes were written from a lot more positive perspective than at the beginning and my remarks were even admiring. My initial criticism changed to understanding; I appreciated the Westerners' lifestyle although I did not necessarily agree with them on everything. All in all, the various emotions I experienced during my fieldwork contributed to me gaining knowledge of the phenomenon I was studying (on emotions and anthropological research, see Behar 1996).

4.7 What about My Spouse?

I participated in as many social occasions as possible and eventually, I became known as the woman who never misses a party. Having such an active social life caused also confusion among the people I was studying.

My spouse was busy with his own studies and thus he did not have time for a busy social life. My new friends knew that I have a spouse but since they never saw him, our relationship started to look strange. They started to wonder if he was jealous or suspicious when I went out alone all the time, especially at night. After awhile, he had to come to a few parties and concerts with me in order to prove his existence and his approval of my behaviour. Yet, he often would have preferred to stay home.

My fieldwork was very hard on our relationship. At the beginning, I was constantly sad and angry; later, my work became so intense that I did not have time for my spouse. In a way, I did not have a private life at all. Almost everything I did was part of my research, and this was not easy for us as a couple. Anthropological fieldwork is often all-encompassing, stressful and time-consuming and being an anthropologist's spouse in the field can be difficult. Those being studied may expect the spouse to also be involved in the research, or at least in the social activities. One may even ask whether an 'ethnographic sub-genre consisting of the reflections of the "field-husband"' will appear (Bell 1993, 9; see also Friedl 1986, 211). Surely my spouse has a lot say about his role and experiences during my fieldwork. Luckily, he was a post-graduate student himself and he bore with me through the fieldwork and we even got married in Varanasi in the end.

Although it was hard, I am very thankful to my spouse for being with me in Varanasi. He had to suffer a lot from my anthropological failures as he was the only person there with whom I could discuss the problems and frustrations arising from my research. He also reminded me of my life outside the research. Moreover, my role among the Westerners was easier because of him: as a single woman it might have been more difficult for me to hang out with so many Western men without them interpreting my intentions incorrectly whereas now — after the initial confusion — the men did not see me as a potential sexual partner. Moreover, local people in our neighbourhood thought that we were married, which made my role a lot easier and clearer than it would have been if I had been in Varanasi alone. Single women are anomalies in Varanasi and their everyday life can be problematic sometimes (see Kumar 1988; Korpela 2006).

The marital status of the female researcher is often crucial in her field relations (Golde 1986, 10, 79). Several female anthropologists have written about how the presence of their father or husband has helped them to gain a respectable role in the field. However, a disadvantage may arise in that one is easily defined in subordinate terms in such a situation, even to the extent that the husband is understood to be conducting the research (see e.g., Berik 1996, 62-3). In my case, this did not occur, quite the opposite; my spouse was defined as subordinate to me as he was not socially active. Sometimes, the field-husband ends up working as a co-researcher with his

wife (see, e.g., Smith Oboler 1986). My spouse did not adopt such a role but at times, I was able to get from him information that I could not have obtained myself: as a Western man his interactions with Western men in Varanasi were very different from my contacts with them. Moreover, as his mother tongue is Hebrew, he could communicate with Israelis in a very different way from me. In addition, being his spouse gave me a special status among the Israelis. All in all, the existence of my spouse affected my role to a great extent both among the Westerners I was studying as well as among local Indian people and without him my fieldwork experience would have been very different. For example, his knowledge of classical Indian music was very useful for me as I was not familiar with it, but most of those whom I was studying were. His ability to speak Hindi also eased my everyday life to a great extent²⁴.

4.8 An Immoral Western Woman

With regard to local people and their norms, my work as an anthropologist studying Westerners was problematic for me at times. I often had to behave in ways that are considered improper by local standards. Defining certain actions as indecent is partly based on my own understanding but partly also on the feedback that I, and other Western women, got from locals in Varanasi. In my case, especially the family in whose house I lived was often giving advice as to how I should behave and look. In addition to dressing modestly, proper female behaviour includes limiting one's interactions with men in public to the minimum. However, during my fieldwork, I was very mobile and visible in public and I socialised a lot with Western men. Doing these things made me feel uneasy as I assumed locals disapproved of my behaviour.

Since the social activities of the Westerners in Varanasi often take place in the evenings and nights, I had to go out late and I regularly came home after midnight. Such behaviour is definitely not suitable for a good and respectable woman in Varanasi (which of course is not a homogeneous category, although it is here understood as such). In fact, men in our neighbourhood were questioning my spouse about my active nightlife and it proved useless to try to explain that it was part of my work. I thus got a rather questionable reputation in the area: a good wife should not go out alone, at least not on a daily (or nightly!) basis as I did. In short, it was

²⁴ I studied Hindi myself for some time while in Varanasi but had to quit because I did not have time for it.

impossible for me to meet the expectations of both the Westerners and locals, and it made me feel uneasy.

Why was it so important for me to get the approved of locals? I knew that locals often criticise the immoral and improper behaviour of Westerners in Varanasi and I did not want to be talked about in similar terms: I wanted to prove that also a Western woman can behave in appropriate ways. Penny Vera-Sanso writes about having had similar feelings when she was doing fieldwork in South India. She, however, also points out that Indians are tolerant; they are used to other castes, religions, tribes and nationalities having different ways of doing things (Vera-Sanso 1993, 162-165). Therefore, they are rather tolerant also towards Western ways of behaviour. I wanted to soften the boundary between myself and the Indians but from their point of view, such an act was maybe unnecessary.

A researcher often has contradictory relationships with those whom s/he is studying but in my case such relations were concerning also other people I encountered during my fieldwork. In particular, my contacts with local women suffered from my work. During my several visits to Varanasi, I had become friends with the wife of my landlord and especially with their two teenaged daughters. These women considered me part of their family and they enthusiastically looked forward to my visits. The wife liked me precisely because I was an 'untypical Westerner', dressing in Indian ways and behaving modestly. Also the daughters enjoyed my company. As unmarried daughters of a traditional Hindu family, they seldom left the house except for school, and I was their only 'friend'²⁵ who visited them at home. I used to enjoy spending long lazy afternoons with the women. However, the more involved I got with my research, the less time I had for them. This caused them to be angry at me and me to feel sad, guilty and frustrated. I genuinely wanted to spend time with them but it was impossible because I was so busy with my fieldwork. I felt that as a woman, I should have been more involved with local women, at least with the women in whose house I lived and whom I considered my friends. I felt I betrayed them; they had expected me to socialise with them. On the other hand, they were very impressed with my university career and I became sort of a role model for the younger daughter.

I had a troubled relationship also with another Indian woman. When I was extremely busy with my fieldwork and my spouse with his own studies, we decided to hire a cook: a woman came every evening to cook dinner for us and wash our dishes. I was embarrassed to hire household help. I felt uncomfortable with the fact that it would make us look rich in the neighbourhood. For the sake of our everyday life it was, however, necessary to get some help (on a similar situation, see, e.g., Friedl 1986,

²⁵ Our friendship is unusual since I am fifteen years older than them.

208). There was, however, no need to feel embarrassed. In India, it is rather common to hire domestic help if one can afford it, and as Westerners we were defined as well-off. My feelings of embarrassment were in fact more connected to my Finnish background as until very recently, hiring domestic help has been rare (see Julkunen 1995; 1996; Markkola 1994; 2002) and viewed in negative terms in Finland (see the ‘maid debate’ in Finnish media in 2000). In my relationship with our cook, class became a significant factor; my good intentions and efforts to socialise with local women did not include her. By the time we hired the cook, I was very busy with my fieldwork and as a result, my relationship with her was very distant: it was my Hindi-speaking spouse who communicated with her and acted as her boss.

4.9 Back in the Field: The Second Part

The first part of my fieldwork lasted from January till June in 2002. Then, I returned to Finland to apply for more funding and to review the material that I had collected. I returned to Varanasi in October and stayed until May 2003. When I arrived in Varanasi for the second time, I was immediately involved in the activities of the Westerners there. I was well informed about all kinds of social activities and I had a large network of social contacts. This time, finding interviewees and occasions for participant observation was no longer difficult.

Conducting the fieldwork in two parts was dictated by circumstances: the people whom I was studying are not in Varanasi during summer, therefore it was useless for me to be there either. Having a break from the field was useful in the sense that I was able to reflect on my experiences from a distance after which I was better prepared to continue my fieldwork. Moreover, in spite of the break, I did stay in Varanasi one whole season of the Western sojourners — from autumn 2002 till spring 2003. Due to research grants often being short-term, anthropologists are increasingly conducting their fieldwork in several short periods, and it is not necessarily a disadvantage but can have advantages as well (see Latvala 2006, 44). The advantages include the possibility to observe changes, or as in my case, the possibility to understand better the temporality and annual reorganisation of the group I was studying. Breaks also allow the researcher to reflect on the research from afar for awhile and thus to be better prepared for the continuation of the fieldwork, for example by adjusting one’s focus.

4.10 My Position as a Finnish Woman Studying Westerners in India

Many anthropologists have discussed the differences and similarities between the ethnographer and his/her subjects (see e.g., Caplan 1993, 21). In my case, this is a particularly interesting issue as I was not studying 'exotic others' but people who were in many ways similar to me, and had my life been different I could have ended up living in Varanasi like them. I was of the same age as most of those whom I was studying and after my initial problems, I behaved and looked more or less the same as them. I also felt myself that I fit in rather well. My role among the Westerners in Varanasi was that of an active participant. My work as a researcher made me different but at the level of everyday interaction, I was considered more or less the same as everyone else.

In a way, my research was similar to 'anthropology at home' as I was studying people whose cultural backgrounds were similar to mine. Nonetheless, the fieldwork took place in a far-away 'exotic' location, thus having characteristics of 'traditional' anthropological research. The particular characteristic of the phenomenon I was studying is that neither I nor my research subjects were living there permanently. Thus, I was 'a native' as much as anyone else there. Much discussion has taken place, in fact, on methodological issues of ethnography in tourism research (see e.g., Crick 1985; 1989; 1991; Nash 2001). Doing fieldwork is indeed tricky when studying tourists, who come and go while the anthropologist stays put, albeit not permanently. One can also ask how (or whether) an ethnographer is different from tourists (see e.g., Galani-Moutafi 2000). The Westerners in Varanasi, however, are not tourists passing through. Their stay and practices are characterised by much more permanency, and thus, the fieldwork experiences that I had were different from the experiences of those anthropologists who have been studying tourists or travellers (on the difference between (passive) tourists and (active) travellers, see, e.g., Boorstin, 1961; Pearce 1982, 36; Rojek 1993, 175; Munt 1994, 114-5; Thompson 2007; Mowfort et al. 2009, 130-147).

Various aspects of my identity became salient depending on the circumstances (on the shifting aspects of fieldwork identity, see Williams 1996, 72; Zavella 1996, 142). Gender was often primary but also my nationality became significant at times. I was the only Finnish person among the Westerners in Varanasi, which increased people's interest in me at times; in fact, I was often the first Finnish person they had ever met and many defined Finland as a very interesting and exotic country. Class did not play a significant role in my field relations as I shared a middle class background with most of the Westerners in Varanasi. Very few knew that I

had a research grant and thus got paid for being in Varanasi. Although my university education distinguished me from most other Westerners in Varanasi, it did not become very relevant as it was not revealed in everyday interaction. I shared with the Westerners the long-term experience²⁶ in Varanasi, and was therefore defined as the same as them. In fact, my research subjects did not seem to define me as a researcher, although they knew about it, because I was of the same age as most of them and acted more or less the same as them. Instead of being defined as a researcher, I became defined as a good friend of a European woman who has been in Varanasi for several years. For example, when she was away from Varanasi, people asked me about her whereabouts. The fact that we are both women was not a co-incidence; if we had been of opposite sexes, the definition might have been different. All in all, I conducted my fieldwork as a young Finnish woman. Someone else — of a different age, gender or nationality — would have experienced the life of the Westerners in Varanasi differently and would have gathered a different kind of material.

It is important to be aware of one's gender when doing anthropological fieldwork or any kind of ethnographic research, since gender affects such research on many levels. My participant observation and the interviews that I conducted are all gendered. As has become clear, I adjusted my looks and behaviour according to the expectations of the people whom I was studying and these changes were gendered. Moreover, my preparation for the fieldwork as well as my interpretations of the material gathered are gendered: I am a female researcher with a background in women's studies.

During my fieldwork, I learned that gender is a vital distinction tool among the Westerners in Varanasi (see section 9.3). When I started my research, I thought that gender would not play such an important role there. I even sometimes employed stereotypical notions of gender roles in 'oriental' India, forgetting that gender is present also in cultures that are more familiar to me. Since I did not know how significant gender is among the Westerners in Varanasi, I was not prepared for the consequences of my own gender for my fieldwork.

Being a woman had both advantages and disadvantages. In the beginning, I encountered problems with Western men who defined me as sexually available. On the other hand, as a woman I had more freedom in not following all the norms; as a man I would have faced even more pressure to conform. For example, the fact that my music studies did not last very long and I did not put much effort into them was tolerated so well partly because I was a woman; as a man, I would have had to show more

²⁶ Although the Westerners do not stay in Varanasi permanently, they nevertheless stay (repeatedly) for several months and their sojourn is thus clearly long-term, especially if compared with tourists.

commitment to music (see section 9.2). The fact that, as a woman, I had more freedom to not conform than I would have had as a man contrasts interestingly with what is usually understood to be the case with female fieldworkers, who are often expected to conform to local gender norms much more than male fieldworkers (Golde 1986, 5-6).

My closest friends were women and I spent a lot more time with women than with men. I was hanging out with men as well but did not feel very comfortable in all-male gatherings. My presence did not seem to bother the men but I felt I was in the wrong place. I was always welcomed to such get-togethers of men if I appeared at the door, yet, usually my presence was ignored: the men did not talk to me but neither did they seem to mind me being there. I was an observer but not a participant and it made me feel uncomfortable. I felt that with women my participation was more relaxed and I definitely played a more active role when interacting with women. As a woman I got to know a lot more about women's lives in Varanasi. I learned a lot about men's lives as well but this information is surely different from what a male researcher would have obtained²⁷.

To some extent, my fieldwork had characteristics of a performance. I chose, or felt compelled to choose, a strategy that included me performing a certain role, especially regarding looks. During my fieldwork, I adopted and utilised gender-specific behaviour and clothing, and as a result I became very aware of ways in which I was *doing gender* (see Butler 1999). For example, I once noticed that when I was talking with a particular man on the phone, I was flirting in a way that I would never do in Finland. Somehow, I unconsciously adopted a girly way of talking and acting with him in order to please him. It worked well and he was very helpful in my research but I feel a bit embarrassed about my behaviour towards him now. Diane Wolf writes that although feminist anthropologists consciously resist essentialist thinking, they 'have often used essentialist notions of womanhood in a strategic manner during fieldwork, to gain access and acceptance' (Wolf 1996, 9). This is precisely what I did in the case described above and it makes me feel uncomfortable. I used my gender in order to be able to get research material and in order to maintain good relations with my (male) informants. However, I cannot know what kind of material I would have gotten, for example, from this particular man if I had not played the 'gender card'.

I was studying a group in a cross-cultural setting and at the same time, I was myself situated at a crossroads of cultures. This made my role in the field complicated and multilayered. It was not simply a question of the Finnish Mari changing into the Mari of India. Instead, I had to give up

²⁷ Especially my spouse's experiences in Varanasi suggested to me that a man would have acquired different information from what I got.

the role that I had adopted in Varanasi during my previous stays and adopt a new role as an anthropologist studying Westerners. Entangled in all this was the Finnish Mari who is not a permanently fixed entity either, and who even has an Israeli spouse. Throughout my fieldwork, I was balancing between four cultures (the Westerners' culture in Varanasi, the local culture in Varanasi, Finnish culture and Israeli culture). Obviously, those four cultures are not monolithic but at the level of my everyday experience in Varanasi they often appeared as such. Somehow, through trial and error, I managed to find a way to navigate between and among the four cultures (on the multiple roles of an anthropologist, see Golde 1986, 13).

Our personality and actions affect our fieldwork but at the same time, the fieldwork affects us (see Whitehead and Conaway 1986, 1). My fieldwork became a personal process of change. Diane Freedman writes that 'ethnographers are not like chameleons. We cannot change our personalities to fit our field situations' (Freedman 1986, 357). As has become evident in this chapter, I was a bit like a chameleon during my fieldwork. Some of the changes that took place in me during the fieldwork also affected my life away from Varanasi. After the fieldwork, I was not the same person as before. For example, my views on many issues changed as a result of living with the Westerners in Varanasi. Yet, the changes I went through were relatively easy for me and I did not feel uncomfortable with my new ways. Freedman continues by stating that 'we can learn more about who we are when we see ourselves through the double-sided looking glass of our ethnographic lens' (Freedman 1986, 357; see also Whitehead and Conaway 1986, 8; Johnson 1986, 178). I definitely learned a lot about myself during my fieldwork, especially regarding my work ethic and relationships with people.

4.11 The End

Research is always a long process. My fieldwork started when I boarded the airport bus in Finland — or even before, when I was planning my research — not when I finally participated fully in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi. I painfully learned to be patient. It took time to get involved in the activities that I was hoping to study, and now I understand that without the initial difficulties and my solutions to them, I would have missed something crucial about the people that I was studying. I knew that anthropological fieldwork can be difficult but I assumed that my situation would be different because I was studying people whom I thought were familiar to me. I learned that it is not wise to make such assumptions. Researchers doing anthropology 'at home' emphasise the fact that the task

of the researcher is to see the strange in the familiar, that is, things are not as they first seem to be (see e.g., Passaro 1997). I shared with my research subjects the experience of being a Westerner in Varanasi but I did not always share their views and norms. Moreover, their conventions and practices were not necessarily the same as what I had been socialised into (on the surprising differences between oneself and those one is studying with regard to anthropology at home, see, e.g., Zavella 1996, 139-143). A researcher should never try to predict what will happen during the research; in the end, research is about new discoveries, not about old assumptions. However, despite my wrong expectations, I eventually succeeded and collected very rich material. I am glad that I did not give up my research, although I thought about doing so more than once during my first months in the field.

It was +48°C when I left Varanasi. The fieldwork had not gone as planned but my backpack was nevertheless full of diary notes and interview discs. I was very sad to leave. I had become a participant among the Westerners in Varanasi to such an extent that leaving the life and my friends there was very difficult. In fact, returning to my life in Finland was even harder than it had been to settle down in Varanasi. That, however, is another story.

In fact, my fieldwork did not end when I left Varanasi. I am still in e-mail contact with many people whom I knew in Varanasi: sometimes they write from Varanasi, sometimes from around the world. I have met a few of those people later in Europe and Israel, and occasionally I meet other Westerners who have lived in Varanasi at some point. I have also returned to Varanasi twice after finishing my fieldwork. Therefore, it seems that my fieldwork never ends, which means that I constantly get updated on my research topic. This also illustrates how the personal and professional are deeply intertwined in this kind of anthropological research: friendships and information flows continue even when the official fieldwork ends. In other words, anthropological research is not 'outside' one's personal life but becomes a part of the persona.

5. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

5.1 Research Questions

In this research, I first ask why some Western people prefer to live in India instead of their countries of origin. I elaborate on their lifestyle choices and ask whether the phenomenon can be called a counterculture and whether the Westerners can be defined as lifestyle migrants and if so, what kinds. The second major question is whether the Westerners in Varanasi form a community and if so, what kind. On a more analytical level, I ask how we can conceptualise the phenomenon of Western people preferring to live in India over staying in their countries of origin and what role communality plays in the phenomenon. In addition to asking what the phenomenon tells about those people, I also ask what it tells about communities and mobile people in the contemporary globalising world.

5.2 When and How the Research Was Conducted

I conducted the fieldwork for this research in two parts. First, I was in Varanasi from January to June 2002. The second part of the fieldwork took place between October 2002 and May 2003. Altogether, I spent thirteen months in Varanasi. In addition, I had previously been in the city several times for shorter visits. My research is ethnographic. The methods used are interviews and participant observation. While in Varanasi, I actively participated in the life of the Westerners and wrote detailed field diaries on my participant observation there. The diaries consist both of personal notes and notes related to my research, and they are hundreds of pages long. My aim was to write more or less everything that I did, saw, heard, felt and experienced. In addition, I did fifty-six interviews (see the next section). Three of those interviews were conducted in the United States during spring 2004, where I interviewed people who had been in Varanasi in the early 1970s. The interviews also include nine interviews of local music teachers who have Western students and landlords who rent rooms to Westerners. I did not include in the research material of this dissertation interviews of Indians nor the countless informal discussions I

had with them. They gave me valuable information on the local point of view, but here I want to concentrate on the Westerners. Moreover, in order to deal properly with the locals' views, I would need to collect a lot more material.

5.3 How the Interviews Were Conducted

Among my Western interviewees in Varanasi, there were seventeen women and twenty-seven men. The difference in the number of male and female interviewees reflects the proportion of men and women among the Westerners in total. The interviewees were originally from Israel, France, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Greece, Spain, Australia, Canada, Japan and South Korea. All the interviewees were staying in Varanasi for at least two months (most for longer) and had been there for long periods before as well. I chose my interviewees according to who were 'available' to me, that is, people whom I knew or whom I heard about from others. Most were active participants in the social life of the Westerners in Varanasi. However, I also interviewed a few long-term sojourners who did not take part in the Westerners' social life there. Some of the interviewees I had not met earlier but most of them I knew rather well, or at least recognised prior to the interviews. Some of the interviewees, especially quite a few women, were my friends before the interview; many became my friends after the interview (the ongoing relationships between the interviewer and interviewee is typical for ethnographic research (see Davies 1999, 94). Almost all the interviews took place in the apartments of the interviewees; a few were conducted in my apartment. Except for one, all of those whom I asked agreed to give me an interview. One person made it clear that she would not want to be interviewed; thus, I never even asked her. One did not allow me to record but preferred that I only write notes. All the other interviews are recorded on tape (during the first part of my fieldwork) or mini-discs (during the second part of my fieldwork). I used open-ended questions, modifying them according to the interviewee, but to a large extent, I asked everyone the same questions. The shortest interview lasted for about forty minutes, the longest for almost five hours. I conducted the longest interview in three sessions and the remaining ones in single sessions. On average, the interviews lasted for a bit more than an hour. The interviews were conducted in English, which is not the mother tongue of most of my interviewees²⁸ and many of them do not speak it grammatically correctly. In this book, I have corrected only the most obvious language

²⁸ Five of my interviewees were native English speakers.

mistakes in their speech patterns to make the quotations more comprehensible to the reader. Whenever I refer to particular people or use quotations, I use pseudonyms. After each interview quotation, I have also marked the person's age at the time of the interview. I have not revealed their nationalities in order to protect their anonymity. Moreover, nationalities are not significant in the context of this research (see section 11.4), and I am not making comparisons between the various nationalities among the Westerners in Varanasi. When I illustrate my analysis with interview quotations, I usually also include the interview question in order to show the interactive context in which the comment was made. If the question is missing, the reason is that the interviewee was talking freely for awhile without me posing any questions.

My gender was significant with regard to the interviews: it affected the way people talked to me and what they said. First of all, my interviews with women were more intimate than those with men. Perhaps I was feeling more comfortable with women myself but it seemed that also my female interviewees felt at ease chatting with me and telling me about their lives. Many women said to me after the interview that it had been nice to have female company; it is rare because there are more Western men than women in Varanasi. I also shared with my female interviewees the problems that women face in Varanasi (especially harassment by local men, see section 11.5). It seemed to be easy for the women to talk about this with me since it was obvious that I had also had difficulties with local men. The interviews with women often felt like therapy sessions: the women used them as opportunities to reflect on their views, life choices and inner selves. The interviews with men were a bit more formal: men were answering my questions instead of taking the opportunity to reflect on their inner views. But men also talked with me quite freely; after all, almost all of them knew me from before, although I was not their close friend.

In addition to having an effect on the interview situations, my gender often affected the very moment I requested an interview. One young man agreed to be interviewed by saying 'How could I say no when a beautiful woman wants to sit with me and listen to me?' I felt that many men agreed to be interviewed by me as a favour to 'the harmless pretty girl' whereas women saw the interviews more as a chance to share their thoughts and reflect on their lives and experiences. The nine Indian men whom I interviewed treated me as a professional researcher as they often seemed to take the interviews very seriously and sometimes also hoped to benefit from my international connections. They also seemed to be careful of the image they presented of themselves, that is, they were careful with how much they revealed. Moreover, they did not reflect on or problematise the themes but gave me very straightforward answers.

I had a confusing experience with one of my Western interviewees. She willingly agreed to be interviewed but we did not finish the interview the first time because it took her almost two hours to tell her life story (for others it usually took only a few minutes). She told me that it was the first time she had really thought about how she had ended up in India. A few days after the interview, she came to ask me if she could borrow the tape because she would like to hear how her story came out. I did not have a double copy but I felt compelled to lend the tape to her as she has a right to hear what she had told me. When I went to get the tape back, she told me it had broken and she had thrown it away. She claimed not to know that tapes can be fixed²⁹. I do not know whether the tape really broke or whether she simply did not want me to have it. All in all, telling her life story had clearly been a vital experience for her. She did not seem to be keen to continue the interview and in the end, I did not manage to interview her again. None of my other interviewees wanted to listen to the tapes/discs although I offered that opportunity to all of them.

In the interviews, I first asked about the interviewee's personal details and life story. The subsequent questions covered the following themes: reasons for being in India; views on the 'West', India and Indians, and one's current life situation; activities in Varanasi; and one's future plans. For those who were involved in music studies, I posed a separate set of questions related to music. The list of the interview questions is available at the end of this book (Appendix 1). The interviews were rather casual occasions in spite of the fact that I was recording them. I also got a lot of information by asking people questions and by asking for clarifications in my everyday interaction with them. In other words, I sometimes directed conversations with people with the research in my mind (see also Davies 1999, 94-95; O'Reilly 2005, 115). Out of the forty-four Westerners whom I interviewed in Varanasi, forty-one appear in this book at least once, and I use quotations from eight interviewees four times or more.

5.4 Organising and Analysing the Data

I have transcribed all the interviews and coded them by using the computer software Atlas.ti. I have also coded the diaries using the software. The list of codes is available at the end of this book (Appendix 2). The computer software has helped me to organise the vast material, making it easier to analyse. When analysing quotations within a certain code, I have

²⁹ Tape recorders often 'eat' tapes in India and it is very common to fix such 'curly' tapes.

then manually separated the material into smaller sub-codes, thus getting a better idea of variations within certain codes. When analysing the interviews, I have concentrated mostly on how the interviewees talk about themselves, India and Indians, their lifestyle and the choices they have made. When analysing the diaries, I have paid attention in particular to common practices and activities as well as interaction among the Westerners.

5.5 Ethical Dilemmas

A basic ethical rule for anthropological fieldwork is that those being studied know what the researcher is doing. In my fieldwork, I was not always able to follow this rule. Many Westerners in Varanasi did not always know or understand that I was doing participant observation and that I wrote notes on the life I lived with them. The interviews were clear: interviewing people was 'real' research. Many people probably thought that my work consisted merely of interviewing. Only a few people made it clear that they understood my participant observation. Some of them kept teasing me on various occasions by asking whether I was working and talked with them only because of my research. I felt a bit uncomfortable with such questions and always answered something vague about enjoying their company also without research intentions. I had assumed that the 'news' of my research would spread fast in such a small group but I was wrong. Many people were surprised that I asked to interview them although I had earlier interviewed their friends, which suggests that people did not talk about my work with each other.

Whenever I met new people, I told them about my research, that is, I did not intentionally keep it a secret but there were situations in which not everyone present knew that I was an anthropologist. The fact that many people did not know about my participant observation is clearly an ethical problem but I believe it is not very significant since when I told people about my research, they usually got excited; they were happy that someone was interested in their lifestyle. Many also stated that they did not mind being the focus of my research. Moreover, they willingly, sometimes even enthusiastically, gave me interviews; some even volunteered to be interviewed. Moreover, when I returned to Varanasi twice after finishing my fieldwork, many people impatiently asked for my book as they were keen to read it. Even people whom I had never met before had heard about the Finnish anthropologist who was studying the Westerners in Varanasi, and they were very interested in meeting me. It is obviously rewarding to a

researcher when those being studied are enthusiastic about the results of the research³⁰.

Confidentiality is obviously a basic rule in this (or any) kind of research. After all, despite the fact that most Westerners in Varanasi knew each other, I knew more about my interviewees' personal lives than anyone else there. I always emphasised that I would not publish anyone's names and that nobody else will listen to the interviews or read my notes. Near the end of my fieldwork, one woman mentioned that I am a very suitable person to do this kind of research because I am so quiet, thus, I do not tell people's 'secrets' to others. She did not seem to be aware of the fact that as an anthropologist, I am compelled to 'remain silent'. Nevertheless, this comment together with a few similar ones made me feel that I had gained the trust of the people whom I was studying. In this dissertation, I preserve everyone's anonymity by using pseudonyms and by changing details that could reveal who they are. Tuula Juvonen has discussed the issue of anonymity in interview research and she points out that pseudonyms do not prevent insiders from recognising each other. She argues, however, that it is not necessarily catastrophic as often those insiders know each others' 'secrets' already prior to the research. (Juvonen 2002, 66) The same applies to most of my research material. As most Westerners in Varanasi know each other, they may occasionally be able to guess who I am writing about but I have written the text in such a way that one cannot follow any individual's story throughout the text. Moreover, instead of referring to certain people as originating in specific nation states, I use terms like 'country of origin', 'the West' or Europe.

As I was personally so deeply involved in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi, my personal relationships also became research material: my friends were also objects of my study. This was quite an awkward and confusing situation. To those people with whom I became closer, I revealed many things about myself. Yet, I never felt I could openly tell them about my frustrations with the research. I was afraid that their respect for my work would have suffered if they knew how frustrated I was³¹. Moreover, I could not talk about myself and my views to all my interviewees although they revealed their personal lives and views to me, as the interviews would have become extremely long. Moreover, the researcher giving information about him/herself can be felt to be a nuisance by the interviewees (Wolf 1996, 20), and it is therefore not always an ideal way to conduct interviews.

³⁰ After having finished my master's thesis on the experiences and views of European women in Varanasi (Korpela 1999), I brought a couple of copies of it to Varanasi. I later heard that the Westerners had been reading it together — at least the interview quotations. They had been enthusiastic about my thesis although I had been afraid they would get angry at me since not all my conclusions were very positive.

³¹ In similar terms, Latvala has written about how she did not tell her interviewees about her marital problems although the interviewees were discussing their marriages with her (Latvala 2001; 2005 251-2).

In similar terms, I often felt that my interviewees were not necessarily interested in knowing about me and my views, at least not during the interviews, which were defined as a time and space for them to talk about themselves with me.

An ethical dilemma that I encountered during my fieldwork is that I participated in a few very intimate events in Varanasi. A few Western babies were born during my fieldwork and in two cases, I was present in the hospital very soon after the deliveries. The rooms of the mothers became sites of big social gatherings and as a researcher, I found it interesting to see who was there and what they did. However, I do not use such material in my dissertation as I was clearly participating in those events as a friend, not as an anthropologist. Nevertheless, these occasions do support my arguments drawn from other, less intimate, situations. It is an eternal dilemma for anthropologists that the people s/he is studying also become her/his friends (see e.g., Joseph 1996, 120). Especially feminist researchers have discussed this issue and, for example, Wolf warns that 'friends end up knowing more about each other than do conventional researchers' (Wolf 1996, 20; see also Zavella 1996, 140). However, since we anthropologists often need close contacts in order to get the kind of information we want, we cannot, and should not, avoid becoming friends with those we are studying. Nonetheless, it is important to be aware of the fact that one's research intentions initiate and affect such relationships (see e.g., Joseph 1996, 120).

At times, I felt uncomfortable in playing a certain role in Varanasi and not being 'truly myself' (as if such an entity existed). First of all, I was constantly careful (even too much) of not doing something that would look odd in the eyes of those whom I was studying. Secondly, the Westerners in Varanasi thought that I am a real party fanatic although in fact it was for research purposes that I participated in so many parties and other social activities. Moreover, at times, I felt I had to limit myself in expressing my opinions. Sometimes I was afraid to express my disagreement with someone since I felt it could ruin my relationship with that person and maybe even with some others, since the social circles are so small among the Westerners in Varanasi. I felt very vulnerable at many points during my fieldwork (on researchers' feelings of vulnerability, see, e.g., Caplan 1993, 24), therefore, I consciously avoided confrontation and I was not always completely honest with people. In fact, my spouse also felt that he had to be careful about his behaviour and words when he was with the people whom I was studying. My interviewees also seemed to presume that I shared their views and opinions (on this theme, see Juvonen 2002, 72). Such a presumption was natural as I lived and behaved to a large extent the same way as them. It is true that I shared some of their views but not all; yet, I never challenged them aloud. I believe that even if I had done so,

they would probably not have been offended because they were very confident in their lifestyle choices and values. Nevertheless, I did not want to take such a risk when I was in the field.

The Westerners in Varanasi will not benefit from my research in any way, except for maybe getting an entertaining book to read about themselves. Some mentioned that it is good that more people will know about their lifestyle so that they can start to live likewise. The Westerners in Varanasi believe they have made good and right choices in life. In this book, I want to show their point of view and discuss the context of their lifestyle, linking it to relevant theories. Therefore, it is time now to let the Westerners speak for themselves.

6. SEEKING REFUGE FROM TIME AND PLACE

Happy about my life, yes. [...] Otherwise, I wouldn't live this life, I wouldn't do this. (Marco, 34)

My interviewees in Varanasi claimed to be happy with their lives and they often explained their lifestyle as a simple choice: life is dull in the West; therefore, they prefer to live in India where there are 'more vibes'. It appears to be a very simple solution but if one looks more carefully, the phenomenon has much more to it than merely a matter of individual choice. In this chapter, I elaborate on the reasons the Westerners in Varanasi gave for having left their countries of origin and continuing to live in India now. I first illustrate the discourse through which the Westerners in Varanasi justify their lifestyle choices. I then discuss the context in which and the position from which they are talking. In a separate section, I discuss the economic factors that contribute to and facilitate their lifestyle. Subsequently I discuss the ideals the Westerners in Varanasi aim to live out and claim to have found in India. At the end of the chapter, I discuss whether their lifestyle can be called countercultural.

In this chapter, I rely mostly on my interview material. In their interview talk, the Westerners construct a certain discourse. The questions that I ask them obviously influence their talk, but their answers reflect themes and words that they use also in their interaction with each other. A significant factor in their interview talk is the fact that since English is usually not their mother tongue, they have learned to explain their life choices in a certain way also linguistically when they have met others who share a similar lifestyle. In addition to interview quotations, I occasionally refer also to the practices and everyday talk of the Westerners in Varanasi in this chapter. In my understanding, discourse not only consists of words but also of practices (see e.g., Jokinen et al. 1993). When I use the term 'Westerners in Varanasi' instead of 'my interviewees', I refer to discourses that take place also outside the context of the interviews. When I use interview quotations to illustrate a certain discourse, a rather simplistic view often appears. It is, however, good to keep in mind that in spite of such simplistic statements, my interviewees' views are not necessarily as

one-sided as it may appear here; their discourse — like any discourse — contains also contradictions.

6.1 Big Bad West

Q³²: What do you think about your country of origin now, would you like to live there?

A: Em... no... not now.

Q: Why?

A: Boring. (Naima, 31)

My interviewees often said they had felt unsatisfied with their lives in their countries of origin and explained their stay in India as a choice to search for a better and more interesting life. When I asked them why they had left their countries of origin, they often described them in very negative terms. In this talk, ‘the West’ often became understood as one, that is, my interviewees did not only talk about their countries of origin but about ‘the West’ in general. In the following, I elaborate on the ‘West’ that they criticised and wanted to turn away from.

Q: Why you do not want to stay in your country of origin permanently?

I don't like this mood of all people becoming old the same, the same trouble, the same way: buying a TV, buying a house, getting a very big ...[loan] ... and after you work 10, 12, 20 years for paying for this [...] They chain you for all your life and after they start to say “ok, you have the house but you need also one big DVD player and one very beautiful screen” [...] a ‘beautiful car’ and you pay a lot of money, another loan... (Anton, 32)

The lifestyle in the West is not for me [...] People end up just working and they don't seem to really know why they are working any more. It's for the second car or the third fridge or the new, bigger television or... (Paul, 47)

When I asked my interviewees what they do not like about the West, all of them mentioned consumerism. They were not anti-materialistic in the sense that they would have completely refuted modern commodities but they emphasised being content with fewer material goods than ‘average Westerners’. Freedom is a significant aspect in their anti-materialism: loans tie one to a job. In addition to opposing materialism verbally, the anti-materialism of the Westerners in Varanasi also has a practical basis as their mobile lifestyle places constraints on material accumulation. Some of my

³² Q: the interviewer is talking; A: the interviewee is talking.

interviewees mentioned that possessions would tie them to a specific location and they want to avoid such a situation: consequently, one should own only what one can easily carry along.

Here [...] I don't have fridge, nothing, electricity... but here is a good life. [...] The house here is different [from the West]. We don't have any normal bed or [...] nothing in the house or furniture. I don't need that now. [...] Like it's really minimal, I even don't try to fix something in the house because I don't know if I will come here again. (Sandra, 31)

Sandra gave this comment when she was talking about why she likes India. The quotation reveals the temporal character of the life of the Westerners in Varanasi: none of them stay there permanently and although they keep returning year after year, they can never be sure of their return, which affects the consumption habits of many of them. All in all, they explained living with few material possessions as an individual choice which has resulted in a good life. Another central theme in the answers to the question dealing with the negative aspects of the West is the critical attitudes towards wage work that most of my interviewees displayed: most of them saw having a permanent job in very negative terms.

Q: Why don't you want to stay in your country of origin?

You have to go to work at nine o'clock in the morning and work five days a week, have only a few weeks' holiday. To me it just felt like a bad choice in life to work all the time. (Tom, 36)

It's not possible, working every day. Every day waiting for the five-week holiday. It's not possible. (Ricardo, 41)

The main argument against work among my interviewees is that work would tie them to unwanted routines. In today's flexible labour markets, however, they are actually ideal workers since they do not even want permanent contracts. Instead of feeling oppressed, they felt they have the power to decide when to work. In other words, they explained their lack of permanent jobs in positive terms, emphasising their own agency, although the other side of the coin may be that permanent jobs were not available to them.

Their negative conceptualisations of wage work may partly result from the fact that without (much) professional training, the Westerners were usually working in their countries of origin in rather menial jobs. However, their own explanation for their situation was that working prevents their self-development. Many of my interviewees said that people in the West are blindly following the same routine as everyone else, which prevents them from realising their true selves. One of my interviewees used

the term 'dead alive' when she referred to people in her native country. Others had very similar ideas.

Q: Do you feel different from people in your country of origin?

A: I feel different from the normal people everywhere. [...] If you sit by the television, eating the same hamburger like your neighbour, watching the same television show as your neighbour, you even start to look much the same after some time. Probably think the same, talk the same, feel the same, love the same things, have the same political ideas more or less. (Rafael, 40)

Q. Why do you not want to stay permanently in your country of origin?

A: I get this overwhelming feeling in my country of origin that people are [...] doing a prison sentence: They are in, they got this amount of time they gotta do. They are just trying to get through this the best they can [...] It's all about making the time pass. (Jamie, 26)

A particular aspect in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi is that instead of aiming to change 'the prison of the West', they escape from it, that is, they have chosen the option of leaving. Many claimed that one cannot lead an alternative lifestyle in their countries of origin.

Q: How is your life different in India compared to your country of origin?

A: It's difficult to live in a different way in my country of origin. [...] If you want to live and be happy there, I think you have to live the way people are used to living. (Sara, 32)

Q: Why don't you like life in Europe?

A: If I have to be in their world, I have to become the same [as them]. Otherwise everybody is just trampling on me. (Olga, 48)

My interviewees often saw leaving their country of origin as their only option to improve their lives as in their understanding, there is no space for an alternative lifestyle in the West. A couple of them, however, disagreed with this: according to them, one can lead an 'alternative' lifestyle also in the West but it is a lot easier to maintain such a lifestyle in India.

Q: How is life in India different from your country of origin?

A: Some people I know there [in Europe] make very beautiful things but then, it takes your whole life...I mean it takes many years to build [that life]. Here [...] for us, it's less expensive, we can study, we can live as we like [doing] art [...] much more easily than in Europe. (Laura, 25)

Q: Why do you not like living in your country of origin?

A: [...] The alternative is always there. [...] You can also find the alternative without coming to India. There are people that think like you in

India [but] you can also find people that think like you in Europe. Of course it's harder to find these people but there are [people]... that are not fully [completely] in this system and [don't follow] what the government wants from them. There are people like this also. But sure it is harder, sure everything is more expensive, you have to work harder to have a nice life. (Iris, 33)

The reasons given for not being able to have a nice life in the West are simple. The Westerners in Varanasi often referred to the rat race: everything is expensive, thus one has to work hard in order to get money, and as a result, one does not have time to enjoy life, and eventually one becomes unhappy. Again, there is the implicit idea of a prison, being stuck in the dull everyday routines without the ability to jump out.

Q: What is important in life for you?

A: I was going shopping in the supermarket and I was looking at some fifty-year-old people and they all seemed to have something to regret. (Sara, 32)

My interviewees said they do not want to regret their lives, therefore, they have changed the situation drastically by leaving or at least this is how they articulated their current situation. Having the ability to improve their lives had become an important part of their self-definition as well, as becomes evident in the following.

6.2 Me, Myself and I

A lot [of people] are not happy. They listen to me saying, maybe I'll go to India for three months, and they say "oh, I wish to go, ah, you are lucky" and blaah blaah but "hallo Bombay, *calo*³³ Bombay" I say, "no, come on". They prefer one newspaper, one big sofa, putting their legs up, watching TV until bedtime, sex once a week after the news of the night, Friday...Because the day after you do not work, so you can sleep a little bit more and you can enjoy half an hour more... yeah, it is like this for a lot of people. (Anton, 32)

Q: Are you different from people in your country of origin?

A: I think yes, I'm totally different. [...] At least I do something interesting for me. I meet different people. (Marco, 34)

³³ *Calo*: Let's go.

My interviewees often claimed that people in the West are unhappy without realising it. Many considered themselves very lucky to have left behind the boring and meaningless life in their countries of origin. India had offered them a chance to search for something different, and better. In their talk, the self becomes presented as an active agent: although they may not initially have made a clear choice to leave the West, they now have made a choice to take distance from it and not to return permanently. Many of my interviewees defined themselves as courageous and independent in comparison to people who had stayed in their countries of origin. When talking about lifestyle choices, they held a very individualistic view. In their understanding, the possibility of and responsibility for having an interesting and meaningful life lies with each individual. By using such a discourse, they ended up defining themselves as active agents in opposition to passive people who blindly follow routines, and in their case it was not only a matter of words but also of actual practices.

Q: What do you think people in your country of origin think about your lifestyle?

A: [...] I think everybody can have this lifestyle if they want it. You want it, you can do it. The only thing is you might have to make some money first. (Ivan, 45)

Q: Did some of your friends come to India?

A: [...] It's a decision, if you want to take also the decision to travel and to work, you can take this decision. If you don't want to, if you prefer to have one house, a fixed house, a fixed job...this is your decision. Don't say after [that] we always take holidays. [...] I think it's really jealousy because they feel sometimes bored in Europe and they cannot leave, they don't have the power to leave everything. (Julia, 27)

Envy comes up a lot in the interviews; many of my interviewees said that many people, even their good friends, are envious of their free and interesting lifestyle. Some went even further by stating that their way of life is very disturbing for people who stay in the West because it forces them to evaluate their own (unhappy) life.

A: [...] it scares people that you don't think about this.

Q: About the material future?

A: Yeah, it scares people, your existence scares people. (laughs)

Q: Aha. You are the problem because you are different.

A: You are treating [questioning] other people's lives, all that they are based on...Suddenly you come and with, even with your humility, you know, not disturbing or something but only they see you [and the way you live], everything [in their lives] vooh, falls [they see how meaningless their own lives are]. (Stefan, 32)

Prior to this dialogue, Stefan was telling me that it is impossible to explain his lifestyle to ‘normal’ people in his country of origin since they cannot understand it. I do not have research material on outsiders’ reactions to the lifestyle choices of the Westerners in Varanasi. However, when I have talked about my research in various situations — as a teacher, researcher or in personal interaction with people — it has become evident that the phenomenon provokes strong reactions and many negative feelings; several people have condemned to me the life of leisure that they believe the Westerners in Varanasi lead³⁴. Also a journal article about Finnish youth in Goa caused a heated internet debate about the lifestyle and most commentators condemned the lifestyle as irresponsible; those people are wasting their lives instead of contributing to Finnish society, it was argued (Helsingin Sanomat Kuukausiliite 3/2005) ³⁵. Therefore, the lifestyle indeed seems to disturb many people; whether it questions or reinforces their own choices is a question that I do not have the material to answer.

Many of my interviewees claimed that leaving their countries of origin had helped them to realise their true selves, and many also seem to have become empowered in the process, that is, they emphasised acting as individual agents.

Q: Do you feel you have changed in India?

A: Yes, a lot.

Q: How?

A: When I was child, I thought I have to do what everybody does [...] Everybody has a job, everybody gets married, everybody gets a career...But when I started to live here, I realised that it’s best when I do what I want. I should do what I want. (Naima, 31)

[Ivan is telling his life story]

I was really sort of unsatisfied with that life, I felt trapped but I didn’t know what to do and then, the opportunity for travelling came up, and I knew this was, I had to learn about myself, to find out what makes me happy. (Ivan, 45)

The goal is happiness and individual satisfaction: it is all about the self. Most of my interviewees claimed to have changed fundamentally in India.

³⁴ In addition to criticising the life of leisure, I have repeatedly encountered an assumption that the Westerners are in Varanasi because of hash. I definitely want to refute such an interpretation: there are a lot more comfortable places to use drugs in India than a city of over a million inhabitants. I also want to point out that although smoking hash is rather common, hard drugs are not tolerated among the Westerners in Varanasi.

³⁵ I have been told that such a debate exists also in the French and Israeli media.

Q: You said you have changed here a lot yourself [...] What has [happened], how has India affected you?

A: I cannot imagine my life without coming to India. It is really true. I don't even remember who I was before I came, and I'm one of the guys that had more interest in life [than many other people] before I came here. I travelled a lot, I'd been in many places, I knew many people, had many friendships, but the change that I went through in India was so strong, I don't even remember what was before, it sounds like a vague dream. It happened [to] somebody else. (Rafael, 40)

Seeing India as a turning point in one's life is obviously a realisation that has come afterwards. In the interviews, my questions contributed to such a discourse since I specifically asked whether the interviewee felt s/he had changed in India. However, the Westerners in Varanasi often talk in such terms also outside the interview context. Some Westerners have also ended up adopting an Indian name³⁶. Adopting a new first name illustrates well a change of identity. Very often, the Westerners in Varanasi used the talk about the changing self also to justify their stay in India as the change was always understood in positive terms.

Q: How is your life different in India from your country of origin?

A: [...] After India my life changed.

Q: How has India changed you?

A: ...More relaxed... and more, I feel more happy, happier and relaxed. (Maya, 31)

Most of my interviewees said that India had made them more relaxed and content. In making such comments, they implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, criticised Western societies where people are nervous and worried. The ethos is that one has to learn to be one's true self and one has to learn to be free. Moreover, it turns out that places matter: even when one had learned these things, many considered it difficult to maintain the attitude in the West when they went back. Many said that after spending some time in the West, they have to leave again in order to be able to live as their true selves. Here, the West is again understood as a place where it is impossible to lead a happy, and in this case also true, life, and consequently, staying in India is a justified choice.

Although many of my interviewees said that India had changed them dramatically, some claimed to always have been different: they had felt uncomfortable in their countries of origin whereas in Varanasi, they felt content and happy. In both cases, defining oneself as different from 'ordinary Westerners' is significant. In addition to one's talk, being

³⁶ The Indian names that they adopt usually carry a Hindu or Buddhist spiritual meaning or a meaning connected with nature.

different became manifested in one's actions, above all by having moved away. Travelling to India is crucial here: many of the Westerners in Varanasi had travelled in several countries (see section 7.1) but they claimed to have found their true selves only in India.

Q. Why don't you want to stay in Europe? [...] Which things do you appreciate there and which things do you not like?

A: It's again my experience as a Westerner but I feel it is more easy for me to really try to be what I am here than in the West somehow. Although we are so much educated in this idea of individual freedom and we are free to some extent; but still, I don't know how many of us have the ability [...] I don't know many people in the West [who] really try to be what they are really. (Marcel, 31)

Marcel's comment reflects a commonly shared view among the Westerners in Varanasi: there is a core self to be realised and knowing one's true self does not come automatically. In this line of thinking, being in India is not about changing oneself but about realising one's true self. All in all, the emphasis is on the self.

Q: Why do you not want to stay in your country of origin permanently?

A: I feel more true here. (Anton, 32)

Q: How is India different from other places where you have been?

A: India brings you to yourself. [...] For this India is very good, to find yourself. (Thomas, 28)

India is in fact a very particular place to search for oneself. Started by theosophists and adopted by the *gurus*³⁷ of the hippies, ancient meditation and yoga techniques have been developed to meet the needs of Westerners who are searching for themselves. In addition to such a conscious search for the self, many of my interviewees claimed that one is bound to change in India even without spiritual searching.

I think... if you are receptive to Indian culture, Indian culture will change you in some ways definitely. It has to be, it's such a strong culture. I would say that you're gonna have to change if you spend some time here in India. (Marcel, 31)

A significant factor is obviously that one is forced to redefine oneself when one encounters the 'Indian other' (see section 11.3). In fact, a common travellers' discourse considers India not as 'a place you simply

³⁷ *Guru*: a (spiritual) teacher or guide.

and clinically “see”: it is a total experience, an assault on the senses, a place you’ll never forget’ (Lonely Planet 1997, 16), and the Westerners in Varanasi seem to share this view.

A few of my interviewees mentioned that India offers a possibility for a new beginning, an opportunity to create a new self as one can leave old expectations and roles behind.

Q: Why do you not want to live in Europe?

A: [...] Here you can invent yourself, you can create yourself. You come here, nobody knows you, you can put the best of your behaviour [forward], you put the best of your character. [...] And nobody doubts what you are. You can create your own story in this country, you are free for this. Sure if you don’t follow [act according to] your words, I mean if your actions don’t follow your words, also very quickly you see here, you can collapse very quickly also in India. [...] Here it’s to do a lot with your, always working on yourself and always working on your character. (Olga, 48)

Olga’s comment indicates a kind of a game with the self, yet, at the same time she is referring to the concept of a ‘true’ self when she mentions working on one’s character. All in all, the Westerners in Varanasi often defined a trip to India as a trip to oneself, and the emphasis on individuality was a recurring theme in their talk. Moreover, although they often articulated their stay in India in terms of criticism towards the West, it was also very much a question of finding and defining the (Western) self (see also section 11.3).

6.3 Situating the Criticism: Is It Really so Simple?

Many Westerners in Varanasi claimed that since they did not like the West, they left it. But is it really simply a matter of choice? In the following, I elaborate on what they are actually criticising and in which context they are posing their criticism. I argue that their criticism is very situated. I also discuss the significance of the self becoming celebrated to such an extent.

The Westerners in Varanasi often aim their criticism at ‘Western lifestyles’. In this discourse, the ‘West’ is understood as one. First of all, national differences seem to disappear. Secondly, on closer look, the criticism is aimed at certain kinds of middle class lifestyles and values. In fact, such a lifestyle exists not only in the West but among middle classes everywhere, including India (see e.g., Eriksen 2004, 389). The Westerners in Varanasi, however, are typically not in contact with middle or upper

class Indians³⁸ (see section 11.2), and therefore, they do not confront their lifestyles. They are, however, very familiar with the middle class lifestyles in Western countries, especially since most of them come from middle class families themselves.

When the Westerners in Varanasi talk about their lifestyle choices, they construct a very positive discourse and put much emphasis on individual choice. Their lifestyle and the choices they celebrate, however, also have structural constraints. As Nigel Fountain puts it: ‘in the 1960s the young dropped out, in the 1980s they are dropped out’ (Fountain 215 in McKay 1996, 52), and the latter seems to apply also in the new millennium. The Westerners in Varanasi say that they wanted to escape a lifestyle that in their view was dull but one can also argue that especially the young ones use the critical discourse as a coping strategy in a situation where they have realised that they cannot reach the standard of living that their parents have, at least not in the near future. An interesting similarity with the colonial era is the fact that then, India offered jobs for the younger sons who did not have career opportunities in Britain when the older sons inherited the family land (see e.g., Cohn 1987, 432). In very similar terms, also now India seems to serve as a relocation destination for young people who might not be employed in their countries of origin or who have been disappointed by the lack of opportunities there — with the significant difference that now they are not employed in India either and they do not even want to have (permanent) jobs. Many Westerners in Varanasi thus explain their somewhat disadvantaged situation to their own benefit, resulting in a positive self-definition. They even go so far as to claim that others are envious of their lifestyle, thereby turning a possible criticism into a positive self-definition.

A significant aspect of the phenomenon is that the majority of my interviewees had left their countries of origin when young and thus had not themselves experienced the life that they were criticising; they wanted to ‘run before it is too late’. Their criticism can sound rather simplistic but it becomes meaningful if understood as a tool for defining themselves and the choices they had made. Seeing ‘the other’ in simplified and homogenising terms is a common tactic in constructing a distinguished self (see e.g., Grossberg 1996, 94). Here, the ‘other’ is actually also the ‘potential self’. This idea suits well the understanding of the Westerners in Varanasi occupying a liminoid stage from which they critically view the mainstream society into which they do not want to (re)integrate.

When considering my analysis, it is important to keep in mind that the material was collected in Varanasi. I captured the discourse and

³⁸ The Westerners’ music teachers are in fact middle class but they become defined as representing the ancient musical heritage (see section 9.2) instead of a modern middle class lifestyle.

practices of the Westerners at a specific time in Varanasi but I cannot know how they would have talked when back in the West. For example, my interviewees shared an anti-materialistic discourse. Yet, at least for some, their anti-materialistic lifestyle seemed to be location-based, that is, they lived without many material goods in India, but they appreciated, and even expected, material comforts when in their countries of origin. Therefore, their anti-materialism — and possibly some other values that they praised — were situational. Nevertheless, the anti-materialistic discourse was a central factor when they explained and justified their lifestyle choices. Yet, at the same time, money matters: without money, the Westerners in Varanasi could not maintain their lifestyle, and many of them constantly plan how to earn money. In fact, they are economically relatively privileged as becomes evident in section 6.5.

6.4 Situated Individualism

Being in India is a very individualistic project for the Westerners in Varanasi. In the interviews, there was much talk about finding, defining and changing the self. My interviewees emphasised being individual agents making their own choices in life. The emphasis on the self is typical for our era: the self has become a project that needs to be developed and reflected upon (see, e.g., Giddens 1991). It is remarkable that the Westerners in Varanasi have gone to India to realise their individuality. Indian cultures are usually not characterised in individualistic terms but quite the opposite: in orientalist discourse, India represents collective values whereas the West is described in terms of individualism (see van der Veer 1993, 37; Turner 1994, 54; Goody 1996, 246). As outsiders — far away from home and commitments there — the Westerners in Varanasi are able to gain freedom: because they do not belong to the local social networks, commitments and expectations there, they are free to pursue individual happiness. Locals are definitely not free in the same sense in Varanasi. Therefore, when the Westerners realise their own individuality in India, it is actually not Indian culture that has made them free but their outsider — liminoid — status.

In a different cultural surrounding far away from one's country of origin, it is crucial to define one's self (see also section 11.3). Therefore, staying in India becomes actually a trip to the self and for the self. The issue of finding oneself through travelling is widely discussed in travel research (see e.g., Bruner 1991; Wang 1999; Desforges 2000; Elsrud 2001; Noy 2004; Harrison 2006; in a colonial context: Ghose 1998a; 1998b). Thus the Westerners in Varanasi are not distinct in this sense. Yet, they are different from tourists and travellers in the sense that they have chosen to

stay in India repeatedly for very long periods. Realising the self that they have found through their travels thus requires recurring sojourns in India.

It is also interesting that although the Westerners in Varanasi define individualism as a Western characteristic, they claim to have found their true selves in India. In the West, they explain, people follow empty routines without being true to themselves. Here, the Westerners define themselves as opposite to ‘average’ Westerners. In other contexts, however, the ‘other’ against which they define themselves is Indian people (see section 11.3). All in all, the emphasis on individualism allows them a positive self-definition as active agents: they have done something to improve their lives.

The Westerners in Varanasi use the anti-Western discourse in order to justify their lifestyle and they use individualistic discourse in order to justify their personal life choices. The lifestyle, however, also has its material conditions.

6.5 Economic Privileges

...how rich we are [in Europe] and we are miserable. When I see people who are very poor, they don't have even food, and they wake up in the morning and they sing for sunrise. They don't have any kind of stress, and they don't have even five plates of food. I understand, if you accept yourself and your life, you can be happy even if you don't [have] things like this. (Aron, 42)

I learned that you can be poor and very happy. You can have nothing but really enjoy life. This is a real big thing for me, to see that. In the Western world, people seem to be unhappy...many... but they have everything. They have everything but they talk so negatively...about their daily life, about other people. [...] So fake and false and a lot of lying, not my style any more. (Ivan, 45)

The anti-materialistic discourse of the Westerners in Varanasi takes place in a very particular context. The Westerners in Varanasi often idealise poverty. For many of them, poor people represent an authentic living that they admire. It is easy to blame them for naivety but refusing to acknowledge the hardships of poor people's lives may actually be a coping strategy. I argue that this applies in fact to backpackers, and although the Westerners in Varanasi were not backpackers any more when I conducted my research, most of them had been earlier and even at the time they occasionally used backpacker facilities in India. One is bound to see much extreme poverty in India, and many Western travellers feel overwhelmingly helpless when confronted with it. In order to be able to

enjoy their trip in India and keep their mental balance, many backpackers opt to ignore the poverty. The ethos is that since one cannot help everyone, it is better not to help anyone. Backpackers are often very annoyed by beggars and refuse to consider their situation seriously (on tourists and beggars, see e.g., Crick 1989; Hutnyk 1996, 67-69). On the other hand, doing charity work is part of the India experience for many backpackers (see Hutnyk 1996) but those short periods of work do not necessarily result in deep understanding. Such work may nevertheless silence one's conscience so that afterwards one can happily continue one's privileged trip, relaxing in tourist restaurants and guesthouses. Moreover, having done such charity work often raises one's status among backpackers. The long-term sojourners in Varanasi are more confronted with the reality of poverty than backpackers but they do not let it affect their lives negatively, and one way to do that is to adopt an idealising 'the poor are happy' view instead.

When talking about their anti-materialistic views, many Westerners in Varanasi claim that also local people live a non-materialistic life. In their talk, they do not seem to acknowledge an important difference, namely that those Indians who live without material comforts are usually poor: it is not their choice to have few material possessions whereas the Westerners have consciously chosen such a way of living, and they always have the option of buying at least necessities. Voluntary poverty is a very different experience from forced poverty: choosing not to buy something is definitely not the same as not being able to purchase that item. Most of the Westerners in Varanasi enjoy a basic security that the local poor lack: they are a flight ticket away from Western health care and friends and relatives there. In case of extreme trouble, most of them can count on their relatives sending them money for a return ticket.

The fact that India is a very cheap country for Westerners is not insignificant in this lifestyle. Even people who are poor in their countries of origin can act rich in India. In fact, already in the colonial era people from lower ranks could become elite in the colonies (McClintock 1995, 238), and similar processes are not uncommon today either. Living costs are very low in Varanasi; with less than two hundred euros a month, one can afford a rather comfortable life there. In spite of idealising poverty, the Westerners in Varanasi are not willing to give up all material comforts. In a way, they make poverty a game, since they voluntarily give up certain things, such as cars or televisions, but by no means are they aiming at an ascetic life. Although the Westerners claim to oppose consumerism and materialism, they do not live very ascetically in Varanasi. First of all, although they initially arrive in Varanasi with just a backpack, they gradually accumulate goods — mostly household utensils, mattresses, carpets and bedsheets — which they store in huge tin boxes while they are away from Varanasi. On the one hand, their standard of living is lower than

it would be in their countries of origin; for example, they have simple gas stoves and very little, if any, furniture and no hot water in their apartments. Moreover, many of them use only one pair of shoes and have very little clothing. On the other hand, they can afford eating in restaurants, using laundry services, getting their clothes sewed by tailors and buying relatively costly Western food products (for example, tofu, yellow cheese, olive oil and brown bread). Some Westerners also hire household help, in most cases a cleaning lady, and some women get massages regularly. Being served, if one can afford it, is common in Indian cultures, and labour is cheap and easily available. Thus, it is not very surprising that the Westerners use such services. However, they could not afford them in their countries of origin and India thus allows them a higher standard of living. Therefore, their practise of a modest lifestyle is selective, and can thus be conceptualised as a game: they choose in which respects they act poor but can afford even luxuries in Varanasi when they so wish. In other words, they set the rules of the game themselves: it is the Westerners who define what the idealised poverty means.

The Westerners in Varanasi thus live rather privileged lives compared to many locals and even compared to many middle class people in their countries of origin. Most of my interviewees also admitted that they are materially richer in Varanasi than they would be in their countries of origin.

Q: How is life in India different from life in your country of origin?

A: Here we have a much better way of living than if we were in our country of origin. Like the food, it's a very good quality of food, we have every day whatever vegetables we want. When I want to buy cheese or milk, then I buy it, or honey or, very good products. If I was in Europe, it would be very expensive and I could not get it. Like I don't drink tea every day with honey in it, I put sugar, it's cheaper. Many things like this. (Laura, 25)

Some Westerners who have children mentioned that people in the West often think that their children learn to be non-materialistic in India but in fact the opposite may easily happen as everything is cheap there, and therefore children often get new toys.

In fact, richness and poverty are problematic issues among the Westerners in Varanasi. The Westerners pose their criticism of the West from a privileged economic context; they have chosen poverty but are by no means in circumstances of material deprivation. This results in a dissonant position, especially in terms of self-definition. Compared to the majority of the locals, they are rich but many claim to be rather poor and marginalised in their countries of origin (see section 7.4) because they do not have permanent jobs or housing. Consequently, they define themselves

as poor and emphasise having voluntarily chosen a non-materialistic lifestyle. In the Indian context, however, their self-definition as poor does not apply very well and they end up in a contradictory situation. After all, they can afford air fare and they have a lot more money at their disposal than many locals with whom they are in contact. Nevertheless, many Westerners in Varanasi want to hang on to their status as poor and many are very sparing with their money. It is obviously true that the longer one's money lasts, the longer one can stay in Varanasi, but many locals find their stinginess strange. The fact that the Westerners in Varanasi define their poverty vis-à-vis the West, implies that they feel a certain fundamental belonging to the West, despite often claiming otherwise and despite criticising the West.

The contradictory economic status of the Westerners is evident when they pay for rickshaw rides. There are no fixed rates for the rides and paying causes constant headaches for Westerners: tourists often bargain harshly for every ride they take but most long-term sojourners in Varanasi know the local rates and pay without negotiating with the driver, which often leaves the drivers somewhat unhappy since they often try to get more money from Western customers than they get from Indians. A few long-term Westerners, however, always pay extra for their rides, saying they feel sorry for the rickshaw drivers; usually those Westerners have been in Varanasi for a particularly long time and such 'generosity' is by no means shared by all the long-term Western sojourners. Such people also often emphasise that they are not rich but the rickshaw drivers are extremely poor and miserable and the rides are very cheap anyway. In other words, they recognise their economic privilege, although most Westerners in Varanasi refuse to recognise it when they pay low fares for rickshaw rides.

Economic capital is indeed interesting in the case of the Westerners in Varanasi. They possess rather little economic capital in Western terms but rather high economic capital in Varanasi terms. In terms of economic rationality, they have actually made a rational choice by moving to India, where their money lasts longer and allows them a higher standard of living than it would in their countries of origin.

Q: Why don't you want to stay in Europe?

A: [Here] I don't have to suffer from economic pressure. [...] In Europe, the cost of living is so high, it's very difficult. (Marcel, 31)

In addition to the economic privileges as foreigners, Westerners in India enjoy other privileges too. For example, they can reserve train tickets

under the tourist quota³⁹, which often allows them to get into fully booked trains that Indians cannot get tickets for.

Although many Westerners in Varanasi admit the significance of economic factors and acknowledge their privileged position in India, they emphasise that being in India is not (merely) a question of cheap living costs but an escape from the West in search of ‘more vibes’, that is, a more meaningful life. Cheapness facilitates the lifestyle but the main point is the criticism of Western societies. Some of my interviewees, however, admitted that their reasons for being in India are not necessarily very idealistic. Such comments form a clear counter-discourse to the talk of the majority of Westerners in Varanasi.

To be honest, part of the reason for me coming to India is totally an escape from the fact that I couldn't find anything in the West that I could do to maintain a lifestyle that is easy. The travelling I enjoy and I enjoy the easy lifestyle of travelling. I can't really enjoy the West. [...] So I came here to India, it's a good option, makes my life interesting. (Tom, 36)

Tom made this comment when he was telling about his lifestyle and how he supports himself economically. Again, the self is presented as an agent who is actively pursuing an interesting, and easy, life.

Many Westerners in Varanasi are aware of the criticism that their lifestyle raises in their countries of origin (see section 6.2). Usually they justify their lifestyle by emphasising having found happiness, having realised their authentic selves or having found something meaningful to do, which in most cases refers to their music studies (see section 9.2). These reasons are very individualistic, whereas anti-Western talk raises the criticism to a different level. One of my interviewees employed yet another reasoning.

Q. Would you like to live here [in Varanasi] all the time, like twelve months a the year?

A: This is not possible, not possible. Because [...] we need money. [...] I cannot do business in India Money from Europe, I think we should give them [Indian people] much more. We take so many things from them. I mean white, Western people, and [...] we have everything because they are like this. They don't have enough to eat and we have much food, because we take everything from them. [...] The biggest diamond in the world belonged to India but now it belongs to the Queen of England. [...] Many [Western] people complain: [...] ‘you take the money [from the West] and you go to India to spend’. [...] Or they say, ‘Indians steal from us, one package of cigarettes is twenty rupees and they ask for twenty-two’. I think

³⁹ Indian trains usually have a certain number of seats reserved for foreign tourists. In order to be entitled to purchase tickets for those seats, one has to show one's foreign passport and tourist visa.

they should steal much more. Much, much more. We need many, many years to pay them back all this. [...] I don't have any guilt about this. I take the money from there [the West], I come here [India] and I spend here. [...] I prefer it like this, [...] they don't need money there [in the West], they have [it]. (Aron, 42)

The above comment is exceptional in my material; most of my interviewees did not think that far but I believe many would agree with the statement if asked directly. They genuinely seem to believe that their lifestyle and above all their interest in Indian cultures benefits India. Here they actually acknowledge their economic privilege; they bring money to India.

6.6 The Alternative Path: Ideals and Values

I will invest my time in enjoying [the] *good* in life. (Sebastian, 26)

I've understood that life should be a celebration. (Ivan, 45)

The above quotations reflect well the life philosophies of the Westerners in Varanasi. In the following, I discuss what such statements mean in practice. In addition to having found their true selves, the Westerners in Varanasi claim to have found an ideal, more meaningful life. In this section, I elaborate on the values that the Westerners in Varanasi appreciate and the ideal life that they claim to have found there.

6.6.1 Time is Not Money

There is a fisherman somewhere on the beach by the south sea. An American tourist comes to him and asks: 'What are you doing?' The fisherman replies: 'I'm relaxing. I catch fish every day for an hour, and then I sell it.' The American gets excited to give him advice: 'If you fished for eight hours a day, you could buy a big boat and you could make more money. Then, you would be safe and you could relax'. The fisherman looks at him and replies: 'That's what I do now.'

One of my interviewees told me this anecdote⁴⁰. The story illustrates well the ethos among the Westerners in Varanasi: their ideal is an easy and

⁴⁰ Versions of the same story are told in various parts of the world.

relaxed life. Instead of worrying about the future, the emphasis is on enjoying the present.

Time is a recurring theme in my interviews, and the Westerners' attitudes towards time are visible also in their everyday actions in Varanasi.

Q: Why you are now here instead of your country of origin?

A: [In Varanasi] I've just got this beautiful freedom, I can talk to people, I've got time to...If I meet somebody in the *chaishop*⁴¹, I can sit for an hour if I like, and just have a chat with them or whatever. [...] I just love that freedom, I just go, what shall I do today? It's nice. (Paul, 47)

Having plenty of time is an important distinguishing characteristic of these Westerners, in contrast to 'ordinary Westerners'. Many of my interviewees said that a busy lifestyle makes people unhappy whereas in Varanasi, one can be happy as life is more relaxed. One of my older interviewees, who had given up a successful career in his country of origin when he moved to India, mentioned that he sees his mother more now living in India than he did when he lived in the same city as she. His life used to be so busy that he did not have time for her whereas now, he can spend a lot of time with her whenever he goes back.

The Westerners' pace of life in Varanasi is slow, and they live without strict daily plans. They appreciate the fact that they have plenty of time in Varanasi, and they are not forced to do anything but can use their time as they please. Their everyday life is to a great extent based on the idea that everyone has plenty of time. Visits are often unplanned and frequently last for hours. The life is also very impulsive: one is supposed to be able to participate in common activities on short notice. When I was sometimes unable to do so (because of my research *work*⁴²), I got comments like 'How it is possible that someone does not have time in Varanasi?' For the same reason, making interview appointments was often problematic. Many of my interviewees did not want to make exact plans but vaguely told me to come around to check if they would have time. Even if people sometimes make appointments for specific times, those appointments are never very exact; the actual activity often takes place a lot later. Living a hectic and scheduled life is an aspect of the 'Western life' that the Westerners in Varanasi definitely want to avoid. In any case, it would be practically impossible to live a scheduled life there, since conducting everyday tasks, such as shopping or cooking, takes so much time, and local people are usually not punctual either.

⁴¹ *Chaishop*: tea stall.

⁴² Crick has written that 'Tourists are at play; fieldwork is work.' (Crick 1985, 81; 1991, 16) Although my research subjects are not tourists, their lives are characterised by a certain playfulness (see chapter 8) as a consequence of which, my *fieldwork* activities did not fit well into the lifestyle I tried to share with them.

The Westerners in Varanasi are very aware of the accusation of laziness that they often face in their countries of origin⁴³. Also many locals in Varanasi view the long-term Western sojourners as lazy, since they are spending so much time in India without working⁴⁴. By emphasising the positive sides of having plenty of time to do what they enjoy, the Westerners defend themselves against these accusations: they are not lazy but they do things that make them happy and give them personal satisfaction. Having plenty of time does not mean that they are not doing anything. Instead, they are not tied to tight schedules and can concentrate on their music studies (or some other activities) according to their own wishes. Moreover, having plenty of time does not mean that life is boring: quite the opposite, all of my interviewees emphasised that their life is more interesting now than it used to be when they lived in the West.

Time is relevant also with regard to attitudes towards the future.

You asked me just before how India has changed me... I live mostly in the present now. Before I was living in the past or the future but never in the present because we are not used to this in Europe. After, after, after, and you don't live. It's happening to you, you don't see because you feel 'I have to do this for this and this.' Even when you start working, you put money aside, just for when you get old, it's crazy. You never live the time you have here. (Sara, 32)

Q: What you do not like about your country of origin?

Europe is a place, [...] [where] from the spring, they prepare for the winter. They cut wood, you know, they do this, they do that, just prepare. And from childhood, they prepare for old age, isn't this mad? [...] There is only retirement. (laughs) (Raymond, 48)

People are more afraid. They buy insurance. Ok, you have to work now to pay when you will be old. This is good, I mean, I don't say it's bad but I say it's bad to be too much worried about this and to avoid doing things because of this. We don't know what will happen in life, we don't know what will happen. [...] So yes, I think about this but I don't want to think too much and I don't want all this to block me in what I like to do. (Thomas, 28)

The Westerners in Varanasi often emphasise the importance of living in the present, and being content with the present results in very relaxed attitudes towards the future. Most of my interviewees claimed not to have clear future plans. In their understanding, such plans are futile as one cannot control what will happen.

⁴³ This came up in the interviews but above all in my personal interaction with the Westerners.

⁴⁴ Such views were expressed to me by many locals in personal communication.

Q: Do you think you'll want to live in your country of origin in the future?
A: I decided to take life like, take one stone, throw it and walk up to the stone. Take the stone again and throw again. (Anton, 32)

Q: Do you want to say something to conclude the interview?
A: I listen to myself when I speak and I hear my answers are very open because I think I need this a little bit. [...] Leave it as it is and continue our lives...*Shanti*⁴⁵. (Hanna, 24)

The ethos among the Westerners in Varanasi is that when one does not have plans for the future, one is open to new opportunities and new directions in life, and such openness results in a happy life instead of one being chained to meaningless routines 'in prison'. Such comments also indicate that my interviewees have a lot of confidence in their future.

[Alberto is telling his life story]
I never refuse in my life [to] have an experience, I always follow my heart. (Alberto, 47)

Q: Do you have plans for the future?
A: There was a time in my life when I was saying no to the proposals of life, to the gifts of life, or opportunities but then I learned to say yes to all. [...] To sail. It's good because I have learned to develop more confidence, and I know, it just comes the right way. [...] I know it comes the right way, so it's good, not to have to worry. (Margaret, 56)

In addition to affecting attitudes towards the future, living in the present affects attitudes towards the past. Personal histories and backgrounds seem to be rather irrelevant among the Westerners in Varanasi. In the interviews, their life stories are usually very short and such issues are not discussed in their everyday life with each other, as a consequence of which the Westerners in Varanasi do not know much about each others' past or background. I interpret this as a way to emphasise the importance of living in the present. Moreover, I argue that being defined in those past terms may seriously conflict with their present self-image, and since many claim to have found their true selves, the past becomes insignificant as it represents the 'false' self' (see also D'Andrea 2007, 32).

An interesting aspect of my interviews is that many of my interviewees were not able to give definite answers to the question of how many times they had been in India. Initially, it looked to me like bad memory but I then understood that it is not necessarily a matter of forgetting but points towards their emphasis on living in the present. Counting the number of trips or years is not very relevant for them, and

⁴⁵ *Shanti*: relaxed, peaceful.

instead of bad memory, it is rather a matter of ‘forgetting’ by choice. This is a point that clearly distinguishes the long-term Western sojourners in Varanasi from tourists: in the backpacking experience one is usually very aware of the time one has spent at the destination and the longer one has been on the road, the more prestige one gains (Munt 1994, 111). In the case of the Westerners in Varanasi, not talking in such terms may be a way of expressing that one is a long-term sojourner instead of a tourist, that is, one has been in Varanasi so many times that s/he can no longer count how many. Having plenty of time and appreciating the present are thus important values among the Westerners in Varanasi. In addition to these, they share other values regarding the ideal life.

6.6.2 Authentic Living: Nature, Spirituality and Social Contacts

What I like the most here [in Varanasi] is maybe that you are not disconnected from nature. In a Western city, you never know how full the moon is, and it never has any effect on your life. [...] [Here] it’s a huge difference: no moon, full moon, rainy season, hot season, people behave differently. [...] You’re very connected to nature here, as much as you can be in a city. [...] There are monkeys, and birds and cows. They are a living part of the city. Without these animals everything would rot, everything would be stinking. They also give milk, even the cow shit is used for burning, for fertilising ... as a mosquito repellent. [...] In a way, it’s men and nature living together in symbiosis. I like many things here, they eat from banana plates, and [...] everything is recycled. (Noel, 31)

When my interviewees criticised the West, it was usually defined as an artificial urban space whereas Varanasi represented a more authentic and ‘natural’ life. In Varanasi, cows, water buffaloes, dogs, goats and rats are visibly present in the streets and one must constantly be aware of monkeys that may steal one’s food. Thus, nature — in terms of animals — is very close to one’s everyday life. One also feels the rather extreme climatic changes profoundly since the Westerners in Varanasi do not have air conditioning or proper heating. Many of them also claim to aim at a ‘natural life’, which means, for example, that many prefer homeopathic or ayurvedic medicines to Western medicines, and some grow herbs and other plants on their balconies. Many also appreciate the fact that one can buy unprocessed milk and butter in Varanasi, and one can cook with natural ingredients instead of buying ready-made processed food.

For many, India also represents a return to the past.

When [...] I tell my mother or the men, how the life is here, they are not so surprised because they had the same fifty years ago, before the war, the same...like milking the cows [...] My mother [milked cows by hand] until

marriage... mountain life. It is almost the same life, also here. I saw oil lamps and, it was like that. [...] It was the same when they were children. (Anton, 32)

Q: What did you think about India when you arrived, did you like it or...?

A: Oh you know, India, I grew up in the mountains in Europe, I mean, I didn't feel much different. Just I see myself thirty years before, something like this. Tradition there is the same, people think the same....the system of family the same. Now of course it is changing [...] but there was like this, very simple way: we knew each other, we spoke to each other. My mother even didn't choose her husband, her father chose. India didn't shock me. (Aron, 42)

In the above quotations, the European past refers to rural life. In such comments, the past is usually romanticised as representing an 'authentic' life in close connection with nature. The picture is superficial as it ignores both the urban past of the West as well as the modern Indian present. In fact, the dichotomisation of the authentic, natural past and an unauthentic, even spoilt, present — conceptualised as civilisation — has long roots in European romantic philosophy, above all in the ideas of the 'noble savage' (see, e. g., Rousseau 1754; see also Fabian 1983; Ellingson 2001). All in all, in spite of praising the 'authentic' past, the Westerners in Varanasi are not willing to return to the past but happily take advantage of modernity, for example by frequently travelling by aeroplanes or by using the internet. In fact, their whole lifestyle depends on modernity. The past that India represents is picturesque for them; something that they admire from afar but are not willing to fully engage in themselves. If they do become engaged in it, they do so only temporarily and partially, choosing whatever suits them. The 'authentic past' that they admire is a construction they make from their Western point of view in the present.

It is not a coincidence that the Westerners are in Varanasi and not in some other Indian city. In addition to its particular religious meaning, Varanasi is also a special city geographically. While sitting on the *ghats*⁴⁶ looking at the slowly flowing Ganges river and the empty shore on the other side, one can gain a feeling of being surrounded by serenity, especially since there are no vehicles by the river. However, as soon as one starts to walk away from the river, one is confronted with the smells, noises and density of the city. Varanasi is clearly very different from organised Western cities, offering perhaps a romantically shabby contrast to the Westerners' countries of origin. Nevertheless, it is a very urban environment, and the infrastructure does not support well the current population; there are constant problems with water, electricity and rubbish.

⁴⁶ *Ghat*: stone stairs leading to the Ganges river.

Although Varanasi represents authenticity for the Westerners in Varanasi, almost none of them plan to stay there forever and they want to live away from big cities. In fact, many dream about having a house in the countryside (in the West, see section 7.1) in the future as the countryside ultimately represents authentic living in close connection with nature. Some also said that being isolated in the countryside would give them the freedom to live according to their ideals, that is, there is nobody to judge their alternative lifestyle in rural circumstances; another conceptualisation of ‘authenticity’ which may not correspond well with reality.

Noel mentioned above sunrise, sunset and the cycle of the moon. The fact that they are important in Hinduism surely contributes to the fact that many Westerners in Varanasi are so aware of such matters. Moreover, the slow pace of life also allows them to notice such matters more than in the West. Additionally, the New Age cultures emphasise such things, and the Westerners in Varanasi share many views with the New Age spirituality.

In addition to naturalness, Varanasi represents ‘authentic spirituality’ to the Westerners there. Varanasi is indeed a very special place in terms of spirituality. Some of the long-term Western sojourners in Varanasi study Hinduism and even those who do not study it have some basic knowledge of Hindu and/or Buddhist philosophy. However, instead of adopting a Hindu or Buddhist way of life, most Westerners in Varanasi talk about spirituality in broader terms⁴⁷.

[Laura is talking about a huge religious festival, *Kumbh mela*⁴⁸, in India]

A: ...in Europe, we see religion but

Q: It’s different

A: ...just dead. It is a few people going to church and you don’t see any more the face... like the face of god who can make people change everything just for this. It’s very beautiful to see. Here you really see because it’s so many people, just with a simple heart, they just go. (Laura, 25)

Q: Has your view of India changed during all these years that you have been here?

A: [...] They [Hindus] understand that all creation is one vibration. If you speak about this vibration, you connect, and so...I feel more a part of, I really feel part of the universe, the cycle, I feel part of it here. There in Europe I don’t feel it because there, you are felt [considered] somebody [important only] if you are [living] in a certain way. (Olga, 48)

⁴⁷ There are many Westerners in India who have adopted Hinduism or Buddhism as a way of life and who even lead their lives as Buddhist monks/nuns or as Hindu ascetics. Such people, however, are not included in this study. (see e.g. Allsop 2000)

⁴⁸ *Kumbh Mela* is a huge Hindu pilgrimage that occurs every three years and rotates among four locations.

The Westerners in Varanasi emphasise the importance of spiritual values and spiritual growth. For them, good spirituality means personal experience instead of empty words and rituals. The Westerners in Varanasi claim that ‘Western’ culture has lost its spiritual links, and in order to improve one’s life, one has to regain spiritual understanding. Talking about supernatural powers, energies and vibrations is indeed common among the Westerners in Varanasi and many Westerners have a small altar with pictures and statues of Hindu gods in their apartments. However, instead of worshipping Hindu gods, most of them talk about spirituality in broader terms, picking and choosing from various spiritual beliefs whatever suits them best. Such New Age spirituality – choosing from the supermarket of spirituality whichever combination of beliefs and practices that pleases one at the time – is popular nowadays (see, e.g., Aupers et al. 2006; D’Andrea 2007, 55). Many Westerners in Varanasi have also conducted Buddhist Vipassana retreats⁴⁹ which they view as opportunities for personal development. Moreover, they claim that spirituality is manifested in classical Indian music, which most of them are studying in Varanasi (see Korpela 2010).

Another important aspect of the ideal life of the Westerners is ‘genuine’ social contacts.

Q: Why do you prefer to live in India?

A: [In Varanasi] we can speak with the neighbour, and the neighbour smiles to you, says good morning. This does not exist in the West anymore. (Aron, 42)

Q: Do you feel different from people in your country of origin?

A: Here in India people look you in the eyes, no problem, there in Europe, people feel very disturbed if you look them in the eyes. (Alberto, 47)

Many Westerners in Varanasi emphasise the importance of close social contacts. In practice, those contacts refer to friendships among the Westerners, although the quotations above refer to Indian people. This theme is discussed in detail in chapter 11. Moreover, the above image of harmonious neighbourly contacts is actually much romanticised, since India is a very stratified society. All in all, in addition to criticising the West, the Westerners in Varanasi share and appreciate certain values that they feel are lacking in the West but that become lived practices in their lives in Varanasi.

⁴⁹ A *Vipassana retreat* is a silent meditation retreat that usually lasts for ten days, during which time one is not allowed to talk with anyone except for asking advice from the meditation teacher. The participants are provided with food and accommodation; their only task is to meditate silently (for more information, see <http://www.dhamma.org/> (accessed 4.12.2006).

6.7 Conceptualising their Criticism and Ideals: Is It a Counterculture?

Appreciating anti-materialism and 'authentic' living in close connection with nature are typical for many Western countercultures. Counterculture is a term that became well-known after Theodore Roszak's (1969) book on hippies. The term sub-culture (see e.g., Hall et al. 1975; Hebdige 1979; Brake 1985) traditionally refers to working-class youth cultures, whereas countercultures are usually defined to be of middle-class origin. The hippie movement is the most famous and large-scale counterculture. By definition, countercultures oppose certain values and practices of mainstream cultures (also called parent cultures) and search for alternatives, very often in the form of different lifestyles. The members always believe they have created something new, although their values and practices often resemble those of past countercultures. For example, Western countercultures have a long history in admiring 'simple' and 'natural' lifestyles (Roszak 1969, 226; Vesey 1973, 439-441; Musgrove 1974, 90; Miller 1991, 40): already in the 17th century there were alternative communities in the American countryside (Zablocki 1980, 3). In spite of not always being very original, the countercultural values are 'new' in the sense that they are always articulated in a specific societal context at a specific time; that is, they are reacting to a current situation (Vesey 1973, 62).

It seems that the contemporary Westerners in Varanasi are similar to hippies. Pursuing a relaxed life, spirituality and 'true' selves are values that hippies appreciated in the 1960s (see e.g., Miller 1991) and in fact, hundreds of hippies also travelled to India (see e.g., Hall 1968; Alderson 1971; Wiles 1972; Mehta 1979; Odzer 1995; Tomory 1996; MacLean 2006). However, most contemporary Westerners in Varanasi seem to reject such a characterisation. Many of them understand the term 'hippie' in pejorative terms; some of the older ones were hippies themselves but they define themselves as having been somehow different from the 'real' hippies. Moreover, there is a clear difference between the emphasis on collectivity that the hippies demonstrated, e.g., by living in communes (see e.g., Miller 1999; Kanter 1972; Vesey 1973), and the emphasis on extreme individualism that the contemporary Westerners in Varanasi celebrate.

Can the Westerners in Varanasi be considered to be forming a counterculture then? Their middle class origins and the emphasis on the simple life suggest such an interpretation. Many of them also share political opinions: for example, on several occasions during my fieldwork, I heard people criticising the war in Iraq as well as the success of right-wing politicians in France and especially in the USA. Their lifestyle, however, is

based on individualistic values and they do not aim at collective commitment or political action. Moreover, although the Westerners in Varanasi are convinced of having found a better lifestyle than their fellow citizens in the West, they do not have a mission to convince others to live in the same way. They think everyone should live like them, but consider it useless to try to persuade others who, they argue, should make their own individual decisions and who 'wouldn't understand anyway'.

Duncombe has written about cultural resistance that is not political. He has asked whether doing nothing is doing something. (Duncombe 2002, 82; see also Marchart 2003, 88) The Westerners in Varanasi are not political in the sense that they would participate in protest movements or demonstrations. As I have shown, however, although they make their choices on highly individual bases, the Westerners in Varanasi share certain countercultural values which are reflected in their lifestyle. This is actually very typical of today's protest; in post-modern countercultures, or post-subcultures (see e.g., Muggleton et al 2003), certain values unite various groupings that themselves are based on individual choice. (see e.g., Hetherington 1998a, 51-52; St John 2003, 70) Therefore, if not a counterculture as a clearly defined entity, the lifestyle of the Westerners in Varanasi can be characterised as countercultural and the Westerners often understand themselves in countercultural terms, since they oppose the 'mainstream Western life'. Moreover, the negative reactions that they often face because of their lifestyle in their countries of origin indicate that the countercultural aspects indeed have significance, as they irritate many in mainstream society, in spite of the Westerners in Varanasi not being a united entity with clearly articulated values and goals. Contemporary theories on countercultures and subcultures claim that in today's context, resistance is scattered partly due to the fact that there is no longer a homogeneous 'parent culture' (although one may in fact ask if there ever was) (see e.g., Fornäs 1998, 149). An interesting aspect of the Westerners in Varanasi is that in spite of (or perhaps because of) their various countries of origin, they seem to construct or imagine an entity of a homogenous parent culture, the 'West', which they oppose.

The negative reactions of the mainstream society towards countercultures are not new. In the 1960s, hippies were often criticised for living at the expense of the mainstream society without making their own contribution, since they accepted the social benefits and services of the society but refused to work and pay taxes themselves (Roszak 1969, 36; Musgrove 1974, 40). However, Roszak asks why the outsider status of the hippies was seen in such negative terms in comparison to the 'real' poor. He argues that the hippies' home societies did not need their work contribution (Roszak 1969, 27), thus it was unfair to criticise them for not working. Moreover, the baby boomers had the time and money to study for

a long period before starting their careers (Gitlin 1987, 29). The problem for the 'mainstream society' was that hippies were enjoying lazy lives and did not even try to get respectable jobs (Roszak 1969, 36). Consequently, the lawmakers in the USA even tried to change the rules so that the 'voluntarily poor', that is, the hippies, would not be entitled to the food coupons targeting the 'real' poor (Zablocki 1980, 51; Miller 1999, 163). The moral panics against the New Age Travellers and the consequent changes in British legislation are more recent examples of the unease of the 'mainstream society' with those who voluntarily (or seemingly so) drop out (see section 2.4). Also today, for example in Finland, there are discussions on who is a 'deserving' poor person, and thus entitled to certain benefits, and who is not (see e.g., Helne et al. 2006). Therefore, also in today's context, the voluntary poor are often criticised, although their lifestyle may be a rational choice in their situation, in which well-paid permanent jobs are not available. This became evident already in the case of the New Age Travellers and is likely true also for many Westerners in Varanasi. It is easy to criticise their lifestyle but it may be a rational option: countercultural values are used by the Westerners in Varanasi in identifying themselves in a positive light and such values provide an explanation of and justification for their lifestyle.

When my interviewees emphasised their courage to live without fear, they implicitly defended what to outsiders may seem like a highly insecure life situation. Having confidence in the future also means that the Westerners in Varanasi refuse to worry about financial securities like a pension. However, the other side of the coin is that they might not be able to do much about such things anyway: in the current economic systems, an increasing number of people cannot get permanent jobs even if they wanted to and those working with 'unconventional' contracts or on their own are not necessarily entitled to the same social security benefits as those who are permanently employed (see e.g., Rifkin, 1995; Moisala et al. 2004; Lehto et al. 2005). Again, the Westerners in Varanasi turn the potentially disadvantaged situation into a positive self-definition.

A special characteristic of this countercultural lifestyle is its transnational context. Why have the Westerners in Varanasi moved abroad to improve their lives? First of all, global economic inequalities enable and contribute to the phenomenon. Secondly, living an alternative life outside or at the margins of society may be easier in a place where one has never belonged to the mainstream society. Far away from home, it may be easier to define one's marginality in positive terms than it would be in one's society of origin. And without social commitments to the 'mainstream society', one simply does not need to explain one's choices as much as one might need to do in one's society of origin. Or alternatively, one can use cultural differences as an explanation (see section 11.2). Varanasi is in fact

a very particular place in which to realise a countercultural lifestyle. The Westerners there have purposely chosen to reside in that city and not somewhere else in India or in another country. In their understanding, there are 'more vibes' in Varanasi above all because of its image being an 'authentic' spiritual and musical centre (see Korpela 2010).

The Westerners in Varanasi aim at an alternative lifestyle on an individual basis. They are, however, not alone. According to them, similar-minded people can be found in various places, which encourages them to continue their lifestyle.

Q: So there is a big group of people who live in a few countries and...

A: Yes, I think every country has many, many people who live outside.

Q: Aha. Enjoying.

A: Enjoying, yes... and I think every year more and more. (Ricardo, 41)

The alternative that the Westerners claim to have found in Varanasi is not, therefore, tied to only one location, and in fact, the Westerners lead very mobile lives.

7. WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS

I don't think I will ever settle down, I always say that a divine god gives roots to the trees, for us it is giving feet, we can go from places to places. So I like to go from place to place. I like to stay a few years here, few years there. (Rafael, 40)

I very much feel like a gypsy, I don't feel really bound to one place and I think life is travel. I mean our forefathers who were hunters and gatherers could never ever live [...] in one place, I think this is in our brains. In modern cultures, so many people are so unhappy probably [because] in their education people are made to forget their real roots. They forget their roots, they have this longing inside but they fulfil it by watching TV, they watch the Discovery Channel or whatever. There is some compensation for this. (Raymond, 48)

In many ways, the ideal life that my interviewees claim to have found materialises in a specific location; Varanasi. However, they sojourn there only temporarily and many emphasise not staying permanently in any specific location. Therefore, it seems that their ideal life is actually not location-bound. In fact, many of my interviewees used the term 'stuck' when they talked about staying put in one location: they preferred movement. In their talk, movement is not only fun and interesting but is a precondition for a good life. Their talk thus reveals a moral discourse of a kind: one has to move, albeit voluntarily, in order to have a good life, and there is something bad and wrong in a sedentary life; staying put means wasting one's life. Such a romanticised view of a mobile life is not new; prior to the First World War, the German youth movement *Wandervogel* tried 'to turn nomadism and camping into a Romantic and heroic rejection of modernity' (Hetherington 2000, 77-78), and New Age travellers have embraced a similar view since the 1970s. Appreciating movement is not only words but also lived practice among the Westerners in Varanasi. In this chapter, I describe their mobile lifestyle and the discourse that goes with it. In addition, I discuss the context and consequences of such mobility. Finally, I analyse the phenomenon in terms of lifestyle migration.

7.1 The (In)significance of Locations

In the interviews, I always first asked for the life story of the interviewee: what had happened in his/her life before ending up in Varanasi? Most of those life stories were connected with more than one country. Most of my interviewees had travelled extensively, especially in Asia: almost everyone had been to Thailand and Nepal at least once and many had visited also other Asian countries. Some had been to South America, and travelling in Europe was so common that many of my interviewees seemed not to consider it real travelling at all as many of them failed to mention their European travels until I specifically asked about that⁵⁰. Many had also worked abroad for some period(s). Their talk shows that their minds are not fixed just between their countries of origin and Varanasi but for them, the world is an open arena where they can move freely according to their wishes and preferences. In other words, unlike many refugees or economic migrants, their world is not bi-polar (poles being in their case India and their country of origin) but multi-sited. There are hundreds of opportunities to move, and settle (at least for awhile), and all this is done voluntarily, out of personal preferences and moods. Living a mobile life and having been to many places is nothing extraordinary but taken as a matter of fact by the Westerners in Varanasi. They hardly ever seem to be surprised by each others' far-away travel destinations, and it is common to discuss the different destinations that one has encountered. Although not a regular practice, sometimes the Westerners sojourning in Varanasi meet each other in various locations around the world without it being considered extraordinary. Moreover, many emphasise that wherever they go, they always meet some old friends and other similar-minded people.

I am visiting a Western woman, and I notice that her flip flop shoes are almost broken. I mention to her that soon, she will need to buy new ones. She has told me before that those are the only shoes she owns. She replies that she is planning to buy shoes in Germany where she will go in a few weeks. (She is not German herself.) (a field diary excerpt, February 2002)

Since many of the Westerners in Varanasi move so much, they can plan their shopping according to the destinations they are going to travel to in near future. For example, Germany can then represent a place to buy good shoes or Italy a place to buy good *parmesean* cheese. Moreover, they possess information based on personal experiences from various places. For example, knowing the coffee shops of Amsterdam or the airport of

⁵⁰ Not mentioning travels in Europe applies to Israelis in addition to Europeans.

Kuwait is common knowledge among them. Therefore, the ideal life of the Westerners in Varanasi takes place in a transnational setting: the world is an open arena where one can satisfy one's personal needs and wishes. Yet, they are not 'floating' in some transnational space but anchor themselves to certain concrete places. The result is a kind of personal mapping of the world; various places become significant according to personal experiences and preferences. At the same time, there are others who lead a similar lifestyle and for whom at least some of those same places are significant. Therefore, although they circulate among those places as individuals, they end up meeting certain people again and again. Personal contacts are very much tied to specific locations; the Westerners seldom keep in contact with the friends they meet in Varanasi or somewhere else⁵¹ but they expect to meet them again either in the same place or elsewhere. Such a lack of contact-keeping indicates also their emphasis on individuality; they appreciate having friends but avoid becoming attached to those relationships.

A Western woman once told me how she had spent her previous summer walking in the mountains in Germany and Italy (she was not German or Italian herself). She had loved it there and was dreaming of buying a house in that beautiful environment, that is, she wanted to choose where she lives according to her preference for beautiful scenery. The story suggests that in addition to having travelled extensively in the past, many Westerners in Varanasi view their future as involving many geographical locations. Many dream of a house in the countryside but they are not quite sure where that would be. Such comments indicate well how many Westerners in Varanasi understand the world as an open arena where they are free to move according to their personal preferences.

The ethos among the Westerners is that one has to *find* a nice place to settle, it is not the place where one was born. Currently, they are in-between, searching for the ideal place as very few plan to stay in India permanently. The Westerners in Varanasi often discuss certain countries or areas as potential places in which to settle. As many are searching for the perfect place to live in, they like to exchange information about others' experiences. Moving to Australia seems to be a dream for many Europeans and Israelis whereas Canadians, Japanese and Australians often dream about moving to Europe; that is, the ideal location is always somewhere far away from one's country of origin. In addition, the location is to be reached in the vague future. In Europe, Ibiza, Greece and Italy are the most popular destinations. Interestingly, the ultimate ideal locations are affluent Western countries. A comfortable climate is an important criterion for a 'dream

⁵¹ For example, they seldom e-mail each other and some do not even have e-mail accounts.

destination' but these places are also believed to be tolerant towards people with 'alternative' lifestyles.

Q: Why you don't want to stay in your country of origin?

A: [They do not accept different people whereas] in Australia, you live more easy, you can live safe [...] most of the people don't look how you dress, what is your job and what you [do]. (Sylvia, 38)

Q: Do you want to stay in India or do you want to go to other places?

A: [...] maybe Australia even.

Q: Have you been there?

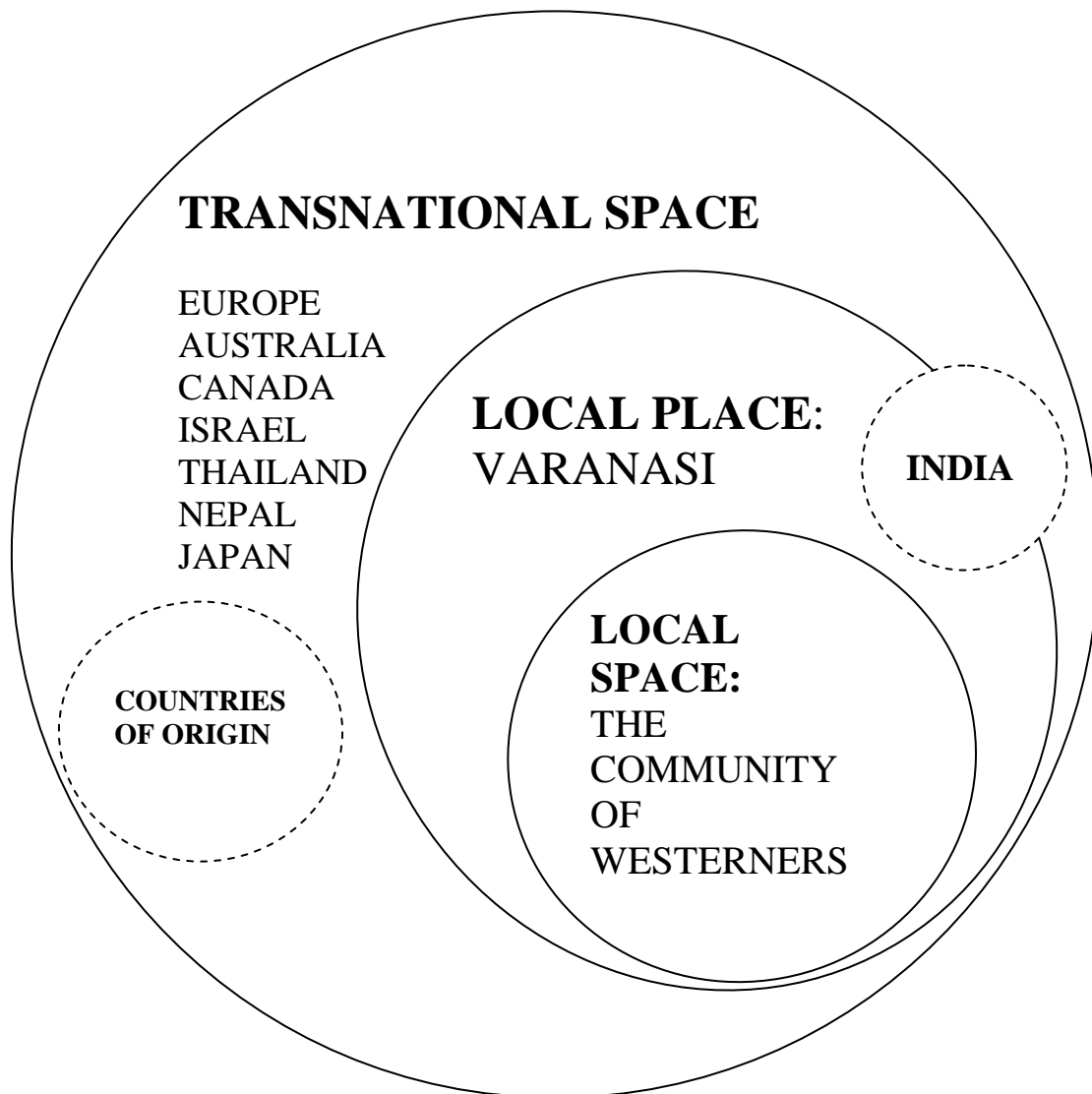
A: Not yet, no. That's my next goal. It's to try to get enough money to go to Australia and see what people do there [...] You can actually have quite a simple lifestyle there and many people I know in Australia live quite hippie lives, self-sufficient and stuff, so that attracts me a lot. (Tom, 36)

In many migration theories, one's country of origin is 'considered the place where one fits in, lives in peace, and has an unproblematic culture and individual or collective identity' (Faist 2000, 19; see also Beck 2006, 25). Minorities obviously do not necessarily share this feeling and neither do the Westerners in Varanasi. They claim to have voluntarily left their countries of origin because they have not been satisfied with their lives there. Now, they are living an ideal life in India but they are not planning to stay there permanently either. They currently emphasise mobility but most say that eventually they want to settle down, or at least they need to find a place from which to move and to which to return. The two quotations valuing eternal mobility at the very beginning of this chapter were actually said by interviewees who are not very young and in fact both of them have a permanent dwelling. Therefore, they may actually be talking more about avoiding attachment to a permanent dwelling than refusing to have such a place at all. In other words, they want to avoid 'getting stuck'.

7.2 Transnational and Local Spaces and Places

Several places and spaces are significant in the lifestyle of the Westerners in Varanasi. By places, I refer to certain physical locations whereas by spaces I refer more to social aspects: in Michel de Certeau's words: 'Space is a practiced place' (de Certeau 1986, 117 in Fog Olwig et al. 1997, 4). In similar terms, according to Thomas Faist, space has a social meaning which comes into being with concrete social or symbolic ties (Faist 2000, 45). I argue that the Westerners in Varanasi create local spaces within transnational fields. Many of their ideals, values and practices materialise in a particular place, Varanasi, and earning money in specific

industrial countries (and in specific cities, towns or villages there) is essential for maintaining the lifestyle. In addition, they move between various other places in India and in many other countries and their (vague) future plans are connected to various locations. The Westerners in Varanasi clearly act in a transnational space: they visit various countries and belong to various networks in diverse places. In fact, the Westerners sojourning in Varanasi act on three levels: transnational space, local places, and local space, by which I here mean their social scene in Varanasi. They participate in local spaces also in other parts of the world but in this research I concentrate only on the one they create in Varanasi. A particular characteristic of the transnational space of the Westerners in Varanasi is that it is somewhat different (that is, never identical) for each individual as the space is constructed via personal, not collective, ties. The following figure illustrates the spaces and places where the Westerners sojourning in Varanasi spend time and act out their lifestyle.



Varanasi, especially the Western space there, serves as a kind of a hub in their lifestyle: it is a significant and central locality for the Westerners but they are not tied to it and they do not sojourn there permanently.

For some, Varanasi has become a temporary sanctuary as they have grown tired of constant movement.

Q: Have you been in many countries?

A: [...] Because I'm moving a lot, when I arrive Varanasi, every time I [feel] that finally I can rest, I can have a routine and do what I like to do. Because all the time I, even when I stay in my country of origin, it is market [selling goods from India in markets], so much running, moving [from place to] place. (Yvonne, 33)

Above all, Varanasi becomes significant because there the Westerners meet others who share the same lifestyle and values.

[Donna is talking about what she likes about India and how she is not close to Indian people.]

A: Most of the foreigners come to India because they have [are] something special. Almost with everybody, I feel a connection really. We can use our language, I mean the language of the heart. Very often when you speak with people here, you use words like energy, vibration, love, this kind of vocabulary. If I speak like this in Europe, everybody [thinks] ok she's crazy. [...] Here you can meet people the same as you. [...] This is really good for the heart. This is nice. (Donna, 28)

7.3 Mobility in India

Although many of the Westerners in Varanasi spend most of their time in India in Varanasi, they are familiar with many other places in India as well and easily move between different locations when they so wish. In their minds, they seem to have a map of India where certain locations signify specific activities. This map resembles the map that can be found on the front page of the *Lonely Planet* travel guide book; there, certain locations on the map are described by a few words that refer to tourism infrastructure and sights and activities that tourists may find interesting. The Westerners in Varanasi, however, have also other knowledge and purposes for their trips than merely what is given in the popular tourist guidebook, and they often exchange such information, as well as practical travel tips, with each other.

I sit at a tea stall and hear a Western man explaining to his friend that he is going to leave the city the next day. He is a very devoted music student and his trip to Goa will interrupt his music lessons but the weather is getting cold. His explanation for the trip is simple: 'I want to wear my flip flops all the time and I do not own any socks'. (December 2002)

Winters are cold in Varanasi. The temperature drops near 0°C at night towards the end of December and in January. In daytime, the average temperature is 10°- 15°C, and it rains often. Most houses in Varanasi, including those where the Westerners live, do not have glass windows or heating, therefore also room temperatures are low. Many Westerners buy electric heaters but with constant electric outages, those are not always very useful. Another option is to heat with coal but the smoke is unhealthy, and it covers everything in the room with thick black dust. Therefore, many Westerners leave Varanasi for warmer climates in December; mostly they go to Goa and Kerala (Indian states on the Arab sea) or Thailand (especially to Koh Phangan). Like the man quoted above, many say that they do not want to buy warm clothes, thus they have to move to places where they do not need any. Such comments can be understood to state an anti-materialistic discourse but maybe they tell more about an emphasis on a life of pleasure. The Westerners in Varanasi are obviously very privileged to be able to move like this; since they do not work in Varanasi, they do not have any obligation to stay there when the weather is unpleasant.

Interestingly, many Westerners talk about their trips to the south as holiday periods away from Varanasi. They do not work in Varanasi but the living conditions are considered so tough — because of extreme weather conditions, dirt and garbage in the streets, pollution, the intensity of the crowded city life and 'the passionate Hindu energy'⁵², — that one is considered to need a break every now and then. Here, Varanasi is clearly defined as a 'bad' urban place although in another context, it becomes defined as representing a natural life (see section 6.2.2). According to many Westerners in Varanasi, Goa and Kerala provide perfect environments for relaxing on the beach. The weather is nice and warm there in December and January. In addition, many Westerners claim that the food is good there and therefore, many go there in order to regain their health, lost in cold and dirty Varanasi. Those who have small children find Goa especially comfortable since there are many Western children there, and thus many playmates for the children. Goa is also famous for its *techno* music parties and a wide variety of drugs, yet, those are not the main reasons for the Westerners from Varanasi to go to Goa. The negative aspect of Goa is that

⁵² In addition to being a central location in Hinduism, Varanasi is very significant also for Muslims. The Westerners, however, usually acknowledge and appreciate only the Hindu aspect of the city.

it is expensive compared to Varanasi. However, for some of the Westerners in Varanasi, Goa is also a place in which to earn money: for example, one can give a massage to tourists, sell self-made handicrafts, teach yoga on the beach or one can cook 'Western' food (meaning usually Italian or 'Israeli'⁵³ food) and sell it to tourists at a weekly market (see also Wilson 1997, 67; D'Andrea 2007, 192; Saldanha 2007, 137-143). Therefore, in addition to Indian people, tourism offers income opportunities to some long-term Western sojourners in Goa. In fact, the hippies of Goa have become a sight for package tourists there: Western tourists go to see the hippies whereas Indian male tourists are attracted by Western women sunbathing on the beaches (see Wilson 1997, 61-8; Saldanha 2007; 115-117, 141).

In addition to cold winters, another period of uncomfortable weather in Varanasi starts in April. The temperature can rise up to almost 50°C, the average in May being nearly 40°C. For the Westerners this is also the time to leave Varanasi: they either go to earn money in the West or they go to the mountains in northern India where the weather is pleasantly cool but not too cold as it is in winter. For many Westerners in Varanasi, the mountains signify fresh air and a relaxed healthy life. This image is constructed in opposition to the dense urban character of Varanasi. Again, time away from hot and crowded Varanasi is considered a relaxing holiday. Moving to the mountains, following the pleasant weather, is a practice that was common already in the colonial era. The Indian climate was a great challenge for the colonial expatriates and it became popular to escape the heat of the plains to the mountains. 'Hill stations' were villages in the Indian mountains where the British colonialists, especially women (the wives and sisters of the colonial administrators), spent the summer months, if they could afford it. (see, e.g., Kanwar 1990; Vernède 1995, 72-6; Edwardes 1967, 45; Allen 1975, 152-160; James 1997, 166) Such mobility according to the weather obviously reflects a very privileged position; the majority of the locals cannot escape the heat or the cold⁵⁴.

Among the contemporary Westerners in Varanasi, Rishikesh in particular is defined as a place in which to live a healthy life; mostly due to it being a centre for many kinds of yoga courses. There are also other popular destinations in northern India. Dharamsala is famous for Tibetan Buddhism, being the home of the *Dalai Lama* and thousands of Tibetan refugees. It is also a very popular place for *Vipassana* meditation retreats. However, in recent years, many Westerners have started to complain that Dharamsala has been destroyed by increasing numbers of tourists: the quiet

⁵³ Since Israel is a young nation state, 'Israeli food' actually refers to certain Arab dishes.

⁵⁴ It is in fact common for the better-off Indians to vacation in the mountains during the summer months but they are a very small minority among the entire Indian population.

Buddhist village has been transformed into a noisy centre of all-night *techno* parties. Other locations in the mountains, for example Manali, have suffered from a similar trend, which many Westerners in Varanasi regret. According to them, big tourist crowds are quickly destroying the relaxed atmosphere of the beautiful mountains. This is of course the eternal dilemma of tourism: tourists always wish the other tourists were not there although at the same time they need the other tourists for marking the significance of the place (see e.g., Culler 1988, 157-9; Bruner 1991, 243). The Westerners in Varanasi typically do not consider themselves tourists in India but they still often use tourism infrastructure, visit the same places as tourists and enjoy the Western comforts that such places offer. Thus, they are affected by tourist crowds too. (on the Westerners' relationship to tourists, see section 8.3.2)

In addition to the beaches of the south and mountains of the north, a few Indian cities are important for the Westerners in Varanasi although they often complain that big cities are very expensive compared to Varanasi. First of all, everyone is familiar with Delhi since most Westerners in Varanasi take their flights to and from India from there. Those who sell Indian handicrafts and textiles in the West often buy at least some of them in Delhi, where wholesale and parcel-packing services are well organised. Earlier, Delhi was also the place to buy Western products, especially food, that were not available in Varanasi but nowadays such goods are increasingly obtainable also there. Moreover, some of the music students in Varanasi take lessons also in Kolkata, Delhi or Mumbai. Therefore, many Westerners in Varanasi view also India as an open arena where they can move according to their personal preferences and needs and their lifestyle is thus characterised by constant mobility.

7.4 The Problem of Non-belonging or the Privilege of Selective Belonging?

If the sun is in your heart, the sun will shine everywhere on this planet for you. (Raymond, 48)

You see in life, when you have to do something, everything is given, if you really follow what you have to do. (Margaret, 56)

These kinds of statements are common among the Westerners in Varanasi. However, in reality their life is not always as easy as such a discourse claims. There are practical limitations to how far one can follow the sun and the heart, and the mobile lifestyle of the Westerners in Varanasi involves numerous preconditions as well as consequences that are not

necessarily anticipated. Above all, a mobile lifestyle raises the question of belonging: Where are the Westerners in Varanasi anchored, if anywhere, and what are the consequences of this anchoring or lack thereof?

Indian people often ask foreigners, 'Where are you from?' or 'What is your home country?' Many Westerners in Varanasi are troubled by these questions. They give answers like 'I live in India now', 'I belong to where my heart is', 'I belong to the human race', 'I belong to the world', 'Now, my home is in Varanasi'. These replies never seem to satisfy those who ask. According to their view, everyone belongs to a nation state and a location within that state (on this theme, see e.g., Malkki 1995, 4-6; Faist 2000, 19; Beck 2006, 25) whereas many Westerners in Varanasi say that although they have a passport from a certain nation state, it does not mean that they feel belonging to that country. Most claim that having been away for so long has caused them to feel like outsiders in their countries of origin. They say Varanasi has become a crucial place for their life but even then, they do not have a sense of belonging there either. In fact, many of the Westerners in Varanasi buy return flight tickets from India to Western countries, which shows that India is currently a central location for them. All in all, the Westerners in Varanasi share a discourse of non-belonging. However, interestingly, when the Westerners meet other Westerners for the first time in Varanasi, also they usually ask for each other's nationality. It seems that when Westerners pose the question, they are understood not to invest nationality with the same ideas of belonging as the Indians asking the same question are believed to do. Yet, such questions indicate that origin still matters and plays at least some role in defining the self and others. It is in fact very situational, when one's nationality matters and when it does not. (on the significance of nationality among the Westerners in Varanasi, see section 11.4)

'You don't seem Swedish at all!' claimed a man who had lived in Sweden for awhile but was not Swedish himself. The woman to whom he was talking replied 'It is because I have been away for so long'. She, like many others, says that by being away they have moved far from their national identity and the characteristics associated with it. In nationalist thinking, we all conform to some extent to the stereotypes associated with our native country (Beck 2006, 25). The example above shows that many Westerners in Varanasi do not agree with this logic⁵⁵. Among the Westerners in Varanasi, however, not everyone feels such flexibility with their nationality: this applies above all to Israelis. They often claim feeling stuck with their nationality, which makes many of them unsatisfied. First of all, an Israeli passport limits one's possibilities to travel: most Muslim

⁵⁵ Pertti Alasuutari has in fact argued that people seldom want to be defined as typical citizens but prefer to define themselves as somehow different (Alasuutari 1998).

countries (e.g. Pakistan) do not allow Israeli tourists, and in some other countries (e.g. Nepal), private hotels may put up a sign 'No Israelis', due to the stereotype of groups of young Israelis being loud and demanding customers⁵⁶ (see e.g., Haviv 2005, 77; Saldanha 2007). Moreover, some Israeli men are reluctant to return to Israel because they might have to go to the army there⁵⁷, and many Israelis say they prefer to stay away from there until there is peace.

In spite of considering themselves different from their fellow nationals, most of my interviewees did not want to deny their national roots.

Q: Do you miss anything from your country of origin?

A: You are attached anyway even if you try not to be attached to many things, some things still [matter]. You have some roots there, you have many friends, you have many... many, many stories there, experiences there. (Marco, 34)

Moreover, having a Western passport is very important to the Westerners in Varanasi. As citizens of industrialised Western nations, they easily cross borders and get visas. Citizens of 'Third World' countries, for example Indians, could not as easily, if at all, live transnationally mobile lives as the Westerners in Varanasi do (see e.g., Ong 1999, 11; Calhoun 2002, 89; Hiebert 2002, 214). With regard to global mobility, Brah has stated that 'the question is not simply about *who travels* but *when, how and under what circumstances?*' (Brah, 1996, 182, italics in original) It is obvious that the Westerners in Varanasi are relatively privileged actors on the global arena. They say they have left their countries of origin because they did not like it there but one can also argue that they have left *because they can*. Such a choice is not available to everyone, especially not sojourning in various countries instead of a single destination, which is a more typical pattern of (lifestyle) migration. The fact that one's passport is so significant implies that concrete nationality matters in practice for the Westerners in Varanasi although they may downplay its significance on a personal level.

The policies of many nation states, however, do not seem to reflect an appreciation for or even understanding of this kind of a mobile lifestyle. A Western woman told me how she and her boyfriend had been refused permission to enter Reunion as tourists because they did not have tickets back to their country of origin, only to India. Whether this story is true is not crucial here; what matters is that mobile people encounter problems

⁵⁶ This has nothing to do with anti-Semitism: the Nepalese guesthouse workers' dislike is targeted towards Israeli nationals, not towards the Jewish religion.

⁵⁷ Israeli men are regularly called to service from reserves until they are 45-50 years old.

because of their lifestyle: they do not fit into the national order of things (Malkki 1995, 4-6). Many Westerners in Varanasi complain about having lost social security benefits in their countries of origin due to their long absences. Sometimes, they cannot even get treatment in public hospitals in their countries of origin because they have dropped out of the system. Leaving the social security aside, even buying private medical or travel insurance can be difficult, even impossible, if one does not permanently live in any country. In fact, many Westerners in Varanasi claim they do not have any insurance. Many of them do not want it but even if they did, they might not be allowed to purchase any⁵⁸. Therefore, although as holders of passports of industrialised Western nations, the Westerners in Varanasi are privileged, freedom does not come without costs: they are marginalised as they have lost benefits in their countries of origin and many of my interviewees also claimed to be looked down upon by their fellow citizens.

Q: Do you feel different from people in your country of origin?

I feel different, yeah for sure. [...] People around make me feel as well that I'm not really normal, I'm like... (laughs) Yeah, I feel different. (Donna, 28)

They look at me like I am an alien, sure. Yes, I'm very different, very different. [...] Because...people don't share the same things. [...] I don't care about many things which other people care about, so in that way yes, I'm different.

[...]

We are not appreciated much in the society. We are outcasts. [...] We work little, we have no house. [...] We don't have many things because of our lifestyle. But for me, I'm more rich now than I was before when I was working at full power [...] and I had many things. [...] To me, I'm a much nicer person now. (Olga, 48)

Olga's comments are very interesting because she talks both about 'me' and 'us'. Being defined as an alien is a personal experience but talking about 'us' hints that there are others who are living and thinking the same way. Sometimes, being different causes some of the Westerners to feel alienated but very often, their discourse reflects the difference in positive terms (see chapter 6). All in all, many said that their mobile lifestyle had caused them to view their countries of origin from a different perspective.

⁵⁸ For example, in Finland, insurance companies issue insurance policies only for those who are entitled to social security benefits in Finland.

Q: Have you changed in India?

A: [...] When I come back to my country of origin, I feel it is very strange.

Q: Ah, you see it differently?

A: It's very different, it is very strange. I used to think that the tradition and ways there are normal but it has become very strange. So I wonder what is normal and what is... hmm... [...] I am part of my country [...] I know but I can see [it] maybe from a different point of view that India gave me. (Amado, 33)

Q: Do you feel different from people in your country of origin when you are there?

A: [...] I think sometimes, I can [...] see a little bit from far away. You see your country from far away or you see a problem little bit from far away. Maybe I have a different philosophy. (Thomas, 28)

Q: Why do you not want to live in your country of origin?

A: When you come to your country, you don't feel that you are totally from there. [...] I think this is the price when you start to live too much outside, you will never more be anywhere [in the world] in your place. (Yvonne, 33)

At a personal level, maintaining networks in one's country of origin can become time- and energy-consuming when living abroad (see Faist 2000, 126). As a result, being away for long can mean that one loses personal ties to one's country of origin (see Ong 1999, 135). Some of the Westerners in Varanasi say they no longer have anything meaningful to do in their countries of origin: they go there only in order to make money and to meet their relatives and their aim is to get back to India as soon as possible. Many of my interviewees said that they feel like outsiders in their countries of origin; spending only a short time there between their trips to India does not allow them to re-establish relationships with old friends. In fact, many claimed not to have many friends left there, and they said they feel so different from those who have stayed that it is not worth the effort to try to make new friends; except for those who have travelled a lot themselves.

Sometimes they ask me questions about India and blaah blaah blaah because it's exotic to them but they cannot really understand. So I cannot fully talk about this with them. I also don't want to look harsh by saying to them, 'look a little bit more farther than a hundred kilometres, what's going on'. I feel I have to say this but they might take it bad because it's like this where they live. They are from this place and they will never move. (Henry, 33)

They [people in my country of origin] don't understand me, they don't know who I really am because they don't know my experiences. My experiences are very different from theirs but I know their experiences. (Ivan, 45)

On the other hand, despite claiming to have lost contact with their countries of origin, many Westerners in Varanasi also seem to have maintained certain ties there: they have definitely not lost all contacts and networks. First of all, when they go back, they usually live either with their parents or other relatives or with friends. Such living arrangements are in fact an important factor enabling their lifestyle between India and the West since in such a situation, one can save a lot of money as one does not have to pay rent. Renting a place in the West for a short time would be too expensive and even useless since they are not going to settle down there. The fact that my interviewees claimed always to find a place to stay shows that they are well connected in their countries of origin. Moreover, finding temporary jobs seems to be easy for them. Sebastian was below talking about how he does not want to live in order to improve his curriculum vitae.

If I want a job, it's easy in the West to get a job, to survive, make some money (Sebastian, 26)

Such comments surprise me. There are plenty of unemployed people in Western societies and I doubt many of them would share my interviewees' views on the easy availability of jobs. In practice, this must mean that my interviewees who say so belong to networks that help them to get jobs. In this sense, they are not marginal outsiders but have connections to resources and networks that they can use to their own advantage. On an emotional level, they may feel alienated but when it comes to practical issues, they have resources to draw upon, and many belong to such resource networks in several places. This seems to be the case, for example, when some of the Westerners go to work in Japan. Working in Japan is rather common among the Westerners in Varanasi; one can presumably earn a lot of money there. However, the Westerners need to have networks ready at the time of arrival, that is, they have to have a friend (either Japanese or Western) who can provide accommodation and advice in finding a job quickly; without an income they cannot afford to live in Japan for more than a few days.

Being able to utilise such resources indicates that instead of having dropped out of all social networks, the Westerners in Varanasi have been selective: they have maintained or constructed certain networks while abandoning others. In other words, while for those who have stayed in their

countries of origin and as reflected in the policies of many nation-states, the Westerners' situation may seem like a problem of non-belonging; they actually maintain a privileged selective belonging according to what suits their needs the best.

The Westerners in Varanasi can be understood to occupy a liminoid stage from the perspective of the mainstream society in their countries of origin, since they are not participating in societal life but spend most of their time abroad. They look at their societies of origin from afar and their temporary outsider status has become permanent. However, even in the liminoid space, they maintain various useful networks in the West, and they occasionally temporarily leave the liminoid space when they return to the West to earn money. Their constant movement intensifies their marginal, or liminoid, status as they do not stay long enough to be able to properly integrate into the surrounding societies in the places where they sojourn, for example in Varanasi. Yet, the fact that they maintain certain important ties to the West indicates that they are not fully outside the structure. Their belonging is situational, yet, they still belong. In other words, although in many respects the Westerners in Varanasi seek refuge from time, place and boundaries, it seems that eventually their refuge is partial. I did not meet any Westerner who would have been fully integrated into the local life, and if such a person exists, s/he is no longer leading the kind of lifestyle described in this research.

7.5 Conceptualising the Lifestyle: Transnational or Translocal?

In today's world, it is possible for an increasing number of people to move away from the country where they were born. Transnationalism is a popular word nowadays. It refers to processes where people, ideas and goods move across national borders. It is important to keep in mind that transnational practices affect 'specific people situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times' (Guarnizo and Smith 1998, 11). Ong uses the term transnationalism to refer to 'the cultural specificities of global processes' (Ong 1999, 4). In other words, transnationalism refers to more concrete phenomena than globalisation (for more definitions, see Hirsiaho et al. 2005, 11-17; Bryceson et al. 2002, 3-30; Martikainen et al. 2006, 9-41). Transnational lifestyles, then, refer to people whose lives are not tied to one particular country but who move between, and have connections to, two or more nation states. In addition to geographical boundaries, such people cross cultural and psychic boundaries (Brah 1996, 194). For some, a transnational lifestyle is an opportunity; for example, for

the Westerners in Varanasi. For others, it is a necessity — for example, for refugees or migrants who cannot find income opportunities in their countries of origin.

Thomas Faist writes that spatially hypermobile individuals are the exception and not the rule (Faist 2000, 288) even in the rapidly globalising world. The Westerners in Varanasi are an example of such hypermobile people; however, even their practices do not exist in a deterritorialised space but are tied very concretely to a specific locality. Faist also argues that ‘aspects of lives of transmigrants remain highly localised, albeit characterised by a profound bi- or sometimes even multifocality’ (Faist 2000, 211). Multifocality seems to be the case also with the Westerners in Varanasi since in addition to Varanasi and their countries of origin they spend time also in various other destinations.

The Westerners in Varanasi celebrate a discourse of freedom; they see India and the world as an open arena where they can move following their personal wishes and they value movement a lot more than a sedentary life. In many ways, this ideology of a ‘world without borders’ becomes also a lived experience as their lifestyle is very mobile. Nevertheless, although the Westerners in Varanasi emphasise personal choice, there are also practical premises and structural facts enabling their lifestyle. Above all, they have ‘visa-friendly’ passports and due to global economic inequalities, living in India is very cheap for them; the money that they earn in the West lasts longer when used in India. At the same time, however, their lifestyle has its structural constraints: among other things, visas expire and the Westerners may not be entitled to social security benefits in their countries of origin. Amit refers to the aspect of insecurity by stating that ‘it has probably never been “easier” to travel the world, for play or work. But much of this is travel without a safety net’ (Amit 2002b, 41). Yet, although the Westerners in Varanasi see certain negative consequences of their lifestyle, talking in terms of following one’s heart provides them with a positive self-identification.

The Westerners’ talk reveals free-floating ideas about places yet, at the same time, their identities and lifestyle are tied to specific locations, above all to Varanasi, albeit temporarily. Although many Westerners in Varanasi claim that their lifestyle is not anchored to a particular place, certain environments do make it easier to lead the alternative lifestyle that they appreciate. Thus, places matter after all. Moreover, in addition to being anchored to Varanasi, they depend on their countries of origin (or some other Western nations) at least in economic terms. They also usually maintain ties to their kin, for example, by living with them when back in their country of origin, which is another anchorage to their native country.

Instead of using the term transnational, I argue that the term translocal is more suitable for describing the lifestyle of the Westerners in

Varanasi. It is true that they move between nation states but at the level of experience, they actually move between various locations. In their experience, it is specific locations, their characteristics and movement between them that matter, not nations and their borders, especially since the Westerners hold passports that enable them to easily cross national borders. Translocalism is an appropriate term also because they do not necessarily stay in one location in a particular nation state but often move between various locations in whatever country they happen to be living in. Moreover, the Westerners in Varanasi draw upon resources and utilise ties from various localities and those resources are not nationally defined, especially since there are often people of several national origins in a particular location, for example in Varanasi.

If defined in negative terms, people who lead transnational (or I would say translocal) lifestyles are seen as uprooted, disintegrated and homeless (see Beck 2006, 7) but this is not necessarily the case in real life. Instead, such people often find various positive ways to define their lives and identities. The Westerners in Varanasi do not always consider their countries of origin very relevant for themselves, as became evident when I wrote how they feel irritated by questions about their belonging to their countries of origin. Nevertheless, they have roots in and certain important ties to their countries of origin in addition to which they have (concrete and emotional) ties to Varanasi and often also to other places in India and in the world. Moreover they claim to be searching for an ideal location to which to move abroad. All in all, their temporary 'between' status in Varanasi is not problematic for them. One positive conceptualisation is offered by Clifford's (1992) term 'dwelling-in-travelling' which suggests that dwelling and travelling are not mutually exclusive (see also Clarke 2005). The concept characterises well the lifestyle of the Westerners in Varanasi: their lifestyle is characterised by constant travelling, yet, the movement temporarily stops when they stay – dwell – in Varanasi.

The fact that the Westerners usually ask for each others' nationality when they meet for the first time in Varanasi indicates that nationality is an important marker to them although it is not understood to tie one to a certain geographical location. Above all, a passport is an important identity marker which anchors them to a specific Western nation state. Ong writes about multiple-passport holders who move between various nations according to which political-economic conditions suit them the best at a particular time (Ong 1999, 6). Also Anderson has argued that passports have become 'less and less attestations of citizenship, let alone of loyalty to a protective nation-state, than of claims to participate in labour markets' (Anderson 1994, 323 in Ong 1996, 2). The Westerners in Varanasi do not have several passports but they do benefit a lot from the ones they have. For them, rights to free movement are crucial but also rights to participate

in 'Western' labour markets in spite of the fact that they prefer to work as little as possible.

The Westerners in Varanasi are obviously privileged actors as they have simply left their countries of origin in order to search for a better life elsewhere. It is easy to conclude that they are living parasitic lives, taking advantage of the cheap living costs in India and the good income levels of their countries of origin. It is easy to criticise them for using the globalising world to their own benefit as they seem to pick from various locations whatever suits them the best. But are not people always trying to maximise their own benefits? One may also ask whether India needs to accept such people into its local communities, for shorter or longer periods. Obviously, the phenomenon is part of global inequality, where citizens of affluent Western countries can utilise the cheapness of India to their own benefit. However, India is encouraging the long-term sojourn of foreigners as they issue tourist visas which are valid for several months, even for years⁵⁹. These kinds of 'tourists' bring money to India although their daily spending is probably a lot less than that of short-term tourists. Moreover, unlike many tourists, they are satisfied with rather modest services and thus do not require much investment from tourism authorities.

7.6 Conceptualising the Lifestyle: Bohemian Lifestyle Migrants

In many ways, the values and aims of the Westerners in Varanasi are typical of lifestyle migrants. Stated simply, lifestyle migrants are active agents searching for a relaxed and more meaningful life abroad. Defined in these terms, it is easy to characterise the Westerners in Varanasi as lifestyle migrants. One can definitely not claim that they are merely visiting tourists momentarily occupying a leisure space as they return to Varanasi again and again and their sojourns and practices there seem to be characterised by more permanency (see chapter 10) than their sojourns in their countries of origin.

Like many other lifestyle migrants, the Westerners in Varanasi appreciate a slow pace of life and aim at 'authentic' living. They realise these aims abroad, in this case in India. As typical lifestyle migrants, they emphasise individuality and their own agency and consider it each person's responsibility to search for quality of life. They take advantage of cheaper

⁵⁹ Depending on one's nationality, a Western person can usually obtain a tourist visa valid from six months up to ten years.

living costs abroad and escape pressurised working environments in their countries of origin. Moreover, like many other lifestyle migrants, they do not have a myth of return but share a negative image of their countries of origin. They are also anti-urban and anti-modern although at the same time, they are very much part of modernity; they are active agents who take advantage of opportunities that are available to them on a global scale.

The Westerners in Varanasi are, however, different from many other lifestyle migrants. First of all, the fact that they depend on their sales of Indian goods or on wage work in their countries of origin (or occasionally in some other Western countries) differentiates them from many other lifestyle migrants who often live on savings, pensions, or small business ventures in their new home. Moreover, unlike most lifestyle migrants, the Westerners in Varanasi did not consciously leave their countries of origin but construct such an explanation afterwards; most of them initially came to India as backpackers planning to return to their home countries afterwards but then ended up going to India again and again. Moreover, unlike many other lifestyle migrants, they have typically left whilst young, before personally experiencing the ‘rat race’ which they nevertheless criticise. In other words, unlike the majority of lifestyle migrants, they are not trying to liberate themselves from the past but want to liberate themselves from the future that they see waiting for them. Consequently, their views on ‘the bad West’ are equally constructed and imagined as are their views on ‘the ideal India’. Nevertheless, criticising the West allows them a positive self-identification as it enables them to justify their lifestyle choice.

Varanasi is also a very distinctive destination: typically, lifestyle migrants choose areas with a pleasant climate and good tourism infrastructure (O’Reilly 2007, 281; Williams et al 2000, 31) but Varanasi is lacking even basic infrastructure and the climate is harsh. The attractiveness of Varanasi lies elsewhere: it draws Westerners as a sign of Eastern otherness as it ‘has become a symbol of traditional Hindu India’ (Eck 1983, 9). Their choice of destination thus also indicates that the Westerners in Varanasi are particular kinds of lifestyle migrants.

Following O’Reilly’s and Benson’s (forthcoming) conceptualisation, I characterise the Westerners in Varanasi as bohemian lifestyle migrants. They are bohemian above all because of their aiming at an ‘alternative’ lifestyle and their commitment to certain countercultural values; the life that they have found abroad is not merely a better version of life in their countries of origin but also includes certain countercultural aspects. Moreover, the good life that they have found in Varanasi is characterised by artistic — above all musical (see section 9.2) — and spiritual aspirations. Spirituality is evident already in their choice of location, the holy city of Hinduism, but also in their spiritual search, which includes

combining various beliefs and practices. The fact that most of the Westerners in Varanasi study classical Indian music clearly suggests that artistic aspirations are important for them but the music is assigned with spiritual meanings as well⁶⁰.

Since many of the Westerners in Varanasi claim to be searching for the ultimate ideal destination in which to settle down, one could define them as temporary lifestyle migrants in India who are hoping to become permanent lifestyle migrants somewhere else in the future. But in fact, a mobile lifestyle is typical of bohemian lifestyle migrants. The Westerners in Varanasi indeed are very mobile and they circulate among various destinations, many of which are attributed bohemian meanings; for example, Goa, Bali, Koh Phangan or Ibiza. Moreover, many of the Westerners define their ideal location to be tolerant towards 'alternative', which can also be conceptualised as bohemian, lifestyles. However, finding an ideal place does not necessarily mean an end to mobility. Many say that even if they were to find such a place, they would still continue travelling; it would just be their base, like Varanasi is for many of them currently. Moreover, as typical bohemian lifestyle migrants, their social relationships are very international, that is, they do not socialise merely with their fellow citizens (see section 11.4).

Furthermore, I earlier defined reflecting on one's distinctive self as an important characteristic of bohemian lifestyle migrants. The Westerners in Varanasi seem to fulfil this criterion as well since many of them, especially the women, constantly reflect upon their 'true selves' and elaborate on the choices they have made and will make. They view India as a very particular place to find themselves, which is in fact common also among, tourists and travellers. Another typical characteristic of bohemian lifestyle migrants that I listed earlier is that they create an alternative space with like-minded people in their destinations. This happens also with the Westerners in Varanasi, as becomes evident in the following chapters.

In one respect, however, the Westerners in Varanasi differ from typical bohemian lifestyle migrants. Instead of aiming at a holistic lifestyle in which labour, leisure, spirituality and identity formation are combined (see e.g., D'Andrea 2007, 4), for many Westerners in Varanasi labour is a clearly separate sphere of life; something that they conduct in the West between their sojourns abroad. Therefore, unlike many other bohemian lifestyle migrants, their economic strategies are separate from their identity formation, even more so because they usually work in menial jobs in the West, not in jobs that would promote their 'alternative' identities. Examples of the latter types of jobs would include a spiritual healer, an

⁶⁰ According to Indian aesthetics, music (or any art) is considered to have a metaphysical aspect: listening to or playing the music, like practicing yoga, can contribute to reaching a higher spiritual level.

artist or a yoga teacher but very few Westerners in Varanasi have such occupations; even if they practice something similar, they do not make enough money from it in order to support themselves but need better (or more precisely regularly) paid (menial) jobs as well. Consequently, in some respects their bohemian lifestyle migration seems to be a part-time project. However, they repeatedly return to the bohemian space and can thus be conceptualised as bohemian lifestyle migrants. Therefore, although others have conceptualised a similar phenomenon as nomadism (see e.g., D'Andrea 2007; Bousiou 2008), I do not want to refer to the Westerners in Varanasi as nomads because nomadism precisely indicates a holistic lifestyle which does not characterise my research subjects. Instead, they move in and out of the bohemian space. Finally, I conceptualise the bohemian space as a liminoid space. The Westerners' stay in Varanasi is not a liminal ritual to adulthood but a much more permanent and long-lasting phenomenon; yet, it is clearly an alternative marginal space separate from the 'mainstream' society, both from Western and Indian points of view.

All in all, although they make their choices on individual bases, the Westerners in Varanasi emphasise the importance of being with like-minded people. The next chapters thus deal with what happens in this hub or alternative space of like-minded people, in the local space of Varanasi.

8. LIFE IN VARANASI: EMPHASIS ON FRIENDS AND FUN

Now that I have described and discussed how the Westerners in Varanasi justify their lifestyle and what kinds of values they appreciate, it is time to look at what they actually do there: the activities they are involved in and the practices they share. This chapter is based on the field diaries of my participant observation.

8.1 The Intense Social Life of the Westerners in Varanasi

8.1.1 Routines and Surprise Visits that are Not Surprising

‘My house is like a coffee house; people are coming and going all the time!’

A Western man said this to me when I asked him when would be a suitable time to visit him. His comment refers to the intensity of being together and the ease with which the Varanasi Westerners visit each other. The Westerners live within walking distance of each other, many even in the same buildings. One is welcome to visit others at almost any time. I was amazed to realise that people were not surprised at my visits, even when I had not visited them before. They had seen me around, thus it was not odd that I appeared at their door one day⁶¹.

The Westerners in Varanasi do not have internet connections, telephones or mobile phones⁶² and therefore, one cannot e-mail, call or send an SMS in order to make appointments. Therefore, surprise visits are

⁶¹ Usually in such situations, I visited the person in order to ask for an interview.

⁶² At the time of my fieldwork, the mobile phone network was not very good in Varanasi and since the network seldom worked, it was rather useless to have a mobile phone. Moreover, the pre-paid cards were rather expensive and valid for only a very limited period of time. Many Westerners in Varanasi also opposed mobile phones as useless commodities. When I visited Varanasi in 2009, however, almost all the Westerners whom I met had a mobile phone, some even an internet connection. Yet, surprise visits were still a common practice among them.

the easiest option, and the Westerners frequently seek out each others' company and enjoy spending time together. As unplanned visits are very much part of everyday life, one does not need a special occasion to stop by. Sometimes, the 'hosts' continue doing whatever they were occupied with without paying much attention to the guest or the guest can feel so much at ease that s/he goes to the kitchen to make tea or even to cook a meal. The same man who called his apartment a coffee house once asked me to make tea for us — using his kitchen as if it was mine — while he was taking a shower. I was not his close friend and I had just come to his place but he had already had several visitors that day and he had postponed his shower for hours. Thus, he decided to finally shower despite the fact that I had just arrived. This indicates that he did not consider my visit something special, and he also expected me to feel so much at ease in his apartment that I would feel comfortable using his kitchen.

The sociability and surprise visits are usually appreciated among the Westerners but it can also become overwhelming: a few people have moved to live further apart from the other Westerners in order to gain privacy. Those people have not isolated themselves but are often socially very active, albeit on their own terms: by living far away from others, they limit the number of surprise visits to their apartments. They still visit others' apartments, however.

The everyday life of the Westerners in Varanasi is very relaxed. Many of them practice music for a few hours every day and have lessons several times a week. Household tasks (cooking, cleaning and doing laundry) take a lot of time. Their daily routines are very similar to each other although they do not follow strict routines; activities are commonly interrupted, for example, by friends visiting, electric outages or cuts in the water supply. All in all, the Westerners intensively spend time together. In fact, they see each other almost daily, sometimes even several times a day. A crucial time in the daily routine is sunset. Some refer to sunset as 'socialising time': the Westerners gather at a particular tea stall to drink *chai*⁶³ and chat for awhile. Very often, friends cook and eat dinner together and hang out, chatting, playing music and smoking hash⁶⁴, until late at night. Sometimes, there are bigger parties; at other times, it is just casual socialising. None of the Westerners have televisions and there is no nightlife, such as bars, in Varanasi. Therefore, hanging out is an important source of recreation for the Westerners. They also regularly attend concerts of classical Indian music, and occasionally they go to picnics on the other

⁶³ *Chai*: spicy (ginger, cinnamon etc.) tea with a lot of sugar and milk.

⁶⁴ Varanasi is the city of the god Shiva, who is associated with hash smoking. Therefore, many Westerners justify their hash smoking by claiming that smoking it is a part of the 'Varanasi life' although it is definitely not a very common, and definitely not an appreciated, practice among locals.

side of the river or to swim in the Ganges or a waterfall which is an hour's taxi drive from Varanasi⁶⁵.

In addition to daily routines, there is also a certain annual repetition in the lives of the Westerners in Varanasi. First of all, arrivals in September-October and departures in March-April reoccur year after year. Moreover, Hindu festivals give a certain rhythm to the life of the Westerners, and certain concerts which the Westerners attend take place at specific times in the Hindu calendar every year. Certain parties are organised regularly as well: for example, the birthdays of some long-term sojourners. All in all, the Westerners in Varanasi enjoy each others' company and appreciate the fact that there is always someone to visit and chat with.

8.1.2 Parties, Parties and More Parties

A very central activity among the Westerners in Varanasi is parties. There are parties on a weekly basis and parties and smaller dinner gatherings are the main evening entertainment among the Westerners. In the following excerpt I describe a typical party.

I sit at the tea stall by the Ganges River. I hear a few women planning a party for the evening. I turn towards them and join the discussion. They tell me that there will be a party in the 'Ashok house', and we now need to plan who will buy which food ingredients. Some people have already promised to make a salad, pasta and rice pudding. I am invited to the party and I promise to buy whole wheat bread. Anton says he will buy *chapati*⁶⁶, Sandra is told to buy leaf plates and clay cups, Celine promises to bring fruit. We discuss whether everyone 'important' knows about the party or whether we should make an effort to invite more people. We assume that the message has been spread enough; usually information about parties easily reaches 'everyone'. It is six o'clock in the evening. I go home to rest for awhile.

Soon after nine, I go to the house where the party is being held. Many Westerners live in that house. I enter Anton's apartment: it is easy to know whose apartment to enter since there are several pairs of shoes in front of the entrance. About fifteen people are sitting on the floor in his room. Some are cutting fruit for a fruit salad. Anton is in the kitchen with a few people and the food they are cooking smells delicious. I give them the loaves of bread that I have bought. A *chillum*⁶⁷ is passed around and people chat quietly. The small apartment is getting hot with so many people inside

⁶⁵ When the weather gets hot, it is common for the Westerners to go to the waterfall with their friends to spend a day swimming in the fresh water.

⁶⁶ *Chapati*: thin soft bread.

⁶⁷ *Chillum*: a hash pipe.

it. It is already April, and the fan is not working since there is again an electric outage. Candles –that are needed to give light – obviously heat the air more. Someone suggests we move to the roof of the building. There, we will have more space and the air is fresh. The food is almost ready anyway. Everyone gets up and carries something to the roof: pots of food, dishes, musical instruments, mats to sit on etc. The mats are arranged into a circle and the food is put in the middle. There are various dishes of food since several people have been cooking. There is no running water on the roof but Anton brings a bucket of water for washing hands — we will eat in the Indian style by using our fingers. People chat quietly with their friends, everyone is waiting for the party to start. I feel almost bored; it always takes so long for anything to start in Varanasi. We sit and wait for almost an hour. More people arrive gradually. Some of them are greeted excitedly: they are the ones who are the most popular or the most well-known. Finally, Anton comes up with the last pot of food. Everything is ready and we can finally eat. Celine and Cecil put the food on plates so that everyone gets an equal share. Compliments are given to those who cooked, otherwise we eat in silence — by that time many of us are starving. The women and children of the landlord’s family come to the roof as well; they want to taste the food but disappear soon after.

After we have eaten, a box of Varanasi sweets⁶⁸ is passed around as well as several *chillums*. A few men tune their instruments and without any announcement, start to play together. There is a flute and a few drums. We all sit back and relax to listen to classical Indian music in the dark warm night. At times, the musicians take breaks and someone else starts to play; the jamming continues for a long time. I chat with some friends of mine. We look at the moon, talk about some friends who have already left Varanasi, we make plans for another party, and complain about the long electric outages. Sandra gets up and says goodbye, she goes home to sleep. Gradually more and more people leave. It is already two o’clock in the morning. Finally, the musicians get tired and pack their instruments. At that point, I leave but I hear the next day that the party continued until sunrise.

This exact party never took place but many similar ones did. Usually parties are arranged for a reason. Yet, it is rather easy to find ‘excuses’ for organising a party. Such reasons include birthdays, a full moon, Western as well as Indian (but only Hindu, not Muslim) holidays (Christmas, Easter, *Holi*⁶⁹, *Diwali*⁷⁰ etc.). A very important category is farewell parties, which I discuss later (see chapter 10). Usually, there are 15-30 people at the parties but sometimes there are parties of over a hundred people. In the latter, there are also short-term tourists present and there is no food. Consequently, such parties are less intimate than the ones where everyone knows each other and eats together.

⁶⁸ Varanasi sweets are made mainly of milk and sugar.

⁶⁹ *Holi*: the new year in spring.

⁷⁰ *Diwali*: the festival of light in autumn.

Parties are routine occasions, not something extraordinary and special, among the Westerners in Varanasi. Parties are usually quite similar: it is the same people, the same few locations and the same activities. Everyone knows what to expect: food, music and *chillums*. Occasionally, someone's *guru* is invited to perform; otherwise some Western men play together (on the gender aspect, see section 9.3.1). Sometimes, a few Western women perform a fire dance⁷¹.

Sometimes, however, things do not progress as planned. Once, a party was going along as described above. A man was playing *bajans*⁷² with a guitar and many joined in the singing. The atmosphere was slow and relaxed. Suddenly, a woman put on techno music from a mini-disc player connected to big loudspeakers: she wanted to dance. The change of music completely changed the atmosphere of the party. As a result, many of those who had been singing *bajans* left, and there were a few quiet comments about techno music being inappropriate in this context. Nobody, however, challenged the situation openly, and the techno music continued for the rest of the night.

Obviously, parties do not just happen but require actions. Although not everyone is expected to organise parties, everyone is expected to somehow contribute to them. Mostly this means cooking or buying food, sweets, plates, flowers, firewood or other necessary items. Sharing one's hash or alcohol is an important way to contribute to party arrangements and failing to do so is unthinkable. I noticed that one man never brought anything to parties, although he frequently participated in them. However, he always brought along his instruments. Therefore, his contribution was his musical performances and it seemed to be well accepted as he was considered to be a talented musician and people enjoyed listening to him.

When people share and contribute to party arrangements, they also expect something in return, that is, the contributions should be mutual. As a consequence, one has to be careful whom to invite, that is, with whom one is willing to share. When planning a party, one has to take into account that the rules of reciprocity can easily be violated. Once I was observing a planning session for a small private concert in the apartment of a Westerner. The organisers were joking that one must not invite any *Rainbow people*⁷³ since they will come in big numbers, eat all the food and

⁷¹ Fire dancing is performance art that involves the manipulation of objects on fire. Typically these objects have one or more bundles of wicking, which are soaked in fuel and ignited. Fire dancing is often performed to music. It has been a traditional part of many cultures, and modern fire performance often includes visual and stylistic elements from many traditions. (Wikipedia, accessed 15.4.2008) The art of fire dancing has become popular among travellers all around the world, and one can take fire dance lessons also in Varanasi.

⁷² A *bajan*: a hymn with easy, catchy tunes.

⁷³ The Rainbow Family is an informal group of people who consider themselves to be part of a huge extended family. The members gather together at festivals in nature in order to create harmony and peace.

smoke all the hash. Moreover, one was not to advertise the concert in tourist restaurants or guesthouses: it had to be 'a secret' occasion which only a few chosen people would find out about. Indeed, such information easily spreads by word of mouth, and sometimes, information about the parties spreads to the 'wrong' people. I was told a story of a party that suddenly attracted a big crowd. The organisers did not know who all those people were and they got worried they would not have enough food for all of them. There was also an unknown Indian man sitting in the crowd, and one of the organisers went to ask him who he was and why he was there. He replied that he was a taxi driver who brought some tourists to this tourist happening. The man, as well as the tourists, were asked to leave. The message of the story is clear: the parties of the long-term sojourners are not meant for tourists. However, such a situation easily occurs because the Westerners value openness: any Westerner can appear at a party venue.

People are often personally invited to parties but there is actually no need for a formal invitation. In the early stages of my fieldwork, a man asked me why I had not been at a party held the previous evening. 'Everyone was there' he said. I told him that I had not been invited. In fact, I had really wanted to go to the party as I had heard about it but I had felt that without an invitation, I could not go, especially since I did not know the host at all. The man replied to me: 'You don't need an invitation. I was not invited either but I heard about it and went there anyway.' Later on in my fieldwork, I knew that I could go to any party I heard about even if I was not formally invited and even if I did not know the host(s).

The Varanasi parties are very informal, open occasions. In addition to not needing an invitation, people do not dress up but come in their usual clothes. Therefore, it is very easy to come and go according to one's moods. For example, people can leave parties very quickly if they do not like the event or if they are 'not in the mood' for it.

The locations where parties take place depend a lot on the season. In winter, it is too cold to be outside whereas in late spring, it is too hot to be inside. Roofs are commonly used as living spaces in India especially in the hot season, and the Westerners often organise their parties on the roofs of buildings where they live. In winter, parties usually take place in someone's apartment, which results in a very intense atmosphere due to the lack of space. However, also in winter, people can gather outside on roofs or terraces in the daytime. In such cases, there is usually a fire in the middle and everyone sits as close to it as possible. In the hot season, the days are

They are committed to principles of nonviolence and nonhierarchical egalitarianism. Many of their practices are based on native American traditions. The movement started in the US but there are huge gatherings in Europe and Australia as well, and occasionally also in India. (<http://www.welcomehome.org/>, accessed 20.1.2007, see also Niman 1997)

too hot and so parties take place late in the evenings. Obviously, organising a party requires some initiative: one has to invite people and organise food and other accessories. At times, there are no such people in Varanasi and then, the social life of the Westerners is quieter.

8.1.3 Row, Row, Row the Boat: Refreshing Swimming in the Ganges River

During my first period of fieldwork, swimming excursions to the Ganges River were very popular among the Westerners.

It has been a very hot day, over 40°C degrees. I feel sweaty and dirty. It is 5 pm and I go to the tea stall. Anton and Celine are already there and very soon, a few others join us. We walk down towards the river, and our favourite boatman, Anil, leads us to his boat. Marco has seen us from the *ghat* and runs to the boat as well. We are eight people all together. Anil pushes the boat away from the shore and starts to row. The wooden boat is very heavy and Anil is an old man but we are not in a hurry. The sun is still shining and there is a refreshing breeze in the middle of the river. We chat together while Anil rows towards the opposite shore of the Ganges. In the middle of the river, Anton and Samir take off their clothes and jump into the water in their underwear. The rest of us wait until we reach the shore. We get off the boat: the men swim in their underwear whereas the women swim in full clothing. We enter the warm water which feels very refreshing after the hot sweaty day. Some of the men pretend to be dolphins; they are acting like small children, enjoying being in the water. We are in the water for maybe half an hour. Gradually, one by one, we return to the boat. The men change their clothes and the women squeeze the water out of theirs. Sara wants to change her shirt and I try to cover her with a scarf but in spite of that, two Indian men appear on the beach and stare at us. Anton tells them to leave but they refuse to move; they are too excited to see a woman changing her clothes. I do not change my clothes; luckily cotton dries quickly in the hot weather. Sunset is approaching, and Anil slowly rows us back to the other side. Anton collects ten rupees from each of us and hands the money to Anil when we leave the boat. We all go to drink *chai* at the tea stall. We are feeling fresh and relaxed although the heat of the stone stairs where the tea stall is located soon makes us sweat again. (April 2002)

Almost every day in April and May, three to ten Westerners, including me, met at a particular tea stall before sunset. We then took a boat to the other side of the river, swam for awhile and returned to the tea stall. A few times, a swimming excursion ended up being a big singing session when a certain Western man brought his guitar to the boat and played *bajans*. Those times, we stayed on the boat for one to two hours.

According to the health authorities, the river is so polluted that nobody should swim there. It is impossible, however, to forbid devoted Hindus from bathing in the holy river. The Westerners who do swim in the river do not seem to get sick from the water, and therefore, they also ignore the warnings. Already in early April, the temperature reaches 40°C in Varanasi and swimming is very tempting in such heat⁷⁴.

Paying the boatman after the excursions often causes a hassle. One person has to collect the money after it has been discussed how much everyone should contribute. Usually, the boatman is not asked for a price but the passengers decide themselves how much is appropriate. There are always some who do not pay, claiming they do not have any money with them at the time, they do not have proper change or that they paid a lot the last time. In principle, everyone is expected to contribute but in reality, some never do. Yet, it might be that I am the only one who noticed it: the others did not pay much attention to who gave money and who did not but expected everyone to contribute.

Sometimes, it was just us women on the boat but most of us preferred to have men with us. Boat rides on the Ganges are common entertainment among Indian people as well, and young Indian men out on boat rides often come very close to the boats of Westerners. Moreover, if Westerners are on the other side of the river, local men regularly appear from the deserted-looking shore or from other boats: they want to see Western women in wet clothes or in little clothing. Their bold staring disturbs the Western women and the women repeatedly tell the men to go away. Sometimes, the boatmen or some Western men tell the staring men to leave. If the men do leave, they typically return soon after and thus have to be told to leave several times. Indian women do not swim in the Ganges; they may take ritual baths but they are carefully covered then. Swimming for fun is not suitable for Indian women in Varanasi, whereas it is a very popular activity among the men living there. The Western women do not want to miss the fun of swimming but they have to pay careful attention to their 'swimming costumes'. Appearing in a swimming suit would be unthinkable, unless one wants to attract a big crowd of excitedly staring men, and even dangerous, since by wearing such an outfit, a woman conveys a strong message of sexual availability.

The following season, when I conducted the second period of my fieldwork, swimming excursions were rare. Those of us who had been swimming the year before, sometimes nostalgically talked about those

⁷⁴ The Ganges can also be dangerous for those who are not good swimmers and the boatmen often warned us to be careful of the strong currents. Every year, a few Indians drown in Varanasi. The Westerners, however, are rather careful when swimming in the river and those who are not good swimmers stay near the shore.

excursions. The swimming excursions were our common memories: we had shared some fun moments in the past. It is difficult to say why the swimming excursions became so rare but an important reason is probably simply the fact that there was no one to initiate the swimming; everyone seemed to be too busy. This shows the importance of active, initiating individuals; without them, there are a lot fewer common activities among the Westerners in Varanasi. Things do not happen unless someone makes them happen, and practices need participants.

8.1.4 Very Long Nights: Concerts of Classical Indian Music

Depending on the year, at the end of February or beginning of March, there is a big Hindu festival called *Shivaratri*. It is a celebration of the *Night of Shiva*⁷⁵ on the last new moon of the year — New Year is celebrated two weeks later. On *Shivaratri*, one is allowed to let loose and especially in Varanasi, cannabis is consumed by anyone without blame. It is common to drink *bhang lassi* — a yoghurt drink with cannabis — or eat *bhang cookies* — cookies with cannabis. In Varanasi, there are always a few music festivals on *Shivaratri*. The biggest of them is *Dhrupad Mela*⁷⁶, which concentrates on *dhrupad* music, an ancient style of Indian music. The festival is patronised by the *Maharaj*⁷⁷ of Varanasi and it lasts for three nights. The festival takes place by the Ganges River on a compound that is closed to the public for the rest of the year.

Dhrupad Mela is extremely popular among the Westerners. It has been organised annually since the 1970s, and is thus well known. Moreover, the location is very close to the area where the Westerners live, therefore, it is very convenient for them to spend at least part of the night at the concerts since home and bed are not far. *Dhrupad* music is popular among the Westerners in Varanasi but even those who claim not to like it very much attend the festival. In fact, participating in the *Dhrupad Mela* is almost ‘compulsory’ for all the long-term Western sojourners, and one can count on seeing old friends there even if those friends are usually not participating in the activities of the Westerners in Varanasi.

The concerts are free, they start after sunset and often last long past sunrise. There are plastic chairs at the back of the audience but most people sit on mattresses in front of the stage. The soft mattresses tempt many to take naps during the long nights as well. Each performance lasts for an hour or less, and one can skip the ones that one does not like. In fact, music

⁷⁵ *Shiva*: one of the major gods of Hinduism.

⁷⁶ *Mela*: festival.

⁷⁷ *Maharaj*: a king. He does not have any official power nowadays although he is still highly respected.

is only part of the experience; the social scene that goes on during unpopular performances is at least as important as the music.

Since the concerts last all night, there is plenty of time for socialising. In fact, sitting in the audience all night would be physically very demanding. People typically come and go from the venue: one can go to eat dinner, drink *chai*, visit friends or just go for a walk, and return later. Such behaviour at concerts is typical in India (see Hämeenniemi 2007, 16-19) and is thus a local custom that the Westerners in Varanasi have adopted as it suits them well. At the venue of *Dhrupad Mela*, there is a particular area for socialising: there is a sort of terrace facing the Ganges River where the Westerners gather to chat with each other and to smoke hash. Someone even said to me that *Dhrupad Mela* is the best music festival in Varanasi since there is such a convenient place for smoking there. The Westerners in Varanasi always look forward to the festival with excitement. Yet, spending three subsequent nights at concerts is physically demanding and when the festival is over, everyone is exhausted. It should also be noted that the fact that the Westerners do not work in Varanasi enables them to fully participate in the festival. If one had to go to work the following morning, one could not stay at concerts all night long. In fact, in the morning the audience is almost exclusively Western: the Indians have gone home to sleep.

Dhrupad Mela is the most important yearly event in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi. Concerts are also essential entertainment in Varanasi, and it is not only the music but the whole social experience that matters at *Dhrupad Mela* as well as at other concerts. In a way, *Dhrupad Mela* is an event where ancient classical music is used as an excuse for a social gathering of the Westerners. Meeting old friends and socialising with friends are important aspects of the concert experience. Yet, it has to be kept in mind that classical Indian music is very central in their lives and many truly enjoy the music.

It is the third night of *Dhrupad Mela*. I have slept all day but I am still tired. I am not in a hurry to go to the concert venue since I know that I have a long night ahead of me. I arrive after nine o'clock. There is a drum performance which does not interest me much. I see Roy at the tea stall and we talk for awhile. I tell him that he missed an amazing singer this morning. He says he was too tired to stay until the morning. We also talk about some other performances of the previous night. He seems to have very strong opinions on what was good and what was not. I go to the socialising area in order to see what is going on there but the terrace is empty. I walk around restlessly trying to find someone to talk with. The drumming stops and I go to sit in the audience in order to listen to the next

performance. The *vina*⁷⁸ music is very pleasant and I almost fall asleep. I sit near some friends of mine; one of them is recording the performance onto a mini-disc. I stay in the audience for the next three performances. The last one of those involves a Westerner on stage, which means that all the other Westerners carefully follow the performance and later give compliments to this person.

Three hours later, I finally get up and go again to the socialising area. I sit with Noel and his friends. They are talking about the performances. We are ten people sitting next to each other facing the river. Raymond comes and states: 'Ah, this is the freak line!' Noel replies, 'Yes, I think you are the only normal one.' Raymond corrects him fast: 'No, I am not normal!' Being defined as normal seems to be insulting for him. He joins us and starts a conversation with someone else. The music continues behind our backs, the river in front of us is black and mosquitoes are biting us. My mosquito repellent is welcomed with relief. We chat without much direction in the conversation; nobody seems to have much to say and we are all tired. I decide to go for a walk in order to freshen up.

In the street, I meet Matt, who is coming from another concert. He says it was nice but nothing extraordinary. Therefore, I decide it is not worth the effort to walk there — it is still a twenty minutes' walk and it is already past midnight. I need to use a bathroom but there is none at the concert venue. I remember that Lars lives next to the venue and in his house, there is a common toilet. I go there and see many shoes in front of Lars's room. The door is not locked and I enter the room. There are ten people there sitting on cushions on the floor. They have come there to rest and to drink black coffee in order to be able to stay awake until morning. I am offered a glass of coffee which I need to share with two other people since there are not enough glasses for all of us. We can hear the concert also in the room. When there is a break between two performances, many people get up to leave; they want to see the next performance. Lars leaves as well and tells us to lock the door when we leave. We are welcome to stay and make more coffee though.

I soon go back to the concert and sleep on the mattresses for awhile; I simply cannot keep my eyes open anymore and my body is aching from the pain of tiredness. After about an hour, I wake up to listen to a singing performance and later, I join my friends, who sit on the terrace looking at the sunrise on the Ganges River. Fishermen are checking their nets on the river, which shines in various colours. The red sun quickly grows and turns yellow: a new day has begun and the magic of the night is gone. We decide to go down to the *ghat* to drink *chai*. The sun is already high and it makes the tea stall hot. Nevertheless, it is refreshing to get a cup of *chai*. My friends decide to go home to sleep whereas I go back to the concert venue and stay for another drumming performance. We are only ten people left in the audience, which makes me feel sorry for the performers. It is past nine in the morning when I finally go home to sleep. (February 2003)

⁷⁸ *Vina*: a string instrument.

The description above suggests that the social aspect is very significant at *Dhrupad Mela*. The sociability culminated in the coffee gathering in Lars's apartment. Obviously, it involved only long-term sojourners as one had to know where Lars lives; short-term tourists would not have known him or the location of his apartment. Sharing coffee glasses is a rather extreme act of sharing. It is not very common among the Westerners in Varanasi but it occasionally happens in very intimate gatherings. In the end, Lars showed a significant amount of trust when he returned to the concert while many of us stayed in his apartment. Obviously, he would not have let just anyone stay alone in his place but he was not worried about us, since he knew us. Moreover, Raymond's comment above about 'freaks' hints at a countercultural attitude (see section 6.2.3).

In the end, I watched the sunrise and went to drink chai with a few Westerners. These activities also illustrate the emphasis on the social scene: we were at the concert venue but preferred socialising with each other to listening to the music. A similar pattern also obviously occurs at music festivals in the West and is typical for an Indian concert audience (see Hämeenniemi 2007, 16-17). However, in Varanasi, it is a rather peculiar phenomenon as many Westerners claim to be devoted music students (see section 9.2). Yet, instead of listening to all the performances, the devotion is expressed by being a very selective audience. In fact, the long-term Westerners refuse to listen to anything but the very best and they share an understanding of who the best musicians are. In the description above, Roy behaved in this way when he gave me his critique of the performances of the previous night.

It is remarkable that at *Dhrupad Mela*, the majority of the audience is Western. The main reason for this is that *dhrupad* is not as popular among Indians as 'lighter' classical music is, whereas many Westerners in Varanasi are particularly fascinated by *dhrupad*. Some performers who are not from Varanasi comment that they are surprised by the large number of Westerners in the audience whereas local musicians are well-prepared to perform for Westerners; above all, they are ready to speak English. In addition to the long-term sojourners, most of whom study Indian music, there are many tourists there; the free festival attracts them even when they are not familiar with the music. Yet, tourists never stay at the concerts as long as the long-term sojourners and they do not have the knowledge needed to choose which performances to follow and which ones to ignore in the way the long-term sojourners do.

Since the festival takes place at the same time every year, it also plays a role in the annual rhythm of the Westerners in Varanasi. Many come to Varanasi specifically for *Dhrupad Mela*, others leave soon after it. In any case, the festival is a turning point in the life of the Westerners there.

After it, the weather starts to get hot and people gradually start to leave or at least start to think about leaving.

8.2 Central Locations

There are certain locations in Varanasi that are central to the life of the Westerners there. In the following, I describe three of the most important places: a tea stall, a restaurant and a shop.

8.2.1 Tea, Gossip and Information: The Tea Stall by the Ganges River

The *chaishop*⁷⁹ was full. [...] I watched myself yesterday sitting on the *ghat* and I knew everybody who was coming. And just to say ‘Hello, how are you?’ took one hour. (Hanna, 24)

A tea stall by the Ganges River is the most central place in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi as they gather there daily at sunset. There are several tea stalls by the river but one in particular is the favourite of the long-term Western sojourners. It is a very simple place. A man – usually accompanied by his family members — makes *chai* on a single coal stove. He also sells simple biscuits. The stall is not a building but just a spot on the ancient stone stairs by the Ganges River. Customers sit on those stairs facing the river. In case of rain, nobody goes to the tea stall since there is no roof. Also in the heat of the sun, it is impossible to sit there.

The Westerners do not sit at the tea stall during the day: if one wants to meet other Westerners, the right time to go there is at sunset. Usually people stay at the tea stall for at least half an hour but can sometimes stay for a few hours. During a full moon, it is particularly popular to go to the tea stall because one can see the moonrise above the river from there. On those nights, Westerners often stay at the tea stall for a long time. In addition to sunset, sunrise is another popular time to drink tea but very few long-term sojourners make the effort to go to the stall so early in the morning. Going to the tea stall at sunset is a clear turning point in the day: the Westerners usually spend their days practicing music and running errands whereas sunset marks the beginning of ‘time for socialising’.

The tea stall is also an excellent spot from which to observe life on the *ghat*, and that life is never boring: all kinds of people walk by, there are

⁷⁹ *Chaishop*: tea stall.

often performances of child acrobats and there are boats on the river. The Westerners consider the tea stall a convenient place to socialise and pass the time. Occasionally, someone comes with a guitar and plays *bajans*, in which case people can stay singing at the tea stall for a very long time. Sometimes, someone comes with an African *djembe* drum (one can buy them in India nowadays). Loud drumming obviously catches everyone's attention, and often attracts a big Indian audience. Once, a film crew was shooting a movie by the river near the tea stall. The film setting attracted a big Indian audience but an even bigger crowd was attracted by two Western men playing *djembe* drums at the tea stall. In fact, the gathering of Westerners at the tea stall often attracts the attention of Indian people walking by and many stop to stare at the group; especially Indian tourist groups, who occasionally also want to get their photo taken with the Westerners. In addition, well-off Western package tourists often stare at the 'hippie' crowd at the tea stall and may also take photos of them. I also probably appear in a few such photos.

The fact that on special request, one can order also black tea, shows that this particular tea stall aims to serve Westerners: Indians usually drink milk tea and rarely black tea, whereas some Westerners never get used to the sweet milk tea (*chai*). The tea is served in small glasses but in order to please some of the more demanding Western customers (most of whom are women), one can get one's *chai* in a small clay cup as well. This used to be the norm in India earlier but glasses have replaced the clay cups: the clay cups become more expensive since one throws them away after use whereas glasses can be reused again and again⁸⁰. All the Western long-term sojourners know the owner of the tea stall by name and he recognises all of them. He also quickly learns who wants her/his tea in a clay cup so that one does not have to request it explicitly every time. The tea is cheap and it is common among the Westerners to pay for the tea of one's friends.

The tea stall is a convenient place to meet one's friends without making the effort to visit their homes. In fact, if one is a long-term sojourner, one is even expected to come. At one point during my fieldwork, I went to Calcutta for a few days. I was away for less than a week, yet when I returned, several people asked me where I had been since they had not seen me at the tea stall. The incident suggests that the tea stall is very central: when I was not seen there, it was assumed that I had either been away from the city or that I had been sick.

The following incident also illustrates the significance of the tea stall among the Westerners.

⁸⁰ Some upper caste Hindus still refuse to drink from glasses since they may have been used by impure lower caste people. Nowadays, many tea stalls in Varanasi have started to use disposable plastic cups but the tea stalls by the Ganges River have not adopted this practice (yet).

I am on my way to the tea stall when I suddenly realise that the police has destroyed it, among many others. I suppose the reason is that the owner does not have a license for his business⁸¹. Later in the evening, I meet Olga whom I usually meet at the tea stall. She says to me: ‘Today, we don’t have our home!’ (December 2002)

Olga’s words were meant as an exaggeration but they also sum up well the significance of the tea stall for the Westerners in Varanasi: it is an extremely central place in their lives, and if it is closed their routines are considerably disturbed.

If I had to describe it in a word, I would call the tea stall the information centre. At the tea stall, future activities are discussed and one thus gets information about upcoming events. Countless times, I was informed about concerts and parties when I was at the tea stall and countless times, people asked me for such information as well as for the whereabouts of some people. If one is looking for a certain long-term Westerner, the best place to ask is the tea stall; most likely there is someone there who knows the whereabouts of that person — also of those Westerners who are away from Varanasi at the time but who regularly sojourn there. If one is not actively present at the tea stall, one may fail to get important information and consequently, one may miss crucial events. For example, concerts are not very well advertised in Varanasi, and definitely not in English. Usually such information is spread among Westerners by music students whose *gurus* have given them the information. Reaching the word of mouth chain of news is easiest at the tea stall.

8.2.2 The Living Room: Restaurant ‘M’

It is early evening. I have been at the tea stall but there were not many Westerners there. On my way back home, I decide to check what is going on in restaurant ‘M’. I enter the restaurant and immediately notice familiar faces gathered around a table there. I go to sit down with them. I order French fries and chat with the people sitting next to me. We are ten people around the table, all long-term sojourners, and we all know each other well. There are a few small groups of backpacker tourists at other tables but we do not pay any attention to them. Nono gets the waiter confused by ordering a *falafel* sandwich without *falafel*. Marco is watching a Hindi movie with Ron and Sandra. A few people are drinking coffee; Oscar is reading a newspaper. Someone leaves, someone else arrives. The food is

⁸¹ Obtaining such a license is very difficult — if not impossible — and in any case expensive. Therefore, even if one wanted to operate legally, it might not be possible. Every now and then, the police target the illegal businesses but after a few days, everything returns to normal.

never served to everyone at one table at the same time in this restaurant, thus others have already finished eating when the last ones get their orders. We chat, joke and eat. The atmosphere is very playful and relaxed. We hang out in the restaurant a long time. Tourists come and go: some of them glance at our noisy group but none of them approach us. (March 2003)

The restaurant where the above gathering took place is set in a peaceful, garden-like environment. There is a roof but no walls. The green and relaxed atmosphere is very unique among the tourist restaurants in Varanasi, most of which are small, dark and situated in noisy, narrow alleys. This particular restaurant attracts many tourists but it has nevertheless become popular also among the long-term sojourners. There are not many good 'Western' restaurants in Varanasi and this one is considered the best of them, although it is also criticised a lot. The restaurant is in the middle price range and it serves pasta, pizza, mashed potatoes, french fries and other 'Western dishes' that are available in all backpacker restaurants in Asia (on 'the banana pancake trail', see Hutnyk 1996, 43; Scheyvens 2002, 148). Indian food is also available but it is not very popular there since one can get the same food a lot cheaper in restaurants that are meant for locals. In addition to Westerners, restaurant 'M' also attracts middle class Indian customers. Yet, I have never seen any interaction between the Indian customers and Westerners. (on the Westerners' relations with Indian people, see chapter 11)

The restaurant is very conveniently located close to the homes of most of the long-term Western sojourners. For them, the restaurant is not just a place to eat but it has become their 'living room' as became evident in the story above. Some Westerners go there regularly to read newspapers, watch television, or have a chat with the staff or with their friends. It is common to stop by the restaurant to check if any of one's friends are there. There is no obligation to order food although many long-term sojourners eat there occasionally as well. One can also make phone calls and change money there. In addition, it has travel agent services and many of the long-term sojourners order their train tickets from there in order to avoid going to the crowded railway station themselves. The staff knows most of the long-term sojourners: I sometimes used the restaurant as a source of information when I had to find out where someone lived and I usually got accurate answers to such questions.

In backpacker tourist restaurants in Asia, one can sit for hours talking with other tourists, writing letters etc. This particular restaurant in Varanasi is therefore not an exception but it is peculiar in the sense that also the long-term sojourners frequent it although they usually avoid places that are popular among tourists (see section 8.3.2). In restaurant 'M', tourists are physically present but the two groups are socially separate as the long-term sojourners consciously keep their distance from tourists; for

example, they never sit with them at the same table. The long-term sojourners differ from tourists also in that they know the menu of the restaurant and do not necessarily even have to look at it when they order, whereas tourists are not that familiar with the food served there.

Almost all the long-term Western sojourners eat in restaurant 'M' every now and then. Very often, they defend this by claiming that they are too busy to cook. Yet, even if almost everyone does it, eating in restaurant 'M' is not valued very much. In my understanding, an important reason for this is the need to distinguish themselves from tourists: long-term sojourners cook their own food or eat in restaurants meant for locals whereas tourists eat in 'Western' restaurants. Moreover, it is very common to criticise restaurant 'M' on terms similar to any other tourist restaurant in India: the food is not good, the service is slow, they are too sparing with the ingredients, it is too expensive and it is not clean and thus, makes one sick. Such comments may or may not have truth to them but they nevertheless construct an 'Indian other', that is, a restaurant in India cannot make good Western food; only Westerners themselves know how to cook Western food well. Nevertheless, very often the Westerners want to eat Western food instead of Indian food although Indian food is cheaper and very often of better quality. All in all, restaurant 'M' is a very central place for the Westerners in Varanasi. One of my interviewees even suggested that I ask all my interviewees what they think about it.

8.2.3 All Roads Lead to Govinda's Shop

I am sitting in a party. We are chatting with friends and enjoying the evening. Suddenly, an Indian man comes to the roof where the party is being held. Everyone gets excited and greets him happily. It is clear that everyone knows him and he knows everyone. He joins the circle where we sit and the party continues. (March 2003)

No other Indian people are present at the party but this one man is warmly welcomed. Who is he? His role among the Westerners in Varanasi is so central that he deserves his own section.

He is Govinda, a wealthy businessman in his 50s. He owns a tourist shop but also works in the export business and as a travel agent. Most long-term Western sojourners know him and he knows most of them. His shop is an important place in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi. It is situated rather far from the area where most of the Westerners live but still, many of them visit the shop every now and then. Several items are sold there: souvenirs, material for clothes (e.g. raw silk by the meter), clothes, incense sticks, musical instruments, handicrafts, cassettes and discs (mostly of

classical Indian music). For the long-term sojourners, however, the shop also serves many other functions than just selling goods that Westerners like to buy. In fact, they usually go to the shop for other reasons than buying souvenirs.

I want to buy apricot oil. I have asked in several shops but nobody seems to sell it in Varanasi. I decide that instead of spending hours looking for it, I need to go to ask Govinda; he will know for sure. The same day, Sandra's boyfriend has a bad toothache and she decides to go to ask Govinda where to find a good dentist. We go together. We enter Govinda's shop but do not stop to look at the things on sale but determinately walk through the small shop. At the back of it, there is a door leading to another room. The employees are not surprised by our actions: they probably recognise our faces and even if not, they are used to people walking through the shop knowing exactly where to go. We take off our shoes and enter a big room. The floor is covered with soft mattresses and the shelves on the walls are full of colourful fabrics, clothes, toys, souvenirs, cassettes, discs and instruments. Govinda is sitting on the floor in front of three telephones. He greets us happily and calls one of his employees to bring us *chai*. He asks how we are and we chat for awhile. Every now and then, one of his phones rings and he answers it. Sandra uses Govinda's computer to check her e-mail. She asks for a good dentist in Varanasi and he gives her an address, claiming that this dentist is 'Western style', that is, he is not pulling out all one's teeth as many dentists in Varanasi do. I ask where I can buy apricot oil, and Govinda mentions one shop. While I am wandering around the room looking at the things on sale, I notice Govinda talking with one of his employees in Hindi. I later find out that he sent him to that particular shop to buy the oil for me. I and Sandra then have to wait for the employee to return and we end up spending more than an hour in the shop. We chat with Govinda about what we have been up to lately and we talk about some common friends who are not in Varanasi at the time. Govinda clearly enjoys our company and we enjoy sitting on the comfortable pillows on the floor of his shop. While we are chatting, one of the employees comes with a few tourists who want to buy souvenirs. The employee shows them around the shop; they do not pay any attention to us and neither do we to them. Sandra buys a package of incense sticks but other than that, our visit in the shop is not profitable to Govinda — but he does not seem to mind. Just when we are leaving, Noel and Dan enter the shop; they want to reserve flights. More *chai* is served to all of us and we talk with the guys for awhile before leaving. When we finally go, Govinda tells us to be careful with the cold weather; so many people have fallen ill in the past few days. (December 2002)

In the story above I describe one of my many visits to Govinda's shop. Every time, the visit proceeded more or less the same: I walked straight to the second room, I asked for some information and I ended up spending one to two hours in the shop chatting with Govinda and the other

long-term Westerners who happened to be there. Instead of buying things, I hung out in the shop without any intention of spending money.

At first look, Govinda's shop looks like any other tourist shop in Varanasi but for the long-term Westerners it is much more than just a shop. Many Westerners in Varanasi told me that if one sits long enough in Govinda's shop, one is bound to meet everyone. I agree with the statement: eventually, all the long-term sojourners end up in his shop. In fact, he told me that he is providing services that the local tourist administration should provide but that it fails to offer, that is, he gives the Westerners practical information about Varanasi and travelling in India. It is indeed a lot more convenient to go to ask him than to try finding out on one's own. There is no well-functioning tourist information centre in Varanasi, and locals do not necessarily know solutions to the problems of the Westerners. Govinda knows how the Westerners want to be treated and what kind of information they need. He is indeed a very important source of information for the long-term Western sojourners in Varanasi. It is usually him that the Westerners turn to when they need help or advice with some practical matters. He is very well connected in Varanasi and can thus get information about almost anything that the Westerners might ask for. Govinda's role in providing information to the Westerners suggests that he is an important person for them. He also acts as a kind of a father figure when he advises me and Sandra to take care of our health.

Although the long-term Westerners seldom buy souvenirs from Govinda, many order their train and flight tickets from him as he is also a travel agent. If one wants to buy something that Govinda does not have, he either orders it or explains where one can purchase it. As in the story above, he can also send his employees to buy the item for his customer. In addition, he has a parcel-packing service for sending goods abroad. Sometimes, he also sells handicrafts made by some of the long-term Westerners (mostly things that women have knitted or crocheted).

Govinda also allows the long-term Westerners to take musical devices, such as *tabla machines*⁸², home with them in order to check if they like that particular model before buying it. Such a practice shows well the significance of being a long-time sojourner: Govinda trusts them since he knows where they live, who their friends are and that they stay in Varanasi for longer periods. Giving a musical device to such a person for checking is not very risky, whereas he could not do the same with short-term tourists who can easily disappear and take the device with them without paying for it.

⁸² *Tabla* machine: a device that imitates the sounds of a *tabla* drum. Musicians use it for rhythm when they practice other instruments.

Govinda's days in the shop are a mixture of business and socialising with Westerners. It seems to be more of a lifestyle than just work to him. His shop is a comfortable place to hang out and the long-term sojourners usually stay there for at least an hour. The mattresses and pillows on the floor make for a very relaxed atmosphere and invite one to lie back for awhile. A good illustration of the function of his shop as a comfortable hangout is that once, I saw a Western man taking a nap there. It happened during the hot season and that man was enjoying the air-conditioning so much that he fell asleep while waiting for his flight ticket.

The Westerners sometimes call Govinda to ask for advice but in general, they prefer face-to-face meetings and thus the whole social scene: chatting about recent events and future activities as well as gossiping about other Westerners are part of the experience. The gossip also includes Westerners who regularly come to Varanasi but are not in Varanasi at that particular time, since Govinda often knows their whereabouts and current activities. While away from Varanasi, many Westerners e-mail him and the news of those who do not e-mail often reaches him through common friends. He is thus an important information link — an information hub — among the Westerners in Varanasi.

Govinda's role is by no means limited to his shop. He participates in many parties organised by the Westerners and visits his Western friends also at other times; he participates in such occasions as a friend, not as a businessman. Moreover, he himself organises parties and big concerts for the Westerners. The concerts he organises are central events in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi, and they are so famous that some of my interviewees claimed to have heard about them even in their countries of origin. Govinda knows more or less all the long-term Western sojourners in Varanasi and is a good friend of some of them. Interestingly, Govinda's son, who is in his early twenties, is from the same generation as most of the Westerners in Varanasi, but it is the father, not the son, who socialises with the Westerners.

Without a doubt, Govinda is a key person among the Westerners in Varanasi but his role is also controversial. On the one hand, he is a businessman but on the other hand, he is a friend of the Westerners. This double role causes some tensions. Many long-term sojourners complain when he charges them for some of his services when they have thought that he has helped them as a friend. They seem to think that Govinda should make his money from tourists, not from them. Govinda is definitely very wealthy according to Varanasi standards and it is interesting that he is also wealthy compared to the Westerners with whom he socialises so much. In fact, the Westerners regularly benefit from his wealth, for example by getting rides in his car. Although many Westerners complain about his high prices, it still seems that in the end, it is the Westerners who profit from the

relationship more than he does (at least in practical terms), especially since very few of them do any significant business with him.

The Westerners in Varanasi are not dependent on Govinda but his role as a provider of practical information and help is very important because it eases their lives considerably. The Westerners consider him a very peculiar Indian: they say that he does not hassle them like ‘all’ the others and he behaves as the Westerners do, that is, he talks about the same things as them and enjoys the same activities as them. In short, he behaves as if he were Western, yet due to him being Indian, he can give valuable local information to the Westerners. Govinda may seem like a tout, a phenomenon that has been widely discussed in tourism research (see e.g., Bowman 1989; 1996; Crick 1989; Phipps 1999, 78, 84; Salazar 2006) but I do not want to label him as such above all because he seems to make his money mostly from other things than the Westerners in Varanasi. Whatever his motives are, he keeps a low profile when offering his commercial services, and his role as a friend and source of information is well established among the Westerners. He is a controversial figure; nevertheless, he is a very central person for the Westerners in Varanasi.

8.3 Practices, Rules and Boundaries

8.3.1 Issues of Sharing and Caring

‘Are you hungry? Please, take some food that we just cooked!’

I was offered countless lunches and dinners when I happened to visit someone at the time they were eating. In fact, the Westerners in Varanasi regularly cook more than they would eat themselves in order to be prepared for surprise guests. Eating together is a core activity among them. In their living circumstances, cooking takes a long time and requires a lot of effort. Therefore, it is also practical to cook and/or eat together⁸³, although they clearly also enjoy each others’ company.

Having seen how common sharing is among the Westerners in Varanasi, my landlord was often laughing at a Western woman who always closed her windows when she ate in order to avoid the obligation of sharing her food. Her behaviour was clearly an exception and in fact, she did not hang around long-term sojourners but tourists, although she had been in

⁸³ The Westerners have small gas stoves and very few own a fridge. They also do not have microwave ovens, mixers or other electric kitchen equipment.

Varanasi several times. In addition to food, also dishes, books, discs and other goods are occasionally shared. For example, it would be useless for everyone to buy big pots as they can borrow from others on the rare occasions that they need one. Sharing is especially appreciated when one has Western products that are not easily available in Varanasi. Such products include olive oil, parmesan cheese, chocolate and coffee.

Nevertheless, one has to be careful with whom one shares as becomes evident, for example, when tourists are not welcome to parties where food is available (see section 8.1.2.). Among the Westerners in Varanasi, sharing applies to close acquaintances, so that one can expect reciprocity at some point. Sharing with outsiders would be a waste, since one could not expect anything in return. In a way, a gift economy (see Mauss 1950; Cheal 1988) exists among the Westerners in Varanasi: reciprocity is a clear, yet unspoken, rule. Sharing corresponds with the Westerners' emphasis on anti-materialism, as sharing indicates that one is not too attached to material things. More importantly, however, a network of vague interdependencies is created with the reciprocal relationships. Those unspoken relationships of reciprocity tie people together and define people as insiders and outsiders. I was advised not to be too friendly with certain people because if I were, they would come to eat with me every day. A Western man told me how he had had to get angry at his neighbour, who came to eat with him daily, that is, he had had to make clear that his house was not a restaurant. The obligation of reciprocity is an important part of the system of a gift economy together with the right to benefit from the system. I discussed this theme also previously in this dissertation when I mentioned that everyone contributes to parties in some ways; if not by bringing food, then, for example, by performing music (see section 8.1.2.).

Another practice of the Westerners is caring for each other. For example, if someone is sick, others care for him/her. They go to buy medicines, take the person to the doctor, cook for him/her and practice *reiki* and other healing techniques. A Western woman who gave birth in Varanasi told me that she had come to deliver in Varanasi precisely because she knew there would be Western people there to help her. However, such care does not last forever: people easily get tired of helping someone, and one can thus not rely on the help of friends for very long in case of trouble.

In addition to helping one's friends — other long-term sojourners — one may encounter other Westerners who need help. Western tourists develop mental problems in Varanasi on a regular basis. Often, they are related to drug abuse but not necessarily. Mental problems among backpackers in India are in fact a recognised phenomenon: 'India acts as an

amplifier of minor idiosyncratic symptoms which may escalate to mentally dysfunctional levels' (Airault 2000, 53 in D'Andrea 2007, 216)⁸⁴. Most long-term sojourners in Varanasi know about such 'crazy' people and some have been involved in helping them to return to their home countries. However, many long-term Westerners also try to avoid getting involved in such cases since it is often a difficult task: the mentally disturbed person typically does not want to leave and in many cases, embassies are not very co-operative. In fact, oddly behaving tourists are often tolerated to a large extent. Yet, there eventually often comes a point when intervention is necessary and someone has to act, especially if the ill person lives in the same building or close by the long-term sojourners and causes a public disturbance. Such care seems to be 'racially' defined: the Westerners help other Westerners (especially those who are of the same nationality as them but also others), yet, they do not help Indian people with similar problems.

8.3.2 'I'm not a tourist!'

I described earlier the difficulties that I had when entering the 'field' (see chapter 4). Dressing in a certain way and studying music became 'gateways' through which I could enter the social scene of the Westerners in Varanasi. I thus painfully realised that some sort of boundaries exist among the Westerners. The ethos among the long-term sojourners is that anyone can enter the group but in practice it is not always so easy and straightforward.

Above all, the long-term sojourners distinguish themselves from tourists. This is manifested in clothing, accommodation, activities and simply by avoiding contact with them. The long-term sojourners are indeed different from tourists in many respects: above all, they live in rented apartments instead of hotels and their everyday routines are very different from the daily routines of tourists. Being a long-term sojourner is evident also in the emphasis on being familiar with the city of Varanasi and its local habits. For example, using Hindi — even if only a few words — is a common way to demonstrate that one is a long-term sojourner. On the one hand, distinguishing oneself from tourists is an important act towards other long-term sojourners but on the other hand, it becomes a significant part of one's self-definition.

The long-term sojourners usually ignore tourists if they happen to be present in the same place. A good example of this boundary between long-

⁸⁴ Cities loaded with particular significance sometimes cause mental disorders for tourists. (On the Jerusalem syndrome, see Kalian et al. 1998; Bar-el et al. 2000; Van der Haven 2008; on the Paris syndrome, see Nam 2007.)

term sojourners and tourists was a party which was organised by a few long-term sojourners on the roof of a cheap hotel. Because of the location, there were many tourists there in addition to the long-term sojourners. However, the two groups remained separate throughout the entire evening: tourists were sitting in a circle on one side of the roof and the long-term sojourners in another circle on the other side. The two groups were present in the same physical place, the roof, but they spent the evening in socially separate spaces. Nobody stated anything aloud but the invisible boundary was respected by both groups. The same happens in various places: although in all the key locations that I described earlier there are often also tourists present, invisible boundaries between the long-term sojourners and tourists seem to exist; in spite of physical closeness, there is social distance.

The invisible boundaries between insiders — the long-term Western sojourners — and outsiders — above all tourists — become very tangible also at the tea stall (on boundaries between Indians and Westerners, see chapter 11). In fact, the tea stall was the place where I most felt like an outsider at the beginning of my fieldwork due to the fact that everyone seemed to know each other well and nobody paid attention to outsiders like me. Consequently, once I was actively participating in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi, it was especially at the tea stall where I felt like an insider since I knew ‘everyone’, and they all greeted me. At the tea stall, the long-term sojourners greet each other and sit and chat together. I have observed on several occasions how a Western person who has freshly arrived in Varanasi comes to the tea stall when seeing it crowded with Westerners. Yet, s/he is not talked to even if s/he sits in the middle of the crowd. This can make a tourist feel quite alienated and very aware of the invisible boundary. It is a peculiar situation since usually backpacker tourists easily socialise with each other: chatting and sharing experiences with other tourists is an important part of the backpacking experience (see e.g., Loker-Murphy et al. 1996; Hutnyk 1996, 61; Westerhausen 2002; Teo et al. 2006; Cohen 2004; Maoz 2006; 2007.) A few tourists told me explicitly that they felt very special ‘group energy’ among the Westerners in Varanasi. Such comments were made in referring to the group in admiring terms, that is, those tourists would have liked to be part of the group and its ‘energy’.

From the point of view of tourists, the long-term Western sojourners may seem unfriendly or even arrogant. From the point of view of the long-term sojourners, however, their unfriendliness is a practical choice: one gets tired of constantly explaining to new people about one’s life in Varanasi. The long-term sojourners are busy with their own friends and everyday life in Varanasi and they feel it is a waste of time to socialise with short-term tourists again and again.

Also some locals distinguish between Western tourists and long-term sojourners. When a Westerner arrives at the Varanasi railway station, s/he is quickly surrounded by rickshaw drivers offering their services. Based on the looks of the newcomers, some rickshaw drivers are able to distinguish between tourists and long-term sojourners, which becomes evident in the fact that they suggest different destinations: tourists are taken to cheap hotels whereas the sojourners are taken to the area where they usually rent apartments. A few Westerners also told me how they sometimes laugh at tourists together with locals in which case the locals obviously recognise them as long-term sojourners. The long-term sojourners may, for example, express amused approval to local shopkeepers who cheat a few rupees from tourists, thus implying that they themselves know the correct prices.

The boundaries between tourists and the long-term sojourners are evoked in various everyday life situations in Varanasi. For example, tourists are usually not invited to the social activities organised by the long-term sojourners. Yet, since the boundaries are invisible and not stated aloud, tourists may not be aware of them. In fact occasionally, a few tourists are invited to participate in the activities of the long-term sojourners but never in big numbers although hundreds of tourists visit Varanasi monthly. Once, a Western tourist was somehow invited to join our swimming trip. He came along and tried to chat but was ignored most of the time. A boundary between the long-term sojourners and the tourist was clearly evoked although he was invited to cross it in the first place.

In recent years, the area where most long-term Western sojourners live has attracted an increasing number of tourists, which in turn has attracted touts and especially rickshaw drivers who eagerly offer their services to any Westerners walking by. Many of them do not distinguish the long-term sojourners from tourists but hassle all Westerners the same. Consequently, many long-term sojourners complain that the quiet and harmonious atmosphere has disappeared from the area, as a result of which many of them have moved to quieter areas.

The *Rainbow* people (see footnote 73) are considered a particular category of tourists by the long-term Westerners in Varanasi. Although a few have been to *Rainbow* gatherings, many of them determinedly distinguish themselves from *Rainbow* tourists.

There are the *Rainbow* people. It is actually a pity that they come. In a way they spoil Benares. They are so naive, they play loud music, they smoke near the river, all these activities that they do near the river. They do not see that it is a sacred place and these things do not fit there. Indians tolerate this, they are very tolerant but for sure they do not like it. (Julia, 37)

Such a judgmental comment implies that Julia thought she knows better how one should behave in Varanasi in comparison to, in her understanding, the ignorant *Rainbow* tourists.

With regard to local people, many of my interviewees expressed a view that one has to prove that one is different from tourists; only with time can one gain respect in the eyes of the locals.

Q: What do you think local people think about Westerners who stay in Varanasi for long periods?

Maybe they [the locals] kind of respect you after awhile, after they see you every day for two months going to buy *dahi*⁸⁵, vegetables...not being a straight tourist, like in the Lonely Planet, like having leather boots. (Anton, 32)

Most important is if they [local people] see you serious in what you are doing, they will never disturb you because they think it is your [...] *karma* to do this. [...] I think, whatever you do in India [...] if you do it seriously and you like to do it, they will not make problems for you. If you have respect for the community as well. If you don't disturb people. [...] It depends how you do something, more than what you do I think. Maybe this is closer to their culture, like they have a caste system: so what you do, you don't decide but how you do it, you decide, so this is the main point. If they see tourists coming and smoking *chillum* on the *ghat* all day, yeah, they will think these people are not so interesting and why do they do this and [...] don't do anything [useful]. (Thomas, 28)

Thomas's analytical comment above suggests that he knows a lot about local culture, which indicates that he in fact is different from 'an average short-term tourist' who probably would not know so much. An interesting detail is that many of my interviewees emphasised that they have proven themselves to be clean, that is, they take a bath every day, an act which they believe distinguishes themselves from tourists, especially from *Rainbow* tourists, whom they believe locals consider dirty. The long-term Western sojourners say they prove themselves to locals but a more significant factor may be that they are proving their distinctive character to themselves and to the other long-term sojourners. Not being a tourist is important for their self-definition because it helps them to justify their long stays in Varanasi.

⁸⁵ *Dahi*: local curd.

8.4 Is there an us?

8.4.1 Definitely Yes, Definitely No

The long-term sojourners in Varanasi enjoy hanging out together, they share certain practices, activities and locations and distinguish themselves from tourists. Does this mean that they form a community in Varanasi? I asked my interviewees whether they think there is a community of Westerners in Varanasi and got two kinds of replies:

Oh for sure, yes. Sure, for sure, yes. (Olga, 48)

No, not at all. (Ron, 31)

Most of my interviewees stated that a community exists but a few strongly denied such an idea. The diverse views bothered me a lot and I was especially puzzled by the negative answers. The different replies were the result of different definitions that my interviewees gave for the word 'community'. Those interviewees who stated that a community exists often supported their views by referring to the intense social life that the Westerners have in Varanasi.

For sure there is a community. [...] You see, the people that stay here for a long time, they are always together [...] In one area you see everybody that knows each other. (David, 28)

The counter-arguments defined community in more detailed ways.

There are many Westerners but there is no community of Westerners. Community, in my understanding, means a group of people that help each other; here they are all mother-fuckers, they think only about themselves. (Alberto, 47)

A: People that stay all the time, they are most of the time in the room...not...

Q: Not so social...

A: Social but only at times...Two hours, three hours a day, afternoon, evening time. No, not a community at all, at all. (Ron, 31)

I don't know if there is anything really going on [...] What is the purpose of hanging out in Varanasi? I see it as a sort of lodging house where people get to know each other and they keep coming here. That's why I don't see there is really a scene, it's not like there's any real sort of community.

There is no real purpose apart from passing time in Varanasi. So...I'd say it's a complete transit lounge and you'd just go. (Tom, 36)

It looks like there is a community of foreigners here but there is more a group than a community; there is a group of foreigners living here. We almost all know each other but not everybody mixes with everybody and anyway, the people change all the time. Only a few of us stay here. [...] I had a lot of friends and now I don't have any more. The first year I was thinking, these are my Benares friends, we are like a community but after two years, one went to stay again in her country because she found a job [another one...]. (Iris, 33)

In the quotations above, a community is defined in several ways. Community members are supposed to help and care for each other, they are supposed to be together more than a few hours a day, a community should have a clear purpose and it should consist of people who stay in Varanasi year after year. According to those interviewees, the group of Westerners in Varanasi is lacking these characteristics and therefore, cannot be called a community.

The Westerners in Varanasi do not recognise themselves as an entity, for example they do not refer to themselves with a common label although a few of them use the expression 'local *videshi*', that is, local foreigners. I would, however, argue that a community exists in Varanasi, and in fact, the relevant question is not whether it exists or not, but what kind of community it is and how it is constructed. In my understanding — following Vered Amit's definition — communal relationships do not need to be all-encompassing; they can be temporary and partial, yet still significant for the members. The Westerners are in Varanasi only temporarily, yet, they spend time together intensively, and they enjoy the social life with each other. Common activities and central locations contribute to the existence of community but the community becomes live also through certain practices and the values attached to them. Moreover, there are certain ways to define 'us' and act as 'an insider'.

8.4.2 Insiders and Outsiders: Defining Us

I sit at the tea stall when a man who has recently arrived in Varanasi mentions having heard that *some* people are organising a trip to the waterfall. Stefan immediately asks who these people are; for sure *we* know at least some of *them*. (March 2003)

Most of the long-term Westerner sojourners in Varanasi know each other, at least by name and looks if not personally. With some, they have intense daily social interaction, others they see less frequently but

nevertheless recognise familiar faces. Once defined an insider, one is supposed to know others as the following incident suggests.

I am in a dinner party where Fiona has invited me. It is my first time in her party. It is a gathering of about ten people. Before eating, I end up being alone on the terrace with two men who have been coming to Varanasi for several years. Neither of the men knows me. They have seen me a couple of times but I have never talked to them. However, while we are sitting on the terrace both of them talk to me as if they knew me well from before. I feel puzzled; why do they behave in such a way? (April 2002)

My interpretation is that the two men could not admit to each other that they did not know me, since my presence on that terrace meant that I had to be an insider. Among the Westerners in Varanasi, it is assumed that everyone knows everyone else, and this becomes visible in particular when the Westerners avoid admitting not knowing someone. Moreover, it seems that one is never a newcomer among the Westerners: such people try their best to act as if they had been there already a long time, which in turn contributes to the fact that the practices of the Westerners are very consistent. In practice, the impossibility of being a newcomer means that such people are usually not publicly introduced to others but people find out information about new faces through private gossiping. The only exception is the tea stall, where one is 'allowed' to meet new people but if one meets at someone's house — within a private space — one cannot admit not knowing someone as the incident above suggests. The fact that one is never a newcomer caused problems for me at the beginning of my fieldwork as it was not appropriate for me to admit that I was a novice, a strategy which many anthropologists have willingly used in other kinds of field situations. However, although not being a newcomer is a basic rule, sometimes new people do appear and are recognised as such, and they do get accepted into the community. It often depends on their behaviour and actions, for example, their clothes and music studies, as happened to me (see chapter 4). In addition, newcomers are typically defined as friends of certain insiders, which also happened to me. Therefore, although some are rejected, as happened to me at least at first, others are accepted into the community, and those negotiations are situational and depend on various factors, for example on one's clothing and activities. After all, the community would not exist after awhile if it did not take in new members, as not all old ones return every year, if at all.

Many of my interviewees mentioned that once you live in the same house as other Westerners, you are automatically involved in their activities. In my understanding, it can work in this way but not 'automatically', as the following example suggests.

For awhile, I live in a house that is a very central place among the long-term Westerners in Varanasi. Some call it 'the *kibbutz*' due to the active social life the inhabitants have with each other. While I am living there, a new woman moves into one of the apartments. It is her first time in Varanasi but she has been in the city already for several weeks. Moreover, as a student of music, she fulfils the criteria of not being a tourist. However, she is not integrated into the activities of the house. She is never invited to join the others and her neighbours do not talk to her much. (March 2003)

My interpretation is that a boundary was evoked by the long-term inhabitants of the house and she was defined as an outsider. She was present in the same physical place but was not welcome to enter the social space. Judging from her actions, it did not seem that she wanted to be an outsider: she always greeted everyone and often came to sit outside when she heard others were there. It is difficult to know why she was not integrated into the activities of the house, but one contributing factor is surely that it was late spring, which means that the social scene of the Westerners was already very established for the season and many started to be oriented towards leaving. Had she arrived in autumn, when the season of the Westerners starts, the situation may have been different. All in all, I saw her experiencing difficulties similar to those I faced when trying to get involved with the Westerners in Varanasi at the beginning of my fieldwork (see chapter 4).

Some newcomers are more active than she was in seeking contact with the long-term sojourners: they may, for example, visit the long-term sojourners, which is easy to do as one does not need an invitation. If an outsider visits a long-term sojourner, s/he is not told to leave and the sojourners usually behave in a friendly way towards such visitors. Yet, they may afterwards gossip with each other about the particular person, condemning his/her behaviour and thereby evoking a boundary.

Having become involved with the community of Westerners, one shares certain unspoken rights and responsibilities. The rights concern mostly being informed about common activities and being welcome to participate in them. The responsibilities concern, for example, rules of sociability and sharing. Becoming an insider requires certain looks, behaviour and attitudes, as is evident in chapter 4, where I describe my entry into the field. In short, insiders dress in a particular way, study something in Varanasi (usually classical Indian music), share certain countercultural values (see chapter 6), live in the city for long periods and have (usually) been there several times.

I am chatting with Olga on her balcony. She complains to me that yesterday, when she was sitting in front of her house, two Western men

who know her well were talking with each other for a long time a few meters away from her without greeting her. She seems to feel very insulted. (January 2003)

Those who are defined as insiders are treated as such, and if an insider is ignored, s/he may feel upset. The incident above illustrates how important it is to greet other insiders. This applies also in cases in which one does not personally know the other person but recognises him/her as an insider, as the following incident suggests.

A man walks by the tea stall and I and a few people with whom I am sitting greet him. Afterwards, Olga asks who the man is and what he does in Varanasi. She has seen him before and she says she greeted him: 'Because it is not nice not to say hello to people whom one is supposed to know'. (May 2002)

I myself felt I had become accepted as an insider among the long-term Westerners when they started to greet me on the street. Once people were saluting me, I could go to chat with them wherever I saw them, and I was informed about upcoming events. In other words, I was included in the social space of the Westerners in Varanasi and that scene is indeed very intense: once one has become involved in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi, s/he easily knows dozens of people and sees many of them daily. Several times, I heard the comment that it can take hours to walk a short distance in the area where the Westerners live because one meets so many (Western) acquaintances and friends along the way.

I felt privileged to be noticed by the Westerners. Not everyone, however, feels the same.

I am sitting with a few Westerners at the tea stall when a woman who has been in Varanasi for several years walks by. Iris comments on her by saying that this person is very snobbish; she never says hello even if you see her every day. (November 2002)

The occasion illustrates that failing to be friendly towards other Westerners and thus intentionally excluding oneself from the other long-term sojourners is not considered proper. The assumption seems to be that if one is a long-term sojourner, that is, not a tourist, one should be friendly and social towards other long-term sojourners. This may reflect the feeling of solidarity Westerners think they should have towards each other when surrounded by the Indian environment, by the 'Indian others' (see chapter 11). Also backpacker tourists often greet each other in India merely due to the fact that they recognise each other as backpackers, that is, not local, not the 'other'. The long-term Westerners in Varanasi, however, do not greet

tourists, which is one way to distinguish themselves from them. It is interesting that among the Westerners in Varanasi, outsiders are carefully kept out but the long-term sojourners who deliberately exclude themselves — for example, by not greeting other long-term sojourners — are criticised. In other words, some people (short-term tourists) are excluded while others (long-term sojourners) are included even against their own will. All in all, boundaries exist.

Nevertheless, some long-term Western sojourners intentionally behave in ways that leave them outside the community: they avoid the social life of the Westerners and may also live in different areas. I interviewed a few such people, and all of them said that they did not want to get involved with the community because they did not feel welcome there nor did they want to be with those people. Nevertheless, they clearly recognised the existence of the bounded community.

Q: Why don't you want to live in the area where most long-term Westerners live?

A: [...] I don't know why, but I don't like them [...] I know these people because I see them every year but there is something there I don't like. I talked with some of them and they are so proud, like 'I'm the best musician', 'I'm the best *yogi*⁸⁶' and I don't like this. I prefer to stay with normal people.

[...]

A: I think it's a kind of a community even with a hierarchy, something like that between people... This is what I feel because I really don't know so much about them but when I go there, I see and I think... This is my feeling but I think they are like this. And also I saw the faces of these people, and they are always very serious, like very... I don't know, I go to a concert, I see many people and I can say who's living there and who's not living there.

[...]

Q: Not so easy to get inside [the community].

A: But I don't want to get inside. I prefer to stay outside. (Tobias, 29)

The quotation above tells a lot about the boundaries of the community. Tobias feels that a boundary exists and he is not willing to cross it. He views the community as hierarchical and it does not appeal to him. Instead, he prefers to remain an outsider. Using words like 'normal people' indicates strong feelings and Tobias is indeed firm in not wanting to get involved in the community of 'abnormal' people. I also met a few others who shared his view. The insiders of the community, however, do not always appreciate such a choice. Above all, they do not admit the existence of boundaries and thus think that the long-term sojourners who

⁸⁶ *Yogi*: a person who does yoga.

remain outside the community are deliberately, and without reason, unfriendly. This was the case in the incident condemning the woman who does not greet other Westerners staying in Varanasi long-term.

To outsiders, the community easily looks like an insular group of close-knit members. However, among those who belong to the community, not everyone likes everyone else. Yet, disagreements are seldom visible in public. Formal politeness is usually maintained, for example, by greeting in the street or at the tea stall, although to one's closer friends one may complain that s/he does not like a certain person. In other words, a façade of 'a happy family' is maintained.

The community of Westerners consists not only of those who are present in Varanasi at a particular time but also of those who once lived there and are expected to come again. I mentioned such a person to a woman who had never met her. She said that she had heard so much about this person that it felt as if she were there with us. Sometimes, such people become almost mythological figures about whom many stories are told. Talking about them can be interpreted as a way of keeping communal ties alive: those people are not physically present but socially they still belong to the community. By remembering such people, the swimming excursions and other events from the past, the Westerners in Varanasi construct continuity to the community and their own being in Varanasi as well as a communal genealogy and history. A shared past is indeed a crucial element in creating and maintaining collective identities (see e.g., Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm et al. 1983). However, among the Westerners in Varanasi, such historical memory covers only the most recent years (see chapter 13). The temporary nature of the community makes it special in terms of common history; it is above all a question of shared personal history with certain people instead of shared collective memories without personal involvement in the events.

8.4.3 The Making of a Community

At first sight, one may think that the Westerners in Varanasi do not share anything but on closer look, one sees that something is shared and this 'something' gains a lot of importance. The members come from various countries and none of them are in Varanasi permanently. Yet, they share certain values and a lifestyle, and above all they share their long sojourn in Varanasi. Despite their individualistic and mobile lifestyle, many of the Westerners appreciate togetherness when in Varanasi and they emphasise the importance of being together with like-minded people and living in close contact with each other. I thus argue that they form a

community, which is fluid, based on individuals' temporary participation, yet very concrete in a particular place and at a particular time.

In addition to common activities and central locations, boundaries, sharing and caring — or the lack thereof — are aspects that define the existence of a community. The community of Westerners in Varanasi is very real; it is not imagined but constructed through practices by real individuals interacting face-to-face in a particular location on a daily basis. The community is also very intensive; those who are considered insiders are expected to constantly participate in common activities and show up in central locations, and failing to do so is not appreciated.

One's actions towards other community members are very important ways of expressing and evoking belonging. The question is actually not so much who the community members are as how one becomes a member and how one demonstrates being a member in particular spaces and times. There also seems to be an unspoken rule in the community that one should avoid confrontation. Therefore, when some people did not enjoy techno music at a party, they resolved the situation by discreetly leaving instead of challenging the choice of music. At a personal level, they were not very content but communal balance was maintained. Similarly, when a Westerner does not like another Westerner in Varanasi, a confrontation is avoided. I argue that disagreements are downplayed in order to maintain the communal togetherness and the idea of a harmonious community. Since the community is small and fluid and individuals stay there only temporarily, it is particularly important to maintain an idea of cohesiveness and ignore fractures.

A central factor within the community is its gift economy. The gift economy is not a clearly defined structure but it becomes true as a living practice, resulting in reciprocal ties. When one shares one's food or pays for others' tea, one participates in the gift economy and ties oneself to the reciprocal relations. Eriksen writes how people in modern societies avoid the vague relations of reciprocity that gift-giving requires. He illustrates the point with Archetti's example from Norway about how people tend to offer coins as soon as someone has paid for their coffee in a university cafeteria (Archetti 1991 in Eriksen 2004, 238-9). Exactly the opposite happens among the Westerners in Varanasi, where the long-term sojourners indeed accept the vague expectation of reciprocity. As is typical in gift economies, exact values are not calculated and some people end up contributing more than others; nevertheless, everyone is expected to contribute in some way. Those who appear to be free-riders often contribute in some other way than materially. Especially eating and cooking together are crucial moments among the Westerners in Varanasi as they strengthen the feelings of sharing and belonging together. Sharing food is in fact a classic example of creating and manifesting belonging (see Nash 1989).

The Westerners in Varanasi value openness but at some points, their community is very exclusive. As has become evident, when the community is reinforced via sharing, boundaries are important — one cannot extend the sharing too far as there is no guarantee of reciprocity then. Consequently, tourists are excluded as they are not part of the community and its rules of reciprocity, and distinctions between insiders and outsiders are in fact manifested in various ways. I argue that since the community is fluid, it is particularly important to be careful whom to include in the circle of sharing, and this requires constant negotiations as the boundaries are re-evoked in changing circumstances. Moreover, as a result of the fluidity, the communal connections and feelings need to be strengthened continuously.

A particular aspect of the community is that there seems to be only outsiders and eternal insiders. As was evident earlier in this book, there is no overt point of entry to the community. I argue that if points of entry would be announced and accepted, the fluidity of the community would be too visible. By denying them, aspects of change are downplayed.

The shared practices among the Westerners in Varanasi, which are never stated aloud, are constant. For example, parties are always very similar and the daily routines remain the same year after year. I argue that the familiarity contributes to the community construction. The community members come from various countries and do not stay in Varanasi permanently but the continuous, even stagnant, practices keep communal cohesion and a feeling of permanency alive. On the other hand, there is always the danger that when nothing changes, life becomes boring. Avoiding boredom is particularly significant for the Westerners as they claim to have found ‘more vibes’, that is, a more interesting life in Varanasi. Obviously, one can always leave Varanasi if life gets too boring there but if too many people left, the existence of the whole community would be threatened. The community, however, persists: new people arrive and fill the old roles and adopt the old practices. Amit has written about institutional structures that survive in spite of shifts in personnel (Amit 2002b, 23). The community of the Westerners in Varanasi is obviously not an institution and thus such official structures do not exist. However, a very similar process takes place also there; new people fill old roles and adopt old values and practices, and the community thus survives. The practices stay constant because the new arrivals try to achieve the ‘authentic’ way of being a true long-term sojourner in Varanasi by adopting the ways of the old-timers. I argue that the community’s strict rules and stagnant practices are necessary means of keeping the community alive since the bases of the community are fluid.

Almost two years after finishing my fieldwork, I went back to Varanasi for a few weeks. The primary feeling on that trip was that everything in Varanasi seemed to be the same as a few years earlier. To a

great extent, it was the same people, the same kinds of parties, and similar discussions. It felt as if I had never left, and in fact a few Westerners commented on my presence by stating that I looked like I had never left. It seemed to me that the community had 'frozen'; the practices that I observed during my fieldwork had remained very much the same⁸⁷. Therefore, my research is not merely about a group of people temporarily living together but there are many permanent characteristics and processes in their life in Varanasi. That is why I argue that it is a community. It has its strict rules and practices although it is not permanent in the sense that the same people would stay there forever. The community can also be conceptualised as a shared space of similar-minded people where one is expected to behave in certain ways, which in turn gives individuals clear identities and reference points in their mobile lifestyle.

Amit and Rapport write that a transnational movement does not necessarily mean that people long for new binding communal relationships. Quite the opposite: for many, the premise of a 'movement is constituted by a paradigm of disjunction and escape' (Amit & Rapport 2002, 4). Amit and Rapport acknowledge that communal relationships nevertheless exist in such circumstances, yet they are not binding. I want to emphasise that even if one is happy to break away from previous relationships and from the familiar and the local, it does not mean that people continue endlessly living in unfamiliarity and strangeness. The life of the Westerners in Varanasi illustrates how quickly one can adopt routines and familiar places, faces and practices even in a new environment, and the familiar routines and practices remain even when one leaves in the meanwhile and returns later. To a great extent, the Westerners' community construction in Varanasi seems to be exactly a question of creating familiarity, with the precondition that it is only temporary albeit renewable. Eventually, everyone leaves and disperses to the global arena but at a specific moment the close local communal relationships are extremely important. Moreover, those relationships are renewed year after year.

Equality is an important value among the Westerners in Varanasi. This is illustrated, for example, by the fact that when they eat together, someone always serves the food onto everyone's plates, securing everyone an equal share. However, on closer look, the community is not as equal as the members claim it to be. In order to gain status in the community, one has to behave in certain ways. There are many unspoken behaviour norms and expectations among the Westerners in Varanasi. Some of those norms have already been discussed here, for example, whom to greet or not to

⁸⁷ I returned to Varanasi also in 2009 — six years after having finished my fieldwork— and still found the same practices there; there were many new individuals but the Westerners' ways were very much the same.

greet, how to behave at parties, where to show up and when. There are also other behaviour norms that become significant tools for evoking one's belonging to and status in the community, as becomes evident in the next chapter.

9. DIVISIONS IN PARADISE

During my fieldwork, I drew ‘maps’ on which I put all the Westerners I knew in Varanasi and drew lines between them in order to illustrate who were friends with whom. A few circles of friends emerged on those maps: there were clearly a few individuals who stood out as persons who were particularly well connected socially. Those central persons were known by all community members, having typically been to Varanasi several times, and most of them were men. Others were defined as friends of these central people. There were a few such circles of friends that hung out together intensively but quite often got together with others as well. Observing people at the tea stall easily revealed the most central persons as they were approached by several people, whereas others could drink their *chai* without interruptions. However, it is not only a question of some individuals being more social than others: in addition to distinctions between insiders and outsiders, there are distinctions (see Bourdieu 1979) within the community of Westerners in Varanasi although those are not explicitly stated.

The long-term Western sojourners in Varanasi emphasise equality: they say that any Westerner can come to Varanasi and join in their activities, and everyone is treated the same. I argue, however, that distinctions do exist and my view is supported by a few long-term Western sojourners in Varanasi who are outside the community (see section 8.4.2). The various distinction mechanisms are not stated aloud and one cannot assign each person a particular clearly articulated status among the Westerners. There is no hierarchical structure where some people would be accorded positions of power over others (see e.g., Dumont 1970). However, statuses and distinctions are lived out in the everyday practices and talk of the Westerners. The various distinction strategies resulting in status differences and gaining status, which is appreciated and even expected by many Westerners in Varanasi, comprise an interactive process in which the feedback one gets from others is significant. In the following, I elaborate on the most central distinction mechanisms and I argue that a constant game of distinction is played among the Westerners in Varanasi.

9.1 Staying for Long

I start to hear gossip about a Western *sitar* player who has arrived in Varanasi after a break of several years. Nobody with whom I talk seems to know the man but they are all very interested in him and keen to meet him. According to the gossip, he has spent several years in Varanasi and he is considered to be an excellent *sitar* player. To me, he starts to sound like a mythological person. (February 2003)

The story illustrates two aspects of the distinction mechanisms among the Westerners in Varanasi. First of all, music students hold a very special status, as will be discussed in detail in the next section. Secondly, the more time one has spent in Varanasi, the more respected s/he is. When such people appear again after having been away for a long period, their 'fame' spreads quickly and they are highly respected, even admired, by others. In spite of this, however, they are not necessarily easily involved in the social activities as they do not know the other Westerners currently present in Varanasi and their old friends are not necessarily there anymore. Some who returned after years told me that they feel they have become outsiders. It seems that although they were familiar with the practices of the community, their previous distinctive status was no longer valid. The other Westerners currently present in Varanasi were not aware of their distinctive status since the historical memory in the community is very short (see chapter 13).

If such people want to become involved in the social life of the Westerners, they need to actively rework their status. From my observations, it seems that this happens by emphasising one's past in Varanasi, for example, by talking about 'the good old times', and becoming involved as an old-timer is rather easy although it takes some time and effort. Not all returning Westerners, however, want to get involved in the social life of the Westerners but they distinguish themselves from the others by stating that they have already 'passed the party stage' and now want to concentrate on other activities, usually on their music studies, in Varanasi. This in turn increases their standing as great musicians and accords them a high status.

All in all, those who have stayed in Varanasi the longest and have come several times, distinguish themselves and are distinguished by others with a particular status vis-à-vis those who have only been there a few times (so far). This distinction tool is available to both women and men. Being 'an old-timer' becomes demonstrated above all by talking about past events and other Westerners who have been in Varanasi earlier; the demonstration does not include counting how many times one has been in Varanasi (see section 6.2.1).

9.2 Music is Everything

A Western woman, who had been in Varanasi several times for long periods, told me that she did not have many friends there because ‘everyone is talking about music’ and she is not interested in it and does not know much about it. Her comment illustrates well how central classical Indian music is among the Westerners in Varanasi⁸⁸. As I have already mentioned, most Westerners in Varanasi study classical Indian music and to a large extent, the Westerners’ daily life revolves around music. The music students usually take lessons several times a week and (try to) practice many hours a day. They all take lessons from private teachers, that is, they do not study in formal institutions. The Western men typically play instruments (*tabla*, *sitar*, *pakhavaj*, *santoor*, *shahnai*⁸⁹, flute) whereas women usually sing or dance. On almost a daily basis, many men gather together to play music with friends, especially in the evenings. Usually, it means that drum players accompany those playing other instruments⁹⁰. In addition to being useful practice for the music students, the occasions are important entertainment since other Westerners often listen to those who play. Music is therefore a central activity among the Westerners in Varanasi and many Westerners there are genuinely interested and enthusiastic about it. Music is, however, much more than that: it is a significant distinction tool. First of all, via music studies, one can manifest belonging to the community and secondly, one’s status within the community often becomes defined based on one’s music studies.

Some Westerners study Hindu religion and philosophy with *gurus* and they may distinguish themselves based on their knowledge about and devotion to Hinduism. In practice, this means for example following certain religious rituals and making the others aware of it. Devotion to religion, however, carries with it also a danger of marginalisation within the community as most Westerners there are interested in music instead.

9.2.1 Playing the Role of a Music Student

I am sitting behind a Western man in a concert of classical Indian music. He is constantly counting the beats and emphasising the patterns of music with his hand in a similar way to what one often sees Indian musicians and music lovers doing (see also Hämeenniemi 2007, 15). I think the man must

⁸⁸ The woman who was complaining about the centrality of music among the Westerners in Varanasi actually started to study music a few years later.

⁸⁹ *Tabla*: a pair of drums, *sitar*: a string instrument, *pakhavaj*: a drum, *santoor*: a hammered dulcimer; *shahnai*: a double-reeded flute (similar to an oboe).

⁹⁰ Usually, they play in pairs, which is a customary practice in Indian music.

have been studying Indian music for a long time in order to have adopted such gestures. After the concert, I find out that he has been taking lessons only for a few weeks! (March 2003)

In the anecdote above, the man clearly knew how to act out, that is, to play the role of a musician. Why did he do that? In addition to being audible, music studies often become visible among the Westerners in Varanasi.

First of all, those playing small instruments, such as the flute or *shahnai*, often carry them along at all times. The *sitar* is one of the most common instruments among the Western male music students in Varanasi but one can obviously not carry around such a large and fragile instrument; instead, at least one sitar student occasionally wears a *mizrab*⁹¹ on his fingertip. When carrying one's instrument along, one is noticeably ready to play with friends at any time. However, by such actions, one's role as a music student becomes visible as well. Music is visible also in the rooms of many music students where there are many cassettes, discs and instruments. Obviously music students have such things because they are interested in the music, but at the same time the goods convey a certain message to others: one is a music student. Some Westerners also have self-painted posters of different versions of musical scales on their walls. The primary purpose of such posters is to help them to memorise the scales but at the same time, they present an image of a committed music student to whoever visits the room and as I have discussed earlier, surprise visits are very common.

Attending concerts is also important. Obviously, most of the time the music students genuinely want to go to concerts but sometimes attending concerts becomes a duty, and one has to have a good excuse for not attending a particular concert; otherwise his/her interest in music is questioned. Many also record concerts for their private use. The Western music students also use Hindi expressions that are popular among the Varanasi musicians even if their knowledge of Hindi may otherwise be limited to a few simple sentences. Many Western men also dress like local musicians do, that is, in cotton *kurta* pyjama suits, although the majority of local men dress in regular pants and shirts.

Why do such visible signs become so important? First of all, they help to evoke and manifest one's identity as a music student. I argue that this is particularly significant among the Westerners in Varanasi because they do not study in formal institutions and because many of them do not have much official education after secondary school. By claiming to be music students, they are able to defend themselves against the view that

⁹¹ *Mizrab*: a wire plectrum.

they are uneducated lazy drop-outs (see section 6.2), and they gain a positive self-identification and a purpose for their long stays in Varanasi. Music studies also distinguish the Westerners in Varanasi from short-term tourists. Manifesting one's role as a music student is significant also in terms of communal belonging. Being a music student shows commitment not only to the music studies but also to the community of Westerners as one is compelled to stay long and to return if one takes his/her music studies seriously. Moreover, music studies affect one's status among the Westerners in Varanasi: the more devoted and talented a music student one is considered to be, the more respected he (rarely she) is.

Establishing one's status as a devoted music student does not only depend on the aspects of appearance and image. The music students are rather judgmental towards each other and they gossip about each others' talents a lot, as a consequence of which certain distinctions become evoked. Therefore, playing with friends in parties not only provides entertainment but also becomes an occasion for manifesting (and judging) one's talent, which in turn affects one's status within the community. The judgemental mentality in fact results in it being very stressful to be a music student in Varanasi. I know a few music students there who have faced severe emotional stress because they have not progressed with their studies as they were hoping to and as other music students expected them to progress.

In January, the temperature drops below 10°C. On such a cold day, I sit at the tea stall with a few Westerners. A Western sitar student is explaining how the sitar strings get cold and it takes an hour to warm them up with the fingers. Celine, who has been listening to him, asks in a surprised voice: 'Do you play only for one hour a day?' (January 2003)

Celine's comment reflects an important norm among the Western music students in Varanasi: one should practice for several hours a day. Devotion and seriousness are indeed crucial factors in defining one's status as a music student. The length, intensity and content of their practice are common discussion topics among the Western music students. When the temperature rises above 40°C in May, most Westerners leave Varanasi, claiming it to be too hot to practice. In other words, they use their leaving as a way to communicate their devotion to their music studies. On the other hand, those who stay in the heat claim to be more devoted students than the others since they stay with their *gurus* even in unpleasant weather. In this case, opposite actions are used to demonstrate the same characteristic, that is, one's commitment to music studies. In reality, of course, leaving or staying is not necessarily a matter of choice as one may run out of money and/or a visa but in one's talk, one may explain one's actions as if they were voluntary.

In addition to one's appearance and talent in music, one's knowledge of music is crucial too. First of all, music is often discussed among the Westerners in Varanasi, and everyone knows the most popular *ragas*⁹² and *bajans*. It is common to ask one another which *raga* s/he is practicing at the time. After hearing the reply, the one posing the question often demonstrates that s/he is familiar with that particular *raga* by humming the particular tune or by mentioning the specific notes that belong to the *raga*. Criticising someone's performance is another common way to demonstrate one's knowledge of music.

One is also expected to know local musicians. Once I had heard that a famous *dhrupad* singer was to perform that evening but I had not caught the name. I mentioned this to a Western music student and his immediate comment was that it should not be difficult to guess who the person is. Implicitly, he claimed to know all the famous *dhrupad* singers of Varanasi. In fact, it is considered to show great ignorance if one fails to know a musician whom the other Westerners regard as central. By such knowledge, one proves one's knowledge of music, a test that I failed on numerous occasions.

In addition to distinctions among the music students, boundaries between music students and those who are not studying classical Indian music are significant among the Westerners in Varanasi. For example, occasionally, there are Westerners who play African *djembe* drums in Varanasi. Some of those studying classical Indian music leave *djembe* drumming occasions, if they happen to be there when the drumming starts, claiming not to like such music. At the same time, their own identity as students of classical Indian music is emphasised.

One can also use one's music studies as an excuse for not participating in certain social activities, for example parties. Missing a party or two does not affect one's status within the community but missing many parties is easily interpreted in negative terms: insiders are expected to participate and failing to do so requires a good excuse and the most legitimate excuse is one's music studies. In such cases, one's status may even rise when one misses parties since being with one's *guru* or practicing a lot conveys an image of a devoted music student.

Why is it so important to express devotion to music studies then? Distinctions between serious and less devoted music students reveal that not all music students are equal among the Westerners in Varanasi. Those who are believed to be the most talented musicians and/or have the most knowledge of Indian music and musicians are respected the most, and they are always men. Individuals obviously do not think in terms of gaining status: they are merely interested in music and the rest comes along. Yet,

⁹² *Raga*: a melodic scale or a set of notes used according to certain rules of musical grammar.

from the point of view of community construction, one can observe the significance of status and distinctions. However, although those who have gained distinctive status regarding music are respected for that, they are also criticised a lot, that is, their talents are commonly questioned so that they need to prove themselves again and again. The status of a music student is in fact very fragile and in a constant process of redefinition and rechecking. It also seems that one is always somehow defined as less than the ideal, that is, the status of being a fully devoted and talented music student always seems to escape the Westerners studying music in Varanasi, both in their own understanding as well as in the eyes of other Westerners, which makes the ‘game of distinction’ never-ending and stressful. Distinctions and rivalries are in fact common among Indian musicians, which surely affects the Western music students’ interactions in Varanasi. However, I find it very interesting that the distinctions between music students strongly affect the Westerners’ interactions within their own community too.

9.2.2 The Significance of a Correct Guru

One’s knowledge, talent and behaviour regarding music contribute to one’s status as a music student but the most important factor is one’s *guru*. One’s status among the Western music students depends to a great extent on who one’s *guru* is. All the Western music students know who is studying with whom and they define each other on that basis a lot. If the first question for a new person is ‘What are you studying?’, the second one to those who study music is ‘Who is your teacher?’ It is extremely important to have a *guru* who is known and appreciated among the other Westerners if one wants to be respected by other Western music students. It is important to note that the Westerners want to take lessons only from the most famous musicians in Varanasi and since India is a cheap country for them, they can afford to do that. Moreover, the musicians are willing to teach them, even beginners, because it means a lot better income than they get from local students. On average, a Westerner pays four euros for a lesson whereas locals pay the same amount for a month, if they pay at all.

The popularity of local musicians among the Westerners is not always connected to their talents but to their ‘luck’ to have become involved with Western music students. Therefore, it may be that some talented local musicians remain unknown to the Westerners in Varanasi. When searching for a *guru*, the Westerners trust the advice of other Westerners a lot more than that of locals. Having Western students thus brings a *guru* more Western students, which means more money as well. However, having too many Western students is also taken negatively; the

Westerners easily interpret it as a sign of greediness and unprofessionalism. Many Westerners believe that a good teacher, that is, a real *guru*, does not agree to teach short-term tourists but chooses his/her students according to their intentions to learn seriously. This idea refers to the traditional ideal when a *guru* chose carefully whom to teach and it was difficult to become accepted as a disciple (see Massey 1976, 80). Nowadays, however, musicians cannot afford to be so picky; economic realities force them to accept paying students with less strict standards; a fact that the Western music students in Varanasi often seem to ignore. The idea of being ‘a chosen one’ suits well the Western music students as it implies that they are devoted and talented, that is, distinguished. The Western music students talk about their *gurus* a lot. With such talk, their close relation to the *guru* becomes manifested: the assumption is that only devoted students are close to their *gurus*. This is certainly important for their self-identification as music students but at the same time, it also contributes to their status among the music students.

The way one behaves towards one’s *guru* also demonstrates one’s commitment to the music and not only in the eyes of the *guru* but also in the eyes of the other Westerners. Traditionally in Indian music, it has been the responsibility of a disciple to show respect towards the *guru* and to provide her/him with services that make her/his life as comfortable as possible (Neuman 1980, 46). Many Western music students act accordingly. They greet their *guru* or their friends’ *gurus* by touching their feet⁹³, they carry the *guru*’s instrument to the stage in concerts⁹⁴, bring drinking water to the stage, adjust microphones and may even change broken strings. Moreover, some *gurus* expect their students to offer them cigarettes or *paan*⁹⁵ at lessons. Some Westerners even follow certain religious rituals according to their *guru*’s advice. For example, a Western man fasted for nine days in order to have an intense period of ‘pure’ practice. The other Westerners showed him a lot of respect because of this; he was defined as a devoted music student already earlier but the fasting strengthened this image.

One’s status as a serious music student is demonstrated also in concerts. If a *guru* is at a concert, his/her students follow him/her constantly and often imitate the *guru*’s gestures; for example, the religious gestures when entering the temple if the concert takes place in one. Being known and thus greeted by local musicians is a great honour for the Western music students, and an even greater honour is to be allowed to go

⁹³ It is a common custom to greet a person who is one’s superior, e.g. an elder or a teacher, by touching her/his feet. The gesture shows great respect.

⁹⁴ A central duty of a disciple is to carry the *guru*’s instrument (Neuman 1980, 46).

⁹⁵ *Paan*: Betel leaves that are chewed as a palate cleanser and a breath freshener.

to the room where the musicians get prepared for their performances. Such occasions do not go unnoticed by the other Western students; they clearly contribute to one's status although certainly again one's self-identification is significant as well.

Most *gurus* allow their Western disciples to accompany them on stage when they perform in Varanasi. By being on stage, one's identity as a successful music student becomes demonstrated to the Westerners among the audience as customarily, *gurus* have invited only their most talented and most advanced disciples on stage. The other Westerners always go to see when their friends are on stage, and the Western music students often talk about their own concert performances (even if limited to only a few seconds) by exaggerating; both before and after the concert. Sometimes, being on stage does not even include any involvement in the musical performance but merely sitting behind one's *guru*. Yet, the effect on one's status is clear even in such cases.

9.2.3 Distinctions Based on Music

Most of my interviewees said the reason for their being in Varanasi is their music studies. Only very few of them had come to India because of music in the first place but once they had discovered music, it had become the reason for their repeated returns to Varanasi. Classical Indian music indeed plays an important role in the life of the Westerners in Varanasi. In addition to being a central activity, studying music can be a tool for gaining belonging as one becomes involved in the community a lot more easily if one studies music, as happened to me, for example. This section has, however, suggested that it is only the start: there are distinctions based on music and in order to gain status, one must constantly prove one's knowledge, talent and devotion. It requires following certain behavioural norms, having the right *guru* and being able to act the role of a musician in addition to knowing about music and being talented in it. One's status among the music students thus does not come easily and is not secure. I do not deny the fact that the Westerners in Varanasi are genuinely enthusiastic about classical Indian music; their music studies are not only a tool to gain status. Moreover, some of them end up making music their career so that they earn money from performing or teaching in the West. Nevertheless, the aspects of status distinction are clear as well.

9.3 Women and Men: Same but Different

The community of Westerners in Varanasi consists of both men and women but the majority of the Westerners there are men. The Western men and women in Varanasi lead the same lifestyle. Yet, gender is by no means insignificant among them. In the context of Varanasi, gender carries with it various expectations as to how to behave, and it seems to be easier for men to gain distinctive status than it is for women. Gender becomes manifested and performed in several ways among the Westerners but all in all there seems to be a basic understanding of biological sex determining one's behaviour and talents.

9.3.1 Female Musicians: A Contradiction in Terms?

In my interviews, I asked the interviewees why there are more Western men than women studying music in Varanasi. The men's replies were rather surprising to me. Many referred to the fact that Varanasi is a difficult place for Western women because of sexual harassment (see section 11.5) but it was not the main explanation that was given to me.

Men as a whole aspire to much more than women. [...] They are unsatisfied with their life much faster than women [...] ...Always when you see a man and a woman together, the man is always, a lot of times, he is thinking about business, he's thinking about this and that. [...] I think that women have it much easier than men in a way, getting the quietness out of life. Men have to study, they have to play *tabla* for six or seven hours just to be hooh, like this. (David, 28)

To be alone and to do this kind of work is easier for the nature of men, more familiar to the nature of men than to the nature of women. I believe so. (Stefan, 32)

The instruments take a lot of physical strength, a lot of pain. You have to be crazy [...] to want to suffer and to really go through all this. [Men are] maybe more crazy and like more the pain and take it as a challenge. Women give birth, it's enough pain. (laughs) Also I think it's, if a woman wants to have children [...] she comes to a point when she wants to settle down, to have children...She has to think about that. (Noel, 31)

The views of the male interviewees above appear to be very chauvinistic. Women, on their part, usually explained the small number of female music students by referring to the hard living conditions of women in Varanasi (see section 11.5), and to the male dominance in the local

music life. All in all, women did not say that they would not be able to become musicians; they were just not interested in doing so. Moreover, there are Western women who do study classical Indian music, especially singing or dancing, but the devoted female students often exclude themselves from the community of Westerners and thus make themselves 'invisible' (or, rather, 'insignificant') to the other Westerners. The male students, however, do not leave the community. The fact that devoted female students prefer to take distance from the space of the Westerners actually suggests that those few women are very devoted to their music studies since they say the active social life with other Westerners disturbs their practice. Yet, the other Westerners do not define them in those terms: the devoted female students are not accorded distinctive status because they do not participate in the 'game of distinction' among the Westerners as the male students do.

Performing publicly in parties hardly ever involves female music students whereas men seem to feel quite confident to do it even if they have taken lessons only for a few weeks, which may indicate that men have more self-confidence and they are more willing to put themselves in the centre. It may also indicate that the women are not interested in showing off their talents, which is actually the case for those devoted female students who have excluded themselves from the community. Men are also expected to take an active and devoted role as a musician whereas women do not face such expectations. For example, when my spouse, who plays sitar, did not attend a concert with me, a Western woman commented on it by saying: 'I thought he is interested in music'. Her tone indicated that she questioned not only his interest, but also his talent in playing the sitar. However, it was not a problem for me and my status that my singing lessons did not last for very long and did not result in me becoming a talented singer; I believe a man would have faced more pressure to continue and succeed. I know a few men who have become very frustrated when they have not progressed in their studies as quickly as some other Westerners. Noel's comment above clearly states that he did not expect women to succeed in their music studies, and he was not alone holding such an opinion among the Western men in Varanasi. Therefore, I, as a woman, actually fulfilled many Western men's expectations by quitting.

9.3.2 Gendered Orientations

Everyone here is little crazy and the women staying here too long are even crazier many times. You hardly see a woman that survived ten years in Benares and is not totally [mad]... (laughs) (Noel, 31)

Noel states that 'everyone is crazy' in Varanasi, yet, such 'craziness' is problematic particularly for women. Many of my male interviewees shared this view and consequently, many of them said that women should not stay in Varanasi for too long. In fact, both Western men and women seem to consider that not having a focus, that is, not having something to do in Varanasi, for example studying music, is problematic for women; it involves a danger of 'becoming lost' and 'becoming crazy'. Men are not considered to be in such danger even if they lack such a focus. It is true that being in a very different cultural environment can cause mental problems and bring out problematic issues from the past (on the Indian context, see Airault 2000), yet, this should not be applicable only to women; also the Western men are away from their familiar environment and have chosen, or ended up with, a very peculiar lifestyle.

It is rather revealing that many Western men in Varanasi talk about the women in terms of becoming crazy and never in terms of becoming empowered. The Western women themselves, however, emphasise the empowerment factor and their individual development (in spite of agreeing elsewhere that lacking a focus is problematic). The Western women in Varanasi emphasise being free and independent. In their view, the fact that they travel in India on their own proves that they are independent and self-sufficient and being in India has been an empowering experience for them. (see Korpela 2006) There is an interesting contradiction in the views of the Western men who consider women somehow weak (lacking focus and in danger of becoming 'crazy') and the Western women who emphasise that being in India requires them to be strong and/or makes them strong. The fact that the Western men in Varanasi often define the long-term Western women as somehow 'crazy' suggests that the men accord the women an inferior status vis-à-vis themselves. The men define themselves as 'not crazy', or at least as 'less crazy', and they define themselves as active agents pursuing their artistic goals in music in opposition to the women who, in the men's talk, 'lack focus and goals' in Varanasi.

The talk about 'having a focus' in Varanasi points towards the importance of being able to explain one's stay in Varanasi. In addition to the Westerners considering it dangerous for women to lack such a focus, my material suggests that the women have more trouble in general with justifying and explaining their long sojourn in Varanasi than the men. The women commonly elaborate on their identities with each other and reflect on the choices they have made and discuss their future options, whereas the men present themselves as much more confident in their choices. Why then is the justification more problematic for women than men?

An interesting gender aspect is the fact that many Western women in Varanasi have a bachelor's degree or they have dropped out of university whereas most of the men have not continued their studies after secondary

school and some have dropped out of school already before or during secondary education. This may contribute to the fact that the Western men in Varanasi often maintain an identity as a music student and are content with it whereas many Western women search for a different identity; they are past the student stage (either they have finished their studies or decided not to study in case they have dropped out of university or have not entered it at all). The men's emphasis on a student identity is visible also in their apartments: most Western men in Varanasi treat their apartments as places to sleep, practice and possibly, but not necessarily, to eat. An explanation for such an attitude is that the men define themselves as leading a temporary student life. The Western women, however, put more effort into making their apartments look nice and in creating an atmosphere of home. Many women decorate and paint their rooms and almost all the women cook their meals. Another factor that tells about the women wanting to put more effort into their homes than the men is that some Western women hire household help, for example a cleaning lady, whereas I do not know of any Western man who would have done so. One explanation for this gendered aspect of 'home-making' is that the women are more troubled with their liminoid status than the men (with their student identity) are. Thus the women try to downplay it by emphasising being 'at home' in Varanasi, albeit temporarily. Although many women appreciate the fact that *travelling* has empowered them, they seem to be troubled with *staying* in the liminoid space.

The women are also more concerned about being able to make money once they return to the West than the men, who seem to have more confidence in their income opportunities. This may indicate that it is easier for the men to find temporary jobs than it is for the women or that the men do not admit feeling insecure as easily as the women. It may also indicate that the women are more troubled with their lifestyle than the men and thus worry about it more. The women also seem to have more problems than the men in defining what their focus in Varanasi is. The Western men present themselves as rather firm in sticking with the activity that they have chosen in the first place, in most cases playing a certain instrument. In contrast, many Western women try several activities: they may do yoga, charity work, try various instruments, dancing and singing. This may in turn contribute to the fact that most women do not return to Varanasi for as many years as most men do, that is, men are more permanent community members than women although some of those who have stayed the longest are women. This may also have something to do with the common local attitudes that consider the Western women's long sojourn in Varanasi as something bad whereas for men such a lifestyle is considered more acceptable (see section 11.5) Moreover, there are clearly more male musicians than female musicians among the local population in Varanasi.

All in all, the Western men act more determined than the Western women: the men appear to know what they want to do in Varanasi and they present themselves as more confident in their lifestyle choices, and such a role contributes to them gaining more status than the women, whose roles and identities are ‘fuzzier’. In addition, the men’s chauvinistic attitudes make it more difficult for the women to gain status within the community.

9.3.3 Gendered Activities and Roles

Although the men and the women hang out together a lot, their closest friends are often of the same sex. A Western woman who had been coming to Varanasi for ten years mentioned that the separation of the men and the women is a recent phenomenon: when there were fewer Westerners in Varanasi, men and women spent more time together than now. Yet, many women still complain that they do not have enough female contacts in Varanasi as the majority of Westerners there are men. Although there is no activity that is exclusively for men or women, and the Western women and men in Varanasi participate in the communal activities equally and mix together a lot, in some respects the activities and especially the roles of the women and the men are different.

When the men spend time together they usually play music and/or smoke hash. Interestingly, both playing and smoking work as distinction mechanisms within the community. I have already elaborated on distinctions based on music but smoking hash is also a distinction method: those who consume the most gain more status than those who smoke less or not at all. This ‘rule’ applies particularly to men and many of those who do not smoke are women. All in all, by smoking a lot one can gain distinctive status and this especially concerns men. The fact that men in particular are involved in the activities that contribute to status distinctions indicate that the game of distinction involves above all men. Consequently men are able to gain more status than women and although women are not as much involved in the game in the first place, the men nevertheless often define them as ‘less equal’ than men within the community.

The Western women in Varanasi hardly ever play music together and they also smoke hash less than men. When the women spend time together, they often discuss their thoughts and feelings, elaborating on their identities and choices in life. Therefore, unlike the men who are involved in ‘status work’, the Western women seem to be involved in ‘identity work’. Moreover, the women organise and initiate a lot more common activities in Varanasi than the men. While many parties are initiated and organised by women, however, men often take an active role during parties by playing music together whereas women usually remain passive listeners in those

situations; even those women who would have the talent to play. Sometimes, one or two women perform a fire dance but those performances are not received with as much excitement as the men's musical performances. Men's role as performers is obviously very visible whereas women's role as organisers often remains rather invisible. Moreover, organising events does not provide one with distinctive status whereas performing music does, which suggests that women are not as involved in the game of distinction as men are.

Gender roles among the Westerners in Varanasi can be interpreted by using Judith Butler's (1999) concept of performative gender, by which she refers to gender as being constantly made (performed) by acts. I have discussed above how gender becomes true (that is, is acted out and thus also performed) in the everyday lives of the Westerners in Varanasi. In addition, gender is acted out in terms of looks among the Westerners in Varanasi. In fact, the performance of gender requires constant negotiations vis-à-vis the other Western men and women in Varanasi but also vis-à-vis gender roles in 'the West' as well as vis-a-vis local gender roles in Varanasi.

I am at a party and Laura comes to the venue asking for 'a strong man' to help with carrying a heavy box. The men present start to laugh. (January 2003)

Many of the Western men in Varanasi have long hair and shabby looks⁹⁶. They are also usually thin and do not consider themselves strong. In fact, they often make fun of themselves for being so anti-athletic. Many of them claim to be living differently from 'average' Western masculinity. However, in spite of not looking like what they consider to be 'typical Western men', they have not given up a masculine identity altogether but end up emphasising it in different ways. Rather often they even hold chauvinistic views, good examples of which are the comments regarding men's better abilities to study music than women. I argue that it is particularly easy for the Western men to emphasise their male identity in Varanasi since male privilege is very prevalent among local Indian people there (see section 11.5).

Many Western women in Varanasi also define themselves as different from 'average women' in their countries of origin because of their 'shabby' looks. Yet, unlike the Western women in Goa whom D'Andrea describes as 'warriors', emphasising wildness, toughness and dexterity (D'Andrea 2006. 110; see also D'Andrea 2007, 207), the Western women

⁹⁶ The men's 'shabby looks' refers above all to their ragged clothes. Some Western men (and women) in Varanasi also have dreadlocks.

in Varanasi typically emphasise their femininity, for example by having long hair and by wearing dresses. All in all, although the Western men and women in Varanasi consider themselves different from men and women in their countries of origin, they are not challenging gender roles as such but actually end up emphasising them: women above all through their looks and men above all through their opinions.

9.3.4 Sex in the City

Most Western men who stay in India are completely chauvinistic. The number of guys I know who have got kids all over the world or run away from relationships, who completely [...] escape. (Tom, 36)

The above quotation is from a male interviewee who, to my surprise, started to talk about Western men when I asked whether being in India is more difficult for Western women than men⁹⁷. Tom does not belong to the community of Westerners in Varanasi despite having spent much time there and he is the only one who pointed out the chauvinistic aspect of many Western men in India. Yet, I share his view. The earlier comments from the men regarding women's inability to learn Indian music already pointed towards male chauvinism. In addition, the men's chauvinistic attitude becomes evident regarding sex. Relationships between Indians and Westerners are rare (see section 9.3.4), and most Westerners in Varanasi are single. Nevertheless, quite many single Western men in Varanasi seem to be actively searching for sexual company, or even a girlfriend, but the long-term Western women seldom seem to be interested in having relationships with them. Consequently, many men try to attract short-term tourist women, and rather often they succeed. Those relationships are usually very temporary. Tourist women seem to be viewed as 'free targets' by many Western men in Varanasi, and many tourist women are also themselves searching for sexual company, or potential spouses, and seem to be impressed with and attracted to the Western men studying music in Varanasi. The relationships, however, seldom seem to last for more than a few days or weeks; eventually, the tourist woman moves on and the Western man stays behind in Varanasi.

The Western men's temporary relationships with tourist women do not affect their reputation within the community, either positively or negatively⁹⁸. If, however, a Western woman has several sexual relations, it

⁹⁷ Usually my interviewees said that India is more difficult for Western women than men because Indian men harass women (see section 11.5.1).

⁹⁸ I do not know whether it affects one's status among the Western men themselves, but within the community as a whole, it does not seem to have a positive or negative effect.

definitely affects her reputation in negative terms. Such women and their relationships are often gossiped about among the Westerners and the women are blamed for their promiscuity. In other words, among the Westerners in Varanasi it seems to be important, for both the men and the women, to control women's morals and sexuality whereas such moral codes do not apply to men, and in fact women involved with various men are very rare among the Westerners in Varanasi.

The community of Westerners in Varanasi is very heteronormative. None of the long-term sojourners appear to be gay, and the heterosexual nuclear family is the ideal among them. This is visible especially in the several comments that criticise single mothers for their child-rearing abilities. Single mothers obviously do exist, partly due to the fact that many travelling Western men seem not to take much responsibility for their offspring, as Tom stated in his comment above. This suggests a contradiction in the talk and actions of many Western men; they value nuclear family in their talk, yet in practice they may have affairs and even children with several women. This can be interpreted as a sign of their chauvinism and in fact, they are using patriarchal power. Although the Westerners in Varanasi criticise 'the West' on several counts, neither the men nor the women criticise patriarchal practices.

I never heard of any sexual initiatives among the long-term sojourners in Varanasi towards each other⁹⁹. One explanation for this is that the men seem to define the long-term Western women sojourners primarily as their friends, almost as their sisters, not as potential partners. Moreover, the long-term Western women in Varanasi often emphasise being independent, whereas many men seem to prefer more submissive partners. Many of the long-term Western women are also not interested in having a relationship at that particular point in their lives: searching for their individual identity is more crucial. Consequently, couples are seldom formed in Varanasi as the expectations and aspirations of the Western men and women sojourning there do not seem to meet. Therefore, the Western couples who are in Varanasi seldom have met in Varanasi initially. Very often, the partners are of different nationality, in which case they commonly circulate between India and their two countries of origin (and possibly also between some other countries).

An interesting aspect regarding couples is that to a great extent the partners are identified as individuals. Everyone knows who are in a couple but those people are usually not defined via each other. For example, many

⁹⁹ As I explained in section 4.3, I was the target of several sexual advances when I was not considered a community member and people did not know me. But once I got involved with the life of the Westerners in Varanasi, that is, became defined as an insider and people got to know me and my spouse (or at least of his existence), such comments and initiatives ended.

people talked to me about a particular Western woman who was not in Varanasi at the time. When she finally arrived and I was able to interview her, she told me that she comes to Varanasi because of her boyfriend, who is learning music there. However, the numerous times that people had talked about her to me, they had never mentioned her boyfriend although he is a very well-known and respected music student among the Westerners. I had been told about him as well but no one had ever mentioned him having a girlfriend. Such a practice suggests how central individuality is among the Westerners in Varanasi.

Some couples have a child (seldom more than one), most of them do not. Many Westerners told me that earlier, there were no Western children in Varanasi whereas now, the number of children is increasing constantly. This is probably due to the fact that living conditions in Varanasi have improved and it is therefore easier to manage with a child there. Secondly, there are now rather many Western women in their thirties in Varanasi and some of them feel that they are reaching a critical age with regard to becoming mothers. Yet, they do not want to give up their life in Varanasi and so they stay there with their babies. A crucial moment in deciding whether to stay in Varanasi or not is actually not the birth of a child but when the child reaches school age. Many Western parents do not want their children to attend a school in Varanasi but prefer Western education. Here, we see that although the Westerners in Varanasi criticise the West a lot, many still see positive attributes in it as well (especially when they compare 'the West' to the 'Indian other' (see chapter 11). Providing children with Western education obviously means that the family, or at least the mother with the child or children, has to live in the West instead of Varanasi for the greater part of year¹⁰⁰.

The small Western children in Varanasi do not attend day-care but spend the days with their parents, or at least with the mothers. Children come along to concerts and parties as well. From today's Western perspective it may seem unusual but in fact, children participate in adult activities in many cultures and it is actually a very recent and rather exceptional phenomenon that children spend their days away from their parents. The Western parents in Varanasi highly appreciate the fact that they are able to spend so much time with their children. This is one characteristic of the better life they have found in India.

¹⁰⁰ I know a few such families in which the father continues traveling whereas the mother stays in the West with the child.

9.3.5 Distinctions Based on Gender

In this section I have argued that gender is significant in many ways among the Westerners in Varanasi. Through their lifestyle, the Western men and women there escape and challenge certain gendered expectations and norms of their countries of origin. Yet, when gender is acted out in the new environment in Varanasi, it is by no means insignificant and gender roles seem in fact to be crucial. Gender distinctions and gender-specific roles seem to be fundamental and very persistent among the Westerners in Varanasi. Within their community, a particular gender system seems to form. The gender system is not referred to explicitly but is implicitly understood. It is constructed among the Westerners in Varanasi instead of simply being brought there from their countries of origin. In spite of the Westerners' emphasis on equality, within the gender system, the men eventually seem to define the women as 'less equal than men'.

Women play a significant role in organising common activities among the Westerners in Varanasi. Such activities contribute to the maintenance of the community; one can even claim that the women act as cultural reproducers of the community of Westerners in Varanasi. The women keep many practices alive by organising common activities in which those practices are conducted and transferred to newcomers. However, although such 'maintenance work' is very significant for the survival of the community, it is rather invisible as status within the community is gained by other means. The various distinction methods seem to be more easily available to the Western men than to the women, above all in terms of music studies but also in many other respects. As a consequence, those who have the most distinctive status within the community are men. In fact, one can argue that through their maintenance work women keep the community alive, whereas men keep the distinctions alive as the distinctions concern the men to a much greater extent than they concern the women. Women's role as cultural reproducers may also be an underlying reason why their morals are controlled to such an extent among the Westerners in Varanasi: the women are needed as 'moral pillars' of the community and if they spend their time in affairs with men, they do not contribute to the maintenance of the community.

The Western women in Varanasi emphasise that travelling in India has provided them with experiences of freedom and empowerment. However, in spite of this, they seem to end up in a subordinate position in comparison to the Western men within the community of Westerners in Varanasi, which suggests that (once again) a lifestyle of freedom mainly means freedom for men. (The same has been said, for example, about the hippie movement; see, e.g., Vesey 1973, 466; Zablocki 1980, 318; 343; Gitlin 1987, 372; Miller 1991, 16, 53). The heteronormativity of the

community is in fact rather peculiar as the Westerners emphasise leading alternative lives. Yet, the alternative does not seem to mean ‘alternative’ gender roles or sexuality. The chauvinistic views of many men as well as the male dominance, or patriarchal control, in the community suggest that it is actually a male-defined entity although it would not last without the women’s maintenance work. It may well be that the women do not care about gaining distinctive status within the community but they are nevertheless affected by the game of distinction played among the Westerners in Varanasi, especially because they are a ‘significant other’ against which the Western men define their identities.

9.4 Distinctions within the Community

When the Westerners arrive in Varanasi for the first time, they are without status and distinctive social capital. However, if they stay in the community of Westerners for long, they get involved in the game of distinction. Many Westerners claim to have found an ideal life and their true selves in Varanasi. They share a certain lifestyle, values and practices, yet, they are not all equal although they often claim to be so. The members are equal in the sense that nobody holds positions of power over others, that is, it is not a hierarchical community. Yet, certain people have more distinctive status than others, and gaining status through distinctive mechanisms is much more available to the men than it is to the women. In this chapter I have shown that one’s status among the Westerners in Varanasi depends on the amount and length of one’s stays in Varanasi, and above all on one’s music studies. The distinctions are largely based on one’s achievements and actions, including one’s appearance, and thus require constant effort. However, one’s economic situation does not seem to affect one’s status and neither does one’s nationality.

Individuals gain status within the community through distinctions and by gaining status one also becomes defined as a true community member instead of being seen as a tourist passing by. Moreover, distinctive status enables one to express commitment to the life of the Westerners in Varanasi. The aspects that contribute to one’s status in Varanasi are certainly significant for one’s self-definition as well. Gaining status can be particularly important due to the marginalised position that the Westerners in Varanasi claim to occupy in their countries of origin. At least in Varanasi, they can feel respected and they can therefore define themselves as people who have made a successful lifestyle choice. Yet, at the same time they need to be involved in the game of distinction and constantly proving their talent and devotion to music can be very stressful, as the

game is never-ending. Therefore, the relaxed life that the Westerners claim to have found in Varanasi (see section 6.2) is not necessarily very relaxed after all.

The existence of distinction mechanisms supports my argument that the Westerners form a community in Varanasi: distinctions can take place only within some sort of an entity. Moreover, the existence of distinctions implies a certain permanence; the community is not as fluid as it may appear to be at first. It is not merely a group of individuals who hang out together for awhile but is a more permanent entity with its own practices and divisions. Yet, individuals' temporal participation is also a significant characteristic of the community, as becomes evident in the following chapter.

10. 'EVERYONE COMES BACK TO VARANASI!': LEAVING AND RETURNING

10.1 Farewell parties

Although the community of Westerners is evoked in everyday life and practices, leaving is the most crucial moment in terms of defining the community and one's membership in it.

I sit at the tea stall and join Kate and Celine's conversation. Matt is leaving tomorrow, thus, there will be a farewell party for him tonight. The women plan the food for the party and leave the tea stall early in order to have enough time for cooking. I go with them to the market to buy ingredients for dinner. Once we get to Celine's apartment, I cut some vegetables. Soon, a few people living on the same compound join us. Some of them have already cooked a few dishes for the party, and some come to the kitchen to help us. Someone starts to play the flute while we are cooking. Matt is not at home although this is a party for him. He is visiting his *guru* for the last time. Gradually more and more people arrive: Matt has been a popular person among the Westerners in Varanasi and eventually almost everyone who is 'important' is there, about thirty to forty people altogether. Finally, Matt arrives. We eat and later a few men play music. Suddenly, Celine appears with a camera; she wants to take a group photo of all the 'girls'. David mentions to Anton that this is the photo of 'the class of 2003'. What an accurate comment, I think. After taking the photo, the jamming continues, Anton even sings and people chat quietly. Several people ask Matt what he will do in his country of origin and when he will come back to Varanasi. He does not know. He has to leave because his visa is expiring and he has run out of money. In his country of origin, he must find a job and he has to stay there until he has enough money to come back. He doesn't know when that will be but hopefully soon. He is rather stressed about all the things that he still has to do before leaving Varanasi. Tomorrow will be a busy day for him. He has not finished packing — neither his luggage nor the boxes that he is going to store in Varanasi — and he still has to go to say goodbye to a few people. He is sad to leave: life is good in Varanasi, his music studies are progressing well and he enjoys the company of his friends. He is also a bit worried about how life will be back in Europe; he has been away for six months. The jamming continues but people gradually start to leave after 11pm. Some say their

goodbyes to Matt but most promise to come again tomorrow; there is still time for goodbyes since Matt will catch the train only in the evening. It is a nice evening together with friends, yet, we are all sad to know that this is Matt's last night in Varanasi — until next time. Matt goes to sleep rather early but the party continues without him. His leaving was the reason for organising this party but his presence is not a necessity for enjoying the night with friends. (March 2003)

When one's date of departure approaches, the person or her/his friends often start to make plans for a farewell party. Usually, such parties take place one to two nights before the person's departure. One such party is described above. Farewell parties are not very different from other parties organised by the Westerners in Varanasi but they play a very important role. In many ways, communal togetherness culminates when someone leaves: leaving is not the end but an occasion to evoke and demonstrate belonging. Therefore, the moments of leaving are extremely important in the life of the community. On the one hand, one's departure can be seen as just another excuse for having a party. However, enjoying one of the last nights together also strengthens the ties: the party atmosphere will be the last image in one's mind when boarding the train and eventually the plane. The hardships of everyday life in Varanasi are easily forgotten then. By analysing the farewell parties from the point of view of community construction, I do not mean to downplay the fact that many Westerners genuinely enjoy hanging out with their friends and from an individual's point of view, farewell parties, or other farewell activities, are part of one's nice life with friends in Varanasi. Yet, the farewell activities also highlight several aspects of the community.

The party described above illustrates well two central aspects of the life of the Westerners in Varanasi. First of all, Matt's departure reminds us of the transnational and fluid character of the community. Secondly, the intense social life that the Westerners enjoy in Varanasi culminates in the party. As in so many other parties, also in the farewell ones, cooking and eating together as well as playing music together are central activities. Therefore, farewell parties, like other parties, play a central role in the reciprocal relations in addition to providing occasions to enjoy each others' company. In the description above, I mentioned that 'almost everyone who is important' came to the party. This is a crucial observation which reveals that insiders, those who belong to the community, participated and that Matt himself was an insider. It is also noteworthy that it was Matt's friends, not he himself, who initiated the party. This also shows that Matt was an insider: such parties are not organised for outsiders or for those who do not possess any distinctive social capital. The fact that Matt was spending his last evening with the *guru* suggests that he was a committed music student

which in turn provided him with distinctive status among the Westerners in Varanasi and allowed him a self-definition as a devoted music student.

Taking the photo of 'the class of 2003' indicates communal feelings; 'we' and not 'others' were included in the photo. The photo also shows the temporal nature of the community: it is a memory of a group that will be separated and probably never reunited in the exactly same form. Although the community will be reconstructed the following season and its practices will be repeated again and again, the individual members will not all be the same. The fact that Celine wanted a photo of all the 'girls' is interesting as she had both male and female friends. It definitely tells about the significance of gender in the community: gender matters although many Westerners in Varanasi might not admit it (see section 9.3; 11.5).

In the excerpt above, Matt was worried about what would happen once he returned to his country of origin. He also did not know when he would be able to come back to Varanasi. In farewell parties, anxiety about the future is often expressed, yet it is set aside by enjoying the moment. When others asked Matt when he would return, they revealed that they anticipated seeing him again the following season, that is, they expected the community to be reunited. In a way, organising a farewell party is contradictory, since one is celebrating leaving the place one enjoys living in. In one such farewell party, a Western man sarcastically mentioned that the 'star of the party' was very happy to leave, and thus separate herself from the life in Varanasi, whereas he himself would have been very sad if he were leaving. I, however, would argue that instead of departure, belonging is celebrated in such farewell parties as it is made visible. The 'star of the party' was maybe not so happy to leave but happy to belong. First of all, one gains strong feelings of belonging when many people come to one's farewell party. Secondly, one will remember the nice communal party atmosphere when one is away; and eventually also when one returns.

10.2 The Long Process of Leaving: Preparations, Postponements and Rituals

Leaving is not a very clear break among the Westerners in Varanasi. It is a long process during which plans are frequently discussed with friends. One almost always leaves alone but nevertheless involves others in the planning process, which makes communal relationships and belonging visible. On the other hand, one is also oriented towards relationships in one's country of origin (or in whichever country one is going to) by buying presents for friends there, which reflects the transnational connections of these people.

Typically, the Westerners in Varanasi do not want to settle the date when they depart but leave that decision to the last possible moment. Expiring visas and reserved flights give ultimate deadlines but often, one is flexible in deciding when to leave Varanasi. One can, for example, plan to visit other places in India or to do some business¹⁰¹ in Delhi before one's flight, and such plans are flexible. It may also be difficult to reserve train tickets for specific dates and this provides a good excuse for prolonging one's stay in Varanasi. It can happen that one talks about leaving for weeks until it happens. Although the Westerners emphasise staying a long time in Varanasi, at the same time, the idea of leaving is constantly present as people often ask each other for their departure dates. After all, the Westerners do not stay in Varanasi for more than a few months at a time and very few, if any, plan to stay there permanently.

Communal bonds are evoked in a very tangible way when packing: one gives to other Westerners, seldom to Indians, whatever food products are left and whatever does not fit into the luggage and storage boxes. Those who stay in Varanasi the longest always benefit materially from being the last ones. The following season, they have a particular relationship with people whose food and goods they have received earlier. During the last days in Varanasi, one also returns borrowed dishes, discs etc. and pays one's debts. Such activities suggest that one has been a part of a larger collectivity — and its gift economy — and that one is committed to keeping those relationships on good terms. The latter is important because one is planning to return and expects others to return as well. In other words, continuity of relationships becomes visible at the moment of departure and change.

Just prior to one's departure, certain 'rituals' of leaving take place and they clearly strengthen the bonds among the community members. Not everyone's departure is marked by (all) the rituals described here; some even leave very discreetly. Yet, many characteristics of the community nevertheless culminate in those rituals. First of all, the rituals involve the last *chai* at the tea stall. Going there on one's last day puts emphasis on the fact that one has taken part in the everyday routines of the community of Westerners in Varanasi. Many also spend a few minutes alone and go to touch the Ganges water, thus saying goodbye to the holy river. In this way, the spiritual character of Varanasi is made visible: at the time of departure, when one is about to step back into the non-spiritual (or 'dead religion' as some Westerners define it, see section 6.2.2) Western world, it seems to be important to remember the spiritual significance of Varanasi. The performative aspect of such actions is obvious as the ritual of saying goodbye to the river is conducted publicly by the river shore and other

¹⁰¹ 'Doing business' refers here to buying goods for sale in the West.

Westerners often see it from the tea stall. It clearly also marks one's departure: it is the last time one sees the Ganges — until the next season.

Saying goodbye to the Ganges River is a personal ritual but leaving Varanasi also includes social and communal aspects. Very often, a few hours before one has to go, one's friends gather in one's room to smoke hash. It is very important that all the friends honour the person who is leaving by offering 'the last *chillum*'. This is an important act of sharing which also easily reveals who has more distinctive social capital among the Westerners in Varanasi: those with greater capital get offered more *chillums* than those with less (on the *chillum* smoking ritual, see Saldanha 2007, 65-69). Those final gatherings are very intense, partly due to the simple fact that there are many people in one room but also because of the last chance to spend time together. When it is time to depart, everyone goes outside and hugs and kisses the person who is leaving. Then, they all walk to the street carrying the luggage together. When the *rickshaw* disappears into the traffic, the others are left waving after it. These are very sad moments but there is always the presumption of meeting and enjoying the life together in Varanasi again the following season. An interesting aspect of the farewell ceremonies is also the fact that although they clearly celebrate communal ties, the Westerners leaving typically travel alone, which indicates that in addition to communality, individuality is a very central value for them (see section 6.2).

The act of participating in the farewell rituals not only celebrates but also constructs bonds. Even if their relationship has not been very close, the next time those people meet, they remember the intensity and intimacy of the previous farewell moments and thus feel a bond with each other as a consequence of which, the relationship often becomes closer than it was previously. In fact, in respect to belonging and continuity, the last moments before departure can become more significant than the weeks, even months before them.

10.3 'When Are You Coming Back?'

In spite of the very intense social life together in Varanasi, it is crucial that people also leave¹⁰²: the community of Westerners in Varanasi is not about staying eternally but a construction where leaving, returning and re-construction play extremely important roles. One has to leave in order to be able to return later, which in turn provides one with distinctive

¹⁰² Even those Westerners who have Indian spouses and who spend most of the year in India regularly leave Varanasi, that is, they do not stay there permanently.

social capital within the community. Moreover, movement is a crucial part of the lifestyle: being stuck in one place is a situation that many Westerners in Varanasi definitely want to avoid (see chapter 7). Leaving is also considered necessary among the Westerners in Varanasi as it is commonly agreed that no Westerner can stay in Varanasi forever: if one did, the 'Hindu energy' of the city would drive one crazy (on the gendered aspect of such 'craziness', see section 9.3.2). In practical terms, leaving is usually dictated by expiring visas and/or a lack of money, yet people often give other kinds of explanations for their departures.

In no way is leaving understood as an end as it is expected that everyone will return the following season. There is definitely no point of resignation from the community. When people were asking me towards the end of my fieldwork whether I would come back in October or November, they refused to listen to my efforts to explain that I might not come at all the following season. It seemed to be impossible that someone would decide not to return. In this way, the fluidity of the community is downplayed at the very moment when it is clearly salient, that is, at the time of departure. In other words, an illusion of eternal continuity is evoked at a moment of drastic change. In reality, it often happens that people do not return but one is not supposed to plan for it; or at least not to state such plans aloud.

Another example of the illusion of permanence is an occasion when I was asking a local music teacher if he could give me singing lessons. He asked how long I would stay in Varanasi and a Western man who was present at the meeting burst out 'Mari is always here!' although it was obvious that I was not staying in Varanasi permanently. By making such statements, feelings of permanence and stability are created. I argue that it becomes particularly important since the community is so fluid. The fact that people constantly come and go is downplayed and instead, people act as if nothing, and no one, ever changes. Such behaviour strengthens communal feelings even when circumstances are fluid.

With regard to one's status within the community, contradictorily, it is crucial to leave; only by returning does one establish his/her status as a community member. I argue that since the community is fluid and characterised by individuals' comings and goings, return becomes a significant distinction tool. When one returns several times to Varanasi, one shows commitment to the life of the community and such a manifestation of commitment helps to establish one's status as an insider. It also definitely provides one with distinctive social capital if done several times. I explained earlier (see section 8.4.2) how people whom I hardly knew the previous time acted like my good friends when they realised I had been in Varanasi previously. Returning strengthens the communal ties also

to old friends; one pays attention to those relationships as they need to be re-established.

When a person returns to Varanasi, s/he is recognised as an old-timer. Obviously, many people know her/him from previous year(s) but also one's actions indicate that it is not her/his first time there. First of all, s/he usually returns to the same house where s/he has lived before or at least s/he knows well where to look for accommodation. Then, s/he unpacks her/his boxes of household items that have been stored in Varanasi, goes to the tea stall at the correct time and quickly meets old friends and hears new gossip and news. The person becomes quickly involved in the activities of the community, almost as if s/he never left. The Westerners in Varanasi claim that arriving there is like coming home; you know where to go and what to do and you meet many old friends already in the first few hours. The expression of 'coming home' is possible obviously only if one has been in the place before and one has lived away in the meanwhile. Moreover, there has to be familiar people left to meet there; that is, others have returned as well. Moreover, stating that they feel like they are coming home indicates that Varanasi is a significant place of anchorage, associated with feelings of belonging, in the Westerners' mobile life.

A significant and special aspect of the community of Westerners in Varanasi is that it continues even when no one stays there permanently. The community is not constant, yet it is re-created over and over again. In fact, many claim that when they return to Varanasi, they often get the feeling that nothing has changed there, which suggests that their feelings of continuity are strong. Obviously, the environment and the local people are the same but also the activities and practices of the Westerners are the same, and many of the Westerners are the same as well. There are always also newcomers but they do not break the image of continuity as they behave the same as the old-timers.

10.4 The Significance of Leaving and Returning: Reconstructing the Fluid Community

The community of Westerners in Varanasi is voluntary and fluid; characterised by individuals' comings and goings. I argue that fluidity is not problematic but rather a defining characteristic of the community and in fact, moments of leaving and farewell are very significant occasions for manifesting and evoking communal belonging. In many ways, leaving is not about breaking ties but strengthening them by making them visible. In other words, in spite of change being inevitable, continuity is emphasised at

the time of departure. In addition to leaving being significant, returning is even more crucial. Continuity becomes salient at the time of return, both from the point of view of the individual who returns and from the point of view of the community as a whole, as it becomes reconstructed so that old practices continue in spite of a break in the middle. In fact, in terms of practices, the community is not only permanent but in many respects even stagnant (see chapter 13). A particular characteristic of the community is that although farewell activities are very significant, there are no 'joining parties' or welcoming activities, that is, arrivals are not celebrated but quite the opposite, downplayed, and I have argued that this is a way to create feelings of permanence and continuity. This chapter has shown that the farewell activities clearly celebrate continuity and belonging, even more so because one is not allowed to state openly plans to leave permanently, but is expected to return.

10.5 Conceptualising the Community

At the beginning of this book, I outlined various theoretical approaches to understanding communities. They are helpful when conceptualising the community of Westerners in Varanasi, although none of them alone satisfactorily explain it.

When taking into account the fluid nature of the community of Westerners in Varanasi, one could define it as a neo-tribe, following Maffesoli's conceptualisation. The community definitely has neo-tribal characteristics, above all due to its fluid and voluntary character as well as due to it being based on individuals' personal lifestyle choices. However, it is more consistent than the neo-tribes that Maffesoli writes about: even if individuals constantly come and go, practices and structures persist and the community has existed for years, even for decades (see chapter 13). Moreover, unlike typical neo-tribes, it is very concrete, based on personal interactions, and it is formed through tangible practices and has clear boundaries. Therefore, although the community of Westerners in Varanasi has neo-tribal characteristics, its long existence, permanent practices, and boundaries as well as the existence of significant status distinctions make it different from neo-tribes as Maffesoli defines them. The community of Westerners in Varanasi is indeed very particular as its practices are very persistent, although at the same time, the whole phenomenon is characterised by individuals' leaving and returning, that is, by mobility and change.

The community of Westerners in Varanasi is also clearly location-based, consisting of interacting people present in the same locality. Yet, its

fluid nature makes it different from conventional location-based communities. Moreover, the community is definitely not imagined, especially since the members do not maintain ties, or imagine belonging, with each other while away from Varanasi. In spite of its global setting, it is not a typical transnational community either. Usually transnational communities are understood not to be anchored to certain places but to be formed by people who live in various countries while maintaining contacts with each other and feeling belonging together. The Westerners in Varanasi are very mobile in the global arena, yet, the community that they form is very location-based and not transnationally maintained. The community could actually be characterised as a means of creating temporal familiarity and concrete social ties and interactions when the movement in the global arena stops for awhile.

Additionally, the community of Westerners in Varanasi is interest-based: the uniting factor among the members is their interest and willingness to spend long periods of time in India where they claim to have found a more meaningful life. It is thus a community based on a shared lifestyle instead of being based on a single hobby or activity.

Ultimately, the community of Westerners in Varanasi can be viewed as an alternative space of bohemian lifestyle migrants. Within the community, similar-minded people act out their ideals and countercultural values in addition to pursuing their bohemian — artistic and spiritual — aspirations. All in all, although the communal belonging is based on individual choice, that is, the members come and go as they please and they are lacking a (permanent) commitment, they nevertheless temporarily appreciate communal life and belonging.

Finally, the location of the community is not arbitrary: the Westerners assign the city of Varanasi special spiritual and artistic meanings. Now, it is time to look at how the community is situated in the local setting in Varanasi.

11. WESTERN SPACE IN AN INDIAN ENVIRONMENT

The community of Westerners in Varanasi is very location-based: their practices are tightly linked to specific locations and the members seldom keep in touch with each other while away from Varanasi. In the following, I elaborate on how the community becomes situated with regard to local people in Varanasi.

11.1 Appreciating Indian Culture instead of Indian People

It is a hot day in May. I am walking on the street and accidentally meet Celine. She is very happy to meet me and she says: 'It is so nice to see you! I thought there is nobody left in Varanasi any more in this heat.' (May 2002)

It is rather revealing that although there are over a million inhabitants in Varanasi, for Celine there was 'nobody' there when there were not many Westerners. As my research has shown, the social scene of the Westerners in Varanasi is very intense and significant for the long-term sojourners. Although the Westerners emphasise individuality and personal choices, almost none of them would like to be in Varanasi if there were no other Westerners there. Although physical proximity to locals is obvious, it does not necessarily mean social intimacy or genuine encounters (see Ahmed 2000). I argue that the Westerners in Varanasi have found 'more vibes', that is, a better life, *in* India but not *with* Indians. In fact, the Westerners seem to create a socially isolated Western space; a kind of bubble or island in Varanasi, and their social contacts with Indians are rather rare. Also the fact that I was not able to spend time with the Indian women in my house once I got involved with the Westerners suggests that the 'Indian' and 'Western' spaces are separate in Varanasi. Indeed the following extract confirms that the two spaces are separate.

It is almost midnight. I sit on a *ghat* by the Ganges River where I am watching a jamming session of Western music students. Several Indian instruments are played but there are no Indians present. (March 2003)

As reflected in the diary excerpt above, the Westerners create their own social space within the public space in Varanasi. In fact, they can be understood to be performing or acting out *their* 'authentic' India that does not require 'authentic' Indian people. It is rather ironic that the Westerners play classical Indian music by the holy river of Hinduism, yet, there are no Indians present. On that particular occasion, some Indians walked by but did not try to join in the activities of the Westerners, thus there was an invisible boundary. Sometimes, however, the boundary between the locals and the Westerners is more explicit.

I am attending a party of about 150 Westerners. At the door, there is a 'bouncer' making sure that no Indians enter the building although all Westerners are allowed to get in regardless of whether they know the host or not. The only criterion is one's 'Western' appearance. (March 2002)

The above two examples illustrate how the Westerners organise social activities in Varanasi without inviting or even allowing local Indians to join; except for Govinda and the Indian spouses that very few Westerners have (see section 9.3.4). Sometimes the Westerners create their own space without much consideration for the surrounding environment: at parties, they may, for example, play loud music outside in the middle of the night. In such cases, their Indian neighbours often observe the party scene from their own roofs, windows or balconies but do not try to join and even if they tried to, they would probably not be allowed. Thus, a boundary is evoked. Such temporary use of local grounds for the purposes of the Westerners is common in Varanasi. Occasionally, however, the Westerners end up realising that they do not have much power to decide which place is used for which purposes.

One Western man told me how he got annoyed by water buffaloes that were pasturing below his window. He complained about the noise to the owners who told him that the place has been used by buffaloes for generations and the animals are worth a lot of money. (February 2002)

Therefore, the quietness of the home of a Western man did not count and the buffaloes continue to pasture below his window even today.

Regardless of whether the Westerners can use the public places according to their wishes or not, their presence in Varanasi is generally well-tolerated, and many of my interviewees acknowledged that locals are very tolerant towards them.

Q: What do you like about India if you compare it to the West?

A: The acceptance, first of all. They accept everybody, many things, whatever you want. Whatever you want to believe, whatever you want to do, do it quietly. That's what they say. You wanna smoke *charras*¹⁰³, smoke it in your room. You want to believe in this god, believe in this god. (Noel, 31)

Q: How did you feel about India the first time you arrived here?

A: I enjoy so much this diversity of life. This kind of life, there is a feeling of craziness in India. When you are a bit crazy yourself, India makes you feel much more at home. (Marcel, 31)

Such feelings of freedom and acceptance apply to the Westerners because they are outsiders. Locals do not seem to be too bothered by the Western presence in Varanasi, and in a city of over a million inhabitants, the activities of a few hundred Westerners do not have as severe an impact as they have had in some Indian villages, for example, in Goa or the Himachal Pradesh in northern India. The fact that the Westerners have money surely contributes to their presence being tolerated to such a great extent; many locals benefit from them economically (on the Westerners' privileged position, see section 6.5).

All in all, the Westerners seem to create their own social space in Varanasi, and living in such a separate space obviously affects their relationships with local people. Although the Westerners criticise their countries of origin a lot and claim to have found a better life in India, it is not necessarily Indian people but Indian culture that they appreciate.

A: I'm little bit sceptical about Indians. (laughs)

Q: But you still like them?

A: Yeah. I like the culture, the art and the music, really, this keeps me coming back all the time. For dance, for the music and for... meditation, for these kinds of things. (Sylvia, 38)

Many of the Westerners in Varanasi talk about India as a school, and emphasise the learning aspect as being the main reason for their long stays there. The comments about learning refer above all to their music studies but the Westerners also consider the whole experience of being in India educational; referring above all to surviving in different circumstances from what one is used to in one's country of origin and to seeing much poverty and suffering. Viewing India as a school was typical also for hippies. Gita Mehta claims that as India was starting to see the West as a model for the future, millions of young Westerners (meaning hippies)

¹⁰³ *Charras*: hash.

'turned their backs to all that amazing equipment and pointed at us [Indians] screaming: "You guys" You've got it!' (Mehta 1979, 6).

In the orientalist discourse (see Said 1978), India is characterised as an ancient and spiritual place in opposition to the materialistic West, and Indian nationalists adopted this view in order to create national consciousness and pride (see Edwardes 1967, 39; Fox 1992; Breckenbridge and van der Veer 1993; Ludden 1993; van der Veer 1993). In fact, India has been rather successful in promoting the image of India as a home of ancient wisdom and this image has been promoted in the West too (see Bandyopadhyay & Morais 2005). Nowadays in India, there are plenty of meditation and yoga courses marketed for tourists and travellers as a means to experience the 'authentic spiritual India'. In Varanasi, classical music in particular has become a profitable tourist industry in recent years, and for most Westerners appearing in this study, it is precisely the classical music and values and practices attached to it that represent Indian wisdom.

Romantic interest in India is not a recent phenomenon. Western scholarly interest in India started already in the 1780s (Edwardes 1967, 170), and especially Sanskrit texts were believed to reveal something fundamental about the human spirit (Edwardes 1967, 304). Particularly the German critique of the Enlightenment saw India as a pure and innocent lost paradise. The romantic interest in India was therefore inseparable from a critique of the European present. 'The West' was characterised by rationality, progress, quantification and secularism whereas India came to represent a spiritual return to the superior past characterised by unity and harmony. However, although in the critique of the Enlightenment, India was idealised and glorified, it was not viewed as a place of refuge and retreat. Returning was not considered desirable or even possible but it was hoped that studying the Indian sources would help to change Europe for the better. (Halbfass 1988, 69-83) For the contemporary Western sojourners in Varanasi, however, India is precisely a refuge: there, one can live a more authentic and meaningful life. The ancient and mystic city of Varanasi is a particularly suitable place in which to search for such a meaningful life. Yet, the appreciation and admiration of India concerns above all certain selected cultural aspects, and it is rather typical for the Westerners in Varanasi to be 'sceptical' towards Indian people, as Sylvia stated in her comment above. In fact, even when they need local information, for example, when they are looking for a music teacher, they usually rely on advice given by other Westerners instead of asking local people because they do not believe locals would understand what it is that they are looking for.

11.2 Indian Friends: A Contradiction in Terms

The Western space that the Westerners in Varanasi create is a social construction, an 'imagined' space; it is not physically separate from local life as the Westerners live in local neighbourhoods, renting apartments from local families. Consequently, the Westerners cannot avoid contact with local Indian people. One of my interviewees blamed some Westerners for not knowing their Indian neighbours even when they had lived in Varanasi for years. The same interviewee, however, admitted that he himself did not have Indian friends. Having local friends turned out to be a problematic issue for almost all my interviewees.

Q: Do you have Indian friends?

A: Good question! (laughs) Very good question, yeah. It depends on the definition of a friend. [...] not, really no. And this is funny because the first time I went [back to Europe], a lot of my friends asked me 'but you are still in contact with Indian friends there. You continue to write or phone or whatever' and I was thinking suddenly that I don't have Indian friends really. (Donna, 28)

The Westerners' relationships with locals in Varanasi are usually instrumental: their Indian acquaintances are landlords, shopkeepers or music teachers. In other words, there is a service connection. Most of my interviewees say that they do not have any Indian friends. Some have local friends but even they usually say that they do not share their lives with them the same way as they do with their Western friends. For example, one of my interviewees described how his Indian friend occasionally feels obliged to visit him with his family. Those occasions are very formal: everyone sits stiffly and the guests leave as soon as they feel they have fulfilled their duty. Therefore, the social relationship is somehow uneasy even when there is an attempt to socialise. When my interviewees explain the lack of local friends, they refer to cultural differences which they consider to be fundamental.

Many of my interviewees mentioned that the Indian conception of friendship is very different from the Western one. They are thus referring to culturally bound ways of making friends and eventually suggesting that cross-cultural friendships are a contradiction in terms.

Q: Do you feel different from Indian people?

A: [...] We [Westerners] want to make friendship and they [Indians] want money. (laughs) Maybe it's the main difference. (Sara, 32)

A reoccurring complaint among the Westerners in Varanasi is the belief that Indian people consider all Westerners rich and always try to

benefit from them economically. This irritates many. 'I am not a bank' said a Western man to an Indian acquaintance who was asking for money from him. Many Westerners acknowledge the structural causes behind such behaviour but are determined to avoid any unpleasant consequences for themselves. Many of the Westerners occasionally give money or goods to beggars and other poor people but they do not like to be asked, that is, they do not like to be put in the position of a patron but instead define themselves as poor (see section 6.5). Being careful with one's money is also connected to the image of Indians being cheaters and liars. Being cheated is a common tourist experience in India. The Westerners in Varanasi were tourists once and almost all of them admit having been cheated in the past. However, they emphasise that they cannot be cheated any more: they have learned to be on the alert. They also acknowledge that not all Indians cheat but such incidents have nevertheless caused them to be on the alert, and contributed to them viewing 'the Indian other' in negative terms.

The reoccurring requests for money have caused many Westerners in Varanasi to adopt a very reserved attitude towards Indians. One of my interviewees, however, admitted that such an attitude is not necessarily fair.

Sometimes it makes me very worried. [...] I wonder 'ok this man looks nice but why he comes to me and why he wants this, maybe he wants something else behind [all this]' [...] But sometimes I make a mistake. Sometimes I say to some people, 'oh leave me alone, please, I don't want to speak' but finally, they are very nice people, they just are interested. (Thomas, 28)

Another theme that causes irritation among the Westerners is the curious questions that locals frequently ask them. Such common questions are, for example: what is your name, what is your home country, what kind of work do you do, are you married, do you have a boy/girlfriend. The Westerners in Varanasi consider such questions naïve and they feel very annoyed by them. This leads the Westerners to avoid situations where they would end up in such contact with locals, and when avoidance is not possible, many simply ignore the Indians' attempts to socialise. For example, at the tea stall, the Westerners often avoid sitting next to Indian people, and they frequently ignore Indian people's attempts to chat by simply not replying. By such actions, they try to keep their Western space, which according to their view, should not be violated. At the same time, the incidents illustrate that the space is not isolated from locals. As the boundaries are defined by the Westerners, not all locals want to respect them or more likely, they are not even aware of them.

Q: Do you have Indian friends? How is it to be here as a Western man?

A: I sometimes get suffocated by the non-privacy. I mean, I go to the homeopathic store to buy some medicine, and there is a seventeen-year-old guy beside me and he says, 'I know you.' I say 'How you know me?' 'You bought a piece of soap from my shop seven years ago'. Sometimes I think [how it would be] if no-one would see me. I mean, I don't like to be seen all the time. Certain lack of privacy. (Raymond, 48)

Many Westerners are very visible in Varanasi due to the fact that they are white, they dress and act differently from locals and most of them are also taller than most locals. In fact, Westerners attract a lot of attention in public places in India (see Hottola 1999). Yet, the Westerners in Varanasi often want to avoid such attention and want to keep the boundaries of the Western space as intact as possible.

Obviously the lack of language proficiency is an obstacle for getting to know locals: most Westerners in Varanasi know very little, if any, Hindi and many locals do not speak English. On the other hand, a few of my interviewees also mentioned that those locals who speak good English are usually very 'modern' and 'Westernised', thus they do not understand why the Westerners are so enthusiastic about Indian traditions. Here, the difference is not understood in terms of India versus the West but in terms of 'modern' middle class values versus a counterculture that idealises ancient 'authentic' India. Tourists often assume that the 'other' can be defined as either inauthentic modern or authentic non-modern (Gavin et al. 2005, 2). The same dichotomy seems to apply to the views of my interviewees. For them, modernising India and modern Indian people are not authentic, or they are authentic in the wrong way, thus the Westerners are not interested in getting to know them. In fact, the English-speaking middle class of Varanasi may have more in common with middle classes in the West than they do with the Westerners who are searching for the 'simple' and 'authentic' life in Varanasi (for the viewpoint of modern Indian men and for the difficulty of applying the term middle class in Indian context, see Favero 2005). It may also be that having a different educational background contributes to the Westerners' dislike of middle class Indians as many of them have rather little formal education, and they typically claim not to value such education. The Westerners, however, do not usually recognise themselves as being less educated than many (middle or upper class) Indians but instead often refer to uneducated Indians with whom, in their view, deep discussions are impossible.

Q: Which things do you appreciate and which are problematic [in India]?

A: It's very rare, the conversation I could have with Westerners, I could have with Indians. More or less, they won't have the ability to understand

what I try to express and [what] I have an interest in. I received [got an] education. (Marcel, 31)

In the above quotation, Marcel characterises Indians as a homogeneous uneducated bloc, unable to understand Westerners. Such a view easily results in a lack of contacts with Indians. One of my interviewees, however, expressed a different view. In addition to Varanasi, he had been taking music lessons in Delhi and he mentioned having felt ignorant there. He had not felt he fitted in the modern city and its educated people whereas he felt comfortable in backward (meaning authentic) Varanasi.

Some Indian men have, however, managed to enter the Western space. Usually, they are in a relationship with a Western woman but they have then also become friends with other Westerners in Varanasi. In their case, the Westerners emphasise that they are very special exceptions, and they are not really Indian any more but have adopted the 'Western attitude', meaning that they share an emphasis on leisure and parties and they are so familiar with Western cultures that they do not pose curious questions about Western habits. When I was in Varanasi, there were two to three Indian men involved with the Westerners in addition to Govinda, whose role in the community is very particular (see section 8.2.3). Thus, the number of Indians socialising with Westerners is very small and despite the few exceptions, the Westerners seem to share an understanding that 'authentic' Indians are and must always remain different from Westerners, and cross-cultural contacts are impossible because of this essential difference. However, a British person whom I interviewed claimed to appreciate the company of well-educated Indians and in fact, he did not feel comfortable with the community of Westerners although he had been coming to Varanasi for years.

Q: Of all the countries you have been to, what attracts you in India?

A: [...] So many people here speak good English. Really good English. To a point where I can really talk for hours and hours with Indians and it's not boring. [...] There are very few foreigners [non-English speakers] whom I have met [...] except who lived in England and really made a big effort to learn English. Most people know English from Bob Marley records, and so it's like really difficult to get any kind of depth in the conversations. (Tom, 36)

Having English as his mother tongue is very significant here. Tom is able to encounter English-speaking Indians on a very different basis from many other Westerners in Varanasi who do not speak English very well. At this point, one may ask why the Westerners do not learn Hindi. It seems that most of them do study the language at some point but usually give up

rather quickly. Many of those who have stayed in Varanasi for years, are able to talk some Hindi but becoming proficient in it is seen as requiring too much effort and many Westerners also feel that they do not necessarily need Hindi as they can get by in everyday life with English. The locals whose services they need usually know English or the Westerners' limited knowledge of Hindi is enough for their daily errands. Moreover, as they are not necessarily interested in knowing locals but prefer to socialise with other Westerners, they do not see much need to learn Hindi, although they usually admit that they should learn it since they are staying in India for so long. Nevertheless, knowing English is much more important than knowing Hindi among the Westerners in Varanasi and in fact, many of them have learned to speak English in India.

All in all, the Westerners in Varanasi justify not having Indian friends by referring to essential cultural differences. Those differences play a role also in their self-definition.

11.3 Defining the Self Against the Other

Q: Do you feel different from Indian women?

A: [...] For me, Indian people are children, they are big children for sure [...] because they don't have responsibilities at all. Not at all. Even when they grow up, always you have your parents giving you money or looking at what you want to do, what you want, and it's not like 'ok, mom, dad, I take my luggage and I *calo*¹⁰⁴, I go'. (Donna, 28)

Q: Do you feel you are different from Indian men?

A: In a way yes.

Q: How?

A: I've got aspirations, I aspire. A lot of Indian men, they take life as it is. They say [...] Right now I'm like this and this will never change. And a lot of them are very self-defeating in a way because [...] I often get from Indian people a sense of giving up and a feeling of not being able to change a certain situation. It might look very, very, very calm [...] but I think that Indian society is very structured and for a person not to feel completely at home in this situation is terrible, because they can't get out as easily as I can. I have, yeah, I'm different because I'm more free. (David, 28)

When I asked my interviewees about differences between themselves and Indian people, many of them characterised Indians in negative and simplified terms. In both quotations above, independence and free will

¹⁰⁴ *Calo*: 'Go' or 'Let's go'. It is an imperative form of *calnaa* (to go) but the Westerners often, wrongly, use it to mean 'I go' or 'I leave'.

become distinguishing markers against Indians: culture prevents Indians from being independent whereas Western cultures become defined as highly individualistic. This makes sense when taking into account that the lifestyle of the Westerners in Varanasi is based on their individual choices. Yet, earlier there were quotations where some of my interviewees claimed that those Westerners who have stayed in their countries of origin are trapped in 'prison', that is, they are not independent (see section 6.1). Therefore, it seems above all to be a question of the Westerners in Varanasi defining themselves as independent; both in comparison to Indians and to people in their countries of origin.

I asked my interviewees whether they feel different from Indian men and women and the answers usually contained long reflections on fundamental differences. Usually those answers tell more about the Westerners themselves than they tell about Indians. Whether it was Western men defining themselves vis-à-vis Indian men or Western women defining themselves vis-à-vis Indian women, 'Indians' were understood as one and differences regarding, for example, class or age were usually ignored, which indicates a lack of contact. Indians are merely granted the role of the insignificant 'other'. In this process, the Westerners place themselves in a position of judgement from where they are able to see 'the Indian other' against which they present themselves as active agents responsible for their own decisions and actions. One can even see traces of racism in the Westerners' views although they themselves would most likely argue the opposite if asked.

Self-definition plays a part also in the following quotation from a Western man.

Q: Are you different from Indian men? [...]

A: [...] They are lazy.

Q: Indians are lazy?

A: Indians are lazy, it's a big difference. If you don't say [anything], they don't do nothing. So that's a big difference and they have no [...] responsibility, I think, they don't have so much responsibility. [...] They don't care, I think. (Patrick, 21)

Patrick's comment is very interesting because laziness and irresponsibility are accusations that these Westerners often face themselves. They meet such criticism in their countries of origin, where they are often accused of being parasites who enjoy an easy life without working (see section 6.2). Moreover, locals in Varanasi often see the Western sojourners as lazy. Yet, the Westerners themselves do not view themselves as lazy (see section 6.2.1).

Sexuality is another arena where the Westerners define themselves as essentially different from Indians.

Q: Do you feel you are different from Indian men?

A: Yeah.

Q: How?

A: (laughs) Em, I don't know, I'm not so horny (laughs). (Sam, 32)

Many Westerners emphasise that, in their opinion, they are sexually a lot more experienced than Indians and they often are frustrated by the curious questions regarding sexuality that local men pose, both to Western men and to Western women. Those questions usually focus on aspects of promiscuity: judging from their questions, it seems that the Indian men often believe that since one can engage in sexual relations without being married, there are no rules about sexual behaviour whatsoever in Western countries (see also Hottola 1999).

In the case of the Western women, defining the self against the 'Indian other' is even more significant than it is for the Western men: many Western women in Varanasi define themselves as strong, free, independent and progressive, in opposition to unfree, dependent and oppressed Indian woman (see Korpela 2006; compare with Mohanty 1991). In addition to distinguishing themselves from Indian women in their talk, the Western women distinguish themselves also via their clothing as even when they use local clothing, they use it differently from local women (see section 4.5).

Q: Do you feel you are different from Indian women?

A: ...Yes.

Q: How?

A: Because Indian women, they accept not being free. They feel normal not to be free, just being at home, not going outside ...For me, it's very different, I have a very different spirit. (Sylvia, 38)

I wouldn't like to be Indian, Indian girl. [...] They are not so free as we are in Europe. We, I am used to this freedom. I cannot imagine being Indian but I don't think they have a problem with this because they stay at home but they don't mind, they have no idea about going away [it does not come to their mind to leave]. (Sara, 32)

Sara's comment implies that if Indian women knew about the possibilities for freedom, they would like to have them too, that is, they would like to be as Western women are. This is obviously a very ethnocentric and evolutionist view but it is very common among the Westerners in Varanasi. Such comments also suggest that although in some respects, the Westerners criticise 'the West' (see section 6.1), in other respects they appreciate it.

Usually, my interviewees saw Indian women as one. Some acknowledged regional differences¹⁰⁵ but none acknowledged class differences. Above all, many Westerners in Varanasi see Indian women as housewives, and such comments are clearly a part of the Western women defining themselves as essentially different, that is, as active and independent. The Western men share the view of Indian women as a homogenous group.

The whole life, they [Indian women] more or less stay at home. They don't even want to leave home. Taking care of the family, cooking. Many times even passing the day, just all day you can relax, all day stay in the house and enjoy. Usually Western people cannot do this, if you tell them just the day in the house with nothing to do, they would go crazy. (Noel, 31)

Noel seemed to have a rather unrealistic view of housework. I first thought that the comment is gender-related, that is, it is a typical male view but I was wrong: I heard a Western woman once explaining that Indian babies do not use diapers because the mothers do not have anything else to do except taking care of their babies whereas Western women are busy with other things and therefore, do not have time to clean after a diaper-free baby. Not all the Westerners in Varanasi share this view of Indian housewives living a life of leisure but it nevertheless exists among them.

Despite the generally negative tone in their views on Indian women, some of my interviewees also acknowledged positions of power that Indian women may have.

A: Indian women sometimes become like queens because of this system they have here. Like, this *mata-ji*¹⁰⁶ here [in the house where I live], she's queen. She is very...

Q: Powerful?

A: Yeah. (Ron, 31)

If you control sex, if you control children and money and food, what else can you control? Indian women control all this. (Raymond, 48)

In this section, it has become evident that the Westerners in Varanasi talk about Indian men and women in very simplistic terms. Since they have few contacts with local people, stereotypical views prevail. The Westerners' views on Indians also play a crucial role in their self-definition and contribute to them maintaining a social distance from local people and living in the separate Western space instead.

¹⁰⁵ An example of acknowledged regional differences that the Westerners often mention is that women in the mountains (north) or in Kerala (south) are more independent than women in Varanasi.

¹⁰⁶ *Mata-ji*: a term used to address an elderly woman. (*Mata*: mother; *ji*: an honorific suffix)

In addition to understanding the essential cultural differences distinguishing them from Indians, many Westerners in Varanasi also acknowledge that their peculiar lifestyle choice makes them different.

Q: What do you think Indian people think about Western men?

A: I think mostly they think we have a baby mind. Many times, I heard this: 'You have a baby mind' ['you are immature']. Because maybe we look younger, so they think we are young. Also we want to enjoy and for Indian people, when they start to be more than twenty, they want to make a family and they want to...because they have these kinds of ideas but not like us to travel around the world and to study music at thirty years old. So for them it's a baby mind. (Sara, 32)

Here the willingness to extend the status of youth, staying in the liminoid stage, is defined as a Western characteristic; as something that differentiates the Westerners from Indians. It is true that from an Indian point of view, the fact that the Westerners in Varanasi prolong their youth by hanging out for years in Varanasi may seem strange. In the West, youth is something that people want to prolong whereas in many other cultures, including India, youth is seen as a phase that one wants to get rid of as soon as possible because one wants to gain the rights and authority of adults (see Vigh 2006; Antikainen 1998, 154-6); extending youth would mean getting stuck in a powerless position¹⁰⁷.

The fact that the Westerners occupy a strange liminoid stage, at least in Indian terms, becomes significant especially in the case of women. When the Western women explain their lack of contact with local women, they often refer to the fact that their life situation is very different from that of most local women their age. Most of the Western women in Varanasi are unmarried and childless whereas local women of their age are usually married with several children and those who are not are usually students, and even those Western women who have a child lead a very different lifestyle from local Indian women.

Q: Do you feel you are different from Indian women?

A: Sure we are different. I know girls of my age already with two children. [...] Their routine is [very different]. They don't have time to drink coffee and smoke cigarettes. They are very busy. (Hanna, 24)

In Hanna's comment, the liminoid space is defined as a leisure space, and leisure — an easy life without responsibilities — indeed characterises well the Westerners' life in Varanasi. In fact, they specifically want to

¹⁰⁷ Paolo Favero (2005) shows that India might be changing in this respect, at least among young modern men in Delhi.

avoid being busy and that is one of the reasons why they do not want to move back to their countries of origin (see section 6.2.1). However, having a busy everyday life is not merely a Western characteristic and the relaxed, slow-paced life that the Westerners have found in Varanasi means actually the life within the community of Westerners, not the life of the locals.

This section has shown how the Westerners in Varanasi define themselves as opposite to Indians. In those definitions, 'Indians' and 'Westerners' are often understood as homogeneous, essentially different wholes, and being 'Western' is a uniting factor. However, in the following I discuss whether national differences play a role among the Westerners themselves in their lives in Varanasi.

11.4 The West Becomes One: the (In)significance of Nationalities

I sit at a tea stall by the Ganges River. People on my left-hand side are talking Hebrew and on my right-hand side French. A bit further away, there is a vivid discussion in Italian. (April 2003)

The situation described above is very typical in Varanasi. During my fieldwork, I participated in conversations in English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Hebrew and Hindi, and witnessed conversations in many other languages as well. The community of Westerners in Varanasi mainly functions in English mixed with common Hindi expressions. The English is far from grammatically correct; yet, there are seldom communication problems due to language difficulties. Moreover, talking or at least understanding more than one language is taken for granted among the Westerners. Everyone knows English in addition to their mother tongue but many understand also other languages. Local internet stalls have also adapted to meet the needs of their international clientele: in most of them, one can type in Hebrew and Japanese in addition to the Latin alphabet whereas typing in Hindi is not commonly available in internet stalls¹⁰⁸.

I discussed earlier how in their interview talk the Westerners understand 'the West' as a coherent entity which they criticise (see section 6.1). In addition, 'the West' becomes unified in their everyday lives in Varanasi. They understand this 'Westernity' to mean above all a certain kind of education, knowledge of certain popular cultures and appreciation of certain values; especially individuality and freedom. An everyday example in which the common Western identity becomes manifested is

¹⁰⁸ Indian people usually type in English when using the internet.

food. When the Westerners cook together, the most popular dish is pasta, and it is understood as a common Western dish (instead of representing Italian cuisine). In fact, even *falafel* becomes ‘Western’ food in the context of Varanasi. When food and other goods or values are defined as ‘Western’, the crucial factor is classifying them as ‘non-Indian’.

Nationalities are, nevertheless, acknowledged among the Westerners in Varanasi; when Westerners meet for the first time in Varanasi, one of the first questions usually concerns one’s nationality and everyone knows each other’s nationalities. However, relationships are not in any way limited to one’s fellow-citizens and there are no status differences based on nationalities. At the same time, many people (especially the French and the Israelis) prefer to talk in their mother tongue with their fellow citizens even if others are present. Israelis also celebrate important Jewish festivals although they also often invite friends of other nationalities and religions to join. The Israelis also often express feeling a bond to their fellow nationals based on their common experiences in the army¹⁰⁹ (on the uniqueness of Israeli backpackers, see e.g., Noy et al. 2005; Noy 2007) All in all, whether national differences matter or not is situational among the Westerners in Varanasi, and the only nationality that really makes a difference is Indian: a crucial boundary is evoked between us, the Westerners, and them, the Indians (see section 11.3).

One of my interviewees who had travelled for decades said he does not want to define himself or others in terms of nationality.

I don’t ask people their nationality. I don’t, because immediately when I say, ‘where you are from’, it means that I separate them from myself. Human being...I put immediately a border. If I say where you come from, it means I put a border.

[...] If I am fascinated to talk with some person, he doesn’t have to know my nationality. [...]

We become friends, maybe have a cup of tea together, and when we are totally in peace and harmony, we can ask, what part of earth you come from...from the warm part, the cold part, the rainy part, the stormy part, every part (laughs)... the war part. (Harry, 45)

Harry’s attitude, however, is clearly an exception among the Westerners in Varanasi; most of them do not want to deny their, or others’, national roots, and also Harry acknowledged that many others consider nationalities significant. However, all in all, being Western, regardless of one’s nationality, appears to be a unifying factor among the Westerners in Varanasi but they also emphasise being ‘different kinds of Westerners’,

¹⁰⁹ Israeli youth are required to serve in the army for two (women) or three (men) years, and only after completing their military service are Israelis able to travel to India (or elsewhere) for long periods.

that is, they lead a different lifestyle and share alternative values in comparison to ‘average Westerners’.

11.5 Western Women in an Indian Environment

If I was a woman, I would never come here. That is for sure. (Dan, 35)

Dan said this comment to me when I asked him whether he thinks it is different for Western men and women to be in Varanasi. His comment is rather extreme but it does reveal that gender makes a difference in how a Western person experiences life there. The boundaries of the Western space in which the Westerners in Varanasi live are a lot more fragile for Western women than they are for men: it is not necessarily easy to be a Western woman in Varanasi.

11.5.1 ‘Hello Sexy!’

Iris comes to the tea stall looking very upset. She has been downtown and a man has touched her bottom. She is very angry. She is wearing a *salwar kameez* but this time, it has not prevented her from being sexually harassed. (April 2002)

The above incident is very typical among the Westerners in Varanasi. When someone tells such a story, others often start to tell similar ones. All the Western women seem to have numerous unpleasant experiences with Indian men and the Western men know about incidents that have happened to their female friends. The harassment that Western women face in Varanasi, or the prospect of it, is a recurring theme in my diary notes and in the interviews. Judging from my notes, it seems that the Western women’s life is a constant struggle in Varanasi. It seems that in fact the women do not live in an isolated Western space but constantly encounter local people and local cultural norms and react to them in some ways.

There is a common travellers’ discourse that sees India as a difficult and dangerous place for women travellers (Bhattacharyya 1997, 378). Varanasi is a particularly conservative city due to its religious importance. For example, local adult women in Varanasi dress in *saris*; very rarely did I see a woman wearing jeans, which often happens, for example, in New Delhi, Kolkata or Mumbai. Therefore, Western women need to negotiate their place and roles at a crossroads of cultures in Varanasi more than in

many other Indian cities (Kumar 1988; see also Korpela 2006). In Varanasi, poor women appear in public out of necessity, above all because they have to earn money, but middle and upper class women tend to stay at home or when they do go out, they are accompanied by their fathers, husbands, sons or other male relatives or occasionally they go out in a group of female relatives but hardly ever alone as the Western women do.

In the streets, Western women often hear comments like 'Hello sexy!'. Sometimes, local men also touch women's breasts and bottoms, yet there is no serious threat of rape, or at least not in daytime. Local women are harassed in similar ways but Western women clearly attract more unwanted attention than them. In Varanasi, there is a clear division between the private world of women and the public world of men (see e.g., Kumar 1988, 62). The Western women, however, are active also in the public arena and the local men's abusive comments constantly remind them that it is not a proper place for them. This is especially the case because they are single or at least appear to be single, since they are not always accompanied by their partner even if they have one, and they are thus not protected by their spouse or male relatives as they should be according to local customs. Many local young men seem to define Western women as sexually available and since the women do not share this view, they frequently end up in unpleasant situations, that is, mentally as well as physically harassed.

Nita Kumar, an Indian anthropologist and historian, has discussed the sexist comments and abusive behaviour of Indian men towards Western women in public areas in her book about her fieldwork experiences in Varanasi. She argues that many males in urban areas are lonely because they are separated from their village-based families. These men see any woman outside the defining sphere of home and family as a target, like a prostitute or a film star, for their frustrations. (Kumar 1992, 173) Petri Hottola (1999) has studied the harassment that Western backpacker women face in India. His explanation for the phenomenon refers to the stereotype of an amoral Western woman that is based on Western movies and television series, such as *Baywatch*. Obviously, not all local men harass women in Varanasi; the harassing men are usually young and unmarried, very often college students, but the incidents are so frequent that many Western women easily view all local men negatively (see Korpela 2006).

Many Western women in Varanasi are convinced of the fact that even if they are in the public sphere, their private space should be respected. By 'private space' I mean that they want to have 'room around their body', that is, they do not want local men to come too close, especially not so close that they could touch them. Rather often, the men who offend that private space challenge the accusation.

I am sitting at the tea stall when a young Indian man with his friends sits next to me. A Western man standing in front of the tea stall says to me: 'There is so much space and this man chose to sit next to you.' The Indian man gets annoyed and asks whether it is a problem that he sits there. The Western man replies: 'Not at all, this is a free country.' I soon leave the tea stall. (April 2003)

I am walking on the *ghat* when an unknown man greets me. When I do not reply to him, he gets angry. 'Why you don't reply? I don't like this. You are now in a spiritual place, you should be nice.' I feel very upset since I know that it is not a local custom to greet unknown people in the street. (February 2002)

It is indeed difficult to challenge the disturbance of one's private space when one is in a public place. Such incidents illustrate that the Western space in the case of the women constantly has fractures in Varanasi — its boundaries are not as respected as the women would like them to be — and the women have to take into account those fractures in their own behaviour.

11.5.2 The Western Women's Coping Strategies

Being a Western woman in Varanasi requires constant awareness and negotiation of proper behaviour. Following certain gender-specific behaviour norms reduces the amount of harassment considerably. Above all, dressing in a non-provocative way makes everyday life easier for Western women in Varanasi. The dress code includes not wearing shorts, miniskirts or sleeveless tops and all clothing should be loose. Kumar argues that if one dresses in the local way, people understand a person better and respect him/her more (Kumar 1992, 171). Moreover, when one's body is properly covered, one does not stand out as one does with revealing clothes. When the Western women in Varanasi go outside, they usually change their clothes. However, instead of putting on more 'fashionable' clothes (as many women might do in the West), they put on more 'protective' clothes, that is, something loose and covering. This can be understood as an attempt to emphasise the boundaries of one's body. A few women told me that wearing a *salwar kameez* makes them feel as if they were using a uniform; they do not like it but it nevertheless eases their everyday life considerably.

The Western women in Varanasi have learned from personal experience to avoid certain behaviour and to be on the alert whereas short-term tourists do not have such knowledge (yet).

I am standing in front of the tea stall with Iris. She points out how a tourist woman sitting at the stall does not seem to be disturbed although she is surrounded by Indian men. Iris remarks that she or I would feel very annoyed in such a situation and would immediately leave the place. (December 2002)

On one level, the above incident tells about how the long-term women sojourners distinguish themselves from tourists but it also tells about learning from experience: unpleasant experiences have taught them to be on the alert. The Western women who stay long in Varanasi have typically accepted the fact that they constantly need to be aware of how to dress and behave. In their everyday lives, they often need to consider whether a certain action is suitable for a woman and whether doing something will possibly put them into an unpleasant situation. Many women also regularly avoid certain actions. For example, some Western women prefer to stay at home on Sundays because there are so many Indian men in the streets enjoying their day off. Many Western women in Varanasi avoid going out alone at night. When they are at a concert or a party late at night, they make sure that they do not have to leave alone but in a group. On several occasions, I and a few other Western women intended to go to the tea stall but once we saw it crowded with Indian men, we decided to go to another one¹¹⁰. At concerts, women sometimes change their place if Indian men come to sit too close to them. Local young men also often try to get a chance to touch Western women. For example, they are eager to shake hands with Western women although handshaking is not a local custom and they could not shake hands with Indian women. The long-term Western women are, however, very determined not to shake hands with Indian men, and they insist on using the Indian greeting of putting one's palms together instead.

Usually when Western women are harassed in Varanasi, they simply leave the situation. Sometimes, however, they defend themselves, even aggressively.

I am walking with a few Western women on the street. Suddenly one of the women runs after a young Indian man who has passed us and starts to hit him and shout at him. We do not know what has happened but it is obvious to all of us that he has touched her indecently and we all start to shout at him. (March 2003)

¹¹⁰ The young men hanging out at the tea stall are mostly university students who are keenly looking for female company. They often talk about Western women in very pejorative terms, knowing that the women do not understand enough Hindi to grasp what they are saying.

Sandra told me how she had once hit a man on the head with a small table that she was carrying when he had touched her breasts in the street. (December 2002)

Such incidents are usually quickly over. All parties leave, and there are no consequences for the men. I, however, argue that having had a chance to defend herself may be an empowering experience for the woman even if it seems that the situation just evaporates. Such self-defence can be a significant experience since it can provide the woman with a feeling of being in control of her body and private space despite the constant trouble that she faces in Varanasi. All in all, the long-term Western women consider themselves well-prepared to defend themselves in case they encounter harassment.

Q: Do you think it's different for Western men and Western women to be in India?

A: [...] We know how to defend ourselves because we come from the Western world, we have to defend ourselves all the time there¹¹¹. (Olga, 48)

Q: Is it more difficult for women to stay [in Varanasi] than for men?

A: North India is difficult for a woman. [...] Men are still very... little bit repressed, so when they see a woman, they can act really stupid in the street, especially young boys. [...] It is not that Western women will get so crazy [angry] about this [...]... because they can fight with the men in the street without a problem. (Iris, 33)

Olga and Iris connect their ability to defend themselves to their 'Western' origin. Such comments work well as tools distinguishing them from Indian women, who are then implicitly understood as powerless victims, unable to defend themselves against harassing men. The harassment is obviously annoying but most Western women do not seem to be afraid in Varanasi, that is, they do not feel threatened by the harassing men. Instead, they often consider the harassing men to be like children who want to check the women's limits and who want to show off to their friends, after which they get scared and run away. Therefore, both Indian women and men become defined as inferior: women cannot defend themselves and men are childish.

The Western women in Varanasi typically try to maintain an indifferent attitude towards harassment, at least towards minor incidents (such as staring or commenting). Many Western men encourage such an approach. A Western man advised me not to get angry at the harassing men because:

¹¹¹ Unfortunately, I did not ask Olga what she meant by saying that women have to defend themselves all the time in the West.

If you get angry at one, the others will not learn anything and also he will not learn anything. (Stefan, 32)

Stefan may be right in pointing out that the harassing men will probably not change their behaviour if some Western women get angry at them but I would argue that the feeling of empowerment that the women may gain from defending themselves may nevertheless be significant. Moreover, Stefan's comment is very patronising, even racist.

To a large extent many Western women have accepted the difficulties that being a woman causes for them in Varanasi. Their attitude is in fact rather positive as the following interview quotation shows.

Q: What do you think about Indian men?

A: [...] When you are a woman, you feel you are meat. [...] This is a problem, the rest is ok. (Anna, 27)

Such a statement can be understood as a survival strategy. A Western woman's life in Varanasi would indeed probably become unbearable if she got upset and angry about every unpleasant incident with local men. Instead of challenging the situation, most Westerners seem to believe that Western women in Varanasi need to adjust to the local norms, and the Western women who have stayed there a long time feel that they have learned to respect the local rules.

Q: Do you feel it's more difficult for Western women to live in Varanasi than for Western men?

A: I feel that when you adjust to the place...you feel safe... when you understand the rules of the place. [...] It means some things about your behaviour, about your dress, about the way you speak, and if you are willing to do it, then, I feel it's very safe. (Hanna, 24)

Many Western men in particular emphasise that women need to adjust to the local norms in order to avoid trouble.

Q: Do you think it's different to be a Western woman in India from being a Western man?

A: [...] If they [Western women] manner [behave] themselves, they never have problems in this country. (Harry, 45)

Q: Do you think it's more difficult for Western women to live in Varanasi than for Western men?

A: [...] They [Western women] have to respect and to understand, otherwise they [are the ones who] are stupid. [...] Here you don't see breasts and women have a shawl [covering the chest] all the time [...] [No] very small t-shirts. [...] Men are not total savages, but you have to be gentle

with them. [...] It's respect. If they [the women] cannot have it, so please don't [come]. (Nicolas, 27)

With regard to women's clothing, many Westerners, especially many men, hold the view that Western women should conform to local norms. In my understanding, it is easy for the men to judge and advise Western women as they themselves do not have to follow such behaviour norms in Varanasi; for example, they can dress however they want. They may not necessarily be respected by local people if they break cultural norms, for example, dress inappropriately, but this does not cause much harm in their everyday lives; they are not bothered as the women are¹¹². Therefore, the women cannot hide in the Western space but have to take into account the surrounding cultural environment, which limits their behaviour to some extent. The men, however, even benefit from local gender norms. In fact, many Western men take advantage of the freedom and privileges that they can have because of their gender in Varanasi. They may, for example, urinate in the street as is a local custom. Neither Western nor local women could do it as it would be considered very inappropriate. Although the Western women are occasionally also able to utilise some privileges that their gender offers them in India, those situations are rather limited in comparison to male privileges. For example, in principle, women have the right to be served separately and before men but this rule is not always respected: for example in railway stations, the booking window for women is often closed.

All in all, both the Western women and men in Varanasi end up defining themselves against and with the local norms. They may refute what they define as 'traditional roles' but they nevertheless react to them in some way, and especially the women have to conform to the norms to some extent (see Korpela 2006). The Western men have much more space to negotiate their behaviour and roles in Varanasi than the Western women who, in addition to conforming to local restrictions, have to face the often chauvinistic views of the Western men as well (see section 9.3).

Some Western women and men say that Western women should dress and behave the same in Varanasi as they do in the West since it is time for Indians to learn to respect that. This indicates that they see the West as superior and hold patronising, even racist, views of Indian people. Many of my female interviewees point out that as outsiders, foreign women are allowed to break rules in Varanasi.

¹¹² If a Western man dresses in traditional Indian ways among the Westerners in Varanasi, he usually does it in order to look like a musician, not in order to make his everyday life easier as is often the case with the women. Some Western men also end up cutting their long hair short in India in order to gain more respect from locals; not in order to avoid trouble like harassment.

Q: Do you think about your own behaviour, do you try to follow some rules here?

A: [...] I feel I'm ok, it's ok. I'm a foreigner, I'm different. To put [on] jeans is not a problem. (Naima, 31)

Foreigners in India [...] you can do whatever you like. People sometimes can judge you but they don't speak about this. If you want to wear Western clothes, they don't like it so much but they won't tell you it's not good. But if you wear Indian clothes, they will tell you, "Oh very good dress". So you know that they have an opinion about how you live and how you are but they don't speak about this. (Sara, 32)

Sara said this comment when we were talking about the life of young Indian women. Her comment suggests that although as a Western woman, she has much freedom in India, conforming to certain local norms accords her the respect that she might not otherwise get.

This section has shown that in certain respects the everyday life in Varanasi is different for the Western women compared to the Western men. The Western space has somewhat different meaning according to one's gender: the women may experience the space as temporary relief from the local cultural environment, the norms of which they need to conform to in order to avoid trouble. The men, however, do not face similar trouble in Varanasi and thus do not need relief in the same sense as women do. Nevertheless, the men also prefer to socialise within the Western space; but they also take advantage of the local male roles. All in all, although the Westerners form an isolated Western space in Varanasi, the space does not remain immune from local influences and reactions, and especially women constantly have to negotiate their behaviour vis-à-vis the local environment.

11.5.3 Keeping the Boundaries Intact; the Duty of the Western Women

Intimate relationships between Indians and Westerners are rare in Varanasi. A few older Western men have married Indian women and those relationships are considered successes. Interestingly, those women seem to be rather 'traditional', that is, they are housewives who cook and clean for their husbands and they are not much involved with the Westerners. These things probably reinforce the Westerners' view of fundamental cultural differences between Western and Indian women. As I have mentioned earlier, a couple of the Western women are involved with Indian men. Those relationships are considered doomed by the other Westerners unless

the Indian man is 'Westernised'¹¹³, and has been integrated into the community of Westerners. If a Western woman has been involved with an Indian man and the relationship ends, others often gossip about the situation and easily blame the woman for the failure of the relationship.

She gave an Indian man a new toy, herself, and then, she took it away from him [when she went to Europe to earn money for a few months]. You can't do this with Indian men. They are like children: if they get a toy, they want to play with it. (Olga, 48)

Olga sees the Western woman in negative terms when she blames her for the failure of her relationship with an Indian man. She also defines Indian men in very negative and essentialising terms. Olga's comment is interesting with regard to the fact that many Western men in Varanasi consciously 'play' with tourist women when they get involved with them temporarily. Yet, the Western men are not blamed for their actions whereas Indian men become defined as children. Defining 'the other' as a child is in fact a common strategy in cross-cultural encounters (see Mills 1991, 89).

When a Western woman is blamed for the failure of her relationship with an Indian man, her morals are judged; she has done something wrong. The fact that Western women having affairs with Indian men are strongly condemned if the relationship ends suggests that the women are considered guardians of boundaries, and not only guarding the boundaries of the community of Westerners in Varanasi but the boundaries between 'the West' and 'India'. The Western women can also be understood as 'embodiments' of Western ways of being and affairs with Indian men would then challenge their 'pure Westernity'. Also the emphasis that many Westerners put on women's proper dress suggests that the women have a role in maintaining the boundaries of the community. Those who say that the Western women should dress like local women in order to avoid harassment can be understood to be saying that the women need to protect themselves (and thus the whole community of Westerners) against the Indian men who might want to cross the boundaries when they get excited by inappropriately (by Indian standards) dressed Western women. Also those who say that the Western women should dress in Varanasi the same as they do in their countries of origin can be understood to protect the community's boundaries as such clothing conveys a message of being different, and thus out of reach of the Indian men. All in all, the Western women seem to have a significant role in keeping the boundaries of the Western space intact in Varanasi, as a consequence of which their

¹¹³ Usually, such 'Westernised' Indian men have spent time in some Western countries or at least in Goa where they have participated in the techno music scene with Westerners.

behaviour is monitored whereas men seem to have much more freedom to ‘trespass’ if they so wish (on women’s role as symbolic border guardians of nations, see Yuval-Davis 1997).

11.6 The Significance of the Western Space

The Westerners in Varanasi claim to have found an ideal life in India but this chapter has shown that the ideal does not necessarily include the company of Indian people but instead, the Westerners appreciate the company of other Westerners, that is, the social life within the Western space that is physically located in Varanasi. For example, the intense social contacts that the Westerners in Varanasi appreciate refer to the contacts within the community of Westerners instead of on contacts with locals. Living in the Western space thus means that although the Westerners are interested in learning about certain aspects of Indian cultures, for example, classical music, they are not interested in having Indian friends and the lack of local friends is justified by referring to essential cultural differences. In other words, physical proximity does not result in social intimacy; quite the opposite — many Westerners in Varanasi even intentionally avoid contacts with Indians. However, the location is not insignificant; the Westerners appreciate and are interested in Indian cultures although they do so on a selective basis and on their own terms (for example by appreciating the ancient Indian past but not the present). Moreover, their views on ‘local life’ are very romanticised; locals do not necessarily lead or even appreciate the kind of ‘authentic’ and ‘natural’ life that the Westerners value (see section 6.2.2). Therefore, the ideal life that they claim to have found in Varanasi refers above all to the life and values of the particular group of Westerners. One could even argue that Varanasi provides the Westerners with the scene and setting for *their* performance of ‘authentic’ India.

Maintaining the Western space plays a role also in the Westerners’ self-definition: they define themselves as essentially different from Indian people. If boundaries broke down and Indians and Westerners mixed, the main danger from the Westerners’ point of view would probably be the questioning of Westerners’ self-definition as fundamentally different from locals. Yet, this chapter has shown that the boundaries have many fractures, especially in the case of women, and although the community of Westerners is very tight and intense, it is not immune to local influences and reactions. I have also argued that the Western women’s role is significant in guarding the boundaries of the Western space.

The isolation of the Western space in Varanasi, and especially the Westerners' aim to keep it intact from local people, suggests that the Westerners are in a privileged position. They take advantage of a relatively easy entry into the heart of another country and live almost as if the hosts did not exist when they construct their community, the Western space, in the midst of an Indian city. Although the Westerners claim to have found 'more vibes', that is, a better life in India, their ideals and the good life do not involve close social contacts with Indian people, who, in the Westerners' view, are either backward and uneducated or think and act 'wrong', that is, are not authentic as the Westerners define it. Although the Westerners are not rich, their economic privilege in the context of Varanasi enables such a situation: they can 'afford' to be isolated and selective as they do not need local people for their survival. The rather large number of Westerners in Varanasi also means that they do not need local people for their social life; the Westerners are self-sufficient both in economic and in social terms. When they occasionally need local information, Govinda is able to give it to them in his 'Westernised manner'. Therefore, although the Westerners in Varanasi criticise the West a lot and can be understood to be escaping it, their flight is actually only partial; above all it is geographical. Although they articulate their choices as anti-Western, what they look for is not anti-Western but a different kind of (bohemian or alternative) Western.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 Bohemian Lifestyle Migrants on the Move

When I started my fieldwork in January 2002, the euro was being introduced to many European countries. For many people the new currency caused confusion and governments were busy organising programs to teach their citizens how to convert the value of ‘the old money’ to the new euros. The media were full of stories in which people complained that they would never get used to the new currency. During my first days in Varanasi, I talked about the euro with a European man who had been coming to Varanasi for years. He said he could not care less about the euro, except that it is nice to get rid of American dollars¹¹⁴. Every year, he spends time in a few countries, therefore he is very used to different currencies and converting prices to the euro would be nothing new or difficult.

The above story is from the first page of my field diary. It was the first, but not the last, incident that suggested that the Westerners in Varanasi lead very mobile lives. They claim to have found an ideal life and as has become evident in this book, in many ways this ideal refers to the life within the Western space in Varanasi, that is, with other Westerners who share similar views, values and lifestyles. Yet, in spite of the community in Varanasi being so significant, the Westerners are only temporarily there and they move often between various places both in India and transnationally.

I stated earlier that I found among the Westerners in Varanasi a moral discourse of movement: in their view, movement is a precondition for a good life. The existence of such discourse, and the various kinds of mobile lifestyles that are becoming increasingly common in the Western world, are a great challenge for nation states and the present political world order, in addition to affecting the lives of an increasing number of people. Therefore, research on various kinds of mobilities is important. As has also become evident, travel, migration, and tourism are troublesome categories used to describe different forms of movement. I believe such categorisations are not as important as are attempts to understand the motives, processes and outcomes involved in such movement. Instead of

¹¹⁴ Anti-American sentiments are common among the Westerners in Varanasi (see section 6.3).

collectively conceptualised theories on mobility, we need to pay careful attention to various kinds of mobilities that people are engaged in as an increasing number of people are affected by such movements, if not personally involved in them.

People's movement around the globe is not necessarily bipolar but it is never random either and it is important to pay attention to directions and destinations even when those mobile people do not settle down in certain locations permanently. In this dissertation, I have argued that even in the global postmodern era, people do not 'float in transnational spaces'. Locations still matter; even highly mobile people have certain ties to specific places with specific meanings, and research needs to pay attention to those actual ties and processes. In other words, globalisation and transnationalism are concepts that easily hide the fact that it is actually translocal lives that mobile people lead: localities are far from insignificant.

Chan Kwok-Bun has suggested that instead of 'origin and destination', it might be better to talk in terms of 'departure and arrival' (Kwok-Bun 2002, 193). This wording fits well the case of the Westerners in Varanasi. Their movement does not have a clear direction: arrivals are temporary and departures vague. However, I want to emphasise that they do arrive, albeit temporarily; that is, they are not constantly in transit. I argue that although it is important to pay attention to departures, i.e. to people's motivations behind various kinds of transnational and translocal movement, it is also crucial to pay attention to arrivals: in which places and spaces the mobile people arrive and what happens within those spaces, for example what kinds of (temporary or permanent) communities are formed. Such knowledge can be obtained only by detailed ethnographic fieldwork, and this is where anthropology has much to offer. Although it is often pointed out that the world of tribes that early anthropologists studied disappeared long ago, there is still much need to gain information using the same research methods, and for the patience of doing long-lasting fieldwork in particular places and spaces.

This research has established that arriving in Varanasi and belonging to the tight and intense community there is highly significant for the Westerners. Their life in Varanasi can be described as 'temporary permanence' as their sojourn is transitory, yet, their practices in Varanasi are very persistent. They do not necessarily celebrate their roots in their countries of origin. However, creating new, albeit temporary, belonging in the community of Westerners in Varanasi is highly significant, and Varanasi is a significant point of reference for them, playing a crucial role in their self-identification. Although the translocal space within which they move is unique for each individual, Varanasi has become the centre, the 'hub', to which they all more or less regularly return. Moreover, their choice of destination is not arbitrary: the holy city of Hinduism carries with

it very particular (bohemian) meanings for the Westerners. Above all, it is a spiritual and musical centre.

Transnational lifestyles are often understood to be reserved for the 'transnational capitalist class', people who belong to the top management of multinational corporations and consulting firms (Calhoun 2002, 106). In this line of thinking, 'ordinary' people are understood to continue living in local communities (Calhoun 2002, 106), and they are looked down on by the mobile business elites (McKinsey in Vertovec and Cohen 2002, 7; see also Hannerz 1996, 94). As lifestyle migration in general, and the example of the Westerners in Varanasi in particular show, also people who do not belong to the business elite can lead transnational (or translocal) lives and also for them, those 'staying put' are important 'others' whom they look down on. The Westerners in Varanasi are definitely not elite — they do not have access to privileged airport lounges nor can they afford fancy international hotels — but they are nevertheless privileged in many ways and they create their exclusive 'Western' space, i.e., their community in Varanasi. We cannot ignore the fact that voluntary movement around the globe is very much a Western privilege and even the bohemians cannot (and do not want to) escape their privileged position; although they claim to be escaping the West, their Western roots and identities are highly significant. My research has shown that who is privileged and who is marginalised is sometimes a tricky question and the same individual can be both, depending on the context; nevertheless, Western privilege seems to prevail even in the postcolonial world.

Lifestyle migration by definition refers to non-elitist, yet relatively privileged, movement, and in this study, I have characterised the Westerners in Varanasi as bohemian lifestyle migrants. This study has shown that they define the 'good life' in somewhat different terms from many other lifestyle migrants because of their bohemian, i.e., spiritual and artistic, aspirations, and the holy city of Varanasi is a very attractive place in which to pursue those aims. Moreover, as typical bohemian lifestyle migrants, the Westerners in Varanasi lead very mobile lives. It actually seems that lifestyle migration is an ongoing process and a state of mind for them. It is not simply an act of moving from one country to another: it is an understanding of having found and finding a better quality of life abroad. Their lifestyle migration thus looks like a never-ending search; although the better life currently materialises in Varanasi, the Westerners are not planning to stay there permanently but claim to be searching for an even more ideal place elsewhere, and circulating among various locations is a significant part of their ideal bohemian lifestyle. Moreover, they are particular kinds of lifestyle migrants because, although they share similar motivations with other lifestyle migrants, they have chosen their lifestyle as

‘a pre-emptive move’: they have left the ‘rat race’ before jumping in (or trying to jump in) at all.

Instead of trying to change the present circumstances in their countries of origin, the Westerners in Varanasi take the easy way out; they escape, since such a choice is available to them. They say they have made the right choices with regard to their lifestyle by leaving the ‘prison’ of the West and they have found a more meaningful and happier life in Varanasi. They, however, also claim to have become marginalised in their countries of origin because of their long absences and they are not integrated in India either. From an outsider point of view, their position is ambiguous, and one can ask whether they have ended up in another prison, that is, has their escape been successful? It seems that the sojourn of the Westerners in Varanasi, intended to be temporary but ending up lasting relatively long, results in a liminoid status. It is liminoid from the point of view of the dominant ideology of people in their countries of origin as well as from the point of view of local society in Varanasi. However, the Westerners create their own order, a tight community, albeit temporarily. Moreover, in spite of their liminoid status, they maintain certain selective belonging and are able to utilise various networks and resources in various places. Although the Westerners clearly occupy a liminoid space, they are able to leave and re-enter it by choice according to their personal needs and preferences. In other words, being liminoid is not a restrictive status for them. However, the question of return, or settlement in another place, and reintegration remains since we cannot know for how long their positive self-definition as bohemian lifestyle migrants lasts.

12.2 Does It Ever End?

Q: Why don't you want to stay in your country of origin? Or in some other Western country where you have lived?

A: No, it's not that I don't want to but, this is what interests me now. To learn this [music]. After, I'm sure, I won't live all my life in Benares, for sure. (Stefan, 32)

Q: Do you feel you belong here [in Varanasi]?

A: [...] I think India has called me because Mother India has something to show me and when it will be finished, I will know. I think one time it will be finished. (Sara, 32)

Only a few of my older interviewees planned to stay in Varanasi¹¹⁵, whereas the rest considered their sojourn there temporary, which suggests a liminoid status. In the long run, living a mobile life is energy-consuming and one may eventually want to settle down or at least slow down. In more abstract terms, the ambiguous status of the liminoid has to be solved eventually. It is, however, not necessarily easy to leave the liminoid. The ethos among backpackers is that their experiences are beneficial, a form of cultural capital that can be used, for example, for finding jobs when they return to their home countries (Desforges 2000; Noy 2004; Caprioglio O'Reilly 2006, 1013). But what happens when backpacking has resulted in lifestyle migration?

Occasionally, some Westerners get tired of Varanasi and say they will never come back but very often, they appear again after some time. In fact, there are many who have tried to settle down back in their countries of origin but who return to Varanasi after a few years when settling back has proved to be too difficult. It is not easy to adjust to everyday life and routines in one's country of origin and to find one's place there after being away for long. Among other things, it is not easy to explain a gap of several years in one's curriculum vitae. Therefore, becoming a lifestyle migrant at a young age involves a risk; it may turn out to be difficult to return in case one ever wants to do so.

I have met so many kinds of people in these years of travelling, I'm used to meeting all kinds of human beings, all different. If you live in one country all the time, in the same place, you meet only one kind of people. (Iris, 33)

The Westerners in Varanasi have gained a certain cultural capital during their travels and stays in India. Above all, they have met many kinds of people and they are able to survive in different places and cultures. It is, however, not necessarily easy to turn such cultural capital acquired abroad into a marketable asset, for example, when searching for employment (see e.g., Ong 1999). Although the Westerners in Varanasi claim it to be easy to find temporary menial jobs, those are not the kinds of jobs they would like to have if they stayed in the West permanently. It thus seems that they have ended up in a rather ambiguous position; the relaxed life in Varanasi does not come without costs.

My data does not provide answers to the question of what would be a successful return. There are some clues which hint that a typical 'solution' would be to open a shop selling Indian goods and handicrafts in the West. Such a business venture would provide income, still allowing one to travel

¹¹⁵ Even the older interviewees who were planning to stay in Varanasi, regularly left the city for long periods in the West.

to India every now and then. In addition, one would be one's own boss, which is crucial since the Westerners in Varanasi embrace independence. Moreover, some of those who have been studying music or some other art in India manage to make it a profession in the West, for example by playing fusion music that combines Indian music with other styles. Some others are able to utilise other skills that they have learned during their travels, for example by becoming yoga teachers or massage therapists in the West. Some may start studying or working while others simply continue travelling. One solution, at least for some time, is to rent a good apartment in an upmarket middle class housing area in Varanasi and continue a more settled life there¹¹⁶. I already mentioned earlier that if one has children, their schooling forces the families (or at least the mothers) to settle down in one place, while small children easily travel along with their parents.

The Westerners in Varanasi have chosen the option of leaving or, more precisely, of not returning. They initially only decided to postpone their studies or decided or were denied the chance to have permanent jobs, but the consequences may end up more severe: at some point they may realise that their options are limited. In the situation of having become marginalised against their own will, the anti-Western discourse, the emphasis on individual choice and the claim to have found a more meaningful life allow them positive self-definitions and justifications for their lifestyle. However, the fact that they are constantly defending their lifestyle of not having permanent jobs or housing indicates that their status is problematic and needs explanation, for outsiders but also for themselves. Moreover, as the years go by, it may become increasingly difficult to defend the lifestyle, that is, the liminoid status.

While in Varanasi, I met a few people who had returned successfully to the West. The following excerpt from my diary describes my interaction with Rafael, who had come to visit Varanasi for a few weeks after several years of absence.

I meet Rafael the day before he is leaving Varanasi. I ask him how he feels about leaving. He says he is happy to leave because he is feeling strange in Varanasi now. 'I am old [forty years]; I want my home and I want to work. I love my work with music'. He says that being in Varanasi is very strange: he feels like he is looking at what he used to be but it is not him any more. (April 2003)

Rafael's comments indicate that he had stepped out of the liminoid space of Varanasi: he had moved on with his life. Also another Western

¹¹⁶ I noticed the trend of moving to better houses in 'modern' areas while I was back in Varanasi in 2009.

man explained having moved on with his life and he was thus feeling troubled with the life in Varanasi.

Anton has returned to Varanasi for a short period. He cannot stay for long because he has a job that he likes in the West. Last season, he was an active community member but this time, I feel that he is more reserved than before. He mentions to me that he cannot understand how people can allow themselves to come to Varanasi year after year, just to learn music or something and not to work; he himself is working very hard now. (March 2003)

Also Anton had stepped out of the liminoid space of Varanasi and defined himself as a responsible person who is working instead of just hanging out in India. His comment points towards understanding a long sojourn in Varanasi as getting stuck. Both examples above suggest that there eventually comes a time when the lifestyle in the liminoid ends: for some it is easier to exit than for others. What kinds of lifestyles and values the returning people eventually adopt remains to be seen; it is outside the scope of this research.

12.3 A Community of 'Lucky' People

I started this book with an interview quotation stating that there are 'more vibes' in India. Throughout the book, I have elaborated what such a statement actually means: what is better in India and how it all becomes a lived practice among the Westerners in Varanasi, for whom a backpacking trip that was supposed to be a temporary phase has resulted in lifestyle migration. When I asked one of my interviewees what kinds of people end up living in Varanasi, his reply was 'lucky people.' This book has been a story of those 'lucky', or more correctly, fortunate, people. I have described their lives in Varanasi and their justifications for their lifestyle. I have characterised them as bohemian lifestyle migrants and I have argued that they form a tight community in Varanasi. I have shown how their community is formed and maintained; it is very much a lived experience created in actual practices. I have argued that in spite of participating in the community only temporarily, it is very significant for the members. I have also argued that although the community first seems temporary and 'light', it is actually very persistent. Something is shared although it may first seem that nothing unites those people. Moreover, I have argued that fluidity becomes a defining characteristic of the community; moments of leaving and returning are very significant in the construction of the community. My research has thus shown that communality can be characterised by both

permanence and temporality. Anthropology defines people as social beings and my research has shown that communality is central even among people leading highly mobile lives in which they celebrate individuality and disjunction.

When talking about globalisation, we often get a sense that people, objects, signs and symbols are chasing each other around the globe and as a result, the local and immediate does not matter any more (Lash and Urry 1994 in Amit 2002, 9). In this line of thinking, cultures and people are being 'delocalised', that is, lifted from particular and familiar places and thrown into 'global post-modern' chaos (Hall 1992, 302 in Kennedy and Roudometof 2002, 9). This, however, does not necessarily correspond with people's experience, even if they are 'delocalised' themselves, as people also reject disintegration (Kempny 2002, 63). Moreover, as anthropologists repeatedly emphasise, immediate locality has not lost its significance (see e.g., Eriksen 2004, 379-400). This research has focused on an immediate locality: the community of Westerners in Varanasi. Yet, it is a very special kind of community as the members come from various nations and their lifestyle is characterised by constant mobility.

Why does creating such an intense community become so important for the Westerners in Varanasi then? In their lifestyle, there is a tension between an ideology of movement on the one hand, and a desire to rest and settle down on the other. I argue that the tension is resolved in the maintenance of the tight, yet fluid, community in Varanasi. In spite of romanticising it, mobility is not their final aim; eventually their ideal boils down to the opportunity to create a 'refuge' or an alternative space, that is, a community with similar-minded people. The community can also be viewed as a means of rejecting disintegration. Earlier (section 3.1), I quoted Bauman, who writes that communities are often understood to be warm, cosy and comfortable places where individuals can feel relaxed, safe and understood (Bauman 2001, 1-3). The community of Westerners in Varanasi can be described in such terms. The community becomes so important because it is there, within the Western space, that the ideal life of the like-minded people materialises. The view offered by Bauman sees communities in terms of a lost paradise. In the case of the Westerners in Varanasi, and in the case of lifestyle migrants in general, moving abroad is indeed a question of finding, or founding as it requires constant effort, a paradise. This research has, however, shown that the paradise is not as ideal as the members like to claim; there are also divisions, distinctions, obligations and norms. Moreover, the life of leisure can also be stressful and is thus not always very relaxed.

Another reason why the community becomes so important is that it is a response to the Westerners' liminoid status. Although from the point of view of people in their countries of origin as well as from the point of view

of locals in Varanasi, the Westerners occupy an ambiguous outsider status, within their own community they construct their own normality and stability. In other words, when occupying a liminoid stage for long, it becomes important to create normality with others in the same position. This is important especially because it allows a positive self-identification and justification for the lifestyle: instead of being a dropout, one has chosen a more meaningful lifestyle and there are others who share this view. I believe the community of Westerners in Varanasi becomes so tight precisely because it is formed in a liminoid space in fluid circumstances far away from the members' countries of origin. The 'imagined' aspect of togetherness is above all a result of being 'different together'; both *vis-a-vis* the local Indian people and *vis-a-vis* people in the 'West'. All in all, this research has shown that communities have not lost their significance even in our age of individuality; people may participate in them temporarily, yet they can still be very important for the members and very persistent in terms of practices.

In this research, I have also argued that individuality is a crucial factor among the Westerners in Varanasi. Their lifestyle between India and the West allows them but also requires from them much individual agency. Also the community that they form in Varanasi is based on individual choice. Yet, at the same time the community has many behavior norms that the members are expected to follow, as a consequence of which they end up behaving in very similar ways to each other and their behavior is also controlled by the other community members, for example in terms of their music studies or women's sexuality.

Bauman writes that 'missing community means missing security' whereas gaining community eventually means missing freedom (Bauman 2001, 4). The case of the Westerners in Varanasi is interesting in these terms. It is clear that seeking communal belonging is a way of finding security and stability, albeit temporarily, in their constantly mobile lifestyle. The tight community also provides them with concrete ties and practices that anchor their identities and give them much appreciated feelings of belonging. Yet, they do not want to lose their individuality and thus come and go as they please; as a consequence, their belonging to the community is temporary. Eventually, the community consists of individuals who refute communal commitment but who nevertheless appreciate temporary communal belonging. Amit argues that many contemporary transnational movements are not undertaken with the intention of carrying along relationships formed in one context into a new situation. Instead of continuity and integration, separation and reconfiguration are celebrated. (Amit 2002b, 35) This is true also for the Westerners in Varanasi but I want to emphasise that this does not mean that the relationships are not significant at a particular time and place or that

people would not like to re-establish those relationships again and again. Tight communities are often understood to restrict individuals but in the case of the Westerners in Varanasi, the tight community is actually a resource for individuals who gain feelings of belonging but are still able to come and go as they please. My research has thus shown that individuality and communality are not necessarily mutually exclusive; consequently, we need to carefully examine contemporary forms of communality instead of celebrating the age of individuality as an end of communality.

Finally, I have conceptualised the community of Westerners in Varanasi as an alternative space, that is, as a space of bohemian lifestyle migrants where similar-minded people act out their ideals and pursue their bohemian — artistic and spiritual — aspirations. Their lifestyle, values and ideals culminate within their community in Varanasi. The Westerners in Varanasi do not commit themselves to any political goals but their resistance or at least their search for an alternative becomes a lived practice through their lifestyle and especially through their life in Varanasi. Creating such an alternative space indicates that the Westerners are privileged actors; underneath the phenomenon lies the freedom and opportunity to imagine, and realise, an alternative lifestyle and an alternative community. And it is above all a Western privilege since the Westerners sojourn so far away from their countries of origin in (cheap) India.

The phenomenon in which Westerners choose to live in an Indian city because they claim to find ‘more vibes’ there tells much about our era in the affluent industrialised countries where an increasing number of people leave the ‘rat race’ and search for a more relaxed life. This can mean, for example, aiming at an ecologically sustainable life in the countryside (see e.g., Moisander et al. 2002; Pesonen 2006) or it can mean lifestyle migration. Globalisation means new opportunities for many people, and an increasing number of people are taking advantage of the fact that they can move abroad to seek a better quality of life when their countries of origin do not provide them with the kind of life they appreciate. Such people are obviously privileged actors on the global arena, and this research has been a story of such privileged people: fortunate people in a self-made paradise.

I want to end with a comment made by one of my interviewees in which he expresses how content he is with the choices he has made in life. It really seems that fortunate people live in Varanasi, and they are fortunate not only in economic terms or in terms of their nationalities but also in terms of being satisfied with their lives.

I'm feeling really happy about my life. I think one should live this way.
(Rafael, 40)

13. POSTSCRIPT: NOW AND THEN – NOTHING EVER CHANGES

Most of the Westerners who come to hang out here [in India] just sit around, drink tea and have their feet massaged and do yoga... So, in the end, it's actually no difference [compared] to what was going on here a hundred years ago. (Tom, 36)

Tom suggests that the contemporary Westerners in India are living in very similar ways to colonialists. In fact, bohemian lifestyle migration to Varanasi is not a new phenomenon: before hippies, there were Western artists and theosophists living there (see e.g., Alexander 2000). Comparing the current situation to colonial times is out of the scope of this research, yet, I have acquired some hints that similarities with the hippie era are striking.

When I was in the USA in 2004, I interviewed a few Americans who had lived in Varanasi in the early 1970s. They had studied music or Hindi there, living in the same area as the contemporary Westerners. Their descriptions of their everyday lives in Varanasi sounded very familiar to me.

I had my lesson every day at three. I did my homework in the morning, went to the lesson. Then we would go to the *chai* store and drink tea or whatever else was available and evening would kind of drift away trying to find out where the music was. (John, a Hindi student)

Today, Govinda acts as the father figure of the community of Westerners in Varanasi. In the 1970s, there was also a father figure, *chai baba*, and his existence was actually one reason why some hippies ended up in Varanasi.

We heard about *chai baba* in Istanbul on our way to India: 'You just go to *chai baba*, he'll find you a place to live' — which is true, he did — 'and he will find you a teacher' and we went to the *chai baba*. (Tanya, a dance student)

It also seems that there were distinctions among the Westerners in Varanasi also then, especially regarding music.

There was the hippies and there was the people who tried to distance themselves from them. (Katie, a sitar student)

There were differences between the people who only came to smoke and get high and then all the people who really came for studying. (Tanya)

All the infighting is terrible there in music. [...] There were rivalries between teachers and between students of teachers... it was bad. (Katie)

Also the view of it being dangerous to stay too long in Varanasi is shared by the contemporary Westerners and those who had stayed there in the 1970s.

I could have easily stayed actually but I decided no, this is too... Benares gets claustrophobic... It's so ingrown... It's a complete world, my feeling was you can get stuck there and never get out. It's very absorbing. [...] I think, something about that place, it's its own world. You become mesmerised by the place. (Katie)

Despite the striking similarities in activities and discourses, the contemporary Westerners in Varanasi do not have any historical memory of their hippie predecessors, and not even of those Westerners who were there only a decade ago. Every generation seems to believe themselves to be special pioneers whereas in fact, the community of Westerners and its practices are recreated again and again. When individuals arrive fresh in Varanasi, they end up in the midst of practices that have been persistent for decades, although they do not acknowledge that. One reason for this 'amnesia' may be that awareness of historical continuity does not fit well the emphasis on individuality. The Westerners in Varanasi do not think in terms of joining a certain scene or community in Varanasi but emphasise making individual choices with regard to their lifestyle and their sojourn in Varanasi. Yet, in this process a community with shared practices and values is created, again and again. The historical continuities show that bohemian lifestyle migration to India is not a new phenomenon, although it is conceptualised in somewhat different ways in various eras. Nevertheless, the view of finding 'more vibes' in India that the contemporary Westerners in Varanasi embrace is shared also with their hippie predecessors; it is indeed an attractive lifestyle migration destination.

Your heart beats different in India, you breathe different in India, you walk different, you feel different, you see differently, everything is so... [...] It's so encompassing, so good for that. (Tanya)

Appendix 1

List of interview questions

How old are you?
What is your nationality?
Could you tell me your life story shortly? What have you done after high school until now?
Tell me a little bit about your family background.
What are your sisters and brothers doing now?
In which countries have you been?
When and why did you come to India?
How many times and for how long have you been in India?
Why did you come to Varanasi?
Where have you been in India?
Have you been in other places than Varanasi in India for a long time?
What are you doing in India? Are you studying something?
Why are you in Varanasi now?
How do you get the money to come here?
Can you describe your yearly routines? When do you go to your country of origin, when do you come to India?
How did you view India at the beginning? Have your views changed if you compare them to now?
Is India different from your country of origin? How?
Do you miss something from your country of origin? What?
How would you compare life in your country of origin to life in India? What is better, what is worse?
Do you prefer staying in India? Why?
Has India changed you? How?
Are you different from people in your country of origin? How?
Where is your home? What does home mean to you?
Where do you belong to? Is it important?
Do you always live in this house in Varanasi or have you lived in others as well? Which ones?
How did you end up in this house?
Why do you like living in this house?
Why do you like living in this area?
Do you have many friends in Varanasi?
Who are your friends here?
Are your friends mostly from the same country as you? Are most of your friends men or women?
Do you meet the same people every year here?
Do you keep in touch with them while you are away?
Is there some kind of community of Westerners here? Who belongs to it?
Why are there so many Westerners in Varanasi?
Has Varanasi changed during the time you have been here? How?
Has the life of the Westerners changed here? How?
Can you describe your daily routine? Describe 'an average day' of yours.
Do you speak Hindi?

Do you have Indian friends? Who are they? Are they men or women?
How did you get to know your Indian friends?
What do you do with the Indian friends?
Are you different from Indian men/women? How?
Are Indian men/women different from Westerners? How?
Why are there more Western men in Varanasi than women?
Is it different for Western men to be in India than for Western women? How?
What do you think about Western women here? Should they dress or behave in certain ways?
What about Western men?
Is it necessary for Westerners to dress in Indian clothes?
Do you think about your own dress and behavior? How? Why?
What do you think the locals think about you and other Westerners staying here?
What does your family think about you coming to India so many times?
What do your friends in your country of origin think about you coming here?
Do you still have many friends in your country of origin?
What do you plan to do in the future?
Do you want to continue living in India? Why not/yes?
Are you planning to return to your country of origin permanently or where would you like to live?
Do you want to settle down somewhere?

Additional questions for music students

Which instrument do you play?
How did you come to know about your instrument?
How did you find your teacher?
Have you had other teachers? If yes, why did you change?
Have you taken lessons also in some other places in India except in Varanasi?
What is your musical background in your country of origin? Did you play some instruments before?
Did you know about Indian music before coming to India?
How much do you practice?
How often do you have a lesson?
Do you pay to your teacher each time or monthly? Is it expensive to take lessons here?
Where did you buy your present instrument?
Do you have many instruments?
Do you read theoretical material about Indian music?
Do you prefer classical or light classical music?
Do you listen to Indian music? What kind?
Do you listen to Western music? What kind?
What kind of relationship do you have with your teacher?
Does your teacher have many Western/Indian students?
Do you know your teacher's other students?
Has your teacher been in the West? Where? Why?
Do you practice a lot when you are in your country of origin?
Do you perform?
Do you teach?
Do you have future plans with music? Which?

Appendix 2

Diary coding in Atlas.ti software: diaries

activities	making money
against west	music
babies	nationalities
care	nature
tea stall	negative India
concert	parties
destiny	politics
difference construction	power of the locals
excluded	privileged
gender	my research
goodbye	routines
gossip	self
Govinda	sharing
Restaurant 'M'	smoking
health	space, creating own space
status	spirituality
hippie sight	student
home country	swimmig
housing	time
Indian customs	tourist talk
information	transnationalism
insiders	Varanasi
living area	visa
looks	Western products

Diary coding in Atlas.ti software: interviews

activities
against work
anti-materialism
anti-Western
around India
babies
changing self
changing India
changing views
coming to India
community
dress
family's views
first impressions
friends in one's country of origin
friends in Varanasi
future
gender
health
Hindi
home
home country
housing
India, negative
India, views
Indian friends
Indian men
Indian women
individualism
the interview
Israel
life story, transnational
living area
locals' views
making money
music studies
nationalities
parents
privileged
religion
routines
seasons
sisters and brothers
smoking
studies
time
tourists
transnational lifestyles
Varanasi
visa
vs West
Westerners in Varanasi
why India?
yoga

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