Could this ever be home? Exploring Home, Homemaking and Belonging for Forced Migrants in the North East of England

Raphaela Berding-Barwick

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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology

Newcastle University

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Abstract

The thesis explores experiences of refugees as they find housing and make their homes as part of their post-asylum experience in the North East of England. It uses data gathered from ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a period of eight months, which included observations made from long-term voluntary work, home visits to a key informant as well as semi-structured interviews with forced migrants and other stakeholders from the local authority and third sector organisations. Using participatory methods with refugees and asylum seekers, including photo elicitation and solicited diaries, the research highlights the subjective, lived experiences of forced migrants during this homemaking, from finding housing to venturing out into their communities. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with support service staff from local authorities and third sector organisations, this study provides new insight into the contexts of refugee homemaking and the different structures that shape forced migrants' experiences. The empirical research is situated within literature on migration, home and belonging and takes a materialist approach which is distinctive in analysing the minutiae of refugee homemaking after experiences of asylum and refuge in the UK. This thesis explores how forced migrants show agency through various forms of homemaking and developing strategies for belonging while operating in limiting structures and hostile environments, thus distancing it from dominant ideas about refugees' experiences of "integration" which do not capture subjective experiences and nuanced feelings of belonging. Through placing subjectivity centre-stage in exploring homemaking, home and belonging, this study emphasises how micro-practices of homemaking are essential in understanding the agency of forced migrants. The research considers how forced migrants' experiences of housing and homemaking are impacted by past and present experiences, future aspirations and transnational connections and how these can be complexly intertwined.

COVID-19 Impact Statement

This research was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular during fieldwork, and initially during the analysis and writing up of findings. Restrictions were introduced just as the researcher wanted to start fieldwork, and the introduction of travel restrictions meant that the researcher had to amend her original research proposal which sought to conduct a comparative study between Newcastle, UK, and Münster, Germany. Following the emergence of the pandemic, Münster as a fieldwork site was abandoned. While this presented the biggest change to the project, COVID-19 also impacted on the methods used for data collection. The researcher had set out an ambitious methodology, including participant-led methods. However, the methodology had to be adapted to changing circumstances, and the researcher included remote interviewing. Given that participants in this research included refugees and asylum seekers, using remote methods presented methodological challenges. This was due to, for example, language barriers which are heightened when using a communication medium, or access issues to a telephone or stable internet connection. Conducting research remotely and restrictions made it difficult to maximise the degree of participation in participant-led methods. For example, due to closures of shops and facilities, participants could not engage in activities freely, or how they would have done under normal circumstances. This impacted on engagement in the research process beyond the interview, namely photo-elicitation and reflections participants wrote in solicited diaries.

Restrictions on social (indoor) mixing disrupted fieldwork plans for the researcher in Newcastle, not only in delaying the start of fieldwork (August 2020 instead of April 2020), but also in cancelling plans to conduct home visits, and in-person research. The researcher mitigated against this in adjusting the methodology, however, she believes that the original fieldwork plans would have added greater empirical depth to this thesis.

In addition to fieldwork, COVID-19 also impacted on ways of working for the researcher for nearly two years since restrictions were first introduced. As the University closed its doors, access to office space and the library was restricted. While this initially caused disruption to the analysis and writing stages of this thesis, the researcher was able to submit her work timely, and she is convinced that she has produced work which is of equivalent quality and rigour to research produced under normal circumstances.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank participants in this study, without whom this work would have not been possible. I hope that the words presented in this thesis reflect your experiences and perspectives about how you make the North East your home. I have learned a lot from you, and I am forever grateful that you have trusted me with your stories.

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1. Chapter one: Introduction

It's never the same but, you know, [I] try to say 'yes, I am at home'. But there are things happening sometimes that make you feel, makes you wonder that it could ever be [home] … but, yeah, because there is nowhere else, you have to put up with this one (Mustafa).

Mustafa's words powerfully illustrate what is at stake when individuals have no choice but to leave their home country behind and make their home anew elsewhere. Although physically, past homes may still be there, being unable to return to their countries of origin, homes from the past are unmade and destroyed when individuals are forced to flee the place they call home and have limited choice over an alternative place where they can make a new home. As Mustafa so profoundly says, however, the homes which individuals make anew may never be the same as previous ones, and negative experiences in the host country, such as discrimination or stigmatisation but also experiences with disabling structures and dehumanising systems, may leave many forced migrants in great uncertainty about whether they can ever call the place where they found refuge, 'home'.

In engaging with issues of housing, home, homemaking and belonging, in this thesis I seek to explore how forced migrants in Newcastle make their homes after having had to leave their countries of origin and finding refuge in the North East of England. Tracing journeys taking place from when individuals arrive in the UK to how they develop strategies for belonging in Newcastle, I will focus on experiences and meanings of housing, how respondents make homes and how they develop belonging in negotiating transnational connections, past and present experiences, and aspirations for the future. These aims are summarised in the following research questions:

1) What are the experiences of refugees as they find housing and make their homes in Newcastle? How do they construct meanings of home and what kind of home do they build?
2) What role do state actors, local authorities and third sector organisations play in refugees' housing pathways and homemaking? What context are these stakeholders working in?
3) What are refugees' strategies for belonging? How do transnational connections, past and present experiences and future aspirations impact on homemaking in Newcastle in the present?

4) How do the research findings contribute to understanding refugees as agents?

Guided by these questions, I undertook eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in Newcastle during which time I conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with refugees, asylum seekers, support workers and other stakeholders from local support organisations and the local authority.[1] I produced detailed ethnographic field notes from my own observations and reflections generated during my voluntary work in supporting agencies and interactions with forced migrants I developed close fieldwork relationships with. I also actively engaged respondents in the research process by using participant-led methods. Drawing on this data, this thesis will focus on analysing various issues, including housing searches, the physicalities of home and experiences outside the house, which, taken together, aim to scrutinise how forced migrants make their homes and negotiate belonging in Newcastle. Taking a person-centred approach and focusing on individual subjectivities, this thesis seeks to capture agency and the human experience of respondents, as they find housing, make their homes and employ strategies for belonging in interacting and engaging with people, places and social structures in Newcastle; all of which is underpinned by past and present experiences, future aspirations and transnational connections. Although incorporating a variety of perspectives from forced migrants and other stakeholders, such as support workers and local authorities, this study seeks to focus on forced migrants' voices, as they speak about their experiences of housing, home and belonging, to highlight their subjective experiences of homemaking.

This thesis examines homemaking for forced migrants in Newcastle within the context of past experiences of refuge and asylum, present contexts of operating in often restricting and disabling environments, as well as hostile and underfunded institutional structures, and future imaginations of home. The structures forced migrants are embedded into, including time limits on visas, 'supporting' structures and welfare systems, but also subjective lived experiences in the neighbourhood and beyond, affect homemaking processes which are rooted and expressed in the materialities of the house as well as by the things inside it; but which are also linked to strategies for belonging and negotiations of experiences and encounters outside of the house. These can be seen as acts of pushing back against these limiting and disabling structures and institutions.

[1] For an overview of interview participants, see appendix.

The issues this thesis seeks to explore are positioned at the intersection of migration, mobility, housing, home and belonging. Literature exploring questions of home and mobility range from offering rather abstract conceptualisations of being at home in the world, this intertwined with questions of identity, where home is 'where one best knows oneself' (Rapport and Dawson, 1998, p. 9); to more recent explorations of migrants' practices of homing (Boccagni, 2016). Contrary to understandings of home as totally unfixed to a location, the latter recognises that home is 'materially anchored' (Boccagni, 2016). This is acknowledged in this thesis by employing a material approach to home through an exploration of its physicalities as they can be found in the type of housing, as well as inside it, for example, in decorations, and possessions.

The decision to focus on materialities was informed by my conviction that a de-territorialised approach would not do enough justice to the search and creation of home for respondents in this study. I found that homemaking often entailed the mobilisation of limited resources to make claims for the spaces of respondents' dwellings, as well as hard labour to make spaces liveable. A focus on materiality was therefore valuable to discover agency and choice, of which Rapoport (1985) argues that they are essential to home environments. At the same time, through materialities, respondents tried to bridge the gap between here and there. In taking a materialist approach, I also seek to distance this work from representations of forced migrants as fundamentally uprooted and as having lost their moral bearings because they have lost connections to their homelands (Malkki, 1992). I seek to demonstrate that home and belonging are not out of reach for participants because of their legal status, and equally, that their homemaking processes, and the result of these, are not less to those of individuals with other legal statuses. In addition, connections to homelands were not lost, but transnational connections were maintained and indeed embodied and manifest in, for example, the materialities of how houses were decorated, but also the immaterialities of, for example, practices and behaviours in the home, or identities and expressions of belonging.

This thesis does not romanticise homemaking. Ahmed et al. (2003) point out that experiences of home are impacted by differences generated in social processes and institutions, for example those relating to race, class and gender; and as I demonstrate in this thesis by legal status. I understand the experiences of home for refugees in a host country to be impacted by past and present experiences, but also future imaginations and aspirations. Regarding the former two,

these include experiences of asylum and refuge and experiences of new environments. In the present, individuals navigate a new culture, systems and social structures as 'strangers' (Simmel, 1950), all of which are underpinned by increasing hostilities towards forced migrants, and a rhetoric of a binary process of integration according to external indicators, which do not align with micro-level experiences. Future perspectives, imaginations and aspirations also inform experiences of home.

Although home is subjective, and almost everyone has their own idea of home,[2] these subjective experiences take place in circumstances shaped by often shared constraints and precarity. However, this thesis does not seek to make conclusions outlining in a naturalistic manner an 'underlying, shared, cognitive order' of homemaking, home and belonging for forced migrants in Newcastle which is typical of so-called 'human nature' and can be explained by 'biological reductionism' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, p. 42; in Maso, 2001). Instead, a subjective approach is central to this thesis which focuses on the human experiences of participants as they make homes and negotiate belonging and navigate (often very) limiting systems and structures. This acknowledges 'the variability, heterogeneity and contingency of […] subjectivities as they unfold within the realm of experience', or the intricate commitments and moral challenges individuals navigate (Kleinman and Fitz-Henry, 2007, p. 53). Experiences are socially constructed by and through the environment individuals are embedded into and with which they interact (Hacking, 1999; Lovell, 2007). For many refugees in the UK, experiences of 'home' are shaped by policies of the UK asylum system, such as no-choice dispersal, intentional impoverishment, or long waits for asylum claim decisions; but also by the processes and institutions in place which are supposed to support individuals who have the legal status and label of 'refugee'.[3]

Building on ideas of homemaking, home and belonging, this thesis advances knowledge on meanings of home for forced migrants and the different temporalities and structures that shape their experiences. I explore how refugees show agency through various forms of homemaking and develop strategies for belonging while operating in limiting structures and hostile environments, thus distancing it from dominant ideas about refugees' 'integration' which do not

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[2] This includes individuals who are homeless (see for example Parsell, 2012).

[3] All participants but one were 'asylum route refugees' where they made a claim for asylum in the UK. This is in contrast to resettled refugees who have refugee status before they come to the UK.

capture subjective experiences and nuanced feelings of belonging. In doing so, this thesis also advances scholarship understanding the agency of forced migrants that occurs in micro-practices of homemaking. This includes a critical focus on the limits of this agency (Habash, 2021) through highlighting the gaps between macro structures and micro experiences. Focusing on the North East of England, which is an underdeveloped site of inquiry despite having a large number of asylum seekers dispersed to the region, I contribute to a growing literature on forced migration, advancing knowledge at the intersection of (forced) migration and home (for example Beeckmans et al., 2020; Boccagni, 2016). Moreover, writing in the context of increasingly restrictive refugee regimes and anti-immigrant sentiments in the 21st century, this thesis is uniquely placed to ask critical questions about the rights of refugees to rebuild their lives, make a home and find refuge and peace in exile.

The remainder of this introductory chapter offers an account of the research context, discussing both the national context, where a dehumanising asylum system is operating, and the local context in Newcastle, where fieldwork for this study was conducted. This chapter will end by outlining the overall structure of this thesis.

1.1. Immigration and asylum in the UK: depicting the context of homemaking

Immigration is notoriously politicised and often presented as a security issue, fostering anti-migration rhetoric. In the UK, the hostile environment created by the coalition government of the early 2010's accelerated the politicisation of immigration.[4] Plans for policies on how immigration can be better controlled to 'take back control of [Britain's] borders', a term infamously coined by Boris Johnson, have come to play a decisive role in determining election success in recent years. For example, in the 2016 Brexit referendum, anti-migrant sentiments and the creation of fear about having reached a 'Breaking Point' of uncontrolled flows of migrants into the UK were used to garner support among voters to leave the European Union (EU), the outcome and consequences of which have been discussed regularly in the public and political domains in the past years.

[4] The term is often ascribed to Theresa May, who served as Home Secretary from 2010 until 2016. However, Yeo (2018) shows that a hostile environment was created through policies as early as 1988.

Anti-migration rhetoric, often fuelled by the media but also those in power on the political stage,[5] is often directed at people seeking asylum, criminalising those who flee war and persecution by labelling them as illegal migrants compared to other types of migrants. This has raised questions about who is desirable, or allowed, to migrate to the UK, and fostered debates about the influence of colonial legacies in migration policies implemented by governments (Doebler, 2022; Mayblin and Turner, 2020).[6] The term 'refugee' has a different meaning in the 21st century from when it first evolved after the Second World War, and this influences how forced migrants are perceived. In their overview of a century of asylum and refugee policies in Britain, Ibrahim and Howarth (2018) for instance observe a shift from hospitality to hostility towards people seeking sanctuary. Stewart and Mulvey (2014) echo this and claim that restrictive measures are put in place to 'deter, control and manage asylum flows' (p. 1024), thus increasingly tightening immigration policies. Power operates within the refugee regime, and this is expressed, for example, through policies and laws, which influence the construction of categories and labels, and how the legal definition of 'refugee' is interpreted and applied (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018; Vigil and Baillie Abidi, 2018).

Bureaucratic practices further fraction the category of 'refugee' and these categories and sub-categories are then institutionalised in policies (Thomaz, 2018; Zetter, 2007). As a consequence of this bureaucratisation and politicisation of the process of seeking asylum and refuge, the rights of forced migrants are restricted more generally but there are also concrete material consequences for individuals and their experiences (Zetter, 2007). For example, a 'refugee' can be someone who has been resettled or who has been granted refugee status after claiming asylum in the UK. Even though they have the same legal status, their experiences are distinct; the latter having gone through the asylum process in the UK and then 'transitioning' to becoming a refugee; and the former having been resettled, often with their immediate family, and being supported by support workers in the UK. The mode of entry for forced migrants in the UK plays a decisive role in the support they get, or how they are perceived (Karyotis et al., 2021). For asylum

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[5] For example, Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who at the end of 2022 spoke of an 'invasion' of the UK's south coast by people who come to the UK across the Channel.

[6] The distinction between 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees' is important here too, not just in terms of legal status and associated rights, but also regarding public opinion and political debates. For example, Karyotis et al. (2021) point out that since the early 2000s, 'successive governments [in the UK] had separated asylum seekers and refugees' (p. 484) and while the latter are only 'reluctantly accepted' (p.484), asylum seekers are 'considered unwanted and treated with suspicion' (p. 484). This is even though individuals flee the same circumstances but arrive in the UK in different ways.

seekers, there are even more labels and these are also tied to government support entitlements; for example, 'asylum seeker in initial accommodation with section 98 support'; 'asylum seeker in dispersed accommodation with section 95 support'; or, something which has developed more recently due to the use of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers, 'asylum seekers in contingency accommodation with section 95 support'. In addition to entitlements, policies and legislation also determine which behaviours and experiences are 'genuine' of asylum seekers, thus creating ideal types of forced migrants only to then 'castigate the majority of asylum claimants as bogus' (McFadyen, 2016, p. 613). These practices legitimise more restrictive and derogatory interpretations of the label 'refugee', and in turn may withdraw claimants from international protection (Zetter, 2007, p. 176-7). However, they ignore that 'neat' migration categories often fail to account for the fact that individuals have multiple reasons to leave their home countries (Castles, 2003).

In addition to changes to the asylum system itself, successive governments have not stopped short of proposing (unsuccessful) schemes aimed at deterring asylum seekers from coming to the UK, in particular with the view to 'stop small boat crossings' across the English Channel since the early 2010s. In the period between 2019 and 2023 alone, the UK government attempted 43 different ways to stop people seeking asylum crossing the Channel (Bland, 2023). These ranged from warnings directed at 'illegal' migrants that they will be sent back; increasing surveillance and security in the Channel; sending asylum seekers to Rwanda; to introducing the 'Illegal Migration Bill' essentially banning everyone who entered the UK 'illegally' from claiming asylum (Bland, 2023). Changes happen frequently, and while in a previous draft of this chapter I was writing about then Home Secretary Priti Patel's plan to fix the broken asylum system through the Nationality and Borders Bill she announced as recently as the summer of 2022, only two seasons later, in the spring of 2023, as I was reviewing this chapter, the government had announced the Illegal Migration Bill. These schemes to stop 'illegal migration' to the UK increase in cruelty, raising doubts about their legality as well as human rights concerns (Glover, 2022). Regarding the proposal from March 2023, for example, Priti Patel's successor Suella Braverman admitted that it would likely 'push the boundaries of international law' (O'Nions, 2023).

The conditions of seeking asylum in the UK are dehumanising, and the circumstances in which asylum seekers are forced to live are horrific. For example, welfare and working rights for asylum

seekers have been increasingly restricted since the early 2000s (Mayblin and James, 2019). Asylum seekers are eligible for accommodation and subsistence support, and in 2023 at the time of writing this chapter, they received weekly payments of £45 on an Aspen card if they lived in self-catered accommodation;[7] and £9.10 if they lived in accommodation providing meals (gov.uk, no date).[8] While this is very little, the Home Office justifies these amounts by drawing on their own calculations for the amount spent on essential living needs by the poorest 10% of the population in Britain (Prothero, 2022). However, these figures used by the Home Office are not in line with other official data, for example from the ONS, and so the payments asylum seekers receive are still 25% lower than what the poorest 10% of the UK population live on, according to the Home Office (Prothero, 2022). In other words, asylum seekers are systematically impoverished, many being 'close to economic, social and cultural death' (Mayblin, Wake and Kazemi, 2020) after they have come to the UK so seek safety from war, violence and persecution and seek to make a new home after having had to flee their previous one.

At the time of writing this introductory chapter, the world had just come out of a global pandemic. Already while in the midst of it, evidence emerged that some (ethnic minority) communities suffered more severe negative consequences of lockdowns and restrictions than others, thus exacerbating already existing inequalities (Blundell et al., 2020). The grinding to a halt of public life also made circumstances much worse for many asylum seekers in the UK, as it impacted, for example, on the Home Office's operational capacity to process asylum applications, as well as how asylum seekers were housed. Therefore, many asylum seekers were accommodated in so-called contingency accommodation, or hotels, which had been used as accommodation since before the pandemic in September 2019, because of a rise in asylum applications, and delays caused by a switchover to new contracts for asylum housing. However, justified by the need to stop the spread of COVID-19 and because individuals who had been granted refugee status were not forced to leave their government provided accommodation within 28 days, many more hotels had been used since March 2020 (Sturge and Gower, 2020). At the end of November 2021, 21,500 asylum seekers were housed in hotels, which was more than double the numbers in May 2021

[7] The rate has been implemented in later 2022. When I started fieldwork in 2020, this amount was £39.60, and later increased to £40.85 (Gower, 2021; Home Office, 2022).
[8] This was initially £8, then £8.21 (Home Office, 2022).

(Neal, 2022). Hotels were also used to house those refugees who were fleeing the Taliban in Afghanistan, and who had been living in this temporary accommodation for more than a year since being evacuated (Taylor, 2022). While initially, the target to stop using hotels was set to May 2021, neither had the revised target of March 2022 been achieved; and they are still used at the time of writing in the Summer 2023.

It is not only these living conditions which make the asylum system dehumanising. It is also the Home Office's practice of moving individuals around the UK as their claim is ongoing. Guidance available from the Home Office (2019) on 'Living in asylum accommodation' describes a linear and straightforward, yet free from choice process about where and how individuals live after they first arrive in the UK. Asylum dispersal policies are in place which stipulate that when asylum seekers first arrive in the UK, they are dispersed across the country after they have applied for asylum. Such policies operate on a no-choice basis, and individuals have no control over where they may be placed. Normally, asylum seekers are first placed in initial accommodation for three to four weeks, and then in dispersal accommodation if they are otherwise homeless until their claim is decided. Then, after individuals have been granted refugee status, the local authority in which they had been given status is responsible for housing and 'move on' support (Home Office, 2019). While asylum seekers do not have a choice about where they will be sent initially, and are expected to comply with the Home Office, after they get refugee status, in theory individuals can choose their movements and determine their own mobilities.

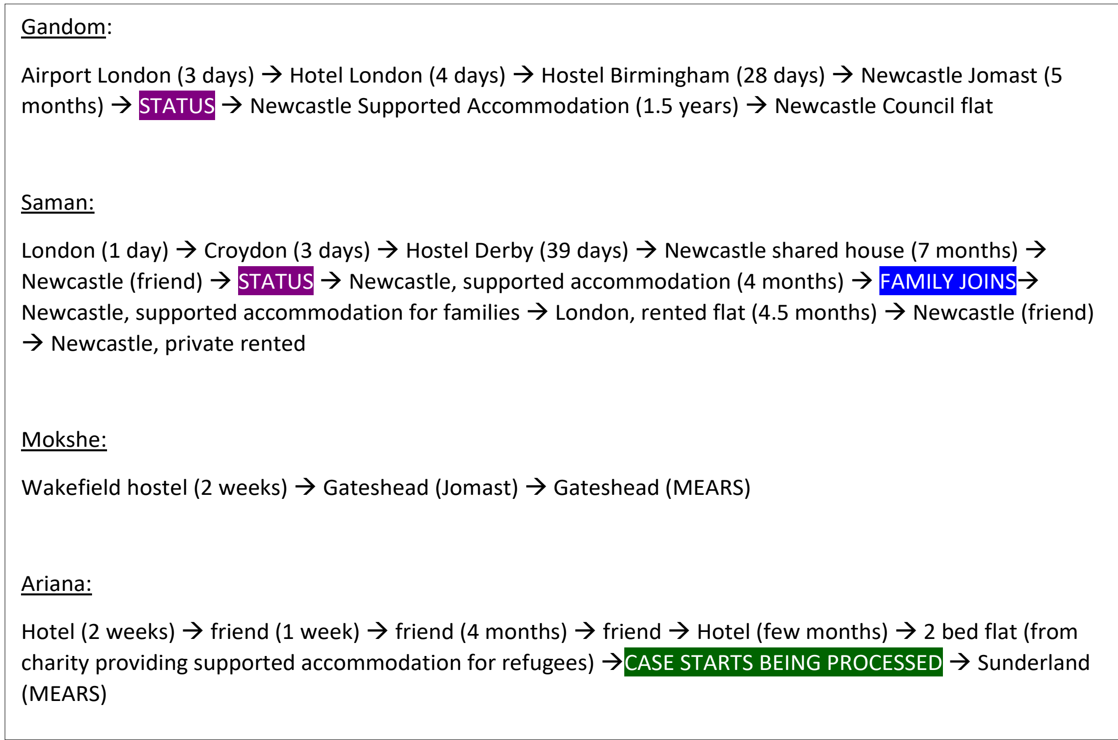

Figure 1: Participant journeys

It is perhaps needless to say that for most respondents in this study, their journeys were not as straightforward as can be seen in figure 1. For example, many respondents (were) moved more than twice as asylum seekers since their arrival in the UK, partially because of a change in housing contractors in the summer of 2019; but also because of Home Office operational failures during the pandemic. Often, movements did not stop after respondents had been granted refugee status and echoing approaches which problematise the relationship between movement and freedom (Sager, 2014), very often individuals continued to be dependent after they had been given refugee status in Newcastle. This included institutionalised accommodation, such as homeless shelters, as well as help from third sector organisations (Mayblin and James, 2019). This was, for example, due to significant pressures on the housing market, low availability of housing and alternatives to renting from the council; as well as pressures stemming from the asylum support system itself which requires that, once refugee status has been granted, individuals need to leave their government provided accommodation within a 28-day 'grace period' (Carnet et al., 2014). In this sense, respondents in this study displayed high levels of (forced) mobility within Newcastle, as they moved between different kinds of accommodations. On the other hand, in an effort to

realise their idea(l) of home, some respondents chose to move from Newcastle to a different city. This decision was often influenced by intersecting factors, such as employment opportunities, or support networks, including friends and family (Stewart and Shaffer, 2015). However, as I will discuss in this thesis, imaginations of life and home elsewhere often did not materialise, and so many moved back to Newcastle.

Most participants in this study were 'asylum route refugees' and claimed asylum after arriving in the UK. Only one participant, Afra, was resettled to the UK with her family. In addition to claiming asylum inside the UK, there are resettlement programmes through which individuals who have been recognised as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) can be resettled to the UK. Until 2020, the UK operated four resettlement schemes: Mandate, Gateway, the (Syrian) vulnerable persons resettlement scheme (VPRS), and the vulnerable children resettlement scheme (VCRS) (Wilkins and Sturge, 2020); and there is a Community Sponsorship Scheme. In 2021, the VPRS and the VCRS were replaced by the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) (Home Office, 2021); and resettlement schemes for Afghans were set up; as well as, most recently, for Ukrainians (Sturge, 2023).[9] While resettled refugees and 'asylum route' refugees are often fleeing the same conflicts and persecutions, there are significant differences in their journeys to the UK, as well as the support they receive once they have been resettled or granted refugee status (Karyotis et al., 2021). For example, the level of funding allocated by the government to local authorities where refugees are settled, and asylum seekers are housed differs greatly. For refugees resettled under the VPRS and the VCRS, local councils received funding for the first five years of resettlement (Home Office, 2017). In addition, for refugees resettled under the Afghanistan schemes, the government allocated a 'core local authority tariff' of £20,520 per person over three years (LGA, n.d. -a);[10] and for Ukrainian refugees, £10,000 per person (LGA, n.d.).[11] In contrast, for asylum seekers, local authorities get £250 per asylum seeker housed in Home Office provided accommodation per year (Home Office, May 2022).[12]

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[9] In addition, routes for people from Hong Kong have been set up following China's National Security Law. Settlement routes for all schemes vary significantly (see Lenegan, 2023).
[10] And additional funding to support education, 'additional costs', housing costs, NHS costs etc (LGA, n.d. -a).
[11] And additional funding for schools (LGA, n.d.).
[12] Contracts to house asylum seekers have been outsourced and so housing cost is not included in this. Recently, a lot of attention has been on the cost of housing asylum seekers in hotels, which according to Migration Watch (2022)

The difference in financial support the national government allocates to councils for asylum seekers on the one hand, and resettled refugees on the other, is reflected in the support in place for the latter group: personalised support plans, advice and assistance with housing, employment, access to welfare rights, and language classes. For asylum seekers by contrast, and subsequently for refugees who receive their status in the UK, any such assistance is reliant on the voluntary sector, with volunteers often filling in the gaps in service provision and giving up their time to provide free English classes or run advice sessions. This has created a 'two tier system' for forced migrants (Flug and Hussein, 2019, p. 5), or hierarchies of refugees, which can be felt even by individuals who flee the same circumstances from the same country, but arrive in the UK through resettlement or on the asylum route (Karyotis et al., 2021).[13] This is the policy context of the asylum system which then creates the conditions which local authorities, where forced migrants ultimately settle, inherit from the state, and which demonstrates the inherent discrimination within the system (Wilcock, 2019).

1.2. The local context in Newcastle

Newcastle is in the North East region of England with a population of 300,200 (ONS, 2022). The North East is among the least diverse regions in the UK, with 90.6% of people identifying as White British (ONS, 2022a). In Newcastle, 74.5% identify as White British (ONS, 2022a). While this is lower than for the entire North East region, in surrounding councils, such as North Tyneside or Gateshead, this percentage is higher, at 92.5% and 90.3% respectively (ONS, 2022a). Unemployment in Newcastle is at 5.8% and thus above the 3.7% UK average (Centre for Cities, 2023; ONS, 2023).[14] Newcastle is a polarised city in terms of wealth distribution, and there are stark differences between poorer and often stigmatised areas of the city, and higher-status areas in the northern suburbs of Newcastle (Cameron, 2003). The housing landscape of Newcastle is unlike the rest of England. 27% of housing in Newcastle is social housing which is significantly

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amounts to £51,000 per person per year. For other accommodation, that is housing in communities, this figure was £3,500 per person per year in 2016 (Rutter, 2016).

[13] After finishing fieldwork, I observed a conversation between a resettled refugee and an 'asylum route' refugee. The former was astonished by the lack of support the latter received after having been given status, for example having to leave the government-provided accommodation within 28 days. With some sort of resentment in their voice, the resettled refugee was then called a "VIP refugee".

[14] While this is the official unemployment rate, the hidden unemployment rate is much higher at 18% (Centre for Cities, 2023)

higher than the average in England at 17.7%; 19.1% is private rented, compared to 16.8% average in England, and 48.9% owner-occupied (just over 63% in England) (Newcastle City Council, 2018).

Newcastle was once an 'industrial powerhouse', thriving during the industrial revolution, and building a strong industrial base in subsequent years through mining, shipbuilding and heavy engineering industry (Newcastle City Council, n.d.). However, after a decline of these industries during a period of deindustrialisation beginning in the mid 20th century, economic downturn and population decline followed. While from the 1990s onwards, regeneration schemes were put in place to counter population decline and rebrand the city as a 'vibrant and stylish regional capital' (Newcastle Local Studies & History Centre, 2009), the decline of industries and disproportionate funding cuts to essential public services from austerity policies in the 2010s have fuelled deprivation in Newcastle. Among the most deprived English local authorities, Newcastle ranks 53 out of 326, with more than 20% of its population living in areas that are in the 10% most deprived in the country (Casla, 2018).

Deprivation in Newcastle goes back further than the 2010s, the consequences of which are visible, for example, in the number of children living in poverty (28% of all children in Newcastle live in low-income families). Consequences can also be seen in different health outcomes to less deprived areas, or Southern regions of England. The Black report of 1980 revealed that social inequalities, including income, housing and employment, led to a widening of unequal health outcomes for Southern and Northern regions in the UK (Gray, 1982). In 2010, the Marmot Review (2010) further drew attention to the effect of social and economic status on health, highlighting that the best off in society live longer than those living in poorer areas. Ten years after the Marmot review and four decades after the Black report, Dalingwater (2020) found that there was still 'a clear North-South divide in health outcomes' (p. 10), thus manifesting the link between deprivation and poor health outcomes and drawing attention to the fact that little has changed since the 1980s. This creates a challenging environment not only for how support services for forced migrants operate, but also for forced migrants themselves to make home anew.

1.2.1. City of Sanctuary and Forced Migrants

Newcastle has been a dispersal area for asylum seekers since 1999 (Vickers, 2012). In the early period of dispersal, asylum seekers were housed in the East End of the city, which had a large

number of unoccupied properties, including ones which were inhabitable and meant to be demolished (Vickers, 2012, p. 54). The practice of allocating poor quality housing has not changed since the beginning of asylum seeker dispersal, as I learned at an event organised by City of Sanctuary (CoS) in November 2021. Accommodation for asylum seekers was concentrated in three of the most disadvantaged wards in Newcastle, due to available housing that was otherwise low in demand.

At the end of December 2021, the North East was housing the most asylum seekers as a share of their population across the UK (Walsh, 2022). At the end of December 2022, there were 1,810 asylum seekers dispersed in Newcastle (Home Office, 2023).[15] While the number of resettled refugees in the North East, and the number of dispersed asylum seekers is recorded by the Home Office, there is less data available on the number of refugees who stay, live and settle in Newcastle. This is, for example, due to secondary migration, as individuals leave Newcastle to move somewhere else after they have received refugee status or move to Newcastle from elsewhere in the UK (Flug and Hussein, 2019, p. 7). Regardless of this, the council records 'refugee move-on' numbers, which includes those individuals who have been granted refugee status while they were in Newcastle. Thus, in 2019/20, there were 348 refugee move-ons, while in 2020/21 this number decreased to 183 due to the pandemic (Foggie, 2021).

Since 2013, Newcastle has been part of the CoS network which brings together different cities and towns across the UK sharing a vision of becoming 'places of safety' and offering 'sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution'.[16] In interactions with the local authority in Newcastle, I learned that city officials were proud of being a City of Sanctuary, and the coordinated and collaborative work across different departments this has enabled to make Newcastle a welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers. In our interview, Rachel, who held a senior position at the council, for example said that being a CoS was 'the right thing to do' in Newcastle, as it reinforced an image of an 'open and outward facing' city.

Wilcock (2019) writes about CoS as an 'institutionalised form of resistance' (p. 143), and so CoS illuminates the tension that exists between hostile national level policies, and welcoming local

[15] This includes asylum seekers who receive Section 4, Section 95 and Section 98 support.
[16] https://cityofsanctuary.org

level approaches (Bauder, 2017). Being part of the CoS network is thus a counter-narrative to the negative discourse surrounding refugees and asylum seekers, and many local authorities use this movement to answer to 'hostility with hospitality' (Wilcock, 2019, p. 143). However, the movement has also been criticised in the literature, suggesting that the 'soft face' of the CoS movement is misleading (Bagelman, 2013, p. 50). Squire and Bagelman (2012) highlight the rationalities of power inherent in the CoS movement and draw attention to the ways in which sanctuary also involves the governing of migrants. Equally, Wilcock (2019) in her analysis of CoS training and outreach activities critically points out that portrayals of forced migrants as heroes or victims do little to challenge the hostile environment created by the government, but rather align with narratives of 'rightful presence and moral purity' of forced migrants (p. 148).

While I do not disagree with Rachel about the symbolism of the CoS label, my experiences from volunteering, working and doing research with refugees and asylum seekers, provoke a more critical assessment of CoS, similar to that of Bagelman (2013), Squire and Bagelman (2012) and Wilcock (2019). Although CoS facilitated and coordinated the support for forced migrants in Newcastle, for example in bringing together third and public sector agencies for regular meetings to share updates, or organising events for the public, I nevertheless questioned the extent to which CoS made a difference for respondents, and other forced migrants in the city on the micro level; or what changes the movement can bring about on a policy level. However, from my experiences of working and volunteering in supporting organisations, I acknowledge that changes in asylum and immigration policies happen so frequently and are sometimes unpredictable. Instead of acting, organisations are then *re*-acting, making it difficult to establish longer-term strategies leading to change.

1.3. A short biographical account

While so far, I have introduced the research topic, and helped establish the national and local context in which this research took place, it is also important to acknowledge my own subjectivities and experiences of and with home, as well as my engagement with the local context in which this research took place. Before I started this research project, I rarely thought about home and what it meant to me. I remember a conversation I had with my host 'parent' in Australia, where I spent some time after I finished high school in Germany in 2011. Having taken a job as a temporary au-pair, I lived with her, her husband and two children for three months. In

a moment where I was overwhelmed by homesickness, she said to me that I needed to remember that I could always return home to where my parents lived. At the time, this thought provided me with great comfort, and it made me cope better with my homesickness.

My thinking about home and return changed, however, when I came to Newcastle in 2018 to study. I knew I would be living in Newcastle for at least the next four years; and I had not spent that much time in one place ever since I finished high school in Germany in 2011. When I came to the UK, I did not have any intention of permanently moving or making a home here, always keeping one foot in Germany. Being at the end of my PhD journey now, my thinking has changed compared to when I first moved to the UK in 2018. In the context of my research, I have increasingly reflected on issues of home and homemaking and applied this to my own experiences and ways in which I built attachment to my environment. Also, almost five years after coming to the UK, I am married, and I have become very familiar with my surroundings, and at times they feel more familiar than my hometown in Germany, to which, over the years, I have and always will return frequently. Apart from return visits, however, I find myself increasingly not wanting to *live* in Germany which has become a somewhat strange place. However, this is a choice for me and one that respondents in this study do not have.

In addition to my research impacting on my reflections on my own experiences of home and homemaking, my work was also impacted by my engagement in the local community through volunteering. Between October 2018 and September 2021, I volunteered continuously with third sector organisations supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Newcastle, and in January 2022, I took on a paid part-time role at one of the charities where I previously volunteered and then worked alongside writing my thesis. I consider these experiences to complement my fieldwork.

I volunteered in a variety of roles, for example, a teaching assistant for English classes, a befriender, and a volunteer support worker in a supported housing project, and it was in the latter two roles where I was able to gain most insight and knowledge into the asylum system in the UK, and the experiences of forced migrants as they make their homes anew in Newcastle. Being involved in charities, these experiences also opened my eyes to the enormous strains that the third sector is working under. For example, when I first started as a volunteer support worker, the housing project was managed by an interim manager due to the previous manager being off sick

because of burn out from the job. I lost count of the number of times that I was asked to 'please not leave' and stop volunteering as I was the only additional help for the supported housing project.

It is important to acknowledge that the experiences of home for respondents in this study and my own are distinct, however I nevertheless bring my own subjective, lived experiences into the research process. As such, I do not remove myself from the research process, and this includes my own convictions about home, but also my (privileged) social position compared to that of many respondents and power relations stemming from this. While I have a choice about where my home is, it is crucial to point out that for many people fleeing their home countries, they (very) often do not have this choice.

1.4. Thesis outline

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two will provide an overview of the literature in which this research can be situated. I will review literature at the intersection of migration, migrant settlement, home and belonging; distinguish houses and homes, and frame this study within literature on forced migration, home and homemaking. This chapter will also provide a rationale for why this study is important and relevant to existing scholarship on home, homemaking, belonging and forced migration more generally. While chapter two will frame this thesis, the empirical chapters will review additional literature which is relevant for analysis in the particular chapters.

Chapter three will outline the methodological approach. I will give a rationale for why I chose a co-productive ethnographic approach and reflect on the effectiveness of my methods in the field. Due to the different roles I occupied while in the field (support worker, friend, researcher), I will pay critical attention to issues of power differences, positionality, as well as reflexivity and questions of representation within ethnographic work and when doing research with vulnerable communities, including forced migrants. Chapter three will also highlight ethical issues, including those arising from leaving the field.

Following the literature review and methodology, the three empirical chapters in this thesis will explore how respondents make their homes in Newcastle, reflecting the temporal logic connected to the different dimensions of home, as it is set out for instance by Duyvendak (2011).

This involves ‘arriving’ (chapter four), ‘having arrived’ (chapter five) and ‘venturing out in the community’ (chapter six); although I acknowledge that such processes can take place simultaneously and are not linear. Chapter four will initially outline why respondents move between cities and within Newcastle, and explore housing journeys in more detail, including those from when they were asylum seekers. Using the concepts of choice and control, I aim to characterise the search process for respondents to find housing in Newcastle after they had refugee status. I will focus on the role of supporting services in this, and the extent to which respondents were dependent on help from institutions. Drawing on perspectives of forced migrants and other stakeholders who provide support in the housing search process, I argue that there is a lack of choice and regard for individual preferences regarding housing. This chapter will outline support workers’ perspectives of housing and home and contrast these with understandings of house and home of refugee respondents, arguing that there are fundamental differences which are evident of a mismatch between macro structures and micro experiences.

Chapter five will explore domestic spaces and highlight how individuals make houses into homes. Applying a materialist approach and focusing on spatial practices, this chapter will focus on belongings and consumption of dwelling spaces. Through investing a lot of time, effort, and money, respondents made dwelling spaces hospitable and consequently claimed spaces as theirs as part of homemaking processes. This chapter will also discuss immaterialities and how they impact and relate to homemaking, including practices and memories from the past. Chapter five will illuminate that while many participants had less control over where they lived, there was more control over how they lived.

Chapter six is the last empirical chapter which will extend the gaze beyond dwelling spaces and explore how belonging, and home are conditioned by experiences beyond the house in mapping strategies for belonging. Going back in time initially to when respondents had arrived in the UK and Newcastle, I argue that respondents’ strategies for belonging consist of negotiating the city and the physical environment as well as how they connect with the community and neighbourhood. In exploring this, I will also discuss the importance of wider social structures for belonging. Chapter six will also explore homes and belonging 'here' and 'there’ and discuss the impact of transnational connections and belonging on identities as well as feelings of belonging in the UK. Mobilising different concepts, the last empirical chapter will illuminate the various

tensions between feelings of belonging and non-belonging that occur on different dimensions, and which respondents have to negotiate.

The concluding chapter seven will offer responses to the research questions outlined in the introduction, as well as highlight key contributions of this thesis. Avenues for future research on issues of refugee homemaking will be explored.

2. Chapter two: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The primary aim of this study is to explore how refugees in Newcastle construct home, both materially and immaterially, and negotiate belonging. This is examined from the perspectives of refugees themselves, and other stakeholders such as local authorities and support workers, allowing for an exploration of the role of forced migrants' transnational connections in the (re)making of home and negotiation of belonging; as well as consideration of the local and national context different stakeholders are working in. Approaching questions relating to home and belonging through ethnography, interviews and participant-led methods such as photo-elicitation and solicited diaries allowed me to explore subjectivity and uncover forced migrants' agency within the process of making home and negotiating belonging.

While I offered a preliminary outline of the conceptual framework to explore home and belonging in the Introduction, in this chapter, I will build on these ideas. I provide an overview of the key literatures within which this research can be situated, outlining approaches upon which I have drawn and debates to which I seek to contribute, and further define the conceptual framework for exploring the concepts of 'belonging', 'home', and 'homemaking'.

This chapter will begin by reviewing literature at the intersection of migration, belonging and home, helping to connect this study to the wider context of migration while also reviewing literature on home within refugee studies. I will review debates on the concept of integration and highlight prevailing critiques, before moving on to discuss symbolic violence and symbolic boundaries which create sites of exclusion, against which individuals can push back through various homemaking practices. This is followed by a discussion of *where* and *when* home is for migrants, focusing on temporalities and reviewing positions on transnational practices and how they impact on belonging and the making of home, both from an immaterial and material perspective. The latter is further elaborated on through a review of research on migration and housing, this strengthening the rationale for focusing on home and housing, as well as creating a narrative on why a focus on material and im-material aspects is warranted.

The second part will review debates in the literature which distinguish between houses and homes in elaborating on key features of both. Building on this, I will then move on to discuss

materialist approaches to home, with a particular focus on spatial practices and belongings inside dwellings, and how they contribute to making houses into homes and can help to reveal agency. This section will end with a review of discussions about how immaterialities contribute to making home.

The last section of this chapter will further develop the context for this thesis and review contemporary scholarship in refugee studies on home, belonging and everyday life of forced migrants in societies of the Global North. This section will review positions on mobilities, distinguish between forced and voluntary movements, and how these impact on senses of home. This chapter will end by reviewing debates which characterise refugee homemaking as a top-down process, indicating the role of other (powerful) actors in refugee homemaking and how their actions contribute to maintaining a dehumanising system that forced migrants navigate.

2.2. Migrant settlement, home and belonging

This thesis seeks to take a person-centred approach, situating it within debates of belonging to analyse respondents' experiences of how they navigate and (re)build their lives in the UK rather than drawing on a linear understanding to capture a binary process of integration according to external indicators. It will focus on individual subjectivities to capture agency and the human experience of participants and 'the inner lives of subjects' (Biehl et al., 2007, p. 5) as respondents find housing, make their homes in Newcastle and develop feelings of belonging through interacting and engaging with places, people and social structures; all of which is underpinned by past and present experiences, future aspirations and transnational connections. The feeling of belonging and home that is developed through such processes can be conceptualised as expressions of attachments, socially and emotionally that individuals forge 'to each other and social groups' (Basoik and George, 2020, p. 100); but it also becomes visible in material claims for space made through spatial practices, the latter warranting a focus on materialities (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). In this thesis, I thus subscribe to Boccagni's (2016) perspective that home is 'materially anchored', as opposed to conceptualisations which understand home as totally unfixed to a location.

A prominent concept when discussing migrant settlement, adjustment and participation in European societies is integration. It is used both in political discourse and as an analytical concept

in academic studies, and having originated in policy, integration theory is a highly contested concept within academic literature (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). It is often described as 'chaotic', 'controversial and hotly debated', 'vague and slippery', and there is no agreement on what it means (Castles et al., 2002, p. 12-116; Robinson, 1998, p. 118). A repeated critique of integration is its ideologically driven assumption that migrants have to 'fit in' to the host society, including conforming with dominant norms and values, to be accepted (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Such thinking reproduces 'problematic imaginaries of societies' (Spencer and Charsley, 2021, p. 2) which depict a homogenous cohesive environment into which migrants have to integrate, and often disregard the role of migrants' transnational connections in settlement processes, or complexities of individual localised experiences (Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Karner and Parker, 2011; McAreavey and Krivokapic-Skoko, 2019; Schinkel, 2010). Other critiques of integration theory highlight that integration is often presented as a straightforward process of change for immigrants when they settle in a host society presuming that all members of a society will live according to one way of life. For Anthias (2013), this projects a narrow understanding of belonging where belonging and difference are regarded as mutually exclusive. As such, integration is seen as simplistic, one-dimensional, and a fixed state of 'all or nothing', taking a top-down approach instead of capturing nuanced experiences, individual subjectivities and migrant agency in the settlement process (Ryan, 2018; Wieviorka, 2014).[17]

For example, migrants can experience in- and exclusion which can occur simultaneously on different dimensions of their social worlds, such as on the labour market or in their neighbourhoods (McAreavey and Krivokapic-Skoko, 2019; Ryan, 2018). Ghorashi's (2021) study illuminates this further, as she argues that although Iranian refugee women in the Netherlands had integrated successfully into Dutch society, for example visible in being enrolled at university or being employed, they did not have stronger feelings of belonging. Drawing on Buijs et al. (2006, in Ghorashi, 2021) the author uses the term 'integration paradox' (p. 76) to highlight that

[17] Critiques of integration also extend to practices of housing associations and how they respond to integration agendas to create 'integrated' communities in diverse neighbourhoods. Finney et al. (2019) for example observe that housing associations place emphasis on individual behavioural change for some (ethnic minority) groups, such as learning English or finding employment, instead of addressing issues of race and racism. The authors criticise that macro-level visions and practices to create integrated communities do not align with how community was understood locally.

immigrants may be more sensitive to feelings of exclusion when they show eagerness to integrate into a society. Such exclusion can be visible, for example, in 'unfair treatment, [or] daily public insults' (Buijs et al., 2006 in Ghorashi, 2021, p. 77). It is these nuanced experiences, subjectivities and agency of forced migrants in the North East of England which I examine in this thesis, instead of analysing integration processes superficially.

In criticising integration theory, authors have developed alternative approaches to analyse the nuanced process of settlement and attachment for migrants, and their interactions and engagement with the host society. A Special Issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018a) for example is concerned with 'rethinking integration' and brings together various authors who offer critical perspectives on ways to think about migrant settlement, adaptation and participation. In this issue, Ryan (2018) for instance uses 'differentiated embedding' to emphasise the nuanced ways in which migrants engage with the people and places around them, and that they can develop different 'depths of attachment and belonging' (p. 237). Meanwhile, Grzymala-Kazlowska (2018) develops the idea of 'social anchoring' which she argues allows for close examination of the social connections migrants make in the host country, while considering emotional, psychological as well as tangible aspects.

Although scholars have developed alternative approaches in response to critiques of integration theory, integration is a stated 'goal' in policy. Meissner (2018) for example points out that 'the goal of integrating migrants has become a maxim and a putatively necessary characteristic of what constitutes a desirable outcome for […] a post-migration society […] without viable alternatives' (p. 8). Integration outcomes, or tangible and practical measures of integration, become standards by which successful or unsuccessful integration can be determined.[18] However, in conceptualising integration as an outcome, it is always out of reach, and integration initiatives are not sufficient to respond to diverse migrant backgrounds (Meissner and Heil, 2021, p. 743). At the same time, funds and plans linked to immigrant integration, for instance those from the European Commission, paint a picture of immigrants who are always in need of integration. Across generations, this might lead to frustrations, as labels such as second, third or

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[18] For example, Ager and Strang's (2008) framework in which they set out 'ten core domains reflecting normative understandings of integration' (p. 167) sets out how integration can be achieved, or what successful outcomes of integration are, and how integration policies and initiatives can be measured.

fourth generation immigrant persist (Gilroy, 2006; Meissner and Heil, 2021). In focusing on integration discourse, Gilroy (2006) points out that it is exclusionary and xenophobic in character and so individuals 'stay an immigrant forever' (p. 3); however, there are 'economic, racial and colonial inequalities' entangled in this which need consideration (Meissner and Heil, 2021, p. 746).

Phillimore (2019) acknowledges that migrants' ability to integrate is influenced by factors beyond their control. In the case of Iranian women in the Netherlands, for example, Ghorashi (2021) argues that feelings of exclusion and the 'integration paradox' are partially due to the ideological shifts from cultural pluralism to assimilation in Dutch society, as well as the high expectations that are imposed on immigrants. De Waal (2020) analyses integration policies of various European countries, as they increasingly set requirements for immigrants in order to gain citizenship and rights. She argues that although they do not have legal effects per se, some of these requirements lead to social marginalisation of certain groups of (non-Western) immigrants, represent and reinforce symbolic boundaries, and ultimately create social hierarchies between citizens (De Waal, 2020, p. 233-240; Flam and Beauzamy, 2008). For example, De Waal (2020) observes a trend in these requirements where certain groups of people are seen as 'unwanted', or citizenship is presented as a reward, which is 'contingent on certain competencies, characteristics and efforts' (p. 239). That certain groups of immigrants are presented as unwanted within national policies has also been argued by Mulvey (2010) in the UK context. He analysed immigration policies legislated for by the Labour Government in the UK elected in 1997, and found that while many migrants were othered, it was asylum seekers and refugees who were placed on the unwanted side of a 'scale of desirability' (p. 456), leading to hostility; and this ultimately negatively impacted on migrants' ability to integrate to conform with a moral imperative of adhering to 'British values'. While policy changes to curb immigration have been increasingly put on the political agenda recently (see Introduction), anti-immigration rhetoric and practice, particularly against forced migrants, has been part of immigration discourse for a long time in the UK.

Policy rhetoric and integration discourse, and the expectations that are imposed on migrants about their achievements and behaviour, may thus be at odds with migrants' feelings about whether they belong or not. Definitions of belonging account for this personal, intimate

dimension on the one hand; but also for the politics of belonging on the other (Yuval-Davis, 2006); or forms of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion (Antonsich, 2010), both of which this thesis makes reference to. Belonging is broadly defined as the attachments that individuals build to their surroundings and refers to immaterialities, such as social worlds, but also materialities (Miller, 2003; Wood and Waite, 2001). Belonging is actively negotiated and fostered, and instead of being separate, the material and immaterial dimensions of belonging are related, as individual and subjective feelings of place-belongingness do not happen in a vacuum but are conditioned by and embedded into power relations and the politics of belonging (Antonsich, 2010, p. 649).[19]

May (2011) points out that belonging consists of 'a political element of claim-making for space and for recognition' (p. 369); and so negotiations of belonging can be useful to detect individual agency occurring in strategies for belonging; for example as individuals are 'drawing upon a range of resources and identities' when belonging is constructed while being embedded into 'everyday contexts of relative powerlessness' (Clayton, 2012, p. 1689). This agency can occur as individuals develop attachments to social worlds, but also to their material worlds, for example the physical surroundings of a city, but also the intimate spaces of their dwellings. In case of the latter, Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2021) argue that, as individuals make homes, they make claims for space through spatial practices, this term most generally referring to 'the shaping of [a person's] […] built environment' (Beeckmans et al., 2020, p. 14).[20] In this context, different authors highlight the feeling of being at home within definitions of belonging, as the emotional component and experience of belonging (Boccagni, 2016; May, 2011).

May's (2011) and Miller's (2003) definitions add to conceptualisations of the intimate and emotional dimension of belonging. They define belonging as 'a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings' (May, 2011, p. 368) and a relation which is 'fitting, right or correct' (Miller, 2003, p. 22) which evokes good feelings about being in the world and where individuals find themselves in a state where they are at ease with themselves. This is then how belonging can be linked to identities; and the different dimensions on which belonging takes place indicate that strategies for belonging can be varied and multiple; but also bear different successes. For

[19] May (2011, p. 369) in this context points out that belonging is a relational concept that necessarily focuses on social interaction and intersubjectivity, and the emotional components of these'.
[20] I will provide an overview of literature discussing spatial practices in chapter five.

example, individuals can develop a feeling of belonging to a place because they can identify with prevailing norms and values; however, they might experience hostilities and discrimination in their neighbourhoods, resulting in feelings of non-belonging. Feelings of belonging are subjective and, in this context, Dromgold-Sermen (2022) found that for refugees, feelings of security are important in their definitions of belonging. I will address these issues particularly in chapter six, where I discuss respondents' experiences made in new environments as they venture outside of their houses and develop strategies for belonging from positive and negative experiences, taking into account transnational connections.

2.2.1. Forced migration studies and home

While the preceding paragraphs have situated this study in the context of migration studies more broadly, the focus of this thesis warrants engagement with debates on home within refugee studies more specifically. Dona et al. (2023) demonstrate how understandings of home within this field are closely linked with wider, geopolitical realities and processes, as well as asylum and immigration policy changes in host countries or solutions to 'refugee crises' by supranational organisations, such as the UNHCR. Different stakeholders are involved in the lives and making of homes for forced migrants, such as policy makers or humanitarians, and they all conceptualise home differently (Taylor, 2013). I found a multiplicity of understandings among different stakeholders in my own research, and I will discuss how this played out in the field in the first empirical chapter.

In the conceptualisation of international and domestic policy actors, it often appears that essentialised understandings of home prevail. 'Home' is understood as the nation state, and is entangled with questions of citizenship, or conceptualised as the place where individuals have the right to reside and live (Dona et al., 2023). This is visible, for example, in policies where repatriation is favoured as the solution to displacement. However, in academic literature, the notion of 'returning home' to the place where individuals had the right to live has been problematised. Moving away from an essentialist understanding of home as equal to the country of origin or resettlement, critical scholarship instead highlights multiple meanings and scales of home, such as house or community, including the 'wider space of settlement containing natural, cultural, social and economic aspects' (Capo, 2015, p. 19). Conceptualising home as a process of becoming emplaced, instead of being a naturalised attachment, this opened up a transnational

perspective within refugee studies to understanding home in the context of displacement and challenged the assumption that refugees have to choose between home and host countries, but instead can feel multiple belongings and feel connected to more than one country (Taylor, 2013).[21] Alongside this, researchers have increasingly focused on how forced migrants made homes in situations of displacement, thus illuminating their agency in this (Dudley, 2011). This has fostered an understanding of forced migrants' homes as spanning multiple locations, as they may be physically in one place in the present, but feel they belong somewhere else (Brun, 2001).

Writing in the context of increasingly restrictive asylum and immigration policies, Dona et al. (2023) note that the contemporary global refugee regime is characterised by 'widespread precarity, fewer opportunities for safe migration routes, informal integration arrangements, new immobilities and restricted forms of graduated citizenship' (p. 48). Understandings of home within refugee studies highlight its contingent, fragmented and precarious nature. Increasingly restrictive migration regimes put an 'end of permanency […] in sight' (Dona, 2015, p. 70); and this is entangled with questions of rights refugees can claim which recognise 'the human need to put down roots' (Ellermann and Gorokhovskaia, 2019, p. 46). In the UK, for example, the Home Office operates a 'safe return policy' where every refugee is subject to a process of scrutiny whether it might be safe for them to return to their home country once their initial leave to remain has passed (Home Office, 2017). I will return to this issue throughout the empirical chapters.

2.2.2. Boundaries and symbolic violence

Connected to debates of belonging and migrant settlement processes, this study is situated within literature discussing boundaries, asking where and by whom these are drawn, how they are upheld and shifted, what impact they have on migrants' feelings of belonging, and what individuals do to push back against exclusion. Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. (2021) for example point out how anti-immigration rhetoric and discourse of non-belonging in British mainstream political and social debate maintain boundaries between ethnic minorities and majorities based on a politics of belonging structured by hierarchies of deservingness. Similar to Ghorashi (2021), the authors conclude that such discourse can undermine feelings of belonging, and even 'ideal' migrants, or those who are rendered 'legitimate', and who may be integrated according to

[21] However, transnationalism for refugees can also be forced (Al-Ali et al., 2001). I will discuss this in chapter 6.

indicators, feel alienated and as though they do not belong. Belonging is therefore politicised and strangers or 'others' are produced as 'border figures' in order to construct the boundaries of an imagined community and determine who belongs to it and who does not (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011).

This links with the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) or 'the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon [subordinated] groups' which produce order and social restraint (Jenkins, 2002, p. 104). Through symbolic violence, socially constructed categories of domination and exclusion are imposed which reproduce, manifest and obscure power relations between different groups (Vassilopoulou et al., 2022). A social order is created through this, which is legitimised and naturalised through often-unconscious acts or routine practices that legitimate and naturalise the system of symbolism and meaning. This, for instance, can be in the form of exclusion of certain (ethnically minoritised) groups, or discrimination, and it rests upon consenting to dominant values and behaviours within a society. Power, domination and control are also relevant when analysing state-level welfare institutions and practices, or the provision of social benefits and services. Peillon (1998) for example argues that 'welfare agencies and welfare clients belong to a structure of domination, […] which is largely misrecognised […] as caring' (p. 221) but is organised in terms of control. Power relations for example operate in relationships between social workers and clients, especially when the former perpetuate oppression through symbolic violence instead of addressing inequalities and social injustices (Wiegmann, 2017). Soaita and McKee (2019) use the concept of symbolic violence to illustrate the power relations between private landlords and their tenants. The authors argue that symbolic violence occurs through landlords' practices of ignoring or rendering unworthy tenants' requests for maintenance of broken things inside dwellings. Through not at all responding, or responding late to those requests, landlords leave tenants to live with broken things. I will build on these ideas in chapter five.

Related to this are debates on the formation of group identities and community, which highlight how particular groups can be constructed as the 'Other' and ultimately be excluded. Separations between 'us' and 'them' can for example take place through processes of identifying features which are not present in the majority population, as Simmel (1950) emphasises in his writings on

the stranger.[22] While any newcomer to a place may feel like 'a body out of place' (Ahmed, 2000), the idea of the stranger goes further by drawing on the fact that strangers are *produced* – and so 'nobody *is* a stranger' but it is relational (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011, p. 355, emphasis in original). These practices of exclusion, othering and boundary creation are often visible within neighbourhoods, where encounters take place, despite being described as 'significant places' where belonging and attachment can be fostered (Huizinga and van Hoven, 2018; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001). Even where they do not experience physical violence, migrants can experience symbolic violence, for example through being asked questions such as 'Where do you come from?' in encounters with natives, or more pronounced through direct insults (Flam and Beauzamy, 2008, p. 236). These negative experiences of discrimination and racism indicate that the relationships and attachments migrants build in their settlement process can be fragile (Hirsch, 2019; Mayblin, Wake and Kazemi, 2020; Parker, 2017). Although symbolic violence hurts, migrants can push back against these sites of exclusion (Flam and Beauzamy, 2008). In this thesis, I explore this agency as it occurs in various forms of homemaking, for example through spatial practices, which I will discuss in chapter five.

Literature on diverse communities where individuals from various ethnic backgrounds live side by side often highlights that minority groups still experience prejudice and that racism persists (Amin, 2002; Askins and Pain, 2011). Majority groups can thus 'communicate their hostility' towards migrants in everyday interactions, for example through staring, or verbal or physical abuse (Flam and Beauzamy, 2008, p. 238). Schachter (2016) critically highlights that residential mixing does not determine relationships between 'natives' and their 'foreign' neighbours; neither does it facilitate belonging to the 'in-group'. Just as belonging can be felt and experienced on different dimensions, boundaries are equally drawn on various levels. In their review of *The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences*, Lamont and Molnar (2002) distinguish between symbolic and social boundaries. The authors define symbolic boundaries as 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space. […] Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership' (p. 168) Social boundaries on the other hand 'are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and

[22] I will elaborate on Simmel's (1950) concept of the stranger in chapter six.

nonmaterial) and social opportunities' (p. 168). Therefore, even where social boundaries may have been eliminated, symbolic boundaries continue to exist, resulting in exclusion of certain groups. Individuals can thus feel a 'plurality of belonging' to different places (Antonsich, 2010, p. 653) as they create 'emotional geographies' (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021); where they feel they belong to certain places, but not to others.

2.2.3. Where and when is home?

As discussed previously, home can be conceptualised as the emotional experience of belonging (Boccagni, 2016; May, 2011). This can be applied more broadly to individuals, including those who are not migrants; however, when home is analysed in the context of migration and mobility, questions about belonging and home, such as to where migrants feel they belong, when and where home is, or whether it can be found in just one location, arise. This is partly based on the argument that feelings of belonging can be multiple, and individuals can build emotional attachments to various places, which can be on the level of the house, neighbourhood, city, nation and beyond.

The relation between 'home' and 'migration' may be marked by friction, for home implies rootedness and migration implies mobility (Boccagni, 2016). However, this incompatibility, Boccagni (2016) argues, offers a unique opportunity to expand upon existing definitions of home, and researching the intersection between migration and home can help to reveal 'the cognitions, emotions and practices associated with [home], as a place and a set of biographic routines' (p. 17), as well as provide new perspectives on the 'ordinary spatial and temporal conditions of home' (p. 26). A place can be home regardless of whether one was born there or not and to perceive migrants' (re)made homes as 'less than fully rightful or authentic' would be wrong (Frost and Selwyn, 2018, p. 1). Following this line of argument, for Boccagni (2016) then the issue is not *if* migrants make a home, but rather what resources they use, and how successful their homemaking attempts are.

Boccagni (2016) argues further that migrants' 'map of home' needs to be reconstructed over space, that is different geographical locations, such as host countries, home countries and spaces in between; and time, that is experiences in the present, but also past memories and future aspirations. Time often appears in analyses of domestic life more generally, for example, when

highlighting the routines and everyday practices which take place inside domestic spaces, such as cooking, tidying up, sleeping, and eating, this advancing an understanding of time as cyclical (Lawrence, 1985). This contrasts with conceptualisations of home developed against the background of individual biographies, which are defined by a linear life course. While Boccagni (2016) argues that time and space are linked as 'the changing material bases of home, and the meanings attached to it' are connected to individual biographies (p. 66), migrants' experiences of home are unique in that home for many migrants includes a spatial and temporal shift. A sense of home can be found in where individuals live at a present time, but also in experiences and locations from the past and previous life (Boccagni, 2018; Kim and Smets, 2020).

Debates about home, time and temporality are relevant to frame this thesis as they are interwoven with different aspects this research addresses in various ways. For example, regarding the material culture inside a dwelling, objects which are displayed inside the home can tell stories about the past or project the future (Harvey and Know, 2013). In this sense, home in the context of migration can be displayed as an idealisation of the past or the future which is impossible to inhabit in the present (Ahmed, 1999; Boccagni, 2016). At the same time, the material structure of dwellings itself may undermine any sense of permanency of individuals to stay in a place for longer, for example when such dwellings are not designed with permanency in mind or are not associated with it (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020).

These positions on different spatialities and temporalities of home can be placed within the wider context of transnationalism. Theories of transnationalism are often used to analyse the impact of the various ties migrants have to different countries, as well as the exchanges that take place within these contexts. Transnationalism was first coined by Glick Schiller et al. (1992) as a new analytical concept to account for 'processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement' (p. 1). Central to the idea of transnationalism is that migrants can develop and maintain relations, including for example social, political, and financial, that transcend borders, either literally or symbolically. They are therefore connected to two or more societies at the same time which raises questions about settlement and adaptation patterns, such as how much influence connections across borders have on these processes.

With transnationalism, Glick Schiller et al. (1995) challenged understandings of migrants as leaving behind their home country, and instead contributed to thinking about migrants as 'transmigrants' who maintain firm roots to their home countries. Since its emergence, transnationalism has been criticised, for example for exaggerated claims that all migrants are transmigrants, or for lacking clarity why transnationalism as a new concept was introduced in the first place, and what new insights it can produce, or for overstating migrant agency (Piper and Withers, 2018; Portes, 2001). In addition, critics of transnationalism point out that it is limited to a small number of migrants and mirrors 'traditional lines of privilege' (O'Flaherty et al., 2007, p. 839).[23]

Despite these critiques, other studies recognise the value and significance of transnationalism in understanding various experiences of migrants in home countries. For example, Portes (2001) points out that transnational activities can provide migrants with material and moral resources which in turn can help cope with barriers and 'solidify [immigrants'] position in the receiving society' (p. 189; also Landolt, 2001). Other authors explore the ways in which transnational roots to left behind homes are maintained, focusing on materialities and practices inside migrants' dwellings. For example, Tolia-Kelly (2004) analyses how migrants foster memories of their homes through 'home possessions'; and Osirim (2008) examines how transnational activities, such as sending remittances, may help or limit the recreation of home away from one's country of origin; while Marschall (2017) explores how migrants' memories of their home influences their return visits to real or imagined homelands. Based on this, transnationalism is relevant to this thesis in two ways; first to explore how transnational memories and connections help individuals foster belonging and (re)create home in the UK, and second to examine the ways in which transnational connections are used by some respondents to claim belonging to the country of origin, and that it is still home. I will demonstrate these points through a focus on material aspects of home, such as 'old' belongings and possessions, as well as through focusing on immaterial aspects in relation to left behind places, for example relationship ties to family and friends still in countries of origin, identities, as well as claims of belonging to the home country, and related to that, questions of return. I will discuss this in chapters five and six.

[23] And some migrants do not want to or cannot physically travel back home (Long and Oxfeld, 2004), as it is the case for refugees. I will discuss this in chapter six.

Underlying discussions about the (re)creation of home in the context of migration and displacement are questions relating to the ability of individuals to transfer home meanings from one location to another when they migrate (Mallett, 2004). Boccagni (2016) uses the terms 'portability' of home to refer to those efforts which aim at maintaining practices to 'retain a meaningful sense of home' in 'new life environments' (p. 52); as well as 'reproducibility' which describes the attitudes and abilities of migrants to reproduce their home experience of the past, at least in part and while they undergo processes of adjustment over time (p. 52).

The question of portability relates to both, material and immaterial aspects of home. Although not writing in the context of international migration, Miller's (2001) argument about the role of objects in the reconfiguration of selves is relevant here. The author claims that when individuals move to a new dwelling, they can choose to leave things behind in an effort to reconfigure themselves. In turn, individuals can decide to take things with them which they deem to be representative of identities and, in the context of home, which create homeliness for them. The portability of 'stuff' often depends on resources for all kinds of mobile individuals, including those who move between dwellings inside the same city, for example (Boccagni, 2016). However, many migrants face unequal challenges in bringing certain objects and possessions with them; and many may have had no choice but to leave most of their (non-essential) belongings behind, as is the case for many refugees, for example.[24] This is significant, taking into account the mutually constitutive relationship between people and things, as well as the role of objects and belongings in the creation of home and homeliness (Soaita and McKee, 2019).

Based on the premise that in the 21st century goods may move easier and faster due to increasing interconnectedness, some argue that homes may become less dependent on time and space (Kim and Smets, 2020). Familiar food products can be bought outside of one's home country, or familiar content can be watched online, anywhere and anytime. However, there are nevertheless limits to how much familiarity can be created through this, and to what extent a home from a different time and space can be recreated. Objects themselves are important, since they can be reminders of (old) selves, or people and places, as well as expressions of identities (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021; Wheeler and Bechler, 2021); and new objects do not carry those

[24] Siddiqi and Chitchian (2022) in this context describe refugees as the 'pure embodiment of the contemporary subject of […] dispossession' (p. 46). I will pick this up in chapter five.

stories. Differences between the home 'here' and 'there' can therefore be visible in the different material cultures in homes here and there (Rosales, 2010, p. 521). As individuals find themselves in 'new life environments' (Boccagni, 2016, p. 52), attempts to recreate home according to old schemes, and to preserve culture and nostalgia, may in reality be just the creation of a 'diminished version of the original' in an attempt to recreate place (Habash, 2021, p. 1384). Such cost is not visible per se, but rather individuals negotiate 'inner struggles of displacement and emplacement' (p. 1384). I will address these issues in chapters five and six.

Related to attempts to transfer home from one location to the other through bringing objects and possessions and maintaining transnational connections, are questions relating to whether individuals still regard their country of origin their home, and whether they have the desire to return. Such debates often inquire whether transnational connections and prospects of return may help foster belonging to the 'homeland', and whether individuals identify or become estranged with their homelands (Long and Oxfeld, 2004).[25] In this context, Van Hear (2006) for example raises questions about transnationalism and loyalty to host societies, as well as commitment to place. Al-Ali et al. (2001) in contrast focus on the home countries of transnational migrants to which connections are maintained and argue that transnationalism may well be forced as individuals feel a sense of responsibility towards their families who they have left behind. The authors speak of 'capabilities for transnationalism' which they argue are necessary to participate in transnational activities, and these include identification with the home country. This then raises questions about identifications with home and host countries, such as whether migrants feel at home in a host country, which I will address in chapter six.

2.2.4. Migration and housing

Boccagni (2016) describes migrant housing as 'a tangible indicator of their differential position in the social hierarchies "here" and "there"' (p. 55). Gans (2009) in this context points out that, despite the aspiration of many migrants that their migration will result in upwards social mobility, many refugees often experience downwards social mobility. This can be visible, for example, in the physicality and type of housing individuals occupy. Research in this context shows that

[25] This often links with positions in integration theories which suggest that 'the longer migrants stay, the more they become integrated in receiving societies, the more difficult it becomes to return in practice, and the more they are inclined to settle' (De Haas and Fokkema, 2011, p. 756). The idea of an automatic link between integration, transnational ties and not wanting to return, however, is contested.

housing processes can reflect patterns of social exclusion, visible in and through space, as spaces are often divided according to social groups differentiated by race, ethnicity or social class; or practices of (private) landlords of increasing rents, changing leases without explanation, or making tenants pay for repairs (Goyer, 2016; Somerville, 1998).

A significant body of research in various disciplines analyses the housing inequalities that exist for Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals, including migrants and refugees. For example, authors argue that urban 'renewal' and redevelopment affect and often displace communities, in particular those from ethnic minority backgrounds (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Lees and Hubbard, 2021). Other research focuses on migrants' housing journeys after they have arrived in a host country, as well as housing conditions to draw attention to the housing disadvantages many migrants face, and the way that structural constraints impact on housing outcomes (Lukes et al., 2019; Ratcliffe, 2002). While Lukes et al. (2019) give an overview of how in the UK, various laws and regulations have limited migrants' access to housing since the 1940s, McKee et al. (2020) focus on the performance of 'everyday bordering' by landlords through right to rent checks, who in doing so discriminate against individuals who cannot prove their immigration status and may force undocumented migrants into precarious housing situations. Similar arguments are made by El-Kayed and Hamann (2018) who outline how regulations about access to housing have created internal border regimes which make it difficult for migrants, including refugees, to access housing. In line with this, Robinson et al. (2007), take a 'constrained choice perspective' to analyse housing journeys of minority ethnic populations and highlight that there are limits regarding the housing choices individuals have compared to the majority ethnic population.

Other research highlights the types and quality of housing individuals live in, to further draw attention to inequalities on the housing market for minority ethnic populations and migrants, including refugees; as well as the consequences of this often-unsafe housing for individuals. For example, a recent review by the Women and Equalities Committee (2020) found that overcrowding, as well as poor and unsanitary housing conditions such as damp, disproportionately affected individuals from BAME backgrounds. This research aligns with findings from Doyle (2018) and Philipps (2006) who both highlight that migrants often live in overcrowded conditions. The case of Awaab Ishak, a two-year-old boy of refugee parents from

Sudan who tragically died after being exposed to mould in their Rochdale flat rented from a housing association, further highlights the very real consequences of unsafe housing for many (Weaver, 2022). Williams (2022) argues researching this case that a lack of affordable, safe housing and supply of new housing has created a ‘housing underclass’ who are being treated as inferior and as a nuisance, undeserving of safe housing. This indicates the material consequences of housing inequalities but also the immaterial effects of being inserted into a system which treats some individuals as less or undeserving of equal treatment. In this context, it has been argued about social housing estates that there is stigma attached to them, and by extension the communities living there (Garner, 2011; Kearns et al., 2000). This is important, given that many forced migrants who participated in this study lived in social housing.

Based on Rapoport’s (1985) argument that choice and home are inextricably linked, questions and uncertainty arise about what kind of homes migrants are (allowed to) create given the structures they are embedded into, as well as the limited resources they often have. This directly links with agency, which is critically highlighted by Hoggett (2001) who argues that individuals may be ‘objects of circumstance’ rather than having agency to shape their own lives (p. 45). Experiences of these issues for respondents in this study will be discussed in chapter four.

2.3. Houses and homes

This chapter so far has touched upon key positions in the literature discussing issues this study seeks to address, including the intersection of migration, belonging, settlement and home; but also housing as a material reality for many migrants as they make homes in a new environment, and expressions of inequalities they face in the host society. In the literature, a distinction is often made between ‘house’ on the one hand, and ‘home’ on the other. Recognising key features of both ‘house’ and ‘home’ and the relationship between the two helps to understand how homes can be made; this is approached in this thesis from a materialist perspective while also taking account of immaterialities associated with feelings of belonging and home. This is based on the premise that a feeling of belonging and home can be anchored in materialities, and expressions of attachment can become visible through spatial practices and claim-making for space.

The expression ‘every Englishmen’s house is his castle’ (Rykwert, 1991, p. 53) is perhaps the most popular phrase which over time has come to be appropriated as a popular definition of home

based on English case law of the early 17th century. This original declaration that 'the house of everyman is to him as his castle and fortresse, as well as his defense against injury and violence, as for his repose' (Rykwert, 1991, p. 53) has led to a conceptualisation of home popular in public discourse of modern Western societies as a haven, or a place of safety.

While in the 16th century, 'home' referred to country or land, the 'domestication' of the word led to a switch of its meaning to refer to the house instead (Moore, 2000). This was reflected in the focus of research, for example, in anthropological approaches to home, which focused on Levi-Strauss' 'house societies' (Joyce and Gillespie, 2000), examining the role of houses and the social processes within it in sustaining and ordering society; or houses and the domestic sphere as sites where embodied habits were learned, and values internalised (Bourdieu, 1986). These early anthropological studies of home focused on its symbolism and interpreted meanings of home to emphasise 'issues of territoriality, psychological needs and attachments, and phenomenological connectedness' (Somerville, 1997, p. 228). Sociological approaches however differed in their interpretation of the meaning of home, and instead highlighted that these meanings are socially variable (Somerville, 1997). In establishing that the meaning of home can be influenced by class, gender, or tenure, this research challenged meanings of home as merely symbolic; instead acknowledging these differences and accounting for the 'material and social realities of domestic structures', as well as the 'construction of experience and action' (Somerville, 1997, p. 237).

That meanings of home vary depending on social attributes is critically discussed within feminist literature on home which points out that it can be associated with negative feelings and emotions such as fear, danger or depression (Mallett, 2004; Young, 2005); as well as material dangers such as poor housing conditions. This has especially come to light while this research was carried out. Fieldwork for this study was conducted while the world was grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic,[26] and many governments across the world introduced stay at home orders, thus confining many lives to the domestic sphere. This helped construct an image of the home as a sanctuary from outside dangers, such as a deadly virus (Durnova, 2020). At the same time, however, the restrictions imposed and confinement of lives to the 'home' emphasised and deepened existing inequalities, for example relating to housing and health. Damaging images of

[26] I will discuss methodological approaches and the impact of restrictions in chapter three.

homes as havens, sanctuaries, or 'defences against injury and violence' (Rykwert, 1991, p. 53), the pandemic instead drew attention to poor housing conditions of many communities, as well as to the reality of resurgent domestic violence for many.

Thus, a domestic space can be experienced negatively and may not be a haven or sanctuary, nor ascribe to experiences of strong positive emotions and attachments. In other words, it may not be described as home by those who live in it. Gurney's (1996) ideas regarding 'ownership ideologies' are helpful in this context to better understand how negative meanings of home are formed and attached. Acknowledging that meanings of home can vary by gender, he found that some women he interviewed displayed what he called instrumental attitudes towards home. These were manifest, for example, in the ways that they spoke about their home primarily as 'a roof over their heads', thus emphasising the physicality of the dwelling, and not recognising the difference between house and home (Clapham, 2005).[27] This analysis of the differentiated meanings of home, or how home can be experienced differently and for example evoke fear and danger, reinforces a distinction that is made in the literature between home and house. This is underpinned by theoretical approaches to home which move away from positive, idealised notions of home grounded in phenomenological thinking, emphasising states of being at home or rootedness, to acknowledging that home can be experienced as, for example, threatening and alienating (Gibas, 2019). Blunt and Dowling (2006) in their *Critical Geography of Home* in this context highlight three aspects of home which problematise idealised notions of home: 'home as simultaneously material and imaginative; the nexus between home, power and identity; and home as multi-scalar' (p. 22). This highlights the role of social and material practices in the making and enacting of home, which extend beyond the 'actual home space' (Gibas, 2019, p. 604).

In addition to Gurney (1996), other scholars developed definitions of 'house' and 'home' to emphasise that they are different. Clapham (2005) for example describes houses as a familiar physical construction, or 'units of accommodation' (p. 117) characterised by physical attributes and standards; whereas for Samanani and Lenhard (2019), houses are social institutions and settings for certain social practices, thus relating to early anthropological approaches to home. Definitions of homes on the other hand rather draw on symbolic features, and have been

[27] These issues will be addressed in chapter four where I discuss different understandings of 'home' from both perspectives of refugee respondents as well as support workers who help refugees.

described, for example, as a mental construction (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 3; Duyvendak, 2011, p. 31; Eduardo and Murcia, 2019, p. 145). For Duyvendak (2011), home is an emotion and he points out that individuals can feel sad as much as they can feel at home. Some authors relate home to belonging, for example Samanani and Lenhard (2019) who describe home as a 'subjective sense of being rooted within the world'; while May (2011, p. 369) argues that feeling at home is the emotional component of belonging. Home is multi-layered, and can occur at different scales – house, community and nation (Duyvendak, 2011) – and so both, private and public spaces, can be called home (Anderson et al., 2016). Home is not something that lies objectively *there*, but home is 'an emergence of relationships across time-spaces' (Nieto et al., 2020, p. 168). Social interactions, relationships and different kinds of social networks play a role in constructing home. As an analytical category, home describes the processes by which individuals make a place their own, and so it can uncover 'the ways in which individuals and groups struggle to nourish a sense of security, familiarity and control within their dwelling and living circumstances' (Boccagni, 2023, p. 3). I will show in this thesis how the process of homemaking is ambiguous, and ridden with conflicts.

In addition to conceptualising house and home separately, authors also attempt to establish the relationship between the two. In doing so, they highlight that home is more than physicality. Easthope (2004) for example emphasises that 'while homes may be located, it is not the location that is 'home'' (p. 135). This is also in part echoed by Samanani and Lenhard (2019) who further argue that 'house' and 'home' exist simultaneously; however, the authors also point out that they do not always overlap, as 'home' may be imagined, or found in practices rather than in the materiality of a house. Yet, the latter notion is often criticised, for example by Anderson et al. (2016) who approach home with a degree of 'material mindfulness' (p. 3) and argue that a house, or space, is necessary, yet insufficient for home. The distinction between 'house' and 'home' has therefore invited materialist approaches to home. Through this lens, the transformation from the former to the latter is often highlighted through analysing material cultures of homes, or how inhabitants change materialities and engage in spatial practices. This literature will be reviewed in more detail in chapter five.

2.3.1. How houses become homes: the role of materialities

To understand the relationship between house and home, and how one can become the other, the concepts of space and place are useful. Mary Douglas for example describes home as 'A kind of *space'* (1991, emphasis added), while Hazel Easthope writes about 'A *place* called home' (2004, emphasis added). In distinguishing between space and place, it is often emphasised that space is material, and place is a social construct. However, a long way from being subjective, 'the creation of places is influenced by physical, economic and social realities' (Easthope, 2004, p. 128-129) which determine opportunities or access to resources, for example, to make the space of a house into a place called home. In creating *place* individuals try to create a relationship between them and their environment, or *space*, and develop attachment to it. Boccagni's (2016) conceptualisation of the home experience as encompassing a special, interactive relationship between people and place echoes these understandings and further manifests them within the study of home.

The relationship between individuals and their environment may not be positive, but negative. Dovey (1985) uses this understanding in order to develop a conceptualisation of homelessness as a negative relationship between people and places, instead of a housing problem. Therefore, feelings of homelessness may arise despite living in a space which resembles a home based on its physical attributes and standards. In this context, Clapham (2005) critically highlights that perceptions of the space from those who are living in it overrule any 'objective characteristics of the building' (p. 122). This is important, as the relationship that individuals (do not) build with their environment is invisible to outsiders, indicating that home, conceptualised as a special relationship with the environment, is subjective. Therefore, a house does not automatically become a home (Basnet, 2016; Clapham, 2005); and likewise, a home that was left behind does not remain the same home over time. This was indicated in research with refugees returning to their country of origin and former homes, after some time in exile, who had to negotiate their home anew (Capo, 2015; Hart et al., 2018).

Being mindful of the distinction between house and home, the relationship between the two concepts and how one can become the other, this thesis focuses on respondents' spatial practices, and how, through shaping their built environments, they make the place that is home, and infuse it with meanings. It therefore displays 'material mindfulness' (Anderson et al., 2016,

p. 3) when thinking about home in that it attempts to expose the links between constructions of home as place and materiality, including the structure of participants' dwellings and what is inside of them. For example, both the objects and belongings inside the house and its physical structure can be seen as expressions of the dwellers' cultural capital. Related to this, Kearns et al. (2000) identify status as one component of what home means. As such, dwellings can be expressions of identities, and they can also convey messages about the dweller to the outside which are then evaluated against 'grammars of living' which stipulate how houses are to be consumed in socially desirable ways (Flint, 2003; Kearns et al., 2000). A house as a consumer good can therefore be a statement and mirror at the same time (Dovey, 1985; Goyer, 2016). For many migrants, including forced migrants, the material structures of dwellings can evoke experiences of loss or displacement, as differences between houses in the UK and home countries are noted (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020; Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2004). For many respondents in this study, for example, their houses and flats in Newcastle were of lower quality than in their home countries, reinforcing the realisation what they had lost and to what they could not return.

In this thesis, I acknowledge the role of immaterialities of home, such as relations in- and outside of the dwelling, routines and practices, as well as conceptualisations of home which highlight its symbolism and see it as fluid, a process, or a 'specific and meaningful setting' (Boccagni, 2016, p. 22; Mallett, 2004). However, the thesis also aims to examine the ways in which respondents establish a relationship to place and materiality and explores how home can be fixed and located explicitly in physical space. Not acknowledging that 'place and materiality matter' would ignore spatial practices as individual articulations of the need to retain and materialise a sense of home; or ignore such practices in the context of individual struggles for home (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021; Boccagni, 2022). At the same time, a de-territorialised approach would not do enough justice to the search and creation of home for respondents in this study which entailed the mobilisation of (limited) resources to make claims for the spaces of their dwellings, as well as hard labour visible in spatial practices to make spaces liveable. This focus on spatial practices, Beeckmans et al. (2022) argue, has remained underexplored in studies on homemaking and displacement, despite the acknowledgement that 'place and materiality still matter', especially when home is thought of as a 'material or symbolic condition [individuals] struggle to reach' in a context shaped by hostility and unequal access to resources (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo,

2021, p. 12). As such, a focus on materiality is valuable to unpack what this materiality reveals about agency and choices, of which Rapoport (1985) argues that they are essential to home environments, and which can therefore be manifested in the built environment.

Focusing on the inside of individuals' dwellings, some research uses materialist approaches to analyse how individuals make houses into homes through changing their materiality to create an 'enchanted space' and make 'anonymous houses' into homes through placing objects and belongings in it (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 13; Rosales, 2010). In this context, Daniel Miller (2009) has written extensively on *Stuff* as he discusses the centrality of material culture in individuals' everyday lives and acknowledges the ways in which human beings relate to materialities, such as their possessions and belongings. Boccagni (2016) in his book *Migration and the Search for Home* is interested in which resources, material and immaterial, migrants use to make a home, and how successful they are in this. In addition to Miller, other authors have theorised the relational dynamics of materials and objects to other entities. Latour (1987) for example, developing Actor-Network-Theory, refers to the 'agency of things' to point out how objects, or non-human actors, actively engage in social networks.[28] While Soaita and McKee (2019) in this context argue that 'things' create homeliness, they also speak of the 'agency of broken things' in their analysis of the relationship between tenants and the broken or outdated furniture inside their privately rented properties. Tenants can thus be reminded of their landlord's power over them, as they refuse to exchange old and broken furniture. At the same time, artefacts can demonstrate their owners 'place in the social hierarchy' similar to the house being an expression of the dwellers' cultural capital (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 23). As such, 'stuff' can also be representative of a different lifestyle individuals had in their home countries, when objects were bought for example in charity shops. This is how individual imaginations of ideal homes can be grounded in materiality, indicating the importance of materiality and symbols for home, in addition to immaterialities.

This approach points towards studies of consumption and material cultures inside houses. Various studies have been conducted on material cultures inside individuals' dwellings to trace, for example, the stories and narratives individuals' produce about different belongings. Not only are objects 'socially entangled or materially and socially constituted' but they also are the

[28] Actor Network Theory is a controversial approach to understanding the relations between humans and non-humans (for example, Cresswell et al., 2010).

‘crystallisations of histories, projections into the future, powerful forbearers of that which is to come and painful reminders of that which has been’ (Harvey and Know, 2013, p. 10). Seen like this, furniture or other decorations in the house can tell a story and carry meanings when they were bought in a particular place or were given as a gift from someone. Individuals can thus be surrounded by their lives, and so possessions and belongings can be important not only for a sense of home and belonging but also to develop a sense of biography (Miller, 2009). A key argument in such studies is that individuals can be defined and produced through things inside the house. By engaging in spatial practices, such as improving and beautifying a space, or placing objects, interiors become the ‘deeply individual and individualised site of the private individual’ (Beeckmanns et al., 2020; Boccagni 2020; Park, 2016, p. 69).[29] While this can be seen as examples for intensified consumer identities (Anderson et al., 2016), as well as links between identity and place (Easthope, 2004), it also raises questions about who can take part in consumption, and who is excluded from it; or who is included in this construction of homes, where interiors become deeply individualised and individual sites, and who is not. This is relevant particularly when, for example, individuals do not have a choice about what furniture or decorations to pick, or generally lack the resources to express themselves in their home space. Randell (2017) in this context points out the relationship between structure and agency, where agency can arise from structure, or the ‘systems of rules and resources’ into which individuals are embedded, for example when structures are enabling; and likewise, structures can be reinforced or reformed through agency. As such, it is important not to romanticise spatial practices, especially when individuals operate in circumstances characterised by precarity (Beeckmans et al., 2022). It is not only individual assets and human capital that influence the process of homemaking, but also the ‘external opportunity structures’ (Boccagni and Kusenbach, 2020) which play a significant role in making homes.

In addition to the individualised spaces which are created from consumption and practices, it is the agency occurring within these practices which is likewise important. Douglas (1991) links the concept of control with home, as she argues that ‘home starts by bringing some space under

[29] While this points towards the link between place and identity, such identification can also take place against the people in a place. Easthope (2004) discusses this in drawing on Edward Said (1979) and further develops these ideas to highlight debates within academia which explore boundaries, ‘the other’, and other exclusionary practices on different scales.

control' (p. 289). Parsell (2012) builds on this and argues that 'control over space' means that individuals are able to take control of their lives. This thesis seeks to uncover and understand the various ways in which individuals operate within the limiting structures they find themselves in to bring some space under control and attempt to realise their version of their ideal home (or a variety thereof) after having lost or left their past homes and create their individualised site. It therefore seeks to contribute to debates in refugee studies which advance an image of individuals as actors as they engage in spatial practices and homemaking, however mundane such practices may appear.

2.3.2. How houses become homes: the role of im-materialities

Although 'home' entails a material site humans inhabit, a sole focus on materialities is insufficient to describe the condition or experience of home or homemaking processes (Anderson et al., 2016; Boccagni, 2016). While a materialist approach is valuable to reveal agency and shed light on the extent of individual choices, research on how home is constructed also emphasises the role of immaterialities in this; referring to experiences and behaviours inside houses, as well as outside of them. This underlines an understanding of home as a combination of physical (material) and emotional (immaterial) experiences.

Therefore, security, ideas, imaginaries, familiarity, privacy, identity, interactions and emotions likewise constitute home, as do routine, habits and discourse (Boccagni, 2016; Duyvendak, 2011; Eduardo and Murcia, 2019; Gazso, 2016; Park, 2016; Somerville, 1997; Taylor, 2013). The interaction between materialities and immaterialities of home is complex, and they are intertwined; for materialities play a role in some of these aspects that constitute home, for example when stuff can express identities, or represent past experiences (see above). Similarly, discussions in the literature often focus on embodied experiences inside the home, such as eating habits, growing plants, or wearing certain clothes which can be used to express identities, involving materialities (Taylor, 2013; Tharmalingam, 2016). In her study with Tamil and Somali refugees in Norway, for example, Tharmalingam (2016) found that some individuals adopt cultural practices from their home countries not only because they are part of their traditions but also because they provide happiness, comfort, reduce nostalgia, contribute to a sense of belonging and function as identity markers. While identities do not become materialised in objects or possessions, individuals can nevertheless express their identities through

immaterialities, for example through speaking particular languages, or eating particular foods. However, these might remain invisible to outsiders, and likewise, individuals are not surrounded by their lives through objects and possessions.

Related to this is the role of a stable home for 'ontological security', and vice versa the role that home plays in providing a space where individuals can attain a sense of such security (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998; Giddens, 1991). This can be seen in the context of (re)creating familiar materialities in the spatial environment, as well as of immaterialities, such as familiar routines, habits, and social relations. In this sense, elements of the home resembling Goffman's (1990) 'backstage' indicate that home can provide the freedom to perform without constraints or expectations from others. However, Somerville's (1997) reflections on three key dimensions of home (identity, privacy and familiarity) show that home is not just an individualised experience, isolated from social context, but that it is embedded into social relations, such as power or gender relations. Spatially, these extend beyond the intimate dwelling spaces of the house; and this aligns with arguments outlined earlier, that home is multi-layered, and can occur on the level of the house, community, and nation (Duyvendak, 2011). While the privacy of the house provides a space where identities can be enacted through, for example, decorations or habits, it is important not to neglect the social context in which individuals act outside of their intimate dwelling spaces, and how this can impact on a sense of home and belonging.

While the preceding sections addressed how homes are made, some literature also discusses how homes can be unmade.[30] Although home unmaking is not the primary focus of this study, but rather how respondents make their homes, it is nevertheless relevant to many respondents' experiences of homemaking in Newcastle. In introducing the concept of 'domicide', Porteuos and Smith (2001) contributed to understanding the impact that the destruction of homes through extraordinary events by external actors has on individuals. However, Nowicki (2014) criticises their concept, for instance for not only lacking consideration of ways in which individuals and communities resist the destructions of their homes; but also for using 'overly simplistic visions of home' which build on essentialist conceptions of home, without considering that home can be experienced negatively (pp. 786-788). As a consequence, the focus of domicide is reduced to the

[30] This spans a variety of scales, from mass displacement through war, to displacement through national housing policies (Nowicki, 2014).

macro-political level, highlighting 'only large-scale violences of home displacement' (p. 788) while ignoring the everyday and mundane.

In addressing these issues, Baxter and Brickell (2014) use the concept of home unmaking to describe a 'precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged or even destroyed' (p. 134). Compared to the rather apocalyptic, dramatic concept of domicide, home unmaking instead captures mundane practices through which homes can be unmade in banal and incremental ways, for example through poor relations with neighbours arising from disputes over annoying behaviour or fences and walls which divide properties (Cheshire et al., 2021).[31] In these cases, aspects such as privacy, autonomy and status which are associated with home, 'are inadvertently impinged upon by others', and so conflicting understandings and ideas of home between neighbours can lead to a situation where one's homemaking practices unmake the home of another (Cheshire et al., 2021, p. 148). Beyond this, acts of vandalism or intimidation which can arise from disputes may then further contribute to home unmaking. The concept of home unmaking thus indicates the fragility of home but also addresses the fact that homes are 'made, unmade and remade across the lifecourse', influenced for example by individual financial factors, but also socio-political ones (Nowicki, 2014, p. 788). I will address how home unmaking unfolded for participants in chapter six, in particular with regards to homes they had to leave behind.

2.4. Refugees, homes and homemaking

To speak of 'home' in the context of forced migration reinforces the tension that exists between home and migration more generally (Boccagni, 2016; see above). While many migrants may voluntarily move away from their home, refugees are most often forced to move away, and so in a crude way, refugees are defined by the loss of their home (Beeckmans et al., 2022; Taylor, 2013, p. 130). Similarly, in contrast to understandings of home as located, refugees are often portrayed as 'exceptionally mobile' (Jacobsen and Kühne, 2021), revealing another tension underlying the study of refugees and home. Regardless of this, Turton (2005, p. 278) emphasises that

[31] Nevertheless, for many respondents in this study, their homes were violently destroyed through extraordinary events, such as war.

> to say nothing—or little—about the work of producing home […], whether in a refugee camp, resettlement site, detention centre, city slum or middle class suburb, is to treat the displaced as fundamentally flawed human beings, as lacking what it takes to be social agents and historical subjects. It is to see them […] as a category of 'passive victims' who exist to be assisted, managed, regimented and controlled—and for their own good. Above all, it makes it more difficult for us to identify with the suffering stranger, to see him or her as an ordinary person, a person like us, and therefore as a potential neighbour in our neighbourhood.

Despite the tension that generally exists between migration and home, an exploration of home in the context of displacement is called for, in order to dismantle representations of refugees as flawed and unable to act independently, and instead portray refugees as agents who (re)make their homes after displacement and try to 'reclaim "normal" life' (Sanyal, 2014, p. 570). In other words, to analyse homemaking among refugee communities is to humanise them, to reveal capabilities for agency which can occur, among others, through 'ordinary activities' (Sanyal, 2014, p. 570) which are part of homemaking processes for individuals regardless of their (migration) background; and in the context of this study, this is after experiences of being dehumanised by an asylum system which criminalises certain groups of people and portrays them as unworthy of equal treatment (De Angelis, 2020; Jannesari et al., 2022).

2.4.1. Forced mobility and senses of home

Despite representations of refugees as lacking agency, there is a focus in the literature on forced migration on refugees and the journeys they undertake, finding agency in refugees' mobility. In the European context, studies often describe the arduous journeys of refugees, for example as they move to and through Europe (Dimitriadi, 2017; Gillespie et al., 2018). Using theories on borders, this literature highlights how on the one hand forced migrants experience such journeys, and how they navigate, negotiate and mobilise different resources to cross various kinds of borders (Collyer, 2007; Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018); and how, on the other hand, authorities try to control and limit 'irregular' border crossings to ensure 'orderly and limited arrivals' (Fassin, 2011; Scalettaris, 2009, p. 59) and so reinforce the impression that governments are denying the right to claim asylum to certain (mostly non-European) refugees (Mayblin, 2017). These positions also highlight that movements are not linear or non-directional, but often circular, involving

movements backwards and forwards, to and from the same places (Brigden and Mainwaring, 2016; Fontanari, 2017). This aligns with analyses of time being experienced as circular, rather than linear by many forced migrants who are 'stuck'.

Mobilities and movement may not always be positive and associated with 'freedom, liberation and resistance' (Gill et al., 2011, p. 303). While mobility, similar to spatial practices inside a dwelling, can be used to reveal agency, it can also be seen as a 'last-ditch attempt to exercise agency', especially when lacking a destination, and uncertainty about the future stand in contrast with a longing for stability and stillness (Gill et al., 2011). Gomes et al. (2017, p. 7 in Gomes, 2019, p. 228) use the term transience to refer to 'mobile individuals and […] groups who are either forced by circumstance or voluntarily undertake circular and/or temporary migration for a variety of reasons'. These circumstances can include, for example, urban renewal which force often already marginalised communities out of their living spaces (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). This indicates that individuals can be affected by multiple displacements; not only from their home country but also in host countries from their living spaces when such spaces are subject to gentrification.

Although transience refers to both, forced and voluntary migration, a distinction nevertheless needs to be made between migrants who move voluntarily, and so live in transience voluntarily, as well as forced migrants, who have not chosen to move or be transient, as there is a difference in how individuals negotiate transiency. For example, while the former may incorporate transiency into their identity (Gomes, 2019), for the latter transiency can have an impact on their ability to forge a sense home as it is connected to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity in their longing for stability and finding a place to call home (Fox O'Mahoney and Sweeny, 2010).

For forced migrants in the UK, transiency is characterised in a variety of ways, for example, by no-choice asylum dispersal policies in place, or secondary or onwards migration after they have received refugee status. For asylum seekers in the UK, it is almost guaranteed that they are moved at least once;[32] from their initial accommodation to dispersal accommodation, and this is often within a short period of time from first arriving. During fieldwork for this research, this was exacerbated in a variety of ways; first because of a change in asylum accommodation provider

[32] This is after their arrival in the UK and not considering any journeys undertaken before they arrived in the UK.

from Jomast to Mears in late 2019.[33] This meant that asylum seekers in government provided accommodation had to relocate from accommodation provided by Jomast into accommodation provided by Mears (Brookes, 2019). Second, restrictions on moving asylum seekers into dispersed accommodation because of the coronavirus pandemic meant that individuals were placed in hotels which were used as 'contingency accommodation' (Neal, 2022) before then eventually being moved again into dispersal accommodation. Although the Home Office planned to stop using hotels as contingency accommodation in May 2021 (Neal, 2022), they were still being used at the time of writing in July 2023. In fact, their usage has increased, which exemplifies the mismatch between political rhetoric and reality. In addition, many individuals continue to move around as refugees, either between accommodation, or between cities.

The notion of secondary movements or onward migration implies that refugees move independently from countries of first asylum to reach their destination (Lindley and van Hear, 2007). While a lot of research focuses on movements across national borders, much has likewise been written about onwards movements and migrations within countries and between cities (Stewart and Shaffer, 2015; Sumption, 2009). Few refugees have a choice in any country about where they will live in the first (or second, third etc.) instance while asylum claims are being processed, and while many have idea(l)s about where they can (re)make their homes, such idea(l)s can likewise be developed over time, leading to secondary movements away from where they were first living, often involving circular movements (Brigden and Mainwaring, 2016; De Hoon et al., 2021; Fontanari, 2017). In their journeys and movements, individuals may pass many (and/or the same) places before they finally arrive. While this relates to discussions on belonging reviewed earlier, debates in the literature also highlight the role of 'in-between' places individuals pass and the meaning such places may have for individuals. Crawley and Jones (2021) for example argue that place should not be considered merely a backdrop to physical journeys, but that it is important to understand the meanings of places to individuals, including the relationships with them. This is important, as many asylum seekers have been moved often, and so the different places they pass can be representative, for example, of their powerlessness, of their identities,

[33] Jomast, a subcontractor for G4S, was contracted by the Home Office to manage asylum accommodation in the North East until 2019. The company have received media attention after houses were asylum seekers were housed were identifiable by their red door (Mason et al., 2016).

experiences or status as asylum seekers (Netto, 2010; Zetter, 2007). It is also important because at times it may explain why individuals return to a place that was initially only considered an 'in-between' place to move on from; such as those places individuals were dispersed to as asylum seekers.

Scalettaris (2009) highlights that such mobility is often at odds with UNHCR solutions to displacement which rather imply settlement, either as repatriation in the country of origin, local integration in neighbouring countries, or resettlement in a third country. As such, 'refugees are not supposed to move again after finding a refuge from persecution or war' and mobility is presented as problematic (Scalettaris, 2009, p. 59). In the European context, this notion is for example upheld on a supranational level in the Dublin III Regulation which determines that the country where an individual claiming asylum first entered the EU has to process their asylum application.[34] This has consequences for refugees as in the EU, they are excluded from the freedom of movement which applies to EU citizens (Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018). Therefore, even after refugee status has been granted, the stipulation that refugees are not supposed to move after finding safety continues to apply due to legal restrictions, and so in theory, refugees have no choice but to settle in the country in which they first arrived and which has given them asylum.

2.4.2. Refugee homemaking from the top-down

Research often focuses on how refugees make homes in settings considered as highly institutionalised, such as camps, often located in the Global South (Paszkiewicz and Fosas, 2019); but at times also in the Global North, for example when refugees are housed in re-purposed shipping containers as emergency accommodation in Berlin (Steigemann and Misselwitz, 2020). Object of such debates are the ways in which homemaking is restricted or dictated from above, and how forced migrants resist this, and so similar to the analysis of spatial practice, such studies are therefore useful when looking for agency. Paszkiewicz and Fosas (2019) for example discuss refugee agency in the context of building shelters in refugee camps in Jordan and Ethiopia. The authors argue that 'agency is a factor that guarantees dignity' (no page) and it can humanise the refugee experience, as individuals make decisions and put effort into improving their

[34] https://www.unhcr.org/4a9d13d59.pdf

surroundings and lives in the context of displacement (Hart et al., 2018; Paszkiewicz and Fosas, 2019).

While the contexts of Ethiopia, Jordan and Germany may be distinct, what binds these case studies together is that they highlight that rules and regulations can dictate how individuals can design their living spaces in institutionalised settings, and ultimately how homes are made. A mismatch may exist between refugees' agency and decision-making on the one hand, and the regulations in place determined by institutional, legal and political structures on the other. For example, refugees' decisions about structures of their shelters in a camp in Jordan, as well as extensions of the re-purposed shipping containers in Germany may result in inappropriate, hazardous solutions with risks of fire and flooding, and so a kind of discipline and control to prevent certain practices is exercised by rules and on-site security staff (Paszkiewicz and Fosas, 2019; Steigemann and Misselwitz, 2020). Active decision making is thus overruled by someone more powerful which is significant, considering that limiting survival and adaptation strategies may lead to most suffering among refugees (Paszkiewicz and Fosas, 2019). In addition, this can be linked back to understandings of home. Dreyer (2022) for example, drawing on a feminist approach to home, argues that homemaking has 'emancipatory potential' for individuals who were displaced in that it can 'counteract feelings of uncertainty, dislocation and unsettledness' (p. 213), and that autonomy is central in order to recreate a sense of home.

In addition to institutionalised settings, forced migrant homemaking has also been examined in the broader context of urban spaces, such as in the context of 'urban informality' in a shantytown in Borgo Mezzanone in Southern Italy (Di Guisto, 2022); in the context of urban renewal in Berlin (Akcan, 2022); or on a micro-level in a housing project in Amsterdam where young Syrian refugees live alongside Dutch residents (Kim and Smets, 2020). Studies often highlight the 'arrival infrastructures' in place which provide newcomers with 'networks of kinship and information', for example, to access housing (Beeckmans et al., 2022, p. 31); but also that such arrival infrastructures are defined by social structures (Bork-Hüffer and Peth, 2020). In this sense, scholars exploring housing pathways of refugees in different European cities often critically highlight the limits of mutual support within social networks. Writing in the Austrian context, Aigner (2019) for example points out that 'help from kith and kin was found to be insignificant'

(p. 798); however, help from NGOs and members of the majority population to find housing was notable.

Although they may be less institutionalised than camps, such spaces are nevertheless subject to rules and regulations which are enforced through systems and power structures, and which restrict individual choice and agency, and influence movement and mobility. While Gateley (2015, p. 26) argues that refugees' can 'exercise autonomous agency and make strategic and informed decisions' with the help of support programmes, the realities of exercising self-determination in this context are often different, nonetheless because third sector organisations often fill the gaps which are left due to a failure of the government to fulfil its 'duty to provide for all their [asylum seekers and refugees] essential living needs' (Mayblin and James, 2019). Therefore, following a top-down approach, power structures continue to determine how or what individuals can and cannot do; and sometimes, the self-interest of organisations to sustain themselves undermines individual needs and aspirations (Shortall and McAreavey, 2017). In this context, frustration about the rules and a lack of clarity of what is allowed and/or possible to do can be created among individuals (Ghorashi et al., 2018). It is these 'local structures of opportunity' which impact on refugees' homemaking (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021).

This resonates with Hannah Arendt's writings on the 'dullness and the bureaucratisation of evil' and thoughtlessness which she describes as the 'heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of "truths"' (Arendt, 1958 [1998] in Burdon et al., 2014, p. 430). Thoughtlessness is a condition where individual 'normal' people lack the ability or '(dis)inclination to think' (Busk, 2015, p. 4). Ultimately, they become complicit with systems which at their extreme may be systems of horrors and atrocities, such as those in Nazi Germany, as individuals lose their ability to see the moral qualities of their actions. In Schupmann's (2014) analysis of Arendt, he points out that individuals then can maintain a 'cheerful innocence' because they only conceive of their situation as one where they have a 'duty to follow commands and laws' and they fail to evaluate the meaning of the very systems they enable to function (p. 136). Rather than stupidity, it is thoughtlessness, shallowness and the incapability of seeing individual actions in the bigger picture and the consequences of one's actions which form the 'banality of evil'.

Analyses of Arendt's ideas often raise questions about moral responsibilities and accountabilities when individuals act in structures which constrain or dominate their decisions and actions; and when organisations act in contexts and structures just as limiting, for example when stipulations from funders determine outcomes. While such questions are necessary and appropriate to ask, Silverman and Kaytaz (2020) use the concept of 'emotional distancing' to analyse a similar problem. Writing in the Canadian context, the authors describe how emotional distance is created between border guards and their actions in the detention of immigrants and the consequences of their participation in the 'detention estate' (p. 12). Through bureaucratisation of the detention process, such as filling out forms to assess the alleged riskiness of detained immigrants, detention is normalised and legitimised and is presented as the moral choice; and likewise, those who are working within the system, such as border guards, can emotionally distance themselves from their involvement.

These ideas about agency, bureaucracy and thoughtlessness are relevant to this study, especially as this thesis seeks to explore the structures and strategies of stakeholders, for example, from support agencies of local authorities, in refugee homemaking. First, in assigning various identities to refugees, for example 'homeless refugee'; or 'refugee within the 28-day-move-on-period', entitlements are determined by bureaucratic processes, and individual desires and preferences are ignored (Zetter, 2007); and second, in the mismatch between macro (support) structures determined by state-level policies and the realities of micro-level experiences of housing and settling for refugees. This thesis acknowledges the consequences of being embedded into systems which limit individual agency in homemaking; especially when this occurs over a longer period of time. This is particularly so for many refugees in the UK who have experienced the asylum system which is described in the literature as dehumanising (De Angelis, 2020; Jannesari et al., 2022).

When exploring refugee homemaking, it is necessary to take into account experiences of the present, that is experiences of housing and making home while being embedded into power (and dis-abling) structures. I turn to this in chapter six, where I discuss the importance of wider social structures for belonging and the consequences of 'support' structures which, in reality, do not support individuals. In addition, in the analysis, I consider related experiences of the past, including unmaking or destruction of past homes; or the impact of the slow violence of asylum

seeker welfare support (Mayblin et al., 2020). It was Nixon (2011) who first coined slow violence as 'a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space' (p. 2). Using slow violence as an analytical concept thus focuses on those injustices that 'slip beneath the radar, [are] dismissed or postponed' (Barnwell, 2019, p. 1111) and take into account different temporalities of migration. It is therefore a valuable concept to understand forms of structural violence which unfold slowly and over time and space. I will discuss this concept further in chapter six.

This relates to the distinction between house and home, as well as how home as a special kind of relationship between individuals and their environment is constructed. Chapter four will relate to these discussions, as I explore differentiated understandings of home that exist between refugees and support workers; the former attempting to realise their ideal versions of home, and the latter focusing on giving individuals a roof over their heads; as well as chapter five, where I discuss how respondents were limited in decorating and furnishing their dwellings due to a lack of resources. This emphasises that top-down approaches and structures persist beyond the spaces of camps and shelters, but also when individuals move out of such spaces, including government provided accommodation, into independent, more permanent housing. Nevertheless, in focusing on agency, I will also highlight how some respondents embarked on 'pathways of resistance' (Denaro, 2016, p. 92) as they found ways to navigate within limiting structures and so challenged their positions.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a frame for this thesis and established a background against which participant testimonies are to be analysed. I have reviewed literature from key fields which this thesis draws upon, giving an overview of conceptual and empirical contexts. These fields are: 1) migration, settlement, belonging and home; 2) homes and houses, or materialist approaches to home and the role of immaterialities; and 3) refugee homemaking, especially contemporary work in refugee studies on homemaking and belonging in the Global North. In taking a person-centred approach, this thesis takes these ideas forward through a focus on individual subjectivities, as respondents find housing, make their homes in Newcastle and develop belonging in interacting and engaging with places, people and social structures. All of this is underpinned by past and present experiences, future aspirations and transnational connections; as well as the desire to

reclaim a ‘normal’ life after experiences of displacement, and the asylum system in the UK (Sanyal, 2014). Perspectives from both refugees as well as other stakeholders, such as local authorities and support workers, are analysed to investigate key themes explored in this chapter. Findings highlight that there is a mismatch between supporting structures and nuanced micro level experiences or forced migrants, and this aligns with critiques of integration which I have addressed in this chapter.

In this chapter I indicated how this study is connected to the wider context of migration, home and belonging but also within wider literature on how homes are made and how I take these ideas forward through the case of forced migrants in Newcastle. This includes discussions on the intersections between migration and housing, as well as the distinction between houses and homes, and how one can become the other. This chapter made a case for using a materialist lens, as this thesis seeks to display 'material mindfulness' (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 3) in examining the ways in which respondents establish a relationship to place and materiality through spatial practices, including the structure of dwellings and what is inside of them. A materialist approach is valuable to reveal agency and shed light on the extent of individual choices when operating within limiting structures and hostile environments; however, immaterialities, such as behaviours and experiences inside and outside the house, are also important when thinking about how home is constructed. The creation of belonging and home for many migrants, including respondents in this study, is impacted by transnational memories and relationships; which can help foster belonging and (re)create home in the UK, but are also used to claim belonging to former homes. These are but some of the tensions underpinning respondents’ negotiations of home and belonging in Newcastle.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodological approach to the collection, analysis and writing up of data. I will provide a rationale for why I have chosen these methods, and I will reflect on their effectiveness in the research process. I seek to take on a deep exploration of issues surrounding home, homemaking and belonging for forced migrants in Newcastle, and in gathering the perspectives of forced migrants as well as other stakeholders, including support workers and local authorities, I aim to draw a picture of these issues as they arise for participants. While I incorporate a variety of perspectives, however, my priority focus is on forced migrants' experiences.

This chapter will begin by outlining the ethnographic research approach and then will critically discuss issues of power differences, positionality, and reflexivity. In doing so, I will emphasise underlying principles of how this research was conducted. I will then discuss issues of building trust and rapport when doing research with refugee communities. I will also outline how disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on this research, in particular regarding the frustrations that arose for the researcher.

The chapter will then move on to discuss how participants were recruited, followed by an outline of the methods used to gather perspectives from forced migrants and other stakeholders, notably interviews, photo-elicitation and solicited diaries. This is followed by a discussion of how data was analysed. The chapter will end by discussing ethical considerations, including reflections on researcher-participant relationships, as well as issues of reciprocal benefits when doing research with vulnerable populations, and issues that can arise when leaving the field.

Data for this research was collected over an eight-month period, between August 2020 and March 2021. During this period, I focused my time on volunteering with two local support organisations for forced migrants although this was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. In addition, I spent extensive time with key informants I built relationships with since starting volunteering in 2018. This gave me the chance to immerse myself into the field, albeit limited due to restrictions and guidelines on social distancing. In total, I conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with forced migrants and other stakeholders, including photo-elicitation interviews as well as interviews

discussing solicited diaries, conducted ten home visits, and had countless informal interactions and conversations which I reflected upon in an ethnographic diary. In addition, five participants took part in photo-elicitation and three participants kept a solicited diary for a period of two weeks. Participants came from the following countries:[35] Iran, Sudan, Syria, Pakistan, Russia, Liberia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan; and all other stakeholders I interviewed were British.

3.2. An ethnographic co-productive research approach

I take a person-centred approach to reveal the 'inner lives of subjects' (Biehl et al., 2007, p. 5), based on the premise that 'experience, or subjectivity, is at the root of things' (Lock and Strong, 2010, p. 4). The methodological approach seeks to capture respondents' subjective experiences of the materialities and immaterialities of home, housing and belonging, at the same time as they interact and engage with places, people and social structures; all of which is underpinned by their past and present experiences, future aspirations and transnational connections. In seeking to get close to the materiality of home and respondents' emotional attachments and experiences, this methodological approach was informed by perspectives of social constructionism. This presupposes that social and individual lives cannot be uncoupled, and I acknowledge the centrality of human lived experiences in the 'construction of meanings in the lived world of everyday life' (Lock and Strong, 2010, p. 30).

Accompanying semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation and solicited diaries, data collection for this study was ethnographic and focused on 'understanding a group, community, or culture from an insider's perspective' (Hyers, 2018, p. 38). Using this term, however, I am not suggesting that I consider myself an insider which I will reflect on in section 3.3. Ethnography can be defined as a qualitative research methodology, involving living among unfamiliar populations in 'foreign' places and immersing oneself into unknown cultures to live out informants' experiences (Madden, 2017, p. 16); however, ethnography at home in 'local' contexts, or in places which are geographically closer, can be just as insightful (Hoolachan, 2016, p. 34).[36] In these 'local' contexts, the familiar can be transformed into an object through a strategy of estrangement, whereby the researcher is making the known into the unknown (Maso, 2001). In the study of home and

[35] This includes participants who participated in interviews, as well as appearing in observational data.
[36] And Maso (2001) critically highlights that researchers, even in their own society, will 'hardly ever deal with people and groups that have exactly the same culture as they themselves have' (p. 137).

homemaking, Hoolachan (2016, p. 32) even advocates the use of ethnography, as it provides an opportunity to capture the 'doing' of home.

This research was conducted with vulnerable populations, and in this context, ethnographic work offers the opportunity to develop high levels of trust, which may not be possible with one-off face-to-face interviews, since it involves lengthy fieldwork periods and spending an increased amount of time with respondents (Hoolachan, 2016, p. 36). As a research method, ethnography involves participant observation and the writing of field notes by the researcher (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Harrison, 2018).[37] Observations then serve to determine areas of further scrutiny, and they can be clarified in semi-structured interviews (Hammersley, 2006). Merriam (2014) writes about systematic observations and observational data in ethnography:

> Observations take place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs […] observational data represent a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a second-hand account of the world obtained in an interview (p.117).

I 'hung out' with respondents in their 'natural setting' during home visits (Hammersley, 2006, pp. 4-10), in particular to the home of Afra and her family. Between November 2018 and December 2019, I was a befriender for Afra who was resettled to Newcastle with her family. During this time, I regularly visited Afra at her house, or met with her in public places, for example to walk around the city centre in Newcastle to look around the shops or go out for a coffee. While I formally left the befriending project before starting fieldwork, I maintained contact with her, and Afra became a key informant for this research. I also undertook ethnographic work in my capacity as a volunteer support worker at a local support organisation for forced migrants where, for instance, I supported respondents in their housing search, and accompanied them to flat viewings. The results of this ethnographic work in the observations I recorded in a reflexive diary, as well as photographs I took with participants' permission, are incorporated in this thesis as vignettes.

Related to the practice of making observations are positions about ethnography which criticise the upkeeping of power imbalances through ethnographic methods. Scholars critically highlight that ethnography as a research method is deeply rooted in colonial traditions (Adjepong, 2019).

[37] Ethnography is also used to describe a writing tradition, referring to the products of ethnographic research (Harrison, 2018). However, this will not be discussed here due to space limitations.

In this context, Gitlin et al. (1989, p. 252) remark that ethnographic methods in which the researcher decides who is being studied and how voices are represented may do little to challenge 'oppressive hierarchies' and so power imbalances are upheld.[38] Following those reflections, scholars have increasingly considered colonial legacies within their fields, including migration studies (e.g. Mayblin and Turner, 2020), drawing on discussions within postcolonial theory which aim to create awareness about the complexities of representations. Questions are raised about issues regarding who can make claims about whom, or whose claims about whom are legitimate, and who can produce knowledge. Pillow (2003) for example interrogates whether researchers can truly represent an 'other'; whose story researchers are telling; or how researchers should practice representation given that they can 'never get it quite right' (p. 176).

These were some of the tensions I had to grapple with and which I reflected on throughout the research process. My methodological approach was informed by acknowledging neo-colonial critiques of academic extractivism (Cruz and Luke, 2020), and through using a co-productive approach, I sought to unsettle the colonial foundations of ethnography and 'data harvesting'.[39] Although fieldwork for this thesis was ethnographic and included researcher observations, this thesis was to a great extent informed by participants' perspectives directly. While I embraced the 'discoverable' (Hardwerker, 2001) nature of ethnography, I consider the contents of this thesis to be the result of a collaboration between participants and researcher. I recognise the limits of my own perspective as someone with different experiences to respondents. In addition to ethnography, I also gathered respondents' perspectives through participant-led methods, including photo-elicitation and solicited diaries. Through this I sought to actively engage participants in the research process, 'recognising the participant as […] [an] equal expert in the field' (Pocock et al., 2009, p. 113). This fed into the overall approach of this study, in that I wanted to learn from respondents, and to not only focus on struggles but also agency. I wanted to conduct research *with* rather than *on* forced migrants in an attempt to reduce uneven power relations between respondents and researcher (Bartlett and Milligan, 2019). Respondent-led methods

[38] Regardless of this, I acknowledge critiques of such approaches which argue that unequal power relationships persist, even when using participant-led or participatory methods (Ensign, 2003).

[39] Throughout the thesis, I use the terms 'respondents' and 'participants' when I present the views and experiences of forced migrants' who participated in my study. I recognise the limits of this terminology as this may be at odds with references to forced migrants as 'co-researchers' and 'equal experts', as I sought to work together with forced migrants.

allow participants to express their views more directly and without much researcher interference which can reduce the pressure of a tense interview setting (Buckingham, 2009; Darbyshire et al., 2005). I considered respondents moral agents rather than data, and I sought to highlight their subjective experiences (Pittaway et al., 2010). This approach has been described as 'empowering' which is especially relevant for marginalised groups of society, such as asylum seekers and refugees (Datta, 2012; Meth, 2003).

Upon starting fieldwork, I wanted to engage in what Geertz calls 'deep hanging out' (1998, p. 69) to generate 'thick descriptions' (1973). Regarding ethnographic work with forced migrants, Rodgers (2004) makes a case for generating knowledge by 'hanging out' with refugees 'with patience, time and personal interest in the lives of people among whom we conduct our research' (p. 49). This became very important to my research and fieldwork approach. Having worked with refugees and asylum seekers for almost two years before starting fieldwork in my capacity as a volunteer in different supporting agencies in Newcastle, I was not only able to gain deep insights into issues related to home, housing and belonging; but I was also able to build networks and trust with participants, as well as a personal interest in their lives. As I planned my fieldwork, I did not simply want to conduct interviews with respondents, but I wanted to spend more time with(in) forced migrant communities and utilise the 'informal and everyday nature of the interactions and processes' to generate knowledge (Rodgers, 2004, p. 48). I therefore wanted to use the opportunity of fieldwork to move from desk-based PhD work and fully immerse myself into the field. I planned to commit to volunteering for at least three full days a week at local support organisations for forced migrants, and to regularly spend time with those refugees and asylum seekers that I befriended.[40] While this plan was heavily disrupted by COVID-19,[41] as I will reflect on in section 3.5., I was able to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in line with restrictions on social contact, and 'hung out' with informants at their homes, or while doing support work with them at a local supporting organisation.

As I was interested in the emotional as well as the physical aspect of home, witnessing the physical environment of participants' homes was an important aspect of fieldwork. Merriam (2014) argues

[40] This was through official 'befriending' schemes run by charities.
[41] Although COVID-19 impacted my 'formal' fieldwork period, it is important to say that my voluntary work not only precedes my PhD (as I volunteered in the sector since 2018) but it also became even more critical during the pandemic as refugees' and asylum seekers' vulnerabilities were heightened during this period.

about home visits in the study of home that they allow the researcher to witness first-hand 'the ebb and flow of physical traces' (p. 148) of individuals' homes, as well as how processes of homemaking are enacted. In this study, I conducted home visits and home also became a setting for a semi-structured interview with Rahman, for example.[42] Conducting the interview with Rahman in his home after his invitation allowed me to see the physicality of where he lived, and how he had created and decorated the intimate space of his dwelling. While as a researcher, I knew the value of seeing participants' homes and therefore had an interest in being invited, I was always aware not to invite myself but to wait for respondents to invite me to visit. In doing this, I also sought to disrupt researcher-researched power relations and emphasise respondents' choice and agency.

Most of the time, however, I conducted home visits for ethnographic research for participant observations, in particular during regular fortnightly visits to Afra, who became a key informant to this research and with whom I cultivated a deep relationship. During my visits to her home, I experienced the 'doing' of home (Hoolachan, 2016), but also materialities, such as housing, objects and possessions. I also took note of objects and how they were allocated, or the layout of rooms and how furniture was placed which was unlike I was used to. I could also observe interactions when, for example, Afra's friends were present.[43] I did not try to influence which activities were taking place, but I immersed myself into the situation and participated in whatever activities took place. Spending time with Afra in this way, I felt that I became a participant in the field, thus experiencing what Dreyer (2022) calls bridging the gap between the 'guest participant/researcher' and the group that is being studied.[44] However, this is not to suggest that I was the 'same' as participants, as I recognise that my position and power is different.

3.3. Power differences, positionality, and reflexivity

In qualitative migration research, it is important to be reflexive, and carefully and constantly consider power differences, as well as individual positionality (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018; Iosifides,

[42] Conducting home visits as settings for interviews was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on social mixing. Rahman was therefore the only respondent I interviewed in his home.

[43] The language barrier presented a difficulty as Afra and her friends spoke in their native language. However, whenever I asked what was going on, Afra explained to me in (broken) English.

[44] While in the field and collecting data, the researcher can take on various roles on a continuum of degrees first developed by Gold (1958), stretching from complete participant to complete observer.

2018). Issues of migration and displacement are often highly politicised and enmeshed with power imbalances, the latter being determined, for example, by social structures, access to different resources, linguistic differences, or awareness of some individuals about their difference from the majority ethnic group (Block et al., 2012; Iosifides, 2018; Olsen, 2012). Before commencing this research and while I was in the field, I constantly reflected on my positionality, how my interactions with participants would be impacted by my characteristics, existing power relations and different roles in which I interacted with respondents; and whether I would be able to have conversations about highly emotional topics with participants, such as home and belonging. This was especially so considering the circumstances and 'life worlds' of many participants, including their material circumstances, experiences of the dehumanising asylum system in the UK, as well as discrimination, marginalisation, exclusion, and loss of friends, family as well as possessions and belongings. In addition, I was aware that many of them lived in poor-quality housing. Yet they were participating in a study taking a materialist approach to home and exploring how forced migrants develop feelings of belonging to the place they had come to seek refuge.

As a white German female researcher, I was aware of my difference to research participants in terms of both identifiable and unidentifiable social markers, such as ethnicity, age, and gender and class;[45] but also the differences in experiences which I was aware could create a gap between participants and me, including our (material) circumstances. I felt I might have little in common with participants, so I would not be able to connect with them, and they would see me as an outsider. Although we may, in a way, have been connected through the experience of migration and being a newcomer to the UK and particularly Newcastle, I was not comfortable to draw on such commonalities. Something over which I tried to connect with participants was the Geordie accent spoken in the North East of England. Upon first meeting respondents, participants would often say to me that their English was very bad and that they did not understand what is being said 'in Geordie'. I would then respond to this, saying that 'I know, it's so hard! I also often cannot understand anything because of the Geordie accent'. While this prompted a laugh, this did not

[45] I did include class here as marker. Many participants came from wealthy backgrounds and evidently from a high-class position which they revealed to me in conversations, but was also visible in their degree of education, behaviour, or photographs of houses they used to live in in their home countries. However, their class position in the UK was different.

pave the way for finding ‘common ground’ (Pickerill, 2009) with participants as conversations afterwards stopped instantly. Instead, the issue remained that while most of us may have been new to the UK, different experiences and positions within the immigration system meant that we were embedded into very different structures of opportunity.

Discussions about researcher positionality often use insider and outsider categorisations. Less nuanced understandings of these categories consider an insider researcher a member of the group being studied, and an outsider researcher a member of the majority population in the host country (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). From this, positions derive which grant the right to do research with a community only to insiders (Milner, 2007, p. 388). Instead of a binary approach of insider-outsider to positionality, a more nuanced approach to positionality has been recognised (Carling et al., 2014, p. 39; Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411; Ryan, 2015). This argument is mainly based on the assumption that identities are contextual and relational, multi-layered and fluid, and are based on, for instance, gender, age, interests, and experiences (Carling et al., 2014). In the research encounter, positionalities are constantly negotiated (McAreavey, 2017); and in each encounter, roles have to be negotiated anew. Both the researcher and the researched attempt to place each other in the research encounter according to markers, such as visible aspects, including clothing style, or gender, or invisible aspects, including class, religion; or in the case of migration research, migration experiences or legal statuses. Social positions assumed in the interview are continuously checked and interpreted against a ‘mental inventory of social categories’ (Carling et al., 2014, p. 41; Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018, p. 181). Insider positions are not attained by merely finding common ground on one single position (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018, p. 180). Instead, insider and outsider positionalities need to be understood along ‘many dimensions’ (Carling et al., 2014, p. 44), and researchers will almost certainly experience both positions when in the field as they have to negotiate and shift between ‘multiple positionalities’ (Ryan, 2015).

Although I had worked with refugees and asylum seekers in Newcastle for almost two years before starting fieldwork, and so believed I had a good understanding of the issues and problems they face and considered myself a ‘partisan’ to the plight of their experiences (Dona, 2007, p. 210), I was always careful not to think of myself as an insider. Instead, in being reflective throughout the research process and avoiding detaching myself from the research process, I acknowledged my position in relation to respondents, acknowledging that I was an immigrant

who came to the UK under very different circumstances than many respondents, as well as my different social position and lived experience as an immigrant in the UK. In addition, in recognising my role as a support worker, the question arose for me whether the 'authority' that my support work may have conferred upon me, and resulting power imbalances might have pushed respondents to participate in my research and created a coercive relationship (Rabinow et al., 2007); and whether respondents thought that my support was contingent on their participation. This was especially difficult given that my research and support work examined overlapping issues, namely housing and home. I tried to mitigate against this through taking my time to explain that my research was separate to the work I was doing at the supporting organisation and reiterating that I was doing unpaid support work but that I was a researcher at Newcastle University.

In addition to considering the influence of characteristics and social markers in debates on insider-outsider positions, Punch (2012) argues for the importance of emotions in positionality. During my time working and volunteering with refugees and asylum seekers in Newcastle, getting to know individuals and building relationships, my desire to help forced migrants to navigate and rebuild their lives in the UK without struggles and independently grew continually. Advocacy and support were the foundations of the trusting relationship that I sought to build with respondents. However, I also realised that it was impossible to help everyone, as I became more emotionally involved after getting to know individuals and developed a personal interest in their lives (Rodgers, 2004). I had witnessed first-hand the realities of support work which do not feature on job descriptions, such as working overtime regularly and on weekends; but with little pay and very often a lack of acknowledgement from those who manage a charity. This was often a harsh reminder not only of the lived realities of many participants but also of the limits of the work I was doing to support refugees and asylum seekers rebuild their lives and fulfil their ambitions and imaginations of their ideal lives, and homes. These experiences made me feel powerless, and often numb.

Although my voluntary work was beneficial in that I was able to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of forced migrants in the UK, as well as the UK asylum system, this also posed an increasing risk of role confusion (Ensign, 2003, p. 47). On the one hand, I was a researcher, but on the other I occupied the roles of a friend, support worker, advocate, or teacher. I had access

to information which I normally would not have in a sole research encounter, and I was grappling with the tensions between being a PhD researcher and support worker. I often found myself asking participants if they needed support with anything when I interviewed them. In a few instances, this resulted in me continuing work with participants after the research encounter, and so I changed between roles of researcher and support worker. On the contrary, participants would often ask me for help with different issues in the research encounter, seeing my role as a support worker, and not as a researcher.[46] Sometimes during interviews, I thus supported respondents with the issues they had instead of conducting an interview, as they started explaining to me the problem they faced and I was unable, and unwilling, to lead the conversation back to the research. For example, in one interview which I conducted in a late afternoon, a respondent told me about an issue they had with rent arrears and presented me with a letter they had received from the housing association, which they did not understand. While I started to explain that I could help with this on a different day, after quickly glancing at the letter I saw that the issue was urgent and there was a payment deadline a few days away. Realising that it was late in the day, I immediately stopped the interview and promptly attended to the letter instead. These tensions characterised the entire research process and whilst I attempted to separate my volunteer work from my research, in practice this was not always clear cut as I found myself invested in providing support when hearing about participants' struggles.

3.4. Building trust and rapport

Miller (2004) describes trust as a methodological issue when researching marginalised communities. Forced migrants often display a 'self-protective insularity' developed, for example, through experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, or vulnerabilities to exploitation and manipulation (Leaning, 2001; Miller, 2004, p. 217). Forced migrants may be mistrusted by host societies (Rebelo et al., 2018); however, they at the same time mistrust others, including on individual, institutional and societal levels (Hynes, 2003). While upon fleeing and during flight, mistrust might be a survival strategy, it can be increased upon arrival in the host country. This is, for instance, through a plethora of bureaucracy and paperwork, measures to ensure obedience and hostile encounters with officials, wider society, and service providers.

[46] Issues that came up often related to housing which were inevitably discussed in the research interview and which participants may have not sought help with otherwise.

Issues of mistrust can also arise in the research processes, impacting the researcher-participant relationship negatively. For example, suspicion and mistrust of the researcher can arise when respondents are asked to sign consent forms, as many may be unfamiliar with research processes, as they are used for example at UK universities (Hugman et al., 2011; Mackenzie et al., 2007). Likewise, some forced migrants may become angry and resentful when researchers are in effect using them to bring their own careers forward,[47] this requiring researchers to be 'very mindful of the trust that is being placed in them by refugees and to reflect carefully on ways to build and sustain that trust' (Mackenzie et al., 2007, p. 306). Miller (2004) in this regard reflects on the 'entering [of] refugee communities' which

> is a complicated process that takes time, negotiation, and a respect for the gradual development of relations based on trust and mutual respect. Even under the best of circumstances this can be a challenging experience with its share of missteps and moments of uncertainty (p. 218).

This is echoed by Mackenzie et al. (2007) who argue that building trusting relationships in which autonomy has a firm place and is not 'thwarted or stunted' (p. 310) is important in conducting ethical research with forced migrants. The authors advocate creating an environment during the research process in which individuals can 'flourish', retaining a sense of control (p. 310). Hynes (2003, p. 16) suggests that trust can be built through giving information about the researcher on research flyers, encouraging respondents to discuss concerns about the research project, use humour during interviews, a non-threatening room layout and building rapport throughout the research process. Regardless of this, just as trust is not just there automatically, it is not guaranteed that respondents are willing to share their thoughts and experiences (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009); and 'missteps and moments of uncertainty' remain (Miller, 2004, p. 218).

In this research, I took the issue of trust very seriously. I started volunteering in 2018, long before commencing fieldwork, not only to deepen my understanding of the experiences, circumstances and local landscape of support for forced migrants in Newcastle, but also the underlying legal and policy structures of the asylum and immigration system, as well as forced migrants' rights and

[47] Turton (1996) in this context argued that researching the suffering of others can indeed only be justified if this research has as an explicit objective the alleviation of such suffering. I will reflect on this later in the chapter.

entitlements. I also wanted to build relationships of trust with refugees and asylum seekers through continuous engagement and interaction with them;[48] but also with gatekeepers, through experiencing first-hand the realities of doing support work with forced migrants.

As a volunteer at a supported housing project ran by a local support agency, I saw forced migrants regularly in their offices. I was also assisting during English classes ran by another local support agency, where I saw individuals weekly for two hours for an entire academic year. I got to know individuals, and more importantly, they got to know me. Through this, I hoped to mitigate against making conclusions based on false 'preliminary impressions' (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, p. 191), from both, the position of respondents and the researcher. An extract from my diary indicates how the process of trust materialised in the field:

> I ask Reza what he was up to during lockdown, and I find out that he has continued working as a barber. 'People call me and pick me up and I go to their house to cut their hair'. As he says this with a lowered voice, I can see that he is aware that he broke lockdown rules which forbade mixing with others indoors, not to mention having close contact with people outside of your own household. He smiles shyly and looks down at the floor. I understand this small gesture as him knowing he broke the rules, and telling me that he does not want me to say anything to anyone about him cutting people's hair during lockdown. I feel like Reza trusts me, as he knows that if it came out, he would be in trouble.

Reza told me about how he broke lockdown rules after having known me for 18 months, after which time I felt he thought he could trust me. However, this is not to say that I did not experience 'missteps and moments of uncertainty' (Miller, 2004, p. 218) which brought back the realisation that building trust is a long, difficult process; and that 'moments of empathy' can be followed by 'instances of tension' (Ryan, 2015). In another encounter with Reza, we spoke about travelling, which we had established we both enjoyed. After Reza mentioned a handful of countries to me that he had seen, he then asked me which countries I had visited. I started speaking about my travels to Australia, New Zealand and South-East Asia and I was excited that Reza showed an

[48] Upon commencing fieldwork, I only wanted to interview refugees. However, I soon realised the importance and impact of the experiences made during the asylum process on processes of homemaking; the continuity of these experiences with those of refugees; and I also could feel a sense of attachment to Newcastle among asylum seekers, as there were stories of hopes, ambitions and future homes which I wanted to represent in this work. I therefore included asylum seekers in my sample.

interest in my experiences, in this moment of empathy. However, when I finished talking, our conversation stopped suddenly, and Reza simply smiled, turned his head away from me, and looked to the floor. Immediately I thought that the reason the conversation had stopped was that I was somehow gloating to him about the countries that I had been able to visit, knowing that he might not have had such opportunities and feeling he could not 'compete' with me. While I thought that our mutual interest contributed to building trust between us, I also felt as though I had broken it, realising that maintaining trust takes as much work and care as building it.

3.5. COVID-19 challenges

The time I had spent building and maintaining trusting relationships was then suddenly interrupted when life ground to a halt during the coronavirus pandemic at the end of March 2020; just as I wanted to start fieldwork. COVID-19 and following restrictions presented a major disruption to my research and ways of working. Like everyone else, I had to work from home which meant sitting either at my dining table, at my wobbly desk in my spare bedroom, or take turns between the two with my husband. Although this was not the most convenient arrangement, I was, however, very aware that our situation was still comfortable, when compared to the living situations of many participants in this study.

Moreover, my voluntary work with supporting agencies changed. Both organisations I volunteered with stopped their face-to-face support services. I signed up to help with remote support work, however, my engagement was limited and not comparable to when I was helping before the pandemic. This was in part due to the impact of the pandemic on my own life, and I was frustrated about this, because I had developed a genuine desire to volunteer, and support forced migrants in Newcastle over the years. I also feared that the time and energy I had invested in developing networks and relationships to forced migrants and supporting agencies in previous years was lost and would not be easily restorable once restrictions were lifted. I did not like to be slowed down by the pandemic, and although I had built close relationships with a few forced migrants, I anticipated that I would need to invest more time to build trust before respondents would be willing to share their thoughts and experiences with me. However, I felt I did not have this time because of PhD funding deadlines.

Alternating periods where restrictions were eased, and periods with tighter restrictions created an unpredictable environment for conducting my study and I realised I had to make methodological adjustments to my research plans to mitigate the uncertainties about my fieldwork. In my original project plan, I proposed a comparative study, with fieldwork sites in Newcastle, UK, and Münster, Germany. The first adjustment was thus to abandon the fieldwork site in Germany. While this was a significant change to my project, I soon realised that this phase of my PhD would require more flexibility from me and that I needed to redesign my project more substantially. This was frustrating and I felt that my hard work during the first phase of my PhD, where I was able to complete tasks ahead of my timeline, was wasted.

I thus decided to incorporate remote interviewing. I did this reluctantly as I was aware of the limitations of using remote methods, such as online or telephone interviews, especially with forced migrants. These relate to practical issues, such as not having enough phone credit, frequently changing phone numbers, or language barriers which are heightened when talking on the phone; but also, when using participant-led methods, such as photo-elicitation and solicited diaries. I thought that there was a possibility that my data would not be of high quality and that my thesis would not be to the high standard that I initially anticipated.

Once I started fieldwork, I was relieved to make progress. However, using remote methods was not something that came up specifically during my research methods training, which required a lot of self-reflection after each interview about what went well and what did not. In this process, I was able to draw on my long-term experiences of working with forced migrants to anticipate some of the difficulties that arose, for example language barriers, and access to a phone or internet. Although I anticipated obstacles to participant recruitment, I was still able to draw on the networks and relationships I built since starting voluntary work to recruit participants, both from a forced migrant background, as well as support workers and other stakeholders. While most remote interviews with (British) stakeholders went well, some remote interviews with refugees and asylum seekers were more challenging. Often, this was due to connection issues, or difficulties to understand and communicate in English through a medium. After a few interviews I learned to handle difficult situations where, for example, I realised that participants did not understand my question. Although this helped to conduct these interviews, I still felt that they were unlike natural conversations I had envisaged. In remote interviews, I was nevertheless able

to get an insight into participants' experiences, and where participants were in their homes, they showed me around their dwellings for me to see where and how they lived. This was invaluable in imitating the witnessing of physical traces of home (Merriam, 2014), similar to home visits.

3.6. Participant recruitment

I acknowledge Smith's (2009, p. 66) argument that random sampling is 'nearly impossible' in refugee and asylum-seeking communities and rather than having many participants, it is more important to gain the trust of few informants instead. Where I had built trusting relationships with forced migrants, I approached individuals myself, via email, text message or face-to-face,[49] to ask if they were interested in participating in my research. In every case, I gave participants a project information sheet,[50] which they could read in their own time before committing to participating in this research; and I emphasised that participation was voluntary, and that participants could drop out at any time during the research process. In other instances, I drew on the relationships I had built with gatekeepers from supporting agencies to recruit participants. As they witnessed my long-term commitment to volunteering and supporting forced migrants, gatekeepers could convince themselves of my good intentions when I asked them if they could help with participant recruitment. I did not have to go through the often-lengthy process of identifying gatekeepers and discuss the research with them in a series of meetings as it is often the practice (Bloch, 1999, p. 376). However, I was aware of the limitations often discussed in the literature when working with gatekeepers, which range from gatekeepers wishing to control the research and push their own agendas forward, to confidentiality issues regarding the provision of contact information, to providing the seemingly 'ideal' respondent (Hynes, 2003, p. 15). One gatekeeper for example asked me if I could produce a document for them outlining the support process in place in Newcastle to allocate housing for newly recognised refugees which they wanted to use in the future to train new volunteers. Although I did not have the impression that it was conditional upon them helping me, I felt indebted to them for their help with participant recruitment; despite my voluntary engagement with the organisation.

In cases where gatekeepers were involved in participant recruitment, they contacted participants either face-to-face, via text message or e-mail and informed respondents about my research.

[49] Where possible and in line with COVID restrictions.
[50] I offered a translated version of this but no participant requested this.

Gatekeepers passed on my contact information (email and phone number) and project information sheet and respondents then contacted me directly, expressing their interest and willingness to participate. I was also able to promote my research during language classes led by a local supporting agency,[51] and leave my contact details so that participants could contact me if they wanted to participate. I also used snowballing techniques where I asked participants if they knew other people within their social networks who would be interested in taking part in this research, and to whom they could pass on my contact details. I did not insist on getting contact details from participants, but instead waited for participants to contact me. I felt this was the best way to proceed so as not to make participants feel uncomfortable if they did not want to take part, and emphasising their choice and agency in deciding if and when to contact me.

The networks I had built through my voluntary work also facilitated access to support agency staff for interviews. Similar to recruiting refugee and asylum-seeking respondents, I asked some staff directly if they wanted to participate in an interview with me. Where I did not have direct access to support agency staff, I sent out emails to staff members who circulated information about my project internally within their agencies.[52] Other stakeholders were identified with the help of gatekeepers throughout the research process and then were contacted directly by me via email.

3.7. Semi-structured interviews

In addition to ethnographic research, I used semi-structured interviews to explore forced migrants' housing and homemaking experiences, and to gather perspectives of other stakeholders involved in this, for example from support services in the third sector and the local authority. I created interview guides based on the literature review, and the topics of this research while leaving enough space for participants to guide discussions and make connections. As the concept of home is subjective, value-laden and personal, Pocock et al. (2009) argue that each individual will almost certainly ascribe a different meaning to the word 'home'. When designing the interview guide for interviews with refugees and asylum seekers, I considered the importance of building 'up an understanding of […] home within the context of [participants'] wider environment' (Pocock et al., 2009, p. 115). For example, instead of asking 'What does home mean

[51] These took place online due to COVID restrictions.

[52] This method did not prove to be successful because the workload of support workers often does not allow for engagement in projects like these.

to you?', I encouraged participants to start conceptualising and forming opinions about home in Newcastle using questions such as 'Tell me briefly what it has been like for you to live in Newcastle?'. Such questions were followed by clarifying questions such as 'What specifically did you do to make yourself feel comfortable?'. Interviews with other stakeholders were partially informed by initial analysis of interviews with forced migrants. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

While interviews are seen as an 'indispensable' method in qualitative migration research, I was aware of the fact that some respondents might have had negative experiences with institutionalised interview settings, particularly after going through experiences of the asylum interview (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018, p. 171). However, in line with my time spent with forced migrants and support work to build trust and rapport with participants, and overall approach taken in this research, I considered interviews not simply a collection of information between the researcher and respondent. After initial contact was made with forced migrant participants, we agreed on a time and place for the interview. In addition to remote interviewing either over the phone or zoom, a local support organisation allowed me to use their premises for face-to-face interviews. There, I had access to a quiet room; and due to its location in Newcastle city centre, it was accessible to participants. When I interviewed respondents at the supporting organisation, staff members were always around to minimise personal safety issues. I was also able to make use of screens in order to minimise the risk of COVID and to adhere to restrictions. Other interviews with forced migrants were conducted in outdoor public spaces, or inside participants' homes.[53]

Questions which ask participants to 'chronicle their history with the phenomenon of interest' are well suited to ask at the start of an interview (Merriam, 2014, p. 103). Where I was able to conduct interviews face to face, I asked respondents at the start of the interview to create a timeline of their housing histories, providing a sheet of paper with a timeline arrow as a visual aid which I found facilitated respondents' understanding of what I asked. This strategy was used previously, for example by Aigner (2019) who investigated housing pathways of refugees in Vienna. Generally, there are certain advantages of timelining, such as enhanced rapport, and increased

[53] I conducted one interview in a participant's home. In this case, I was accompanied by a support worker known to the participant.

participant engagement, both of which are important in the general approach of my study (Marshall, 2019). I used this strategy not only to engage participants in the interview process and facilitate the starting of a conversation but also to trace housing histories since their arrival in the UK. This also provided foundations to ask further questions about housing experiences.

Timelining was more difficult during interviews which were not conducted face to face. I was reflecting on the usefulness of giving participants timelining their housing trajectories as a pre-interview activity. In research with children, pre-interview tasks have been found to help contextualise interview question for participants, as well as establishing a 'conversational relationship' through discussing the activity which can then help build rapport throughout the rest of the interview (Ellis, 2006). However, I decided to not use such pre-interview activities; partly because I did not want to ask too much of participants during a time when lives were on hold, both due to the pandemic and as individuals who had to flee their homes. At the same time, I was questioning the usefulness of this method in a remote interview, and I was faced with overcoming the obstacles that the pandemic presented for this research myself. Instead, I asked participants to talk me through their housing trajectories, while I took notes.

I was aware that the research could potentially address topics that might be sensitive for some individuals. I wanted to employ an interviewing style which would give participants a sense of empowerment and control (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018). Rubin and Rubin (2012) in this context recommend taking a responsive interview approach. While I did not interrupt participants when they gave elaborate responses, occasionally, I asked more concrete questions to avoid drifting onto topics beyond the scope of this research.

Since English was a second (or third or fourth) language for all participants from forced migrant backgrounds, I offered participants the opportunity to conduct interviews with an interpreter; which was taken up by three respondents. I followed Edwards' (1998) advice who suggests that it is important to find a match between interpreter and interviewee, for example in terms of gender, culture or religion. The challenges or dilemmas which can arise from using interpreters in research interviews are widely commented on in the literature. This includes issues related to the translation of meanings between languages (Tribe, 1999); the role of interpreters as intermediaries in the research encounter who co-construct meanings and adopt interpretations

of interview questions and answers (Edwards, 1998; Patel, 2003); or power imbalances shifted by the interpreter (Edwards, 1998). During interviews with interpreters, translations were often accompanied by longer explanations of cultural differences by the interpreter to clarify meanings, and because there was no direct translation in English of what the participant had said. Interpreters would thus sometimes have to elaborate and talk for a long time; and I found myself talking to the interpreter instead of the respondent for follow up questions. While I was making every effort to eliminate or limit power imbalances between me as the researcher and participants, I had less control over interpreters as third persons in what usually is a one-to-one encounter, and what they would bring to it. However, interpreters do not necessarily wield power against the interviewee, for example when they can provide information or support which the researcher cannot (Edwards, 1998). I experienced this immediately after an interview when the interpreter and the interviewee spoke about an issue with a solicitor where the interpreter was able to advise the respondent about what to do where I could not help.

3.8. Participant-led methods

At the end of the interviews, I asked respondents who were refugees and asylum seekers if they wanted to engage with the research process further and take part in photo-elicitation or keep a solicited diary for two weeks. If participants agreed, I gave them prompts as a guide, asking respondents to document and reflect on home, homemaking practices and other experiences which made them feel at home, or not. In real time, rather than retrospectively, participants were thus able to communicate and represent perspectives on their own lives and experiences. Five participants took part in photo-elicitation and three kept a solicited diary.

3.8.1. Photo-elicitation

Generally, visual methods are useful for generating rapport and producing a different type of knowledge to traditional methods (Gold, 2004). Photographs help ‘build shared understandings’ as they reveal participants’ meaning-making processes (Clark et al., 2013, p. 9). At the same time, they stimulate thinking about ‘things [participants] had forgotten’, and invoke memories and discussion, or make them ‘see things they had always known in a way’ (Banks, 2001, p. 90). Authors argue about photo-elicitation that it allows participants to express their views more directly, rather than the researcher interfering and creating a tense interview setting of which some participants might have negative experiences (Buckingham, 2009; Darbyshire et al., 2005).

Participants were given prompts I developed to guide them when taking the photographs (Appendix E). These were inspired by Pocock et al. (2009) who explore the meaning of home among long-term travel returnees. A common issue when using photo-elicitation, access to cameras (Smith et al., 2017), did not arise as all participants had access to a camera phone. When using visual methods, anonymity raises great ethical difficulties and concerns, for example when photographing in public places, or the invasion of privacy of people appearing in photographs (Wang and Redwood-Jones, 2001). I therefore explained to participants that they needed to be careful when taking photographs to not include persons or identifying landmarks, such as street or building names.[54] If persons or identifying landmarks were included in the photographs, I ensured that anonymity was upheld by obscuring the photographs with participant consent.

After a period of two weeks, in which I stayed in touch with participants, and asked them how they were finding the task, I scheduled one-to-one elicitation interviews with respondents. These interviews took place either remotely (online and over the phone) or in-person. Before the interview, participants sent their photographs to me via email or Whatsapp. In a few instances, participants annotated photographs and sent me their written reflections via email or Whatsapp. When interviews took place in person, I brought photographs to the interview on a tablet and each photograph was discussed individually; when interviews took place remotely, I asked participants to describe the photograph they were referring to in order to facilitate identifying which photograph was talked about during transcription and analysis.

Unlike the semi-structured interviews, elicitation interviews were unstructured, and participants determined the topics of the conversations, depending on the photographs they took. Through asking prompt questions, such as 'What does this picture show?' or 'Why did you take this picture?' at the beginning of the interview, and then pursue the topics that emerged, I wanted to give respondents the opportunity to talk about their photographs and explore the 'every-day, taken-for-granted things' in their lives (Rose, 2016, p. 316-321), as well as increase choice and agency over interview topics. Following this process, each photograph was discussed individually; however, participants also made connections between photographs. The process of discussing and reflecting on the images allowed me to explore their 'something else' (Rose, 2016, p. 323),

[54] Other ethical concerns when using visual methods will be addressed later in the chapter.

or their meaning and 'deeper 'situatedness'' (Liebenberg, 2018, p. 5). I also asked questions about photographs that participants wanted to take but could not, following Rose's (2016) suggestion that these questions can be as important and insightful as discussing the actual photographs. With participants' permission, elicitation interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

3.8.2. Solicited diaries

I also used a combination of participant-generated solicited diaries and follow-up interviews to explore participants' day-to-day experiences, or their 'ongoing social realities' (Meth, 2003, p. 200). Solicited diaries are different from personal diaries, in that participants keep them for a specific reason, knowing that they will be read and interpreted by someone else (Milligan and Bartlett, 2019).

According to Zimmerman and Wieder (1977), diary methods as a data collection technique approximate participant observation used in ethnographic studies. In this study, I used solicited diary methods not only for their potential to make participants co-investigators, or participant observers; but also to produce a 'temporal narrative' around participants' daily experiences through regular recordings of activities, this giving researchers access to social contexts which would otherwise remain inaccessible (Bartlett and Milligan, 2019, p. 1449; Meth, 2003). The latter is not only because they might remain un-mentioned in an interview, but in the context of this study, they also remained inaccessible due to COVID-19 restrictions and limits on fieldwork. In this context, Jacelo and Imperio (2005) point out that diary methods are useful when 'extended periods of participant observation are not possible' (p. 991). At the same time, diary methods can facilitate the reporting of sensitive behaviours, thoughts and feelings (Bartlett and Milligan, 2019, p. 1450).

If they agreed to take part, I asked participants to keep a structured, solicited diary for two weeks. I suggested to spend ten to fifteen minutes daily to reflect on their daily encounters and experiences. Diaries were structured and instead of writing freely about their experiences, I gave participants guidance regarding what and when to document (see Appendix F); yet I encouraged them to write about those experiences, actions, thoughts and reflections that they valued and found important. As such, when I briefed participants about the task, I followed Hyers (2018) who suggests that events which can be written about in a solicited diary can 'include nearly any part

of daily living that can be logged, listed, checked off or commented upon' (p. 62). Rather than just report on the events and experiences, I encouraged respondents to write about these reflectively, and as detailed as possible.

I was mindful of the issues that can arise when using solicited diary methods. These include, for example participants' literacy in English,[55] the capacity to self-reflect and the ability to thoughtfully write about experiences, as well as trust in the researcher, and an interest in the research (Hyers, 2018, p. 75; Jacelo and Imperio, 2005, p. 992). Especially the ability to write in English came up repeatedly as an issue which impacted on participants' confidence to be able to keep a diary. In order to mitigate this, I followed Jacelo and Imperio's (2005, p. 992) example who offered participants alternative methods to a written diary. This was also to not assume that all people share a common understanding about the diary keeping process (Meth, 2003). While I acknowledge the nostalgia about handwritten diaries (Hyers, 2018), I did not ask participants explicitly to keep a handwritten diary for this study. Instead, I suggested that participants can record daily voice recordings, or have a daily phone conversation when I saw they were feeling insecure when writing about their experiences. However, after some time to think, all participants agreed to write their reflections, and they sent me regular Whatsapp messages, or reflections written electronically in Word.

In diary research, rapport is important to continuously encourage participants to write their diaries, as well as to achieve depth of personal stories (Hyers, 2018, p. 80; Pocock et al., 2009). Sharing feelings and emotions with a stranger is not something many people do. Following the advice of diary methods researchers, I followed up with participants regularly during the two-week period to remind them to write or record regularly. After the two weeks, and an initial analysis of the diaries, I scheduled follow-up interviews with participants. Focusing on the events that participants wrote about in their diaries, these interviews were unstructured. They were used mainly to encourage participants to interpret more deeply the experiences they reported

[55] Vanner (2015) for example argues that language is a 'starting point for making the research process more accessible and comfortable for research participants' (p. 7). There is thus a tension between the participant-led methods I chose, as well as issues surrounding language. While I attempted to 'empower' respondents by employing participant-led methods, at the same time I reminded participants of their difference through their inability to express themselves in English.

on in their diaries. While the diaries produced rich insight, many participants also explained that COVID-19 restrictions meant that they could not engage in many activities.

3.9. Data analysis

After finishing fieldwork, I had a collection of rich data, including ethnographic diaries, interview transcripts, photographs, and solicited diaries. This enabled me to contrast, cross-read and relate interpretations. In a process of making meaning and making sense, I carried out a focused analysis of the data, after transcribing interviews verbatim with participants' permission. Although I was aware of the value of analysis software, such as NVivo, when analysing large amounts of data (Richards, 2009), I consciously refrained from using such programmes. After becoming partisan to the experiences of participants through my voluntary work and personal relationships I had built (Dona, 2007), and having taken a lot of care in developing relationships of trust and getting to know individuals, I did not see value in inputting this data into a computer software. I felt that this would remove myself from the data and allow another actor to deal with it. Instead, I used traditional methods of analysis, where I used highlighters and pens to code and establish categories. While this process required me to read and re-read transcripts multiple times, I saw this as an advantage and opportunity to critically and carefully reflect upon what was said, my positionality, and claims to objectivity, and engage in a process of reflection about my skills and development as a researcher asking questions.

Following Merriam's (2014) suggestion to analyse data simultaneously with collection, I organised and refined data during fieldwork, as well as discussions with supervisors and peers. The tentative themes and categories which I formulated during fieldwork were 'tested' with every new piece of data I collected, thus moving to a 'slightly deductive mode of thought' (Merriam, 2014, p. 183). In various cycles, I coded data, and rearranged these codes, before organising data in a process of comparing and grouping codes into categories (Saldaña, 2009). Similarities and differences between data were thus systematically examined to identify patterns and relationships in and between themes and establish their relevance to research questions and aims.

Following this process, I attempted to build a coherent narrative to present the data collected which would be an accurate representation and reflection of participants' testimonies as well as my observations. As certain themes reappeared in different interviews, this process allowed me

to identify key themes on which the empirical chapters focus. I organised the data to fit a three-part temporal structure of *Arriving*, *Having Arrived*, and *Outside the Home* to reflect respondents' experiences of home, homemaking and belonging in Newcastle. Throughout this process, it became evident that the perspectives of the various stakeholders involved in this research differed significantly. It increasingly dawned on me that there was a gap between understandings and perspectives of forced migrants on the one hand, and support workers and stakeholders within the local authority on the other. These differences will be discussed throughout the empirical chapters.

3.10. Ethical considerations

Doing research with forced migrants requires ethical considerations that go beyond the established frameworks, such as that from the British Sociological Association. Many forced migrants have had traumatic experiences of violence, oppression, displacement, loss of friends and family members and physical and mental health problems, all of which present vulnerabilities that individuals have (Block et al., 2012; Leaning, 2001; Olsen, 2012). This is especially important, given that the topics this research addresses are sensitive, and involve deeply personal insights and reflections. Talking about home, homemaking and belonging can be difficult, especially with experiences of having lost a home or not feeling at home, and the feelings and memories associated with it. Addressing sensitive topics equires the researcher to show empathy, and to conduct interviews in a 'safe but informal setting in relative privacy' (Akesson et al., 2018). However, while therapeutic retelling of a story or memory can be comforting, Ensign (2003, p. 47) also critically points out that the goal of research is not therapy. I was aware that respondents might experience psychological repercussions and re-traumatisation when reflecting on these issues, for which they might need professional support (Akesson et al., 2018; Strack et al., 2004, p. 57). Because of my long-term voluntary engagement with various supporting organisations and my research with forced migrants in Newcastle, I was aware of agencies I could refer and signpost participants to in case respondents needed additional support, and they actively requested it and agreed to a referral.

In forced migration studies, researchers reflect on using interviews as a method, given their role in determining the outcomes of asylum claims. For this research, I had to consider that many participants may have had negative experiences with the process of interviewing, having gone

through the asylum process in the UK in which interviews are used as interrogations to prove that asylum seekers meet the criteria for asylum (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007). In interviews with the Home Office, stories are being scrutinised for errors and inconsistencies, and ultimately evaluated for their credibility about whether or not forced migrants have a well-founded fear of returning to their homeland (Bohmer and Shuman, 2007; Parker and de Jong, 2019). In other words, forced migrants have to tell their story which needs to be ''recognisable' to the bureaucratic machine' (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018, p. 182). This warrants careful consideration of the meaning of individual stories as well as the process of interviewing to elicit these stories. This is not only because of the meaning and significance of stories for the outcome of an asylum claim, but also as it can emphasise power structures, which can in turn be reproduced in the research interview, leading to participants presenting themselves in a specific way (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018). During interviews with refugees and asylum seekers, I often observed that participants explained to me, 'and this is related to my case', or I was asked 'do you want to know anything about my case?'. Although I acknowledge that issues of home, homemaking and belonging intersect with issues of asylum, flight and refuge in that such events entail a disruption and leaving behind of a past home and homeland, I always explained to participants that my research focus was not related to their 'case' per se; but if they thought it was relevant to the main theme of this research, they were welcome to continue speaking about their experiences if they wished.

Other ethical issues were those of anonymity and confidentiality, which can affect the trust relationship between researcher and participants, if they remain unclarified. Many refugees and asylum seekers may not want to reveal their whereabouts as this would pose a risk to their safety (Hugman et al., 2011). In explaining my research, I addressed confidentiality issues, taking time to explain what this research was about, and how I would ensure anonymity and confidentiality. I asked all respondents to choose their own pseudonym to anonymise the data and made sure they understood the purpose of this research and how data would be used. I also obtained signed and voluntary consent, and reiterated throughout the research process, including during interviews, that there was no obligation to participate, tell me certain things, or answer all the questions I had asked.[56] Pocock et al. (2009) in this case point out that in participant-led methods,

[56] In ethnography, consent is conceptualised as a continuous process throughout the fieldwork, relying on the researcher's responsibility to ensure this process continues (Ensign, 2003).

such concerns may be reduced as the respondent has the power over what to share and what is important. However, it remains the case that individuals may lack the understanding and familiarity with such research processes.

I also offered to provide a translated version of the consent and information form.[57] Given the additional issues with anonymity when using visual methods, such as the invasion of privacy of people appearing in photographs, photographing in public places, recruitment of participants and what they represent and the influence of the researcher on the kind of images that are generated (Wang and Redwood-Jones, 2001), I thoroughly explained these issues to participants when they agreed to participate in the photo-elicitation. I followed Allen (2012) who points out that participants need to be made aware to be 'mindful of their own safety' (p. 448) and of avoiding situations of unnecessary conflict triggered by the act of photographing in public places.[58]

3.10.1. Friendships, leaving the field and reciprocal benefits

I acknowledge the importance of building trusting relationships with respondents, and of generating knowledge by 'hanging out' with forced migrants 'with patience, time and personal interest in [their] lives' (Rodgers, 2004, p. 49). However, this nature of the participant-researcher relationship may pose additional ethical issues, especially when leaving the field. I had started to build relationships with participants when I started volunteering in 2018, almost two years before starting fieldwork. While at the start I took on the roles of a volunteer support worker, teacher, and 'befriender', boundaries between these diverse roles and relationships resembling friendship became blurred over time; and in turn, as Hall (2009) points out can be the case in ethnographic research, boundaries between participant and friend were also blurred. This was exacerbated as I became witness to and was involved in often very emotional circumstances of respondents' lives, for example when their missing family members and friends in their countries of origin prompted strong emotional responses when I was with them; or in one case helped a respondent who was threatened having his refugee status revoked.

Ethnographers critically highlight dilemmas that can occur when friendships are formed, such as loss of objectivity and sample bias (Glesne, 1989); or the manipulative and coercive nature of such

[57] No participant requested this.

[58] However, this turned out to be less of an issue and participants mostly took photographs inside their dwellings.

relationships, especially when there is a difference in power relations between researcher and researched (Rabinow et al., 2007). Crick (1992) in this context argues that friendship in ethnographic research is a 'strategy, "sop" behaviour that is merely part of the extraction of information' (p. 175). While I did (and do) spend an extensive amount of time reflecting on Crick's (1992) critique, I firmly believe that I did not simply extract information, from any participant. These reflections have made me aware of the ethical dilemmas that can occur in the presence of relationships where roles are not clearly defined, for example when information was not withheld on the basis of a 'fake friendship' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012). While this presents a key ethical concern, I do not consider the vignettes taken from my ethnographic diary as containing personal disclosures; nor do I consider all the time I spent with respondents as a collection of data.

Related to this are debates about what happens to the relations built when the researcher leaves the field. After finishing fieldwork, I significantly reduced my voluntary work and home visits to Afra, from which observational data for this research stemmed, and focused on writing my thesis.[59] While I remained in Newcastle, I nevertheless felt that I had left the field as the contact that I had maintained with respondents reduced significantly, and in some cases stopped entirely. I could not help but fear and feel guilty that I had 'used' participants to achieve my objectives and to extract information (Crick, 1992), which was going against my own principles and personal morals. Irwin (2006) points out how leaving the field can be an especially ethically problematic phase, as participants may feel abandoned, and are therefore harmed. While researchers can end their participation in the life worlds of the group they wish to study, leaving the field in this study also exposed the structural differences that exist between researcher and participants. As I explored, exposed and became witness to the (often horrendous) circumstances in which many refugees negotiate and make their homes in Newcastle, these ultimately became data for me while they remained realities for many participants. However, this also motivated me to continue and complete my work, which I hope enables participants' voices to be heard; and, importantly, is relevant and influential to policy.

Jacobsen and Landau (2003) pick up on the dual imperative of conducting academically rigorous research and making sure that the knowledge produced with this research is relevant to policy

[59] Although I took up paid employment in the VCSE sector, working at a local supporting organisations in January 2022 alongside writing my PhD.

and influences institutions and governments to improve refugees' lives. Many researchers take very seriously Turton's (1996) claim that 'research into others' suffering can only be justified if alleviating that suffering is an explicit objective' (p. 96). Mackenzie et al. (2007) for example maintain that research with forced migrants should entail an obligation that it provides reciprocal benefits for those involved. Examples of these benefits include smaller scale changes, such as development of skills and capacities, or improvements on the larger scale, such as influencing governments, or changing social attitudes. There are cases in which refugees are aware that researchers are 'in effect using refugees and other displaced people to further their own careers' (Mackenzie et al., 2007, p. 306). Comments such as 'they come and get their PhDs and write their books at our expense – we should get something back' are expressions of the anger and resentment that refugees feel upon this realisation (Mackenzie et al., 2007, p. 305). The justification of the forced migration researcher to conduct research in order to help refugee and asylum-seeking populations might also be met with a lack of understanding: 'They say it is to help us – how does it help us?' (Mackenzie et al., 2007, p. 305). Indeed, the change that academic research can enact might not be felt directly by the study respondents but only on a larger scale.

I consider myself to having become partisan to the plight of many participants' experiences (Dona, 2007). While I was (and am) reflecting on the impact of my research on alleviating individuals' suffering, I was (and am) convinced that my voluntary engagement and work with refugees and asylum seekers was (and is) a way of 'giving back' to the community I study.[60] Nevertheless, the fundamental question, 'What do participants have to gain from discussing their personal lives with a 'stranger'?, remained for me. In this study, I offered a £10 voucher to forced migrant participants as an unconditional thank you. While giving honorariums to participants is a common practice in social research, there are debates in the literature about whether this form of incentive could be seen as coercion, making the principle of giving voluntary consent invalid (Ensign, 2003).

However, when talking to refugee and asylum seeking participants, I often encountered a willingness from them to talk to me and share their experiences. While I had hoped that my explanations about my research had eliminated doubts among respondents that their

[60] Issues relating to me as a researcher giving back to refugee communities was further exacerbated by my continuing engagement in and commitment to the refugee community in the North East, as well as the charity sector. In January 2022, while I was in the process of writing up my thesis, I started part-time paid employment at a local charity in Newcastle supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

participation was tied to my support, sometimes it seemed as though participants wanted to 'pay me back' through their participation for the help I gave them. This impression was reinforced, for example, by the reluctance of some participants to accept the £10 voucher which they only accepted after I insisted. However, even insisting was sometimes unsuccessful, for example in the case of Rahman. I interviewed him at his home which I visited together with a support worker. When I wanted to give him the £10 voucher, Rahman instead presented the support worker and me with a gift to thank us for supporting him, and refused to accept the voucher. This situation forced me to quickly evaluate whether I should accept the gift or not, and what the potential implications of this could be, as I did not want to upset Rahman or come across as rude. At the same time, I was wondering whether not accepting Rahman's gift would undermine my underlying perspective of refugees-as-agents making their own decisions; and condescend him as being unable to buy presents to someone (seemingly) more powerful.

3.11. Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented an overview of considerations, processes and interactions involved when conducting this research which took place during a time of increasingly restrictive immigration policies, often targeted at asylum seekers and refugees, and an ever more hostile environment. I first outlined the ethnographic co-productive approach taken in this research, followed by a discussion on positionality, reflexivity and power relations. I raised these issues to highlight that this research was conducted being sensitive to power structures and the tensions which emerged during fieldwork due to the different roles I occupied.

I then discussed the different methods used, including interviews and participant-led methods, and how they played out in the field, especially considering the implications from COVID-19 restrictions. In line with this, I reflected on the limitations of the methods used throughout this chapter, which were particularly influenced by the global pandemic.

Conducting research with vulnerable individuals, including forced migrants, require ethical considerations that go beyond those from established frameworks. I have therefore given particular attention to ethical implications in this chapter which arose in this research, including discussions on reciprocal benefits when doing research with forced migrants and the development of friendships while doing ethnography; but also those arising from leaving the field.

The following chapters explore three key themes which emerged during fieldwork. I begin with an exploration of housing, including how it was found and differences in how it is understood of it between support workers and forced migrants.

4. Chapter four: Arriving

4.1. Introduction

The three empirical chapters are presented within a three-part temporal structure which follows a temporal logic connected to different dimensions of home, for example set out by Duyvendak (2011). This involves 'arriving', 'having arrived' and 'venturing out in the community'; although I acknowledge that such processes can take place simultaneously and are not linear. In this first empirical chapter, I will discuss participants' experiences of 'arriving', focusing on finding housing and the role of stakeholders, such as support workers from local authorities or third sector organisations. In outlining housing pathways, I will include participants' experiences from when they were asylum seekers, subject to forced dispersal, and experiences of housing journeys after they were granted refugee status for some participants. Given the geographical focus of this study on Newcastle, I refer to participants' arriving in Newcastle; however, as I will discuss in this chapter, respondents had often passed various UK cities before their arriving.

I will initially discuss why participants moved, either between different cities after their arrival in the UK, or between different accommodations within cities. This was influenced by legal statuses as sometimes individuals had to move, and sometimes they chose to. In doing so, I attempt to develop an understanding of the meaning and significance of different places for participants, discussing this within the context of wider homemaking experiences in Newcastle. This is important, according to Crawley and Jones (2021), so as not to focus on physical movement alone but to recognise that individuals can build meaningful relationships in these places. I argue that the 'in-between' places that respondents stayed in for various amounts of time can then become places where they are embedded and can develop feelings of attachment, whereas before they may have been transient places.

I will then explore participants' housing journeys after they have received refugee status, focusing on the support processes in place in Newcastle which allocate housing to refugees, and the role of state actors, local authorities and third sector organisations. I will argue that this support process is characterised by a lack of choice and control and explore how refugee participants navigate this in a limited space of agency.

The remaining sections will further explore the support in place in Newcastle to allocate housing to refugees. I will argue that this is informed by a differential understanding of the 'house' and what it can and should do for refugees from support services within the local authority and refugees themselves. I will also discuss why and how these understandings were formed. Working under the premise to prevent homelessness, support services have developed an instrumental understanding of housing as a 'roof over refugees' heads'. However, for many refugee respondents, housing was a part of home, as it can help express identities, shape behaviours, and help re-gain dignity after having lived in government-provided accommodation. This discrepancy in understanding is manifest in a mismatch between rhetoric of integration used by support services on the macro level, and the reality of housing allocation in the experiences of refugees. Housing might be suitable, however, I will argue that it is nevertheless insufficient and can lead to a state of emotional homelessness if it does not fulfil expectations and imaginations of what 'home' looks like, raising questions about the sustainability of homelessness prevention more generally.

4.2. Why individuals have to move

It is well documented that refugees often move from the place they are initially sent to, regardless of the country that has granted them asylum. They seldom have the choice in any county about where they will live at first but develop their own ideas of the place they would like to live in, and what that place must do for them (De Hoon et al., 2021). This is the case, for example, for refugees who are resettled to North America (Simich, 2015; Weine et al., 2011), as well as for refugees who have been granted asylum in a European Union (EU) country, and who are exempt from the freedom of movement which EU citizens can enjoy (Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018).

Figure 1 in chapter one showed a few examples of the secondary and onwards movements of those refugees and asylum seekers I interviewed. Gandom and Saman had already been granted refugee status at the time of the interview with me, whereas Mokshe and Ariana were still asylum seekers. All individuals came to the UK as single persons, and Saman was joined by his family after he was granted refugee status. While this is only a snapshot, it shows that participants in my research were highly mobile and moved multiple times, even though the scale of mobility varied. Dependency on institutions for accommodation was high which has been found in other studies (Mayblin and James, 2019; Robinson et al., 2007). While everyone depended on government

support for accommodation and subsistence while they were asylum seekers, dependency continued for Gandom and Saman after being granted leave to remain as they were both housed in different types of temporary supported accommodation in Newcastle. For Gandom as a single refugee this was more straightforward, but Saman experienced how various bureaucratic labels determined eligibilities for where he could live (Zetter, 2007). At first, Saman was a 'refugee' and later a 'refugee who was joined by his family', the latter making him eligible to live in supported accommodation for families. As I will discuss in this chapter, housing journeys were chaotic, and this created unfavourable conditions for home, which Dovey (1985) argues is rather characterised by order.

Moving often was not something that was done consciously or thought about for a long time, at least when it was taking place within the same city. Still, this did not imply a 'borderless space' in which it was easy to move around (Schapendonk et al., 2018). The choice to move was often forced, for example when friends could no longer offer accommodation. Moving was simply something which participants had to do. Sharing the experiences made by those who carry the identity of 'asylum seeker', everyone experienced first-hand the way that 'no-choice' dispersal policies are manifested in the UK asylum system (Netto, 2010). Decisions about where they could live were often made by others, and so participants' mobilities were determined by power relations, as they were imposed upon them. This was the case for asylum seekers, who were moved around the UK by the Home Office, and refugees who were moved between temporary accommodations after they had received refugee status because they could not find somewhere more permanent to live, such as housing from the council.

Asylum seekers, in figure 1 (chapter one) represented by Ariana and Mokshe, were moved from initial accommodation to more 'permanent' asylum seeker accommodation; or they had to move from sofa surfing with various 'friends' which was a precarious living arrangement, as a 'friend' was not someone that individuals had known for a long time. Ariana for example explained to me that 'I met a friend, I met *somebody I didn't know*, [he] try to help me because he thought I was homeless […]. [A]fter four months, he no longer will help me again because of his family' (emphasis added). While initially Ariana spoke of a friend, it immediately became clear that she was living with a man she had just met. Although she was the only female participant who spoke so openly about living with a man she had just met, Ariana's experience nevertheless resembled

many of the experiences of those refugees who I met while volunteering at a local charity in a supported housing project. Often, they were told by their 'friends' that they had to leave their place immediately, and were thus in desperate need for housing, having nowhere else to go.

While Ariana's account mirrors the precarious living conditions of many asylum seekers, Mokshe made references to time to describe the different types of government provided accommodation according to how long asylum seekers spend there:

> So there are different places across the country where they [Home Office] place migrants temporarily. […] [T]hey said [to me] you stay in a hostel until suitable accommodation is found for you. So this was here [Gateshead], where they found my accommodation […]. So they moved me here after a couple of weeks. So to give a sustained accommodation more or less permanent. Not permanent. But hostel is temporarily, temporarily. So this is more or less the settled accommodation until you are processed with immigration.

Following a typical trajectory, Mokshe was placed in initial accommodation, before being dispersed into more temporary accommodation, and then moved again due to a change in housing providers,[61] where he could then stay until a decision on his asylum claim would be made. Mokshe refuses to use the word 'permanent' and corrects himself when he uses it to describe the accommodation he was staying in. Rather, he uses the word 'settled' even though he adds 'more or less', indicating that even 'settled' lacks appropriateness to describe the type of accommodation he was living at as an asylum seeker. Instead of using language from the complex legal system to characterise his accommodation (initial and dispersal accommodation), Mokshe created his own labels to make sense of being moved around, and describe the type of place he was living. Time in Mokshe's account is what characterises the various types of accommodation which asylum seekers are eligible for according to the various bureaucratic labels which are created to manage migration (Zetter, 2007). At the same time, Mokshe displayed an understanding of this time in the context of his migration experience as discussed by Brigden and

[61] In 2019, MEARS was awarded a contract from the Home Office to manage housing of asylum seekers, taking over from G4S. This meant that many were moved into different properties. The takeover was far from smooth, however, and as part of this transition, many asylum seekers were placed in temporary contingency accommodation, such as hotels, because of a lack of housing.

Mainwaring (2016): he is patient in accepting his fate until a decision on his claim has been made as it is 'inherent to the migration experience' (p. 416).

Even when participants were living in 'permanent' accommodation, after going through a period in which they stayed in temporary asylum accommodation, and then moved to temporarily staying with friends, temporarily moving to a different city, or to temporarily living in supported accommodation, questions remain about how 'permanent' this accommodation was in a broader sense. These doubts are not only informed by individual desires to move to a different city or dwelling as only a minority of the refugees I interviewed actually wanted to remain in the house or flat they were living in at that time. They are also informed by the 'safe return review' put in place by the Home Office. Under this policy, every refugee who applies for settlement protection after their five-year limited leave period has ended is subject to a process of scrutiny whether it might be safe for them to return to their home countries (Home Office, 2017). While the Home Office makes it clear that refugee status can be revoked at any time during their leave period, individuals are faced with the possibility of not being allowed to remain in the UK after five years. This has created a system, where refugee status is no longer secure, where temporary rather than durable solutions are sought, and prolonged temporariness is created (Espinoza et al., 2017). The 'safe return review' is an example of how increasingly restrictive migration regimes put an 'end of permanency […] in sight' (Dona, 2015, p. 70). Essentially, this means that the rights that refugees as non-citizens can claim in terms of permanent residency and citizenship as time passes, to recognise 'the human need to put down roots' are becoming more difficult to claim (Ellermann and Gorokhovskaia, 2019, p. 46). The safe return review is an example of how time is used as a tool of immigration control, for example when legal statuses are time limited as is the case in the UK refugee regime (Allsopp et al., 2015).

4.2.1. Why individuals choose to move or stay

Although there are questions about the circumstances of this choice, sometimes moving was a decision participants chose after having been granted refugee status. Very often while I was volunteering, individuals said they wanted to leave supported accommodation because they were leaving Newcastle and wanted to move to London, or Manchester. This decision to move to a different place was influenced by intersecting factors, such as support networks, including friends and family, as well as employment opportunities (Stewart and Shaffer, 2015). Saman for example

moved to London with his family because he had friends there, and he was hoping to find a job. However, he returned to Newcastle after a few months, mainly because the cost of living in London was too high, and he was not able to find a job. Kevin and Wafi, a married couple who I met while volunteering, decided to move to Manchester because it was one of the few places where Wafi, a trained doctor, could engage in further training to work in the NHS. While often employment opportunities were only seemingly better elsewhere than in Newcastle, in some cases such opportunities were simply non-existent in Newcastle.

However, many refugees lack the knowledge of the realities of life in a different city and rely on their imagination, expectations, or things they have heard in their decision to move to a different city (Stewart and Shaffer, 2015). Likewise, having access to social networks in a different city may increase individuals' hopes that they may benefit from them economically as they may facilitate labour market access (Sumption, 2009). However, Ryan et al. (2008) point out that 'networks of co-ethnics' can also be a source of distrust and rivalry, especially among those who are reliant on them, and so they may not provide emotional support. Hoping to make a better life elsewhere, it is difficult for outsiders to interfere, and convince refugees to stay in Newcastle, especially when there is a lack of trust and relationships are determined by power relations, for example between support workers and refugees (Brigden and Mainwaring, 2016). While for some, the existence of a bigger, more diverse population in a city different to Newcastle, and the ties to social networks outside of Newcastle played a decisive role to leave, for others, such as Farid, this was different. He told me that he and his family felt socially isolated in Newcastle and that they often visited their friends in Manchester. When I asked him if he would move to Manchester where his friends are, he answered:

> No, no, no, never. Because it's very difficult to move. […] Especially with the house, I mean we can't guarantee we get the same house and in Manchester they wait for 5 years and they don't get. So Newcastle is better in terms of housing. Compared to other areas. […] [T]he other main reason is the children's schools. So I think it would be a very bad idea to consider moving to another city because of social interaction. When, especially when the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Hanah has got friends at school, and Sandra has got a very good specialist school because of her needs. So I know the teachers, I know the area so…we are trying to cope, we are trying to cope.

Despite feeling socially isolated in Newcastle, and having a social network in Manchester, Farid did not want to move away from Newcastle. His decision to stay was influenced by his knowledge of the pressures on the housing market in Manchester, where he knew it was difficult to find a house; as well as the situation of his daughter Sandra who has special needs, and access to good support to meet these needs in Newcastle. Although previous research on refugee onward migration emphasises the re-constitution of friends and family network as one reason for individuals to move (Stewart and Schaffer, 2015), it is important not to overlook individual experiences such as Farid's. While it can be a pragmatic decision to leave, it can be a pragmatic decision to stay even though individuals feel socially isolated where they live, but have strong social networks in a different city which could alleviate this isolation. For Farid, the decision to stay in Newcastle was one where 'the advantages outweigh the disadvantages', as the family was 'trying to cope' with feelings of isolation and not having friends. This inward negotiation of Farid's choice to stay and having made this decision not based on emotions but pragmatics indicates the emotional cost of his choice and agency (Habash, 2021). At the same time, while for Farid an 'emotional feeling of being at home in a place' (Antonsich, 2010, p. 647) may be absent, this raises the question whether Farid will ever feel he belongs when his emotional attachment to Newcastle is small. I will discuss this further in chapter six.

While many participants had actually moved, for others, onward migration was a plan for the future. Zabi for example, who came to the UK with her daughter, had plans to go to London because of her daughter: 'My daughter loved London so she's teenager 17 years old and I couldn't allow her to come alone'. Sian, a male single refugee in his early 30s, said: 'I have the plan to move to another city, maybe Manchester, maybe London. […] [M]aybe I open the barber shop in there'. For Sian, however, this was not an immediate plan, but rather he wanted to save money first, and then move. Similar to Farid, Sian's decision to stay in Newcastle was pragmatic. Yet, unforeseen circumstances can change individual plans. Abrihet, for example, wanted to move to Manchester after she was joined by her husband and children. However, a few months after her husband joined her in the UK, their relationship broke down, and so Abrihet, in a new relationship, decided to stay in Newcastle.

Although some refugees showed agency though making their own decisions about moving, for support services, moving was something which they regularly advised refugees against. When I

worked as a volunteer, initially, I found it difficult to give this advice. Instead, I wanted to support individuals in their decision to move away, especially when a reason for this was isolation or lack of employment opportunities. However, this changed over time. Brigden and Mainwaring (2016) argue that migrants can use a lack of agency and immobility as a bargain for a 'larger purpose' (p. 416). However, many refugees I met while volunteering did not accept such lack and 'moments of disempowerment' (p. 416) and resisted being passive victims who accept their living situation in Newcastle which they had imagined differently. While above I argue that mobilities are often determined by power relations as they are imposed on individuals when they are moved between different asylum seeker and more temporary emergency refugee accommodations, decisions to move to different cities sometimes seem to be what Gill et al. (2011, p. 303) call a 'last-ditch attempt to exercise agency'. The impression that decisions to move were only an attempt for agency being exercised, somehow making up for the lack of agency throughout the asylum journey, was reinforced by witnessing the return of some refugees who said they were leaving Newcastle, either after a few months or sometimes years. Saman, for example, returned to Newcastle with his family after a few months in London because he was not able to find employment and so could not afford to live there anymore. Mariam who I supported while she was living in supported housing, also returned to Newcastle after a few months living in London. Her move there was facilitated by a friend who helped her find a room to rent in the house she was living in and helped her find a job where she would be paid in cash. However, Mariam returned to Newcastle not only because of the cost of living in London but also because she did not like working illegally, and during nights. Ali's story was similar; after living in London for just over a year, he returned to Newcastle because he was not able to find friends in London, feeling very isolated. I realised that many refugees I met during fieldwork had expectations of how their lives would look like in a different place, derived partly from their current situation, and hopes and aspirations for the future. However, these expectations often did not materialise due to economic realities. Jasmine, a local authority support worker, explained to me why she advised refugees against moving away from Newcastle:

> Obviously sometimes people come and say that they want to move to a different city. […] [A]t that point we advise them about local connection and how difficult it is to get a house in another city with being given leave to remain here. So that's again one of the big

> challenges and we do often find that they come back a few months later and they are saying that they haven't been successful in finding anywhere, […] we do give advice about the risks for that. But I think generally they have made up their mind before it gets to that so there is nothing really we can do to change their mind […]. You know, they think they can get better work in London, or they have got friends which is fair enough, they have got that option now.

Jasmine refers to the 'local connection criteria' which determine the responsibilities a local council has towards refugees once they have been granted status in terms of housing them. While usually local connection criteria can be most easily defined in terms of the time that someone has lived in a council area, refugees automatically have a local connection to that council where the Home Office housed them as asylum seekers and in which they have been given status, regardless of the time they have lived there (Shelter, 2018). The local connection criteria are especially important as, in this context, they ultimately put the responsibility on Newcastle City Council to house refugees after they have to leave the government-provided accommodation within 28 days and are thus at high risk of homelessness. Therefore, if refugees move to a different council, they would not be eligible for housing support from that council should they be homeless as per the local connection criteria.

At the same time, local connection criteria put the responsibility on councils surrounding Newcastle (e.g. Gateshead, North Tyneside) to house refugees who are at risk of homelessness. When refugees approach support services in Newcastle to seek help with housing, they then have to turn refugees away and are limited in how much they can help. While in the field, I met Hassan just after he had been granted refugee status. He was living in a neighbouring council, and because of local connection criteria, was not the responsibility of Newcastle City Council for housing support. Not knowing where else to get help, he came to the support organisation in Newcastle where I volunteered, and where I helped him submit an application for social housing. The following vignette is an entry from my diary where I reflect on the encounter:

> After I submit Hassan's application for council housing, I tell him that it might take a few weeks until he can start bidding. Hassan seems startled, and he double-checks the date on his phone. After a few seconds, he responds: 'So will I be homeless?' I see the look on

> his face changing, as it is filling with panic. I don't know really how to respond to this. Essentially, he is right: there were ten days left until he had to leave his MEARS accommodation. But, of course, I do not want to tell him this. I tell him to wait a second and I go to see Jake, another volunteer working on Hassan's case, who is on the phone to MEARS, trying to find out whether Hassan can extend his stay in the MEARS accommodation. 'This is the second person I am speaking to from MEARS, the first one was very snotty. She said Hassan might be able to extend his stay, but she needs to speak to her manager. She will ring me back', Jake says to me as he sees me waiting next to his desk. I consider this somehow as 'good news'. I go back to speak to Hassan and tell him what Jake just found out. 'Is there nobody in [neighbouring council] to help you?', I ask. 'No', Hassan says. 'It's fine, I was homeless before and I lived in Newcastle. Some people from the church help me. But I don't want to go back to it, I want to progress'.

Local connection criteria meant that Hassan was not eligible for emergency accommodation support in Newcastle where he could stay overnight should he become homeless. When I spoke to Jake about Hassan a few weeks later, he told me that Hassan was able to overstay his MEARS accommodation by three weeks but was now living in emergency overnight accommodation in the local council in which he was housed as an asylum seeker, a service provided to tackle homelessness. Fontanari (2017) argues that asylum seekers who experience 'time as control' while they wait for their claim to be processed, claim 'temporal justice' through re-appropriating 'autonomous time in their own lives' (p. 48). They do this, for example, by spending time relaxing in public places, thereby eliminating power dynamics experienced by forced migrants in host country refugee systems. However, the power exercised over refugees' time and how long they can stay in a place, a dwelling, city or country, cannot be easily re-appropriated by securing permanent accommodation or overstaying a time limit on their accommodation. What happened to Hassan also highlights that migration is not linear or one-directional (Brigden and Mainwaring, 2016; Fontanari, 2017). For Hassan, this meant circular movements between Newcastle and the neighbouring council, as well as being homeless and having somewhere to sleep. Likewise, Hassan was caught in the 28-day 'grace period', and he did not fully understand his situation or the rules, as it is the case with many new refugees (Carnet et al., 2014).

4.2.2. Ending transiency

Fox O'Mahony and Sweeney (2010) question the extent to which individuals caught in a long-term transient status can make a home (p. 299). While some migrant groups choose to be transient as they, for example, engage in (temporary) translocal and transnational activities and incorporate transience into their identities (Bork-Hueffer et al., 2016; Gomes, 2019), many asylum seekers and refugees do not have such agency about their mobilities and transient status. Rather, they are forced to move around either between dwellings or between cities, resulting often in short-term, fleeting stays in various places, where they struggle to 'establish the right to a place' (Brun, 2015, p. 21). While for those who choose to be transient, 'uncertain futures mean opportunity' as they identify as being highly skilled and adaptable to anywhere 'they *wish* to be hosted' (Gomes, 2019, p. 226, emphasis added), Fox O'Mahoney and Sweeny (2010) point out that for many forced migrants, uncertainty and insecurity may not lead to 'home' as an outcome. Instead, uncertainty and insecurity in relation to their legal status, as well as structural exclusion, living in precarious conditions, such as renting informally, or the perception of temporality can all influence whether houses and homes are perceived as transient (Suda, 2016).

I found evidence of this in Jawad's attitude about moving into a council flat, twelve years after he first claimed asylum in the UK. Jawad was a refugee in his early 50s and was living in supported housing when I first met him, just about to move into his own flat which he would rent from the council. Long before arriving in the UK in 2009, he had to leave his home country and stayed in various other countries, before being granted refugee status in the UK in 2019. Since his arrival in 2009, he had gone through a ten-year cycle of 'just claiming, getting refused, fresh claim in and getting refused, going to the NASS [National Asylum Support Service] accommodation, kicked out, become homeless again, go to that friend, that city, that city, one month here, two months there and then apply again, again, get it NASS accommodation, then kicked out again, all the time' (Jawad). For Jawad, this was his 'long sad story of homelessness'. Over a period of ten years, Jawad experienced fluid displacement (Brun, 2015) as he continuously moved and was moved between different places in the UK, relying on the support of institutions and goodwill of friends, while having his life put on hold. It did not surprise me, that Jawad's attitude was so cynical, having experienced long-term transience, as he described the move to his flat as the 'next logical step'.

Crawley and Jones (2021) critically point out that migrant journeys are often 'represented as linear movements between two places' (p. 3226), while conceptualising the places individuals pass as 'places "in-between"' (p. 3226), or steppingstones (p. 3227). However, the authors argue that place is not just a 'back-drop to physical journeys' (p. 3228). While for Jawad, the 'in-between places' he passed were representative of his story of homelessness, other examples I came across while in the field indicate the importance of relationships that are built in places which may at first only be an 'in-between place' from which individuals want to move away. Charles, a local church reverend, for example told me about a refugee who was a member of his church community who wanted to move to London with his family. Where Jasmine in her role as a support worker insisted on refugees having the choice to move to a different city, although she advised refugees against moving away, Charles took on a role of a friend giving informal advice and support, emphasising the realistic chance of failure in an attempt to give advice to a person close to him. He tried to convince his refugee church member that moving to London was a bad idea, drawing on his personal experience of living there. Ultimately, Charles could not convince him to stay but emphasised that he could come back. Charles told me how the family got on:

> And of course they were living in a tiny and very expensive flat, they didn't have a church community that they'd found that had a kind of [language] translation and so on. And it was dirty and noisy and busy and he just absolutely hated it [laughs]. So he called me up and said 'I am coming back to Newcastle' and he moved the whole family back to Newcastle. And […] I suppose for us that is a great thing, but for him, as well, that kind of build a long-term connection that actually this [Newcastle] is becoming his home and his community forever, or […] the foreseeable future […] . And so […] that person then goes from being a transient member of the community to an embedded member of a community.

While the refugee from Charles' story had imagined finding work in London, this did not materialise for him. Charles' story echoes what another participant, Saman, said about coming back to Newcastle after having moved to London, hoping to make a better life there, including finding work. Living in London was difficult, because of the cost of living, not feeling welcomed by the community, and the lack of employment opportunities. While he may have hoped for the emotional support of his social network in London, he experienced the negative aspects of ethnic-

specific networks as they were unwelcoming to him (Ryan et al., 2008). Saman and his family thus decided to go back to Newcastle because 'it was much better from London, I knew the town, I had stayed there, I had friends, I was more comfortable there' (Saman). Saman was not able to find work in London, and similarly, the family did not find opportunities to build and negotiate attachment and belonging, despite having a social network there. Ryan (2018) in this context discusses migrants' 'differentiated embedding' to emphasise the nuanced ways in which individuals can develop different 'depths of attachment and belonging' (p. 237). For example, an individual may be embedded in the labour market as they have work but may feel disconnected from their neighbourhood. Saman, and the refugee from Charles' story, were not able to find work in either Newcastle or London which may have facilitated negotiations about becoming embedded in the labour market, despite hoping to find opportunities in the latter to become embedded in it. While they had social networks in both places, there was a deeper sense of attachment and belonging in Newcastle as they were actively participating in the church community; whereas networks in London were a source of negative feelings.

Having started a 'process of embedding' in Newcastle, returning to it was then at the same time a return to a community where many refugees had connections to, and a place where they had memories, knowledge and experiences (Netto, 2010; Ryan, 2018). This is the case for the refugee in Charles' story, who he described as having made a transition from a transient to an embedded community member; as well as Saman who described the nuances of his feeling of being embedded as having friends, knowing the place, and being comfortable. This also indicates the significance of the 'in-between places' migrants pass in their movements (Cawley and Jones, 2021). Although they may be developed unconsciously, the relationships which are built through interactions, such as those with a church community, contribute to the meanings which are attached to a place. This then creates 'points of connection' (Crawley and Jones, 2021, p. 3237) which in the case of Saman and the refugee from Charles story came to be seen when new experiences were made in a different place, triggering a decision to move again. In both cases, movements and mobilities were circular (Fontanari, 2017). This is unlike Jawad, who was caught in a long-term transient status, with only fleeting stays in various places, unable to stay in one place for long due to his legal status and subject to power relations inherent in the UK asylum system.

The above also underlines the different nature of the interpersonal relationships that refugees build with those who give them support, and the power dynamics that are at play. While Jasmine provided formal support on behalf of the local authority, Charles rather took on the role of an informal support worker within the church. In the latter case, the user-worker relationship is characterised by 'less hierarchical dynamics' (Birger and Nadan, 2022, p. 416). This is for example evident in Charles emphasising that the refugee in his story was always welcome to come back to Newcastle, or subsequently in the individual from his story calling him to let Charles know he was coming back. Birger and Nadan (2022) argue that less formal relationship structures may facilitate trust-building between support workers and refugees and can ultimately achieve positive outcomes. Whereas Jasmine acted within the professional boundaries of her job role and insisted there was 'nothing really' she could do to prevent refugees from moving away from Newcastle although she knew about the risks, for Charles, these boundaries were less defined as he acted in a friend-like manner, being more concerned about a move to a different city.

Despite trusting relationships with local others which may contribute to building 'points of connection' (Crawley and Jones, 2021, p. 3237), there are other influences which may impede on the capacity of refugees to end transiency and to settle. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the safe return review where every refugee who applies for settlement after their five-year limited leave period has ended is subject to a process of scrutiny whether it might be safe for them to return to their home countries (Home Office, 2017). This creates a perception of a 'time limit' on their stay and protection which has consequences for refugees who are re-building their lives and are in the process of developing attachment and belonging. Throughout interviews, it became evident that individuals incorporated this 'discourse of return' into their negotiations of belonging (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020, p. 126). Sahar, for example, reflected on the time limit of his status:

> My residency is like leave to remain, is limited, is for five years and I am not sure what happens after that. […] My status with my residency […] make me not pretty sure about being accepted here or not.

Uncertainty about the time limit on his visa, and what was going to happen after five years created doubts for Sahar about whether he was accepted into the community or not. 'It's not about only you choosing the place, the place chooses you as well', he went on to explain. In negotiating and

constructing the meaning of Newcastle as a place, Sahar was unsure whether it chose him, so that for him, it might be an unstable place until he can secure a legal status which guarantees him indefinite leave to remain in the UK (Mallett, 2004, p. 70). Sahar, like many other refugees, experienced first-hand what the 'hostile environment' created by restrictive immigration policies means for many migrants (Goodfellow, 2020).

Going beyond the need for suitable shelters to live in to lead fulfilled lives, individuals need to have 'confidence in the social order, in their place in society, in their own right to be themselves, and a belief that their self-realisation can be achieved' (Hiscock et al., 2011, p. 50). Although he spoke very positively about the 'friendly Geordies', uncertainty about his legal status and future reinforced a feeling that Sahar was not chosen by the place and that he did not belong, and that he was 'kind of different to normal people'. Sahar's sense of 'ontological security' therefore was weakened, as continuity, and his confidence about his place in the world was fragmented (Giddens, 1991).

Sahar's comments raise questions on notions of embeddedness and belonging for many forced migrants, and ultimately also on the circumstances in which they have to make a home. On the one hand, Charles' description of the trajectory of his refugee church member from a transient to an embedded member may be indicative of a process of developing a sense of belonging or making a home. However, Charles' is an outsider's perspective and so while it may seem for an outsider that migrants are embedded, it may not be perceived as home by migrants themselves – this can be seen in Sahar's doubtful comments on whether he was chosen by the place. Additionally, the perceived time limit creates a state of 'chronic uncertainty' as it cast doubts on whether to engage in meaningful homemaking, if there is a chance that individuals have to leave the UK after five years (Brun, 2015, p. 31). On the other hand, Jawad's experiences of long-term uncertainty and insecurity, and being in a state of long-term transience as an asylum seeker might then explain his cynical outlook when leaving supported housing and the way he talked about his new flat as 'the next logical step' rather than as a 'home'. Although he was in the same country, he had to move frequently between cities, and dwellings, so that he did not experience the familiarity and continuity which 'give meaning to and link people to places' (Werner et al., 1985, p. 6).

4.3. Characterising the housing search

When respondents stayed in Newcastle after receiving refugee status, they followed common housing patterns, often involving four housing types. These can be broadly categorised as: 1) emergency homeless accommodation, such hostel, or sofa surfing with friends;[62] 2) longer term temporary supported accommodations; 3) private rented; and 4) council housing. Participants did not live in all housing types, there was no inherent order in which individuals stayed in these different housing types, and circular movements between places were common. In the following paragraphs I will expand on discussions from section 4.2.1 where I discussed participants' mobilities between cities and explore in detail how participants came to live in these various housing types in Newcastle, incorporating agency and choice into the analysis.

Although there are state support services in place outlining the 'move on' for refugees, which aim to ensure that, at least in theory, every asylum seeker who has been granted refugee status in Newcastle gets an offer of a council house (Newcastle City Council, n.d. -a), in my role as a volunteer in a supported housing project at a local support organisation, I met many refugees who had not been housed following this process, creating different housing patterns involving the housing types identified above. This was for different reasons, for example because individuals did not want to move into the housing offered or because refugees were never contacted in the first place as attempts by council support workers to make contact with refugees either by phone, in-person visits or letter often remained unsuccessful. It was therefore inevitable that some individuals became destitute and needed emergency housing support. Adrian, a staff member at a supporting agency, told me that he helped at least two people every week who come to the charity with all their belongings because they were destitute and had nowhere to stay.

The quotes below are taken from interviews with support workers, both from the council and housing association who manages social housing on behalf of the council. They characterise the support process of finding council housing for refugees who have just been granted status:

[62] On rare occasions, I also met refugees who were street homeless for a short period of time before moving into emergency homeless accommodation provided by the council or sofa surfing with friends.

> I just find the whole process quite oppressive […] because we can actually only offer them typically only one property. And it's whatever we can find (Alex).

> It's understandable, they have had to move around a lot, either in their own country, in this country, they have never really had a choice of where they have been, and then I come along and say, well actually we need to get you moved very quickly. And there is an element of choice they can say 'yes' or 'no', but I am basically again telling them where they are going to live. […] I am quite clear from the start, it's like […] a one offer (Claire).

> I mean I can fully understand why somebody who has come through the asylum process who had been, you know, stripped of their agency, had no choice about where they are, how they are housed, you know I can imagine that once you get status, you feel like 'oh this is me fine, I am going to get a bit of control back in my life'. But […] it isn't about choice unfortunately (Rachel).

> I was horrified when I first started, I was like 'they don't have any choice really, they get one offer', like I was absolutely horrified but I think, otherwise, there would be a lot worse (Jasmine).

In all the quotes it is acknowledged that when refugees have been given leave to remain, there is a lack of choice about where they can live. Within the state support structures in place to find housing for newly recognised refugees, housing is 'allocated' in a very limited 'space of agency', rather than chosen (Fontanari, 2017, p. 38). Previous studies of migrants' housing pathways concluded that there is a 'continuum of individual agency […], ranging from relatively constrained/dependent […] upon arrival in the UK through to increasingly unconstrained/independent […] as resources and rights are gradually accumulated' (Robinson et al., 2007, p. xi). While it is true for asylum seekers that they are very constrained and dependent while their asylum application is processed, it is not the case that refugees become increasingly unconstrained or independent when they are given leave to remain, or when they accumulate rights, including the right to social housing (Mayblin and James, 2019).

Rather, as Alex, Claire, Jasmine and Rachel acknowledge, the process of finding housing for refugees in Newcastle is 'oppressive' as housing is allocated instead of chosen, thus perpetuating power relations in state support structures (Wiegmann, 2017). Many refugees continue to be

constrained and dependent, and the time when refugee status has been given is not the time for choices, as Rachel clearly points out. Although refugees have the right to social housing, many are not exercising this right per se, but rather this right is exercised for them after they get leave to remain. This is mainly due to the 28-day 'notice to quit' period in which individuals have to leave their government provided accommodation, have to secure income, and have to find a place to stay. Carnet et al. (2014) describe this time as a 'grace period', this transition period characterised by potential crisis and hardship, where support services try to mitigate against the 'failures […] in the transition from this [asylum support] to the mainstream welfare system' (Mayblin and James, 2019, p. 387). While previous research underlines the perception of time moving slowly as asylum seekers are waiting for a decision on their claim (Fontanari, 2017), time starts moving fast after a decision has been made. Griffiths (2014) uses the term 'temporal tension' to describe individuals' perception of time moving fast when a claim was rejected, and deportation is faced as a consequence. Even when a claim was accepted, time is moving fast as within 28 days individuals undergo a transition from asylum seeker to refugee.

Support workers described this 'interim' or 'in-between period' as 'very difficult'. Jasmine for example told me that refugees often did not realise the urgency of the situation, and especially finding housing after being forced to leave the accommodation where they lived as asylum seekers. Rachel, a senior ranking officer in the council, said she felt frustrated that there was no 'end to end' process within the asylum support provided by the Home Office for refugees:

> You get to 28 days, that's it, your support stops, your accommodation stops, and your somebody else's problem, […] there is not really a […] kind of warm handover or this is part of the onward journey, it's quite a harsh cut off point and […] that's it […] the tap [is] turned off and […] people are effectively dumped.

Using the metaphor of a 'tap turned off', Rachel indicated how significant the challenges can be which forced migrants face after receiving a positive decision on their asylum claim. Essentially, they are left with nothing but their belongings, if they do not secure an income and find housing within 28 days. This is why refugees lack the possibility for choice in the process of finding housing although they have accumulated rights to claim and exercise choice.

However, choice is a central element of 'home', and it is 'characteristic of [home environments] […] that they are chosen. One could almost argue that *if they are not chosen they are not home*' (Rapoport, 1985, p. 256, emphasis added). Considering the circumstances of being a refugee in general, and more specifically in the UK, what Rapoport (1985) argues is essential. Not only did many refugees not have a choice about living in the UK or Newcastle in the first place, they also did not have much choice with regards to housing, as Alex, Rachel and Claire emphasised. Although an environment can become a home, the conditions of how many refugees came to live in a specific city, which was forced and on a no-choice basis, as well as the support process in place to find housing for them, are not characteristic of a home environment, according to Rapoport (1985).

The 'constrained choice perspective' (Robinson et al., 2007, p. 4) on housing journeys of minority ethnic populations acknowledges the limits regarding housing choices for individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds, including refugees, compared to the majority population. The quotes at the start of this section indicate that the 'constrained choice' participants in this study faced after being granted leave to remain, consisted of saying 'yes' or 'no' to an allocated property, as Claire pointed out. Alex explained to me what happens when refugees say 'no':

> Their choice is essentially, you can take a property, we will support you into it, we help you get your utility set up, we will help you apply for furniture, if you need that, […] but if they choose not to take that property, then our process is to refer them to the Housing Advice Centre in Newcastle and it's then their job, essentially to come in as another voice, explaining to them, if you don't take this offer of a property, which is suitable for you, for your housing need, then you are essentially refusing that property, there is nothing more we can do to support you. And then the support from our side closes down, the Housing Advice Centre closes down as well, […] and then if a notice to quit period is 3 or 4 days away, […] unless they have managed to get something sorted, private rented or they get to stay with friends until they get to secure another property, essentially they have to leave their MEARS accommodation and if they don't have anywhere to go, then they are homeless.

It is certainly not easy for Alex to explain this process to me. Having volunteered with refugees in Greece, I can tell that he very much cares about what is happening to refugees and asylum seekers, and that he is aware of the injustices within the refugee and asylum systems. However, what Alex describes is the reality of the consequences of the choice refugees make about the property that is offered to them. If they say 'yes', they get full support; if they say 'no', they could be homeless and have no support. Where Rachel said that individuals are 'dumped' after they receive refugee status, they are again dumped when they 'refuse' to take a property offered to them by the council. While the Housing Advice Centre steps in after a property has been refused, instead of offering realistic alternatives, they mostly reiterate what was said before: take the property or you will be homeless, with the threat of the latter becoming more and more realistic; yet hoping that a mild threat would enforce the realisation that it might be better to accept the housing that was offered. Engaging in the structures has advantages, while trying to act on their own has disadvantages for many refugees in Newcastle who have to leave their government provided accommodation after getting refugee status.

Thus, the circumstances in which refugees (have to) make a choice about their 'home environment' strongly suggest that rather than being 'shapers of their own lives', refugees are 'objects of circumstance' (Hoggett, 2001, p. 45). It may well be that they accept the council property that is offered to them. However, finding a 'good' property is often down to luck, as it has been described to me by some participants who were 'lucky' enough to be housed in a good property in a good location. Similar to the long wait for a decision on an asylum claim where asylum seekers might feel that they do not have control over their lives (Fontanari, 2017), control is still not gained when time moves fast – as it does during the 28-day move-on period after a positive decision on an asylum claim.

In addition to the links between 'choice' and 'home', the notion of 'control' also plays a central role when thinking about what 'home' is (Parsell, 2012). Douglas (1991, p. 289) argues that 'control' and 'home' are linked, in that 'home starts by bringing some space under control'. Beyond this, 'control over space' also means that individuals are able to take some control over their lives (Parsell, 2012). This for example can relate to being free (autonomous) in what, where and when activities inside the home take place. Control is then also linked to privacy with the home representing freedom and responsibility (Saunders and Williams, 1988, p. 88). 'Control' is

especially important for many refugees and asylum seekers, whose lives, as Rachel pointed out, were characterised by a lack of control. 'Home as control' can therefore be conceptualised as a physical place where individuals can 'realise a desired or expected way of living' (Parsell, 2012, p. 160). The physical place enables individuals to take control which resonates with Anderson et al. (2016) who claim that place is a necessary condition of home.

While 'taking control' refers mostly to what happens inside the house, there is nevertheless a lack of control when it comes to choosing housing. This is important, following Anderson et al. (2016) who consider place a necessary condition of home. Rather, the approach to support refugees find housing I witnessed in Newcastle was informed by the premise that individuals have to accept the housing offered to them as it was allocated on a no-choice basis. Seen like this, choice was limited to 'yes' or 'no'. Nevertheless, some participants in this study took ownership of the little agency they had. However, even when they decided to take control and exercise their claim for choice, it did not mean that respondents chose a home environment as an alternative. Rather, they rejected the council housing that was offered to them and did not engage with the support offered. Some participants also looked at the private rented housing market but this entailed significant obstacles.

Saman for example tried to rent a property on the private housing market by looking at websites, such as Zoopla or Rightmove after he was granted refugee status: 'I looked at 15 houses but every time they said you need to have guarantor and show me payslip'. At one viewing, the letting agent waited for him in front of the property, and when Saman said that he could not provide either, he was not even shown around the property. He went on to explain: 'You know, there are some Pakistani people who say "give me £20 and I write you letter for payslip, how much you need, £2000, £3000? I put the official stamp on", but I do not want to say the lie'. Engaging in something illegal was out of question for Saman, even though he was in a desperate situation.

Reza was considering moving from supported housing into informal housing. Having lived in temporary supported housing since 2018, he had been (unsuccessfully) trying to move out of supported accommodation for over a year. Feeling the urgency to move, he became very impatient about waiting for a council house. Similar to Saman, Reza also told me about a

‘Pakistani man’ he knew who would rent him a house. The following is a vignette from my ethnographic notes in which I recall a conversation I had with Reza about his living situation:

> ‘You can move into private, you know Reza’, I said to him. ‘But make sure that you get a proper contract.’ ‘What is contract?’, he asked me. ‘Because I know a Pakistani, he owns a lot of houses and he says I can have one.’ What he said made me suspicious and panic a little, thinking that Reza would just go and move into a random house, and so I try to explain to him the importance of a tenancy agreement and the securities it would give him, and that otherwise, there was a risk that his landlord would turn around and say that he needed to leave from one day to the next. This seemed to make Reza rethink this option. I try to talk to him sensibly, and tell him that he should not make any rash decisions at this point.

While for Saman it was out of question to do something illegal, Reza was considering rather informal housing practices and renting privately through entering a potentially precarious living arrangement ‘beyond “formal” systems of law or regulation’ (Shrestha et al., 2021, p. 159).[63] However, in doing so he was potentially putting himself in a vulnerable situation, as he was not aware, for example, that he should sign a tenancy agreement. After more than a year bidding on council houses, Reza simply seemed to be fed up waiting. This indicates that participants often acted in an environment with limited understanding, as well as how urgent it was to move from their temporary accommodation, and how they thought they could solve their current housing problem.

When refugees became homeless, some would move in temporarily with friends if they had that option. However, as I pointed out by the example of Ariana earlier, a friend may be someone that participants had only met recently, creating an even more precarious living situation. Very often, refugees were placed in temporary accommodation by the council, either emergency or longer term. Where they were placed depended on availability, and other individual circumstances. There was longer-term accommodation available for refugee families, for example, but as I was told by Jasmine, a support worker in the council, ‘they tend to be full, I mean they are never really

[63] Following Shrestha et al. (2021), I do not consider all informal housing practices as illegal. In this context, Saman’s and Reza’s situations differ as Saman was offered a fake payslip which can be considered illegal.

empty, once one moves out, we have got it turned around for the next person'. At the local supporting organisation I volunteered, that provided longer-term supported accommodation for single refugees, I had similar experiences as generally all flats were full, and once someone had moved out, a new person would move in in days later.

When such longer-term, refugee-specific accommodation was full, homeless refugees were then placed in any emergency homeless accommodation that was available. Jasmine explained to me that she would 'try to avoid putting [refugees] in places where we knew there was drugs and alcohol' because of cultural sensitivities and differences in particular for some Muslims who may choose not to consume alcohol and drugs because of their religion (Mallik et al., 2021). However, if this was the only option, refugees were placed into any available accommodation to avoid them sleeping rough. Sam, a refugee who I met while volunteering, was placed in such emergency accommodation described by Jasmine as 'culturally unsuitable', as there was drug and alcohol misuse. When I met him, Sam had just been admitted to supported accommodation, after having been placed in emergency accommodation where he did not even spend one night: 'It was very horrible, not a good place', he told me. While the staff was nice, he was appalled by the many homeless people living there, who were fighting at night. He hated it so much that he only spent '30 minutes there, and then I went to stay with a friend'. When I asked him whether he had been made an offer of housing as per the council support structures, he showed me a letter from the housing association which asked him to get in touch with them. 'I called but they said they couldn't help me', Sam said. Although support structures are in place, Sam's experience is evidence for the gaps between policy structures that supposedly support forced migrants and micro-level experiences of these individuals. This shortcoming leaves many refugees in a vulnerable position to start making a home after having experienced war or persecution and seeking safety.

The extent of the limiting structures within which individuals nevertheless claimed (imagined) agency was also evident in what happened to Alla, a young female refugee in her late 20s. When I first met her, she was still an asylum seeker, but was granted refugee status a few months after. Having had to leave her government provided accommodation, she was referred to a shared house for homeless women. Even though she was given a high priority band from the council to move, Alla could not find council housing, and she was eventually referred to the local supporting

organisation I volunteered at. Walter, a staff member, contacted her, and we met with her to show her around a vacant flat which I reflect on in this vignette from my diary:

> The flat is still empty, but it has just been decorated and new carpets have been put in, so when we walk in, the first impression is good, as it looks nice and clean and a smell of fresh paint still lingers in the air. There is not much to see since there is no furniture yet in the flat, but we tell Alla that the flat will be furnished. After we show her all the rooms, we stand in the small corridor and Walter tells her about the service the charity he works for provides. Suddenly, Alla takes out a little notebook where she has written down a few questions she would like to ask. This is much to my surprise, and I have never seen someone do that before, as usually when someone is shown around a flat there are not too many questions being asked. But it seems as though Alla has thought about her situation, and she wants to make a decision which is as informed as possible, and so she asks her questions about how much it would cost to live in the flat, how long she can stay, if she can work, and how it works if she wants to leave. […] Walter asks her if she is interested in the flat, and Alla answers, 'well, I don't have a choice'. She explains to us that she has been referred to other temporary accommodations, but that she has not been given a chance to view these, and that they have basically told her that she can either 'take it or leave it'. […] As we drive back to the office, we pass the temporary accommodation Alla is staying in. It is a terraced housed on a busy road, and the door is set back from the road, with a short walkway leading up to it which can be accessed through a fence. I can see a few men standing in front of the fence, and also on the walkway. Immediately, I start thinking about Alla, who is about my age, and who I can therefore relate to in a way, and how she feels about living there. […] When we are back in the office later, Walter and I speculate about whether Alla will accept the flat or not. We are both thrown at the fact that it seems as though the support plan for Alla is simply to be moved around from one temporary accommodation to the other, not being given the chance to even look at the places she might have to live in.

Although Alla seemingly wanted to make an informed choice and asked a lot of questions, she was aware of the limiting structures influencing this choice which ultimately led her to the realisation that she did not have one. Newcastle City Council prides itself as having a 'relatively

good record' in preventing homelessness based on 'long-term committed political leadership, council housing, investment in accommodation, advice and support services and […] partnership working' (Newcastle City Council, n.d. -b); however, it is questionable how sustainable this homelessness provision is. This is especially so for refugees who have limited choice, little understanding of their situation, are being moved around between different homelessness services and are forced to live with people who are vulnerable in their own way; however, with very distinct needs from their own, for example relating to substance misuse. This can then lead to experiences similar to those made by Sam who was referred to a homeless hostel but left after a very short time as he felt uncomfortable among the other residents.

Some refugees, like Sam, who have social networks might be able to stay with friends temporarily, but others, like Alla, are forced to accept their situation, still carefully weighing up their (limited) options. Having both been placed in emergency accommodation before being referred to supported housing, Sam and Alla in a way were both caught up in the homelessness provision system set up by the council as they were moving from one temporary accommodation to the other. Although support structures may be good in theory, in practice refugees are left in a position of powerlessness, with limited agency where they are told to 'take it or leave it'.

The analysis so far indicates that there is a lack of choice and control for many refugees when it comes to their housing, creating unfavourable conditions for the experience of feeling at home and leaving many refugees to live in different temporary accommodations. Individuals are allocated housing on a no-choice basis and are embedded into power structures which limit their agency and capacity to make strategic choices. Regardless of whether they accept the property that was allocated to them or not, refugees may end up in a place which they might neither have desired nor expected. This carries the risk of a state of 'invisible homelessness' in which refugees might have a shelter but do not feel at home or continue to live in prolonged temporariness as they expect to move on from temporary accommodations. This is important, not only because of the house, and what it may look like, but also because 'selecting the "right" area to live in is a crucial factor in many households' search processes, for location has a social and symbolic value' (Saunders and Williams, 1988, p. 83). At the same time, structural failures mean refugees do not get the rights that lead to a self-determined, independent life 'at the very point when society has legitimised their participation' (Strang et al., 2018, p. 211) after they have been given refugee

status and leave to remain. They are being left feeling disempowered and rather than independence, dependency increases after refugees receive their status. This is especially so for housing, as there are significant barriers for refugees to find accommodation, and many rely on charity-run temporary housing, or on support which is funded by public money. Limiting the right to choose the housing individuals want then limits the 'right to important conditions for well-being', such as the right to adequate housing, as well as live in dignity (Karlsson, 2019, p. 72).

As a result, there is a chance that refugees end up in a property which they chose out of rationality and for pragmatic reasons, rather than emotionality, the latter being an important aspect of 'home' (Dover, 1985). This is reflected in Sahar's comments on the availability of choices and how he made his decision to move into the flat he was living in when I interviewed him: 'it wasn't like "I love the flat and I want to go for it"'. Although this was not the case for Sahar, the majority of the people I interviewed did not want to stay in the place where they were long-term, and were considering either moving to a different, very often bigger house or property, or to a different city. Therefore, many participants encountered what Hoggett (2001, p. 45) calls the 'stressful and disempowering environment that many welfare subjects experience, where individuals are surrounded by real demands and real constraints which cannot simply be turned into resources'.

4.3.1. 'At least they have got a roof over their heads'

The two remaining sections of this chapter will discuss meanings of 'the house', how it is understood by those who help refugees find housing, and refugees themselves, as well as how these meanings have been formed. Unpacking how support services understand housing and home for refugees and juxtaposing it with how refugees understand it, indicates that there are fundamental differences; and this will help to further understand points made above on 'invisible homelessness'. Differences in understandings mostly relate to different understandings of what the house needs to do for refugees, and they point towards a mismatch between policy rhetoric of integration and the realities of housing allocation for refugees.

The quotes from Alex, Jasmine, Claire and Rachel in section 4.3 characterise the support process in place within the local authority to find housing for refugees after they have been given leave to remain. In a process that has been described as 'oppressive', refugees very often have to choose between two evils: moving into a property which is not ideal and not fit for purpose in

some cases, or homelessness, as they are made an offer of one property without room for individual preferences. The 28-day period in which refugees have to leave their government provided accommodation creates an urgent situation as they face the very real threat of homelessness. The process of finding housing for refugees in Newcastle therefore takes place in the wider context of homelessness prevention. Refugees are ascribed with the identity of 'the homeless refugee' by support services, and when being identified as homeless, individual preferences do not count and there is very limited space for agency such as choosing where to live. Support services are under time pressure, they are 'up against the clock' (Alex), especially because in reality, the 28-day period is often reduced due to communication problems with both, MEARS and refugees, which has been pointed out as well by Phillips (2004). This means that in that time, support services can find 'accommodation that is suitable for their [refugees'] needs' although 'it might not be […] what they want' (Rachel).

This quote from Rachel provides initial insights into how support services understand housing, namely that it is required to meet refugees' needs in the first place. What refugees need is determined by the support services operating within the council, rather than by refugees themselves. Needs are informed, for example, by the size of the household, or any health needs which require a property to be altered or be suitable to accommodate for those needs. In addition to these, there are individuals' 'homeless needs' which are urgent due to the pressures of the 28-day move-on period after refugees have received their status, meaning that the risk of being homeless increases. Therefore, in interviews with supporting agencies, I heard many times that the main objective is to give refugees 'a roof over their heads'. If housing is 'going to stop them [refugees] being homeless', (Claire) even though it's 'not ideal' (Jasmine),[64] then the council's duty has been fulfilled. The physical condition of the house, or the house or dwelling as an object, is most important in the state-driven process of offering a property to refugees.

This points towards a certain understanding of home which according to Gurney (1996) displays negative or instrumental attitudes towards it. In a study with owner-occupiers, Gurney (1996) asked respondents what home meant to them, and he established twelve categories reflecting different meanings of home relating to, for example, emotions, autonomy or 'display'. Gurney

[64] It was support staff who used the notion of 'not ideal'. This downplays the state of the housing that was allocated – rather, these houses were often in a horrible state.

labelled one category 'negative/instrumental attitudes towards home', which included those answers that 'either do not recognise the difference between house and home, and stress the physical elements of the house, or else do not consider where they are living as home' (Clapham, 2005, p. 140). One key term in this category which Gurney's respondents used to describe their feelings towards their homes was 'a roof over your head'.

Approaching refugee housing primarily as 'a roof over their heads' thus fits into negative or instrumental attitudes towards home, as suggested by Gurney (1996). Essential, but non-instrumental, elements of the home are ignored, and there is a focus primarily on the physical aspects of the house. Clapham (2005) describes a perspective where only the 'physical condition of housing' is dealt with as 'impossible and undesirable' (p. 118). Rather, 'the use to which the house is put and the meaning it has for those living there' (p. 118) needs to be dealt with in relation to it, meaning that needs, such as those relating to what refugees require the house to be and do, need to be considered likewise. On the contrary, the way that interviewees from support services described what housing needs to do for refugees is yet more evidence of how migrants are dehumanised, as they are treated as objects that need to be housed, rather than individuals who have preferences and imaginations about where they want to live. Still, the approach taken by support services needs to be understood in the context of asylum support provision by the government which only gives individuals one month to find a place to live. In other words, many refugees are on the brink of becoming destitute.

From interviews with council support workers, I learned about 'good intentions and localised successes' (Phillips, 2004, p. 551) to meet the housing needs of refugees. For example, to house bigger families, dining rooms had been repurposed into bedrooms, or two properties had been merged into one. However, despite these successes, obstacles remained. While many of these solutions may satisfy the immediate or priority need for housing, the question arises to what extent solutions such as a repurposed dining room may satisfy refugees' understandings of their ideal home in terms of the building, and also whether actions like these are undertaken with the intention of building a 'permanent dwelling', or whether it is just another temporary solution from the beginning (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020, p. 122).

In this context, research has indicated that ‘a roof over one’s head’ is not sufficient with regards to the importance for displaced individuals to get a sense of home for their physical and mental wellbeing (Fox O’Mahony and Sweeney, 2010, p. 299). It is not a given that forced migrants will feel at home where they are housed, and a shelter may not be ‘conducive to feelings of “home”’ (Fox O’Mahony and Sweeney, 2010, p. 296; Karlsson, 2019). Likewise, feelings of home over time may not develop (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020, p. 126). Many people, including forced migrants, have expectations about their ‘ideal home’; and if the housing they live in does not match with these expectations, the result may be feelings of not being at home, or homelessness.

In this regard, Robinson’s (2002, p. 33) definition of homelessness as ‘both negative and positive configurations of relations with place’ is helpful to understand a kind of emotional or invisible homelessness which can occur despite individuals being housed. Robinson (2002) puts individual relations with space centre-stage and develops an understanding of homelessness in which individuals can be considered homeless when they negatively relate to space. This is also picked up by Dovey (1985, p. 34) who argues that homelessness is not a housing problem, and that ‘home is best conceived of as a kind of relationship between people and their environment’. Although housing may fulfil a basic need for refugees in Newcastle to have a roof over their heads, feelings of being homeless may remain, raising further questions about the sustainability of housing allocation as it takes place in Newcastle. This applies not only to respondents in this study, taking into account that poor quality housing is a fact of life for many who are dealing with the consequences of a ‘housing emergency’ (Shelter, 2021).

Although support services spoke of ‘a roof over their heads’, this did not mean that they actually conceived of it for what this means, namely a house. It emerged in the interviews with support services that even though initially the physical condition of the house was put first to fulfil the homeless need, it was implied that refugees can make a home from the property they are being offered, despite it not being what they want. Support workers recognised that they might not be offering the ideal property to refugees and emphasised that they have the choice to bid for other properties after moving into the property they were offered. However, they at the same time spoke about another meaning of housing for refugees, pointing towards a mismatch between rhetoric of integration used by support workers, and the realities of housing allocation:

> Integration is another big thing, trying to integrate them into the community and make them feel safe, secure and stable really that's the main aspect of our job and obviously housing is probably the biggest thing to help them do that I would say. […] I think they are never going to get a job […] if they lived out of a hostel, if they don't have a space they can call a home […] Everyone's kind of got different expectations, and I know it's really hard when they come from quite often really nice houses that they have built themselves, but I think it gives them the foundation to go on and do a lot of other things (Jasmine).

Jasmine considers housing a tool to aid integration, a perspective taken as well by those who consider housing a means of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008; Phillimore and Goodson, 2009). She acknowledges the importance of a home as a place of refuge, safety and stability, and juxtaposes that with the condition of being homeless, or living in a hostel. However, she ignores that a space is not called home simply because it is a house. While Jasmine acknowledges the importance of feeling safe, secure and stable as essential aspects of 'home' as well as integration, if these 'expectations', and others that refugees have of a house are not met, the house can still be a 'foundation', an instrumental space from which to move on (Gurney, 1996). Even though it may be the most rational thing to do for refugees to accept the housing that they are being offered, individuals have ideas of the nature of their 'home' which might not align with the house they are being offered (Easthope, 2004). Clapham (2005) in this regard points out that the way that a household living in a house perceives of it is more important than 'any objective characteristics of the building' (p. 122). As such, the impact of the physicality of the house on its occupants 'is mediated by their attitudes towards the house and the meaning it has for them' (p. 125). Likewise, whether or not occupants of a house are satisfied with it also depends on 'the expectations, situation and position in the housing pathway of the household' (p. 122).

Regardless of whether or not the house refugees are placed meets their expectations, it may well be the case that individuals do not *feel* safe and secure in the location or neighbourhood in which a house is being offered to them. During fieldwork, I frequently listened to stories of harassment and racial abuse which I will discuss further in chapter six. It then becomes questionable whether the house can still be a 'foundation to go on and do a lot of other things', as it had been suggested by Jasmine. Indeed, the location of the house was important for refugees. Support workers knew this, as Jasmine indicates:

> I know that obviously […], when you're so far away from your own country, being close to people that you know, being close to your community, close to the halal shops, it's really important for sense of identity, so I think that's, that's obviously one of the issues with just […] being kind of put anywhere that's got space, as it is. You know it does kind of impact their self, their sense of self.

Talking about the connection between identity, lifestyle and place, the location of the property was indeed one of the main reasons why refugees initially rejected a house that was offered to them. Kabachnik et al. (2010, p. 316) in this context argue that the 'severing of continuity with places' which many refugees and asylum seekers experience, challenges and reshapes identities constantly. However, place-identity is integral to forced migrants' sense of self because of their displacement (Kabachnik et al., 2010, p. 316). Having lived in government provided accommodation often for several years with other asylum seekers who share similar experiences and identities, and thus getting to know an area and building social networks, many refugees therefore want to stay within an area and do not want to move somewhere they do not know. However, within the council support structures, refugees are placed 'anywhere that's got space' (Jasmine), thus ignoring the social dimension of home which refers to inside the house, but also to outside, such as relations with neighbours or the neighbourhood, and homemaking can also occur in neighbourhoods (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 3).

Although in the support process, refugees are often asked for preferences regarding their location, they are told at the same time that it will be unlikely they live in their preferred area, essentially lowering their expectations about having a choice where they can live. Claire, for example, said that 'I ask [refugees] […] where they would prefer to be but I am quite straight about it, I can't guarantee'. She went on to explain that most refugees she supported wanted to live in the West End of Newcastle, due to ethnic diversity, availability of halal shops and supermarkets and proximity to the city centre; whereas areas on the outskirts of Newcastle were less desirable, mainly due to fewer amenities, a less diverse population, as well as distance to the city centre and thus associated higher cost of living in these areas due to the need to get public transport to reach amenities and support services in the centre. Despite acknowledging the importance of the link between identity and space as it was made by Jasmine, generally, there was little understanding among support workers for why refugees insisted on living in one area

when they were about to be homeless, and they referred to the good transport links within Newcastle which make it easy to get around and get to anywhere. They disregarded the cost of public transport for individuals on low income, and the barriers that exist for some to use public transport, including language or unease to go out (Rishbeth et al., 2019), thus potentially resulting in isolation. This again is evidence for a mismatch between integration rhetoric and realities of housing allocation.

It emerged from the interviews that support services' understanding of home did not take account of the complex relations between house and home, and they ignored the complex processes which take place when individuals engage in 'home'. Jasmine, for example, said that 'I don't know of anyone else that kind of gets offered a flat straight away, like a ready-made home', thereby implying that the property refugees are being offered is at the same time their 'home'. Using 'house' and 'home' interchangeably, she does not make the distinction between 'housing' and 'home' (Karlsson, 2019) but rather speaks about 'home' - which is 'housing plus the experiential elements of home' (Fox O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010, p. 285).

One explanation for this can be found in Parsell's (2012) work who surveyed homeless people in Brisbane on what home was: 'home was a house' (p. 170). Therefore, the understanding that 'a roof over their heads' equals home is informed by the fact that refugees are ascribed with the 'homeless' identity, and support takes place under the premise of homelessness prevention. However, conflating home with housing ignores the emotional and psychological dimensions of home which is a subjective experience, and can be achieved in a homemaking process, or can be a state of mind (see chapter two). But it is not just spatial, as Jasmine said. The flat is important, but only as a condition, and in order to speak of 'home', one must go beyond the physical structure (Easthope, 2004).

This emphasises the distinction that exists in most languages between 'house' and 'home' (Rykwert, 1991). Understanding the house merely as a 'roof over one's head' does not relate to deeper understandings of the house pointed out by Goyer (2014, p. 153) where he describes the house as a reference point, or as something which gives individuals security. The 'housing need' as support workers in Newcastle understand it is then not a need which could fulfil identity needs, as houses can, but rather it fulfils the most basic need, which is a roof over one's head. Regardless

of this, support services still use integration rhetoric to emphasise that the house they allocate to refugees would help them integrate. This is rooted in the assumption that home is associated with housing, having given refugees the identity of 'homeless'. However, as discussed earlier, feelings of homelessness may persist despite having housing, affirming the importance of housing which fulfils more than the basic need of having a roof over the head to ensure homelessness is prevented also in the future.

While support workers acknowledged that the processes of finding housing for refugees was problematic, no practical solution could be offered to mitigate against oppressive practices. This was due to the fact that support services on the local level have little to no influence over the structures in which they act, as these are determined by the state. These structures are already flawed and restrictive, as is the case for example with the asylum and refugee regime, where support services are picking up the pieces from the failure of the state to fulfil its 'duty to provide for all of their essential living needs' (Mayblin and James, 2019, p. 391); but also those structures related to social housing. One solution on offer was explained by Jasmine:

> I think they can, from what they have come from, they can really make the best of whatever flat they are given. You know, it's not an ideal home but what is, do you know what I mean?

'Making the best of it' rather than 'making a home' is the more realistic option available to many refugees. Jasmine acknowledges that the property offered might not be the 'ideal home', implying again that individuals will feel some sort of home at some point, engaging in a process of 'making the best' in a context of unclarity of what an 'ideal home' is. However, it is exactly in the intangible nature of home that it cannot be defined as an empirical variable 'in advance of careful management and explanation' (Dovey, 1985, p. 34). 'You can really make the houses really lovely if you want to and if you're kind of willing to give it an opportunity', Jasmine continued. Therefore, if refugees are willing to give the house a chance, they can make it 'really lovely' in a process of 'making the best'. Conversely, individuals might be blamed for not giving an opportunity to the house that was offered to them and punished for making a choice and not accepting the property that was being offered to them. Thinking about this in terms of agency, it

is in a way expected of refugees that they appropriate the place they are given – taking it, take control over it, and caring for it (Dovey, 1985, p. 47; Werner et al., 1985, p. 5).

However, refugees might have a 'really lovely' roof over their head, but they can still feel homeless when they negatively relate to the space they have been allocated; although they might not be homeless as per definitions of homelessness legislation as 'not having a room with four walls' (Kabachnik et al., 2010, p. 317 citing Ager and Strang, 2008). Just as 'home' is more than a house so can homelessness be much more than simply lacking a house, which is especially the case for refugees who by definition have lost their homes. A place cannot just be declared a home although it seems as though this is what is happening, and likewise, 'home is something that grows in a place rather than being imposed from without' (Brah, 1996, p. 194; Dovey, 1985, p. 42). Home might also be in a different time than in the present (Kabachnik et al., 2010). Still, Alex, Jasmine, Claire and Rachel all said that the house which they offer to refugees does not have to be their 'forever home' implying that individuals can move again if they want after having moved multiple times as asylum seekers, and that it is better to live in a house which they might not like, and at the same time ignoring the importance of permanence and continuity in homemaking (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998). Likewise, in order to have ontological security, individuals need more than a shelter (Giddens, 1991; Hiscock et al., 2001). Ignoring those aspects of home that contribute to this ontological security may impact on individuals' sense of themselves thus resulting in feelings of homelessness.

4.3.2. 'The building is part of the home'

Support services' understanding of housing for refugees was formed within the context of having to fulfil a need. As indicated by Jasmine, often the closest support services could get to meet refugees' expectations was to give them a roof over their heads and avoid homelessness, and to allocate a suitable property which might not be what individuals want, but fulfils their needs. Responses from forced migrants about what housing meant to them differed significantly from this.[65]

[65] Both, refugees and asylum seekers spoke about what housing meant to them, and I include perspectives from both in this section. I acknowledge that asylum seekers are not (yet) embedded into the council support process of finding housing; however, they had imaginations and aspirations of housing which they would like to live in in the future after getting refugee status (at which point they would be supported by the council). These went beyond it simply being a shelter, and they were connected to imaginations of a future life, and memories of past homes.

Brah (1996, p. 194) argues that there needs to be a distinction between 'feeling at home' and 'declaring a place a home', the latter characterising the practice undertaken by support services in that they declare the house given to refugees as their 'home' in the context of their limited understanding of differences between houses and homes, and what home entails. Many forced migrants participating in this study demanded more from a house than being a 'roof over their heads'. Their understandings went beyond just the simple fact of the physical dwelling, so that, for example, participants could fulfil their 'homing desires' (Brah, 1996, p. 194). Although objectively a house was deemed suitable from support services, refugee participants often did not regard it as such, never mind as a home. When thinking about identity and place, not only the location of the property was important to them but also the building itself played a role.

Therefore, home was understood by refugee respondents as a 'significant type of place', the concept of 'place' linking the physical world with the 'social, cultural and emotive worlds of people' (Easthope, 2004, p. 137). References to the spatial worlds and materialities were made in many refugees' perspectives on 'home' both inside and outside the house, such as the external and internal structure and decorations (Karlsson, 2019, p. 72). In interviews, comments were made on the architecture of the houses in the UK, both their internal layout and external appearance. For example, both Farid and Zana who are from different countries said that the houses in the UK all look the same. For Farid, the houses in his home country were more sophisticated, while Zana commented that in his home country the houses do not have pitched roofs and red bricks. Speaking of their former dwelling spaces, they emphasised their 'experience of loss' of material things (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020, p. 124). While Farid's and Zana's comments generally show that they noticed differences in the style of the material structures of the houses (Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen, 2004), detailed comments were also made about the insides.

For example, Saman and Zana, both from the same country, talked about the design of the houses in terms of open living space. Saman said that in his home country there were less walls in his house and he wished that 'structurally they [the houses in the UK] are more friendly to have connection of contact with neighbours'. Zana's comments about the inside of the house were similar:

> Structurally it's not the best, we are used to different, open plan but here it's everywhere closed up so that's a little bit different, structurally. I prefer to have an open space, when you come to home, welcoming, see everybody, all the decoration, and open space, which is missing here. I would change the home whenever I have a home here, I will try to change it the way I want it and make it open plan. Because of the building is part of the home and the structure is important as well, […] and you know I would create that [open space] to call it home eventually. […] Occasionally [in home country] we have extended family gatherings which there is no space here in this structure of home […], it's there in the home a big area for example, a guest room, or open space that makes it possible for those occasions. […] when I have my own place eventually, I will try to make it the way I want it.

Beyond just fulfilling a need, for Zana, the material structure of the house forms part of the home. In the excerpts above, Zana and Saman refer to the past and express a desire to achieve continuity with it. Both Zana's and Saman's 'homing desire' is a wish for a house which is open plan, and which would be similar to the houses they lived in in their home countries (Brah, 1996, p. 194). Rather than thinking about the house design in a pragmatic way, and how it could fulfil their needs, Zana and Saman talk about what they want the house to be which would then reflect a variety of their 'social and cultural values regarding individual and family identities' (Clapham, 2005, p. 126; Werner et al., 1985, p. 3). This would make it 'more friendly' to connect with neighbours (Saman) or be more suitable for 'extended family gatherings' (Zana) to accommodate many people, which represent their 'normative understandings of the ideals of home' which they have developed over the course of their lives (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020, p. 124). Therefore, experiences of loss do not only relate to the material things but also to the social relations which take place in and around these materialities (Brun and Thorshaug, 2020, p. 124).

In wanting to change the house to how he wants it to be, Zana wants to reinforce the meaning of a house as a place of social relations, to gather with his extended family and friends. These are his understandings of an ideal home, which he wants to realise in the future in part through the housing he wants to live in. How Zana and Saman think about what their house needs, and what it needs to be, thus goes beyond how support services understand it. Both Zana and Saman demand more from a house than just being a roof over their heads. Relations to neighbours, or relations within the house which arise from the interactions with friends and family are

important. Rather than thinking about their immediate homeless need, as support services predominantly do, Zana and Saman think about their lives in the UK in the future, and how they want their lives in their houses, which they aspire to become home, to look like.

This relates to discussions earlier about how support services characterise housing for refugees, immediately after they get status: it needs to prevent the real immediate threat of homelessness and is therefore considered instrumental. However, doubts remain about housing which does not live up to expectations and imaginations of those who inhabit it, and the sustainability of this approach to homelessness prevention in the long term which were raised earlier. In other words, conceptualisations of homelessness as a negative relation to space (Robinson, 2002) emphasise that individuals can be homeless regardless of the roof over their heads. Considering Dovey's (1985, p. 34) argument that homelessness is not a housing problem, places doubts on the strategy of support services to place individuals into a house to fulfil a need, possibly only in the short term, and to solve homelessness. To this adds the perspective that poor and substandard housing is a reality for many individuals, not only refugees.

Douglas (1991, p. 307) in this context argues that a home can only 'survive' if it fulfils the needs of its members. For many refugees, however, it might be impossible to find a house which fulfils all their needs, such as having enough space to accommodate and welcome a large number of family and friends. Although large, open-plan houses do exist in the UK, many refugees are excluded from living in those, which is mainly due to affordability. This then opens up a discussion about exclusion and social mobilities.

Although migrants often aspire that their movements will result in upwards social mobility, many refugees experience downwards social mobility (Gans, 2009).[66] Not only does this impact individuals' standard of living, but also their 'social position and prestige' (Gans, 2009, p. 1659). For many participants, downward social mobility was evident in the type and quality of housing they lived in in the UK compared to in their home countries. While the quotes above from Farid, Zana and Saman about the architecture of the houses are only a snapshot, many participants drew comparisons between the 'material structure' of their housing in their home countries, and

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[66] Research, for example by Cederberg (2017), has shown the complexities surrounding social mobility, class and migration, where migration can result in upwards or downwards social mobility. However, as per Gans (2009), the enforced nature of mobility for refugees may create a different context to other migrants.

their housing in the UK. These comments mostly resembled the poor quality and small size of properties which are offered to refugees from council housing stock.

When thinking about ‘house’, Goyer (2014, p. 153) points out that it is also a consumer good, representing both, a statement and mirror simultaneously (Dovey, 1985, p. 40). Therefore, consumption can be a way to express different forms of capital and social status, in addition to identities or cultural belonging as pointed out above, and so a house can be a marker of class position, and power (Bourdieu, 1984; Salih, 2002). Using consumption theory, for example, Gram-Hanssen and Bech-Danielsen (2004, p. 25) indicate that a house ‘with its style, size and location is an integral part of the power structure in society’ where urban and class structures ‘reflect each other’. In addition to identity construction, through house design individuals signal how they ‘are or wish to be viewed by outsiders’ (Clapham, 2005, p. 127), for example, they can signal high achievements to neighbours (Danzer et al., 2013). In the case of refugees, this might also be a resistance to ascribed identities.

Like everyone else, many refugees have preferences of what they want their house to look like, on the in- and outside. For participants in this study, these were impacted by memories and images of their old homes, or in terms of materiality by the notion of home as familiarity which includes ‘familiarity with certain spatial patterns from other places in past experience’ often existing since childhood (Dovey, 1985, p. 37). However, alterations to the outside of a house are often not allowed, for example, on public housing, and so tenants are stripped away from their agency to ‘impose their own meanings, symbolism and control upon their own homes and project their own sense of identity to the world’ (Clapham, 2005, p. 130). Seen like this, housing can be a site of exclusion, characterised by the physical condition, location and price (Somerville, 1998). Even though identities can be reproduced in the interior design of houses, seeing these and being invited into one’s ‘home’ is mostly a privilege which is reserved for close friends and families who visit the inside of the house.

During interviews, participants showed me photographs of their houses and apartments in their home countries to give examples of the type of house or apartment they would like to live in. These differed significantly in terms of quality and size from the housing they lived in in the UK. Shirin, for example, a qualified graphic designer, was living in a spacious, light apartment in her

home country; but in Newcastle, she lived with her husband in an old tower block. In the photographs that she took for the photo-elicitation exercise, she frequently commented on the small size and the fact that their flat, including the interior, was very old. Likewise, Saman who was a successful businessman in his home country and retained a higher-class position, showed me some photographs of his old house (figures 2 and 3). Like Shirin, he was not employed when I interviewed him. He said: 'I really miss for […] everything in my country. […] I used to live in my own house but unfortunately the government took it from me.'

Figure 2: Saman's old home (1)

Figure 3: Saman's old home (2)

I asked him whether he hoped to have a house similar to his old house to which he replied: 'I hope so but 100% I can't find same house it', realising that his new life in the UK would be different.

While the photographs of Saman's house in his home country show a very spacious building, where he was living in Newcastle when I interviewed him was different:

Figure 4: Saman's home in Newcastle. Photo taken from Google Streetview. Identifying markers were removed by the researcher.

Figure 5: Saman's home (2). Identifying markers were removed by the researcher.

Although the inside of the flat was clean, the building itself and the location of it was not necessarily desirable for a family of four, including a new-born son and an 18 year old daughter. While the council deemed Saman's housing suitable, it was unsuitable according to the family's own judgement and experiences of living there. This was for example due to the fact that it was located next to a busy road, which meant noise during the day; or the fact that it was built above takeaway restaurants, which meant noise and smells seeped into their house during the late hours of the night and into the early morning. While I was supporting him to move, Saman became increasingly worried about his family's health, as he told me that his new-born son was waking up during the night because of the noise, and that the smells from the takeaway were bothering him and his family, so that they had to keep their windows closed. The family was thus considering sleeping all together in the living room, as the windows were not facing the front of the house, where the takeaway was. Saman did not perceive the place he was living in as a safe place for his family, therefore missing out on a central feature of home, as well as belonging (Dromgold-Sermen, 2022). This is another example of how mismatches between macro structures and micro experiences unfold, as well as a discrepancy between the material house and emotional home.

It emerged from the interviews with refugee participants that the house was indeed a 'kind of place', rather than something to fulfil a need, and more than a 'roof over one's head'. Sahar, although single, told me about a friend of his, who was joined by his family after receiving refugee status, and was placed in a hostel because they could not find suitable accommodation. Although referring again to the physical house, for him, 'without a house, family does not make sense. […] I think without the house, a family can't be a family really. […] it's so, so fundamental the relation between the family and the house'.

When I ask him what he associates with 'home', Sahar makes references to a physical place:

> Self-confidence, because to be honest, it's quite difficult to say but it's so shameful, honestly, I like to mention that, it's so shameful when you are treated as a homeless. You know it's not easy to say, even when I was going to Housing Advice Centre and talking to the employers. I knew it's their job and they work with all the homeless people but it's a shameful feeling, I don't know why, but it is. When you have your place, when you talk with people, and they ask where you live, you know, you don't feel ashamed. […] so it's

> not just about somewhere to sleep, it's about self-confidence, it's about you know what's your goals, how far do you think you are from your goals, how far you think you are from situation that you want to live in.

Sahar refers to the physical dwelling and he, like many refugees in Newcastle, has gone through the support structures of Newcastle City Council in the endeavour of finding, or rather being allocated, housing. When he was offered a property from Claire, he chose to reject it, and therefore he was referred to the Housing Advice Centre, where he was treated as being homeless, leaving him feeling ashamed and powerless. He was then placed in emergency accommodation, heightening Sahar's awareness of his reality that he was homeless.

In saying that he felt shame, Sahar's quote indicates that his ontological security was threatened. According to Giddens (1991, p. 66), shame as the contrast to 'confidence in the integrity and value of the narrative of self-identity' is felt when individuals fail to live up to the expectations they have created of themselves. For Sahar, who is University educated, being homeless was not part of an adequate narrative through which he could '[sustain] a coherent biography' and his imaginations of what he can achieve in the UK (Giddens, 1991, p. 65). These feelings may well have been reinforced by his previous experiences as an asylum seeker. When I interviewed him six months earlier while he was still waiting for a decision on his claim, he described his situation as one where he lost everything, feeling that essentially his previous life was wasted. This indicates an erosion of his identity as his expectation of what he would do and his position on society was not aligning with his reality and experiences. While Burke (1991) and Thoits (1991) argue that events which cause identity disruptions are more likely to cause anxiety than any other life events, it is also difficult for many refugees to avoid the 'public anxiety-state' of shame (Giddens, 1991) when reliance on public services for housing support, emergency or not, contributes to making many refugees' housing situations visible.

In contrast, when Sahar secured a tenancy for council housing, his self-confidence increased, due to the fact that when outsiders asked him where he lived, he was able to answer that he was living in a flat, rather than in a hostel, or with his brother. What Sahar associates with 'home' is an example of how it 'can provide a locale in which people can work at attaining a sense of ontological security in a world that at times is experienced as threatening and uncontrollable'

(Dupuis and Thorns, 1998, p. 43). The locale for Sahar was his flat he was renting from the council, a site that would 'foster a sense of pride in the self' as he felt the opposite to shame, which is self-esteem (Giddens, 1991, p. 66).

Being under time pressure to prevent homelessness, there is no room for support structures to consider what a house means or might do for refugees, such as being a place where continuity with a past home can be established through enacting familiar practices, or increasing self-confidence, and the importance it may have for their ontological security, or trust in the world. For Sahar, his flat was a reference point, it was something he was proud of when others asked him where he lived (Goyer, 2014). This was especially so because his flat was in a very desirable location, very close to the city centre. Sahar acknowledged that he was 'very lucky' to find his flat, and he realised after comparing his situation with that of his friends that only few people find a flat quickly. For Sahar, the experience of securing a council tenancy was positive, and he says that he was quite lucky and did not have to wait long. This was unlike Reza, for example, who was considering his options of moving into a (informal) private house of a 'Pakistani man who owns a lot of houses and said I could have one'; or Saman who started questioning if 'they [the council] will give me a house by bid' after having waited for more than a year.

While most refugee respondents were renting properties, Mustafa was the only participant who had bought a house. Having lived in the UK since the 1990s, his housing journey as an asylum seeker and initially as a refugee was similar to those of other participants (figure 1, chapter one) as he had to move between various places frequently. In the interview with him, he talked about his rationale of buying a house, and what it meant for him in his situation:

> If I was a homeowner here, nobody could kick me out of that, if I had a piece of land here then nobody could ask me to leave. That was another part of it that being in the limbo situation it may be OK for a few years but after getting […] 5 years and 10 years it becomes, you want to somehow you want to fight the...there is some systematic vict…it's not victimisation, it is a kind of […] discrimination but it's not actually the discrimination, it's the help and support one would get but the threshold is very low, to get to that point you have to come too low […] to receive that support and that is, I feel that discrimination. Because you have to go so low, to being yourself, so low to receive that second-class

> citizen services you are allowed. That is something I was trying to fight, trying to not to be a victim of that situation, that was another part of it. […] in order not to be victim of my situation, I had to have a place and I had to do something about it rather than saying 'well I am a victim, I accepted it and that's my life'. I didn't want to go on like that and I want to fight against it, that … discrimination or that, you know that lens that the society wears while looking at people, […] I didn't want to be […] what is expected, what is the norm, in society. I want to go against that. […] I really thought having a property, having somewhere that people have some rights, really, […] because there was a time that I did not have full rights.

Hiscock et al. (2001) question how far owner-occupants obtain more ontological security than renters in that achieving 'psycho-social benefits' depends on the individuals and their distinct characteristics, financial resources, skills and abilities. However, for Mustafa, owning his own home contributed to him feeling secure in the UK in the sense that he could not be asked to leave. This had happened to him before where he was asked to leave his rented flat because the landlord did not want to rent to individuals on benefits and having experienced prolonged insecurities about his legal status in the UK as he had waited for a decision on his claim almost as long as Jawad, Mustafa sought a feeling of security which may as well be part of his 'homing desire' (Brah, 1996). While Sahar talked about feelings of shame, Mustafa focused on telling me how he actively tried to combat marginalisation and treatment as a 'second class citizen' by becoming a homeowner. Having been stuck in the UK asylum system for many years, and having occupied 'low points' for extended periods of time, he was able to transition into a space of agency in which he could feel that he had rights. Mustafa associated housing, and especially owning a house, with the rights he would thereby attain after having waited for a decision about his claim for multiple years. These rights are different to the right to social housing which refugees get after they are being granted leave to remain; but for him, these related to being allowed to stay on his 'piece of land'. However, these claims for space did not remain uncontested, as I will discuss in chapter six.

4.4. Conclusion

Arriving in Newcastle was not straightforward for any participant in this study as they continuously moved between different places, including cities and accommodations, both as asylum seekers and refugees. The experiences made during this for many heightened their

vulnerability in starting to make a home after being displaced; and they were underpinned by a perceived time limit on their visa.

In this chapter, I initially discussed the reasons for this mobility which I distinguished as forced or voluntary. This was influenced by legal statuses and being subject to forced dispersal as asylum seekers, but also because of seemingly better employment opportunities or stronger social networks elsewhere and the choice to move when respondents had been given refugee status. Some participants chose to stay in Newcastle, this immobility due to strained housing markets elsewhere, and the lack of access to social housing because of local connection criteria. While this can be seen as agency there sometimes was an emotional cost to staying in Newcastle, for example when respondents felt socially isolated and had a bigger social network elsewhere. Although as refugees, participants were not subject to forced dispersal anymore and could choose where they would like to live, support services in Newcastle advised refugees against moving away; yet support workers insisted that choice was available. The fact that many refugees who moved away returned to Newcastle somewhat legitimised this advice; however, it also indicated that Newcastle was more than an 'in-between place' in respondents' journeys and that they had built connections to the city as well as the people, including relationships marked by different power hierarchies, to which many eventually returned. As such, moving away from Newcastle may have just been a last-ditch attempt to exercise agency. Staying or coming back to Newcastle after living elsewhere was then a way to end transiency and become settled by choosing to remain in Newcastle.

Focusing on Newcastle, I then characterised the housing search for refugee participants which for most consisted of a lack of choice, agency, and very limited control, as they could make limited choices about where they could live. There were support structures in place to allocate housing to refugees after they had been given status, however, many respondents were moved from one temporary homelessness emergency accommodation to the next, this being due to the ‘grace period’ and pressures on avoiding newly recognised refugees to become homeless, and a lack of available social housing. Support workers themselves characterised these structures as oppressive; and despite having more rights and opportunities for choice, when refugees were given their status, this was not a ‘time for choice’. Participants continued to make similar

experiences to those they had as asylum seekers as they were moved around and continued to be dependent on state actors for help, this indicative of the dehumanising ways in which refugees are treated as objects being moved around and expected to engage with the support offered. The right to housing was exercised *for* respondents, and rather than empowerment, refugees were told where they could live, and that they did not have a choice. While respondents could reject the housing that was being offered, the path that refugees then went down included repeated, mildly threatening reminders of the consequences of not accepting the housing from local authority support services rather than looking for solutions. There was a lack of alternatives to renting from the council, and participants often acted in an environment with limited understanding of their situation and its urgency, as well as how they could solve their housing problem after being given refugee status and being forced out of their asylum seeker accommodation. Findings indicated a mismatch between the rhetoric around support structures that are in place in Newcastle to support newly recognised refugees into a tenancy and the realities of this for individuals.

Many respondents found themselves in a situation in which they had to juggle not only the fact of having lost their old home and house, including material and immaterial aspects, but also that of living in an often worse standard than they did in their home countries. It was often down to luck whether a 'good' property was found. In most cases, the extent to which a dwelling was conducive to a home environment was questionable, not least because it was not chosen, as individuals lived in poor-quality housing, creating unfavourable conditions for the experience of feeling at home. However, the council's approach needs to be understood in the context of limited resources provided to support refugees. In finding housing after being given refugee status, participants were embedded into limiting structures, which impeded their capacity to act and make choices. Many were denied the opportunity to be independent and exercise self-determination, being left feeling disempowered and very dependent on state actors for help.

The last two sections of this chapter analysed the differences between how support services and forced migrants understand and form meanings of housing. Support services in Newcastle mainly saw it as 'a roof over refugees' heads' and this approach was informed by the council's pledge to prevent homelessness. Refugee lives were considered as 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998), and housing

was a basic need that needed to be fulfilled. These findings indicated how refugees are dehumanised, and being treated as objects to be housed rather than individuals with preferences about where they want to live. Simply meeting a 'homeless need' by giving refugees any property available risks overlooking that they may still feel homeless, considering the often-poor quality of the housing provided and the negative impact on those being housed there, including the negative relationship between individuals and their environment. Even though support workers regarded housing as instrumental, they at the same time implied that refugees could make the property into a home, even if it was not what refugees wanted, using house and home interchangeably. There was evidence of integration rhetoric used by support services which did not match with the experiences and realities of housing allocation for refugees. Likewise, support services emphasised that refugees could move again if they did not like the property offered, knowing well the pressures on the housing market and the dehumanising ways in which asylum seekers are being moved around. However, this is not to say that all support workers viewed this as the same. For example, some support workers from the third sector recognised the distinction between a house and home for refugees, while council support workers did not.

This contrasts with the ways that forced migrant participants understood and formed meanings of the house which was less based on needs but rather what they wanted the house to be. This was closely related to the houses respondents lived in in the past. For refugee participants in this study, housing was part of the home, as it helped express identities, shape behaviours inside the house and home, and re-gain dignity after having lived in government-provided accommodation. How refugee participants thought about and imagined their house, and the realities of where they lived was another example of how the mismatch between macro structures and micro experiences unfolded.

The following chapter will focus on homemaking inside respondents' houses, scrutinising the agency that becomes visible through spatial practices of homemaking by focusing on materialities, belongings and objects; but also looking for agency occurring in immaterialities.

5. Chapter five: Having arrived

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on when participants 'have arrived' in their dwellings. In exploring respondents' domestic spaces, I will highlight how they make their houses into homes through shaping their built environment 'behind closed doors' (Miller, 2001; Beeckmans et al., 2022); but also how houses are turned into homes through practices, for instance making changes to interiors or enacting routines and habits. In other words, this chapter will focus on the materialities of the interiors of respondents' houses and flats but also on the immaterial practices which contribute to making home. As part of this, I will discuss refugees' strategies to make their dwellings into homes, but also the role of other stakeholders, such as support workers from local authorities and the third sector, in influencing the homemaking process.

This chapter will first focus on respondents' spatial practices, as they are visible for example in placing objects, such as decorations, furniture or 'stuff' (Miller, 2010), old or new possessions inside houses and flats. In this way, the chapter focuses on agency and I will argue that, while respondents had little agency when it came to choosing their houses, many participants sought and enacted agency to make decisions about the interior of their dwellings, for example when they decided how to decorate spaces and where to place objects. In doing so, spaces which seemed unhomely at first were made homely, and respondents' claims to make themselves at home in Newcastle became visible as they attached space with meaning and attempted to make it their 'kind of space' (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo; 2021, p. 9; Douglas, 1991). However, dependency, for example on support services, remained, especially financially, regardless of individual desires and thus impacted on agency. Discussing what is going on 'behind closed doors', I will therefore also highlight the importance of wider social structures into which respondents were embedded and which impacted lives, as well as focus on the role of actors from the local authority and third sector in refugee homemaking in Newcastle.

The chapter will then explore immaterialities, such as practices, behaviours, feelings and emotions about home which participants spoke about during interviews. By this I mean the role of behaviours, and interpersonal relations in the domestic environment, as well as those practices related to the management of homes. While individual efforts to maintain practices, behaviours

and routines from old homes may be successful, relations similar to those inside respondents' past homes were often lacking in the present because respondents mostly fled to the UK on their own and left friends and family behind. I will also shed light on the role of those memories and experiences which contributed to respondents becoming a refugee, and how these influenced individual efforts to make a home in Newcastle. Exploring the 'substance' of participants' homes (Pallasmaa, 1995) is also an attempt to explore the question what of home is portable (Boccagni, 2016, p. 10). This is relevant when analysing the influence of the past on homemaking in the present, and what materialities and immaterialies respondents might bring to make their homes.

5.2. Making spaces liveable

Most participants were living in a flat or house rented from the council which they were either allocated or they had secured through bidding.[67] For many respondents, this was the first tenancy they had in the UK after receiving refugee status. After having lived isolated and excluded from the mainstream in government provided accommodation as asylum seekers, this then required an enormous cultural adjustment, including navigating new social norms, as participants moved into a dwelling of their own.

When moving in, respondents most often arrived in a space which was virtually empty, apart from kitchen units, built-in shelves and cupboards in some rooms. Respondents moved into the bare structures of a dwelling, which often were far from 'ready-to-use' (Rosales, 2010, p. 521). For example, quite often concrete floors were exposed, although on rare occasions carpets might be laid out in some rooms. Support workers who showed the flats acknowledged that they were often not in a 'decent' (Claire) state, and were aware that for some refugees, seeing spaces in their bare, exposed state could bring back traumatic memories of times spent in prison or detention. Nevertheless, they also argued that it was necessary to show flats which were not 'decent' because of the various pressures on the process of finding housing for refugees after they have received status, such as the 28-day 'grace period'. However, the material circumstances in which migrants settle matter (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021), and this perspective is

[67] An exception to this was Mustafa who had been in the UK since the 1990s and who owned his house, as well as those participants who were still asylum seekers at the time of the interview.

illuminated, for example, by the fact that the built environment can trigger past traumas of being imprisoned, which I learned during fieldwork.

Figures 6 and 7 are examples of the material circumstances into which many participants had to settle. They are photographs I took during a flat visit with Raz, who lived in supported housing provided by the supporting organisation I volunteered at and was moving into a council flat while I was in the field. The state of the flat that Raz was viewing and which he was to make into a home, was poor and grim: the concrete floor was showing, and the walls were dirty, having been stripped of their wallpaper.

Figure 6: Raz' new 'home' (1)

Figure 7: Raz' new 'home' (2)

In a more positive, albeit harsh way, respondents got a 'blank "canvas"' which they could, at least in theory, make into their 'kind of space' (Douglas, 1991; Miller, 1988). Whilst control was often absent in decisions over what kind of space participants were arriving into as there was very limited or no control in choosing where to live, once they had arrived into that space, control re-appeared; albeit this was limited by material resources. Respondents attached and exerted control over the space they were moving into, commencing a process of 'homing' (Boccagni, 2022, p. 141). Where in many cases, agency was lacking when choosing their housing, agency was required as individuals were moving into flats and houses of their own. Through engagement with their material realities, many participants showed they were active participants rather than passive recipients of support (Zibar et al., 2022, p. 99).

Although different to camp-like conditions,[68] many participants told me how when they first moved into their council flat, it resembled an 'inhospitable space' (Singh, 2022, p. 75). A lot of

[68] Singh (2022) uses a phenomenological approach to analyse how the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr Al-Barid has become a place of dwelling, in other words how Palestinian refugees inhabit spaces in 'extreme and highly politicised

work had to be put into not only personalising and adding meaning to it, but to bring it up to a standard which was suitable to live in in the first place, and more importantly, which would be closer to their imagination of their ideal home (Clarke, 2001). The following accounts provide insight into the 'material world of migrants' experience of place (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021, p. 3), as Rahman, Sahar and Gandom talk about the moment when they first moved into their flats:

> It was very dirty here and very bad. […] Step by step, I remember just I cleaned the bedroom first; I leave all the stuff there and I sleep in the floor […]. I save the money, I buy […] carpet and I booked that someone coming to fix the carpet. […] I buy […] the wallpaper […] and I try, I see the YouTube how to fix it and I fix it myself. So slowly slowly (Rahman).

> It took a lot of effort to be honest (laughs) to decorate it. […] Because it's a council property and […] when you actually sign your tenancy, they are not in a very good condition. […] The floor was just the concrete, and I had to paint literally everywhere, all the rooms, and so yeah, it took a lot of effort because I was alone and I did it on my own, and I used to sleep on the floor and on the concrete and work everyday from, I don't know 8am to 8pm painting and stuff, because I did not have any help. So yeah it took a lot of time and a lot of money, but it was ok. […] About the decoration, honestly, it was like a disaster for me. It was too difficult. Because, even for going to shops and buy paints or tools for decorating, I had to think of money. So I used to walk to the shop, to get the paint and then walk back to the home. And when I arrived at the property, I did not have anything to do the decorating […]. It was difficult, it was really difficult for me […]. And being in a city that you don't know very well, so you don't know where you can get a cheap carpet, for example. Many things like that (Sahar).

> When I came to the house I thought 'oh my god, there is not any carpet, even there is not paint', it was not painted […] so I went to the shop for buying [paint], and I do it by myself,

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conditions' (p. 62). This, and the material circumstances of camps among other things, deem these spaces inhospitable and uninhabitable. While refugee camps are often subject to a geopolitical analysis and conceptualized as spaces of exception and exclusion, Singh (2022) offers an alternative, phenomenological reading of refugee camps. I acknowledge that the material and immaterial conditions of refugee camps are different to those in which many refugees in Newcastle make a home; however, the spaces in which participants settled in Newcastle often were nevertheless inhospitable.

> painting that. It was the first experience for painting the wall, but I did it best (laughs) (Gandom).

It is evident from these three accounts that new residents had to do significant work to shape their built environments and engage in spatial practices, or shaping and making changes to the interior of their dwellings (Beeckmans et al., 2022). The above accounts reflect the struggles and difficulties that many other respondents mentioned in making a space liveable as well as the extent of the efforts and 'investment made by the households in their interior worlds' (Clarke, 2001, p. 41). This is essential given that respondents were refugees, who Siddiqi and Chitchian (2022, p. 46) describe as the 'prime embodiment of the contemporary subject of […] dispossession'. Many participants had virtually lost all their material possessions and then found themselves in a position where material investment and hard labour was required to bring built environments to a point where they were liveable. This tension marking respondents' material circumstances, as many refugees experience loss, is also noticed by Brun (2015a), and I will discuss this further in section 5.5.

What Rahman, Sahar and Gandom said indicates how home is a 'socially conditioned experience', as constraints dictated by social circumstance and individual assets shape homemaking (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 6; Kim and Smets, 2020; Smith, 2015). They highlight the importance of resources and capacities; and so while many respondents may have been able to exert control through decorating, locating objects and possessions, or generally improving their surroundings, drawing on 'traditional and contemporary cultural, social, aesthetic and technical knowledge' (Clarke, 2001, p. 26; Tharmalingam, 2016, p. 86), it is important not to be ignorant of the structures, or 'systems of rules and resources' (Randell, 2017) into which they are embedded. As agency can arise from structures just as much as structures can be reinforced and reformed as a consequence of agency, they impact on capacities for agency (Randell, 2017).

Raz, Sahar, Rahman, Gandom, and other participants in this study can be seen as actors, however, it is important to recognise the circumstances in which they and others like them move into their flats or houses, and in which they enact agency. Beeckmans et al. (2022, p. 16) in this context emphasise that it is important not to romanticise refugees' agency to shape built environments, as they often operate in circumstances characterised by precarity. The above accounts from

Rahman, Sahar and Gandom give insight into such circumstances and how their experience of place, as well as their agency is shaped and influenced by structures. They describe the 'socio-material circumstances' into which they as well as many other refugees are embedded as they had limited choices about where they could live, and within which much of their negotiations about 'claims for inclusion, recognition and ultimately membership', as well as agency take place as they brought empty flats up to a liveable standard and later decorated them (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021, p. 5). Although not resembling institutionalised spaces of camps or shelters per se, the potential to negotiate space, and engage in homemaking can nevertheless be severely constrained for many refugees, for example when they are inserted into an environment which in its built form evokes memories of traumatic pasts; or, more importantly, which requires individuals to undertake substantial work to make space liveable within limiting structures, limited resources and possibilities to undertake such work (Beeckmans et al., 2022, p. 29).

Many respondents lacked the knowledge of where to buy, for example, carpets and supplies, and lacking financial resources was the main factor constraining the sheer amount of work that needed doing within the bare structures of their flats to make spaces liveable. Decisions were made on paint, flooring or furniture, however, they were made with, and constrained by, money; and this ultimately impacted the entirety of the work that needed to be done. For example, both Rahman and Sahar mentioned the costs of decorating their flats and how this determined decisions and timelines of how and when to do what kind of work, therefore limiting the amount of control they could take over the space at once, and the agency they could enact at any one time. Both also said that they had slept on the floor for some time, not having enough money to buy all furniture at once, including a bed. Restricted access to financial resources also meant that work could not be outsourced, for example, to carpenters or painters. Therefore, this work had to be done primarily by themselves. Some respondents turned to YouTube to seek help, and others had access to help from their social networks, as they received help from their friends. Sian, for example, had a friend who fitted his flooring, as did Raz whose friends helped him fit flooring and wallpaper.

When they did not have access to the resources provided by social networks, individuals drew on their own human capital, or their capacities, to make spaces liveable, and improve them. Many had never decorated before; however, this was not a barrier to undertake such work and to enact

agency as individuals found ways to navigate within limiting structures while challenging their position on individual 'pathways of resistance' to create and reclaim a normal life within their domestic spaces after often dehumanising experiences of the asylum system and lack of independence throughout (Denaro, 2016, p. 92; Sanyal, 2014).[69] While figures 6 and 7 show photographs of Raz' living room before he decorated it, figures 8-11 show how Raz transformed it:

[69] While volunteering at a local supporting organisation for forced migrants, and supporting refugees move into their independent tenancy, individuals often said to me that they looked forward to 'normality' after experiences of shared accommodation, and other institutionalised state-provided housing.

Figure 8: Space for shoes with leftover floor boards.

Figure 9: A shelf in the living room.

Figure 10: A transformed living room.

Figure 11: A transformed living room (2).

Having engaged in '"appropriation" through transformation' (Miller, 1988, p. 356), Raz finished and decorated his living room to a very high standard, which led him to say 'never ever I want to leave [this flat]'. These feelings of attachment to his 'kind of space' also became evident during a home visit to Raz' flat with Walter, a support worker at a local supporting agency, during which I noticed that Raz was very proud of the work he had done:

> Raz tells me that it took him about ten days of work to transform the flat, for which he received help from his friends. He has got a daughter which is another reason why he wanted to make his new home nice. He shows me a storage cupboard just next to the entrance door (figure 11), which I think is testament to his innovation and resourcefulness: using leftover planks from the flooring, he made shelves where he and his guests can now put his shoes.
>
> […]
>
> While he shows us around, I can sense that he is feeling 'house-proud' as he demonstrates to us the blinds he has installed in the kitchen, by letting them down and closing them. I am especially impressed by this room, which I remember was very dirty before and had awful black-glitter-y wallpaper. Now, the kitchen is tidy, the floor and tiles on the wall are clean, and the walls are painted white.
>
> As we continue our tour through the flat, I can see cardboard boxes containing his belongings which show to me that Raz is still in the process of moving in. He is also still missing some essential items, such as a fridge, a bed, or sofas - but the contrast between the 'before' and 'after' impresses me, and I am not surprised at what Raz said at the end of our visit: 'Never ever I want to leave here'.

Although many participants faced struggles and obstacles when decorating their dwellings due to a lack of resources, they nevertheless engaged in spatial practices and made changes to the material interiors of their dwellings. Respondents were 'creative agents' in shaping their built environment and appropriating space through applying 'creative strategies of consumption' (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 14; Beeckmans et al., 2022; Miller, 1988, p. 370). In doing so, they

actively created justifications to claim the intimate space of their domestic environments as theirs, setting it apart from other places of their lived environment with the hard work and effort they put into these, thus creating 'emotional geographies' as part of their homemaking process (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). For Raz, this meant that he never wanted to leave his flat.

This emotional relationship with their domestic space was also visible in how other respondents spoke about the experience of decorating their houses and flats:

> I love decorating my own flat and it gives me motivation to work more and make more money and decorate the flat because when you have the house, everybody wants, I guess, their home to be nice (Sahar).

For Sahar, decorating his flat was something he loved doing because he wanted to make his house nice. Similar to my impression of Raz as he showed us around his transformed flat, Sahar spoke with certainty about his 'own' flat, and wanted to achieve a feeling of being 'house-proud', this contrasting with feelings of shame when he was homeless. Both Sahar's and Raz' experiences indicate what Dreyer (2022) calls 'the emancipatory power of making a home' (p. 212) which can thwart 'feelings of uncertainty, dislocation and unsettledness' (p. 213). The fact that Sahar had a space he himself called 'home' motivated him to work to be able to buy the things needed to decorate and personalise this very 'home'. He showed the interest necessary to attach meaning and emotion to the space, and this contrasts with experiences of living in shared institutionalised asylum seeker accommodation, and other temporary shelters (Boccagni, 2022, p. 142). Some studies focusing on immaterial settings, such as that by Kim and Smets (2020), argue that refugees' positive experiences of living in an innovative housing project in Amsterdam were grounded in social settings as they interacted with other residents. But for Sahar and Raz, their positive and emotional experience also rested on the purpose and material circumstance of claiming a space as their own, or 'home'. Regardless of Dreyer's (2022) argument that making a home had emancipatory power, doubts nevertheless remain about whether or not this marks a wider transition from vulnerability to empowerment, given the severe constraints from limiting structures many respondents faced, including when finding housing (chapter four).

For Sahar, and other participants in this study, his flat was also a site where he could create his identity through decorating it (Smith, 2015, p. 6). In chapter four, I briefly mentioned the link between identity and place that was acknowledged by Jasmine, a council support worker, as she explained to me that many refugees preferred to live in ethnically diverse areas of Newcastle, or where they were housed as asylum seekers as they had formed attachments and links to these areas. Links between identity and place can also be made in the context of individuals' domestic spaces. Figures 12 and 13 show two photographs that Sahar chose for the theme 'These are the things in my house that I can identify with, that represent who I am and that enable me to express myself':

Figure 12: A personalised living room.

Figure 13: A new balcony.

> This is my living room, and I can design that, I can decorate it, […] so it's something that I made, something which comes from inside of me. So […] that's why I took that picture. […] I chose that [the mountain wallpaper] because it was like a cloudy mountain and it gives me a feeling of like, power. So I chose that because it was like special to me. […] The wallpaper is better on the picture than the real life. I have no experience of putting a picture wallpaper on the wall so when you look at it from very close distance it's not as good as it is in the picture. […] That's my balcony, and honestly for the same subject and the same explanation. Because that balcony was rotten. And it took a lot of time to make it and now I go there and look at the scenery and enjoy, and I did everything in there, so I think, again that is one of the places that I like and I feel comfortable and I feel that identifies me.

The meaning of personal space becomes intensified when taking into account that most participants in this study had experienced living in shared accommodation long-term. For Sahar, this included a shared hostel where he had to stay temporarily as he was threatened with homelessness. While personal space is important to all humans, Sahar's quote is an example of what it means to personalise a space and adapt it according to his taste. Having 'cleans[ed] the property of its previous owner's presence' (Clarke, 2001, p. 26), he undoubtedly has put his stamp on the flat, and his home now reflected a sense of himself and said something about him, based on the work he put into it and the decorations he made. After first-hand experiences of the homelessness provision processes put in place by the council which reinforced feelings of shame for Sahar, he said that living in his own place for him increased his self-confidence (chapter four). This feeling of confidence was materialised in the physical setting surrounding him, namely his decorations. Similar to Raz, he engaged in '"appropriation" through transformation' (Miller, 1998) and so created an intimate dimension of his emotional geographies (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). Sahar attached not only emotions to this space but also his identity, thus facilitating connection to it, of which Dreyer (2022, p. 212) argues that it carries the potential to evoke home feelings. Speaking about the wallpaper, Sahar said with confidence in his voice that it gave him a feeling of power. At the same time, he accepted that his work was not finished to a high standard, when he critically commented on the imperfections in the wallpaper after fixing it onto the wall. Although he knew his work was not perfect, he was not ashamed of it, or saw it as an aesthetic

failure. Instead, it was a matter of 'retention of some ability and desire' to make himself at home (Boccagni, 2022, p. 147). His flat, one of many in a tower block, was personalised and unique, set apart from the rest, and claimed by Sahar (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021).

5.3. Making alterations

In order to make dwellings liveable, respondents also made alterations inside the dwellings they moved into. In making alterations, participants not only took control over space, but also strengthened their relationships to the houses and flats they lived in (Boccagni, 2016, p. 50). For example, both Farid and Gandom made alterations to their bathrooms:

> You know, the water taps, […] when I moved here, I thought that this is a 2017 house, so we expected to see […] mixer taps. So […] we saw the cold water and the hot water, it was extremely inconvenient. I mean, I still can't believe how people use it here […]. So […] we had to change that into mixer taps, just a lot more […] convenient. Yeah, and also, […] when we use the toilet, we have to wash ourselves with water, not like just with toilet paper. But here in the UK, I think in Europe in general, they just use toilet papers. So that's why I had to invent something and you know I got […] a pipe, and extender and […] I invented something to wash ourselves. Like with the pipe, taking an extension from the mixer, and it works perfectly. So, because in [home country], in every house you see like a pipe […] that you wash yourself when you use the toilet. But here, no (Farid).

> It's related to the culture of the UK, it's about the kind of bathroom that they have here. […] They don't have the shower in the bathroom. They usually use the bathtub, fill it full of water and they lie down in that. I don't know maybe some of them they have shower. And I ask […] my case worker in the council, […] 'excuse me, why there is no shower in the bathroom?' And she [the support worker] said 'because we cannot provide luxury item for the house.' And I said 'It's not luxury item, it's a basic item, it's a shower. How is it possible should I wash myself, how should I wash my hair, just lie down in the bathtub, it's not enough for washing the hair.' And she said 'we are really sorry about that because it's a luxury item and the council, they don't have any responsibility about providing the luxury item'. […] And they said 'you can provide it by yourself'. And I saved money for 3 months and I paid around £300, soo much money, to a plumber, just for make a shower. Because

> the shower was not expensive, shower was just £20, the work was expensive. And the council did not accept the cost of that, […] 'you should do it by yourself'. […] But it's good, now I have a shower with hot water. So that's good (Gandom).

While Farid and Gandom both made alterations to their dwellings, their experiences of making them differed. Both evaluated the interiors of their new dwellings based on their 'spatial memory' of former living spaces (Zibar et al., 2022). For Farid, the alterations he made were due to cultural needs and demands for space, while for Gandom, it was due to the fact that she had a shower in her bathroom in her home country. However, Farid and Gandom enacted different degrees of agency based on the systems of rules and resources they were embedded into (Randell, 2017). While Farid had the resources and capacities available to make the alterations himself, Gandom had neither and so she had to save money and pay a plumber to install the shower. Although she asked whether the council would pay the cost, this request was refused based on the explanation that 'luxury items' could not be provided.

Gandom tried to contest this categorisation of a shower as a luxury item, but the council worker insisted on this explanation, advising Gandom that she could pay for it herself as it was beyond the council's responsibility to provide this modification. Although Gandom, and many other participants, spoke positively about support workers in local authorities and third sector organisations, her follow up question in the excerpt above may nevertheless be a sign of mistrust, albeit small, that she was told the truth about the provision of a shower. Issues regarding trust in the relationships between refugees and those who work with them have also been pointed out, for example, by Casati (2017) in the Italian context. At the same time, it may well be a sign of frustration about the rules and lack of clarity about what the council can and cannot do on Gandom's side as she could not fully understand why a shower was a 'luxury item' (Ghorashi et al., 2018).

Although the council worker might have felt empathy, her actions and her approach rather resembled an emotional distance from Gandom. Such strategy of seeing 'an immigrant being dealt with', rather than 'an individual' has been observed in studies on immigrant detention regimes, for example in the Canadian context. Here, Silverman and Kaytaz (2020) argue that border guards try to create an emotional distance between them and the 'consequences of their

involvement in the detention estate' (p. 12) under the pretext of bureaucracy. This approach of emotional distancing can also be seen in the way that the council worker was responding to Gandom when she questioned whether a shower was a luxury item even though a shower may well be considered a basic item by many. The council worker's comments also need to be put into the context of general housing provision for refugees in Newcastle which I discussed in the previous chapter. These structures, together with the material circumstances of their settlement, make up the local structures of opportunities which impact on refugees' homemaking (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). The council may have taken on the responsibility to give refugees a 'roof over their heads'. However, the responsibility to improve these often bare and grim spaces, including making the space liveable and making alterations, is left to each individual who is embedded into limiting structures. For Gandom this meant that she had to save money until she was able to pay for the alterations to have a shower herself.

While Gandom was able to save money, other participants were more limited by their financial possibilities. However, they still enacted agency despite being in more limiting structures (Randell, 2017) and so found other creative solutions. Also struggling with the non-mixer taps, Shirin's husband for example installed a rubber tube to create a kind-of-mixer tap (figure 14).

Figure 14: A mixer tap.

Although none of the objects described above were broken, rather than 'co-functioning' with a bathtub, non-mixer taps, or the lack of a device to wash themselves after using the toilet, Gandom, Farid, and Shirin's husband decided to make alterations to change a 'world-out-of-date' into something they were happy to live with and in (Soaita and McKee, 2019, p. 153); and which they were more familiar with based on their spatial memories (Zibar et al., 2022). These can be seen as instances of individuals' agency, and they are at the same time examples of the power structures they are embedded into and which individuals try to 'evade and resist' with that very agency (Ghorashi et al., p. 386).

5.4. Furnishing a place

Similar to the limitations in improving spaces, the lack of financial resources also made it difficult for many respondents to buy essential household furniture. For example, earlier I pointed out that Rahman and Sahar both had slept on the floor because they could not afford to buy many items at once. Not only does furniture play a role when it is thought of as belongings and possessions, for example in considerations of the material circumstances of many refugees, which

are marked by experiences of loss; but also when considering the role of furniture in transforming a space into a home (Ambrose et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2016), and consequently the disruption that can be caused to settlement processes when it is lacking.

To furnish their homes as part of their engagement with their material worlds, many participants had turned to charity shops, where they could buy items for cheaper than in a home furniture shop. In chapter four I argued that rather than upwards social mobility resulting from migration, or maintaining a social position similar to that in their home countries, many participants experienced downwards social mobility. This was materialised, for example, in the house or flat they were living in compared to that in their home country as markers of social position and power (chapter 4.3.2.; Gans, 2009). Going to charity shops was a new experience for many participants, yet one which was perceived as unavoidable:

> I have never be like that kind of lifestyle in [home country] (*going to the charity shop, my explanation*) but here, I don't have any option, I am forced (Gandom).

For Gandom, buying second-hand items from a charity shop was a different 'lifestyle', one which she had not lived in her home country. There was a discontinuation between her lifestyle in her home country and in the UK. This rupture between previous and new lives indicates that despite all efforts respondents may put into (re)creating a home, and agency that was enacted through spatial practices discussed here, the realities of Gandom's, and many other refugees', social and material circumstance in the country of refuge often do not align with those of their country of origin.

This then raises questions regarding the limits of homemaking and what about it remains outside of respondents' sphere of influence. Likewise, within the 'battlefield' of homemaking (Boccagni, 2022) there may be a point where individuals have exhausted their efforts and reached a limit of their space for agency where they can only accept their circumstances, for example that they have no choice over where they can live or cannot afford to buy new furniture. The disruption this creates between old lives which serve as reference points, and new lives is, for example, manifested in new social and material circumstances where individuals place objects bought in charity shops inside their homes. I will discuss the role of objects and belongings further below.

Generally, for tenants in social housing, there was support available where furniture can be rented through the Newcastle Furniture Service.[70] Tenants can choose from different 'furniture packs', and depending on its size, a charge is applied on a points-based system. This charge is most often covered through individuals' Universal Credit or Housing Benefit; and so in this sense, the furniture is only ever 'rented' and does not 'belong' to tenants per se (Ambrose et al., 2016). If the furniture is rented through this service, it is exchanged every four or five years (Ambrose et al., 2016; Newcastle Furniture Service, no date).

Shirin's husband, who had been living in the UK for nearly two decades before Shirin also had to flee their home country received such a furniture pack to furnish the flat he was renting from the council. Figure 15 is a picture of their living room:

Figure 15: Shirin's living room.

[70] https://www.nfsfurniture.org.uk

Shirin also took a second photograph showing one of the sofas in more detail, and without the white covers:

Figure 16: Old and broken furniture.

Shirin commented: ‘My furniture is very small and very old, in [figure 16] you can see why I covered the sofas with the fabric’.

Figure 16 clearly shows that the sofa is old, and its surface used and broken. Because there was no money to buy new sofas, Shirin covered the old ones with a white sheet to hide their original fabric. While Shirin’s actions can be conceptualised as agency, it is the agency of the objects itself which warrants focus. In discussing ‘the agency of broken things’, Soaita and McKee (2019) argue that tenants renting privately and live with broken or outdated things are constantly reminded of their landlord’s power over them, and the ‘symbolic violence of being ignored, rendered unworthy, or non-existent’ (p. 153) through such broken things. Although they did not rent privately, Shirin and her husband were nevertheless subject to unequal power relations with their

landlord similar to private tenants. Although the sofa was visibly not in a good state, covering it with a white sheet was Shirin's solution to fixing it, as she and her husband could not afford to buy new sofas, and they were told the sofas did not need replacing. Therefore, she found a way to co-function with the aged sofa, as in a situation of 'asymmetric agency' this was the only thing she could do and did not have control over getting a new sofa (Soaita and McKee, 2019, p. 153). Whereas the domestic space for individuals can be a space where claims for attachment and appropriation can be made, it can also be a reminder of unequal power relations between tenant and landlord, including when housing is managed on behalf of the council. Furniture as 'broken things' (Soaita and McKee, 2019) does not belong to tenants, and it cannot be replaced due to a lack of resources, forcing individuals to co-function with these objects.

Those participants who moved into their own flat after leaving supported housing where I volunteered could get furniture at no cost as well as money vouchers to buy things like paint and duvets. This help provided was part of the Supporting Independence Scheme (SIS) put in place by the local authority to enable those on low income who were leaving supported housing to 'access or maintain independence' through 'the provision of basic household items' (Newcastle City Council, n.d. -c). In contrast to the Newcastle Furniture Service, the items received after leaving supported housing did belong to individuals. Rather than applying directly to the scheme, applications need to be made through a supporting agency and while I was volunteering, I helped many refugees leaving supported housing apply for furniture through the scheme.[71]

While the furniture pack was only available without a charge for supported housing leavers, money vouchers were available to other refugees who took up a tenancy with the council. However, the value of these vouchers was low, and restricted to one shop, and so the choice was still limited. Rachel nevertheless evaluated this positively:

> It gives people that element of choice in […] what they want their duvet covers and curtains to look like. […] [P]eople can have a little bit of agency […] and a little bit of choice

[71] Many refugees who I helped apply for items from the scheme initially were sceptical and often said they did not need help with furniture. This was because they had friends who 'rented' furniture from Newcastle Furniture Service. Many did not want to pay the fee for furniture which they might not have even liked, not understanding that the Supporting Independence Scheme they were eligible for was different.

> […], it's obviously […] much better for them, than if we just say [here are your] […] duvet covers that we just selected for you or whatever.

Although the scheme did enable many refugees to make a choice, and the opportunity to exert some control over space, the choice that Rachel describes is very limited, as it is only a choice about duvet covers and curtains. Furniture, on the other hand, cannot be chosen according to personal tastes, or looked at in advance, but has to be accepted. Many times, while I helped with applications to the SIS, refugees asked me what the furniture looked like, or what colour it was. I understood why I was asked these questions, as most have preferences and imaginations of their living spaces in their minds, including the type of furniture. However, to my frustration, I could never say what exactly the furniture looked like, and the most common and satisfying answer I could give was 'it is standard furniture'. I found myself in a situation where the realities and restrictions of the structures I was working in as a volunteer conflicted with my desire to describe exactly the available furniture to individuals so that they could visualise their new dwellings, and even try to enable them to make a choice over the kind of furniture they could put into their flats and houses. Of course, this was unrealistic as I learned quickly.

Meti's experience is one example which illustrates the discrepancy between individuals' tastes and preferences, and the actual furniture they got as part of the council support. Meti had moved into a council flat nine months before I interviewed him, which he was able to furnish with the furniture he had received from the SIS. In the following excerpt, he describes his 'philosophy of the colours':

> Meti: I like the light colour, very bright colour, like white and […] like creamy, very good because when the sun […] come inside, make them the very brilliant place for you and it's good for your soul, for your body, for your health, it makes you calm. But the very sharp colour, very dark colour make you sad, and you have to always turn on the light. And the light is artificial, not natural light, but I think the colour is very important in your mood. For example, […] light green […] is very good colour for your mind, and for your calmness. […] But the red colour gets you stressed. […]
>
> Raphaela: Is that the colour of your furniture then, white?
>
> Meti: No, brown. This is from council, I did not choose that, I had to accept that.

In a very detailed and comprehensive account, he describes his philosophy and tastes of the colours that he likes. Yet, when I asked him if the furniture he had in his flat was of those colours he had just described, his short, simple answer was bewildering. While the scheme in place certainly helps individuals on low incomes to furnish their dwellings, and gives them objects that belong to them, there is a lack of choice and an inevitability of having to accept whatever they are being offered, similar to when it comes to choosing where they live; with a lingering expectation that individuals ought to be thankful for the help. While some respondents describe the furniture as 'exactly in my taste' (Gandom) others, like Meti, have to turn anonymous houses into homes and make claims about a space as theirs with objects they do not like and which they cannot identify with (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021; Rosales, 2010). Therefore, through the provision of essential furniture, support services play an important role in refugee homemaking.

Although the preceding paragraphs outlining Meti's situation may feed an impression of individuals as passive recipients of support with little agency, control and choice, I showed earlier, that many respondents in this study were very resourceful when it came to improving the spaces of their flats and houses. Similarly, many found opportunities for choice and agency to change the furniture they received, and so they were active participants in resolving their own problems. Raz, for example who had received furniture through the SIS, like Meti, sold the furniture to then buy new items which he liked better. In this sense, some respondents did not take pride in the belongings they were given (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2003, p. 70); the opposite was the case as they exchanged them for objects and furniture which were more according to their taste and fitted their image of their built environment called home.

5.5. Objects and belongings

The following sections will continue discussions of materiality through focusing on respondents' belongings; things; or 'stuff' (Miller, 2002) inside their houses and flats. This will substantiate the argument of a material condition for homemaking, and advance Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2021, p. 3) claim for a greater role of the 'material […] circumstances under which migrants [settle] and claim space of their own'. The role that objects and things inside houses play was summarised for example by Zana: 'the surroundings and the things in the house makes the home'.

Through their 'material and symbolic expressions', things create homeliness (Soaita and McKee, 2019, p. 153). In other words, an 'anonymous house' can be transformed into a 'meaningful home' through consumption and objects (Boccagni, 2022; Rosales, 2010, p. 518). While Boccagni (2014) asks 'What's in a (Migrant) house?', Hurdley (2006) explores questions surrounding the narratives which have been constructed around objects individuals display in their homes. These questions are important to ask as the stories people tell about the objects in their homes are at the same time stories about themselves (Hurdley, 2006, p. 729). When a piece of furniture for example was given by someone as a gift, or was bought in a particular place, individuals become surrounded by their lives in their houses (Mezei et al., 2016, p. 24). In this way, artefacts can 'objectify the self' as they say something about the owner's power and status within the social hierarchy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 23). The purpose of things and objects thus goes beyond the need of survival and comfort, and can impact on individuals psychologically:

> Objects reveal the continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past and signposts to future goals. […] objects give concrete evidence of one's place in a social network as symbols […] of valued relationships (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 23).

This indicates complex relationships between things and their owners, anticipating Dudley's (2011) conceptualisation of materiality, which is not just about the 'embodied nature of human experience' (p. 747) but also about the different influences between subjects and objects. Miller's (2001) argument that individuals can reconfigure themselves through the objects within their domestic spaces, for example in deciding what and what not to keep when moving to a new house, further characterises the ways in which things and their owners relate, and can be applied to the analysis in this chapter.

Many refugees do not have authority over the decision what to take and what to leave behind, and the condition in which many refugees have to leave their homes exposes them to existential as well as material vulnerabilities (Parkin, 1999). Likewise, in line with the argument that things and their owners are in a co-constitutive relationship, the decision on which things to take and which to leave behind may be 'part of the preparation […] for what lies ahead […] for it is through the skills and objects one may take that one's future may be given shape' (Parkin, 1999, p. 305).

Many respondents spoke to me about what they used to do in their home countries, and which skills they had acquired through such activities. It was evident that participants were highly skilled and talented, as they showed me pictures of their work, such as restored furniture, paintings and drawings. It also became evident that this was another discontinuation between pasts and presents as individuals had to leave most of their belongings behind. For example, Masud, who was resettled to the UK with his family, owned a business in his home country where he refurbished old furniture. However, he did not bring any of his tools. Likewise, Shirin, a trained graphic designer, did not bring her laptop, or camera, as she mentioned without prompting during the interview that it was taken from her by authorities. Losing these objects not only disrupted respondents' continuity of their selves from the past to the present and future, but at the same time, the loss of these objects meant a lack of 'signposts to future goals' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 23). While many respondents were trained and well educated, the lack of tools needed for certain jobs and work such as drills, cameras or laptops, presented a barrier to realise ambitions and dreams for their lives in the UK, not having enough money to buy equipment. This makes it even more pertinent then to pay attention to the ways in which participants infused their spatial surroundings with their identities through spatial practices.

5.5.1. Old possessions, objects and things: brought, left behind and missed

While Miller (2001) argues that individuals can choose to leave things behind in an effort to 'reconfigure themselves', many refugees had no choice but to leave many of their belongings behind. I asked participants whether they had brought any objects from their home countries which they had displayed in their houses and flats, and in most cases, they were speaking of essential things they brought, such as their clothes or blankets. Some like Sahar, however, brought with him a reminder 'of who they are and where they come from' (Parkin, 1999, p. 313):

> When I arrived, I arrived with a suitcase. But yeah it was mostly, like essential things, some clothes and some socks. The only thing that I brought, it's funny, but it was my mum's blouse, so that was the only thing that I brought that doesn't belong to me, that was not essential to me.

In addition to the 'essential things', Sahar brought a piece of clothing from his mum. In his home country, Sahar used to live with her, and throughout the interview it became clear that she was

an important person in his life and that he missed her. The blouse was the only thing Sahar brought that was not essential to him, and for him it not only mirrored the relationship he has with his mum (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 27; Mezei et al., 2016, p. 28); but also acted as a reminder of his past material home, in that the blouse represented a person, as well as his immaterial home in representing the relationships and memories inside this past home. In line with Dudley's (2011) argument of the 'mutually constitutive relationships between people and things' (p. 747), Sahar therefore might feel the comfort of touching and smelling the blouse, even though it was not an object on display inside his flat. In this context, Pechurina (2020) introduces the idea of 'diasporic objects' which she defines as:

> Objects that are detached from their place of origin; through their subsequent use and ownership they are invested with new sets of meanings. […] [These objects] are involved in a process of (re)constructing and (re)inventing the feeling of being at home. […] [D]iasporic objects mark and symbolise experiences and feelings of having been here and there, of being detached and present at the same time […]. These objects can be bought spontaneously or intentionally, received as gifts or passed as inheritance, they can act as reminders of people and places, symbols of nostalgia, or exotic elements of décor (pp. 671-678).

Just as Dreyer (2022) argues that re-enacting 'habitual embodied routines' such as sleeping, eating and cooking, can facilitate making a space at home, so can objects reinforce such feelings. Although Pechurina (2020) mostly refers to culturally specific souvenirs, such as Russian matryoshka dolls or food, Sahar's mum's blouse can also be considered a diasporic object in that it is detached from its place of origin (Sahar's home country) and is attached with new meanings through Sahar's ownership and his use of it. Rather than acting as a piece of clothing, which is the intended use of a blouse, for Sahar it acted as a reminder of his mum with whom he used to live, and attached to this were memories of his past life in his home with his mum. He therefore attempted to recreate a sense of her being there with him as she appears in his 'spatial memory' of his home. Although it is not an object to put on display, the blouse nevertheless creates homeliness for Sahar through evoking familiarity, thus contributing to his sense of feeling at home (Soaita and McKee, 2019, p. 153). The blouse may not be a representation of his cultural identity similar to a Russian matryoshka doll as a diasporic object; however, it represents other aspects of

his identity which is constituted by the close relationship with his mum, and which contributes to an emerging sense of home for Sahar based on his deeply personal experiences.

Many participants mentioned things that they wished they had brought from their home countries. Going back to Sahar, for example, he said he wished he had brought his gaming laptop which he used to play with in his free time, thus reminding him of his old lifestyle and activities he used to do 'there'; and evidence of the 'habitual embodied routines' which when re-enacted have the potential to facilitate the recreation of home (Dreyer, 2022). When I asked Gandom if there was anything that she wished she had brought with her to the UK, she talked about her books:

> Gandom: The valuable things about item that I left in [home country] it's about the books, that most of them are [home country language] books, […] I am really addicted about the reading the book, especially new books, that's published in [home country] now. So, I ask a lot of company that, like Post Office or anywhere, how can I bring my books from [home country], because […] for my family it's very expensive that they send me the books. And sometimes I ask some people that […] are not refugee, like businessmen, when they go to [home country], I usually ask them 'please, can you bring me, can you go my address, my home and ask my family to give', and they usually do it for me […]. I paid I think the last month a huge amount of my benefit for paying to the post that my family send my books to me, some of my books. And this is the only thing that I should bring it from [home country], the books.
>
> Raphaela: Did you have a big bookshelf in [home country]?
>
> Gandom: Yeah, I have a big bookshelf in my home, in my room, and my daddy packed all of them in a very strong box to send it by the post, and I tell to them that 'don't worry about the cost of that, I can pay it'. Actually, it's very expensive for me but I can manage it. Because I know that for my family it's very expensive. I should do it.

In addition to missing objects and things, it is also important to recognise missing the activities these objects enabled individuals to do, this relating to discussions from earlier about lost or left behind objects as representative of a lack of 'signposts to future goals' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 23). Similar to Sahar's love for gaming, Gandom was passionate about reading, and so she had

started to ask her family to send her books in the post or ask her friends from the same country as her who were not refugees to bring them to the UK whenever they travelled back.[72]

Beyond her passion for reading books, Gandom also told me about a big bookshelf she had in her room in her home country. This indicates another important reason why her books are so valuable to her, and why they have become so 'deeply personal' that Gandom was willing to pay the high cost of sending them from her home country to the UK to be reunited with them: they act as a reminder of the 'peoples and places' in the home she had to leave behind, and they are 'symbols of nostalgia' which help to preserve memories of her old home (Pechurina, 2020, p. 678). Facing the estrangement felt within their new surroundings, respondents felt the need for familiarity (Zibar et al., 2022). Similar to Sahar, who attempted to recreate his old home in which he used to live with his mum, and achieve a sense of her being there through his mum's blouse, Gandom tried to create a sense of home and homeliness through the objects familiar to her which constitute her spatial memory but are still in her home country. Gandom tried to bridge this gap between the new alien and the old familiar with her books still in her home country which she had asked her family and friends to send over, thus overcoming the objects' immobility as it was difficult for her to move them to reproduce 'familiar settings' (Kim and Smets, 2020, p. 621).

It became evident during the interview that Gandom was still very much attached to the place she had to leave behind, as she showed me many photographs of her old house, including the following of her room:

[72] While Gandom had to flee because she engaged in women's rights activism, her family remained in her home country. The transnational connections she maintained to her family thus helped her to belong in the UK.

Figure 17: Gandom's old home.

Gandom annotated it: My own room in my dad’s house, […]. When I upload it for you I couldn’t stop my cry because again it was a chance to remind and all of memories! I really miss there even for my objection [objects] and stuffs not only family members!

For Gandom, seeing the objects in the photograph of where she used to live not only remind her of her old home but at the same time might be a reminder of her old self, as they are expressions of her identity (Wheeler and Bechler, 2021). This highlights the agency that objects have themselves in that they influence Gandom’s sense of self, as well as her emotional state, as she started crying when she saw the photograph of her old room (Smith, 2015). In the interview with her, it became clear that her family was sending her not only books, but also ‘my personal item, […] my clothes, my decoration items, anything’ (Gandom). This signals the future in that she may never return to her home country, thus little by little giving up on the space in her dad’s house she used to call home but about which she cannot make claims for home anymore (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). In bringing all her belongings over, Gandom was also actively engaging in a process of trying to make a home in Newcastle. She is filling the space of her new dwelling

she occupies at present with belongings from her past, and thus with meaningfulness, but most importantly with a sense of her self through the objects she owns, the former being part of the 'bundled package' that Anderson et al. (2016, p. 3) describe as home. This is how Gandom is 'merging present and past' through objects and her possessions; as well as trying to recreate the different emotions that the built environment can trigger, actively creating her transnational home with objects from her past (Boccagni, 2022, p. 139; Brun and Fabos, 2015; Rosales, 2010, p. 521).

Wanting to have her belongings sent to her might also be a way for Gandom to mitigate against the material vulnerabilities that for many refugees are inherent in the decision what to take and what to leave behind, or to 'bridge the material gulf existing between "here" and "there"' (Parkin, 1999; Rosales, 2010, p. 521). Thinking about ways that belonging can be objectified provides another lens through which the sending of Gandom's possessions can be analysed (Rosales, 2010). This can be applied to migrants who move across international borders, as well as individuals who take their belongings with them when they move houses within a city. In focusing on the objects that renters in Montreal take with them when they move between houses, Marcoux (2001, p. 71) for example argues that 'people inhabit their belongings'. Thus, while a case can be made for Sahar's mum's blouse as being a diasporic object that was given to him by his mum as it reminds him of 'people and places' (Pechurina, 2020, p. 678), for Gandom, her books, and by extension all of her belongings that are being sent to her, are companions to her move, similar to that of individuals when they move house which help her create a sense of belonging in Newcastle (Marcoux, 2001, p. 71). At the same time, it may be seen as a form of resistance towards a refugee identity in which experiences of loss and ruptures with the past are centre-stage. Nevertheless, both are examples of how home spans a 'complex translocal system' where past and present collaborate to create a sense of belonging and this is made concrete through artefacts and symbols (Brun and Fabos, 2015; Dreyer, 2022, p. 212).

5.5.2. New possessions, objects and things: bought and gifted

Although Gandom was an exception in that she had her belongings from her home country sent to her to help her create a sense of home in Newcastle, other participants had 'new' objects, things and decorations within their domestic spaces that they got themselves, or which were given to them, in the UK. They had imbued this 'collection of appropriated materials' with

meaning, often laden with stories of experiences made, representations of self-reflections and identifications, or personal tastes and preferences (Hecht, 2001, p. 123); and so just like 'old' possessions and objects, these 'new' things created homeliness, albeit in different ways, and contributed to the creation of familiar spaces.

This can be illustrated by the example of Rahman who I interviewed in his flat. When I first entered his flat together with a support worker, it immediately felt homely, as the place was clean and looked lived in, probably reinforced by the little ornaments and mirrors on the walls, and countless figurines on small tables in the hallway. We entered his living room, and I was astonished to find even more little figurines and ornaments (see figure 19). When we sat down, Rahman brought us biscuits and coffee served in Union Jack mugs, making us feel welcome.

Figure 18: Union Jack pillows in Rahman's living room.

Figure 19: Figurines.

Figures 18 and 19 are photographs of Rahman's living room. Curious about all the little figurines, I asked him why he had so many of them in his living room, and Rahman answered: 'I love the car boot sale'. This was because he found the people there very friendly, as they were always very good to him when offering him good quality items for cheap. Rahman added: 'I love them [the little figurines], sometimes, when I'm going to see my sister, I take some plates for gift, it's very cheap, you know'. The narrative contained by the objects was not only that of the car boot sales where Rahman acquired them, but was interwoven with that of acting as gifts for his sister. While Rahman's flat looked lived in based on the large collection of figurines, there was a part of me which was overwhelmed by the amount of stuff that he had on display. Acknowledging the influence of my own aesthetic judgements about decorations and displaying objects inside my own home, I was thinking that his collection of potential gifts had spun out of control.[73]

[73] This is similar to Daniels (2010) who studied domestic material culture in Japanese house. She observed that for some of her participants, collections of souvenirs and ornaments spun out of control, resulting in an 'eclectic mix' of objects inside some homes.

However, for Rahman, in the tales of the objects on display, it was values relating to home and family that were centre-stage, indicating that Rahman's 'culture of the home' was different from public culture which focuses on beauty (Hurdley, 2006, p. 725). Rahman bought the objects from car boot sales, and they act as reminders of friendly interactions with sellers; and also as gifts for his sister. Similar to Sahar, who acknowledged the imperfections in the wallpaper he had fixed to the wall, Rahman's decorations were not primarily a matter of aesthetics but his desire to make himself at home and become surrounded by his life, which contained memories of his sister and positive memories of his life in the UK (Boccagni, 2022, p. 147). He had attached an emotional value to these objects, although they were not given to him as gift from his sister but were for her. In displaying these objects, he did not tell a story of him as having taste or aesthetic values, but he told the story of an identity which was hidden and not 'immediately present or presentable' (Hurdley, 2006, p. 729).

Rahman had to leave his home country because of his sexual orientation. He feared for his life as his father and brother threatened to kill him. Having lost all relations to them after his father pushed him away, his mum and sister always have been important reference points in his life. For example, from them he learned essential activities taking place inside a home, such as the habitual routines of cleaning and cooking, which was why he kept his flat so clean. After his mum passed away, the relation he had to his sister grew stronger, and this close relation is objectified by the items on display in Rahman's living room, as he told the tales surrounding them, and the purpose of buying these. Hecht (2001) in this regard points out that objects can act 'as a means of coping with and compensating for loss' (p. 124) based on the personal stories they carry or generate. Similar to Sahar who brought his mum's blouse to create a sense of her being there with him and cope with her absence, Rahman had displayed the figurines to compensate for his sister not being there; but to remind him of an (uncertain) point in the future in which he would meet with her to give her some of the figurines as presents. While they are a reminder of the past, the objects at the same time give a perspective of the future. The objects which reminded Rahman of his sister in his home country, were not from or of his family per se, such as photographs or gifts given from them would be, and so be evidence of their existence. Yet, they are examples of Rahman's 'idealised notion of "quality of life"', in which he is together with his sister (Clarke, 2001, p. 28).

In addition to displaying objects as potential gifts, Rahman also had many items with the Union Jack on display: mugs, pillows, and piggy banks. 'I love the England, because changed my life here. [They] give me new life', Rahman answered when I asked him about these objects. The Union Jack-themed objects resemble his experience with 'good' English people as opposed to those who 'want to do bad' to him. Rather than being indicators of a developing sense of English-ness and his living room being a 'mirror of [his] changing belonging' (Boccagni, 2014, p. 279), in Rahman's case, this 'home décor and items on display […] indicate the types of relationships the owners have with the receiving culture, and something of their attitudes towards it' (Pechurina, 2020, p. 675). In fact, many of the stories of how he acquired his furniture, such as the TV or the bright red leather couch contained tales of 'nice English people' who helped him:

> I buy this one [points to the wallpaper] from the car boot sale. […] I buy this chair [couch] from the Facebook I think. […] [V]ery good person, he asking about I think £650 or something like that. Then I speak with him and send a message 'I like this colour, give it to me, I've got £350', he said 'it's alright, you can come but don't forget we buy this chair about the £650'. When I'm going there, I speak to him, he says 'I like you, you are very gentleman', I say 'oh, you are very gentleman' […]. But I said, 'so it's very big, I couldn't take it, what I have to do?' He said, 'no problem, I know someone, we bring you, just give me your address', and I give my address to him and he delivered to me and two, three people bring it up, […] I say 'oh, I appreciate it'.

During our interview, Rahman often contrasted stories like these with accounts of people who 'want to do bad' to him. His fear of being followed and harmed was based on the experiences which led him to flee his home country in the first place, namely that he was not safe anymore from his dad and brother as a gay man. Therefore, while the stories surrounding the furniture and objects in his flat tell where he got them from, they at the same time remind Rahman of the 'good' English people he met.

Despite containing memories of his not-so-far-gone past in the UK, there were some objects that Rahman had in the living room which resembled experiences and memories from his further-gone-childhood past in his home country, and so were informed by cultural norms. For example, there was a big carpet on the living room floor, typical from his home country; and other

participants from the same country as Rahman mentioned during interviews that they wanted to get a carpet like this. Likewise, Rahman had food, such as biscuits and nuts on display (figure 20). I asked him whether he always had the food there:

Figure 20: Snacks on display.

> Always, yeah, always. You know, when I was child, I live like this. […] There always […] was […] something inside the table and all the time […] you can eating. You know, because [home country] people like that […] guest coming to the house, you know. They always ready to try to welcome to my house.

The way that Rahman is 'doing home' was informed by reference points from his home country and influenced by what he had learned during his childhood, which for him was being ready to receive guests and having little snacks out (Boccagni, 2014; Boccagni and Kusenbach, 2020). The meaning of having food on display for Rahman moreover went beyond that of being welcoming towards guests. This practice is a reminder of his childhood home, a marker of his national and cultural identity, and at the same time a way for him to practice and honour what his mum taught him, a person he was so close with and who he keeps in his memory. This mirrors what Boccagni (2014, p. 283) found conducting a multi-sited ethnography of Ecuadorian migration to Italy, as he

discovered sources of ‘consistency and biographical continuity’. While earlier I discussed how participants tried to recreate familiarity through old possessions and objects, familiarity is likewise created through new possessions and objects. Although he had not received any visitors for a long time, Rahman still kept on displaying the food objects because it is what he learned while growing up.

A similar frame of analysis can be applied in Meti’s case. Although he did not have as many decorations in his flat as Rahman, Meti nevertheless made decisions on how to furnish and decorate his flat based on memories from his past, making references to his biography in an attempt to appropriate space (Boccagni, 2022, p. 147). Figure 21 is a picture of his living room, which he annotated as follows:

> I make it classic because years ago when I was a kid I remember people in [home country] use them (pelows [sic] and cushions with rugs). I have sofa but this reminds me my nice youth memories.

Figure 21: Meti's 'classic' living room.

Meti also sent me some ‘nostalgic photo’ of the inside of traditional houses from his home country:

Figure 22: ‘I remember […] we sit around this square table which was covered with heavy blanket and put our feet under it to get warm. This […] collect people together, they eat food and talk friendly together, that was nice’

Figure 23: A nostalgic photo.

Although differences are visible, the setup of Meti's current living room (figure 21), and that of a traditional house typical to his home country (figures 22 and 23) show similarities. Boccagni (2020, p. 13) in this regard points out that 'home is […] a matter of connections with the past', and in Meti's case this is a connection based on space and time. In trying to make his living room 'classic' and recreate the materialities of houses from his home country, as they were manifested in their traditional interior setup, Meti tried to bridge the spatial and temporal distance between his present flat and traditional houses in his home country to evoke 'nice youth memories'. While Meti cannot bridge the distance between his current and past home through return visits, as he cannot go back to his home country nor turn back the time, he tries to make 'reference to contexts associated with […] related practices and senses related to a feeling of home – both past and present' (Pechurina, 2020, p. 672). This also shows how the culturally determined everyday activities performed at home have spatial implications, and the ability to recreate past homes to accommodate for those activities indicated the potential for home (Dreyer, 2022). However, while Meti can place furniture to recreate a 'classic' home, this does not automatically preclude the recreation of the social relations attached to meanings of home which Meti refers to in his annotation of figure 22: 'I remember […] we sit around this square table which was covered with heavy blanket and put our feet under it to get warm. This […] collect people together, they eat food and talk friendly together, that was nice'.

Therefore, Meti's accounts imply a distance in time between where and how he was living at present, and where and how he was living in the past. For Meti, setting up his living room by taking inspiration from traditional houses was not only an attempt to bridge the spatial distance between his home country and his present place. It was also an expression of nostalgia for a past time, where technology wasn't as far developed and people from a household were 'close together' (Meti). However, Meti's nostalgia cannot only be explained by the technological advances in society, and the arrival of technology and entertainments, such as TVs, into households. It can also be related to a distance between practices inside his home now and in the past, as Meti's annotation of figure 22 suggests: the square table in the middle of the room, covered in blankets, as a space for people to come together, talk and eat. The relations between individuals that were part of Meti's home experiences in his home country are absent where he presently lives.

This example indicates Meti's attempts at reproducing familiar environments or 'some traits of his past home experience' (Boccagni, 2016, p. 52). Although aimed at practices, these are materialised in the objects and furniture set up inside Meti's present home, as they tell stories of past lives, future aspirations and imaginations, and facilitate or hinder practices, such as sitting together around a table covered in blankets. His nostalgia, or longing for his 'nice youth' are not necessarily linked to Meti being a refugee; however, being forced to flee and live in an unfamiliar, new cultural environment might reinforce his feelings.

5.6. Witnessing an instance of 'homemaking in practice'

During a home visit to Afra and her family, I was able to observe and become part of 'homemaking in practice' as she and her husband Masud were putting up a new cabinet and frame for the fireplace they had just bought that day from a charity shop. The following field notes describe what happened:

> When I enter Afra's house, she and Masud are just attaching a cabinet onto the wall. I can see that they have also put a frame around their fireplace which makes the living room look more complete than before. Masud and I begin talking and he comments on the tools which are lying all over. 'My toys', he says to me with a smile on his face and excitement in his voice. He tells me that in his home country, he owned a shop where he built and restored furniture. He points to a coffee table in the living room: 'This had a lot of scratches before and I painted it and made it look nice again', he tells me proudly. 'Also, the laminate' he says pointing onto the floor, 'I did this. I did the entire house', he says laughingly. He points to another coffee table which has some marks around the edges where paint is coming off. 'You see this? I will do some work on it so that this goes' he says to me as he strokes the surface and the edges of the small table with his hand.
>
> Once the cabinet is up and attached securely to the wall, it is then Afra's job to clean it. Using glass cleaner and a cloth, she wipes down the top of the cabinet, and cleans the glass doors. Afra then goes upstairs and she comes back with a box of cups and saucers. They look nice, I would say 'fancy', and they are white and have golden flowers on them. I ask where she got them from and she says, 'from a friend'. Afra carefully places the cups and saucers into the first shelf of the cabinet, stacking one on top of another one, putting

three in a row. She brings another set of six smaller cups and saucers, and a dinner set consisting of four small plates, four big plates and four bowls. I help her stack the other cups and saucers, and we unpack the dinner set. After she cleans them, they all go on display into the cabinet. I ask her if she will be using them, but she says no. She also places a tray inside, which was also given to her by one of her friends as a gift. While she is putting the items inside the cabinet, Afra is humming, visibly being in a good mood. Once everything is inside, she looks as me and says, 'now it's finished', and I help her clean the living room.

Figure 24: A cabinet.

Where before was a gap, there was now a cabinet with a variety of cups and saucers, bowls and plates and a tray, some of which have been given to Afra by her friends in Newcastle; but none of which she had brought from her home country. The cabinet not only had a practical function, as a space-filler and as an object holding items that before were stored away in closed drawers and cupboards, where they could not be seen. Where before the objects inside the cabinets were stored away in the backstage of the house, they were now in the frontstage, wanting to be displayed by their owner, Afra. The cabinet also became an object with a story that is on display itself, as a testament to Masud's carpentry skills, in particular his ability to handle the electric tools and attach the cabinet to the wall, and an object treated with care as it was carefully cleaned. In this way, both Afra and Masud infused their identity into the space of their dwelling.

Rather than simply being elements inside her house, both the cabinet and the objects that were displayed in it as part of the interior of Afra's house had become representations of her life in Newcastle, and symbols and commemorations of the friendships and social relations that she has built, including references to her biography (Boccagni, 2022; Daniels, 2010; Pechurina, 2011). The objects inside the cabinet were attached with emotional values, and important to Afra as she cherished them, and so she allocated them a place where they could be seen by visitors, in the cabinet which she and her husband had so carefully installed. The objects given to her by her friends contribute to the building of her biography, and she became surrounded by her life which she is rebuilding in the UK after it had been disrupted in her home country (Mezei et al., 2016, p. 24).

Although individuals may display objects because they feel a sense of duty to those they received them from (Pechurina, 2020), a Google search on décor typical from Afra's home country shows similarities between what I found, and Afra's cabinet in figure 7. Similar to Gandom, who had her possessions sent to her in an effort to recreate her home based on her sense of self inherent in her belongings from her home country, it therefore seems as though Afra is trying to recreate a sense of her old home, a 'familiar materiality' (Pechurina, 2011, p. 112), or 'familiar living environment' which is oriented towards the past, with home therefore spanning a 'trans-local' system (Brun and Fabos, 2015; Kim and Smets, 2020, p. 621). Yet, a difference remains between Gandom and Afra, as the objects she displays in her cabinet are not old belongings, although they still comply with the taste and style of décor from her home country. Rather, these can be seen

as attempts to recover their previous domestic spaces (Boccagni, 2014), or create a 'here' based on the 'there' of the old home.

5.7. Im-materialities: practices and home-relations

This chapter has so far explored how respondents took control over their lives through spatial practices inside their domestic spaces and how 'stuff' can contribute to making a home. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the role of immaterialities inside participants' domestic spaces, such as practices, behaviours and relations, in the process of making a home. For most participants, the place they were living in when I interviewed them was the first independent tenancy they had in the UK after receiving refugee status. Therefore, for many it was the first place where they had relative autonomy, and where they could decide not only about materialities, such as where to place objects and how to decorate, but also about immaterialities. Sahar for example explained that

> You can take shower whenever you want, you can do whatever you want, you can cook whatever you want, you can bring around your friends to see them. So […] one of the words that came in my mind […] was leisure. So, you can do anything you want.

In having 'control over space', Sahar was also able to take some control over his life (Douglas, 1991, p. 289; Parsell, 2012). He refers to being in charge of his own time, especially doing what he wants when he wants, in particular the 'habitual embodied routines' inside the home, such as showering, cooking or bringing friends to his flat (Dreyer, 2022). Sahar called this 'leisure', and having autonomy over his own time, as in deciding when to shower and cook, was an essential aspect in his definition of home after having experienced living in shared accommodation. Not only could Sahar exert control over his life, but he could perform 'anything he wants', enact routines familiar to him, and evoke a sense of home (Dreyer, 2022, p. 212). To understand this kind of agency which occurs during homemaking, Sanyal's (2014) study on how refugees produce space in refugee camps through agency in the Middle East and South Asia provides a useful frame of analysis. Exploring agency that occurs through 'ordinary activities' (p. 570) rather than being linked to 'grand attempts at rebellion' (p. 570), the author argues that such acts of agency are a display of an attempt to 'reclaim "normal" life' (p. 570). Sahar's agency occurs through doing what he wants, when he wants in his domestic space, and in doing this, he is reclaiming a normal life

after experiences of being an asylum seeker. Although Dreyer (2022, p. 213) argues that 'recreating home by doing […] seemingly simple daily acts […] has emancipatory potential', it cannot fully counteract feelings of uncertainty, dislocation and unsettledness. I will discuss this further in chapter six.

In addition to recreating familiar spaces through objects, I also observed that participants tried to recreate familiar behaviours inside their homes. While Kim and Smets (2020) use the term mobility to refer to the reproduction of familiar settings and behaviours as products, online content and memories are moved, Boccagni (2016, p. 52) uses the term 'portability of home' to refer to those efforts which aim at maintaining practices to 'retain a meaningful sense of home' in 'new life environments'. Therefore, some participants spoke about practices and behaviours from their home countries which they maintained in the UK. For Kareem, this was drinking coffee in the morning as he was used to; while for many others, this was eating foods they were used to, and often also how they were used to. Food from home countries, as a material artefact of home, is discussed in the literature, for example for its quality to provide a 'sense of stability and continuity of the idealised home' (Petridou, 2001, p. 102); to establish a connection with the home country (Pechurina, 2020); or to constitute an essential part of an identity (Raman, 2011). While food was rarely mentioned during interviews, it played a role during home visits to Afra.

This was because whenever I visited her, I became part of the lunch ritual – helping to prepare the eating area, and sometimes helping to cook as well. It was not only what we ate but also how we ate which was different to what I was used to. As indicated by the floorplan on Afra's living room in figure 25, there was no dining table, and so when we ate lunch, we sat on the floor or on mattresses (top right), around a PVC tablecloth where the food was placed.

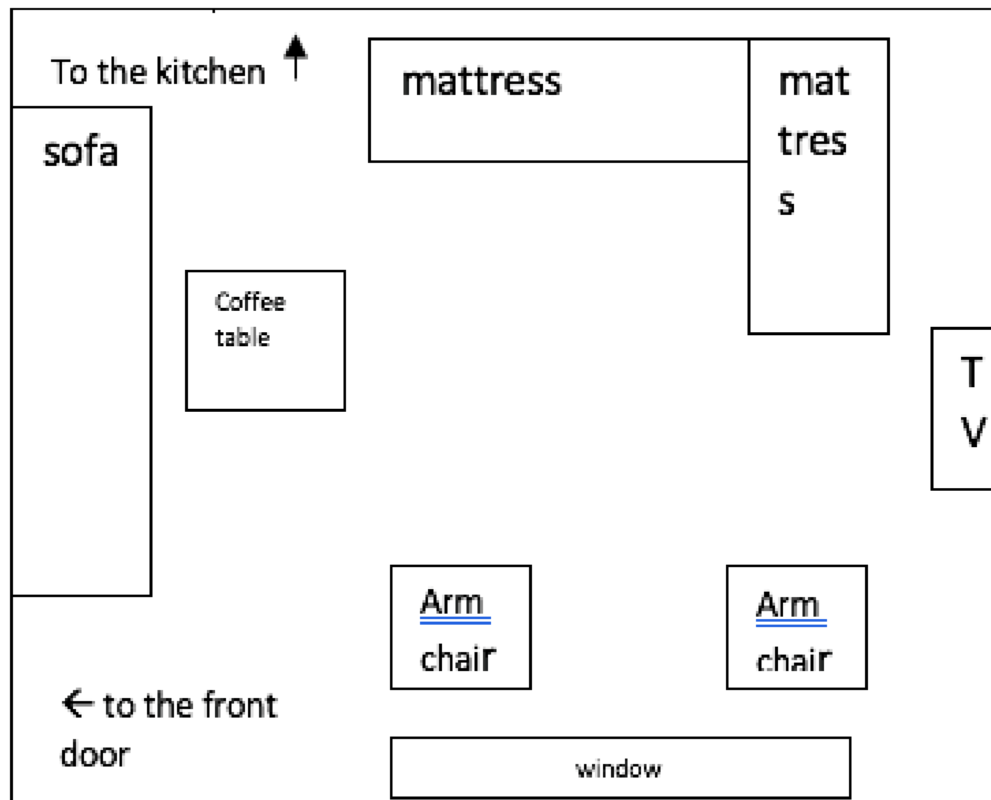

Figure 25: Living room layout.

Although the first section of this chapter shows in detail the ways in which respondents took control over their lives through spatial practices and changing material circumstances inside their domestic spaces, the length of this first section should not distract from the fact that for many participants in this study, relationships seemed to be more important than objects inside their homes. In this regard, Sahar for example commented:

> To be honest the furniture is not really important because they come one day, you know. You buy them finally. The most important thing is people.

Although he only generally referred to 'people', for Sahar relationships played an important role in his definition of home. Also for Farid, relations with kin, or in his case the lack of these, impacted on his sense of home that he could develop in Newcastle. During our interview, we spoke about his siblings who were all living in Germany, and so he remarked that 'they can see each other every day if they want' (Farid). After he, his wife and two children visited them in Germany in summer 2019, 'my wife and [my daughter] literally cried' when they had to return to the UK. Farid admitted that they lacked social interaction with other people, living somewhat isolated. Not only

was he lacking and missing relations with his family, but also those relations with neighbours or friends, which to him are contributing to a sense of home, based on practices from their home country:

> In [home country], so if you got a neighbour and you just knock the door and you say ‘I just want to have a cup of coffee with you’ and […] you go there and it’s fine. And you help each other cook, and you help each other clean etc. Here though, for example, […] our next-door house, we never entered their houses, like never been invited to their houses. […] But this doesn’t mean they are not nice, they are very nice people, extremely nice, but they don’t have this, you know, social interaction like in [home country], do you know what I mean? It’s just, well I think we’re missing that.

Central to Farid’s idea of home were relations, and linked to these practices or what he was used to doing in his house and with whom. While practices such as drinking coffee in the morning alone or sitting on the floor around a PVC tablecloth during mealtimes with the immediate family who have all been resettled to the UK can be described as mobile and portable as individuals can exert control over such practices, what Farid talks about is less so (Boccagni, 2016; Kim and Smets, 2020). This is mainly so because of a difference in cultural norms which prevail beyond the immediate environment of the domestic space and which individuals cannot influence. Yet, they impact on senses of home, as for example, for Farid, inviting and being invited into another’s home is part of the ‘social […] appropriation of space’ that shapes his ideal of home (Boccagni, 2016, p. 49).

Similarly, many participants talked about their families still in their home countries. When I asked Gandom, for example, what she missed in her current home, or what would make her home in the UK perfect, she referred to the spatial (material) environment of a garden based on her memory of how she used it in the past with her family:

> I really miss the garden because we usually spend our free time in the garden. My mum usually cooked sweet things and biscuits in the garden. […] I really miss it. And the family emotion, the connection between family members […]. All of the family was in the same building [in home country] and […] when we gather for the dinner, we usually talk a lot

about the whole of the day, how we spent the day and what is the plan for tomorrow. And we talking together a lot. But here I feel very lonely.

Materialities and immaterialities are not standalone aspects of home but they influence each other. This is visible in Gandom's account in which she associates the space of a garden with the 'family emotion' that she experienced in her home country. The garden was the material place where her and her family spent a lot of their free time. The 'family emotion' is not something that she could recreate easily in the UK, and so Gandom also said that she felt lonely, despite having a partner. Where earlier I raised questions about the limits of homemaking based on the limits of agency as well as disruptions between past and present lifestyles, what Gandom describes further raises questions about the limits of transnational family relationships, and the ability of individuals to recreate these relationships in a meaningful way. While they can be a source of continuity and existential security especially for young migrants (Hiitola, 2021), staying in touch virtually or over the phone makes it difficult to recreate the 'family emotion' which Gandom experienced in her house in her home country.

The loneliness which resulted from such lack of interaction and in-person relations with family and close friends was especially elaborated on by Meti. The lack of relations that he experienced in his present flat were visible not only in the absence of people. On the wall of his living room, he hung a painting of a single tree on a beach (figure 26). He commented on the painting and said how it made him feel:

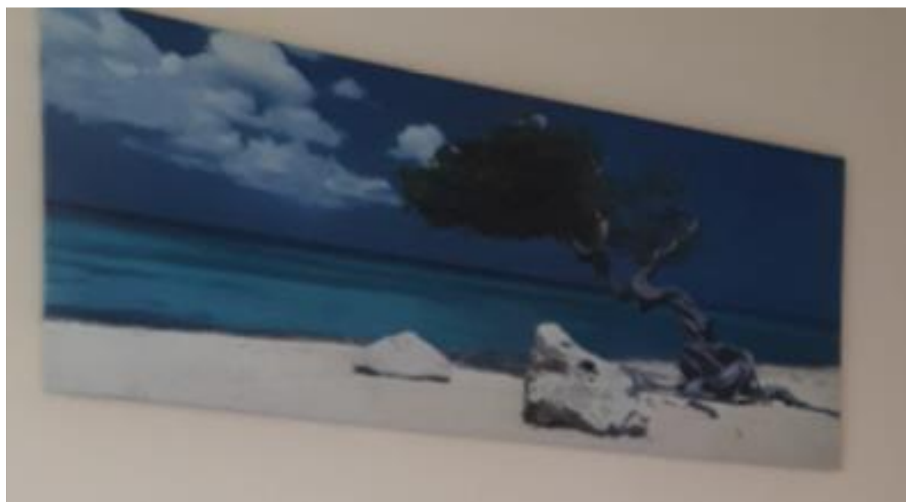

Figure 26: A picture in Meti's living room.

> I bought a painting for a tree near the sea. Just one tree with one cliff near there. It's very good but when I see, I want to change it. […] When you're very concentrate on that picture it gives you a sense of loneliness because this you can see a big sea just a tree. It's very apart from all the trees, just once the sea and tree. It's not good. It's makes you feel loneliness.

For Meti, the painting is a reminder of his loneliness, and of the lack of the 'home-relations' in the place he is living in, again indicating how materialities and immaterialities relate. He said that loneliness causes feelings of anxiety and depression. In order to 'get rid of the loneliness', Meti mentioned social contact, and that it was important for him to 'connect to the community'. This was also to avoid having too much free time to think about his past:

> When you are free […] you are thinking for the past life. […] I try to make myself busy. It's very good way to get rid of thinking, thinking a lot. […] We have a very difficult time in my country. […] But when […] we think about the past life, you get anxious, you have a sense of revenge. And this sense is very bad, it's very harmful […] It's very bad thinking. I try to forget them but it's impossible because sometimes when I am alone this thinking comes back to me.

Similar to Rahman, Meti is reminded of his 'refugee-ness', and this is reinforced by his isolation and lack of social support, of which he is reminded through the painting on his wall. When he is alone, and has free time, feelings of anxiety and revenge occur as he starts thinking about his past and how he could retaliate for his experiences of being a refugee. This is an example of how home can as well be connected to negative feelings, such as anxiety and depression, when being confronted with loneliness and isolation. At the same time, it indicates that Meti's home is transnational as he thinks about his past life in his home country.

In addition, what Meti says illustrates the difficult task many refugees face, which is to make sense of past experiences and coping with post-flight stressors. While participants tried to re-create a home similar to that of their past, past experiences, particularly those relating to their 'refugee experience', formed part of this as well. These experiences and memories from 'there' can at any time enter the 'here'; and while respondents might have chosen to bring certain objects or practices from 'there' to 'here', often they do not have this type of agency over other things.

Therefore, memories of the past can come up at any time, for example during a garden barbecue with Afra and Masud:

> A helicopter flies in the sky, and Masud makes a joke 'They are our friends'. I don't immediately understand this and then he explains: 'In my country, when we hear a plane or helicopter, we go to hide and take cover because of the … I show you.' Masud pulls out his phone from his pocket and plays a video on YouTube, showing warplanes dropping bombs in his home country. Masud finishes his sentence 'because of the bombs' (Ethnographic diary).

5.7.1. Unfamiliar im-materialities in familiar environments: home-management

Despite the efforts discussed throughout this chapter to (re)create familiar spaces, some things remained unfamiliar for respondents. When thinking about practices inside the home, it is important to also think about practices that relate to managing a home. Often, these begin with the task of understanding, for example, how gas, electric and water meters work, as well as how much utilities cost; or more generally, they begin with a familiarisation with the 'habits of the host society' (Kim and Smets, 2020, p. 619). The difficulty of learning how to manage a home was mentioned often during interviews with support services as a main area of concern and support when individuals moved into their own flat or house. For example, one objective of the supported housing project where I volunteered was that refugees would be able to learn the skills necessary to live independently after moving out of supported accommodation, including making phone calls to utility companies, or dealing with issues with benefits or council tax. Support services also helped refugees to budget, which was described by support workers as an essential task to help refugees sustain their tenancy; and so this was another way in which they are involved in refugee homemaking.

The necessity of this has been confirmed in interviews with refugee participants. Sahar, for example, sent a photograph of an electric meter (figure 27) to visualise the prompt 'these things make me feel unfamiliar':

Figure 27: An electric meter.

> [Y]ou don't have time to read about every single thing you know and sometimes when you want to, it's difficult to find your specific answer on the website you know when you are looking for some information on energy suppliers and how the system exactly works, so it's not easy at all. And it's much easier if somebody just tell you, you know. Somebody who had the same experience, or you learn it as you grow up. […] [T]he lack of knowledge about different systems here makes me most uncomfortable other than other things. […] [F]or example I had to provide a meter reading. And in my flat I've got smart meters, as well as a normal meter outside. But and there was no information on my energy suppliers' website about how to read a meter reading on a smart meter. But I called them and asked, and I finally figured it out. But yeah, it wasn't easy and it's just one of the things that I deal with during being here in society.

Home management practices, such as understanding and setting up utilities, or being able to communicate with utility companies, are part of homemaking more generally. Home was then

'experienced as strange and familiar simultaneously' as respondents decorated their environments according to their spatial memories of familiar living spaces from their home countries, but encountered unfamiliar situations in the same environments, such as an electric meter (Steigemann and Misselwitz, 2020, p. 631). Sahar's comments also closely relate to cultural norms which Farid spoke about, which can lead to experiencing culture shock (Young and Chan, 2015).

Zarifa had similar experiences to Sahar. She used to live in supported housing but had moved and was living in London when I interviewed her. According to her, it was very important for refugees to learn about how 'life in the UK' works, and this included things related to home management, such as understanding bills, or contacting her GP. She was very grateful to her support worker for explaining to her 'how things work':

> I think sometimes you must […] put […] courses about this from the refugee, […] not […] to explain and after that everything finished, no. Let the refugee […] do this or to do this by himself. This, I think […] is to prepare someone how to face everything after that in the future. […] And sometimes [people don't have] enough time […] to help you. Because everybody very busy. […] So, I think […] we miss this, […] that is everybody […] who know how to put the refugee in the right guidelines. Because that means you are build someone very succeed how to live in the UK.

In order to know how to live in the UK, support is needed so that refugees learn how to manage their homes. However, Zarifa's experiences of over-stretched services and limited resources has been echoed in research on the provision of support for refugees, particularly in housing (Phillips, 2006).

The accounts of Sahar and Zarifa can be analysed once more through the lens of control over their lives in a broader context beyond just the intimate domestic spaces. Earlier I highlighted the importance of control over space for the notion of home. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003, p. 62) also use 'control' in their definition of resettlement, namely they define it as a process of re-establishing a feeling of control over one's life. In developing the skills and knowledge, or human capital, to solve issues relating to the management of their homes, and having the desire to do so themselves, Zarifa and Sahar have, or at least want to, take control, and so engage in an active

process of homemaking. At the same time, this points towards emerging social relations and building a sense of belonging to a community which I will discuss in the next chapter.

5.8. Conclusion

For many participants in this study, the dwelling they had arrived in was a place where, for the first time in a long time, they could do what they want, when they want and how they want. Autonomy, seeking independence and having personal space after experiences of shared asylum seeker accommodations, and living in other institutionalised accommodations increased confidence, and feelings of attachment to the domestic space for many participants. Before placing objects and possessions in their flats and houses, many respondents had to make the space liveable first. While the local authority saw it as their responsibility to give refugees a roof over their heads, it was then up to individuals to bring the living spaces up to a hospitable standard. Therefore, a lot of time, effort and money, as well as material investment was necessary to transform ‘anonymous houses’ (Rosales, 2010), which were often bare and concrete floor was exposed, into inhabitable spaces. This is significant and indicates the tension within respondents' material circumstances (Brun, 2015), given that many had virtually lost all their possessions, and then arrived in an empty space requiring material investment.

While many participants had less control over *where* they lived, there was more control over *how* they lived. Participants sought and exerted agency through spatial practices and engaging with their material realities as they were transforming, decorating and changing the interior of the dwellings, thereby appropriating it. Yet, there were limits to what was possible to change, in the form of financial resources and personal capabilities and skills. In this sense, control and agency were limited at any one time. Regardless, as a result of spatial practices and improving spaces, respondents often strongly identified with their dwellings, and created emotional geographies as part of their homemaking processes in claiming a space as their own. Positive experiences with dwellings were rested on the purpose and material circumstance of claiming a space as their own, or ‘home’. Feelings of being 'house-proud' stood in contrast to negative feelings of temporariness and limbo during the asylum process or homelessness when respondents were housed in emergency accommodation.

While respondents showcased agency, this agency occurred to create and live a normal life after the experience of being an asylum seeker. Respondents could exert agency, however, the structures they were embedded into impacted on this. This was visible, for example, when participants wanted to make alterations to the interiors but lacked resources. I discussed Gandom's experiences of wanting to install a shower in her bathroom which was considered as a luxury item by the council, and so Gandom had to pay for the alteration herself. Not having sufficient resources themselves, the council employed a strategy characterised by an emotional distance and saw Gandom as an immigrant being dealt with, rather than an individual. This response to demands for support resembles Arendt's (1958 [1998] in Burdon et al., 2014, p. 430) thoughtlessness, where support workers become complicit with the system which dehumanises individuals, as this dominates support workers' actions and behaviour towards who in this case are refugees.[74]

While the council has given some refugees a 'roof over their heads', responsibilities to improve these often bare and grim spaces was left to each individual who was embedded into limiting structures. Regardless of the limits imposed on their agency, respondents tried to evade and resist these limits with their very agency and employed creative strategies to make alterations to their dwelling spaces, and live a normal life. Regardless, this perspective illuminates that it is important not to romanticise refugees' agency (Beeckmans et al., 2022). The severe constraints many respondents faced to improve their living spaces raise questions about what Dreyer (2022) calls the emancipatory power of homemaking.

This chapter then further explored participants' material circumstances and spatial practices through focusing the discussion on possessions, such as furniture and other objects inside dwellings through which participants turned houses into homes. Insights revealed that support services played a significant role in refugee homemaking, for example through providing furniture as part of council support schemes. This meant that often, respondents had to furnish their dwellings with objects they disliked or that were broken. Alternatively, many participants turned to charity shops to furnish their dwellings with cheaper second-hand furniture. This marked a discontinuation with previous lives as going to charity shops was a new experience for many.

[74] This included myself in some instances.

While many participants were also given money vouchers as part of council support, choice was often still restricted as vouchers could only be spent in certain shops. Some respondents found ways to navigate this, as they sold the furniture they were given to then buy items which they liked and which they could take pride in. Yet, this was only an option for those who were given furniture to keep after leaving supported housing, and not those who 'rented' it as part of their tenancy. This chapter also raised questions regarding the limits of spaces for agency, such as when individuals' only option is to accept their circumstances, for example when they have no choice over where they can live or cannot afford to buy new furniture.

Many respondents tried to reproduce the material environment of their old homes within their new homes, for example by arranging furniture in a certain way, or buying decorative items which were of a similar style to those they had in their old homes, or which reminded them of close family in their home countries. This was how respondents consumed their dwellings. Some participants brought 'old' possessions with them, which contributed to creating homeliness inside their dwellings or uphold memories of past homes, including the people participants used to live with. These old possessions contributed to creating familiarity in strange and new environments. For Gandom, attempts to recreate a familiar space, and bridge the gap between here and there were visible in the fact that her family, who was still in her home country, was sending her possessions to her. This may also mark a resistance towards the (material) loss experienced by many refugees. However, most participants did not bring any personal possessions from their home countries, marking another discontinuation between past and present lives. Regardless, new possessions had meaning and resembled stories of experiences made, and friendships built.

While this chapter argued for a material condition of homemaking, it also explored the immaterialities of home, such as practices, behaviours and relations. Findings showed that respondents struggled with unfamiliar practices in relation to the management of their homes. However, autonomy in enacting embodied routines (Dreyer, 2022), such as eating, sleeping and cooking, was essential in definitions of home, and some participants tried to achieve continuity with the past in enacting similar routines from their home countries in their new domestic environments. However, this was sometimes unachievable, for example in the case of Farid, who had failed in his attempt to recreate some of the relations taking place inside the home he was used to with his neighbours; or in the case of Gandom who spoke about the 'home relations' with

her family in her home country which she could not recreate in the UK. In this way, reminders of participants' refugee pasts were reflected in the material culture and immaterial practices of the home. This was especially illustrated in the case of Rahman who was constantly reminded of the persecution he experienced as a gay man when talking about the very positive experiences he had in the UK with ‘good English people’; and in the case of Masud who was reminded of war in his home country by the helicopters while we were sitting in the garden. These memories can be actively evoked, for example through purchasing objects, or they happen randomly and by chance, such as when helicopters flew over the garden. While individuals try to actively recreate what was ‘there’, sometimes those memories come back suddenly and remind individuals of their often-traumatic pasts. As such, to recall Boccagni’s (2016) question from the start of this chapter regarding the portability of home, respondents often brought along memories related to their ‘refugee experiences’ which were intertwined with memories of a past home.

The next chapter will discuss experiences ‘beyond the house’ (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 10) through exploring the role of encounters with local others, wider social structures, and transnational connections on feelings of attachment. It will discuss different strategies for belonging, such as negotiating the physical environment of the city, or connecting to the community and neighbourhood.

6. Chapter six: Outside the House

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will broaden the focus on housing and centre discussions around respondents' experiences beyond the intimate dwelling spaces by mapping strategies of belonging and how experiences outside the house impact on these experiences. This chapter will continue to map the process of arrival, following the temporal logic connected to the different dimensions of home, as it is set out for instance by Duyvendak (2011). This involves 'arriving', 'having arrived' and 'venturing out in the community'; although I acknowledge that such processes can take place simultaneously and are not linear. Homemaking for refugees in Newcastle involves a combination of experiences made before, during and after arrival in Newcastle. The continuity of experiences between 'arrival', 'inside', and 'the outside' is not only manifested temporally but also in the ways that participants showcase agency while they are navigating limiting structures. Instead of being disconnected, 'within the house' and 'venturing out' are linked in my understanding of belonging, and by extension homemaking. As I will indicate in this chapter, regardless of feelings of safety within the house, positive and negative experiences outside the house condition respondents' strategies for belonging, as do connections they have across borders.

Although participants may have created a 'safe space' inside their dwellings, circumstances of arrival and negative experiences of racism and discrimination outside the house suggest that there are fragilities and barriers to homemaking. This illuminates the value of going beyond the house and exploring strategies for belonging when conceptualising refugee homemaking in Newcastle. In this sense, this chapter explores how homemaking can translate into feelings of belonging; that is, it attempts to explore how participants articulate a sense of belonging through building attachments to their environments over time, and what role encounters with local others, wider social structures, and transnational connections play in this process. While this chapter will build on the links between senses of attachment, belonging to material infrastructures and spatial surroundings of less intimate dimensions such as within the community, it will also focus on those dimensions of belonging which transcend materialities, including relations to place and other people. As such, this chapter will add to existing critiques of ideas about integration which I pointed out in chapter two.

In this chapter, I will use Simmel's concept of the stranger to analyse circumstances of arrival.[75] Focusing on the point in time when participants arrived in the UK, I will present the ways that they negotiated their physical environments and the city as strangers as the first strategy for belonging. Following this, I will analyse respondents' experiences as they were trying to connect to the community and their neighbourhood and discuss the impact that negative encounters had on strategies for belonging. Using the concept of slow violence, I will also explore the role of the wider social context on belonging. The final section of the chapter will draw on theories of transnationalism to analyse the role of connections respondents had to their countries of origin in strategies for belonging. First, I will discuss participants' negotiations of their identities in a new environment before analysing how connections and feelings of belonging to the home country affected their sense of belonging to Newcastle.

6.2. Negotiating the physical environment and the city

In focusing on experiences and circumstances of participants' arriving and their impact on strategies for belonging, this section continues discussions from chapter four which outlined housing pathways as part of the process of arrival, including experiences participants made as asylum seekers and refugees. Participants not only arrived in a dwelling, but also in a city where they negotiated a new environment outside of their houses. Going back to the point in time when participants arrived in the UK is necessary to fully comprehend experiences outside the house and their impact on feelings of belonging. I understand these experiences to include the circumstances of participants' arrival in the UK, and by extension Newcastle as their last 'destination' after forced dispersal and moving backwards and forwards between different cities;[76] as well as encounters within the community and neighbourhood as respondents venture out of their dwellings over time.

Wood and Waite (2011) define belonging as a 'dynamic emotional attachment that relates individuals to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience' (p. 1). Belonging is accompanied by an emotional experience, and can be articulated on different dimensions, which

[75] Some participants used the phrase to refer to themselves during interviews. In addition, I find Simmel's concept, and its symbolic meaning to have analytical value to discuss participants' experiences, in particular the ambivalence surrounding the stranger's position.

[76] Because of dispersal policies where asylum seekers arriving in the UK are being sent to various cities in the UK, the geographical focus in this section will be the UK as a whole, and not just Newcastle.

are linked to material infrastructures but also transcend them. I gave examples of the link between belonging and material infrastructures in chapter five where I focused on participants' dwellings as a particular place to which they had built attachment through changing the insides of their houses. Similarly, attachment and belonging can be negotiated and fostered to the physical environment of the city to achieve 'a sense of ease with […] one's surroundings' (May, 2011, p. 368).

During interviews, I asked participants to describe how they felt when they first arrived to trace how initial impressions might have developed into feelings of attachment or belonging. Many commented generally how strange the new environment was at first, and some responses to differences were emotional and far from the 'sense of ease with […] one's surroundings' which according to May (2011, p. 368) characterises belonging. Zabi for example said how scared she was in the first night in her asylum seeker accommodation because she was not used to having windows in the bedroom. Compared to this emotional response, Meti instead commented with a rather neutral tone that he was surprised and thought it was strange to feel cold temperatures which he was not used to coming from a warm country. In comparing how such feelings changed over time, Meti described how this strangeness he felt at first then diminished:

> Everyone who comes here at first are stranger in this city and knows nowhere to go, […] it's very strange for them. After a while you can get familiar with anything. With the restaurant, with the college. And you get used to this city.

To analyse respondents' experiences of arrival and understand the impact of being a 'stranger', as Meti said, on senses of belonging, it is worth considering Simmel's (1950) ideas of 'the stranger'. Simmel introduced the figure of the stranger as the one 'who arrives today and stays tomorrow'. Unlike a wanderer, who is not fixed to space and exists within a realm of coming and going, Simmel described the stranger as a potential wanderer. Since he first introduced the concept, it has been developed by other authors, such as Ahmed (2000) for whom the stranger is a 'body out of place' (p. 39); or Koefoed and Simonsen (2011) who use Simmel's concept to highlight an image of the stranger as the 'internal other' (p. 350), the one who has come to stay.[77]

[77] The authors highlight that one not simply is a stranger, but 'one becomes a stranger' (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011, p. 344).

This emphasises what is central to the idea of the stranger, namely that they claim membership in a group defined by boundaries which may or may not be spatial, rather than being an outsider, albeit such membership can be contested and is antagonistic. This is the case for many refugees in the UK, for example, who have been granted protection and been given leave to remain.

While the concept of the stranger has been applied to discuss experiences of migrants generally, some authors have used Simmel's ideas and applied them to the case of refugees to highlight the forced nature of their migration and movements, and the lack of choices they face compared to other migrants. Writing in the context of the European Union (EU) refugee regime, Vieira and Nunes (2020) for example argue that refugees can be considered 'strangers of a particular type' (p. 222). This is because, compared to other experiences of migration, refugees often undertake longer journeys to get to a host country, and they face 'added bureaucratic issues' (p. 215) which tie them to a particular place. This means it is often impossible for refugees to migrate to another EU country and it excludes them from the freedom of movement within the Schengen area which other EU citizens have. Rather than *choosing* to stay, refugees are thus *forced* to stay in the place they arrived in or were sent to.

The argument that refugees arrive today and have no choice but to stay tomorrow can be applied to the case of refugees in the UK, and participants in this research. In chapter four, I mapped respondents' movements between different UK cities, and these indicated that individuals were often highly mobile as they were moved around by the Home Office or chose to move to different cities after being given leave to remain.[78] Although Koefoed and Simonsen (2011) point out that 'the stranger exists within a *symbolic* realm of coming and going' (p. 344, emphasis added), for many forced migrants coming and going was often *literal* as they were forced to move to different places. Many respondents had therefore arrived in numerous places, but not to stay, until it was

[78] Often, the move away from Newcastle after being given leave to remain was only temporary, however, and participants returned. This was mainly due to the difficulty of finding affordable (social) housing, as local connection criteria make the local authority in which refugees have been given their status responsible for housing individuals. As a consequence, many had to rent privately when they moved away from the area in which they have been given refugee status. Those who were by themselves then often privately rented a room in a shared house; and families privately rent houses or flats. While they were eligible for Local Housing Allowance (LHA), this often only partly paid for the rent, and it meant that individuals worked illegally and did not declare their income because the LHA would have decreased. A return to Newcastle was then inevitable because individuals ran out of money, were asked to leave by their landlords for no legitimate reason, or they were stuck in their situation and could not realise the imagination of life in a different, bigger city.

decided for them in which part of the UK they were to stay. Processes of belonging and attachment to these places were then interrupted as they had to leave and start these processes anew elsewhere. At the same time, many respondents were constrained to have come to stay in Newcastle considering the difficulties of moving to a different city after being given refugee status (chapter four). The forced circumstances of arriving today and staying tomorrow thus impacted on negotiations of the environment as part of individuals' strategies of belonging.

While respondents made claims for spaces through making improvements to their dwellings or placing objects in them, processes of appropriation and developing belonging within the physical environment of the city were different. Anonymous urban environments were appropriated and became 'significant places' through navigating within them, as respondents were given the opportunity to take part in urban life and become familiar with space, thus building a relationship to the city (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011). This opportunity was created as participants were sent to Newcastle as their dispersal area and were allowed to stay until receiving a decision on their asylum claim. Where individuals at first wandered around aimlessly, as Meti's comment suggests, through moving around and engaging with the spaces of the city, meaning was given to them. 'A' college became 'the' college, and 'a' restaurant became 'the' restaurant. This affiliation was not constructed through memories of past places from past lives, triggered for example by visual prompts of their spatial surroundings which made Newcastle a familiar space.[79] Rather, familiarity was determined by time and engagement with the built environment, participation and getting used to it after having arrived and not being (re)moved again.

In addition to strange surroundings, participants also described a strangeness in relation to others around them when they first arrived. While the discussion above relates to the physical environment, Gandom instead describes the alienation she felt to the people around her when she first arrived:

> The first months that I was in the UK, […] I was very down, very depressed, very upset and very hopeless and I was not happy. Because I thought 'this is not my country and I cannot contact with the people.' […] I was thinking that they are not my country mate and they

[79] This was the case when participants tried to create familiarity inside their domestic spaces through objects and recreating familiar layouts within rooms.

> are foreign people and that they think who am I and why I live here because […] my appearance or my face is not similar to them so maybe they think, why I am here.

While Meti described himself and others who arrive in Newcastle for the first time as "strangers" who do not know where to go, Gandom portrayed herself as a stranger based on different 'features' (Simmel, 1950, p. 405), such as the way she looks, or her skin colour, which make her different from the majority population. In their domestic environments, participants engaged in spatial practices to infuse initially anonymous and bare spaces with their identities before claiming these spaces as theirs (chapter five). Within a city, familiarity was established through engagement and participation. Gandom in her testimony, however, highlights that she was not able to make claims for attachment because of the difference she perceived between herself, and others around her during 'embodied encounters', indicating the importance of the relational dimension. Contemporary scholarship relating to transient encounters between individuals from different backgrounds in places such as parks, cafes or cities indicates that these encounters can be 'congenial; developing familiarity, reciprocity, warmth, friendship and trust' (Nayak, 2017, p. 291); however, for Gandom, encounters underlined her difference from others. It led her to describe herself as a 'body out of place' (Ahmed, 2000, p. 29), and Gandom was not able to identify or interact with the people around her when she first arrived in the UK. This prompted strong emotional responses, resembling 'a sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation and dis-placement' (Antonsich, 2010, p. 649) which individuals can feel when they think that they do not belong to a place. Such feelings conditioned by instances of non-belonging (Dromgold-Sermen, 2022, p. 647) are expressed by Gandom as she said she felt down, depressed, upset and hopeless. This indicates that the relational dimension, or concrete encounters and interactions with others, are equally important in making claims about belonging to a place, as is becoming familiar with an environment more generally. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section.

While many respondents were highly mobile and had lived in different UK cities, often such stays were fleeting and short. Many were denied the opportunity to engage with other places as they did with Newcastle as they were moved between cities by the Home Office. The length of stays was never pre-determined and never known, and so relationships with the environment were characterised by series of opposites: 'nearness and remoteness, wandering and attachment, physical proximity and social distance' (Vieira and Nunes, 2020, p. 218). It is within this context

that belonging to a place where respondents did not choose to go was negotiated. Although Leach (2005) argues that engagement with environments is the 'significant factor' in processes of identification with surroundings and building a sense of belonging 'for identification is a product of the consciousness by which we relate to our architectural surroundings' (p. 308), it seemed as though participants did not become familiar with Newcastle consciously. Rather, this happened automatically and unconsciously as respondents moved within and engaged with their surroundings over time; an opportunity which was denied before they had arrived in Newcastle as those places participants were sent to before by the Home Office were not places where they had come to stay.

After being given the opportunity to engage with their environment to create 'significant places' (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011, p. 354), Newcastle then 'turn[ed] to home' (Zana). That belonging was a kind of automated process, was also emphasised by Mokshe's and Mustafa's testimonies:

> It's human nature, I think. As time goes, […] you get used to some things (Mokshe).
>
> When you have [...] rooted in the community […] this automatically becomes your home (Mustafa).

The alienation first felt when participants arrived in Newcastle, was overcome by getting used to it, and so time spent in an environment was a central factor in negotiations of the environment as part of strategies for belonging.[80] This emphasises the point made earlier about the passing of time and developing a sense of belonging through navigating an environment which was denied to many participants in other cities they were sent to because they were moved around different UK cities, often multiple times. In addition, social interactions played a role in overcoming alienation. Having been given time to engage with their surroundings and other people, participants' solicited diaries gave insight into the kind of actions involved in turning a place to home. While they included activities individuals did by themselves, such as walking, cooking or cleaning, participants also reflected on encounters and interactions with local others in different contexts through which they wanted to connect with the community. This will be discussed in the next section.

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[80] This includes the time when respondents were asylum seekers.

6.3. (Not) Connecting with the community

Belonging involves and transcends the relationships built with material infrastructures. As per Wood and Waite's (2011) definition, belonging can also emerge from relations that individuals have with their social worlds. It plays a role in connecting individuals to the social (May, 2011). This is confirmed by Antonsich (2010) who argues that relational factors, or the personal and social ties one has, matter in generating a sense of belonging, and connectedness with others. Huizinga and van Hoven (2018) in this context discuss how for Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, belonging or non-belonging can emerge from encounters with others. In contrast to Antonsich (2010) who supports the thesis that weak ties and occasional encounters are not sufficient to generate a sense of belonging, respondents in Huizinga and van Hoven's (2018) study reported feelings of happiness when they experienced 'successful encounters' (p. 313) even if these were short. However, it is unclear whether feelings of happiness can translate or develop into belonging, or whether this requires strong ties with others. These doubts are fed by Huizinga and van Hoven's (2018) point that it was during encounters where differences between Syrian refugees and Dutch residents were highlighted. Contrary to the assumption that 'nodes of encounter […] are characterised by similarity' (p. 313), encounters of the young Syrian men were often with older Dutch adults because daily life routines of the young Syrian men were not similar to those of young Dutch people. This then resulted in feelings of not-belonging.

For participants in this study, their strategies for belonging did not only involve negotiating the physical environment, but also the encounters which happen within them and through which individuals attempted to connect with the community. These encounters included 'transient encounters' (Nayak, 2017, p. 290) such as those Gandom experienced, as well as encounters in 'semi-public spaces' (Wessendorf, 2014). One of those 'semi-public spaces' was during volunteering, for example in a foodbank or church. Various studies focus on forced migrants who volunteer, for instance, in the context of constructing ideals of 'active citizenship for refugees' to become 'good citizens' (Yin Yap et al., 2010, p. 168); or of the benefits of volunteering in providing a source of leadership, wellbeing and belonging for refugee youth (Carlton, 2015). In my research, respondents often said they volunteered to keep busy and do something helpful, to improve language skills and build confidence. In addition, volunteering was important to 'make more relation with others' (Zabi) and feel less isolated. The places where respondents volunteered thus

were significant places for opportunities to interact with other people and attempts to connect with the community. In contrast to an automated process of getting used to an environment to which participants had finally come to stay, many were actively seeking to interact with the majority ethnic population in their strategies for belonging.

Neal and Walters (2008) argue that 'experiences of belonging' require a desire for community, and routine 'small-scale efforts to create tangible structures of community feeling', such as those of social organisations (p. 293). Although the authors write in a context of rural environments, they emphasise the importance of more or less organised spaces, where belonging, which is rooted in relations with others, can be fostered, and community created. Participants sought those spaces when they were volunteering, as they were looking for meaningful interactions to develop belonging. However, while they expressed a desire for belonging, this was not always reciprocated. Zabi reflected on the difficulties to have meaningful interactions with others who volunteer at the church during gardening activities:

> It's not really close […] maybe [they say] 'hi'. […] They wait you come and speak with them, […] maybe it's […] culture. [Home country] is more friendly, […] more emotional. But if you don't come, they don't come near you. […] They don't speak really, all of them silent. […] [And] they don't gather, in my country when you do gardening, you gather after for example one, two hours, […] and make a fire, and drink coffee or tea, get together.

Despite a clear desire to connect with others, there were barriers to developing a sense of belonging which is rooted in relations with others. For Zabi, this stemmed from the differences in behaviours and the barriers this created to starting a meaningful conversation with other (majority ethnic) volunteers. While participants were able to overcome the strangeness they felt in relation to their surroundings as they got used to and became familiar with it, it was more difficult to negotiate feelings of strangeness in relation to other people. This depended on actions and reactions from others, and required negotiations of identities as part of participants' strategies for belonging. I will discuss this further in section 6.6.

Saman in the context of connecting with others also spoke about differences between cultures, and the difficulties of building social networks and finding friends to mimic the close relationships he had in his home country due to a lack of opportunities:

> We have friends here, but the culture is a bit different. […] It's very difficult because of the close relationship we have back home so we cannot have that here because I have not found it yet. To have that trust. Because […] it's less opportunity there to meet and find those types of friends.

Saman compared the relations he was able to build with his 'friends' in the UK, to those he had with friends in his home country. Instead of identifying with the former, he concluded that they were different in the UK because they were marked by a lack of trust. At first, Saman blamed cultural differences for this, but later he attributed it to a lack of opportunities to meet and find others with whom he could connect and build trusting relationships. Even though 'successful encounters' can evoke a sense of happiness (Huzinga and van Hoven, 2018), for Saman, creating a sense of belonging required more than that. Instead of thin relations and transient encounters, Saman was looking for strong ties characterised by trusting relationships where he could root his sense of belonging into. However, he did not have the opportunities to meet others with whom he could potentially build close relationships. At the time of the interview, Saman lived in a flat above a takeaway restaurant, in a building which was not located in an area akin to a suburban neighbourhood but was next to a fast-food restaurant, positioned in a large car park. These were barriers for Saman to develop relations and connections which would result in a sense of belonging and so he was left longing for close relationships similar to those he had in his home country. This can be applied to the ways in which refugees' and asylum seekers' lives are regulated more generally, especially when they are living away from the mainstream population, or in hotels, without opportunities to connect and build relations with others.

Participants also had to negotiate language barriers as part of their strategies for belonging as they were trying to connect with others. Drawing on Ingatieff (1994), Antonsich (2010) emphasises how language can facilitate connecting with a community, as it can evoke a sense of community, in particular when individuals can make themselves not just understood, but also convey what they mean. As such, language is a cultural factor which can contribute to a feeling of belonging (Antonsich, 2010). For participants, language played an important role as they attempted to connect with other people as part of their strategies for belonging. However, connecting with others was difficult because of a lack of confidence about communicating well enough in English. Meti for example said he only felt about '30 or 40 [per cent], maybe less'

connected to the community and this was due to his ability to communicate in English with the 'native people', as well as understand the rules for socialising. He further commented:

> If I can speak English very well and connect the people without any anxious, without any stress, I feel I live in my country, I feel I can get near to people. […] Because the language, […] it is the most important factor to […] communicate with other people. […] When you cannot tell your feeling, when you cannot tell what you want to say, […] your partner, or your teacher or your friends cannot understand you, it's so bad. Because you mean something else and he understand another thing.

Meti's testimony relates to the aspect of belonging which May (2011) describes as a sense of ease with one's surroundings. In contrast to this sense of ease, Meti describes feeling anxious and stressed when he speaks English to people from the majority population. Only when he has overcome such negative feelings and feels comfort, will he be able to make claims for attachment about the UK being his country he lives in and connect with others (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). Central to Meti's testimony is that being able to communicate and connect with others are important to develop a sense of belonging, indicating the importance of a relational dimension for belonging.

Earlier, I discussed Gandom's feelings of non-belonging during encounters with the majority population due to a lack of identification and feeling different because of her appearance. Such feelings were heightened when respondents were not able to understand and make themselves understood in interactions with native English speakers, in particular those who speak the Geordie accent dominant in certain parts of Newcastle. Gandom for example disclosed that for her, the inability to understand and connect with others, emphasised her difference to them. These feelings stand in contrast with discussions about how respondents had negotiated their environment to become familiar with it. Respondents negotiated various tensions between feelings of belonging and non-belonging that occurred on different dimensions. For many participants, living in the UK was 'an ambivalent process full of contradictory feelings' where doubts and uncertainty remained about whether one belongs or does not (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011, p. 347).

6.4. Connecting with the neighbourhood: Discourses of otherness

Experiences within their neighbourhoods, or in the direct vicinity of respondents' houses, also impacted on how they could connect with their neighbourhood. Although neighbourhoods have been described as 'significant places' where belonging and attachment can be fostered (Huizinga and van Hoven, 2018; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001), participants often shared experiences of negative encounters in their neighbourhoods, which resembled discourses of otherness. These included the display of symbols in neighbours' front gardens, such as Union Jacks, but also verbal attacks, or sometimes physical violence. Participants then negotiated these negative encounters as part of their strategies for belonging. While inside their houses, individuals could make claims for attachment which remained mostly unchallenged, it was in the immediate surroundings of such intimate dwelling spaces where claims for attachment were met by counterclaims (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021).

One example of how discourses and practices of otherness and exclusion were at work in some neighbourhoods is that of Afra. Afra was living in housing rented from the council with her family, and I went to visit her at her house one sunny afternoon in the late summer of 2020. A few months earlier, Afra had moved with her family from a three-bedroom flat into a house with a garden. When I turned onto the street where Afra had moved on the day I went to visit her, I immediately noticed the bunting that was put up between the houses which stretched all the way to the end of the street. From a Google search after my visit, I found out that bunting was a show of 'neighbourly togetherness', and I wondered if Afra and her family felt such neighbourly togetherness, or if they felt excluded from it.

When I arrived at Afra's house, I noticed her next-door neighbours were sitting in the front garden in the sun, but without Afra. As I was locking my bike to the gate near the front door, I thought that it would probably be very difficult for Afra to understand and make herself understood to this group of her neighbours, given that she did not speak much English, and thought that this was probably why she did not sit with them. Similarly, she might not have wanted to sit with them. However, I could not help but think that even though majority and minority ethnic populations were living side by side in Afra's neighbourhood, indicating that structural boundaries may have been eliminated, it seemed as though symbolic boundaries between her and her neighbours were upheld (Schachter, 2016). After I finished locking up my bike on the gate in front

of her house, I raised my head to look at the houses opposite Afra's, and immediately noticed a big Union Jack attached to a caravan in the front garden of Afra's neighbour opposite, directly facing her house.

Despite my first impression of neighbourly togetherness indicated by the bunting, I also noticed tensions, indicated by Afra's absence from her group of neighbours in the front garden, and the large British Flag opposite her house. I could see that Afra and her family were very happy in their new house, not least because of the outside space in their back garden which they did not have in their previous flat. However, I also found out during the visit that Afra and her family were experiencing targeted hostilities from their neighbours. This came up in a conversation I had with Afra which I recall in the diary below:

> After we finish eating dinner, Afra's children go to play outside with water pistols, joining the neighbours' children, although I notice that they stay close to the house where Afra can see them through the living room window. They all look happy, and they laugh and scream. I ask Afra about her friends from her home country who she told me about before, and who she would get together with every morning in the block of flats where she lived before. She says that two of her friends live close, one only five minutes away, and the other two streets away. I ask her about the neighbours, and she says: "They are all very nice, next door they always say 'hello' when I see them. But the neighbour opposite, not nice. Their boy was talking bad to my daughter, and Masud [her husband] speak with the parents about it. I think they do not like [home country] people". I am shocked by this and I can imagine how it makes Afra and her family feel. However, it seems that she is at ease with that incident, and they have resolved it, between them and for themselves. As I look through the large living room windows to the opposite house of the neighbours who Afra described at 'not nice', I notice the trailer with a massive British flag on the front, directly facing Afra's house.

In chapter five I described how Afra and her husband had improved and beautified the inside of their house, thereby making claims for the space as theirs (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). Outside of this intimate space of the dwelling, these claims were met by responses, or counterclaims from her neighbours, such as in the verbal abuse Afra's daughter experienced, or

visibly in the display of the British flag right opposite her house. Muldoon et al. (2020) argue that national flags 'can be seen to be imbued with tremendous significance and meaning' (p. 267), for example, when they are used to make claims for national identity. This in turn can create tensions between different groups. Following a similar line of argument, Callahan and Ledgerwood (2016) claim that flags as symbols of group identity can have a psychological function, when such symbols are displayed to convey an image of unity and threat to non-members of such group. Flags then can become territorial markers (Bryan, 2018), and so through the display of the Union Jack, Afra's neighbour made claims for space himself; but not in the intimate space of his dwelling, but outside of it, for his neighbours, including Afra, to see.

The display of the British flag by her neighbour might therefore be a response to Afra's claims for space she made inside her house. Following symbols of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995), and racial abuse Afra's daughter experienced, Afra assumed that her neighbours did not like people from her home country, and boundary discourses, separating "us" (Afra's neighbour) from "them" (Afra and her family) were upheld. While belonging for Afra was also rooted in the material infrastructures of the dwelling inside the house (see chapter five), outside of it, Afra had to negotiate experiences of non-belonging caused by hostile behaviours and counterclaim-making from neighbours. Belonging was therefore only partially rooted and asserted in the neighbourhood and so the way in which neighbourhoods as 'significant places' (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001) may foster belonging was limited. Negotiations of negative experiences were part of Afra's strategies for belonging, and other participants had similar experiences which I will discuss further below.

While many participants did not have choice or agency about where they could live (chapter four), many displayed agency when they negotiated negative encounters as part of their strategies for belonging. Through this, they wanted to protect their claims for space and yet confront counterclaims, or responses, for these from others, similar to the agency many sought when it came to changing the insides of their dwellings (chapter five). This agency gives insight into the kind of home individuals would like to live in, or their idealised home, which is one free from discrimination and negative encounters, and where feelings of being unwelcome, not belonging and not being at home are to be avoided, confronted and counteracted. In cases of non-belonging, Huizinga and van Hoven (2018) point out that individuals 'retreat into familiar routines

and places to practice their other belongings' (p. 315). I was able to observe this particularly in Afra's case who was getting together with her friends from her home country almost every day, to feel belonging among instances of non-belonging.

In the case of Afra's daughter, it was her husband Masud who acted, as he confronted their neighbour about what their son said to his daughter. Farid, a refugee from the same country as Afra and also in the UK with his family, talked to me about an incident that occurred in his neighbourhood which prompted a response similar to that of Masud:

> One of our neighbours […] they have dark skin. So, this little girl who is as old as my daughter was […] was bullied by one of the other neighbours, like another child. And she told, 'I can't play with you because you have dark skin'. She said it literally. And the mum was so furious and went back to the mum, she said 'how can like a 6-year-old speak like that if they don't talk about it in the house?' She was like 'please if you have anything in the house just make sure it's in your house don't spell it out, don't spread it on the street', because her child was very offended, unfortunately. I don't know, when a 6-year-old speak like this it's just a shame.

Similar to Masud, the child's mother from Farid's account did not ignore the racial abuse. In a way, both, Masud and the child's mother, were active agents in shaping spaces and making place, similar to when individuals shaped the environment of their dwellings. Regardless of the agency participants displayed in confronting the discrimination experienced, they nevertheless were living amongst it in the country where they were supposed to feel safe. Instead, experiences of discrimination conditioned feelings of non-belonging, exclusion and marginalisation. Habash's (2021) framework in which she problematises agency is useful here to be critical of a kind of agency which may 'mask what it *feels* like to adopt' in a new environment' (p. 1384, emphasis in original). The author asks questions about the sustainability of 'acts of resilience' and instead points out that individuals have to negotiate 'inner struggles of displacement and emplacement' (p. 1384). Regardless of the active role Masud took to respond to the abuse, Afra was left feeling that her neighbour did not like people from her home country; in the place where she and her family found refuge after fleeing war.

Confronting and speaking with the perpetrators of abuse was one form of agency individuals displayed as part of their strategies for belonging. However, during fieldwork I also came across more severe forms of violence and negotiations of such negative encounters as part of individual strategies for belonging differed to those of Masud and Farid's neighbour discussed above.

One example of this are experiences of one of Afra's friends. She and her family were intimidated by a group of people who came to their flat with knives and smashed their windows with rocks. Following this assault at their flat in Newcastle, they initially boarded the window up; but later moved to a different area. It was also evident in the case of Mustafa who came to the UK as an asylum seeker in the late 1990s and so had lived in the UK for more than 20 years. He talked to me about how negative experiences in his neighbourhood impacted on his sense of belonging and home and admitted that he was wrestling with feelings of exclusion and non-belonging:

> It's a reminder of I am unwanted, and it is a reminder of that I have a struggle here after […] decades of being here, still I could be targeted […]. That's a reminder of the struggle, I could never […] be home because of that. […] So […] these things are happening. And they are a reminder of that you're seen as a foreigner, as a stranger.

Mustafa told me before that he had his car set on fire multiple times, which the police and fire brigade claimed was due to a technical failure in his car. He was angry when he retold the story as his car was new at the time of the incident and so he considered it unlikely that it just caught fire. These extreme cases of violence, as well as the lack of help he received from the police, led Mustafa to question his belonging and as a result, he felt unwelcome and unwanted. What is more, such negotiations took place based on his experiences just outside of 'his piece of land', as he described it, from which he said no one could kick him out. He doubted his belonging, despite owning a house, being employed, speaking fluent English, and having British citizenship. Mustafa was meeting many of the core domains of integration, as set out by Ager and Strang (2008) which the authors argue are important in understanding how integration can be achieved. However, while he may have achieved integration according to that definition, in reality he questioned whether he could *ever* belong and be at home in Newcastle based on his subjective experiences. This feeds into the critique of integration, for example by Karner and Parker (2011) who argue

that the complexities of individual localised experiences, such as those made by Mustafa, are not captured by conceptual perspectives on integration or cohesion (p. 357).

The ambivalent feelings and uncertainties about belonging many participants had who had lived in Newcastle only for a short amount of time are still felt by Mustafa, even after a long time living in Newcastle, and having citizenship. Similar to Meti who reflected on being a stranger when he first arrived in Newcastle (chapter 6.2.), Mustafa also makes reference to being a stranger. However, Mustafa's reflections were different in that he claimed being seen as a stranger despite having lived in the UK for a long time. Although he was able to claim membership as Mustafa had citizenship, he was reminded by others that he was still a stranger, a 'body out of place' (Ahmed, 2000, p. 39), or the 'internal other' (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011, p. 350) through violent attacks on him, as well as the lack, or refusal, of help from the police when his new car burned down.

Despite his doubts and uncertainty about his belonging, and his experiences of violence, Mustafa did not mention selling his house, or moving to a different neighbourhood. This contrasts with Afra's friend, for example, who moved following the incident with a group of people who came to their flat with knives and smashed her windows with rocks. While both Mustafa and Afra's friend could not connect with the neighbourhood and experienced violence, the ways in which they negotiated these experiences differed, and resulted in different outcomes. For Mustafa, they conditioned feelings of exclusion and marginalisation whereas for Afra's friend, they provided an opportunity for agency as she moved to a different area with her family.[81] Making the right decision, however, was not always easy, and indeed it was not a given that good choices were available. This was because of the lack of alternatives generally available to many participants with regards to housing and a lack of support from institutions (chapter four).

The experiences of participants in this study make visible the consequences of being inserted into a dehumanising system and the symbolic violence exerted through this (Peillon, 1998; Vassilopoulou et al., 2022). For asylum seekers, this is when they are forcibly dispersed and moved around the UK as if they were objects. For refugees, this is when supposedly helping macro structures do not align with realities on the micro-level. This latter point can be illustrated through

[81] I visited Afra's friend at her new house, which was located in a diverse area of Newcastle. When I visited her, many of her friends from her home country also came. Similar to Afra, her friend practiced belonging through this 'retreat into familiar routines' (Huizinga and van Hoven, 2018, p. 315)

the case of Sian, a refugee in his early 30s who lived in supported housing provided by the local supporting organisation I volunteered with when I interviewed him. In the summer of 2020, he was about to move into a council flat, located in a council estate in the North-West of Newcastle. It was at that time when the incident I will describe took place. On three separate occasions, Sian visited a flat he was going to move to. First, he went to view the flat by himself and decided to sign for it. Sian then went back to the flat a second time with Walter, a support worker, to take meter readings and set up his utilities. During this second visit, a group of youths verbally attacked him and Walter, who like Sian had an Asian background. After this second visit, Sian went back to the flat by himself a third time, when he saw that one of the windows had been smashed, and someone was standing on the roof of the property he signed for.

Walter told me about the second visit in our interview:

> [The flat] was on […] one of these big estates, […] his house backed on to this walkway […] and there was lots […] quite dark areas and corners and I didn't think it was good, there was a smashed window […] and I remember saying to him 'oh Sian, are you sure?'. And at the time, I don't think he was 100% but […] he wants to move on, he has got a lot of ideas so he indicated, yes he wanted to follow it through so he did. And it was only after that weekend when he went back and he said he had got […] some comments made, there is another window being put out and he said 'I have got to get out'. […] [I]n an ideal world he would have never applied for that [flat]. […] I know there is other areas around […] that are perfectly fine. And even within this estate it was just a really bad one […]. [W]here he was, in this spot, it was quite vulnerable, I have to say and obviously he wouldn't have known that when he viewed it […]. [T]he other thing is when we went to view it there was a gang of fifteen teenagers […]. I didn't feel great because I parked my car, I had to walk along this narrow path to come in through the back gate of his and they were all looking, and I think to be honest, […] that probably made him [Sian] a target because these kids, these teenagers thought 'oh, look you know, there is Sian', maybe they saw me as an [Asian] man, I don't know, […] and then me and him left together, we went past them, they were going 'look at this, we are going to have some fun here'.

Walter admitted that he did not have a positive first impression of the flat and the area when he went to see the flat with Sian. He also admitted that Sian should have never signed for it in the first place because of its location in an area of high levels of anti-social behaviour and because it was in a predominantly white part of the North West of Newcastle. When I spoke to Sian about this incident, he disclosed that he did have small doubts about the area when he viewed the flat for the first time. Unlike Walter, however, Sian was not fully aware of the area and what could possibly happen and so it was impossible that he could have been alerted. As Sian was keen to move on from supported housing, he then signed for the flat. This sense of urgency was informed by perceiving time as lost due to prolonged displacement.

In chapter four I outlined the existing support structures where housing is allocated to refugees who have been given their status, rather than giving individuals a choice where they can live. This is because of the time pressures created by the 28-day period in which newly recognised refugees have to leave their government provided accommodation and find somewhere else to live. Sian as a tenant in supported housing did not feel this time pressure because he did not have to leave supported housing. In theory, he had more time to choose where he wanted to move to; he would not have been evicted from supported housing, similar to refugees when they are given 'notice to quit' their government provided accommodation after they get refugee status. However, time was a factor in Sian's decision after all in that he wanted to move sooner rather than later from supported housing to live independently. Similar to asylum seekers who wait for a decision on their asylum claim and have their life essentially put on hold (Kits, 2005), Sian had been waiting over a year to move on from supported housing to live independently, which was partly due to the pandemic where restrictions were put in place on home moving. Sian therefore had a choice between continuing to live in supported housing or to live in an area which he was not fully sure about whether it was good to live in;[82] and where he would have quite likely experienced discrimination and other abuse based on his negative encounters *before* he even moved into the flat. Having to negotiate between living amongst racism and hostility, and spending more time bidding on a council property, thus meaning additional 'time lost' in rebuilding his life, he chose to move into the flat.

[82] This would mean limitations in for example how he could decorate his living space, or the amount of hours he could work to not have his benefits cut to pay for rent of supported housing.

Connecting with the neighbourhood did not solely depend on individual efforts; they also depended on the responses of others, how participants negotiated those responses, and the outcomes of those negotiations. While so far this chapter has focused on individual interactions and encounters with local 'others', the next section will focus on wider social structures and how participants navigated and interacted with these and how, in turn, they affected belonging.

6.5. Belonging and wider social structures

A focus on social structures when discussing belonging is warranted, as May (2011) argues, due to their interdependency and permeability with 'the personal', 'each affected by the other' (p. 366). Social structures are 'actively lived' and this can be depicted through taking a person-centred approach to belonging. By social structures, I refer in a very general sense to institutions or organisations to which participants were linked and which they engaged with, such as those that (are supposed to) support them.

I touched upon the interaction of macro- and micro-structures throughout the empirical chapters and discussed how these often misaligned. For example, in chapter four, I discussed how different understandings of home between support workers and participants were formed; and in chapter five, I discussed the discrepancy between the furniture some participants could get from council support schemes and their personal tastes and imaginations of how their home looked like. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed Mustafa's experiences with the police and fire brigade when his new car burned down, who put the cause of the fire down to an error with the car. What these examples point towards is 'support' structures put in place on the macro-level do not actually support individuals on the micro-level. Instead, they 'operate in their own worlds' (Block, 2008, p. 2), forcing individuals to stay in certain neighbourhoods, and the consequences of this become visible in individual experiences in everyday life.

For example, support workers were aware that some refugees they were supporting and had allocated to various neighbourhoods without choice were experiencing targeted hostilities, such as having things thrown at windows. However, responses from support workers to such incidents varied. After what happened to Sian, Walter was noticeably concerned about what Sian experienced. He supported Sian in cancelling his tenancy without having to pay a few weeks' rent, although this required Walter to work overtime and outside of his regular working hours. This

readiness to support individuals was not always given, however, as it became evident in the interview with Alex, a support worker at a housing association managing social housing on behalf of the council. Alex instead emphasised how important it was to have evidence about incidents in order to be considered a priority for rehousing to a different area, or take action against the harassers.

In particular, Alex was telling me about a refugee family he was supporting who had been harassed at their home, having had eggs, some 'slimy fluid', or snowballs thrown at their window. During the interview, it seemed as though Alex was playing down such incidents as jokes played by children in the neighbourhood. After the family had raised their concerns with Alex, he contacted the police about it, internally discussing it with the safe living team within the housing association. However, Alex conceded that it would be difficult to 'do anything about it' without evidence to catch those who were causing the disturbances. While the housing association was not prepared to put up CCTV, Alex advised the family to put up their own CCTV, to potentially generate evidence of who had been throwing stuff at their window or deter such incidents from happening; and this was despite him knowing that there was another refugee family in the same neighbourhood who also had things thrown at their window. Alex commented further:

> I'd like to think that these incidents will stop over time. When the snowball incident occurred […], the gentleman called me up and said, 'kids have been throwing snowballs at my window' and I said to him, 'we've been down this route where they have thrown other things at your windows before' […] So again I just encouraged them to get CCTV […]. [A] sudden fright of someone throwing something at your window can no doubt be a potential trigger, said person suffering from PTSD, so these are things that actually might affect someone from a refugee background, particular from a war zone, more so than other people. […] We don't always have the solution although we have given certain advice and guidance about what he [i.e. the father] can do himself, but he is the one who has to apply for properties and if he is not doing that then he isn't taking the steps he needs to, and if he isn't considering putting CCTV up, considering that that might be a deterrent, although it is a cost to him, then again that is something that he is choosing not to do. It is a really difficult one because you don't want people to go through this but at the same time if they

are, and there is nothing more that we can do, we can only make so many suggestions about the things that he can do himself.

Alex acknowledged the barriers that existed for the family to purchase CCTV, such as language; lacking the knowledge of where to get CCTV, especially during lockdown when shops were closed, and how to install it; or lacking the courage to take on responsibility. However, Alex saw his main role as 'throw[ing] suggestions his [the father's] way, but if he doesn't pick them up and run with them, it can be quite difficult'. Despite knowing that other families in the same neighbourhood were also harassed, Alex did not act upon the family's account of the harassment and placed the responsibility to deal with this issue on the family. In this way, Alex justified why he could not, or did not want to, provide the family with more help.

Similarly, Rachel, who also worked in the council, emphasised that police reports were needed as part of the recognition of harassment taking place in neighbourhoods, and that families and individuals then 'would be supported to move in line with that process'. When I asked Rachel a follow-up question about what would happen if individuals would still *feel* unsafe but could not get a police report, she replied: 'that comes then to perception I guess, I mean it would really need to be evident'. This thinking shows similarities with how knowledge is assessed during substantive asylum interviews, which are characterised by a 'culture of disbelief' (Puumala et al., 2018). In these contexts, 'institutional knowledge is deemed objective […] while refugees' knowledge is seen as subjective' (Häkli and Kallio, 2021, p. 684), and the latter does not count unless proof is provided. Unless there is evidence of harassment in their neighbourhoods, individuals are not supported to move.

The concept of slow violence provides a useful lens to think about the importance of the wider social context for belonging. 'Slow violence' was coined by Nixon (2011) who defined it as 'a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space' (p. 2). Using slow violence as an analytical concept thus focuses on those injustices that 'slip beneath the radar, [are] dismissed or postponed' (Barnwell, 2019, p. 1111). Central to the concept of slow violence is that it is often invisible (Nixon, 2011); however, Davies (2019) argues that it is not a question of visibility but rather a question of 'out of sight for whom' (p. 1); or whose stories about such violence counts. Pain (2019) further links slow violence with trauma and drawing on the field of

psychiatry uses the notion of 'chronic trauma' to describe 'the psychological damage, alongside the physical harm, that slow violence creates and depends on to be sustained' (p. 389).

While Nixon wrote in the context of environmental injustice and climate change, other scholars have since borrowed the term to develop an analytical lens to understand other forms of structural violence which unfold slowly and over time and space. Barnwell (2019), for example, explores the slow violence of social stigma over time. In refugee scholarship, Mayblin et al. (2020) discuss how the UK policy regime inflicts slow violence on asylum seekers through asylum seeker welfare support. The authors argue that many asylum seekers in the UK are close to 'economic, social and cultural death' (p. 108) caused by the government due to the minimal financial support they receive.[83] Thus, individuals are intentionally, yet gradually wounded as they are impoverished. Trauma, for many forced migrants, therefore, cannot only be caused by past experiences of persecution or war in their home countries, or the destruction of past homes, but also by the long-term effects inflicted by slow violence in host countries, as indicated by Mayblin et al. (2020).

Slow violence was inflicted upon many participants in this study as most of them went through the asylum process in the UK, and so many of their experiences with the asylum system resembled those of the respondents in Mayblin et al.'s (2020) study. In addition, my research findings indicated that the slow violence inflicted caused the type of trauma that Pain (2019) writes about. In chapter four I introduced Jawad, who told me about his 'long sad story of homelessness' where for ten years he was caught in a cycle of having his asylum claim refused and putting in a fresh claim, being caught in a transient status. These experiences had an impact on Jawad's outlook about finally moving into a council flat after he got refugee status, and these go beyond the time and space(s) when he was an asylum seeker. I was surprised about how unemotional Jawad was about his move and that he considered it merely as the next logical step in his journey. In chapter four, I drew on Fox O'Mahony and Sweeny (2010) to explain Jawad's attitude with his experiences of being caught in a long-term transient status. The concept of chronic trauma inflicted by slow violence can also be used to explain Jawad's attitude. While invisible to others, the long-term effects of the violence of the UK asylum system he experienced were more than visible to him,

[83] See chapter one for overview of the different support.

resulting in an un-emotional, numb attitude about moving into a council flat, the first space for which he could make claims, 12 years after first claiming asylum in the UK. This is another manifestation and long-term effects of the dehumanising asylum system.

Although invisible and out of sight for outsiders, slow violence was also inflicted upon the refugee family Alex told me about. Regardless of first-hand reports from multiple families that the neighbourhood was unsafe for refugees who often suffer from PTSD, the family was not supported to move to a different area and continued to be housed in a neighbourhood where they were harassed. These were their actively lived experiences of 'the social' (May, 2011). Their stories about the harassment they experienced were not considered sufficient evidence to be used for support to be rehoused. Instead, the family was given suggestions about what they could do themselves, and when they did not take any action, this was then what they *chose* to do.[84] A similar framework can be applied to analyse Mustafa's experiences. After his new car burned down, his concerns were dismissed by the police and fire brigade who blamed a technical failure in the car for the fire.

After having fled violence and insecurity in their home countries, some participants continued to experience fear and insecurity in the host country. This was due to the cumulative effect of negative encounters with local others, as well as a lack of help and dismissal of their concerns from the support structures and institutions that are supposed to help them. This gradually wounded individuals (Mayblin et al., 2020). Solutions to negative encounters and experiences of harassment in neighbourhoods could not be found without help from institutions, especially when this involved being rehoused. Sian had found help from Walter, a support worker from a local charity, but the refugee family from Alex' testimony did not have this support. The long-term effect of these experiences then eroded individuals' sense of being connected with, or belong, to the neighbourhood or community (Coddington, 2019), as is clearly indicated by Mustafa who internalised the othering he experienced in his neighbourhood ('That's a reminder of the struggle, I could never […] be home because of that'). Many had to continue to negotiate negative

[84] This is in contrast to taking the choice away from refugees who were being allocated a house, as I discussed in chapter four.

experiences as part of their strategies for belonging, resulting in feelings of not belonging and not being welcome.

6.6. Negotiating identities

The final sections will focus on the impact of the ways that participants lived their lives across borders, or their transnational ties, on their strategies for belonging. In particular, discussions will focus on the negotiation of identities and transnational homes.

In chapter five, I discussed how respondents' transnational connections are visible in materialities and practices inside their dwellings. Transnationalism is also relevant when analysing identity formations and negotiations that take place in new environments, or in migrants' host countries (Vertovec, 2001). Cassim et al. (2020) for example argue that in a complex process shaped by 'historical contexts, everyday lived experiences, and people's ways of being' (p. 196), migrants develop hybrid identities, reflecting both countries of origin and host countries.[85] Al-Ali et al. (2001) in this regard emphasise that it is important to focus on the transnational capabilities of migrant groups, that is their 'willingness and ability […] to engage in activities that transcend national borders' (p. 581). This is also dependent on issues of identification with social, economic or political processes in home countries. Not identifying with these processes in their countries of origin, individuals may then have weaker ties to their home countries.

May (2011) emphasises that there is more at stake in belonging than 'mere familiarity with a place, a group of people or a culture' (p. 370). In addition to negotiating their environment, including the people around them (chapter 6.2.), negotiations of identities were involved in respondents' strategies for belonging. Stets and Burke (2003) and Thoits (1991) point out that identities are multiple and organised hierarchically. Roles that are socioculturally appropriate are more important in the identity hierarchy and individuals are most likely to enact the more important identities as they give them the most meaning, purpose, and behavioural guidance (Thoits, 1991, p. 105). In her testimony in section 6.3., Zabi reflected on the interactions she had (or rather, did not have) with other volunteers at the gardening session at her local church and explains the differences between behaviours in the UK and her home country. As she was not able to conduct and present herself in ways that she learned before she came to the UK, aspects

[85] In a similar way, migrants can develop multiple belongings, and I will discuss this in the last section of this chapter.

of Zabi's identity were out of place. Informed by past experiences, she had to negotiate between how she would usually behave while gardening with others and how she actually behaved, influenced by those around her who did not facilitate her behaving as she was used to. Identity negotiations were thus informed by transnational connections that Zabi, and other participants, had.

For many respondents in this study, identifications with such processes in home and host countries were part of negotiations of their identities and these shaped individual strategies for belonging. This concerned a dimension of belonging that transcends material infrastructures of housing as discussed in the previous chapter; and the spatial environments of the city discussed earlier; namely norms and values in the host country with which some respondents identified. Based on this, individuals' senses of belonging were conditioned by the prevailing cultural values and norms which were manifest and experienced by participants on the micro level in their everyday experiences; and this is despite the 'hostile environment' created in the UK (Goodfellow, 2020). For example, Gandom and Zabi, both women from the same country, spoke about the freedoms which they had in the UK compared to their home countries:

> Here I feel more comfortable. […] [F]or example, I can go to the street without the [head] scarf, it's a big freedom (laughs happily), I can go to the street on the sunny days with the short skirt, […] with the short, and with the top, and nobody ask me 'why you have this kind of clothes?' It's freedom, but in [home country], never ever. Even you cannot take out your [head] scarf, it's compulsory […], you should always have a long dress, […] with the skirt or top, you cannot go out. Or even about the wine, I can go with my boyfriend to bar for take beer, wine, but this kind of things is crime in my country. So I feel more comfortable here (Gandom).

> For me, valuable [..] it's not golden things, […] for me valuable is freedom, […] valuable is to be honest and I don't have something like this in [home country] (Zabi).

After they had arrived in the UK as strangers and were at first overwhelmed by the strangeness of the physical environment and the people surrounding them, Gandom and Zabi then made claims about the UK as a place where they feel comfortable and which they valued. These claims were based on how cultural values and norms fitted with their own self-understandings and

preferred lifestyles compared to that of their home countries. While in connecting with the community, there were barriers for participants, and encounters with others evoked feelings of non-belonging, negotiations of identities were facilitated by a feeling of comfort with regards to values and norms compared to home countries.

The examples from Gandom and Zabi therefore speak to a dimension of belonging which May (2011) describes as a 'sense of ease with oneself' (p. 368); and according to Miller (2003) refers to the relation between individuals and their environment 'in which who and what [they] are is at issue' (p. 218). A relation which is 'fitting, right or correct' then evokes good feelings about being in the world, as well as a 'sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves' (Miller, 2003, p. 22). Security is important for belonging not only with regards to personal safety as Dromgold-Sermen (2022) discusses it. Security also plays a role in identity negotiations in that it matters with regards to the ability to enact preferred identities, and have these validated (Jenkins, 2004). Gandom and Zabi have found this sense of ease with themselves in the UK. In their home countries they experienced persecution and discrimination because they enacted their preferred identities. For both women, their Christian faith, not wanting to wear a hijab and dressing how they wanted to, were some of the ways in which they enacted these identities. In the UK, they were able to do this freely and without being punished for it, unlike in their home countries. They were able to live their preferred lifestyles in the UK, even though this lifestyle entailed downwards social mobility due to a lack of employment and financial resources compared to their home countries and individuals had to go to charity shops to buy second-hand furniture (chapter five).

The way that Gandom and Zabi negotiated their identities indicates the positive impact of their surroundings for their strategies for belonging, in particular the prevailing norms and values they experienced over time and which they identified with. However, identities are multiple (Stets and Burke, 2003; Thoits, 1991), and so positive outcomes of identity negotiations in new surroundings can be accompanied by negative outcomes and create tensions which individuals have to negotiate. Some participants' accounts therefore resembled negative feelings of displacement and alienation and indicated that feelings of belonging were accompanied by feelings of non-belonging. Talking about the weather, Farid for example emphasised that it was difficult for him to adapt to the different lifestyle that was inherent to the differences in temperature between the UK and his home country:

> I've always thought that the main reason why we are missing the social interaction is the climate. The climate doesn't help here, to go outside and […] go on a picnic […] with other families. It doesn't help.

For Farid, some behaviours he was used to, for example meeting other families for picnics, were not possible to recreate in Newcastle due to the weather. He later joked that 'the weather is cold, so people are cold', thereby explaining the isolation his family experienced, and the lack of social interactions. I quoted Farid in chapter four, when he explained that he did not want to move to a different city with a bigger community of people from his home country, because living in Newcastle, the 'advantages outweigh the disadvantages';[86] and in chapter five regarding his failed attempts to recreate familiar immaterial home practices through interactions with neighbours. Negotiating the different ways that people interact in his home country compared to Newcastle, and adapting to this was difficult for him. He told me about his neighbours, for example, whom he had invited inside their house 'like ten times' but this invitation was never returned to him and his family. While Gandom and Zabi did not identify with processes in their home countries, their identity negotiations in a new environment were facilitated; however, for Farid this was the opposite. Transnational connections can therefore create feelings of non-belonging especially when individuals negotiate 'old' identities in new surroundings and contexts, and when they relate to the relational dimension of belonging.

Research findings also indicate the importance of language in subjective, person-centred approaches to belonging. In their responses, participants often incorporated reflections about language, in particular the Geordie accent, into their reflections about belonging which related to a personal, intimate dimension. Many respondents shared stories about situations in which they had not been able to express themselves in ways that they wanted to, which represented their 'true selves', and their identities. In other words, identities became disrupted as they were not externally validated in encounters (Jenkins, 2004). Alla, for example, reflected in her solicited diary about a phone call she had to make to schedule an appointment to take biometrics for her asylum interview:

[86] By this he meant that he lived in a good house and his children attended a good school and coped well; and he did not want to risk this for living in a bigger city where the family had friends, in order to combat feelings of isolation.

> It was the most difficult to understand the person with whom I spoke on the phone. I said that I was a foreigner, but he continued to speak very quickly and with an incomprehensible accent. I coped with it, but once again I felt that my English is very bad. I felt like a helpless person and stupid. I felt that I was not able to learn the language quickly and it is very depressing. Although I'm not really stupid. I read and read books, I constantly acquire different knowledge. And also many friends can ask me for advice and I know a lot about human psychology. But all this does not mean anything if you live in another country and do not know the language. All knowledge seems to be depreciated at one moment.

For Miller (2003) a fundamental prerequisite of belonging is that individuals are able 'to see themselves as they really are and where they come from' (p. 220). For many migrants, including participants in this study, this inevitably refers to a transnational dimension. Identities and self-understandings were formed in home countries, which respondents had to forcibly leave behind, and identifications are constantly evolving and emerging in host countries. For both Farid and Alla, their transnational connections informed experiences of non-belonging as they were unable to establish links between their countries of origin and the UK as a country of refuge. During the phone call, Alla was not able to see herself who she really is as she could not express her preferred identity. For her, the phone call instead was an instance of non-belonging (Dromgold-Sermen, 2022) which impacted negatively on her identity negotiations. The encounter left her feeling 'helpless and stupid' even though she described herself as intelligent. Language is a means through which individuals can make themselves understand, and through which they can express themselves and the various aspects of their identities to others. However, with limited English, misunderstandings, including about identities, are created.

6.7. Home *Here* or *There*

In chapter two, I discussed the concept of home un-making to describe the damage or destruction, deliberate or unintentional, of material and/or imaginary aspects of home (Baxter and Brickell, 2014). Chapter five explored in detail how participants tried to recreate familiar spaces based on their spatial memories of their past homes, and memories of immaterialities of home, with regards to practices inside the home and home-relations. The latter was also part of discussions in chapter six, when I discussed how participants tried to connect with the community

as part of their strategies for belonging based on experiences outside the home. I will continue this discussion in this section, focusing on the transnational ties participants had.

As past homes were unmade, and material and immaterial aspects destroyed, the question arose whether respondents would still feel attachment, or a sense of belonging to former homes and home countries, and how this would impact on their feelings of belonging in the UK. The concept of transnationalism is useful to explore the impact of connections which participants maintained to their countries of origin on their senses of belonging, and on the question where they thought they belonged, and where their homes were.

Like other migrants, whose circumstances of mobility were not forced per se, refugees as forced migrants engage in transnational practices. In this context, Al-Ali et al. (2001) suggest that 'forced migration sometimes leads to 'forced transnationalism'' (p. 591), as social pressures, for example from family responsibilities in countries of origin may reinforce the maintenance of transnational ties. In a similar way, Golash-Boza (2014) argues that Jamaican migrants who were deported from the US and forcibly returned to Jamaica, rely on transnational ties to family and kin still in the US for their survival. Transnational practices then become a coping strategy to deal with hardship experiences in Jamaica, as well as for emotional and financial support. Echoing Al-Ali et al.'s (2001) argument, Golash-Boza (2014) presents this kind of transnationalism as a forced experience.

Regardless of whether circumstances of mobility and transnational practices are forced or not, migrants can develop senses of belonging to multiple countries and places, resulting from 'cross-cutting belongingness with complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, peoples, places and traditions' which span transnational fields (Caglar, 2001, p. 610). As outlined earlier, however, capabilities for transnationalism, or the willingness and ability to engage in transnational activities, play a role in this (Al-Ali et al., 2001). Participants' responses to the question where they belonged and where home was, therefore differed. Broadly speaking, responses can be categorised into those that did think the country where they were born, grew up in and which they fled was still their home country, and those who did not. When participants thought that the home they had left behind and that had then been, as it were, 'unmade' was still their home, they particularly referred to aspects of personal, emotional, and relational dimensions of belonging to explain this. Similar to the claims participants made for space through

improving, decorating, and beautifying the intimate spaces of their dwelling, they made claims about their home country as home.

> I've got my parents in the previous place, I've got more connection to that (Shirin).
>
> Yes, everybody like their country as a home country, […] they [were] born there and live and want to come back there because they belong to that country. [...] [Y]ou have something that attracted you to that place, I think. Like a magnet (Meti).

Shirin and Meti both talked about a connection, belongingness, and attraction to the place they had left behind. For Shirin, this connection was built upon the social ties to her parents. However, these ties may be a display of 'forced transnationalism' (Al-Ali et al., 2001, p. 591) based on family responsibilities. Similarly, Shirin's efforts to maintain the relations with her parents may well be a sign of her desire to maintain those social relations to her family which are part of the intangible aspects of home that were destroyed. She was only able to recreate these as a 'diminished version of the original' (Habash, 2021) through claiming an imagined connection to her home country based on the relationship she maintained with her parents. Meti's attraction to his home country was based on his childhood memories and associated with that, memories of growing up and living there. He felt he naturally belonged to the place he had left behind, and he wanted to go back to it. Using the metaphor of a magnet, he articulated the feeling of an invisible force pulling him towards his home country. This is similar to language used by international organisations in the context of returning refugees from the Bosnian conflict. Zila (2015) in this regard points out that UNHCR plans to repatriate Bosnian refugees presumed ideas of a 'natural bond' between individuals and places which is also evident in Meti's account. However, many refugees idealise the past (Zetter, 1999), and feelings of wanting to return may change over time as time plays a crucial factor in negotiations about whether to return (Al-Ali et al., 2001). Vice versa, feelings of belonging need to be renegotiated anew upon return to a country of origin (De Bree et al., 2010). Thus, over time Meti may well develop feelings of not wanting to return; or upon returning to his home country, if he ever will, realise that his feelings of belonging to his country of origin have changed and are not rooted in a 'natural bond' anymore.

While transnationalism has been described as an 'enduring' solution to conditions of displacement for forced migrants, migrant transnational practices have also raised questions

about their commitment to place, and loyalties to host societies (Van Hear, 2006, p. 13). Although both Shirin and Meti described a strong attraction and transnational connection to their home countries, this however does not mean that they are less committed to the UK as a place and host society. In fact, both Meti and Shirin were very engaged in the local community through volunteering. Meti was well aware of his relation to the community and that he needed to speak better English in order to deepen this relation; and eliminate feelings of anxiety to ultimately achieve a sense of belonging (chapter 6.3.). Rather, Shirin's and Meti's connections to their home countries were based on an individual level transnationalism which closely related to their understandings of home. These are the relations to family members, kin, as well as personal feelings, emotions and attractions towards their home countries.

Above I discussed how some participants developed ambivalent feelings of belonging based on the negative experiences made in encounters with local others. Similarly, some respondents negotiated ambivalent feelings of belonging based on whether they considered the country they had to flee as their home. Farid for example explained why he considered both, his home country and the UK, as his homes; albeit he ranked the UK as his 'second' home.

> Home is wherever I come from so my home is [home country]. But […] Newcastle is my second home. […] It's the place that provided protection for me and my family. So, this is home for me, it's just a place where you feel comfortable, safe, supported. This is home. […] it's where you feel comfortable and welcome by people and where you feel secure. […] [Home country] will always be my home and I am still hopeful that we will return, if not me, then […] my children. […] I still consider [home country] my home but the UK is my second home, […] our second home. Which one is safer for us? Of course, the UK is safer. Which one provides us with peace of mind, of course the UK. [Home country] is home, but not a practical home [laughs].

Similar to Meti's more abstract explanation why he felt he belonged to his home country, Farid used a simple and general, yet complex and abstract, explanation of his home as the place where he comes from, reiterating that his home country will always be his home to which he hopes he can return. In contrast to this, Farid had concrete words to define his feeling of being at his second home in Newcastle, namely security, comfort and support.

In her study with refugees resettled to the US, Dromgold-Sermen (2022) uses the term 'secure belonging' and argues that security is central for belonging among forced migrants. Farid defined Newcastle as his second home based on what was absent in his home country; yet Newcastle was 'just' a place that provided security, comfort and support for him and his family when his old home could not do this anymore. Although Farid used 'home' when talking about Newcastle, he was often careful and added the word 'second' to distinguish his feelings of and relation with Newcastle as a place and what it meant in comparison to his home country. His left behind home was a 'territorial place' (Warner, 1994), as well as a home in the symbolic sense which he felt was still his home; whereas Newcastle seemed to be only a territorial place not yet designated a 'first' home despite it being associated with home-like feelings such as safety, security and comfort. While he felt welcome, Farid's reflections about Newcastle as his second home seemed less emotional than his reflections about his impractical first home.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how participants attempted to build connections to local others in their communities and neighbourhoods as part of their strategies for belonging, highlighting the importance of a relational dimension for belonging. In addition, building relations with others also played an important role to recreate past homes and evoke memories of what had to be left behind, and was unmade (chapter five). Belonging was then not rooted in interactions and relationships with members of the majority ethnic group but rather in relationships with co-ethnics to maintain cultural practices. Farid, for example, tried to rebuild a social network primarily with others who were from the same country as he. Earlier I discussed comments Farid made about the weather in Newcastle which he joked was the main reason why he and his family were isolated and did not have an extensive social network in Newcastle, similar to that in their home country. While Shirin and Meti used relations as a basis to claim belonging to their home country, relations and social networks were vice versa used to express what was casting a shadow on and letting individuals doubt their belonging. In this way, respondents used their memories of past homes as a standard to make comparisons to the home they had built in the UK. While individual transnational connections helped Shirin and Meti claim belonging to their home countries, Farid tried to incorporate embodied transnational memories of his past home into his strategy for belonging to the UK. This is evident in his attempts to maintain practices from his home country but also in his testimony in which he calls Newcastle his 'second home' and the

country he had to flee his impractical home. However, he did not idealise the past as he was aware that fundamental aspects of belonging, such as security, were absent in his former home. Regardless, he aspired to return to his home country, either himself, or his children.

6.7.1. Returning Home?

The question whether participants had developed convictions of return is especially relevant in the case of refugees who were forced to leave their home countries and who by definition are 'unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin' (UNHCR, 1951). In this context it is crucial to explore the different feelings and thoughts that respondents had developed in relation to the idea of returning *home*. This then also revealed *what* participants wanted to return to, meaning for example a home of the past with all its (in)tangible aspects which may or may not be there anymore.

In the context of refugee return, Zetter (1999) discusses the idea of the 'myth of return home'. Compared to a 'myth of return', the 'myth of return *home'* instead captures the belief that '"home", both as a material and symbolic entity, can be restored as it was before exile' (p. 6). Such practices can be employed for a variety of reasons, for example for 'symbolic security and permanency in conditions of uncertainty and disorder' (p. 6), or to uphold family and kinship bonds. I mentioned above that there is evidence of a myth of return home in Farid's testimony. It is likely that the construction of his 'myth of return home' was influenced by his daughter who said that their lives in their home country were better than in the UK. This myth was mediated by Farid's strategy for belonging in the present, as he was trying to create a social network with co-ethnics to achieve a home similar to that in his home country, where familiar behaviours outside of the house and a sense of belonging based on relations with others were centre-stage.

This indicates that just as individuals can have ambivalent feelings of belonging, many can also develop ambivalent feelings of wanting to return or stay (Zetter, 1999). While adaptation, integration and 'convictions of return' can develop simultaneously, the latter can occur at different intensities, where at its most extreme it can result in a 'pathological state' (Zetter, 1999, p. 5). Farid expressed strong convictions of wanting to return home, however, there was also evidence of ambivalent feelings regarding what Newcastle was for him in terms of his belonging.

This can be seen in him using words such as ‘second’ and ‘not practical’ when speaking about Newcastle on the one hand, and his home country on the other.

Many participants tried to maintain a sense of continuity with the past as it was evident for example in the way they decorated their flats and houses. However, not all of them had constructed a ‘myth of return home’ as part of their strategy for belonging, either abstractly such as Meti, or intensely as Farid. Al-Ali et al.’s (2001) argument that identification with the ‘social, economic or political processes in [migrants’] home countries’ (p. 581) plays a determining factor whether migrants engage in transnational activities can be used again as an explanation for this. Just as identity negotiations based on experiences in a new environment were part of participants’ strategies for belonging, they similarly played a role in determining individual transnational activities, or transnational belonging; as well as in the construction of a ‘myth of return home’ (Zetter, 1999).

In section 6.6., I discussed testimonies from Gandom and Zabi which indicated that they more strongly identified with norms and values of the UK than with those of their home countries. Yet, responses to the question whether they had multiple homes differed between the two respondents. Zabi therefore still considered her home country as home:

> Honestly, if any people say that not [home country is still home] I think it’s not true. Because I was born there.

Similar to Meti, her feelings of belonging to her home country were based on auto-biographical factors, and the fact of a natural belonging to her birthplace. Zabi was still very emotionally attached to it which was noticeable for instance in her reaction after sharing an experience of how she was approached by the police for not wearing her headscarf in the right way. Rather than a sign of shock or sadness about her encounter with the police, I interpreted her tears as feelings of desperation and sadness about the realisation that she would not be able to go back to her home country as she said, ‘We can’t come back, we can’t come back’ (Zabi). In contrast to Farid, Zabi had not constructed a ‘myth of return home’ to the territorial place of her home country despite claiming it was still her home. Gandom on the other hand said that she did not consider her home country as home anymore:

> I don't think, no, unfortunately it's not my home anymore […]. Because I cannot come back to [home country] anymore. […] [B]ecause of my political problem that I have with [home country] government, even after 5 years by the British passport I cannot come back […]. It's very dangerous. If I come back to [home country], they can catch me to the prison […]. I don't feel that this is home anymore.

Unable to construct a 'myth of return', she referred to the lack of security she would encounter if she were to go back. Where above I have discussed Farid's feelings of belonging in Newcastle based on the safety he and his family experienced there, Gandom underlines her non-belonging to her home country because of a lack of security, or secure belonging (Dromgold-Sermen, 2022). Taking into account Al-Ali et al.'s (2001) definition of capabilities for individual transnationalism, the extent to which Gandom can participate in transnational activities is smaller due to her lack of identification with her home country. By extension, this then also impacts on the feeling of transnational belonging, as well as the creation of a 'myth of return' for Gandom. Despite not identifying with her home country, however, it is important to highlight that like Shirin, Gandom did maintain transnational social ties with her family. This then underlines how home was constituted in Gandom's understanding, namely as something independent from place and national borders, as mainly the intangible aspects of home, such as relationships which are portable for her (Boccagni, 2016). While many migrants develop ambivalent feelings of belonging to their host society (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011), Gandom's example indicates how many refugees may have ambivalent feelings of belonging to their home country as they still have strong social ties to it but have not been able to create a 'myth of return' (Zetter, 1999) because they feel it would be unsafe to return there, and do not identify with prevailing social norms and values.

Whether they had constructed 'myths of return home' (Zetter, 19999), as well as aspirations to return to their home countries was therefore something which differed between participants in discussions about belonging and where home was. While Meti thought wanting to return was something 'natural', Farid had hope that he could return one day, although he seemed aware of the unlikelihood of this as it was evident in his testimony. Zabi on the other hand realised and acknowledged that she could not go back to her home country but this did not impact on her feeling that her home country was still her home; in contrast to Gandom who said her home

country was not her home anymore because she could not return to it. This latter point was also made by Sahar and Saman:

> I see only here to be honest because I left [home country] and I don't think I can go back anymore. So maybe in distant future, maybe, one day, who knows. But I think in that case I wouldn't think I am going to live there, because you start a new life when you are refugee in another country (Sahar).

> I don't think that's possible [to have two homes] because I am here now, I want to root here, […] the children […] will be brought up here, so no, I don't think I have two homes. I am trying to root here (Saman).

The extracts from the interviews with Sahar and Saman provide similar perspectives in that neither of them considered their home country as home anymore in their strategies for belonging. While Gandom based her claim on the lack of security in her home country, both Sahar and Saman emphasised a perspective on a future in which they project a home with a 'new life' and 'roots' in the UK. For them, this included processes of breaking with, and unmaking a past home, emphasising its immateriality, as they did not think that it was possible to have multiple homes, or to root in multiple places. While Saman did not mention any aspiration to return, Sahar seemed to initially have created a 'myth of return home' similar to Farid, characterised by hope that he would be able to return to his home country one day. However, he immediately concedes, this would not be a permanent return to a symbolic and material home, but rather a return visit to a physical and symbolic past he cannot reclaim, as he would have made a new home, and new life, in the UK (Zetter, 1999). In fact, for Sahar this is part of being a refugee, where his experiences and work of seeking refuge transcend well into the future and building a new life (Nguyen, 2019).

While the destruction of home can be traumatic because of the strong emotions, attachments and memories of past times and relationships connected to it, visions of the future home for Sahar and Saman indicate the multiple temporalities that are at play in processes of unmaking home and making home in the present (Baxter and Brickell, 2014). Unlike Farid, who upheld a myth of a return home in the present, for Sahar and Saman it was different memories and visions of the past and future that unfolded in the present, where they make their homes based on such visions, but not to uphold a myth of return. Rather, for Sahar and Saman present home making

processes were influenced by the comfort and direction provided by visions of the future which included the unmaking of their past homes. These were part of their strategies for belonging in the UK.

While most participants had not returned to their home countries when I interviewed them, even if only temporarily, for Mustafa this was different. As he came to the UK about 20 years ago, he had travelled back to his home country for occasional visits to his family and kin. He told me about the feelings accompanying such return visits:

> I still go there but I cannot wait until I am out of those borders. I don't really feel home there. Yes, it's nice, talking to the family, [but] I enjoy it much more when I am talking to my family, […] on the phone because as soon as I am back […] seeing the guards at the border, police at the airport with the machine guns, then you start [thinking] well, they could do anything they want to you, so [...] I won't be happy, I cannot call that home.

Mustafa describes how security is central in determining whether he can call a place home or not and feel a sense of belonging to it. Similar to Gandom, who explained that she would not be safe in her home country which was why she could not go back, Mustafa emphasised that security was central for his feeling of still being at home and belong to his home country (Dromgold-Sermen, 2022). Unlike Meti who described a natural feeling of belonging to the place he was born, Mustafa did not feel attracted by the place he was born as this was a place where his safety was under threat. For him, lacking secure belonging had a greater impact on his feeling of not being at home in his home country than the relationships and social ties with his family that make up his relational belonging to that place. In contrast, the security he felt in the UK seemed central to the claim of Newcastle as his home although he concedes that this will never be the same as his past home:

> I feel home here. It's never the same but [I] try to, say yes, I am at home […] because there is nowhere else, you have to put up with this one.

The second part of this extract reveals the struggles Mustafa, and likely many other refugees face. While 'myths of return home' (Zetter, 1999) can be constructed and upheld in the present; belonging to home countries can be claimed and felt based on natural facts such as birth; or transnational connections to a past home and home country can be maintained through social

ties with family and kin, underlying this is the reality for many refugees that there is a lack of alternative places which could be made into home and to which they could claim belonging, as it is articulated by Mustafa. Similar to the lack of choice regarding housing, there is a lack of choice regarding the home that individuals make after their previous home had been unmade. This lack of choice can still be felt even after being in the UK for two decades, as is the case for Mustafa. This then may lead to some individuals 'putting up with', or 'getting used to' a place rather than 'making it a home'. This also reveals the emotional cost when individuals engage in a process of creating what may be only a 'diminished version of the original' which is entangled in struggles of dis- and emplacement (Habash, 2021).

Mustafa's testimony is also an example of the continuous work of seeking refuge. Most participants had been in the UK less than four years when I interviewed them,[87] with the exception of Jawad and Mustafa.[88] While all participants were engaged in the work of seeking refuge, Mustafa's story indicates that experiences of refuge continue to stay with him as they shape his relations with his environment and place. This is taking place instead of 'provisional suffering' and freedom being on the horizon, and even after 20 years of being in the UK (Nguyen, 2019). This also reveals the difficulties many refugees may experience to find refuge, or home, after experiences of displacement.

Mustafa simply putting up with his current home in the UK is an example of what Ngyuen (2019, p. 123) calls 'false optimism […], no blind faith in the nation's interest to uplift the refugee'. Even after two decades in the UK, Mustafa struggles when speaking about the UK as his home. This is not due to a lack of *trying* to establish a sense of belonging and home, however, as he clearly states; and he was not hopeless. What his account is representative of however, are the 'hard truths that underlie the humanitarian virtue of refuge' (Nguyen, 2019): not only rebuilding a life and dealing with the everyday realities of being the other but also the internal negotiations which take place while individuals develop strategies for belonging. These negotiations are not easily

[87] This includes the time when participants with refugee status were asylum seekers. Consequently, most participants only had refugee status for a short period of time.
[88] Jawad may have been in the UK for a similar amount of time as Mustafa but he had only been granted refugee status in 2020.

visible, but they are manifest in the fragile relationship with the place, structures and people that Mustafa, and many other refugees, have to make a home.

6.8. Conclusion

In this final empirical chapter, I mapped participants' strategies for belonging and explored how a sense of belonging and home was conditioned by experiences outside the house. In particular, I discussed how participants negotiated the city and the physical environment and how they connected with the community and neighbourhood as part of these strategies. In exploring this, I discussed the importance of wider social structures for belonging. The final section of the chapter explored homes and belonging 'here' and 'there' and discussed the impact of transnational connections and belonging on identities as well as feelings of belonging in the UK. Respondents negotiated various tensions between feelings of belonging and non-belonging occurring on different dimensions. On a personal dimension, identifications with prevailing norms and values led to feelings of belonging; however, on a relational dimension, some encounters with local others fuelled feelings of non-belonging.

Simmel's (1950) concept of the stranger as 'the one who arrives today and stays tomorrow' is useful to analyse how participants negotiated their new environment, both the physical space as well as other people around them. Respondents were able to develop familiarity with Newcastle as they were given the opportunity to engage with the city due to being dispersed there by the Home Office and being allowed to stay in the city. Before this, many respondents had come to numerous places as they were moved around by the Home Office, but never to stay for long. This makes the time participants spent in an environment a central factor in negotiations of their environment as part of strategies for belonging. In a way, feelings of belonging then developed automatically, facilitated by the length of stay in the city and being able to engage with it. This is in contradiction to the agency that participants showed to develop attachment to their dwellings (chapter five); and it emphasises the dehumanising structures many participants are embedded into. Respondents did not have a choice about whether they wanted to live in Newcastle or not, because of no-choice dispersal policies, creating forced circumstances of their arriving and staying in Newcastle. They were forced to 'arrive today and stay tomorrow' (Simmel, 1950) in Newcastle and thus were strangers of a particular type (Vieira and Nunes, 2020). Equally, given the

difficulties around moving to a different city (chapter four), many respondents were constrained to have come to stay in Newcastle.

Respondents also identified as strangers based on a perceived (physical) difference between them and local others. This negatively impacted on the ability to make claims for attachment and resulted in feelings of non-belonging. I discussed this in the context of how belonging was conditioned by encounters and relations participants had with others in the community and neighbourhood. These included transient encounters but participants also sought to create opportunities to engage with others, for example during volunteering. However, those others often did not reciprocate respondents' desire for belonging and barriers to creating a sense of belonging as it is rooted in relations with others remained. Connecting with others depended not just on individual efforts but also on responses to others and how respondents negotiated these responses. Language played a role in this, but also differences in culture and a perceived lack of opportunities to establish trusting relations with others.

It was thus more difficult for respondents to overcome feelings of strangeness in relation to others and research findings indicated the importance of the relational dimension for belonging. In order to achieve this, some participants were actively seeking connections with their co-ethnics, and so for them a sense of belonging was also rooted in familiarity and shared understandings. Many participants told me about negative experiences in their neighbourhoods, and it was in the vicinity of the 'safe spaces' participants had created for themselves inside their dwellings where they experienced hostilities and discrimination, and sometimes violence, which I conceptualised as counterclaims to their claims for attachment (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). Participants negotiated and responded to these as part of their strategies for belonging. Many participants displayed agency to respond to incidents, for example, by confronting hostilities. Other responses included internalisation of feelings of exclusion and discrimination, and in a few cases, hostilities from local 'others' determined where respondents could and could not live as individuals moved dwellings.

This connected with discussions about belonging and wider social structures, such as those institutions or organisations to which participants were linked through their engagement to receive support. Social structures were 'actively lived' (May, 2011, p. 366) by respondents in this

study, and I used the concept of slow violence to illuminate the consequences of the discrepancy between 'supporting' structures, and micro level experiences. Although support workers were aware that some families were experiencing hostilities in their neighbourhoods, they did not act upon such reports due to a lack of evidence - subjective reports of the lived experience of these incidents did not count. The long-term effects of these experiences then eroded individuals' sense of being connected with, or belong to, the neighbourhood or community (Coddington, 2019). This was clearly indicated by Mustafa who internalised the othering he experienced in his neighbourhood and doubted whether he could ever be at home in Newcastle, despite him being in the UK for more than two decades.

This chapter finished with a discussion of the impact of transnationalism on the negotiation of identities and questions relating to transnational belonging. Identifications with norms and values in the UK facilitated the forging of a sense of belonging for some participants based on a sense of ease with themselves; whereas for others identity negotiations in a new environment were accompanied by tensions and feelings of non-belonging. This was due to, for example, differences in language but also behaviours, especially when respondents lived transnationally and wanted to maintain practices from their home countries in Newcastle, such as those relating to interactions with direct neighbours. In the case of language, participants spoke about identity disruptions when they were not able to express and make themselves understood in ways that represented their true selves. This then impacted on their sense of selves and in turn negatively impacted on senses of belonging. The case of Alla demonstrated this, who described herself as intelligent, but was left feeling helpless and stupid as she was not able to express her preferred identity in a phone call.

Finally, I discussed questions relating to transnational belonging. Responses to the question where home was for participants and where they felt they belonged varied, and it was impacted by individual understandings of home. While most participants maintained transnational connections to family and kin still in their home countries, participants had differing views about whether the place they had left behind was still their home or not. Some tried to articulate a connection to their home countries based on social relations, a kind of natural belonging and attraction to it based on which they claimed that it was still their home. Just as feelings about belonging were ambivalent, so were feelings of wanting to return or stay. Depending on whether

participants were in the UK with their children, some respondents upheld a ‘myth of a return home’ (Zetter, 1999), which was mediated in the present through maintaining practices from the home country. Social relations were also used to formulate what was missing to claim Newcastle as home. A lack of secure belonging meant that other participants did not consider their home country as home anymore, as they could not return. They maintained transnational ties with a home which was not bound to place but constituted by relationships across borders.

7. Chapter seven: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

Through a detailed ethnographic exploration of forced migrants' homemaking practices, this thesis has provided novel insights into the contexts and practices of refugee homemaking. This study has explored participants' housing trajectories, how they made homes materially and immaterially, and how they negotiated and developed strategies for belonging. The structure of this thesis was guided by the temporal logic connected to the different dimensions of home, set out for instance by Duyvendak (2011) which involves 'arriving', 'having arrived' and 'venturing out in the community'.[89] As such, the empirical chapters have highlighted that homemaking for refugees in Newcastle involved a combination of experiences made before, during and after arrival in Newcastle, including experiences made as asylum seekers. Focusing on subjectivities, this thesis has exposed participants' agency as it occurred in various forms of homemaking, inside and outside of their houses, and the different structures that shaped forced migrants' experiences. This included a critical focus on the limits of agency (Habash, 2021) through highlighting the gaps between macro structures and micro experiences of participants.

Writing in the context of increasingly restrictive refugee regimes and anti-immigrant sentiments in the 21st century, this thesis is uniquely placed to ask critical questions about the rights of refugees to rebuild their lives, build a home and find refuge and peace in exile. The materialist approach taken in this study is distinctive in analysing the minutiae of refugee homemaking after experiences of asylum and refuge in the UK, and through this, this thesis advances knowledge on meanings of home for forced migrants and the different structures that shape their experiences.

In this concluding chapter, I return to the research questions set out in the introduction and offer responses by summarising research findings. In doing so, I will highlight connections between the three empirical chapters and outline the key contributions this thesis makes to existing literature. I will also address implications of the findings for policy and practice, as well as suggest avenues for further studies.

[89] As explained before, I acknowledge that that such processes can take place simultaneously and are not linear.

7.2. Summary of research findings

1) What are the experiences of refugees as they find housing and make their homes in Newcastle? How do they construct meanings of home and what kind of home do they build?

For many participants in this study, homemaking was a process embedded into structures and (public) institutions, which contributed to making it a precarious process. For many respondents, it took place within similar 'structures of domination' (Peillon, 1998, p. 221) and circumstances shaped by often shared constraints and precarity. Just shortly after I started engaging in support work for forced migrants in Newcastle,[90] it became evident that housing was a central and problematic issue for support services and for refugees alike, reflecting wider patterns across Western economies. Support services had structures in place to support refugees finding housing, and they were more than aware of the difficulties to find appropriate housing for refugees. Refugees on the other hand wanted to rebuild a 'normal' life after experiences of asylum and refuge (Sanyal, 2014), and they had expectations of their housing and home informed by their pasts. However, research findings indicated that not only were respondents not supported by structures that were supposed to help them, but also that their expectations about rebuilding a 'normal' life were unrealistic. There was a clear mismatch between macro structures and micro experiences, and this was visible in the allocation of council housing by support services and materialised in the circumstances of where respondents lived. This, as well as experiences of a dehumanising asylum system, with often long waits for decisions on asylum claims, and a hostile environment in which refuge was given and lived by respondents, including temporary visas, constituted post-asylum experiences of housing and home, and the circumstances in which respondents made their homes. While respondents sought to start living a 'normal' life and making a 'normal' home, post-asylum experiences and being embedded into limiting structures made homemaking exceptional instead. Although most people engage in homemaking, for many participants in this research, it seemed like something extraordinary as it was made distinctive by their unique circumstances while occupying a liminal space after being granted refugee status.

[90] This was even before starting fieldwork, and this aligns with my volunteer work.

To highlight this, chapter four started with a discussion of respondents' journeys which captured the coherence of respondents' experiences during and after asylum. Echoing literature that discusses forced migrants' mobility and transiency (Fontanari, 2017; Fox O'Mahoney and Sweeney, 2010), this revealed that many had moved around, backwards and forwards before arriving in Newcastle, and in a dwelling. Nothing about this was straightforward as many respondents continuously moved between different cities, and different accommodations in the same city, displaying different kinds of forced or voluntary mobility, often depending on legal status. For example, as asylum seekers, respondents were forcibly dispersed by the Home Office; and as refugees, forcibly moved between temporary accommodations by social workers in the local authority. This was because of a lack of available (social) housing generally but also because of the dehumanising ways the UK asylum system operates where individuals have 28 days to 'move-on' from the government support they received as asylum seekers after they get refugee status. This time pressure is created by the state as a result of individuals being treated as objects not subject to rights.

On the other hand, mobility was voluntary, when as refugees, some respondents chose to move to different cities. This decision was often an attempt to fill the gap between the reality of life in exile as it presented itself in Newcastle, and the imaginations and aspirations respondents had of their lives, and homes, including the type of housing, employment opportunities or social networks (Stewart and Shaffer, 2015). This was underpinned by the restrictions participants experienced from the circumstances and realities of living in Newcastle, to realise their imaginations and aspirations of their lives and homes. After moving away, however, many respondents returned, indicating the relationships, or 'points of connection' (Crawley and Jones, 2021, p. 3237) they had built to other (local) people, and Newcastle. After all, the latter was legitimised by law, as local connection criteria automatically give refugees a connection to the local authority in which they received their status which makes that council responsible for housing them. Although some respondents chose to stay in Newcastle, which was often a pragmatic choice, they nevertheless were not im-mobile, as they still moved between different temporary accommodations. The backwards and forwards movements often entailed multiple makings and un-makings of home: making home in the place that respondents moved to;

unmaking of this very home when they moved back to Newcastle; and making home anew again in Newcastle.

Although home environments are characterised by choice (Rapoport, 1985), for respondents in this study, experiences of (finding) housing after being granted refugee status were characterised by a lack of choice and control. The support structures put in place by the local authority to allocate housing denied participants the opportunity of choice, to act and be independent, and left them feeling disempowered, caught in a dysfunctional system. Although refugees have the right to social housing, for participants in this study, this right was often exercised for them instead. Experiences like those many respondents had as asylum seekers therefore persisted after being granted refugee status, since they continued to have very limited choice, were moved around between temporary, shared accommodations, and were dependent on state actors for help.

A minority of respondents actually lived in a dwelling they liked; and they described themselves as 'lucky' when this was the case, especially when they lived in social housing. Respondents could and did reject the council property being offered, thus refusing the local authority support. This very choice to reject a dwelling because it did not fit within an imagination of home then can be seen as an act of resistance and pushing back against unfair treatment, and part of a process of homemaking. Instead of being presented with an alternative, however, what followed this choice was punishment through threatening reminders of the consequences of not accepting the housing from local authority support services rather than looking for solutions. There was a lack of housing options other than renting from the council, and respondents often operated in their environment with limited understanding of their situation because nobody offered any explanation of it. As a result, many again ended up in more institutionalised accommodation, for instance, temporary homeless accommodation or supported housing. Some respondents accepted a council property in which they still felt homeless (Dovey, 1985), which was often of poor quality and of a worse standard than in their home countries.

These research findings illuminate the dehumanising ways in which agency is being erased by the 'supporting' system, where refugees are treated as objects, their preferences disregarded, and it is expected that they engage with the support offered although it is not what they want. This is

critical, because for many respondents, housing was part of the home, as it can help express identities, or shape behaviours inside the home, for example when a garden or large, open indoor space can provide opportunities for large gatherings with friends or family. Different temporalities played a role in this, as imaginations of the physicality of the house closely related to the houses respondents lived in in the past, and meanings of home were formed based on how respondents imagined their life in the UK after experiences of flight and refuge. Moving into a living space of their own increased confidence for many respondents and having autonomy and independence within a personal space helped to start rebuilding a 'normal' life and re-gain dignity after living in government-provided accommodation; this indicating the importance of materialities when thinking about home and forced displacement.

Taking a materialist approach, chapter five outlined the kind of home that respondents built in more detail, in focusing on the insides of respondents living spaces, spatial practices and material circumstances of their homes. Upon moving into their dwellings, respondents often had to invest significant amount of time, effort, and money into making the spaces liveable and bring them up to a habitable standard. This was the purpose and material circumstance of claiming a space as their own 'kind of space' (Douglas, 1991), or as home, as through this material investment, respondents appropriated dwellings and made claims for space. This often resulted in strong identification with them, and the creation of emotional geographies as part of homemaking processes (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021).

Respondents resisted the material loss they experienced as refugees through spatial practices inside their dwellings and through placing possessions and belongings in them. Through materialities, many respondents expressed a connection to their past lives, as they tried to reproduce a familiar material environment of old homes through decorations and belongings. Materialities often were the embodiment of experiences made in the UK and of a new life, and so new possessions were not meaningless. Some respondents brought old possessions from their home countries, through which they created familiarity, a sense of their old selves being 'here', as well as active memories of past lives and a sense of family being with them. The case of Gandom was curious in this regard, as she had asked her family to send all her possessions still in her home country to her. This materialised a determination and perspective of her future of not being able to return to an old home and old possessions.

However, respondents' engagement with their material realities through spatial practices and space appropriation was also defined by limits to what was possible to change inside the dwelling spaces, for instance through financial resources, or personal capabilities and skills. While there was more control over how respondents lived compared to control in finding housing, nevertheless, control and agency were limited at any one time when respondents transformed, decorated and changed the interior of their dwellings. Material circumstances not only embodied positive experiences of agency and familiarity, but they also symbolised the violence of the limiting structures many respondents were embedded into and reproduced a continuation of being dis-abled and disempowered (Soaita and McKee, 2019). This was the case, for example when respondents received furniture from council support schemes to furnish their homes, which were broken, or not to their taste. As with housing support structures, there were no alternative options, choice taken away, and preferences disregarded.

Familiarity through creating connections to past lives was also constructed through immaterialities, for example in practices or routines enacted in the home. This related to autonomy and being able to decide what and when to do in a dwelling and live a normal life, for the first time in a long time after going through the asylum process in the UK. However, enacting similar practices was sometimes impossible in the new context, for example because of different cultures and others not being 'here'. While respondents tried to actively recreate materialities and immaterialities of what was 'there', sometimes connections to the past came suddenly and unconsciously, evoking memories of often traumatic pasts. Not only possessions, belongings and familiar routines which embody memories of a past home are portable (Boccagni, 2016), but many respondents also brought along those memories and experiences related to flight, asylum and refuge. The kind of home many respondents built was lined with tensions from dehumanising support structures, the desire to create a normal life post-asylum, positive experiences rooted in materialities, unfamiliarities with home management and negotiations of past experiences of refuge and trauma.

2) What role do state actors, local authorities and third sector organisations play in refugees' housing pathways and homemaking? What context are these stakeholders working in?

Research findings indicated that state actors, local authorities and third sector organisations were involved in refugees' housing pathways and homemaking. The degree of this involvement was determined by the relationships between these stakeholders themselves, and the different hierarchies of their roles and the power relations within them. For example, on the national level, laws and regulations are made which create the environment for forced migrants' settling and homemaking; local authorities work within this environment with very limited resources; and third sector organisations, often most accessible for refugees who settle in a local council area through running drop ins and other community activities, work to fill gaps within local authority remits. Stakeholders seemingly provided 'supporting structures', however, in reality, these were structures which, instead of supporting, left refugee respondents with very limited choice about housing and home, and continued to dehumanise people seeking sanctuary, even at the point where they are recognised as refugees. In this way, external stakeholders had power over refugee homemaking, and through this, they then made homemaking exceptional, whereas participants wanted to create a normal life. This then raises questions about whose vision of home was realised when refugees engage in the support offered, and the extent to which refugees could realise their own imagination of home.

Similar to choice and agency for refugees, support workers' agency and capacity to act was restricted. Stakeholders recognised the limits of their support which national policies created on the local level, their actions however also aimed to justify their domination of refugee homemaking, and why there was a mismatch between support in place for newly recognised refugees to find housing and make a home, and the realities of this for refugees on the micro-level. Throughout fieldwork, I came across various strategies of these external local stakeholders, who operated in a context defined by hostile and dehumanising policies towards forced migrants in the UK. Given my own involvement as a volunteer support worker, I reflected in the methodology chapter how this positioned me uniquely in the research process, in that I occupied different roles in interactions with participants. Through this, I also experienced first-hand the tensions between what the structures I was working in enabled me to do, and what I thought was right or what I wanted to do in supporting respondents.

One of the ways in which domination manifested and exceptionalism of homemaking for refugees was visible, was in the support in place to help with 'move-on' for refugees after they receive

their status (chapter four). Support workers in the local authority themselves characterised the process of housing allocation as oppressive, free of any choice and control, despite recognising the meaning of being granted refugee status as the point where individuals have more rights and opportunities for choice. Support workers made clear that the time when refugee status was given, was not a time where refugees could make a choice about housing, or where support workers could accommodate their preferences.

Paradoxically, however, when refugees resisted this domination, and made a choice to move away from Newcastle after support workers could not convince refugees that it was 'better' to remain in Newcastle and engage with the support, mainly because of difficulties to find affordable housing elsewhere, support workers insisted that this choice was available to refugees and did not stop them. Support services thus recognised the agency of refugees in making the decision to move away; however, in doing this, they ignored that refugees may have moved away because supporting agencies did not actually provide support in finding housing which refugees liked. After individuals moved away, they then become somebody else's problem, at least temporarily, similar to when Home Office asylum support is stopped after a positive decision, and the local authority becomes responsible for support.

While for refugees, housing was part of the home, support services' understanding of housing was entirely different to that of refugees, this another indicator of the misalignment of macro structures and micro experiences. Support services operated within the council's pledge to prevent homelessness and had developed an instrumental understanding of housing as part of their strategy to give refugees 'a roof over their heads', which meant housing them anywhere that has got space (Gurney, 1996). This strategy is a consequence of a system that dehumanises refugees, treats sanctuary seekers as objects to be housed rather than individuals with preferences about where they want to live, seeing only their 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998), and risks overlooking that individuals may still feel homeless despite being housed (Dovey, 1985). Although at first, support workers recognised the drawbacks of their approach in that refugees may not live in a property they wanted, they then implied that, regardless of this, refugees could make the allocated, and often poor-quality property, into a home. Moreover, drawing on integration rhetoric, support workers further explained the function of the 'instrumental house' (Gurney, 1996) as helping integration, describing it as a transitory place to move on from – saying this,

despite knowing about the pressures on the housing market. This also misaligns with many refugees' desires to create a normal life and put down roots and end transiency, thus emphasising a longer-term time perspective. While this may indicate that support workers are in denial, at the same time their behaviour can be considered a survival strategy, as their own capacity to act is limited and the system is overwhelmed, especially regarding a lack of social housing.

Chapter five revealed a similar analysis. State actors, as well as support workers from the local authority and third sector organisations were involved in the material circumstances of refugee homemaking; and so despite never having set foot into any of the living spaces, these stakeholders were present. Support workers employed a strategy of 'emotional distancing' (Silverman and Kaytaz, 2020), when they were confronted with requests from refugee respondents, for example, to seek help making alterations to bathrooms. A shower was then designated a luxury item, which the council was not responsible paying for. Similarly, the council 'supported' many respondents with furniture or monetary vouchers to have a choice about paint, duvets or curtains. However, little consideration was given to the fact that participants disliked the furniture they were given more often than what they liked it. Although choosing duvets or the colour of paint was a choice made available to some participants through the provision of vouchers, it was a small one considering that they wanted to make a place in which they could find sanctuary, and rebuild their lives.

Chapter six explored how wider social structures and state actors impacted on respondents' feeling of belonging. Crucially, the reason why respondents were in Newcastle and engaged in homemaking there was not because they chose it but because they were dispersed by the Home Office, this creating the forced circumstances of respondents' arriving and staying in Newcastle. On the one hand, respondents were then allowed to spend time in Newcastle and participate in different places and/or activities there, and on the other hand they were constrained to have come to stay there. I used the concept of slow violence (Mayblin et al., 2020; Nixon, 2011) to illuminate the consequences of the discrepancy between 'supporting structures' and micro-level experiences as respondents 'actively lived' the social structures they were embedded into, for example in their neighbourhoods (May, 2011, p. 366). It was in the immediate surroundings of the spaces respondents made claims for, where local others and neighbours made counterclaims through hostilities directed towards respondents, and sometimes through violence. Support

workers were aware of hostilities in some respondents' neighbourhoods, however, they often did not act upon these reports. This was partially due to their limited capacity to act, because of a lack of alternative housing where individuals could be moved to; but also because support workers insisted they needed evidence - subjective reports of the lived experience of these incidents did not count. These negative experiences of hostility and marginalisation, feelings of not being helped, and continuously having experiences dismissed, then eroded senses of belonging; even for participants who had been in the UK for decades, such as Mustafa who owned a house, spoke English fluently and was employed but yet questioned if he could ever be at home in Newcastle.

3) What are refugees' strategies for belonging? How do transnational connections, past and present experiences and future aspirations impact on homemaking in Newcastle in the present?

Research findings indicated that respondents' feelings of belonging were accompanied by feelings of non-belonging, and so belonging was not straightforward and clear cut. Chapters four and five focused in detail on how belonging for respondents was grounded in the physicalities of housing and materialities of home through discussing space appropriation and claim-making (Beeckmans et al., 2022; Boccagni, 2022; Miller, 1998). While many respondents developed feelings of attachment to their dwellings, it is essential to recognise that these micro experiences of homemaking took place in a context characterised by restricting and dis-abling macro structures, legitimised by restricting national policies which were made real on the local level, and in refugees' micro experiences. The limits of these structures were felt and lived by respondents, and they were sometimes made visible inside their intimate living spaces, for example through broken furniture, or a dwelling which respondents lived in which they did not like. These findings and circumstances raise doubts about the extent to which a sense of belonging can be grounded in materialities.

However, this thesis also focused on other dimensions of belonging which transcended materialities and went beyond a minutiae perspective to focus on contexts and respondents' experiences outside of the home. Chapter four also briefly discussed the circumstances of

protection given to refugees after receiving their status which is time limited and temporary (Dona, 2015). As visas are given for a limited number of years initially, the impression is reinforced that refugees will stay in the UK only temporary. In placing this within the context of home and homemaking, questions arise about the permanency of the home whose making I traced in this study. For some respondents, this temporariness and time limit on how long they were allowed to stay in the UK, reinforced feelings of being different to others, or being a visitor, and some respondents were uncertain about whether they belonged or not based on this. This leads to more fundamental questions about the rights of refugees to rebuild their lives, build a home, and find refuge and peace in exile in the context of restrictive refugee regimes in the 21st century.

In chapter six I analysed how subjective present experiences outside the house, including negotiating the physical environment of the city, connecting to the neighbourhood and community, as well as negotiations of identities and transnational connections conditioned respondents' strategies for belonging. This was essential to better understand the facets of participants' belonging and the different ways in which it was ambivalent, involving multiple temporalities in complex negotiations of present circumstances and experiences, transnational connections to past and left-behind lives, as well as future aspirations and imaginations of life in the UK or a return to the home country.

Many respondents were given the opportunity to spend longer time in Newcastle than other UK cities they had lived in before as Newcastle was their dispersal city. Thus, they were given time to engage with Newcastle, take part in urban life, go to colleges, restaurants; get used to space, and build a relationship to the city (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011). I used Simmel's (1950) concept of the stranger, and Vieira and Nunes (2020) application of this concept to forced migrants as strangers of a particular type, to highlight the forced circumstances of many participants' arriving. Whereas at first, participants described themselves as 'strangers' (Simmel, 1950), belonging was then fostered through experiences of the present, navigating and participating in the city, similar to claiming the spaces of their dwellings as part of emotional geographies. Unlike appropriating the intimate spaces of their dwellings through seeking agency and active spatial practices, a sense of belonging to city spaces was fostered automatically, and meaningfulness developed based on routine behaviours of 'using' the city. Since for many respondents, Newcastle was their dispersal area where the Home Office placed them, many were denied the opportunity to engage with

other places they stayed in before as they did with Newcastle. This reiterates how the circumstances of homemaking for many respondents in this study can be characterised as forced on different levels, and that the notion of not having a choice runs through various areas of asylum and post-asylum experiences.

Whether feelings of belonging developed automatically or not, they often stood in tension with feelings on non-belonging. This relates to discussions from chapter four about the temporariness of refugee statuses and the impact this has on how respondents perceived of themselves in relation to others, and in turn their feelings of belonging. While temporary protection statuses are building blocks of the limiting and hostile environments in which forced migrants make their homes, feelings of being a stranger (Simmel, 1950) however remained despite becoming familiar with the city, as they arose in transient encounters with local others because of (physical) differences. Respondents negotiated these feelings as part of their strategies for belonging. However, in actively seeking and creating encounters between them and local others, many also showed a desire to develop a sense of belonging rooted in relations with others, for example while engaging in voluntary work.

These experiences made in the present from this engagement were not disconnected from respondents' pasts. This was especially visible in an intimate dimension in participants' strategies for belonging. For example, research findings indicated that respondents were connected with the past and lived their lives transnationally in how they negotiated their identities in a new environment (Cassim et al., 2020). Some respondents experienced familiarity in terms of preferred lifestyles, self-identifications and values in encounters with others and navigating the city and were thus able to forge a sense of belonging from this. Identifications with norms and values in the UK facilitated a sense of ease with themselves for some respondents (May, 2011; Miller, 2003) however, for others this forged feelings of non-belonging instead. Language, cultural differences and a lack of opportunities to develop trusting relationships with others played a role in this as these differences were evaluated negatively because of the barriers they presented to enact certain behaviours and routines developed in the past. This disrupted identities, for example when respondents could not express themselves or who they are. As a result, many were actively seeking connections with co-ethnics, this kind of belonging rooted in familiarity and shared understandings, and seeking a connection with the past. For some respondents, this

meant traveling to a different city regularly to find a sense of belonging and familiarity in interactions with others, and find a space where behaviours 'fit' in a new environment. These findings indicate the fragile relationship many refugees may have with the place they found refuge, and inward negotiations which are not visible to outsiders, unlike in the materialities of home which I discussed in chapters four and five.

Present experiences and past memories also impacted on perspectives and aspirations for the future, including reflections on home. While chapter six has widened the gaze to focus on the city, it also indicated how important the context of neighbourhood is for home and how those spaces can become sites of exclusion. While research findings from chapter five indicated that respondents pushed back against limiting structures and unequal treatment through homemaking, findings presented in chapter six echoed this. It was especially in neighbourhoods where symbolic boundaries were concretised, and where claims for space which individuals made through material and spatial practices, were met with counterclaims. It was often in the vicinity of the 'safe spaces' many respondents had created where they experienced hostilities and discrimination through subtle act such as the display of flags, but also sometimes violence. In their strategies for belonging, some respondents pushed back against micro-level discriminations and confronted hostilities; however, others internalised hostilities and unfair treatment, leading to a questioning of whether they could ever be at home in Newcastle, or they moved from an area altogether. These acts impacted on feelings of belonging, even where participants had been living in the UK for decades and had British citizenship. Therefore, homemaking for respondents in this study was intertwined with the continuous defending and (re)claiming of present homes.

While many respondents maintained familiar practices and in doing so mediated a 'myth of return' (Zetter, 1999) in the present, whether or not respondents wanted to return indicated how they conceptualised the place they left behind or whether home was dependent or independent of place. Some respondents articulated a 'natural belonging' to their home countries, and described a home which was grounded in the relations they had in the present across borders with their family still there, or the natural fact of birth. Time was a factor in the mediation of the myth of return, as some respondents maintained a future aspiration to eventually return to their home country. However, for others, future aspirations to rebuild their lives in the UK and start a

'new' life as a refugee meant that they did not consider the place they had to leave as home anymore. Security, or rather the lack of it upon returning also played a role in this.

4) How do the research findings contribute to understanding refugees as agents?

In focusing on subjectivities and individual experiences, the empirical chapters have uncovered refugees' agency as it occurred at different points in the making of their homes and rebuilding of their lives after experiences of asylum and refuge. Respondents were operating in limiting structures, with few opportunities for agency to occur, and within a system rendering them powerless and less-then-human. It is within this context that the chapters have also critically highlighted the limits to agency as it occurred during homemaking, which raise the question about whose home it is that is being made if respondents could not build the home they wanted.

Findings in chapter four highlighted agency as it occurred in the search for housing, or a material condition for the home many respondents sought to rebuild (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). After experiences of the asylum system where independency and choice were taken away, and reliance on support services was high, many respondents pushed back against having no choice and being told what to do by making their own decisions after they received refugee status. This was despite support services insisting that getting refugee status did not automatically increase choice, especially in the context of housing. In wanting to realise their imagination of home, however, many respondents resisted the advice from support services that there would be repercussions (e.g., cut-off from council support) if they rejected an allocated council house and did exactly that. Making this choice, many were then in a way punished for acting, as they were then moved around different temporary emergency homeless accommodations, thus continuing dependency on services, and delaying homemaking in their own dwelling further. This raised questions whether making a choice was a last-ditch attempt to exercise agency (Gill et al., 2011), considering the limited understanding of housing allocation and support, as well as lack of alternatives and solutions to solve housing problems.

In other instances, agency occurred when respondents chose to move away from Newcastle. However, in these cases, doubts also remained whether this agency was the result of respondents' desperate attempt to make a choice and determine the direction of their own lives

in pushing back against limiting structures. This was because after having left Newcastle, many respondents moved back. Homes which were then made in a different city were unmade again, when many realised that it would be better to move to Newcastle where they were dispersed as asylum seekers and had some connection. While these choices participants made can be seen as agency, they entailed a material and emotional cost which was often not visible to outsiders (Habash, 2021). Some respondents, on the other hand, showed agency in deciding to stay in Newcastle; however, this also entailed a cost. For example, despite feeling socially isolated in Newcastle, and having bigger social networks in a different city, some respondents chose to not move away because they knew about the difficulties to find housing elsewhere. In a way, then, the choice participants had and where agency could occur was deciding between two evils. Respondents had very limited choices for rebuilding their homes after experiences of displacement and refuge.

Chapter five illuminated how participants were agents in shaping their built environment through micro-spatial practices after moving into their own dwelling which opened a 'space for agency' slightly bigger than when respondents could choose their housing. In focusing on micro-practices of homemaking inside their houses, chapter five uncovered how respondents sought agency and actively made claims for space, thus creating emotional geographies of their belonging and home. Agency was sought, as well as required, as individuals often moved into the bare structures of a dwelling. As such, agency was also linked to control and choice, which are important notions in the concept of home (Rapoport, 1985). Focusing on the minutiae of homemaking and taking a materialist perspective helped to uncover the ways in which respondents navigated the tensions which mark many forced migrants' material circumstances (Brun, 2015); but more importantly resisted limits imposed on their agency in homemaking through employing creative strategies in this process, to make alterations to their dwelling spaces and decorate them according to their tastes. Instances of acting within limiting structures included selling furniture respondents were given as part of council support schemes to then buy ones they liked; or covering broken sofas rented from the council as part of their tenancy with sheets. However, the latter instance was evidence that limiting structures were ever-present and often difficult to resist. Therefore, sometimes respondents could only furnish their dwellings with the objects they were given, and which they disliked or were broken; and they were not helped by emotionally distanced support

workers who, themselves with limited capacity to act, interacted with respondents as though they were objects to be dealt with, this behaviour diminishing the actions of refugees. However, even in these instances, where respondents seemingly were not given opportunities to act and for their agency to occur, many participants found creative ways to push back, for example through saving money to have a shower installed or seemingly small acts, such as using rubber tubes to create a mixer tap.

Findings from chapter six highlighted that agency occurred in employing strategies for belonging from experiences outside of respondents' intimate dwelling spaces. These included 'using' the spaces of the city to become familiar with them, to find a sense of belonging grounded in materialities; but also seeking opportunities for encounters, for example through volunteering or finding co-ethnic communities, to find belonging rooted in relations with others. In indicating the importance of the neighbourhood for homemaking, chapter six highlighted the agency that occurred in the vicinity of respondents' 'safe spaces' through pushing back against hostilities and discrimination. Agency occurred in resisting discrimination, and defending claims that participants made for space. However, drawing on Habash (2021), chapter six also revealed the inward negotiations which accompany what looks like resistance-through-agency. While respondents may have actively looked for ways in which they could do what they did in the past, there was evidence of an emotional cost occurring in this, because behaviours (and lives) could never be authentically recreated in a new environment.

7.3. Contributions to knowledge

This thesis contributes to debates on home and migration more generally (for example, Boccagni, 2016), and specifically advances knowledge within an emerging body of literature examining homemaking practices in contexts of displacement (Beeckmans et al., 2020) which has focused on the Global South (for example, Hart et al., 2018; Singh, 2020); but also the Global North (for example, Di Guisto, 2022; Kim and Smets, 2020; Paszkiewicz and Fosas, 2019). This thesis is amongst the first to explore issues of home, belonging and homemaking for forced migrants in contemporary Britain, in a region which is less diverse and has seen lower levels of immigration than other parts of the UK. Through a focus on the North East of England, this research provides original insight into the context of refugee homemaking, the different structures that shape

forced migrants' experiences, and the temporalities at play in the experiences and re-makings of homes, and negotiations of belonging for forced migrants.

This study thus provides a novel perspective on the situation of refugees in the 21st century and how experiences of sanctuary and exile are characterised by a lack of acknowledgement of refugees' subjectivity by state actors, through seeing and treating them as objects; as well as the forced circumstances of their being and acting. Through this, homemaking for refugees is made exceptional, while many refugees want to create a 'normal life' (Sanyal, 2014). This thesis advances knowledge in the field discussing the bureaucratisation and securitisation of migration and refuge (for example, Zetter, 2007) through exploring how this is materialised for refugees in post-asylum experiences of housing and homemaking in the Global North. In exploring the minutiae of refugee homemaking, this thesis advances knowledge in how forced migrants can be conceptualised as agents, instead of policy objects, in an environment which is characterised by hostility towards and hierarchies of different types of migrants (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018; Ibrahim and Howarth, 2018; Vigil and Baillie Abidi, 2018).

This work makes contributions to debates on structure and agency, in particular relating to power relations between individuals and the state, and how individuals show agency in contexts where it is taken away. I discussed these issues in the context of material aspects of home, for example housing, objects and possessions, focusing on choice and control as central aspects of this as they occurred inside participants' dwellings and were visible in materialities and immaterialities (Rapoport, 1985); as well as how participants developed strategies for belonging and negotiated experiences made in their neighbourhoods, the wider community, and interactions with wider social structures. Through the subjective approach taken in this study, it also advances knowledge on the limits to forced migrants' agency (Habash, 2021).

While the subjective lived experiences of forced migrants were central to this thesis, this research also explored the role of other stakeholders in refugee homemaking. It thus contributes to the field by exploring how respondents' micro experiences of home and belonging were embedded in macro structures, and highlighted the involvement of state actors, local authorities and third sector organisations in refugee homemaking and negotiations of belonging. Building on literature that distinguishes between houses and homes (Clapham, 2005; Gurney, 1996, Samani and

Lenhard, 2019), this thesis exposed contrasting understandings of housing between support workers (e.g., ‘roof over their heads’) and forced migrants (e.g., wanting to make a home). This mismatch impacted on the type of housing participants lived in, and their attitude towards it; but for support services the biggest importance was placed on the fact that refugees had a ‘roof over their heads’. Similarly, refugees had preferences about their furniture, how to decorate dwellings, or what alterations to make; however, the support available to them did not take account of their preferences. Similarities were seen ‘outside the home’, when some respondents experienced discrimination and/or violence in the neighbourhood and sought support to move house. However, such requests to relocate where often ignored on the basis of insufficient ‘evidence’, a lack of alternative housing stock, or fanciful justifications that situations would improve (e.g., targeted violence would stop). Insights showed that state actors’ and local authorities’ discourse was dominated by binary ideas of integration which fuelled disparities, and that their capacity to act was limited due to their position in the structures responsible for policies and rules relating to refugee homemaking.

In examining how home can be located and materialised for forced migrants, this research makes contributions to the study of home in contexts of heightened and forced mobilities. The focus of this thesis on the materiality of home, including housing, adds to debates on how homes can be ‘materially anchored’ (Boccagni, 2016) through displaying ‘material mindfulness’ (Anderson et al., 2016; see also Douglas, 1991; Easthope, 2004). This research advances knowledge by revealing the role and impact of housing, objects and possessions for refugees as they make their homes. In doing so, this thesis contributes to debates on the tension between refugees as an embodiment of dispossession (Siddiqi and Chitchian, 2022) and the material circumstances of home (Boccagni, 2022; Brun, 2015a; Rosales, 2010).

Ideas around the materialities of home were explored in chapters four and five in which I discussed how, materially, belonging can be rooted in the dwelling, as well as belongings and objects inside of it, this creating a material condition for home and emotional geographies of belonging (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). Building on literature discussing different dimensions of belonging (Antonsich, 2010; May, 2011; Miller, 2003), this thesis also advances knowledge by discussing these ideas in the context of home and homemaking for forced migrants, and how feelings of belonging intersect with material aspects of home.

In addition, this thesis adds to debates about immaterialities of home, for example, familiar practices and behaviours inside the house (Dreyer, 2022; Taylor, 2013; Tharmalingam, 2016), but also those related to home management or memories from past homes and lives. Through an exploration of strategies for belonging, chapter six in particular advances knowledge on the dimensions of belonging that transcend materialities for participants in this study. Mobilising conceptualisations of the stranger (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011; Simmel, 1950; Viera and Nunes, 2020), this thesis contributes to debates on how forced migrants in Britain, who are forced to live in different places in the UK due to no choice dispersal policies, negotiate symbolic and literal coming and staying, both in the context of the physical environment of the city they have come to stay, and connecting with the community or encounters in the neighbourhood. This thesis also adds to debates on belonging and social structures, through drawing on the concept of slow violence (Mayblin et al., 2020; Nixon, 2011) and revealing the impact of 'invisible' (though not to participants) violence over time in homemaking.

Drawing on the concept of transnationalism, I highlighted the impact of past and present connections and relations across borders, for example on identities and feelings of home in participants' strategies for belonging (Cassim et al., 2020; Vertovec, 2001). In doing so, this thesis considered the impact of past memories, lives lived across borders and future aspirations on feelings of belonging to the host and home country, and on the desire to return, recognising the different temporalities that shape forced migrants' experiences of home. In doing so, this thesis adds to the field through revealing the internal, emotional and intimate aspects of how participants negotiated belonging in a new environment (May, 2011; Miller, 2003); as well as the impact of encounters and wider social structures on this.

While issues surrounding home have been explored more widely in anthropology, this is an emerging field in sociology (Anderson et al., 2016). This thesis specifically advances knowledge in the sociological study of home by exposing mismatches between macro structures and individual experiences through exploring the constraints imposed by the structures forced migrants in the UK are embedded into on individual agency, the symbolic violence these exerted on participants (Peillon, 1998; Somerville, 1998). This research critically exposed how integration rhetoric shapes stakeholders' perspectives and actions on how refugees in the UK can be best supported, and the stark difference of refugees' perspectives on this.

7.4. Implications for policy and practice

The findings discussed in this thesis have potential implications on policy and practice. For example, in December 2022, the North East devolution deal was concluded, which 'will unlock significant long-term funding and give local leaders greater freedom to decide how best to meet local needs' (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022, p. 6). As part of this, significant investment in building new housing is being planned, including further collaboration among local government and social housing providers to build affordable homes. In this context, my findings have the potential to inform the creation of the strategic plan for housing that is considered locally, for example through illuminating the lived experiences of individuals in social housing more generally, and the experiences of refugees more specifically as they transition from being an asylum seeker into mainstream systems, including social housing. Additional support procedures for forced migrants could be put in place, for example, to help them rebuild their lives in the UK after experiences of flight and loss. This could be through tailored support for forced migrants and increasing staff capacity and resources to achieve this. However, it is worth pointing out that underlying failures within asylum and immigration policies that impact on the experience of 'home' among my research participants need addressing at the national level. This includes the 28-day 'grace period' (Carnet e al., 2014) in which individuals have to move out of their government provided accommodation after they have been granted refugee status alongside the temporariness that is built into UK's existing protection regime.

In addition, this thesis advances an original comparison between understandings of housing and home of support services and refugees. Based on this, the findings of this work would support a case for an open conversation to be held between refugees and the services that support them to allow for a direct exchange between the two very differing viewpoints and perspectives. While support services work in constraining circumstances, a direct exchange might be valuable to advance understanding among support services of the meaning for refugees of having their own place to live after experiences of exile.

7.5. Future avenues of research

The findings and conclusions of this thesis warrant further research into the intersections of home, belonging and forced migration, in the UK and beyond. As I emphasised in the research, multiple temporalities are at work in the making of home and forging of belonging, including past

and present experiences, as well as future aspirations. As the environment for receiving forced migrants in the UK is changing and is becoming ever more restrictive and hostile, I suggest future research in order to trace feelings of home and belonging over a longer period of time. This would allow an exploration into whether and how feelings of home and belonging may have changed over time, considering the changing context and ever more uncertainty for refugees in rebuilding their lives. In addition, life story interviews would be valuable in order to generate an understanding of past homes and lives before these became disrupted, and how memories of these become materialised (or not) in the present. The subjective approach taken in this thesis has been invaluable in studying home and belonging and life story interviews would continue this. A deep exploration of past experiences with home in left behind countries, as well as during backwards and forwards journeys between cities in the UK would illuminate the various attempts at homemaking in the UK as well as the impact of unmaking of past homes on present senses of home and belonging (Baxter and Brickell, 2014). While this study has focused on refugees' spatial practices, an exploration of these practices for asylum seekers would further illuminate how individuals make homes in liminal, institutionalised spaces characterised by precarity.

As part of the original proposal for this research, I planned to conduct a comparative study between Newcastle, UK, and Münster, Germany. While forced migrants' housing and homemaking has been examined in different contexts of the Global North (Aigner, 2019; Boccagni, 2020; Dreyer, 2020; El-Kayed and Hamann, 2018), I suggest that more comparative work is essential in order to understand the difference that place makes in refugee homemaking. While Newcastle is a distinctive site of inquiry in the context of its culture, identity and history, across Europe asylum and refugee policies are becoming increasingly restrictive, and this impacts on forced migrants' reception and accommodation experiences beyond specific national contexts (see for example Kreichauf, 2018). Findings from comparative research would make wider contributions to theorising the refugee condition in the 21st century based on how societies receive refugees, and how this has changed, for example, since the Geneva UN Refugee Convention 1951. Comparative work could also be conducted in the UK, focusing specifically on experiences of forced migrants and others stuck in the 'housing underclass' (Williams, 2022) who are treated as undesirable and undeserving. While this thesis focuses on the experiences of

refugees and asylum seekers, the ‘housing emergency’ (Shelter, 2021) and poor-quality housing is a fact of life for many other individuals in the context of shrinking social welfare support.

Another interesting avenue for further research is the intersection between class, homemaking and forced migration. This builds on Gans (2009) who argues that refugees often experience downwards social mobility, despite the aspiration that their migration will result in upwards social mobility. It was evident in this research, that many participants came from upper class backgrounds in their home countries, and they were unable to translate their class identities in Newcastle. This was not least because of the different (lower standard) houses they lived in the UK compared to their home countries; and tied to this were behaviours and habits which respondents could not enact because they were forced to live within disabling structures. Lastly, and in reflecting on the value of the participant-led methods employed in this thesis, I suggest researchers working with forced migrants adapt collaborative and participative approaches when conducting research on home, homemaking and belonging.

Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guides

Interviews with refugees and asylum seekers

- Where have you lived since you arrived in the UK? (Housing biography)
- How did you find your current house? Did anybody help you? Was the process easy or were there any problems? Did you feel like you had a choice? Why did you reject certain choices? Why did you leave the previous houses you lived? Problems with the landlord?
- Do you like the house/area/neighbourhood? Do you feel safe? Do you prefer your current house to the place you lived before?
- Can you describe your neighbourhood?
- Do you interact with your neighbours?

Home and homemaking

- Tell me briefly what it has been like for you to live in Newcastle/in your house? Have you felt differently over time?
- Do you feel comfortable in your house? What specifically did/do you do to make you feel comfortable? Do you feel like you are in control of the space?
    - Do you feel this is a space where you can be yourself? Do you think your home is a 'safe haven'? Do you feel like you have brought this space under control?
- Do you think it is only a place to live (*functional/material vs emotional*)
- How much time do you spend in your house?
    - What do you do in your house? Do you have friends around? Do you spend a lot of time alone or with your family?
    - What about food and eating habits?
- (*compare/contrast here vs home country*) If you compare your house in NCL with that in your home country, what are the differences? Did you try to decorate the house as your house in [home country]? Did you bring any objects with you to do that?
    - Does it feel different?
    - Do the objects represent you and your culture?
    - What do the objects mean? (*belonging and belongings*)

  - Do you think there is a sense of you in your home (does it represent who you are?)
  - What about the furniture? Where did you get it and what is in your house? How have you arranged it?
  - Do you have any pictures up? How have you decorated it?
  - What about gardens? Do you use the space? Have you planted anything?
- What is missing in your current house/home?

- Do you think you have multiple homes (ie. home country home, UK home…)?
- Do you want to live there forever (settle)? Or do you prefer a different area/city/country?
- How do you imagine your future? What ideas do you have about your future?

Interview guide for other stakeholders

A)

<u>General: the work of the agency and how they support refugees</u>

- Could you please explain the work you do and how it relates to refugee and asylum seeker housing? What is it trying to achieve?
- How do you mainly support refugees and asylum seekers in their housing and homemaking?
- What is sort of the ideal/best practice in refugee settlement/housing in Newcastle?
  - Where do you encounter problems?
  - What works well?
- Does the support stop after you found them a house?

<u>More specific: refugee housing in Newcastle</u>

- In your experience, in which areas of Newcastle do refugees mostly settle? Are they diverse, do you think they are appropriate?
- Are there any specific characteristics of the properties which are allocated?

- What are the housing trajectories of refugee clients you deal with? (ie. do they move often)
- Why do refugees reject or accept the housing you suggest? Why do you think they move?
    - What percentage of refugees refuse the offer you make? What percentage comes back?
- Do you ever experience that refugees reject the offer you made and then come back?
    - Do you think there is discrimination on the (private) housing market?
- What do you think are the most common problems when refugees look for housing? With what sort of problems do they come to you?
- Do you ever get complaints about other residents in the area where they settle?
- Do you help them with furniture etc?
- What do you do to help people settle in the community? Do you connect them with social networks? Do you encourage them to participate in the community?
- What are the most common problems of sustaining a tenancy for refugees?
    - What do you do to help them? What do you think are the solutions?
- Do you think refugees' and asylum seekers' needs are met, by the available housing and your support?

Housing and integration into the community and the future

- What role do you see for housing in the overall integration/settlement of refugees into the community?
- Do you think there is a lot of scope for refugees to determine their own housing paths? What does this depend on?
- Where do you think are problems in the structures/system you work in with regards to R/AS housing?
- On a national scale, what changes would benefit [your organization] and by extension refugees? What changes would you like to see to be made?

B)

- How/why do R/AS come to [your organization]? How do they get to know about it? How do you reach out to them?
- Demographics of people who come to [your organization]? (ie. R/AS background, where are they from, how many)
- What do you think are the most common problems R/AS face in the community?
    - Where/how does your church help to solve them?
    - If people come to you with your problems, if you can't help them, do you put them in touch with people who can?
- What good things/experiences in the community do they speak to you about?
- What activities do you have in your church in which R/AS engage in?
    - What are the aims of these activities? Are there any specific aims? Or what are the outcomes you see (which might have not been intended?)
- What impact do you think the church has on their lives/on homemaking practices/ (does going to church make them feel they belong to the community)?
- How do you help refugees and asylum seekers with regards to housing (and homemaking)?
- How do you think we can speak about R/AS as actors for the community/having agency/having the capacity to act rather than just doing something for them?
    - How do they make the community better? What do they do for the community? What do they add? What do they contribute?
- Do you keep in touch with R/AS remotely?

Appendix B: List of interview participants

Name	Participant group	Age group	Gender
Alex	Housing association support worker	20-30	Male
Claire	Housing association support worker	41-50	Female
Rachel	Senior Council officer	41-50	Female
Jasmine	Council support worker	31-40	Female
Walter	Support worker local supporting organisation	60+	Male
Charles	Church reverend (support worker)	31-40	Male
Sahar	Refugee	21-30	Male
Gandom	Refugee	31-40	Female
Mokshe	Asylum seeker	31-40	Male
Saman	Refugee	41-50	Male
Mustafa	Refugee	41-50	Male
Shirin	Asylum seeker (later refugee status)	41-50	Female
Meti	Refugee	41-50	Male
Zana	Asylum seeker	41-50	Male
Alla	Asylum seeker (later refugee status)	20-30	Female
Zabi	Asylum seeker (later refugee status)	31-40	Female
Farid	Refugee	31-40	Male
Zarifa	Refugee	31-40	Female
Jawad	Refugee	51-60	Male
Raman	Refugee	31-40	Male
Sian	Refugee	31-40	Male
Ariana	Asylum seeker	31-40	Female
Kareem	Asylum seeker	31-40	Male

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology

Project Information Form

Funding source: This project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council**.**

Name of researcher: Raphaela Berding (r.berding2@newcastle.ac.uk)

Research Supervisor*: Ruth McAreavey (ruth.mcareavey@newcastle.ac.uk)

Please contact the above supervisor should you have any concerns about the research*.**

What is the research about?

This research is part of my PhD in Sociology at Newcastle University. It seeks to explore refugees' housing experiences and their homemaking practices. I want to understand the role of different actors and agencies in refugees' housing pathways and I want to explore which everyday encounters contribute to refugee integration. The sorts of questions I am interested in are:

- Where do refugees live and how have they found these places?
- How have they set up their home and how comfortable do they feel in it?
- What are refugees' experiences and perceptions of their everyday life?

What is involved in participating and what will I get asked?

A range of methods will be used to ask a number of questions which will help me understand refugees' housing, settlement and integration experiences. These methods are interviews, focus groups, video/written journals and photo-elicitation. With your permission, interviews will be audio recorded. You will need to sign a consent form to confirm your willingness to participate.

Are there any risks in participating?

Some people might feel uncomfortable or get upset talking about personal experiences and views. I want you to share only what you feel comfortable sharing and I will never push you to

talk about things you prefer to keep to yourself. You can stop and withdraw from the interview at any time. Based on your thoughts and experiences, I hope that this research will give interested parties in public life, academia, charity and policy sectors a valuable insight into refugees' experiences.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part; taking part is completely voluntary and you can change your mind at any time without any need to justify your decision. I will keep the data already collected up to this point in anonymised form unless you request to destroy it. If you agree to take part, you can choose not to answer questions you don't want to discuss.

What will happen to the information I give?

With your permission, data collected during interviews, focus groups and video journals will be transcribed. All personal data collected will be anonymized so that no connection to your person can be made. Everything you say is confidential. This means I will not tell anyone what you personally have said. I might use direct quotations from our interview in my thesis but any quotes will be anonymised through the use of pseudonyms. I will not name any individuals and it will not be possible to identify any participants. Any person and/or landmark that can be identified in the pictures you take will be anonymized unless you request otherwise. I will work together with you to make sure that you agree to obscuring faces or landmarks that can be identified. Alternatively, digital pictures will be manipulated with a picture-editing programme in collaboration with you. If you decide to keep a video journal, this will be transcribed with your permission, and then destroyed.

How will data be stored, archived, used and deleted?

Data will be used for analysis in my dissertation and shared only with my supervisor(s). Data will be used to disseminate research findings, e.g. in academic journal articles or other outputs associated with the research findings. By signing the consent form you also allow me to reproduce the images you generated during the research. You can withdraw your consent at any time. Data will be password protected and stored securely within the central storage system at Newcastle

University, and in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act of 1998 and the 2018 EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). You can refuse to have your data used at any time of the research process.

University Policy:

Data must be kept safe from unauthorised access, accidental loss or destruction. Not be transferred to a country outside the European Economic Area, unless that country has equivalent levels of protection for personal data

For more on the University's policies, please see the Data Protection website (https://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/dataprotectionpolicy/)

Appendix D: Consent form

Informed Consent Form

Please tick box as appropriate:

		I confirm	N/A
1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet.	☐	☐
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation in the project	☐	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	☐	☐
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	☐	☐
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (i.e. the use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	☐	☐
6.	I agree to having the interview/focus group recorded and the data from the interview/focus group transcribed.	☐	☐
7.	I agree for the researcher to reproduce my photographs and/or my written/video journal.	☐	☐
8.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	☐	☐
9.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	☐	☐
10.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	☐	☐

Participant:

____

Name Signature Date

Researcher:

Raphaela Berding____

Signature Date

Appendix E: Photo-elicitation prompts

- This makes me feel comfortable. This is my home
- These things are familiar to me and make me feel like I want to settle here.
- These are the things in my house that I can identify with, that represent who I am and that enable me to express myself
- This makes me feel uncomfortable, ‘homeless’ or not at home.
- These things/people make me feel unfamiliar and make me want to leave again.
- These are the things I cannot understand, that conflict with who I am, that prevent me from expressing myself.

Appendix F: Solicited diary prompts

Prompt questions were provided to participants, such as ‘What did you do today?’, ‘Where did you go today?’ or ‘Was there any time today you felt treated unfairly?’. In order to facilitate the writing process, the prompt ‘looking back at my day, …’ was given to participants.

I am interested in the things you do every day, who you meet, where you go and how you feel (for example feeling welcome, feeling at home or comfortable, feeling alone or lonely, feeling part of society or excluded etc). You should write the diary to allow me insight into your day-to-day life. It is as if I was by your side.

Please keep the diary for 2 weeks. You can decide when you write the diary. For example, you can write in the mornings or on the evenings. You don’t have to write every day, but you can write them every second day. For example, you can write on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday etc. Please write the entries regularly.

Here are some questions that you can think about when you write your diary:

- What did you do today?
    - Do you usually do those activities or did you do anything different and/or new?
- Which spaces/places have you been today? Did you feel comfortable in these spaces? Who was there?
- Who did you interact or speak with?
    - Describe the interactions.
    - Was there any conflict? How did you manage the situation?
- Was there any time today you felt treated unfairly?

Please write about those experiences, actions, thoughts and reflections that you find important. Please also describe how you felt.

You could start your entries like this:

- looking back at my day, …

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