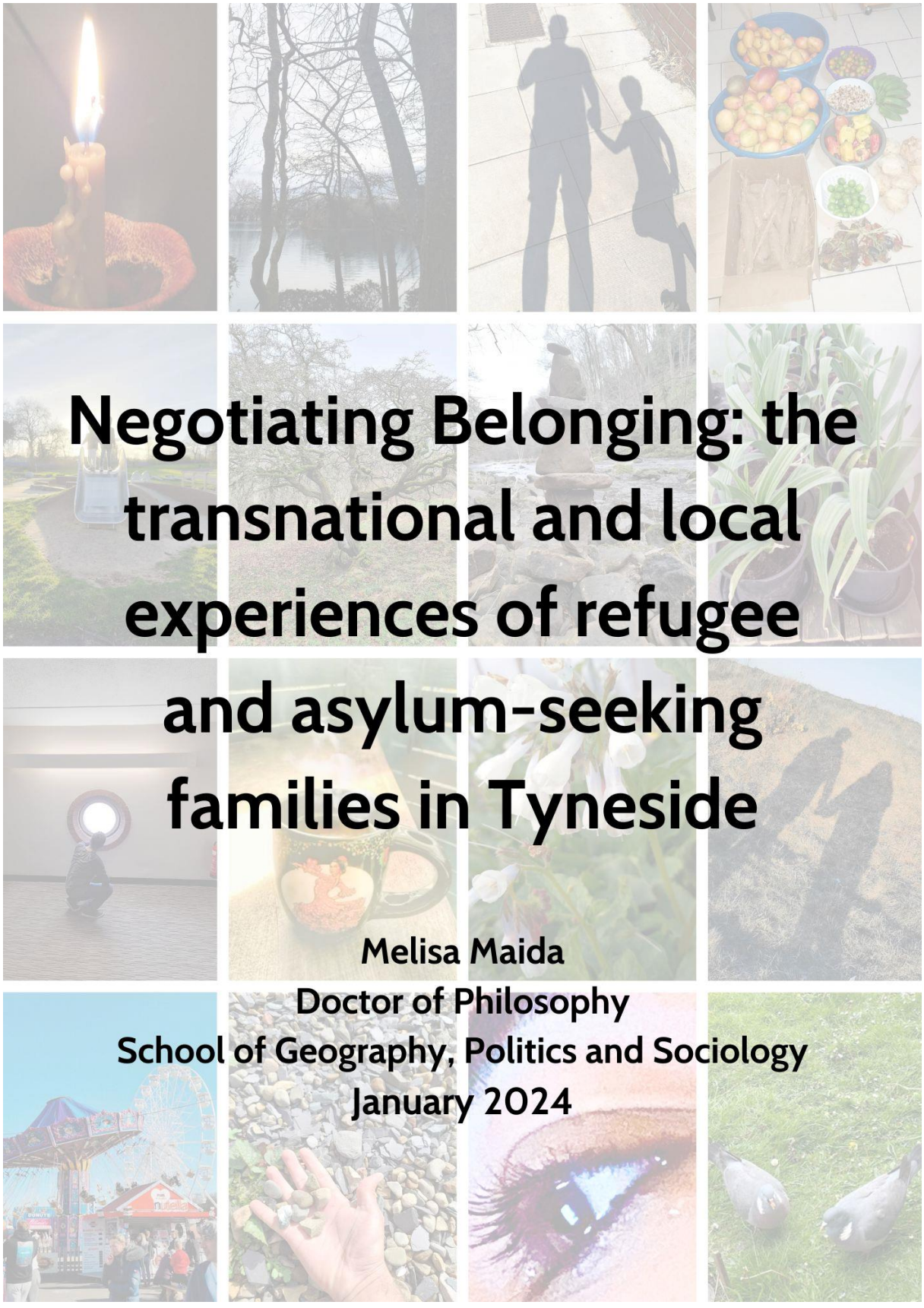

Negotiating Belonging: the transnational and local experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking families in Tyneside

Melisa Maida
Doctor of Philosophy
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology
January 2024

Abstract:

This thesis explores how refugee and asylum-seeking families are negotiating belonging in Tyneside, England. It reflects on the structural challenges facing refugees within the UK's hostile environment and demonstrates how families can and do forge a new sense of home, community and intimacy. Facing the violence of state-enforced precarity and other exclusions, asylum seekers and refugees nonetheless refuse their erasure; they are strategizing, weathering, and carving out their lives within and beyond borders and bordering. My work emerged in a collaborative partnership with the Comfrey Project, a local charity in Tyneside providing support for refugees and asylum seekers in the region. Over the course of a year, I volunteered at Comfrey, and this thesis draws on a period of rich ethnographic community-based observation and organising, which sits alongside in-depth interviews with refugee families and Tyneside-based practitioners working in the refugee sector. My qualitative research is extended with a participatory photography project in which I engaged with refugee participants and together we explored the possibilities of their self-representation.

Combining personal life accounts, reflections and creative work of asylum-seeking and refugee families, this thesis contributes to ongoing concerns among geographers (and others) on issues relating to refugee settlement in the UK. Firstly, I examine the intimate aspects of belonging by exploring how families understand and actively engage in 'homemaking' strategies to reinstate new meanings of home. Secondly, this research explores the 'doing', vitality and spatiality of intimate relationships, how these relations work locally and transnationally in ways that challenge normative notions of 'the' family. Finally, this research examines how state violence and other exclusions in public spaces affects the feelings of belonging of refugee families. It also reveals the welcome and solidarity that refugees encounter in convivial and community spaces which is often actively co-created by refugee communities themselves with their allies.

Table of contents

List of figures

Acknowledgments and credit:

This long journey has not been a lonely one. There are many people to thank for their support, mentorship and friendship. You are my tribe. You have walked with me through the sunny and stormy days and I am really grateful for that.

Thanks to my son Ori (button nose) and my Donny, I know at times this PhD has cost a lot of stress and interfered with family time and I appreciate your patience, support and love. To my mami, papi, Luli and Peta. To my Scottish and Argentinian family thanks for your encouragement. And those who are no longer with us. Massive appreciation to my lovely friends, PhD colleagues and new work colleagues at Northumbria University, particularly – Bex, Bianca, Benita, Daoud, Floor, Helen, Jake, Laura, Matt, Olivia, Pilar and Stine, Sophia, Tom, Tzu-Jung Feng and many others.

To my PhD team – Alison, Caleb and Matej. It has been a wonderful journey, I learnt so much from you and I couldn't have wished for better mentors. You have been there for me in all the challenges that I have encountered - academic, emotional and practical. I couldn't have asked for more.

Special thanks to the Comfrey Project staff and volunteers. Eleni thanks so much for the opportunity to collaborate with Comfrey. I really loved my year with you. I felt so welcomed and learnt so much from everyone.

I also want to say thanks to all those who participated in this research and shared with me your wisdom and stories. To Nicola Maxwell and the Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums for your partnership in co-producing a wonderful exhibition at the Discovery Museum. Nicola, thanks for coaching me through all those photographic challenges. I have learnt so much from you.

Finally, I would like to thank, acknowledge and credit the collaborators of the 'Belonging project' (photovoice project) - Edjee, Keren, Manal, Maye, Lily, Victoria and many more individuals who created the wonderful photographic artwork and shared many stories with me, it has been an inspiring journey we have undertaken together.

Thanks for journeying with me (apologies if I missed anyone – thanks to you too!).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1. Barbara's photovoice image

> *You have something in front of you and you keep looking at it. But you don't look at what is beyond that. It is like something bad is happening […] you endure the pain […] and await that something good will be. There is something blocking, clouding the view, but beyond that you have a lake, something that is awaiting, something better…*

Setting the context

This is the creative work of Barbara (Figure 1) who took part in the photovoice project of this research. Barbara is from South America, and she had only just arrived in Tyneside with her husband and children at the time that she participated in the project. Through this image and accompanying story, she narrates the pain that she is enduring through the asylum process, and yet, she remains hopeful that something better is coming for her and her family, beyond their current challenges.

Barbara and many other individuals who took part in this research were (or had experienced) ‘waiting’ in a state of limbo for a decision about their asylum case. Waiting in a UK state which is becoming increasingly hostile towards asylum seekers and refugees, where we are seeing growing state enforced exclusionary practices, such as the housing of asylum seekers in barges, enforced protracted waiting, limited settlement and family reunification support, outsourcing to Rwanda and other removal practices, amongst many others violent tactics. This research sits within this hostile context, an environment that shapes how refugee and asylum-seeking families living in Tyneside negotiate belonging. Central to this thesis is the question of how refugee and asylum-seeking families carve out new and transform existing intimacies, and senses of home and community both locally and transnationally despite the challenges associated with forced migration that they experience and the hostility that they encounter structurally and in their everyday lives as they settle in Tyneside.

This state-enforced violence towards refugees is the product of an increasing effort from successive Labour and Conservative governments to engineer the systemic implementation of an ‘hostile environment’ through violent securitisation, surveillance and bureaucratic policies, and practices which perpetuates precarity and exclusion both within the UK state, as well as at the border (Benwell et al, 2023). These border regimes operate overseas before migrants and refugees arrive to the UK, at the border and within the UK through systems of 'differentiated' memberships and citizenship (Vaughan-Williams, 2010; Rigo, 2005). For instance, as a result of the various immigration acts (1996, 2014 and 2016) landlords, employers and banks are required to verify the immigration status of individuals and these checks extend to other everyday interactions such as the within educational, health and other services (Yulal-Davis et al 2018; Cassidy, 2019). The Nationality and Borders Act, which was passed in April 2022, during the course of this research project, is another governmental tactic to further criminalise and exclude those seeking asylum in the UK (Gov.uk, 2022; Benwell et al 2023). This Act gives powers to the UK state to transfer refugees to third countries such as Rwanda to process their asylum claims and to further criminalise those who seek asylum in the here (ibid.). Further, refugee families (as well as other migrant families) are being increasingly targeted as a form of exclusionary bordering tactic. Coddington and Williams (2022) refer to these emerging family related bordering strategies as ‘relational enforcement’ (p. 590). These exclusionary policies directed at refugee families involve restrictions and

bordering tactics related to the conditionality, temporality and definitions attached to these policies (e.g. the costs of family reunion, bureaucratic barriers, the long waiting associated with family reunification and the narrow definitions of family within these policies) (Phillimore et al, 2023). These exclusionary policies extend the 'hostile environment' to the context of the family and deny the right to family life to many asylum seekers and refugees.

There is also an increasingly hostile rhetoric towards migrants in the UK (Jones et al, 2007; Goodman et al, 2017). During my PhD journey there were regular sensationalist stories released in the media about refugees, particularly about those crossing the English Channel in boats and the increasing numbers of refugees arriving to the UK. This hostile rhetoric has been often fuelled by outspoken and politized public statements being made by political figures such as Suella Braverman and Priti Patel. For instance, Suella Braverman stated: 'I would love to have a front page of The Telegraph with a plane taking off to Rwanda, that's my dream, it's my obsession' (Toth, 2023). She also called the arrival of refugees to Britain an 'invasion' (ibid.). These political attitudes towards refugees have provoked an anti-immigrant, nativist sentiment and hostile attitudes which scapegoat migrants in their everyday lives (Ehrkamp, 2017). And this ostracism from the state and public affects and profoundly shapes the experiences of belonging and settlement of refugees and asylum seekers. As Barbara explains with her photovoice image and accompanying narrative, her experiences of seeking asylum in the UK feels like something that is blocking and clouding her view. The state exclusion that refugees encounter as they attempt to seek safety takes away their control to pave their paths and futures. It dehumanises refugees and restricts them of their agency, freedoms and choices (Ehrkamp, 2017). It separates refugee families and challenges their ability to rebuild their lives safely in a new country.

Yet, as this thesis claims and demonstrates, despite an increasingly hostile political terrain and poisoned rhetoric in the UK, refugees and asylum-seeking families refuse their erasure. They are strategizing and rebuilding their lives, communities and intimacy within and beyond borders and bordering. Refugees' own accounts and reflections about their lives and experiences are rarely present and acknowledged in mainstream public and academic debates. Their diverse accounts often 'fall away' and are overlooked within mainstream discourses (Tadiar, 2009). Moreover refugees are often misrepresented in generalised ways as either 'undesirable', 'dangerous' or 'victims' in dominant narratives and these representations often

omit the diversity of their lives and experiences (Polychroniou, 2021, Malkki, 1995). Nevertheless, it is through refugees' personal stories that we can glean the many diversities, emotions and complexities of their lived experiences. These stories often reveal nuanced counternarratives that unsettle generalised notions about their lives (Eastmond, 2009). The stories that refugees tell are particularly urgent and timely as under the current climate, they are not being considered as 'relevant or credible or, increasingly, not heard at all' (ibid., p.261). This thesis addresses this by bringing together the personal life biographies, reflections and creative work of asylum-seeking and refugee families to illuminate nuanced accounts of their lives and experiences as they settle and carve out a new life for themselves in Tyneside.

This thesis

This thesis explores the negotiation of belonging of refugee and asylum-seeking families living in Tyneside. It examines how refugee and asylum-seeking families rebuild their lives locally and maintain connections transnationally despite the systemic and everyday challenges that they encounter as they settle in Tyneside.

It examines the overarching theme of belonging within various distinct yet interconnected spatialities. It also explores how the exclusionary politics that frame refugees' settlement experiences is lived and deeply felt on the ground with consequences for refugees' feelings of acceptance and belonging. Firstly, this research focusses on the intimate aspects of belonging by exploring how refugee families understand and imagine home and actively engage in 'homemaking' strategies to reinstate new meanings of home in the new environments in which they are settling. Secondly, this research explores the 'doing', vitality and spatiality of intimate relationships. It examines how these relations work locally and transnationally in ways that challenge normative notions of 'the' family. Finally, this research examines how feelings and experiences of belonging are affected by state bordering. It also explores the tensions which emerge in refugees' everyday lives in public spaces where hostility and exclusion is experienced, as well as solidarity and care. I suggest that refugees and their supporters play an active role in creating communities and cultures of togetherness and belonging in Tyneside.

My motivations for developing this research project are personal, political and academic. Migration has played an important part in my life. I was born in Argentina and at age 15 I

moved with my mum to Czech Republic and then to the UK. My dad was born in Argentina and was descendant of Italian immigrants who settled in Argentina. He was always very proud of both his Italian and Argentinian heritage, and how he negotiated this dual cultural identity was always very interesting to me. My mum was born in the Czech Republic and moved to Argentina in her twenties. Hence, because of my own experience of migration, as well as that of my parents, I always was very aware, conscious and curious about how the experiences of migration disrupt individuals' sense of belonging and their identity. As a young person moving from Argentina to Czech Republic and leaving behind most of my family, friends, school and memories, I experienced this disruption of my own senses of belonging and the process of negotiating my family life transnationally through brief phone calls and letters with my dad, the pain of longing and the hard work of rebuilding my life and settling in a new country which had very little experience of supporting newcomers. This experience deeply touched me and was one of the reasons that I decided to work in the charity sector to support refugees to settle in Tyneside after finishing my first degree at Northumbria University. I worked in a local charity, the North of England Refugee Service, for over 5 years running a series of projects which supporting refugees to rebuild their lives in Tyneside. This professional experience prompted me to reflect again on questions surrounding belonging, exclusion and settlement. I also became exposed to the many realities and injustices that refugees and asylum seekers face as they settle in the UK. Following this work experience, and engagement with refugee communities, I wanted to continue deepening my understanding of how belonging is negotiated amongst this group and felt a desire to bring to light the effects that hostile systemic and everyday exclusions have on refugee lives. This curiosity for what goes on as migrants (and refugees) rebuild their sense of belonging and home in a new country combined with my passion to advocate for refugee rights inspired the development of this research project. In chapter 3, I discuss in more detail how my personal and professional experience influenced my positionality and this project.

This research contributes to academic debates about geographies of belonging and home, family geographies and to ongoing concerns among geographers (and others) on issues relating to refugee settlement in the UK in several ways. First, it presents novel empirical knowledge which contributes to an expanding scholarship concerned with the lived experiences of belonging of refugees and asylum seekers (see Sirriyeh, 2010, Van Liempt and Staring, 2021; Van Liempt and Miellet, 2021, Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018). As emphasized

by Antonsich (2010), until recently most studies tended to focus on the analysis of the macro aspects and politics of belonging and this research contributes to a growing interest in the personal and micro aspects of belonging in relation to the refugee experience. This thesis offers a nuanced account of the refugee subjective and lived experiences of belonging within three interconnected spatialities home, intimacy and public and community space which are framed and shaped by the wider politics, systemic abandonment and exclusions from the UK state.

Second, this thesis responds to recent calls from Van Liempt and Miellet (2021) which invites future research to further examine the complexities of transnational connections and familial relationships within the context of refugee resettlement and homemaking. Much research has explored the transnational relationships of other migrant groups (Baldassar, 2016; Wilding, 2006, Parreñas, 2005). Yet, to my knowledge little is known about how refugee families 'do' family transnationally (see Robertson et al 2016) and the other types of kinship relationships that emerge during exile (Verdasco, 2020).

Thirdly, this thesis also contributes to the understanding of the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Tyneside. There is currently limited research that examines the lived experiences of refugees and asylum-seeking families in Tyneside and little is known about how these groups are settling in the area. Therefore, this research addresses this gap. As I will explore later in this chapter, Tyneside is a compelling area to research the settlement experiences of refugees as despite the region being populated by predominantly by white residents, it receives proportionally higher numbers of asylum seekers than other regions in the UK in relation to its population. The region has also only began receiving refugees since 1999. Therefore, Tyneside offers an interesting environment to examine how refugees carve out a life for themselves. There is some research which is relevant in this geographical area, for instance, studies on hopeful multicultural encounters in Newcastle (see Askins, 2015; 2016; Askins and Pain, 2011), on arts-based methods with mothers seeking asylum in the North East of England and London (O'Neill et al, 2019) and on third sector organisations supporting refugees (Benwell et al, 2023).

This research contributes not only to the understanding on how refugee and asylum-seeking families are 'doing' family in Tyneside, but it also illuminates how families who are separated

are ‘doing’ family transnationally and in other ways, for instance, through intimate friendship ties which emerge locally. As such, this research pushes scholarship which calls for a reframing of the ‘family’ beyond heteronormative and traditional notions and claims that the boundaries of the ‘family’ are becoming increasingly blurred. This thesis adds to this scholarship by evidencing how refugee and asylum-seeking families are doing intimacy in ways that disrupt these normative notions, for instance, by shifting traditional roles within the family, ‘doing’ family transnationally using technology and filling gaps in family intimacy and support through family-like relationships that emerge and develop locally in Tyneside.

Further, this research argues that despite the hostility that refugees and asylum seekers encounter by the UK state (and elsewhere), they are nonetheless actively carving out a new life, relationships and spaces for themselves in Tyneside and transnationally. This research illuminates and contributes to understanding how the practices that refugees engage in and develop emerge and play out across interlinking spatialities (home, intimacy, community and public spaces). It also examines how these practices contribute to developing a sense of home and belonging as refugees settle in Tyneside. Therefore, I explore how the lens of ‘doing’ and examining the practices that refugee and asylum-seeking families carve out within these spatialities reveal the agency and active strategizing of refugee and asylum-seeking families despite the challenges that they face (see also Boccagni, 2022, Wright, 2015, Antonsich, 2010, Van Liempt, 2023).

Conceptually, this research builds on and combines various theoretical concepts, which helps us examine and understand the lived experiences and negotiation of belonging of refugee and asylum-seeking families more deeply. I draw from conceptualisations of belonging (particularly, Antonsich’s (2010) framework of belonging) and combine it with other theoretical concepts from geographies of encounter, transnationalism, geographies of home, kinship and family. I argue that whilst Antonsich’s (2010) framework of belonging is useful as a conceptual structure which enables us to categorise different aspects of belonging, it doesn’t offer analytical tools to understand how belonging plays out within different spatialities. I argue that this dynamic conceptual framework that I propose in this research which combines a variety of theories, enables deeper exploration of the ways that refugees negotiate belonging within various spatialities.

Finally, this research also offers methodological innovation. This research project used a combination of community-based ethnographic and collaborative engagement with a local charity Comfrey Project where I volunteered for a year, with participatory photography (DIY methods) and narrative interviewing. This research is inspired by and contributes to a body of scholarship which calls for 'new methodologies to understand the experiences of forced migration' and proposes 'ethno-mimesis' as a methodological frame (ethnographic work combined with artistic re-presentations developed through participatory research) (O'Neill, 2007). It also contributes to a growing but still limited scholarship which examines the role of practitioner or volunteer researcher methodology, calling for a 'relationship-centred perspective on geographical ethics' (see Blazek and Askins, 2019). Finally, the methodology in this research contributes to a body of geographic scholarship which advocates for more participatory and collaborative approaches and ethics (Kindon et al, 2007).

Tyneside as site to research refugee experiences

Situated within the Northeast of England, Tyneside is a conurbation which merges several populated areas around the River Tyne: Newcastle upon Tyne, Gateshead, North Tyneside and South Tyneside). Tyneside represents an important and timely site of research on the familial experiences of refugees for various reasons. The North East has strong historical roots in shipbuilding, chemical engineering, coal-mining and heavy industry and suffered economically with the decline of these industries (Robinson, 1988). Even with substantial regeneration of old industrial areas and the development of new industries, the North East region includes some of the economically deprived neighbourhoods in the UK. This is has only worsened since 2010, after Britain entered a period of prolonged recession which was succeeded by government cuts in welfare spending and the additional squeeze on local charities (Nayak, 2008; Stenning, 2020). The North East has now the highest poverty rate in the UK (26%), exceeding London (25%), which had historically higher rates (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023). Similarly, the percentage of children living in poverty in the North East is the highest in the UK (38%) and this outlook gets worse for local authorities with more ethnically diverse populations like Newcastle upon Tyne and Middlesbrough (Business in the community, 2023). As it is emphasised in this alarming data, the recession and increasing costs of living are affecting people living in the North East of England the most in the UK. Further, working class families in the North East have been affected by poverty and worklessness for multiple

generations and, similarly to refugee communities, they experience state abandonment and stigmatization (Shildrick et al, 2016; Nayak and Kehily, 2014). Yet, working-class families in the North East find various resourceful ways to negotiate their challenging circumstances and rely in supportive social networks such as family, friends and community (MacDonald et al, 2005). Understanding how refugee and asylum-seeking families are making a life in Tyneside is interesting as there are many similarities in the way both longer term residents, from working-class families and new arrivals (from refugee backgrounds), experience and negotiate structural challenges. Yet, there are also many differences in their lived experiences due to their diverse backgrounds. Therefore, this research adds knowledge by evidencing how refugee families are making a life in Tyneside a region deeply affected by socio-economic inequalities. Further, research in Tyneside is important as austerity has driven communities further apart as socially marginalised groups are placed in competition for scarce resources (Darling, 2016). The experience of settlement and belonging of refugees and asylum seekers is affected by the lack of resources and services available to support them due to the UK's immigration and austerity politics, as well as the attitudes that they receive from communities in Tyneside (Benwell et al, 2023).

Furthermore, Tyneside is an important research site because it places the experiences of settlement and belonging of refugee and asylum-seeking families within a site that is predominantly white (Nayak, 2017). The 2021 census demonstrated that the North East is the least ethnically diverse region in England with 93.0% of its population who are white and 7% who are ethnically diverse (mostly Asian, Black and Mixed ethnic background) (Business in the community, 2023). The region has a very different ethnic outlook to London, for instance, which has 46.2% ethnically diverse population (ibid.). Within Tyneside, Newcastle has 20.0% ethnically diverse population whilst Gateshead has only 6.5% (ibid).

The North East region has received refugee and asylum-seeking populations since dispersal policies were introduced with the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Nayak, 2008). There are currently (in 2023) 7165 asylum seekers in the North East, approximately 27 asylum seekers per 10 000 population (Sturge, 2023). The North East is in the top 3 regions with asylum seekers per 10 000 population with London at 29/10000 and North West at 28/10000 (ibid.). In the North East, Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Gateshead are the top receiving areas per 10 000 population (ibid.). Therefore, understanding this contemporary politics

emerging within Tyneside is significant as a region which is receiving proportionately higher numbers of asylum seekers in relation to other regions in the UK and which represents one of the least diverse places in England. Further as highlighted earlier, there is not much research which examines the refugee experiences of settling here in Tyneside, little is known about how refugees are experiencing the settlement process in the region marked by its whiteness.

Thesis design and structure

This research project emerged in a collaborative partnership with the Comfrey Project, a local charity in Tyneside providing support and horticulture-based activities including gardening, beekeeping, cooking, crafts and construction to improve the wellbeing of refugees and help them settle in the local community (Comfrey website, 2023). Over the course of a year (from June 2022 – July 2023), I volunteered at Comfrey supporting their volunteers (Comfrey participants) and the running of their activities. This thesis draws on a period of rich ethnographic community-based observation where I got to know volunteers at Comfrey and their lives and developed friendly relationships with them. This sits alongside 38 in-depth narrative interviews with refugee families (32 participants) and 14 Tyneside-based practitioners working in the refugee sector. Finally, I facilitated a participatory photography project (photovoice) in which I engaged refugee participants and together we explored the possibilities of their self-representation. This resulted in two photographic exhibitions. One at the Comfrey Project during refugee week (June 2022) and the second one at the Discovery Museum launched in refugee week 2022, which still features at the museum.

This research investigates five interconnected questions that examine the negotiation of belonging and the local and transnational experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking families in the Tyneside:

1 - In what ways do refugee families negotiate and forge a sense of belonging locally in Tyneside and transnationally?

2 - How are the feelings of belonging of refugee families shaped by structural violence and hostility in their everyday lives?

3 - How do refugees describe and sense home, engage in homemaking practices and home dreaming as they are rebuilding their lives in Tyneside?

4 - How do refugees practice family relationships and other intimate relationships locally and across borders?

5 - How do the day-to-day interactions with people, communities and places contribute to the feeling of belonging in the Tyneside area?

These questions have been the focus of this thesis and have been adapted throughout this PhD project as I reflected on the research journey, data and analysis. Question 1 and 2 are overarching questions which are addressed throughout in the three empirical chapters of this thesis. Question 3 is examined in chapter 4 (home and homemaking) and question 4 is explored in chapter 5 where I examine intimacy, kinship and relationships. The final question is addressed in chapter 6 (hostility, togetherness and agency).

Refugee terminology

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it' (UNHCR, 2023). In this thesis, I use the term 'refugee' or 'refugee families' as a general term which encapsulates the many different immigration statuses that participants might have had when they took part in this research. At times it was difficult to navigate and understand at which stage of the immigration process participants were, and often their status was not relevant to their story. There were however situations where participants disclosed their specific statuses as refugees (who were granted with this status by the Home Office) or seeking asylum (awaiting decision from Home Office) or whose asylum claims might have been refused by the Home Office (alongside with other possibilities). If the participant's disclosed immigration status was relevant and important within the context of their experience and story, I made their status explicit within the thesis. When referring to participants as a group (or community), I usually used the following

terminology: ‘refugees and asylum seekers’ ‘refugee and asylum-seeking families’ or ‘individuals seeking sanctuary’. The terminology used in this thesis was at times problematic and I struggled to make decisions about how to best describe participants and refugee groups, on one hand, to account for the uniqueness of their forced migration and settlement experience as refugees and on the other hand to not impose a label as ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’ which participants might not identify with or feel that defines their identity. Further, another challenge was the negative connotations carried by the word ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’ because of the increasingly hostile rhetoric within which these terms are circulated (Goodman et al, 2017). Yet, I believe that using this terminology within more caring and compassionate settings, such as this thesis, can help reframe its negative associations. I therefore tried to negotiate the use of these terms as best as I could within this thesis, whilst acknowledging their complexity.

Navigating this thesis

This thesis has 7 chapters of which 3 provide empirical data and analysis from this research project. Next, I summarise the content and aims of each chapter within this thesis.

This chapter has introduced this thesis and offered a rationale and justification for this research. I situated this research within a context of hostility from the UK state that refugee families encounter, and which affects their feelings of belonging and lived experiences. I proposed the aspirations of this thesis to focus on the lived experiences and the intimate accounts of refugee families as sites of knowledge which accounts for what falls away from mainstream discourses about their lives. I outlined the aims of this thesis to examine the negotiation of belonging of refugee and asylum-seeking families both in Tyneside and transnationally and discussed the conceptual, empirical and methodological contributions of this thesis. I explored the rationale for conducting this research within Tyneside. I also discussed my personal, professional and political motivations for developing this research project. I provided a summary of this research’s methodology and key research questions. I discussed some of the ethical considerations related to terminologies used within this thesis. I finally outlined the thesis structure and summary of chapters.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the relevant academic scholarship and the theoretical framework of this thesis. I begin by introducing the concept of belonging which is central to this thesis. I

explore Antonsich's (2010) framework of belonging which identifies two main dimensions of belonging – 'the politics of belonging' and 'feelings of home or place-belongingness'. I then pay attention to these two dimensions in more depth. I use other ideas from geographies of encounter, home, transnationalism, family and kinship literature, amongst others to develop deeper analysis of the spatialities which this thesis is concerned with. In this chapter, I argue that Antonsich's (2010) framework of belonging is useful to structure the different aspects of belonging. However, I maintain that in order to examine how belonging plays out in different spatialities (i.e. home, intimacies, public spaces and communities), other ideas can offer deeper exploration and understanding. The dynamic framework that this thesis develops, and which combines several ideas and concepts from geographies of belonging, home, encounters, transnationalism, family, kinship amongst others, I argue, offers a strong analytical tool from which to examine the complexities and diversities of the lives of refugee families as they negotiate belonging whilst they settle in a new country.

Chapter 3 reflects on the methodological journey and design of this research project which consisted in a participatory and community-based engagement with the Comfrey Project where I volunteered for a year, as well as narrative interviews with refugee and asylum-seeking families, practitioner interviews and a creative participatory photography project. I begin by introducing the collaboration with the Comfrey Project and a brief synopsis of the research project which includes my positionality and history, the recruitment, demography and engagement of participants in the project, key ethical considerations and methods of recording and data analysis. Then I reflect on the complexities and benefits of this methodological approach. I consider the role of volunteer-researcher within a community-based and ethnographic setting, working with narratives through interviews focussed on the narrator's voices and the 'Belonging project', the participatory photography aspect of the project. This chapter argues that the interplay of these methods which combines longer term community based ethnographic volunteering with narrative interviews and participatory photography-based methods offer opportunities to engage more deeply, ethically and in a more meaningful and useful way with refugee communities. It also offers opportunities for refugee and asylum seekers to explore their voice, share their stories, identities and realities and in doing so they offer more intimate counter self-representations of the complexity of the lives and experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking families.

Within the next 3 empirical chapters I begin with a story from one of the individuals who took part in this research. These stories are shared at the beginning of each empirical chapter to help frame and contextualise the themes that specific chapters focus on.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter of this thesis. In this chapter I explore the personal and intimate aspects of belonging by examining the multi-layered complexities of how home is carved out as refugees and asylum seekers rebuild their lives in Tyneside (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). I consider how home is re-constructed by actively 'doing' home or 'homing' across spaces, as well as temporalities (Ralph and Staheli, 2011, Boccagni, 2022). First, I examine how and where refugees and asylum-seeking families sense home. I examine how home is understood and conceptualised by participants themselves in relation to spatiality, affect and social relations. Second, I consider the many practices that refugees and asylum-seeking families engage in to carve out new senses of home. This involves various homemaking tactics which emerge locally, virtually, and transnationally. For instance, homemaking practices that refugee and asylum-seeking families engage in within dwellings, through rituals and materiality and in special places which are or become familiar. Finally, this chapter explores the future imaginaries of home, the aspirations and hopes which participants envision as they attempt to rebuild their lives and families in Tyneside.

Chapter 5 explores the 'doing', vitality and spatiality of intimate relationships in the context of forced migration and how these relations work locally and transnationally in ways that challenge normative notions of 'the' family. This chapter builds on chapter 4 by exploring the relational aspects of belonging by focussing on how these intimate relationships are negotiated particularly as many asylum-seekers experience being denied their right to family. As this chapter will suggest, many refugees engage in relationships with biological family abroad to continue to exercise their right to family life despite immigration restrictions, whilst simultaneously they also build new intimacies, familial structures and relations locally beyond blood relations. In this chapter, I explore the 'doing' of family and the different ways that care and support is negotiated as refugee and asylum-seeking families experience the absence or disruption of familial support systems. I explore the significance and meaning of these relationships, as well as the realities and tensions of negotiating intimacy in the context of force migration. Drawing on Morgan (2011), I argue that exploring family through the lens of 'doing' rather than 'being' family seems a more suited way to understand refugee and asylum-

seeking families. Firstly, this chapter highlights the harsh conditions, realities and experiences concerned with family separation. I argue that traditional ways of understanding family within policy is in tension with the natural and cultural practices of intimacy, care and support amongst refugees. Secondly, this chapter focusses on exploring the mundane and everyday practices and rituals which refugees and asylum seekers engage in to develop and maintain social relations. I begin by discussing how refugee families who are separated manage their relationships transnationally. Then, I examine the realities, practices and strategies which families who are in Tyneside together or who have reunited employ to manage the challenges of settlement in a new country and culture. Finally, I explore the practices and support that emerge through 'family like' friendships arguing that these fictive kins reinstate a sense of connection, intimacy and belonging locally in everyday life, when blood related kins might be physically absent due to family separation.

Chapter 6 examines the role of the structural violence from the UK state and encounters in public and community spaces play in shaping how refugees and asylum-seeking families' sense (not) belonging and inclusion or exclusion. In reference to Van Liempt and Staring (2020), this chapter argues that there are public and community spaces and encounters that harm and spaces that heal and restore. On one hand, this chapter explores how the structural violence directed towards refugees from the state, as well as other forms of exclusion which they experience in their everyday lives influences their feelings of (not) belonging. On the other hand, this chapter explores spaces of welcome and resistance (Hughes, 2016; 2020) which refugees and asylum seekers actively seek to carve out a familiar space of their own within the new environment. I argue that refugees and asylum seekers themselves play a vital role in developing and sustaining these sites of welcome and solidarity together with their allies (Benwell et al, 2023; Ghorashi et al, 2018). These spaces are important sites where refugee communities claim own spaces in Tyneside and where they co-create a sense of belonging, community and togetherness with their supporters in Tyneside (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2013; Van Liempt and Staring, 2020; Van Liempt, 2023). First, I discuss the how refugee participants experience and sense the hostility and exclusion that they encounter through state enforced bordering policies and everyday convivial encounters in neighbourhoods and public spaces. The second part of this chapter explores the sites of welcome and solidarity that refugees and asylum seekers encounter in public and community settings. A central focus of this chapter is to demonstrate how refugees and their supporters actively organise, resist and tactically

navigate exclusion and hostility. I illustrate how refugees and asylum seekers and their supporters are active agents who co-create spaces of togetherness and sanctuary.

Chapter 7 is the final chapter of this thesis. I outline the main findings of this research and how it contributes to existing scholarship in the fields of belonging, family, kinship and intimacy, as well as refugee related literature. I indicate areas which future research could further examine.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter introduces the wider academic context and the theoretical framework of this research. This project examines how refugee and asylum-seeking families who live in Tyneside negotiate belonging both transnationally and locally. Within academic literature there has been sustained engagement with the concept of belonging by geographers and other social scientists (see Antonsich, 2010; Yulal Davis et al, 2006, Mee and Wright, 2009). Yet, until recently there has been less academic work that explores the lived and intimate experiences of belonging of refugee families and limited work has focussed on the North East of England region and this research connects with and contributes to this body of academic work. In this research I explore different spatialities where belonging unfolds within the context of forced migration, as well as how the wider socio-political context that entail refugees' feelings and experiences of belonging. Therefore, to account for refugee families lived experiences of belonging, in this literature review I combine several theoretical concepts that helped me focus and challenge my inquiry.

As a starting point I begin by exploring literature concerned with the concept of belonging which is central to this thesis. Particularly, I explore Antonsich (2010) framework of belonging which divides belonging into two main dimensions: the socio-spatial in/exclusion (politics of belonging) and as feeling 'at home' or 'place-belongingness'. This chapter then delves deeper into the socio-political aspects of belonging which influence refugee's experiences of belonging. Here, I engage with geographic and sociological literature concerned with state enforced hostility and exclusion and literature which explores sanctuary and the welcome of refugees. I also draw on debates from the geographies of encounter to explore how interactions in public spaces influence feelings of belonging. I then explore the second dimension of belonging which is concerned with the personal feelings of home and place-belongingness. In this section, I engage with literature which examines the concept of home (and homemaking), transnationalism and resistance which are useful in the context of this thesis.

Finally, this literature review explores the relational aspect of belonging by focusing on literature on intimacy, friendship and family. I will primarily review literature which proposes that the boundaries of family are becoming increasingly blurred and call for the extended notions of kin. I will argue that the 'doing' of family (Morgan, 2010) offers a lens to understand how intimacy is performed and practiced in the context of forced migration and examine literature which studies how migrants negotiate family and other intimate relationships.

As the central argument within this thesis is that refugees actively engage in carving out new senses of home, community and intimacy, this literature review will emphasise scholarship which acknowledges the agency and active 'doing' of refugees within the different dimensions of belonging.

This chapter concludes by proposing a dynamic conceptual framework which combines several theories and which I argue can be brought together to examine the transnational and local experiences of belonging of refugee and asylum-seeking families across various spatialities.

The concept of belonging

Over recent years there has been a growing interest on the concept of belonging, for instance, in geography (Antonsich, 2010; Mee and Wright, 2009; Fenster, 2004; 2005; Wright, 2015), in sociology (Anthias, 2006; Calhoun, 2003, Yuval-Davis, 2006) and in politics (Crowley, 1999, Castles & Davidson 2000, Favell & Geddes, 1999). And yet, scholars suggest that belonging remains under theorised, and it is often used without explanation, assuming that it is self-explanatory (see Mee and Wright, 2009; Antonsich, 2010; Wright, 2015). Within geography, attention has been paid to belonging in relation to migration and forced migration (for instance, Valentine et al, 2009; Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018; Ralph and Staheli, 2011). Much of this work suggests that the concept carries multiple meanings. Antonsich (2010) points out that belonging is often used as a synonym of identity or citizenship and intersects with identity formation, inclusion/exclusion, bordering and concepts of home (ibid). Others suggest that belonging conveys an emotional attachment which relates to how individuals feel 'at home' and feel 'safe' (Yulal-Davis, 2006; Antonsich, 2010). Wright (2015) points out that belonging is 'multiple and multiscalar – it is personal and structural, lived and contested, and discursive and

material' (p. 393), and experienced in different personal, subjective and relational ways (ibid). And Antonsich (2010) draws attention to how everyday space plays an important role in developing a sense of belonging as this is where emotional attachment is negotiated and where perceptions of home and safety are formed. This is important in this thesis which explores how refugee and asylum-seeking families negotiate belonging both locally and transnationally by zooming in to different spatialities where belonging unfolds (home, intimate relationships, community and public spaces) and examining how the socio-political context around them shapes their experiences of belonging. Particularly, as this research acknowledges and illuminates the diversity of the lived experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking families and the subjective, complex and contested ways that they sense belonging.

Scholars also point to the performative aspect of belonging and suggest that it can be understood as emergent and becoming (Wright, 2015). For instance, Antonsich (2010) suggests that belonging is a process rather than a fixed status. Other geographers also draw attention to the ways that belonging is performed, practiced and experienced rather than it being a static condition (see Wright, 2015; Curtis and Mee, 2012, Fenster and Vizel, 2007). As Wright (2015) suggests this way of viewing belonging brings to light the multiple ways that it is practiced and takes the focus away from what belonging means and doesn't mean. Building on this performative aspect of belonging, Wright (2015) points to the importance of how belonging is felt, used, created and practiced relationally with other humans and more-than-humans, animals, places, emotions, things and flows (ibid). In other words, co-produced by ongoing engagement with others:

> *In performing belonging, an assemblage of actors, the people, the churches, the music and the hair care products co-create each other. There is no pre-existing world to be reflected, to be belonged to. Rather, the performances, practices and affects of belonging (re)make that world together, they bring it and themselves into being in different ways. This could be conceptualized as belonging as emergent becoming, a belonging based on relational ontologies (Wright, 2015, p. 402).*

This performative aspect of belonging is also central to this research which argues that refugee families engage in rebuilding a sense of home, intimacy and community through active 'doing'

and strategizing, which is highly affective (Wood and Waite, 2011) and emerges through everyday practices and relations (Wright, 2015).

Antonsich (2010) offers a framework which theorizes this complex and subjective notion of belonging. He builds on past contributions from scholars Yulal-Davis (2006) and Fenster (2005) and dissects belonging into two main notions which he argues are mutually interconnected. The first is belonging as feeling 'at home' or 'place-belongingness' and the second is the 'politics of belonging', a resource in discourses and practices of socio-spatial in/exclusion. Antonsich (2010) explains that the first notion 'place-belongingness' or 'sense of home' (Yuval-Davis, 2006) is a personal feeling of emotional attachment towards a particular place which represents a symbolic space of security, familiarity, comfort or refuge. Within this first notion, Antonsich identifies five factors that helps people feel an attachment to a place. First, there are auto-biographical factors which are formed by past experiences, memories, relations and emotions. Second, the relational factors, weak and strong social relationships or ties and encounter experiences. Third, the cultural factors such as language, traditions, habits, materiality (food traditions) and values that can facilitate intimacy. Fourthly, he argues that belonging is also shaped by economic factors and finally, there are legal factor, the rights and entitlements necessary for people to feel safe and secure (2010).

Antonsich (2010) argues that belonging is also shaped by the second notion, the 'politics of belonging' or experiences of socio-spatial inclusion or exclusion. This relates to the social aspect of belonging rather than personal or individual feelings or attachments. Antonsich points out that in every politics of belonging two opposite sides, one which claims belonging and one which has the power of granting belonging negotiate who is to belong and who is going to be excluded (2010; Yulal-Davis, 2006). Politics of belonging is essentially about boundaries production, maintenance and reproduction that separates people and communities into 'us' and 'them' (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and about how group membership and ownership of a place is negotiated (Crowley, 1999). As Crowley (1999) suggests the politics of belonging is 'the dirty work of boundary maintenance' (p.30). Therefore, linked to this idea of boundary maintenance are the processes of 'othering' where communities or groups compare themselves with others to decide who is to be excluded (and included) (Staszak, 2009; Said, 2003). The power dynamics of exchanges and interactions between groups play an important role in the negotiation of who is to belong and who is going to be excluded (Antonsich, 2010;

Yulal-Davis, 2006). In the context of my research the politics of belonging relates to how refugees' experiences of belonging are influenced and juxtaposed by how accepted and included (or not) they feel by the state and the wider social context which has the power of granting belonging. Refugees' experiences of belonging cannot be separated from a socio-political context in which they experience state violence, citizenship restrictions and everyday encounters (both positive and negative) with mainstream populations in public and community spaces. This is important for my research, as the social and political aspects of belonging plays an important role in how refugees and asylum-seeking families feel included, welcomed or rejected in the UK and by the Tyneside community where they are settling (Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008; Antonsich, 2010).

Antonsich's (2010) theoretical framework is also useful for this research because it acknowledges both the personal and intimate aspects, as well as the socio-political aspects of belonging. This adds another dimension to previous research which tended to focus on the macro aspects of belonging and less so on the personal and intimate aspects (see Yulal-Davis, 2006). This framework is useful to this research as it emphasizes various factors that interplay in how refugees forge and experience a sense of (not) belonging. For instance, how the interweaving of the intimate, biographical, social, political and institutional in the lived experiences of settlement of refugees contribute to how they experience and carve out a sense of belonging. Therefore, I suggest that Antonsich (2010) framework of belonging offers a strong theoretical structure to understand the different aspects and spatialities that constitute how refugees' sense and experience belonging. However, to delve deeper into the specific spatialities that this thesis is concerned with, I engage with other theoretical concepts which help unfolding how belonging takes shape both at personal and intimate, as well as socio-political level. The next sections in this chapter will focus more in depth on some of these different aspects or spatialities of belonging and I will review and engage with other theories and ideas which are important to the theoretical framing of this thesis.

Socio-political aspect of belonging

Refugee experiences of belonging cannot be separated from the structural hostility that they encounter from the UK state and other exclusions (and welcome) experienced in their

everyday lives in community and public spaces. This section reviews literature which examines the political and social context that influences refugee experiences of belonging.

Politics of exclusion and welcome

There is an extensive body of literature concerned with the increasing levels of state enforced securitisation, exclusionary practices and hostility at the border and within states (Darling, 2009; Cassidy, 2019; Ehrkamp, 2019; Yulal-Davis, et al, 2018; Hall, 2021; Hyndman, 2012; Loyd and Mountz, 2014). These bordering practices include the formulation of entry policies, surveillance and the exclusion of refugees from certain benefits and privileges which are only limited to citizens (Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016). Hyndman (2012) points out that efforts to securitise borders precedented the attacks 11th September 2001 in the US and subsequent attacks in other countries in Europe. Yet, these events marked the inauguration of fear which was capitalised by states to instil an anti-immigrant rhetoric (ibid.). In the past 20 years, we have seen an increase in hostile practices and securitisation towards asylum seekers and refugees in the Global North (ibid.). And scholars have paid much attention to the hardening of borders, which includes new 'safe third country' agreements, visa restrictions, new border technologies (Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016), and new carceral geographies of detention (Loyd and Mountz, 2014). Academics have also paid much attention to the structural violence produced by new bordering regimes within countries. For example, the everyday bordering of the UK government (Yulal-Davis et al, 2018; Cassidy, 2018; Cassidy et al, 2020), enforced periods of waiting (Khosravi, 2019; Hyndman and Giles, 2011) and the incarceration of refugees in detention and removal centres (Mountz et al, 2012). Coddington (2018) argues that increasingly practices towards refugees in developed countries are parallel to countries which haven't signed the UN Convention on Refugees. These countries use tactics like providing asylum seekers with poorer quality housing, employment restrictions, routinely forcing them into destitution and homelessness, negative media and other unwelcoming soft laws to engineer a hostile environment that denotes exclusion and ostracism (ibid.). Cassidy (2019) points out that ordinary people such as landlords, teachers and doctors are increasingly involved as agents of 'borderwork' and incarceration beyond institutions in everyday life.

Geographers and others have also focused on the solidarity, activism and community organising of refugees and their allies (see Benwell et al, 2023; Meziant, 2022; Sirriyeh, 2018; Gill et al, 2022; Gill, 2018; Bagelman, 2016; 2018; Darling and Bauder, 2019). This community

organising and support plays an important role in easing the consequences of the state violence directed towards asylum seekers and refugees and are also homely spaces of safety and sanctuary (Duyvendak et al, 2016). However, as Bagelman (2016) argues whilst these sanctuary movements and grassroots organising are crucial in alleviating and supporting the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the short term, they 'also serve to obscure the long-term picture whereby people are forced into an indefinite condition of waiting' (p.8). Therefore, extending the a 'suspended state' by easing but not 'undoing the problems associated with protracted waiting' (ibid, p.29). This research acknowledges the limitations and pressures of this type of community organising. Yet, as this research argues some these community spaces are vital spaces of belonging and community. These are spaces that grant belonging to refugees and where they feel welcomed and part of a community. They are also spaces where refugees actively engage in homemaking practices and developing a new sense of belonging. This research reflects on the effects that structural violence has on the lives of refugees. It also reflects on spaces that welcome and act as sanctuary spaces. It explores how these spaces shape refugee's feelings of (not) belonging and this literature helps to contextualise refugees' structural and everyday experiences of exclusion and inclusion.

Everyday encounters

In this section I engage with debates from geographies of encounter to explore how this can be a useful to frame to explore how everyday interactions and relationships which surge in public and community settings, as well as other spatialities of home and intimacy shape and influence the social and political aspects of belonging. These everyday encounters play a role in how refugees negotiate belonging and feel accepted (or excluded) in the area where they are settling.

Encounters in everyday life in cities have received much attention amongst geographers and others who explore how social differences and discourses of class, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, race and the more-than-human are negotiated through these interactions and the possibilities of interactions and conviviality in cities (Jacobs, 2020; Amin, 2002; Massey, 2005; Gilroy, 2004, Darling and Wilson, 2016). These accounts argue that multicultural contact can reduce anxieties and fears towards the constructed 'others'. The work of Jacobs (2020), for example, who praised the North American sidewalks in cities as sites where people can negotiate differences, develop trust and sustain social order as they walk or cycle. Amin (2002) argues

that daily negotiation of ethnic difference through everyday encounters are crucial for reconciling and overcoming ethnic cultural differences. Related to this, there is also a range of literature that celebrate life in the city as a site where people from diverse trajectories can live and negotiate their differences. For example, Massey (2005) argues that cities are spaces of 'thrown togetherness', where people of different trajectories come together and engage. This spatiality may enable 'something new' to happen (ibid.). Similarly, Gilroy (2004) speaks of a 'convivial culture' which develops in multicultural British cities as people from a diverse backgrounds and ethnicities learn to negotiate their day-to-day interactions. Darling and Wilson (2016) present an important account of the transformative potential of encounters in their book 'Encountering the city'. They argue that encounters are 'centrally about the maintenance, production and reworking of difference', they 'frame urban experiences and subjectivities' and have the potential for transformation and change (ibid, p. 2.).

Other scholars have critiqued these positive and progressive accounts of the city. For example, Haldrup et al (2006) claim that 'othering' and 'orientalism' is evident in day-to-day life and it is developed in the concrete bodily encounters of the everyday between immigrants and mainstream populations in Denmark, and as well as other European countries. This becomes a sedimented dominant language that creates the continuous background for social and national exclusions (ibid.). Haldrup et al (2006) give examples of the ways that 'practical orientalism' is experienced through sensuous haptic, olfactory, auditory and visual experiences. This can be gleaned through observing or imagining differences on how 'others' negotiate mutual touching or personal space, through the sounds coming from oral speech, tones, prayers, through visual and bodily differences such as the use of the headscarf and by creating a discourse attached to these differences (ibid.). Haldrup et al (2006) argue that this type of 'othering' and prejudice challenges multicultural encounters in cities; as people meet and interact with each other, their preconceived ideas, anxieties and fears collide and can shape experiences of exclusion. Similarly, Valentine (2008) questions the transformative potential of multicultural encounters. She suggests that proximity does not equate with 'meaningful contact' as people behave in courteous and sometimes even kind manner following normative codes of behaviour in public spaces, and this is not the same as having respect for difference (ibid.). Furthermore, she argues that even when encounters are meaningful and respect for difference is evident, it is often difficult to extend its effect beyond a particular liminal moment. Prejudices are deeply rooted in narratives of economic and

cultural victimhood. Valentine suggests that urban politics need to address questions of inequality and diversity side by side and build capacity of marginalised groups to participate in opportunities for meaningful contact (2008).

In related refugee literature, Huizinga and Van Hoven (2018) observe that Syrian male refugees living in Northern Netherlands engaged in social interaction or contact in transitory zones within their neighbourhoods. These encounters (positive or negative) in public spaces shape their feelings of belonging or not belonging (ibid.). Similarly, Van Liempt and Miellet (2022) argued that everyday encounters and social relationships in neighbourhoods and public spaces are important in producing a sense of (not) belonging. Van Liempt and Miellet (2022) found that there were very different experiences shared by their participants of Syrian background who lived in small and medium sized towns in the Netherlands. Some mentioned that they encountered welcoming interactions, whilst others encountered hostility or rejection from neighbours (ibid.). The authors argue that not being able to speak Dutch and the cultural differences were significant barriers in these encounters between neighbours. In a similar way, my research also argues that encounters and social interactions in neighbourhoods and public spaces, either welcoming, indifferent or hostile influence feelings of belonging of refugee and asylum-seeking families.

Other studies have attended to how encounters are experienced in different spaces and activities such as community groups and spaces. For instance, examining immigrant integration in eastern Berlin, Matejskova and Leitner (2011) observed that sustained encounters in community centres in neighbourhood enabled immigrant and native residents to work closely together, and thus led to a number of positive outcomes. However, they also argued that this change in attitude was directed towards individuals rather than groups, hence critiquing celebratory accounts of cultural conviviality (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011). Similarly, Askins (2016) explores the encounters between refugees, asylum seekers and more settled residents in a befriending scheme in Newcastle, England. She argues that through these encounters, where people are negotiating difference, emotional connections and relationships opened up opportunities for hopeful and fragile meaningful encounters. In relation to this befriending project and the ‘interconnection and interdependence’ between individuals who took part in this, Askins (2015) argues that a quiet politics of encounter emerged ‘attached to desires to belong in the local area’ and ‘enabled and mutually co-produced through everyday

geographies' (p. 471). Askins' work emphasizes the significance of such hopeful encounters. Further, Darling (2011) examines the intercultural encounters of asylum seekers and volunteers in the 'Talking Shop', a drop-in centre in Sheffield. He argues that certain politics of care can reproduce a passive and marginalised vision of the asylum seeker within the UK. He calls for more politically active and ethically responsive spaces of sanctuary where volunteers, organisers, service users and others are critically responsive to their actions and reactions in relation to their approach, positionality and power within the space (ibid).

Other scholars attend to the hopeful and welcoming interactions that can take place between communities through various practices, materiality and approaches. Askins and Pain (2011) draw attention to how art (the tools) and community arts practice can produce spaces for fragile yet hopeful multicultural interactions. Similarly, Kale et al. (2018) discussed how a collaborative painting project with former refugee and host-society participants highlighted tensions regarding legal versus everyday citizenship in New Zealand, while also providing opportunities for strengthened social bridging and enhanced senses of belonging. Johnston and Longhurst (2012) explore how the sensual experiences of food and the shared experiences of a group of migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand, developed a sense reciprocity and mutual understanding that allowed them to share their feelings of (not) belonging and to develop plans for new hopeful futures. Finally, Hunt (2023) considers the possibility of devising 'creative (en) counterspaces' via arts workshops in Thessaloniki, Greece. She argues that these spaces with their distinct practices and cultures 'constituted a welcoming opportunity for building social connections, language skills, and self-confidence—outcomes that extended beyond the physical space of the workshops' (p.1). In this thesis, I also argue that encounters matter in how refugees and asylum seekers feel a sense of inclusion or exclusion. I suggest that certain approaches and practices which take place within community spaces are crucially important for hopeful interactions between communities. Spaces and approaches that promote a culture of community, ownership and equality have the potential to influence power dynamics between groups and promote positive encounters and feelings of belonging.

Personal and intimate aspects of belonging

In this section I delve deeper into literature which engages with the more personal and intimate spatialities of belonging, what is often described as a feeling of being 'at home'. Home

feelings are associated with emotional attachment towards particular places and have many meanings. As the feelings of home (and belonging) of refugees and their families are likely to be disrupted by the forced migration and settlement experience in the new country understanding how refugees varied experiences of home is central to this thesis. Therefore, in this section I engage with literature which considers the complexities of the concept of home and homemaking, as well as, how transnationalism can be a useful lens to understand this personal spatiality. Some of this literature relates specifically to refugee experiences whilst other relate to universal human experiences or other social groups, yet they are reviewed here as they help address the central question of how belonging is negotiated within the spatiality of home.

Conceptualising home

The concept of home has received much scholarly attention within geography and across the social sciences (see Blunt and Varley, 2004; Blunt and Dowling, 2022; Boccagni, 2022; Sirriyeh, 2010; Ralph and Staeheli, 2011; Duyvendak et al, 2016; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021). Blunt and Dowling (2022) point out in the second edition of their book 'Home' that academic and non-academic engagements with the concept of home have substantially increased since the first edition of their book in 2006 and they provide an extensive list of literature which engages with the term (pp. 5-8).

Blunt and Dowling (2022) suggest that the home is 'complex and multi-layered geographical concept' with emotive and subjective meaning (p. 9). They propose that home is 'a spatial imaginary, a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct and connect places and extend across co-existing spaces and scales' (Blunt and Dowling, 2022, p. 9).

Similarly, Blunt and Varley (2004) point out to the complexity of the concept of home and emphasize how ideas and feelings of home are entangled with many other feelings and experiences which include feelings of belonging, exclusion, dreams and fears. They emphasize the ambiguity of the concept in relation to time and space:

> *As a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the*

> *heart of human life. Geographies of home are both material and symbolic and are located on thresholds between memory and nostalgia for the past, everyday life in the present, and future dreams and fears (Blunt and Varley, 2004, p. 3).*

Another useful approach to understanding the notion of home has been proposed by Duyvendak (2011) who defines home as consisting in three aspects 'familiarity, haven, and heaven'. Familiarity refers to the regularity of everyday norms, habits and practices involved in a space and the individual's recognition or knowledge of this (Duyvendak et al, 2016). This sense of familiarity is essential for the other two aspects of home haven and heaven. Home-as-haven relates to the characteristics of home that offer a place of sanctuary, 'retreat, intimacy, and domesticity' that connect to the human need of safety and protection from threats and challenges of external life (ibid, pp. 93-94). Longing (or nostalgia) for home places is felt when there is a disruption in the present environments. Finally, home-as-heaven refers to those aspects of home that are more collective, external and help individuals shape or develop communities through shared practices and identities (Duyvendak et al, 2016). This excerpt illustrates the interconnection of these three aspects of home:

> *Home-making practices are linked to the pursuit to achieve a sense of continuity between past and present and to transitions in personal life histories as well as the forming of social identities* (Duyvendak et al, 2016, p.94).

This framework highlights how the spatiality of home is maintained and negotiated to achieve a sense and feeling of continuity, safety, regularity and community. These aspects of home which are described within this framework help articulate the reasons some spaces might feel homely to refugees whilst others don't.

There are many ways in which home has been and continues to be conceptualised within scholarship concerned with forced and other types of migration. For instance, Brun and Fabos (2015) developed an analytical framework referred to as 'triadic constellation – home-Home-HOME' which conceptualises home both as an idea and a practice. They separate home into three dimensions: 'home' which represent the day to-day practices of homemaking, 'Home' which represent values, traditions, memories, and feelings of home, and the broader political and historical contexts in which 'HOME' is understood in the current global order and

embedded in institutions. This framework is useful for this research because it illustrates the complexity, interconnectedness and multidimensionality of home for those who are forced migrants or living in protracted situations. This frame structures the notion of home around different scales from more personal and intimate practices, ideas and concepts to more structural and systemic which this is helpful in this research.

Boccagni (2022) provides an additional categorisation of home. He proposes the view of approaching home as 'becoming', as emergent or 'homing' instead of solely 'as being, feeling or making'. He explains that 'homing' means looking at the 'lived experience of home as an attempt to tread the fine line between past ascriptions and future-orientated potentialities' (p. 585). Further he adds that 'homing' in fieldwork means bringing to light 'tactics whereby people home themselves' by 'reproducing habits, routines or rituals' which recall individual emotions and memories of home and 'readaptation to new environments, over time, in ways that should make them more personal, private, protected and predictable' (2022, p. 593). Homing as a conceptualization which is focussed around the active 'doing of home' and strategizing at micro-level is a key argument in this thesis.

Homemaking and the performative aspects of belonging

As discussed earlier in this literature review a central argument in this thesis is that refugee and asylum-seeking families actively engage and strategize in rebuilding their lives, relationships and communities. Next, I will focus on scholarship which examines this 'doing' of home and the practices involved in carving out a sense of home and belonging.

There is growing interest amongst social scientists in the diversity of homemaking practices particularly within migration studies (Ahmed et al, 2003; Miller, 2001; Ralph and Staheli, 2017; Boccagni 2017 and 2022; Walsh, 2015; Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Van Liempt and Staring, 2020). For instance, there is a body of literature which examines homemaking practices within dwellings and the use of materiality to carve out homely spaces. Tolia-Kelly (2004) explores the process of making homes of South Asian migrant communities in Britain. She argues that visual and material objects play an important role in how these communities carve out a sense of home (ibid.). Tolia-Kelly observes that South Asian communities placed art, photographs, paintings and other artefacts which made embodied connections to families, friends, landscapes, nature, homes and places from the past and social and diasporic histories. She suggests that

these objects allow migrants to rememorize scenes, scents and experiences from the past and by being present in their homes in Britain they play a role in their present (ibid.). Further Tolia-Kelly adds that objects help to shield South Asian migrants from the pressures of outside cultures and enables them to forge a feeling of identity and belonging somewhere. Similarly, Walsh (2015) analyses the role that domestic objects can play in the homemaking practices of British expatriates living in Dubai. Trapp (2015) points to the importance that imagined and future identities play in the homemaking practices of refugees. She describes that some Liberian refugees, in a Ghanaian refugee camp, who had jobs or who received remittances from relatives and who could afford to buy appliances and more expensive goods, identified as 'being already in America'. The refugees involved in this research owned items such as TVs, refrigerators, fans, tables and consumed goods such as lemonade or ate pancakes (ibid.). Trapp (2015) suggests that these refugee communities were living in imagined homes that represented their future aspirations. Similarly, Salih (2001) explores how Moroccan women who live in Italy negotiate transnational homes through symbolic and material resources. Salih (2001) describes that these women carry and use objects and goods such as domestic appliances, blankets, clothes and food in both countries and with these objects they construct spaces and homes and negotiate ruptures in their identities. These objects that these women carry when they are on holiday in Morocco in the summer holidays enables them to articulate and give meaning to the spaces they inhabit back and forth connecting the two places and carrying with them their 'roots' into their journeys (ibid.).

There is also a growing and recent body of literature that explores the homemaking practices of refugees often focusing on practices that emerge beyond dwellings and houses. For instance, Doná (2015) suggest that forced migrants often engage in virtual and online homemaking practices to recreate home away from their physical dwelling. Many feel more 'at home' among online, often transnational communities. She argues that these virtual interactions with family members, friends and the outside world through Skype calls, emails, WhatsApp messages, can contribute to maintaining homes in the past and to foster future aspirations. This is especially the case for those in protracted situations living in refugee camps, under surveillance, facing legal restrictions or living in detention centres (ibid.).

Boccagni (2022) also explores the making of home for refugees who are 'waiting' in asylum reception facilities in Europe. He explains how through 'homing' tactics asylum seekers create

spaces which are ‘homely enough’ within this reception centres (ibid., p.149). He refers this spaces that refugees carve out as ‘homely bubbles’ or ‘microspheres’ (ibid.). These practices enable refugees in these protracted situations to make a home space in the present, whilst ‘nourishing bonds with a life that was left behind’ (Boccagni, 2022, p.149). Van Liempt and Miellet (2021) echo similar insight, exploring the homemaking practices of refugees who were dispersed to small and medium size towns in the Netherlands. These individuals considered gardening an important homemaking practice. Caring for their gardens was not only a way to relax, but it was also a way to connect with memories of home and to engage with neighbours who share common interests. Similarly, Van Liempt and Staring (2020) explore the homemaking of recently arrived Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, focusing on how local environments outside of individual dwellings can act as ‘places of restoration’ but also places that ‘can harm’. They point out that ‘concrete spaces might trigger emotional and affective responses that are part of the homemaking process and new connections are built to new places’ (p.3).

There is a growing number of studies which illustrate the agency and active ‘doing’ of refugee and asylum-seeking communities who are carving out homely spaces and a sense of belonging this is particularly relevant to this research. Sirriyeh (2010) observes that for young refugee and asylum-seeking women (age 16-25) home is a ‘fluid and evolving process and was reconstructed through and in movement’ (p. 225). She suggests that young refugee women are ‘social actors’ who take on challenges to negotiate home, within hostile environments (p.225). Similarly, Van Liempt (2023) explores how refugees actively emplace themselves by engaging in own orientating activities, exploring and becoming part of the city (see also Glick Schiller & Caglar 2016). Further, Van Liempt notes ‘that appropriating places in the city or other public spaces, spaces from which refugee bodies have conceptually been excluded, is an important part of homemaking and empowerment for refugees’ themselves’ (2023, p.16).

In relation to this active ‘doing’ of home that refugees engage in. There is also scholarship which investigates the agency-in-waiting of those who are in protracted uncertainty and weathering the effects of the UK hostile immigration system. This literature proposes that even in these challenging circumstances refugees display agency through practices and coping strategies (see Ghorashi et al, 2017; Ramachandran and Vathi, 2022; Verdasco, 2020; Brun, 2015; Khosravi, 2019; Lipatova, 2022). Further, there is a renewed body of scholarship on

resistance which is relevant to this research. For instance, Hughes (2020) argues that resistance can be reframed beyond traditional and dominant views which claims, 'that for an act to be considered resistance, it must be characterised by intent' (p. 427). Hughes (2020) points out that doing something creative and disrupting the status quo by shifting the attention away from the enforced hostility experienced by refugees could also be framed as an everyday, emergent forms of resistance (see also Benwell et al, 2023; Hughes, 2016) or slow resistance (see Saunders and Al-Om, 2022).

This research contributes to this recent and growing body of literature which illuminates the active doing of 'home' and 'belonging' that refugees engage in, and which explores the diverse tactics that refugee families use to carve out a sense of home within dwellings, as well, as homemaking that emerges beyond these spaces. This thesis argues that some of the tactics that refugees and asylum seekers and their supporters engage in could also be framed as emergent acts of resistance.

The transnational spatiality of belonging

This thesis is interested in the different spatialities where belonging is negotiated and carved out by refugee families. Transnational spaces are an important spatiality in the lives of refugees and here I will explore scholarship on transnationalism to help me unpack the experiences of belonging within this spatiality.

Much scholarship has been interested in understanding the transnational lives of migrants and how they maintain ties to their places of origin, while simultaneously adapting to their new environments (Ralph and Staheli, 2011; Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018, Ehrkamp, 2005). In a recent study looking at the experiences of Syrian male refugees within an ethnically homogeneous context of the Northern Netherlands, Huizinga and Van Hoven (2018) observe that Turkish supermarkets and Halal butcheries act as transnational places of belonging where a part of their Syrian identity could be maintained. Similarly, Ehrkamp (2005) argues that spaces where migrants can maintain their transnational ties can offer a steppingstone towards a sense of belonging and provides a feeling of safety and familiarity which is reminiscent of 'home' and from which the new unfamiliar place or culture can be explored. Her research conducted in Germany observed that immigrants change the current environment where they live 'through transnational consumption, mass media, and the establishment of communal

places such as mosques and teahouses' (ibid., p.345). Ehrkamp (2005) suggests that these spaces are important as migrants can share and their transnational practices, traditions and cultures and recreate a piece of 'home' where they feel safe and attached, whilst they can 'engage in receiving societies in their own terms' (p. 346).

Other scholarship has paid attention to how migrants hybrid identities intertwine with their complex transnational lives. Easthope (2009) alludes that mobility and place are essential components of identity formation, arguing that migrating Tasmanians create identities that are mobile, dynamic, hybrid, and relational (ibid.). Further, many scholars suggest that migrants often negotiate identities and maintain attachments to multiple locations. Ehrkamp (2005) indicates that immigrants negotiate both transnational belonging and local attachments in their everyday life and construct their identities in ways that move across national borders in their daily practices. Transnational identities and belonging also interweave with migrants' negotiations and perceptions of home. Some scholarship examines how home is perceived by migrants as mobile and flexible challenging traditional ways of understanding homes as rooted and fixed. In these studies, transnationalism is used as an analytical tool to understands how migrants construct and understand home. For instance, Portes (1997) suggest that migrants live 'dual lives' and frequently maintain homes in two countries. Smith (1994) argues that migrants often live simultaneously in two cultures but do not live fully in either (cultural bifocality) (in Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016). Similarly, Ralph and Staheli (2011) emphasise that rather than deterritorializing their identities and connections to one place, contemporary migrants often strengthen and deepen their ties to multiple places and perceive home in numerous locations. Yet, Ralph and Staeheli (2011) talk about the importance of understanding home simultaneously as mobile and sedentary and as localised and extendible:

> *Home is like an accordion, in that it both stretches to expand outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed people in their proximate and immediate locales and social relations (p. 525).*

Some scholars use the analogy of root and routes to interpret the home experiences of transnational migrants (Clifford 1997; Gilroy 1993; Gustafson, 2001). Roots representing the homeland, the soil, the land or the persons sense of belonging to a place whereas routes represent the mobile, unfixed, encounters, exchanges and the evolving sense of belonging that

reflect transnational connections and networks (ibid.). Further, as Clifford (1997) suggests that roots and routes are not necessarily opposed but rather 'intertwined', suggesting the importance of both migrant's sense of home and belonging (p. 4). Similarly, Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue that migrants construct homes by the relationship of both the mobile and located and engaging home-making processes and practices both locally and across transnational space. This resonates with the aims of this thesis which aims to examines the diverse, complex and intertwined ways that refugees carve out senses of belonging locally and transnationally. Further, as Blunt and Dowling (2006) emphasise that migration experiences are unique and so are the motivations to move, past experiences in the country of origin and settlement experiences in the new country, and therefore how migrants negotiate home is also bound to be different (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). This emphasis on how the diversity of migration and settlement experiences and motivations to move of refugees influences the negotiations and understandings of home and belonging locally and transnationally is also argued in this thesis. There is also a wealth of research which considers how migrants negotiate family and other intimate relationships are transnationally and this will be explored later in this chapter.

Geographies of family, friends and other intimacies

This section of the literature review focusses on the relational factors and spatiality of belonging. Particularly I draw on scholarship within geography and other related fields which attends to intimate relationships such as families, friendships and other significant relations. This thesis has a particular interest in how refugee families actively engage and 'do' family in different ways and how this difference unsettles normative and traditional ways of viewing the 'family'. Although my focus is on refugee and asylum-seeking families, at times in this section I engage with literature which deals with other groups because the ideas discussed allow me to address central questions in this thesis about of how belonging is negotiated.

In 2008, Valentine describes an 'absence presence' in family related research within geography (2008, p. 2097). She argues that most work tended to focus on 'intimate relations' particularly within geographies of sexuality, children and youth/young people geographies (ibid.). Within the context of family, she adds that geographic work focussed mostly on feminist research exploring complex moral and practical choices that women face to combine paid work and caring responsibilities in the domestic context (Pratt, 2003) and through transnational care

chains (Pratt, 1997; 1999; 2003 in Valentine, 2008). According to Valentine, this work has tended to examine the practical organisation of care rather than the emotional ties, the meaning and quality of relationships, and the 'doing' of intimacy within families (Valentine, 2008, p. 2101). Further, she argues that this absence has been particularly significant in attending at familial relationships beyond that of the child and parent, disregarding relationships between other extended family members (ibid, p. 2101). Yet, there has been a recent renewed interest in 'family studies' within geography. For instance, in recent years there has been new studies looking at family and other intimate relationships within care contexts (Bowlby, 2012; Pratt and Johnston, 2022), migration (Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Pratt, 2012) and austerity (Hall, 2019; Stenning, 2020)

Other fields like such as sociology and anthropology have had a longstanding interest in understanding kinship, and how people manage and practice intimacy, love, care and support within these and other contexts (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Carsten, 2003; Morgan, 2011). In these fields, there have been calls to decentre and expand the notions of the family beyond traditional heteronormative compositions. This scholarship considers other possible family structures and ways of negotiating support and relatedness and recognises that meaningful connections and support increasingly takes place beyond 'traditionally accepted family forms', for example, between parents who aren't living under the same roof or within other intimate relationships and communities (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004, p. 135).

Early examinations of 'family' within humanities and social sciences have been deeply rooted on the traditional model of the family (Aitken, 2009; Morgan, 2011). These notions of 'the standard family' generally referred to a heterosexual couple (married or cohabiting) and their children (ibid.). Early theorists, such as anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski or sociologist George Peter Murdock, referred to the 'conjugal family' or 'nuclear family' as a stable, natural and functional union of biological and social reproduction (Aitken, 2009). These earlier studies of the family tended to study other forms of families by framing them as 'alternative or deviant' and diverting from what was seen as the standard family model (Aitken, 2009; Morgan, 2011).

From a feminist perspective, 'family' has been in the cards of dialogue for a substantial amount of time viewing 'the family' as a conservative structure that preserves a patriarchal social

order. Oakley (1982) described the foundations of the traditional family structure as the 'cereal packet family', and considers how 'the family', as dominant structure, is a form societal control (ibid.). Feminist sociologists Thorne and Yalom (1992) contest the dominant model of the 'normal family' and argues that it disregards the diversity of family structures which exist in contemporary societies. Many attempts have been made to deconstruct the family unit and its gendered practices (Aitken, 1998; Jamieson et al, 2006; Morgan, 2011; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Aitken (1998) argues that our understanding of spatial relations within families is limited by myths that are far removed from the everyday lived experiences of family. Similarly, Morgan (2011) asserts how traditional models of family often fail to accommodate the diversity of familial structures, adding that whilst normative understandings of familial relations could accommodate 'deviations' such as cohabitation and re-constituted families (separation and re-partnering), it seemed unable to go beyond these, excluding other forms of family compositions such as other heterosexual relationships or gays and lesbians and their various living arrangements (p.4). Similarly, Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) argue that if we are to understand the current state (and future) of how people organize their intimate lives in modern societies, we need to decentre the 'family' and the heterosexual couple in our intellectual imaginaries beyond the 'family'. They argue that intimacy and care are increasingly moving beyond familial structures to within networks of friends (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Jamieson (2006) pushes this idea further by suggesting that the boundary between 'familial' and 'non-familial' relationships is increasingly blurred in everyday lives. He highlights that it could be described in terms of the elasticity and constant widening of the boundary of what constitutes 'family' as the constellations that people designated as 'familial' become increasingly diverse (ibid.). This research sits within this scholarship which challenges and critiques the normative understanding of 'the family'.

Anthropologist Carsten (2003) argues that the meaning of kinship has become increasingly stretched and blurred. Whereas traditional ways of understanding kinship described it as exclusively blood related or direct family, we are now seeing much more complex and new forms of kinship aided by technology and non-biological social ties. Carsten (2001) seeks to reframe kinship as 'the lived experience of relatedness'. According to Carsten (2003) this 'doing of kinship', can be seen in Malay culture where those who settle permanently and engage in the process of living with local people become part of 'the family' or for instance in gay communities who form 'chosen families' by 'doing'(ibid). Carsten (2003) argues that kindship

is increasingly being 'made' rather than 'given' and that the image of the perfect heterosexual family, as seen in earlier scholarship, was a mirage (2003).

In the similar way, sociologist Morgan (2011) draws additional attention to family practices. He argues that the 'doing of family' or viewing families through how and what they do together (family practices) seems to define better modern families than 'being a family' (the biological family we are born into) (Morgan, 2011). This shifts the understanding of 'family' as a unified structure towards families formed by activities which have a specific meaning to those individuals who perform it within that particular spatiality and temporality (see Finch, 2007). Morgan (2001) reflects on the contemporary tendency of using the word 'family' as an adjective as in 'family life', 'family processes', 'family events', 'family practices', and focusing on the activities that define family, moves us away from family as a relatively static structure or sets of determined relations. He situated family practices as being 'active', 'regular', 'fluid' and taking place in the 'everyday' (pp. 6-7). First, family practices are 'active' as they are made and remade through various activities, for example, 'mothering' or 'fathering'. Second, practices have a sense of the 'everyday' as families engage in everyday activities that the majority of population experience like parenting, sickness, bereavement and mundane activities (ibid.). The 'regularity' of these practices refers to the frequency of when these activities take place, for instance, daily, weekly, monthly, annually etc. Some of these regular activities might be shared by sections of the population (i.e. school runs) and some might be particular to that family unit (i.e. family rituals, jokes etc). Finally, 'fluidity' for Morgan (2011) refers to the boundaries of the family practices and the flexibility of these boundaries. For example, in the way that family practices merge and overlap with other practices such as gendered or work-related practices (i.e. commuting), but also in the sense of determining who is included and excluded in certain family activities (i.e. weddings, funerals, family gatherings, birthdays etc, which emphasises the fuzziness of the boundaries between family and non-family (2011). Finch (2007) echoes similar sentiments, suggesting that the boundaries that constitute family shift over time. She points out that for practices to be effective, they need to evoke a shared meaning to the individuals involved. Furthermore, she argues, that families 'display' their family relationships by showing to each other and others that 'certain of their actions do constitute doing family things and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family' relationships' (ibid., p. 67). As an example of the importance of 'display' in family relationships, Finch (2007) illustrates how a blood connection with a brother or a daughter exists even if the

relationship doesn't work, but there might be a sense that this individual is currently not in 'my family'. Hence the activity of 'display' is important in nurturing or developing family-like qualities in relationships. This framing of the family through the lens of 'doing' or 'family practices' is useful in this research as it helps to demonstrate the multiple forms of kinship that emerges within blood related relations and beyond due to the forced migration and family separation experience.

Friendship has surged as an area of study within geography only in recent years (Hall, 2018; Bowlby, 2011**;** Bunnell et al., 2012**;** Coakley, 2002). Previously most work on friendships has been mainly within the fields of sociology and anthropology**.** Sociologists have pointed out to the changes of family roles and dynamics, noting how 'intimacy' and 'care' emerged both within and outside context of the 'family' (Oliker, 1998; Pahl and Spencer, 2004; Smart, 2007; Weston,1991; Jamieson, 1998). This interest has been closely linked to research on relationality, personal life, social bonds and relatedness (Mason, 2004; Powell and D´epelteau, 2013; McCarthy, 2012 in Cronin, 2015). Sociologists Pahl and Spencer (2007) examine the role of friendships in modern societies. They explore the ways in which friends and friend-like ties often form a valuable and unrecognised site of social connection (ibid.). Pahl and Spencer (2007) point out that friendships might emerge within different spatialities, for instance, within biological family relationships with friend-like qualities, and beyond family setting in many other contexts. Pahl and Spencer (2007) discuss the importance of 'personal communities', a range of important relationships that constitute a network of support and intimacy for an individual. This can be very different from person to person and be composed of distinctive combinations of given and chosen ties (i.e. family, friendships, neighbours and professionals) (ibid.).

Within geography, Valentine (2008) urges the need for geographers to look at intimacies beyond the domestic sphere. Hall (2019) adds that 'intimacy and intimate relations are not necessarily bound by family and friendships' (p.777), they can emerge outside the family context. Bowlby (2011) suggests that friendship are relationships that can be entered and ended voluntarily and require a level of interdependency, reciprocity and emotional involvement. Vertovec (2004) adds that friendships require active, ongoing and necessarily reciprocal work. Bunnel et al (2012) explore the geographical dimension of friendships and examine how people maintain intimacy both at proximity and at distance. There is also a body

of literature which examines the gendered geographies of friendships, for instance, Holloway (1998) who examines how mothers gravitate towards friendships and social groups of a similar class and social characteristics and Valentine's (1993) who observed how lesbian women look for hints in dress or body language to determine whether other women share similarities with them.

There is a body of literature within social sciences that examines the notion of 'families of choice' or 'chosen families' which exists within friendship and other intimate relationships particularly in lesbian and gay communities (Weston, 1991; Weeks et al., 2001). For instance, Weston (1991) points out the creativity of gay communities in transforming friendship ties into kinship ties. Some gay communities create new families because of being rejected or estranged from their biological family (ibid.). She argues that these ties are at times unmappable and compares them to that of sisterhoods, brotherhoods or cousinhoods which exists within white working class, African American and American Indian communities (Weston, 1991). These other forms of kinship or kin-like relationships might have regular routines and practices and might be constituted of friends, former lovers or other people who are simple 'there for you' (Weston, 1991). Similarly, Wilkinson (2014) explores the ways in which single people construct intimacy beyond traditional familial structures and outside of heteronormative couple structures through friendships and other intimacies. She argues that single people 'create new forms of home and new spaces of at-homeness with those with whom they are not biologically (or romantically) related' (2014, p. 2453). Literature suggests that this 'crafting' or 'doing' of family and kinship through friendships is a vital form of intimacy for those whose lives don't fit neatly into normative forms of familyhood for instance in gay groups (Weston, 1991; Nardi, 1999; Weinstock and Rothblum, 1996), migrant and transnational communities (Bunnel, 2010; Bunnel et al, 2012; Conradson and Latham, 2005), working-class families affected by poverty and the effects of austerity (Hall, 2019) or within care settings (Baldassar et al, 2017, Pratt and Johnston, 2022; Millighan and Wiles, 2010). Finally, there is also literature that attends to the role of friendships within geographies of childhood (Neal and Vincent, 2013), cultural differences (Askins, 2015), the spatialities of crafting (Hall and Jayne, 2016) and which explores how animals are often classed as part of family (Nast, 2006; Hall, 2019).

Migrant and refugee families and other intimacies

This research is interested in how refugees and asylum seekers negotiate and organise their family life both in Tyneside and across borders. Refugee family lives are affected by separation from loved ones due to stringent family reunification policies, and other types of bureaucratic violence and settlement challenges. One area that has received much attention within scholarship concern with family migration in geography has been the transnational familial relations of migrant workers (Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Pratt, 2012; Parreñas; 2005; Waters, 2002). Geographers have paid much attention to the complex spatial lives of migrant families. Valentine (2008) defines transnational families as families that are physically divided between different nation-states, but which maintain close contact. Parreñas (2005), Pratt (2012) and Hochschild (2000) illuminate the many emotional challenges of family separation that mothers, and their children, experience by living in separation as they work caring for other family's children or elderly individuals abroad. Writing in regard to Filipina labour migrants, Parreñas (2005) emphasises the emotionally wrenching experiences of transnational mothering, detailing how the children of these workers often yearn to be nurtured by their mothers. Hochschild (2000) uses the term 'global care chain' to describe the transfer from the Global South into the Global North, a system in which the children of migrant workers are being left behind in the care of other family members. Similarly, Bloch (2017) examines how children who are 'left behind' are cared for. She illustrates this by presenting a range of case studies which highlight the arrangements that Moldovan migrant women use to ensure their children have adequately cared for whilst they work abroad (ibid.). One distinctive practice that is notable is 'other mothering', which refers to the various people, who are not always biologically related to the children, 'doing' caregiving whilst the mothers work away from home (Bloch, 2017). Bloch (2017) emphasises how other mothering practices encountered in Moldova involves many different layers of caring and nurturing provided by multiple actors including parents, grandparents, extended kin but also state-sponsored spaces like preschools and day-care centres. She explains that although transnational caregiving highlighted multiple forms of hardship and practical strains, the Moldovan migrant workers rarely mentioned that they missed or felt guilty about leaving their children with other caregivers, suggesting a wider set of socio-cultural mothering practices and norms (ibid.). Bloch (2017) argues for nuance in understanding care situated in migrant families, with mothering and family structures situated in different norms and cultural expectations. In Bloch's case, the reproduction of family separation that Moldovan women experienced throughout their lives has normalised 'other

mothering' practices. This research offers insights into the diversity of experiences of transnational mothering and highlights the importance of avoiding universal frameworks concerning the experience of motherhood and care practices. In a similar way, Waters (2002) examines the strategies of 'astronaut family', where Hong Kong and Taiwanese migrant professionals (typically males) pursue their careers in Asia, while their wife and children are relocated overseas in immigrant gateway cities such as Vancouver, Sydney and Auckland.

Extensive literature has examined how migrants negotiate familial relations and intimacy from afar. Baltassar (2008) attends to how Italian migrants living in Australia communicate with their ageing parents living in Italy. She documents how these families constructed co-presence to reinforce family closeness in 4 main ways*: virtual co-presence* (through communication technology i.e. phone calls, SMS), *co-presence by proxy* (objects and people whose physical presence embodies the spirit of the longed-for absent person or place), *physical co-presence* (bodily present with the longed for person or in the longed for place) and *imagined co-presence* (for example through praying or through letters and postcards). In later research, Baltassar and Wilding (2020) examine the central role of digital technologies in the maintenance of transnational relationships via Skype calls, WeChat and WhatsApp. They describe this work as 'digital kinning' (2020). Further, Baltassar (2016) discusses how the development of ICTs has enabled transnational families to control when and how they care across distance and to be in touch in real time. Wilding (2006) supports this argument by stating that the main strength in ICTs is its ability to transcend time and space, helping transnational families to feel connectedness and intimacy. Wilding (2006) also discusses the importance of family routines and rituals to nurture and to continuously work on the family relationships and sense of belonging to the family (i.e. the Sunday phone call, the daily text message, birthday gifts etc), as well as providing the foundations of ongoing exchanges of support and care (2006). Yet, Wilding (2006) also points out that for the families in her research, ICTs provide an addition to family practices, they do not replace them. ICTs can enable and supplement the continuation of existing family practices, but physical presence remains the preferable method of communication for these families and this is even more visible at time of family crisis. Similarly, Greenberg and Neustaedter's (2013) research examines the use of video technology and chat within long distance relationships. Their research revealed that couples using this technology tended to 'hang out' with each other, often leaving the video link going, in both locations for extended periods of time as a way of

simply feeling the presence, sharing a variety of activities together and being involved remotely in their partner's day-to-day life (ibid.). Parreñas (2005) also discusses how migrant mothers regularly call their children in the Philippines at least once a week. The separated families are very open about their love and affection and regularly encourage their children to call or email if they are in need of love or guidance. She argues that 'being there' and available facilitates family intimacy across borders (ibid.). Further, Parreñas (2005) brings to light some of the challenges that some of these mother's face in nurturing intimacy, for example, some families lack the resources or access to technology to maintain regular communication. Hence, the technological revolution in communication has not benefited transnational migrant families uniformly (ibid.).

There is scholarship that attends to other important ways of 'doing' of family transnationally. Zharkevich (2019) pays attention to the role of remittances and money in constituting affective relations within the context of transnational migration of Nepalese families. She argues that transnational families in Nepal maintain cohesiveness on condition that there is a flow of remittances and that the flow of money determines how thick "blood" is or how strong those affective ties are. There is also research that attends to the historical accounts of Filipino migrant workers and their families in the 1970s and the ways that they maintained intimacy and kinship with loved ones through crafting love letters and recording cassettes (Madianou and Miller, 2011).

Although refugee families share many similar characteristics and experiences with other transnational migrant families, their enforced migration and precarious condition of their status often means that these families face specific challenges which are different from other transnational migrants (Robertson et al, 2016; Atwell et al, 2009). Refugees' experience of family can often be very distinct given insurmountable separation from family members, impossibility of return, and various challenges to family reunification such as restrictive immigration policies (ibid.). Within geography, the refugee family experiences have perhaps received less attention than the experiences of other transnational migrants (Kallio and Hakli, 2019; Robertson et al, 2016; Coddington and Williams, 2022), yet in other fields there is more engagement. Furthermore, recently, Van Liempt and Miellet (2020) have called for future research to 'examine the complexities of transnational connections within the context of refugee resettlement' and to examine how refugees are reconnecting with friends and family

from abroad as part of homemaking processes (p.2395). Robertson et al (2016) describe the range of challenges that affect the regular contact between refugee family members, including the high cost of travel, immigration restrictions, lack or uneven access and cost of communication technologies and time zones differences (ibid.). The authors also suggest other challenges limiting the contact of family members living in refugee camps or conflict zones, for instance, risks or fears associated with being in contact with family abroad and breakdowns in family ties due to being unable to fulfil expectations from family members such as demands from financial support (Lindley, 2009; Akuei, 2005; Glazebrook 2004; Leung, 2011 in Robertson et al, 2016). Roberston et al (2016) explain that some of these unique challenges that affect refugee families means that they have not been able to take full advantage from the advances in communication technology in the same way as other transnational families. Yet, the authors point out that refugee families who can't maintain regular communication are nonetheless finding new and innovative ways to stay connected with loved ones overseas (ibid.). For instance, refugees use digital imagery to compose and create various imagined scenes and scenarios with family members, which are kept as private objects or are circulated and uploaded in social media platforms (ibid.). Others send packages or letters to immediate and extended family members even to places that are impossible to reach by post using transnational networks or by making use of connections in churches and their congregations (Robertson et al, 2016). Despite the challenges with accessing and affording different communication technologies, there is a growing number of studies which documents how refugees are increasingly using technologies to mediate co-presence with loved ones abroad, to stay in touch with wider networks and to access services in new countries (see also Leurs, 2019; Alencar, 2020; Diminescu, 2020).

There is also scholarship which is concerned with family separation and the exclusionary state tactics that affects and denies refugee families the right to family life. For instance, Coddington and Williams (2022) who refer to these family related bordering strategies as 'relational enforcement' (p. 590). Phillimore et al (2023) who suggest that the main systemic challenges in relation to family separation are associated with the tension between how refugees understand family and the way that policies define family, as well as the conditions and timescales attached to family related policies (e.g. the costs of family reunion, bureaucratic barriers, the long waiting associated with family reunification and the narrow definitions of family within these policies) (ibid). Similarly, Kallio and Hakli (2019) argue that more attention

needs to be given to the existing familial relations of refugees in all interactions with refugees. Their study explores the familial lives and challenges of asylum seekers and refugee families in Finland and the tensions that exist with current state policies and support (ibid.). Some studies also document how family separation and worries about families abroad affect the mental wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers and how this had considerable negative impacts on the settlement of refugees (Nickerson et al, 2010; Wilmsen, 2016).

There is a body of research which is concerned with the experiences and challenges of refugee families as they settle together in a new country. For instance, McCleary (2017) observed that for many Karen refugee families settling together it was beneficial to have family to rely on during settlement in the United States. Yet, the stresses of adapting to the new life, particularly during the first year were also overwhelming and stressful affecting familial relationships. Similarly, McMichael et al (2010) highlight that having families around during settlement supported the wellbeing of young refugees in Melbourne but the changing family dynamics that emerged during the period of readaptation also negatively affected their wellbeing and settlement. Several studies also explore the challenges that refugee parents encounter when bringing children whilst settling in a new country (Deng and Marlowe, 2013; Atwell et al, 2009; Huang and Lam, 2022; Eltanamly et al, 2022). For instance, Deng and Marlowe (2013) discuss the changing family dynamics of South Sudanese families settling in New Zealand and how parenting children was influenced by language barriers, shifts in gender roles and cultural differences. Atwell et al (2009) explore tensions that emerge between parents and their children with different expectations and visions in relation to their children's futures.

There is limited geographic scholarship on the role that friendships and 'chosen families' have in the lives of refugee and this research contributes to this growing area of literature. Yet, there is some research which focussed on understanding this type of relationships. For instance, Verdasco (2020) explores how young unaccompanied refugees living together in an asylum centre in Denmark construct strong ties and relatedness which helps them navigate complex and uncertain situations. She explains that these ties are described as friendships or kinship and are developed through daily routines and rituals (Verdasco, 2020). Some scholars examined the friendships and close relationships which refugees developed through community organisations or charities. For example, Tilbury (2007), explores the language of family used (such as mother, child) to define the relationship between advocates from

organisations and the refugees they are helping to settle. Askins (2015; 2016) discuss how the friendly relations between refugees and their befrienders from a charity in the North East of England supports them to make emotional connections and bonds that can help refugees feel a sense of belonging. Similarly, Darling (2011) observed how the welcoming and caring atmosphere at a drop-in centre in Sheffield helped refugees to make friendships sustained through routines and proximity helping them 'feel at home'. And finally, Frazer (2020) explores how the geographies of care that emerge through organisationally mediated encounters between new arrivals and more settled city residents in Wattle City, Australia can lead to friendships and kin-like relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature to situate this research within wider academic context and offer a theoretical framework for this thesis. I began by situating and defining the concept of belonging amongst the extensive literature that has engaged with the concept. Particularly, I emphasized that Antonsich's (2010) framework of belonging has been central to the framing of this thesis as it addresses both the personal and intimate aspects, as well as the socio-political aspects of belonging which shape refugee experiences. His frame offers a structure to distinguish the interconnected spatialities of belonging (i.e. the intimate, biographical, social, political and institutional) which are useful in my research. Although Antonsich's (2010) frame is useful, I argue that it doesn't offer analytical tools to deeply analyse the individual spatialities where belonging is shaped. I also indicated that the work of Wright (2015) on belonging has been valuable in this thesis as it draws attention to the performative and processual aspects of belonging. My research contributes to these debates on belonging by offering a nuanced account of the lived and personal experiences of belonging of refugees by zooming in different spatialities where belonging unfolds (home, intimacy, community and public spaces). This adds to a growing scholarship concerned with how belonging and homemaking is felt, experienced and negotiated by refugees.

I then explored specific spatialities of belonging that this thesis is concerned with and I engaged with other theoretical concepts which help unfolding how belonging takes shape both at personal and intimate, as well as socio-political level. First, I focussed on the socio-political aspects of belonging which entail the experiences of belonging of refugees. I reviewed

literature which studies how states exclude refugees and asylum seekers, as well as movements and organising which welcomes them. I argued that the geographic literature on encounters offers a useful theoretical frame to explore the ways that everyday conviviality and interactions in public spaces and within community settings frame feelings of belonging and exclusion or inclusion. My research engages with this scholarship and indicates that the socio-political context and encounters in neighbourhoods and public spaces, are important and matter in shaping refugee families' feelings of belonging. This research also contributes to geographies of encounter by suggesting that certain approaches and practices which take place within community spaces are vital for hopeful interactions between communities and which can heal and promote a sense of belonging.

I then explored the more personal and intimate spatialities of belonging. I indicated that scholarship which theorises the concept of home and transnationalism has been valuable for exploring how refugees and asylum seekers who took part in this research carved out senses of home locally and transnationally. In this section, I have drawn attention to the active 'doing' of home by reviewing various scholar's work which explore how migrants and refugees actively engage in homemaking practices. I discussed Boccagni's (2022) concept of 'homing' which invites to approach home as 'becoming' and emergent and Van Liempt's (2023) work which explores how refugees emplace themselves in the new city. This research contributes to this recent and growing body of literature which examines the diverse home-making tactics that refugees use to carve out a sense of home within dwellings and that emerges beyond these spaces locally and transnationally. Further, this thesis adds that some of the tactics that refugees (and their supporters) engage in as they settle could also be framed as emergent acts of resistance (see Hughes, 2016, 2020).

In the final section of this review l focussed on geographies of family and kinship to explore the relational and intimate aspects of belonging. I explored literature which claims that boundaries of family are becoming increasingly blurred and call for extended notions of kin (Aitken, 1998; Jamieson et al, 2006; Morgan, 2011; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). I argued that Morgan's (2010) concept of 'doing' of family is useful for this thesis as it brings out the diverse modes of intimacy which is performed and practiced in the context of forced migration. In this thesis I contribute to this scholarship by exploring how refugees negotiate family both locally and transnationally, an area that has received less attention within geography. I contribute to

this debate by exploring how refugees navigate and maintain relationships with loved ones transnationally, by attending to the significance of 'chosen families' which emerge from friendships locally in Tyneside and by examining how refugee families who live together in Tyneside adapt their ways of 'doing' family to navigate their new life together in challenging circumstances. Therefore, this research contributes to scholarship on family which calls for extended notions of kin and a reframing of the 'family' to include other forms of intimacy beyond heteronormative relations.

Conceptually this chapter has offered a new frame to examine the lives of refugee families and understand how they are negotiating belonging within the spatialities of home, community and intimacy. I combined concepts of belonging, particularly Antonsich (2010) framework of belonging, with ideas from other areas of scholarships such as geographies of home, transnationalism, encounters, bordering, welcome, resistance, kinship and family. I therefore propose a dynamic conceptual framework which connects a variety of theories and enables to tell a fuller story of the ways that refugee families negotiate belonging within various spatialities.

Chapter 3: Methodological journey

Introduction

My journey into the field began in Tyneside during a sunny afternoon in June 2021 in refugee week. After a several long years of being in relative social confinement due to the Coronavirus pandemic, restrictions started to ease, and a range of social opportunities began to emerge. Although many PhD colleagues, where able to adapt their methodologies to online platforms, I decided, based on previous experiences of working in the refugee sector, that online engagement would not be suitable for the type of research I envisaged. Hence, I decided to delay my engagement in the field for as long as possible hoping that as lockdown restrictions would ease up, it would be possible to arrange face-to-face activities with refugees and their families. Around the time that I was able to start contacting organisations to explore partnerships, many refugee charities where prioritising resuming their face-to-face services following the extensive burden that they experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the case with my initial collaborative partner who due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic couldn't commit to support my research in the same capacity any longer.

I decided to explore new collaborations with local charities. My first encounter with the field was at a refugee week an event organised by the Comfrey Project in Gateshead. I cycled from Newcastle to hilly Bensham, feeling rather apprehensive and nervous about getting physically close to other humans and speaking to others about my research project. Those anxieties were put at ease as I was welcomed by Talib a Comfrey volunteer originally from Turkey. He took me inside the Comfrey Project's centre and explained that there was a temporary exhibition displaying cartoons and illustrations related to issues affecting refugees. The poignant illustrations were a great introduction to the political narratives around migration and the everyday challenges faced by refugees who flee their homes and embark in dangerous journeys to come to Europe to seek sanctuary, in a place where they face further discriminations and exclusions.

Figure 2. Cartoon by Pavel Konstantin from Romania, “Refugees” competition (Kimse Yok Mu Foundation)

Exiting the exhibition hall was juxtaposed with a very different side of the refugee settlement experience. People were laughing and body language was welcoming. The atmosphere felt kind, compassionate and respectful, I joined a storytelling workshop and then I went for a walk to explore the gardens and allotments. A Comfrey project volunteer (all those who engage in some manner in the project are called volunteers) was watering the garden. We exchanged a few words; he was keen to talk but language was a barrier. Still, we smiled and found common ground in nature. What a wonderful place, a little sanctuary in the middle of a noisy city. I met some staff from the project and exchanged contacts with the hope that I could volunteer there too. I was excited. I found my place.

As I was leaving, I exchanged a few words with Talib, I told him about my project, and he told me about his situation. He is seeking asylum here and his family is abroad. He explained that he hopes to bring them here one day if he gets status. He said he would be interested in being interviewed. I felt very excited of the potential opportunities ahead. Keys were in my hand, and I felt hopeful that doors were opening.

The extract above is a reflection which was written in June 2021 as I was starting to make sense about how my fieldwork could develop within the uncertain period of the Covid-19 pandemic. It conveys the feelings and considerations I was facing and my initial thoughts on

arriving and connecting with the Comfrey project, which would develop into a vital partner for this work. I ended up volunteering with Comfrey for a year, a period of time in which I developed many close relationships with project volunteers and staff.

In this chapter I reflect on my fieldwork journey which emerged in a participatory and relational community-based collaboration with the Comfrey Project. This research involved a slow and interactive engagement with Comfrey, and it is from this process and my time volunteering there that the opportunity opened for a community-based ethnographic engagement with the project, narrative interviews, and a participatory photography project. This chapter enters in conversation with and draws from the important geographic work calling for more attention to the ethics, process and outcomes of research (Kindon et al, 2007), as well a 'relationship-centred perspective on geographical ethics' (Blazek and Askins, 2019). It also draws on the work of academics who have made significant methodological contributions in refugee scholarship. For example, the work of O'Neill (2007) who advocates for 'renewed methodologies for conducting ethnographic research with asylum seekers and refugee groups in the UK' (p. 72). She proposes that 'ethno-mimesis', a combination of ethnography combined with participatory and 'feeling forms' - arts based or life story narrative approaches, have the potential to 'counter negative stereotypes in the public imagination and facilitate the production of refugee and asylum seekers' self-re-presentations of lived experiences and complex lives' (ibid, p. 72).

How we work with refugees matters in our research. There continues to be sustained calls for the greater visibility and recognition of voices so often ignored, silenced, misrepresented and othered. Such calls have been made loudly by feminist and activist scholars, many of whom argue the need for participatory and decolonising methodologies which not only invite and facilitate self-representation, but offer a means through which to understand more fully the lived complexities and intimacies of participant's lives (see Nagar, 2019; Mohanty, 2002; Tadiar, 2015). This chapter engages with this scholarship by reflecting on the complex ethical and practical considerations, challenges, entanglements and benefits that emerged in this collaborative ethnographic research. A research project that aimed to be less extractive, collaborative and ethical both in its processes and outcomes. This approach with refugees and asylum seekers is important as it disrupts traditional research methodologies where individuals are studied, have little engagement in the research process, knowledge production

and the power between the researcher and 'the researched' tend to be more hierarchical. This is particularly important as the voices of refugees and asylum seekers are rarely acknowledged and valued. This chapter reflects on how this research project worked with narratives through interviews and the participatory photography (photovoice) to invite more nuanced, personal and intimate self-representations of refugee's complex lived experiences. As well as how these methodologies offered opportunities for participants to explore and voice their stories, identities and the realities of seeking sanctuary in Tyneside. By offering an insightful account of the messiness, challenges, entanglements and benefits that emerged in this fieldwork collaboration, this chapter complicates and adds depth to those making calls for more democratic and collaborative modes of scholarship.

The first part of this chapter narrates the foundations of this complex methodological journey. I start by exploring the setting up and nature of the collaboration with the Comfrey Project before providing a synopsis of the methodological design. This includes an outline of the fieldwork methodology, reflection on my positionality and history, as well as the recruitment, demography and engagement of participants in the project, key ethical considerations and methods of recording, data analysis and writing.

The second part of this chapter offers a reflective discussion to highlight the complexities, ethics and values of this methodological approach. I consider the role of volunteer-researcher within a community-based ethnographic setting. I also examine how I worked with narratives and stories through interviews focussed on the narrator's voices and the 'Belonging project' – the participatory photography aspect of the project.

Collaboration with the Comfrey Project

Following my first encounter with the Comfrey Project during refugee week 2021, I was able to arrange a meeting with the Director of the project to explore possibilities of collaborating. The Comfrey Project and the Curious Monkey Theatre Company which provides cultural and arts activities in Tyneside were of particular interest for many reasons. Firstly, in my previous engagement in the refugee sector, I heard countless accounts about the engaging and meaningful work of the Comfrey Project and the Curious Monkey Theatre Company. Secondly, the Comfrey Project was very active during the pandemic and the charity's work

outdoors was particularly helpful as lockdown measures started to ease, it meant I could engage in their online and outdoor activities quite quickly and get to know individuals from the start of the fieldwork. Further, my early impressions about the aims, objectives and approaches of the Comfrey Project were very positive and seem to align with the aims of my research focus. Initially, my plan was to spend a year working with a local organisation as a volunteer and researcher, where I could offer my skills and experience as a community practitioner and researcher. This seemed a valuable means through which to connect my work to local organising and to a build relationship with communities who are seeking sanctuary in Tyneside.

The Comfrey Project provides a safe, welcoming place for people who have fled conflict and persecution and are settling in the Tyne and Wear region. These activities are aimed at improving the physical and mental wellbeing of refugees and developing their skills and connections (Comfrey Project, 2023). The organisation's approach is to use horticulture and cultural activities as way of helping their volunteers (all those who use and are active in the service) feel at home and play an active role in the project (Comfrey Project, 2023).

Figure 3. Images from the Comfrey Project (By Melisa Maida)

The Comfrey Project's Director, Eleni Venaki, reflects on the approach that the organisation uses to support volunteers to develop a sense of belonging and home:

I think openness and sharing and giving people responsibility. The language we use, for example, we call people volunteers and not service users. That is intentional, that is to reinforce that sense of ownership, community and belonging.

My time at the Comfrey project began in July 2021 and ended in July 2022. To navigate the ethics of my dual role as a researcher and volunteer, I was open about my research in conversations with Comfrey volunteers. Initially, I spent a few weeks visiting Comfrey's 3 gardening sites and various activities in Gateshead and Newcastle. During the summer holidays from mid-July, I volunteered two days a week supporting the family sessions designed for refugee and asylum seeking families to experience various activities, meet others and to share a warm meal during the summer holidays when children are off school.

Figure 4. Images from the Comfrey Project (By Melisa Maida)

From September 2021 to July 2022, I started to attend a weekly session that offered opportunities to experience cultural and creative activities, and to share skills. The sessions were usually facilitated by either a volunteer with lived experience of seeking asylum, volunteers from other backgrounds and external partnering organisations. I took an active role as a volunteer in these sessions and as time went by, a close relationship was established with individuals who attended regularly. My role was to support the running of these sessions and I was involved in many different tasks like facilitating activities or supporting others, welcoming new attendees, cleaning or organising the centre, cooking, making drinks and lots of chatting. I didn't start actively recruiting for interviews until October 2021. This was an intentional decision, as I really wanted time to get to know Comfrey members and to develop relationships through informal conversations. Time to develop trust by just being regularly there, letting natural conversations and interactions flow, listening, valuing individuals and

detaching myself from research goals for a while was important as a base to build genuine reciprocal relationships with volunteers and staff. This was informed by my experience of working in the charity sector with refugee and other vulnerable communities who might have experienced various traumas in their life and trust building was always the base of any meaningful work (see also Huizinga et al, 2022; Linn, 2021; Seedat et al, 2004). Similarly, Huizinga et al (2022) reflect on their research with young refugees in Brussels, Amsterdam, Leipzig and Newcastle upon Tyne. The authors offer practical insights of what challenges they encountered in the field and how through collaborative methodologies and trust building they navigated through some of the complexities of working with vulnerable young refugees.

In September 2021, I supported the Comfrey Project by organising 4 focus groups attended by 30 volunteers which were aimed at evaluating the project and to examine the needs of the local refugee community. The main objective of these focus groups was to support Comfrey Project's strategic planning, but it was agreed that I could use the data from these focus groups in my research project (if participants consented). Although, information sheets where shared and consent forms for my project were signed by participants, I later decided not to use this material as I felt the dual aim of the focus groups could have been somehow confusing to some of the participants and it wasn't clear if everyone understood how the information would be used later. However, the focus groups, data analysis and report produced for Comfrey exemplify some of the possibilities of collaboration and action research. Further, the conversations and discussions that came out of the focus groups gave me initial insights into the experiences of local refugees and this helped to shape the direction of my PhD fieldwork. I was also able to ask individuals if they were interested in participating in semi-structured interviews. Around 20 individuals expressed interest in taking part in the research and many of this ended up engaging in the project at later stage. From March 2022 – June 2022, I organised and facilitated a photovoice project as a part of the regular Comfrey session (see more on this later in this chapter). The photovoice project would involve a visit to the Discovery Museum where the photographic work of some participants was exhibited. My involvement with Comfrey in this volunteering capacity concluded in July 2022, however, I am now involved in the project as Trustee.

Before delving deeper into further reflecting on this deep collaborative work with the Comfrey Project and their volunteers (participants). I will provide a synopsis of the methodological design and foundations of this project.

Negotiating Belonging project methodological synopsis and foundations

The aim of this research has been to explore the negotiations of belonging and home of refugee and asylum-seeking families across multiple spatialities (local/transnational) and relationships. Similarly, to Schiller et al (2008), this research looks beyond ethnicity as a unit of analysis, recognising the diversity of experiences that exist within ethnic groups; instead, it focusses on a specific locality, in this instance, Tyneside. This thesis reflects on how this locality and other transnational spaces, relationships and practices shape the experiences of belonging of refugee families. In this research, the term family is understood in a wider contemporary sense, recognising the multiple forms and diversity of maintaining intimacy and care and the 'doing' family beyond heteronormative traditional forms (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Carsten, 2003). This might include transnational families or families who experience(d) separation, single parents, 'extended families', 'family like relationships' or 'fictive kins' and many more as self-determined by the participants. Although there have been some research parameters, mostly around the locality of where refugees and asylum seekers who were involved resided at the time of their engagement in the research, the constitution of the 'field' is understood as something that cannot be easily 'cordoned off' (Hyndman, 2001, p.263). In other words, the spatiality and historiography of the 'field' are often fluid, relational and messy and this research acknowledges this messiness.

This research used a mixed qualitative methodology. The fieldwork took place from March 2021 – August 2022. Firstly, I used community-based ethnographic observations working as a volunteer in local charity Comfrey Project from June 2021 – July 2022. I opted to record reflections through a voice diary into my phone rather than a written diary. After each attending sessions I would find a spot in the Comfrey Projects gardens or nearby park to record and think through observations and interesting happenings. Secondly, I interviewed 32 refugees and asylum seekers and 14 practitioners who work in various projects the refugee sector in Tyneside. And finally, I facilitated a participatory photography project (photovoice)

which resulted in two photographic exhibitions. The first took at place at the Comfrey Project during refugee week (June 2022) and the second one at the Discovery Museum launched in refugee week (June 2022) and which it is still ongoing. During this timeframe, I also attended various refugee related meetings and events which helped me get a sense of what was going on in the sector. The map below illustrates this fieldwork journey (Figure 5).

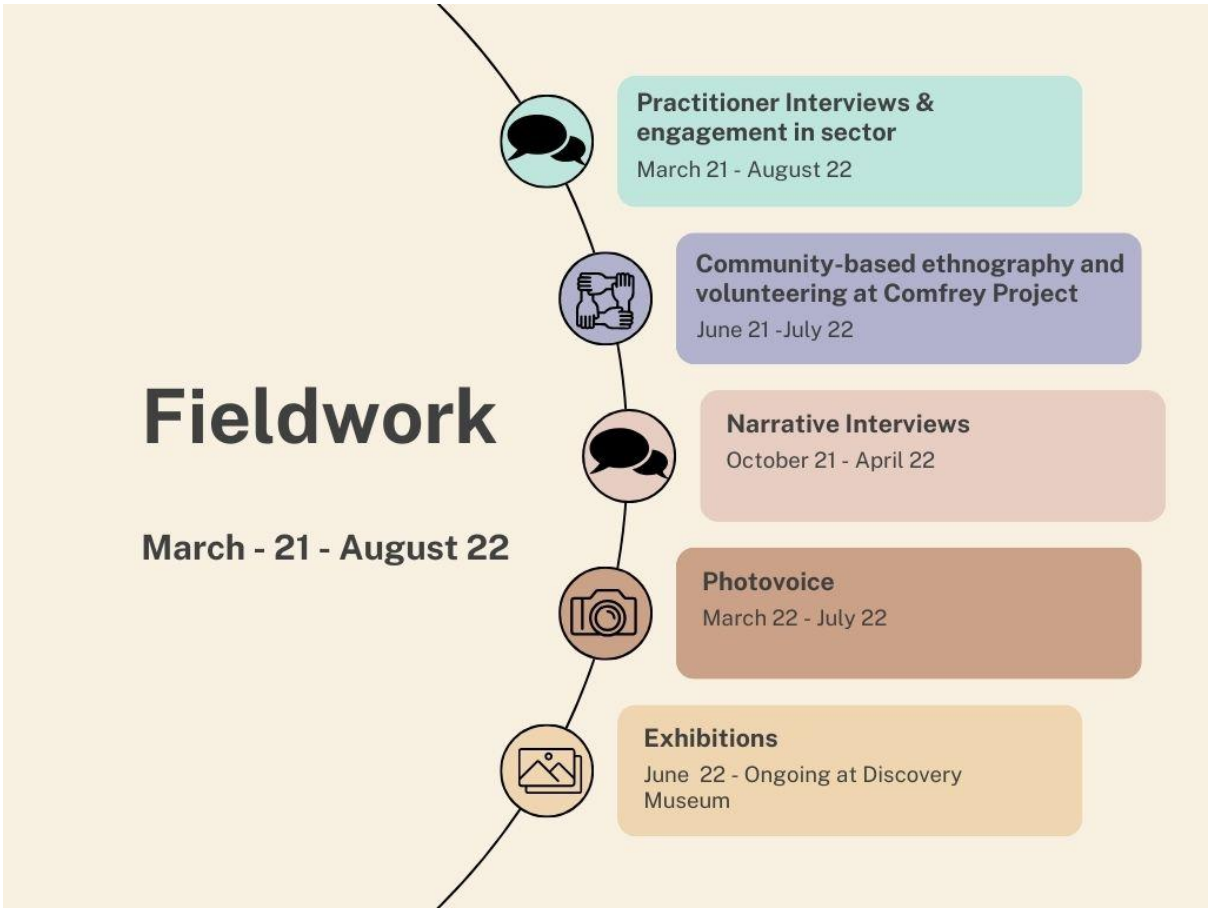

Figure 5. Fieldwork Map

Methodologically, this research stems from a feminist and participatory practice and politics. As such this research's principles and methods were crafted carefully to give opportunities for the standpoints of those who have experience of seeking sanctuary and rebuilding their lives in Tyneside to be valued as sites of knowledge (Ackerly and True, 2010). Particularly, this research is interested in understanding the intimate, personal and subjective feelings meanings and insights of those with 'lived experience' following feminist theorising (Pratt and Rosner, 2012). Feminist theories have a long tradition of action-oriented research, often anchored in scholarship hoping to bring about social change and bringing to light oppressions (Moss, 2001; Reinharz and Davidman, 1992; Ackerly and True, 2010). These are aims that are

also of value in the methodological and ethical approach of this research. For instance, this research uses participatory photography methods offering opportunities to those involved in the research to self-represent their stories from their own standpoint and then exhibiting their work to wider audiences as a way of bringing to light alternative narratives on asylum and migration.

This research was also informed by a participatory ethical stand 'wherein those conventionally researched are directly involved in some or all stages of research', there is a sense of shared ownership of the research, and the research is geared towards action (beyond academic outputs), hence 'offering opportunities for more emancipatory and empowering geographies (Pain and Kindon, 2007, p. 2807). In this research I made a conscious effort try to minimise power hierarchies between myself, the researcher, and research participants by using collaborative methodologies and alternative pathways to knowing. For instance, by using community based, participatory, multi-sited engaging and creative methods but also in the way that I approached building relationships and collaborations with participants and partner organisations (Harding and Norberg, 2005). One of the ambitions of this research has been to create opportunities for refugees to produce their own self-representation and to foster a sense partnership and collaboration where this was possible i.e. within the interview space, collaborative relationship and volunteering with the Comfrey Project, community-based ethnography and within the participatory photography project. Therefore, this research roots itself within a participatory, collaborative and emancipatory frame in aspects of the project, where this was practical and manageable.

This methodological brief would not be completed without acknowledging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As my PhD research was funded for 3.5 years to include research training of the first 6-8 months from October 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic affected and delayed the planning and start of my fieldwork from February 2019 to July 2021, when all the restrictions were finally lifted. As a mum of a young child, I experienced multiple challenges and disruptions during the period of the pandemic such as school closures, multiple lockdowns and restrictions, issues with childcare, periods of isolation due to sickness and due to being in close contact with individuals with COVID-19 and all of this severely affected my research, particularly my fieldwork engagement with was substantially delayed. I have made efforts to readjust the research to fit this limiting and uncertain circumstances as well as the practical

and emotional aftereffects that the pandemic had on myself, (potential) participants and organisations in the sector. These delays and disruptions were acknowledged in all APRs, and I was granted with extra funding from my ERSC. Yet, for me the pandemic has left me with a constant feeling that I am always trying to catch up and behind.

Positionality: coming from somewhere

Before delving deeper into my fieldwork, I want to offer an insight into my story and what lenses, beliefs and approaches I brought along with me to this research. According to feminist methodological scholarship, it is not possible for research to be objective or value free, therefore, the researcher needs to be aware and reflective of their own positionality (i.e. cultural and social position, beliefs, identity) and situatedness (our socio-cultural context and how others might perceive us) throughout the research project as this can affect the research process (Ackerly and True, 2010, pp. 48-52). England (1994) argues 'that the researcher's positionality and biography directly affect fieldwork and that fieldwork is a dialogical process which is structured by the researcher and the participants' (p. 80). In what follows I offer a reflexive account into how my own history, past professional experiences and personal and influences and approaches affected the methodological approaches and practices within the fieldwork.

Migration has played an important role in my life. It has contributed to the many layers and complex entanglements of my identity and meanings of home. I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. My mum was born in Czechoslovakia and settled in Argentina. She couldn't return home for over 20 years because of the communist regime there, so she made her new home in Buenos Aires. My dad was born in Argentina, both his mother and father were Italian immigrants from Southern Italy who moved to Argentina after WWI. My dad was proud of his Italian and Argentinian heritage. He never lived anywhere else than Argentina.

As a child, I remember feeling different and being interested and curious about difference. The complexity of my heritage and entanglements with migration made me consider my own feelings of belonging and identity early in my childhood. The messiness of my feelings of home and belonging became even more complex when at the age of 15, I moved with my mum to Czech Republic, and I experienced resettling in a new country, which had just come out of communism and had very little experience of multiculturalism and migration, particularly

from countries outside the Eastern Bloc. It was a culture shock for me. I experienced the trial and error of a range of resettlement techniques. Looking back, that was an experience that helped me shape the understanding of my identity and began the journey of my interest in belonging, resettlement and integration. I later moved with my family to Scotland, and then to Newcastle to do my first degree. I stayed here, in Newcastle, for over 20 years to meet an inner desire to root somewhere, making my own home within my family, friendships, my community and spaces that are important to me.

Figure 6. Self-reflections of my meanings of home - River Tyne resembling Tigre, Buenos Aires and my garden which connects me with my heritage and my present (By Melisa Maida)

Inspired by own experience of migration, after completing my first degree, I worked in the charity sector supporting newly arrived communities who were seeking sanctuary and were dispersed to the North East of England. Through this work, both within refugee and later in homelessness sector, I developed various projects aimed at bridging communities and supporting individuals to progress with their own development. This professional experience, my own heritage and history had a strong influence in my continuing interest in migration, belonging and resettlement and in my desire to pursue this PhD. My parent's experiences of displacement and homemaking experienced in our everyday family life throughout my childhood form part of my history and heritage. Furthermore, my own experiences of messiness and confusion in relation to my feelings of home and belonging, following migrating and later work in the field, have undoubtedly had an effect in my fieldwork beliefs and approaches and the relationships with participants and organisations within it. Whilst my own heritage, history and experience of migration gave me an insight into my research and in some way some 'lived experience' of some of the realities of the migration experience. I was also cautious and reflexive during the research process about not letting my own experience of

migration cloud my reflections of the experiences of others. Recognizing the plurality and diversity of every individual's migration and resettlement experiences and that my experience was under entirely different circumstances, times, spaces, cultures and motivations that of those who I encountered in my fieldwork and participated in my research.

I observe my position within the field as both an insider and outsider. Like Dwyer and Buckle (2009), I maintain that endorsing oneself as a researcher simply between the binary of an insider or an outsider disregard 'the appreciation for the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of human experience. Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference' (p.60). I observe myself an insider due to my history and experience of migration, previous experience of working in the refugee sector, for speaking the same language as some of the research participants and due to my embedded grounded and relational community approach. This insiderness was a clear asset in the doing of this research; it shaped the way I looked, acted, sounded to participants. For example, it wasn't unusual for individuals encountered in the research to say that I could be from their country of origin (i.e. Iranian, Lebanese, Syrian) or develop close relationships, to be called 'sister' and to have interactions with practitioners in the refugee sector acknowledging my previous experience of working in the sector.

I observe myself as an outsider due to the many privileges that comes with my settled immigration status, the opportunities I had to develop my education, my position of power as a researcher and sometimes because of my mixed heritage, amongst other privileges. My experiences have instances of connections and differences with some experiences shared by participants, whilst some experiences shared by participants I could relate to 'at a deep, personal level' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 61), others were distinct. Therefore, I see my position as somewhere in between. This positioning, I believe, had an influence in some instances on how some groups recognise me. For example, my ability to speak Spanish and being born in a Latin American country was an instant bridge of trust and relatedness particularly with females from El Salvador. Being a mother was another point of connection with many other mothers who were involved in the project. Similarly, Kurdish women who were involved in the project who were very recently arrived and spoke very little English were very physical with me and I reciprocated this type of engagement. For example, they

embraced me as they came in or left the sessions and called me sister. I am not sure what was the reason for this type of relationship but the fact that I was from the same gender and culturally comfortable with physical contact was probably a contributing factor. My lived experience of being a migrant and settling in Tyneside and previously working in the refugee sector was also recognised and perceived as important. For instance, research participants asked me for local advice and practitioners in the sector who I interviewed felt at ease due to previous contact and acknowledged my experience in the sector. These examples demonstrate how my history, gender, lived and work experience and perhaps 'in-between' positionality of an insider-outsider influenced my relationship with Comfrey volunteers and practitioners in many ways.

My previous work in the charity sector has been influential in this research. My insights on the realities of the voluntary sector and of the lived experiences refugees have been crucial in developing a feasible, reciprocal and meaningful research project. I also embedded values and approaches that I used in my work in previous roles into my collaboration with Comfrey and research activities. Bringing in an approach that is relational, organic, gradual, participatory, caring, informal and reflective into the research space. As an example of this, my approach to facilitating group work during my volunteering and researching at Comfrey (i.e. the photovoice project, arts & crafts activities, consultation and focus groups) have been largely informed by my previous experience as a practitioner and training. For instance, techniques to engage participants who might be quieter, using peer support during groupwork, offering opportunities to co-deliver aspects of sessions, using simple language, enhanced materiality and physicality to help communication and an overall relaxed and attentive approach are all skills which I developed during past work experience and training in the charity sector. Another example is the approach that I embedded during interviews which incorporated elements of my coaching training, this will be explored further later in this chapter.

As I embarked into the fieldwork, delayed due to the pandemic but eager to encounter, connect and listen to refugee families in Tyneside, I did so, coming from somewhere. This section offered an insight into how my biographical story of migration and experiences of working with refugee communities influenced my fieldwork practices as a researcher and interactions with participants. Perhaps, supporting Hyndman's claim about the fuzziness of boundaries of the field and that 'as fieldworkers, we are always in the field' (2001, p. 262).

Perhaps, I already was in the field before setting my foot in the Comfrey Project in June 2021. Perhaps, I never left the field when I stopped attending volunteering in my regular session and became a Trustee for the project.

Encounters, recruitment and participation in the research

Through my role as a volunteer and researcher at Comfrey Project and engagement in various refugee related events, meetings and activities between March 2021 and August 2022, I encountered hundreds of individuals with lived experience of seeking sanctuary or who work, volunteer or engage in the refugee sector. The weekly session at Comfrey Project, where I regularly volunteered, was always well attended with about approximately 20-30 individuals with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, the family sessions which took place during the summer holidays was attended by 20-30 families each day and over 30 individuals took part in the creative side of the photovoice project (of these 15 chose to be involved in the exhibition and 8 were interviewed about their photobooks). These encounters, informal conversations and being around or present over a cup of tea, activity or meal have been an important part of ethnographic reflections, particularly as a way of contextualising and experiencing everyday happenings, understanding needs and observing developments and changes in the lives of refugees over time, as well as building relationships and trust (Huizinga et al, 2022).

Overall, 46 individuals directly participated in the research, of which, 14 took part in practitioner interviews and 32 refugee participants in Tyneside engaged in interviews and/or the photovoice project. It is worth noting that several individuals were interviewed more than once, some took part on both, interviews and the photovoice project and others only participated in one or the other activity. Further, some practitioners interviewed had also 'lived experience' of seeking sanctuary in Tyneside, however, their interview was focussed on their observations as practitioners in the sector and to gain understanding of the local context and approaches used to make refugees feel welcome, particularly useful for the analysis in chapter 5 and 6. Practitioners were recruited using personal contacts obtained from my previous work experience in the refugee sector, by attending sector specific meetings and events, and by making direct contact with practitioners via email or in conversations.

The main group of 32 participants who took part in the interviews and photovoice project interviews were from 11 different countries including a South American country, Cameroon, El Salvador, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey and one that was not disclosed. These participants were at a various stage of their asylum journey. About half were seeking asylum at the time of the interview or photovoice project, half had refugee status or British citizenship, a small minority were receiving no support from the home office due to their legal status. Some participant's legal status changed during the year. Some were part of refugee resettlement programmes where refugee status is recognised before their arrival to the UK. There was a diverse range of experiences in terms of length of stay in the UK or the Tyneside area, with the longest stay being about 20 years and shortest being 2 months. Most individuals interviewed had some family living with them in the area, but some were here alone or hoping to bring their families here at some point. Most individuals had family living abroad in their countries of origin or other countries. In various occasions, different family members or close friends were involved in the research, which helped understanding the multiple social and intimate entanglements, ties and diversity of experiences amongst individuals. A small minority were not in contact with friends or families abroad either to keep them safe or due to the lack of ties with them. The majority of those involved in the research were living in Gateshead at the time of their engagement and seven lived in Newcastle or North Tyneside. Many participants were regular attendees of the Comfrey Project or had some level of engagement with the project at some point of their time living in Tyneside. However, some never been to the Comfrey project before. Experience of the engaging with the Comfrey project was not part of the criteria for recruiting participants to the research, however due to my engagement in the project and the various relationships between those who engage in the project, this turned out to be case.

As illustrated above participants who were involved in the research had a wide range of diverse backgrounds and experiences. I recognise that the experiences of this diverse group (i.e. differences in genders, ethnic backgrounds, age, countries of origin) would have an impact in how belonging is experienced across different spatialities. Yet, this research doesn't provide a specific analysis on the different experiences of belonging in relation to their diverse demographic profile and background. Rather I focus on the analysis the similarities and differences of how this diverse group of refugees who are settling in Tyneside and accessing Comfrey, a multicultural space, are negotiating belonging. A deeper analysis of each group by

gender, age, ethnicity could be an interesting project for future research and would require a different design and analysis approach.

Furthermore, methodologically, the aim of this research was not to generalise the lives of refugees, where a more random sample of participants could have been selected, but to explore the experiences of this group of individuals as I encountered them, in a specific time and place. The individuals who took part in this research shared many similar experiences of belonging, particularly due to their engagement in the Comfrey project, and there were also many contesting reflections, and this diversity of experiences was interesting. This is aligned with feminist thinking, which acknowledges subjectivity within research, and hence this research provides an interpretation or analysis of the complex data, stories and accounts of refugee lives and experiences in Tyneside that I encountered during this research, rather an objective understanding of a social phenomenon (Fonow and Cook, 2005).

Figure 6 below provides an overview of the engagement and participation in this research project.

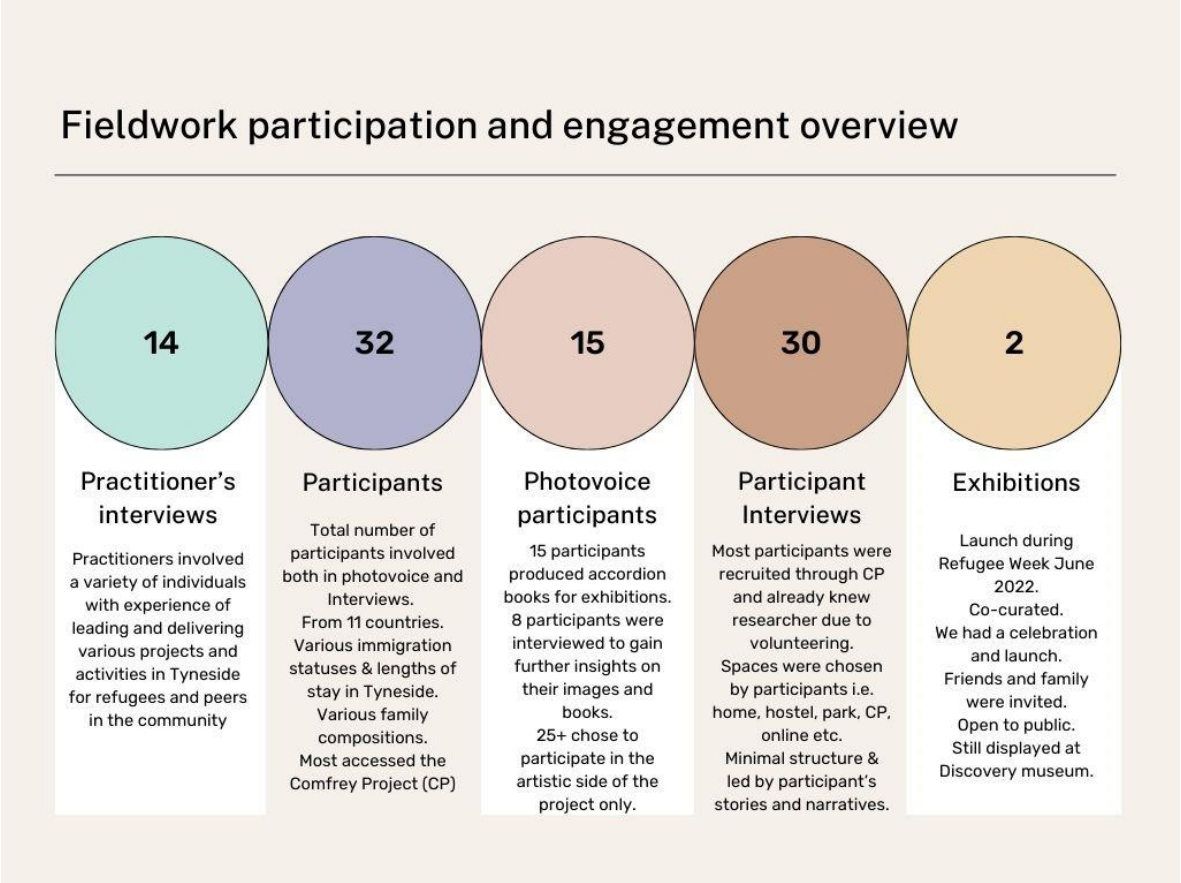

Figure 7. Overview of participation and engagement

Most individuals who participated in interviews decided to engage in the research following a conversation with me about this research at the Comfrey project. Other participants engaged following an initial conversation with a member of staff from Comfrey Project or by using a snowballing approach, where research participants themselves suggested other potential participants. This approach was successful, and I didn't need to contact any other organisations beyond the Comfrey Project to recruit participants. Even if I regularly talked about my research project at Comfrey Project from the start of my engagement, I didn't start actively recruiting until I got to know the individuals well. This strategy was effective and more ethical as it facilitated more natural conversation about my research, allowing space and time for questions and to develop mutual trust. Most participants had a level of engagement with me prior to their interview. Only 5 of the individuals interviewed did not have any prior contact with me before the interview but I was able to establish quick rapport and trust due to their prior engagement at Comfrey, or due to knowing their friends or acquaintances.

Ethical considerations

Within the context of research with individuals who experienced forced migration, research can pose many ethical challenges and tensions (Block et al, 2013). A key tension is the ethics of balancing research with individuals who are vulnerable due to the complexity and precarity of their situation and traumatic pasts (Seedat et al, 2004), as well acknowledging their human agency within the research process (Hugman et al, 2011; Linn, 2021). As this research's methodology was grounded in a relational, collaborative and creative approach over a long period of time some of these ethical challenges were sensitively and attentively negotiated (Huizinga et al, 2022; Blazek and Askins, 2019; Cahill, 2007; Kindon et al, 2007).

Another aspect of ethical concern that relates to this research was the representation of stories and accounts from refugees (Lenette, 2019; Eastmond, 2007). This research invited refugee participants to produce their own self-representations of their stories as a way to negotiate this ethical issue. Photovoice has been a useful method to navigate this ethical concern, and I also took special care in sensitively re-representing refugee accounts in the analysis and writing. In this section, I offer a summary of key ethical considerations around anonymity, consent, visibility and confidentiality, however, further ethical reflections are embedded across other sections of this chapter.

An ethical framework was developed and was approved by Newcastle University. Beyond this, as Wilson and Darling (2021) highlight 'ethical concerns and choices are at heart of all stages of research process, from the posing of research questions to the dissemination of findings' (p.1). As such, a reflective approach on ethics and practicalities has been considered throughout the whole research process (Fonow and Cook, 2005). There were some planned aspects of ethics that were considered before the fieldwork and many other that were reflected upon and negotiated during the fieldwork.

In advance of the fieldwork, I designed information sheets which were used to explain the research project to those who were interested in engaging. This was accompanied with a conversation to ensure this was understood and there were opportunities to ask questions. When there were languages barriers, I offered to arrange interpreting or someone to explain at Comfrey Project who spoke the same language as them, this was usually a staff member or volunteer. At times, this offer was taken, whilst other times individuals used their own online translating tools or took the form/s with them to show to friends or family who could translate this (this was also the case with other forms used in the project i.e. consent forms, debrief forms). For individuals who spoke Spanish, they had the option of speaking to me in Spanish or English. After individuals understood the aims of the research project and key ethical considerations around confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, withdrawal of consent and dissemination plans they were invited to sign the consent form. For the photovoice project additional forms were included i.e. photo release form (which gave permission to use images taken by photovoice participants for dissemination purposes) and photo consent (used for images of people). All these forms were always accompanied with a conversation and discussion to ensure individuals who participated in different aspects of the research were clear of the potential risks and relevant information.

I also revisited participants' consent at various points of the research if I felt perhaps that something changed i.e. for individuals who participated both in interviews and the photovoice project. During the latter, I facilitated a session around the risks of photography; for example, the risk of being identified, misinterpreted and risk of taking images in public. I also developed a resource that individuals could take with them which reminded them of the potential risks of photography and options to mitigate these risks. The group also explored ways of using photography without disclosing identity. Most individuals decided to take images that were

not identifiable. Some wanted to use images of themselves and their families and use creative ways of hiding identifiable aspects i.e. faces, spaces. There was one individual who wanted to use an image of her face in the exhibitions. We explored this at various points of the project and discussed potential risks, and after careful consideration this individual made the decision to use these identifiable images in both exhibitions. I supported this individual's decision. However, as this participant also agreed to be anonymised for their interview data, in the instances where stories were used alongside images, I had to take careful consideration not to choose identifiable images to ensure the participant was not recognised. Further, individuals who took part in the photovoice project had choices in relation to being credited for their photovoice art. However, to ensure they weren't identified, particularly as their work would be used later in other dissemination activities beyond the exhibitions, the crediting appeared jointly in the exhibition description and only by first name and was not attached to their specific accordion book. Further, some individuals decided to change their names and others decided not to feature in the credit. Anonymity with refugee groups is a particular sensitive issue as recognition can put individuals and their relatives, both in the UK or abroad, in danger. Furthermore, their immigration situation could change and asylum seekers could potentially face deportation and face further persecution because of their disclosures. Additionally, their disclosures could affect their immigration status in the UK if they are identified. Finally, it is important to consider that participants might perhaps not want to be identified as refugees or with other aspects of this research later in life as they move on and settle in the UK. Therefore, anonymity is an important ethical consideration, particularly as refugees can experience many vulnerabilities at different stages of their settlement process. This highlights the ethical complexity of balancing risks, visibility, recognition and agency. This balancing process which involved ongoing dialogue and negotiation between research participants and me, extends Dickens and Butcher (2016) work which argues for 'adopting an ethical stance that takes a more situated, processual account of the ways participants themselves might convene their own forms of public engagement and manage their own conditions of becoming visible through the research process' (p.528). Although this process has been challenging and time consuming to manage ethically, it honoured the choices and agency of participants.

There have been some challenges that I encountered in relation to using forms during the research. At times, certain individuals that I approached were wary of engaging paperwork,

particularly as when they realised that they would have to sign it. Perhaps, due to the complex language or the formality that forms impose. In some circumstances, once I explained the paperwork with my own words, individuals felt comfortable to participate in the research, there was usually an existing relationship between individuals and myself at this point and this eased this interaction. Yet, it felt uncomfortable to add such formality, when we had a longer term relaxed and informal relationship. Although I recognise the need for consent, in future projects I would like to explore alternative ways of obtaining consent. Although few in number, there were individuals that refused to be take part in the research. One individual disclosed that this was because of a past negative experience were the individual felt the researcher misrepresented their story. Reiterating our responsibility as researchers of managing the research process sensitively and ethically, particularly when re-representing stories. At the end of every research interaction, I always checked in with individuals to see if they felt affected by their involvement and if they wanted to discuss anything with me. Although there were at times emotional responses during interviews and some of the groupwork, generally most individual shared that they felt positive about their involvement and didn't need to gain any further assistance. One individual, for example, commented that the interview experience gave him an opportunity to reflect, share and be listened and that felt beneficial to him. Following their interview, I provided individuals a debrief sheet with details of dissemination plans, my and supervisors' contact details and key organisations they could contact if they felt they needed extra support after the research had ended. Participants were offered a £10 voucher to compensate for their participation in the research and to thank them for their time and involvement. All the data from the research remained confidential and safely stored.

Recording, data analysis and writing

After interviews, volunteering and photovoice workshops, I usually took some time to sit and reflect on the experience using audio recordings on my phone. This was used to record and analyse key observations and themes that emerged in the interactions within the fieldwork. I usually would sit in a quiet spot and narrate what happened that day, any reflections on my practice, any challenges or tensions, stories and happenings. These were used later in the analysis stage but also during the fieldwork to reflect on challenges, highlights and to continuously develop my approach and practice. The narrative interviews, practitioner interviews, photovoice elicitation interviews and ethnographic reflections were all

transcribed. After this, I conducted a thematic analysis of this data using NVivo. The codes or themes and sub-codes emerged inductively as I reviewed the data from the research rather than assigning pre-existing codes. Some sections from the data were assigned into multiple code categories. Overall, there were 15 main codes emerged: 'Activities', 'Background information', 'Belonging and Welcome', 'Everyday and routines', 'Home', 'Identity', 'Important Quotes', 'Places', 'Plans, Dreams and Imaginaries', 'Relationships', 'Resilience', 'Safety, security and freedom', 'Strategies' and 'Traditions and Culture'. All of these were broken down into subcodes, for instance for the 'Relationships' code which was the one of the most used codes had multiple subcodes i.e.: 'Being alone', 'Community Friendships and Support groups', 'Digital Kinning', 'Encounters', 'Family', 'Friendships'. Some of these subcodes were broken down further for instance the 'Family' and 'Friendships' which were the most predominant codes in this category.

I also used mind mapping to group themes and visualise how these interacted with each other and to explore connections, similarities and differences between stories. This was particularly useful when deciding on the structure of the thesis and organising the content of chapters. Images and accordion books from the photovoice project were not analysed by me but the participants themselves in their interview which reflected on their images. I analysed the interview data from the interviews where participants discuss their creative work using NVivo in the same way as other interviews.

Figure 8. Analysing data using mind maps

In conjunction with these mind maps (Figure 7) which I used to start to develop a structure and key subthemes for each chapter, I also would go through relevant codes in NVivo, and I would paste relevant extracts into a word document into different categories. This would develop a bare structure for each chapter which were in place to use when I started writing.

Within empirical chapters, the different types of data are used jointly to narrate individual's stories and to highlight the diverse experiences of refugee families under different themes. In some sections of the thesis, I bring together segments or excerpts from the stories of different individuals to highlight the richness and diversity of their experiences and as a means of comparison. In other areas of the thesis, I introduce longer accounts from specific individuals, for example, within the opening stories which appear in the introductions of each empirical chapter. In these stories I use a deeper analysis of their narrative to illustrate and highlight the complexity and entanglements of the narrator's lives. These longer narratives provide more profound understanding of their lived experiences. Yet, I recognise the challenge that I have as a researcher to re-represent the stories that has been told to me. I have taken special care to endeavour to re-tell these stories in a way that hopefully respects and makes justice to the stories that collaborators shared (and entrusted) with me during the fieldwork (Eastmond, 2007).

Navigating roles, relationships and boundaries in community-based embedded research

Through the year-long volunteering and collaboration with the Comfrey Project, many opportunities for rich ethnographic reflections and observations emerged. Ethnography involves spending time immersed within a community 'to understand parts of the world more or less as they are experienced and understood in the everyday lives of people who 'live them out' (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 12). Ethnography is well established and practiced within geography (for an overview see Watson and Till, 2010). In this section, I reflect on conducting ethnographic work. I consider an important aspect of working as an embedded community volunteer and researcher, and the art of navigating multiple roles, boundaries and relationships. Managing these interconnected relationships and roles ethically, openly and with care has been central to this research. Many geographers have negotiated volunteer or practitioner and researcher roles during their fieldwork. For example, Cheung Judge's

research on non-elite youth volunteering in Kenya and Zimbabwe (2016), Dickens' research within youth work in London (2017), Blazek's research as a detached youth worker in a neighbourhood of Bratislava, Slovakia (Blazek and Askins, 2021) and Askins' research as a volunteer within a drop-in centre in Glasgow, Scotland (Blazek and Askins, 2021).

During my time at Comfrey, I managed many responsibilities, I was a friendly volunteer, a researcher, a facilitator, a colleague, a friend, and a trustee. To manage relationships ethically through these various roles, I was always open about my role as a researcher from the start. However, when I volunteered at project this was always my priority and was fully committed to it, and the research became a secondary role. As a volunteer, I became embedded within the organisation and alongside my regular volunteering position I also attended inductions, training and was supervised like other volunteers. I had a working relationship with staff and engaged, for example, in session planning, support plans for volunteers (service users), or reflections and debriefs about the sessions. Blazek and Askins (2021) reflect on a similar positioning in their research as practitioner-researchers, where their role as practitioners or volunteers was prioritised over research goals. They observe that this relationship-centred approach on geographical ethics engages with feminist and postcolonial research (Pratt, 2010) which promote more equitable, fair and emancipatory research practices (Cahill et al, 2007) and geographic literature on care and emotional work (Milligan and Wiles, 2010 in Blazek and Askins, 2021). By concentrating in the role of a volunteer or practitioner first, prioritising the needs of the service and their participants, more caring, genuine and ethical relationships emerged. This way of working with Comfrey volunteers (participants) influenced interactions with participants during the research. There are many examples, of how these ethics of care transpired in the research choices. For example, through my role as volunteer, I met individuals who were experiencing periods of distress due to their situation and who shared personal information about those experiences to me in the role of volunteer due to our closeness. These disclosures although were interesting and relevant to my research remained confidentially bounded to context of my volunteering. Further, in some circumstances, I made a conscious judgment not to ask certain individuals if they were interested in taking part in interviews, for example, as I sensed that this could have been prejudicial or harmful to those individuals, or I approached certain topics during interviews with special care and sensitivity because of the information which was previously shared with me as a volunteer.

Conversely, some of the information disclosed or previous knowledge gained through my role as volunteer often acted as useful prompts for conversation, building on previous discussions which emerged during interviews or other research engagements. This was useful not only for the richness of data and relaxed atmosphere that emerged during interviews but most importantly, to negotiate safe zones of disclosure and tailored interventions within the interview space. It enabled me to adapt the research practice to fit the needs and stories of the participants, carefully attending to the relationships that were built before entering the research space. For example, Talib, who regularly attended the Comfrey Project, told me about how growing parsley in his planter at Comfrey project reminded him of home and particularly his late mother. This emerged in a conversation whilst I was volunteering there. Later in his interview, we came back to this, exploring further stories and meanings. I was able to explore this with care and sensitivity because of this previous disclosure and awareness of his situation. These types of disclosures are also ethically challenging as they emerge in spaces and through relationships outside the research space. Yet, the researcher remains a 'researcher' and careful navigation of these instances is important to negotiate the tensions between the extractive nature of research and ethics of care.

Many more ethnographic observations, conversations and happenings which emerged during my volunteering experience at Comfrey Project became valuable later during their research engagement. For instance, my previous engagement with Comfrey volunteers informed me of their everyday contexts, challenges and histories and thus enabling research spaces and interactions to become more caring, individualised and meaningful, mitigating potential instances of harm within the research space.

This relational approach established during the volunteering, and which extended through the research process supported certain level of intimacy to emerge between myself as a volunteer – researcher and volunteers / participants of the Comfrey project and research. By the time that the interview or photovoice project took place, my relationship with most individuals had reached certain levels of mutual trust, comfort, intimacy, and grounding (Blazek and Askins, 2021; Huizinga et al, 2022). This was also observed in Blazek and Askins' (2021) research who draw attention to the relationships or 'frienship-liness' that emerges between volunteer-practitioners and research participants - service users, which is developed through shared experiences. Similarly, to Blazek and Askins (2021) I also argue that this close relationships

which emerge through this kind of rich engagement have a role in creating more caring and ethical research spaces (ibid).

There were many other advantages to this slow, relational and embedded method. For example, access to participants who might have not otherwise engaged in research, access to more intimate and private spaces such as their homes and more open, warm and honest discussions and interactions prior and during participant's engagement in the research. Some of these opportunities were likely facilitated through this longer term and ongoing trust building, sustained through volunteering at Comfrey. Fieldwork access is laborious and it is even more so when working with communities, which might have suffered traumatic past experiences and might find it difficult to trust others, so the time spent developing relationships is crucially important for successful and ethical engagement of participants in this type of research (Huizinga et al, 2022).

Whilst the dual role of a practitioner volunteer–researcher brought many benefits to the research in relation to the research ethics, care, and engagements. There were also some challenges and tensions that were encountered through the process, for example, in relation to the messy boundaries between various roles. For instance, when I was conducting a home interview with a participant that I knew well from the Comfrey Project. She disclosed concerning issues regarding her neighbour and the lack of support she received from her housing provider and the police. I had to carefully consider the complexity of my role and boundaries in that situation, although I was a researcher in that space, I also was very close to that individual due to my role as a volunteer at Comfrey and our common language, Spanish. I also have a wealth of experience dealing with similar situations from working in the charity sector. This individual was experiencing mental health issues and was very isolated. She also disengaged from the Comfrey Project due to the challenges in her personal life. I felt it was appropriate to give her some general advice after the interview concluded and asked her if she could give me permission to disclose her challenges to Comfrey staff so that they could help her with her current situation. I also encouraged her to return to the project for support and company. Due to this interview encounter, she returned to the service. This example highlights the tension between roles, boundaries and relationships when challenging situations like this one arise, and the importance of negotiating this ethically and with care. It

also shows the potential positive impact that this type of entangled methodologies can have in participant's lives.

Another example of the complexities and tensions between the boundaries of the volunteer – researcher role was managing the 'friendship-liness' of relationships (Blazek and Askins, 2021). In my previous work in the charity sector, there were clear protocols which discouraged staff from entering relationships with service users outside work. This was not so clear for my role as a volunteer and researcher, particularly as I was working with adults at Comfrey. Yet, it didn't feel ethical to become friends with service users whilst I was a volunteer – researcher there. However, once my regular volunteering engagement with the Comfrey Project finished, I remained in touch with some participants as friends. These two examples highlight the complex ethical considerations that emerge with this type of relationship-centred approach in geographical research, they also emphasize the spatial and temporary messiness and the blurriness of boundaries within the fieldwork and research.

This section offered insight into the complex negotiations, opportunities and tensions that emerge when adopting a more relational and caring ethical approach to geographic research, in this case by embedding myself as a volunteer and researcher within the Comfrey Project. I discussed how this relationship – centred approach, in conjunction with other aspects of my methodology, offers opportunities for more ethical, caring and relational geographic research and this methodological effort builds on the work of other geographers who also call for advances in this type of geographical methodologies.

Working with biographical stories and narratives

Central to this PhD enquiry has been attending to stories that refugee and asylum-seeking families tell. These stories were told in many ways and spaces. Some were shared in interviews and the photovoice project, whilst others happened naturally and informally over a cup of tea, or whilst making art or watering the garden. Not all stories were told with the intention and consent to be used in this research but by focusing on their stories, really listening to the meanings and interpretations of life happenings in refugee lives allowed me to hear and learn about their lived experiences. 'We live in a storied world', states Jenkins (2013) 'storytelling comes to us as easily and unconsciously as breathing' and these stories are crucial in

developing a sense of self and understanding of others (pp. 140-141). Attending to the stories of refugees, honouring their voices and self-representations brings to light an alternative perspective and knowledge that exist but rarely recognised or valued and often silenced. As Nagar reflects 'for each one of us who is afforded the means or tools to step in with an authority to make knowledge claims, there are millions of others whose words and knowledge we stand on, but who have been systematically erased from, or made invisible (2019, p.5)'. This PhD project endeavoured to take time to explore the biographical accounts that refugees wanted to share and explore their interpretations and meanings of how they are experiencing hostility in their everyday lives and what strategies they are using to weather these structural challenges and carve out their lives and communities. It also offered opportunities within the interview space and photovoice project for those stories to be self-directed and self-represented and in doing so uncovering alternative narratives about their lives and their understandings of home and belonging which are shared within this thesis, exhibitions and other PhD outputs.

Since the 'narrative turn' in the 70s, the interest in stories and narratives proliferated particularly within humanities and social sciences where stories provide a 'rich source of insight' into social life (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 3), particularly as social sciences began departing from engaging with human beings as objects of study (Plummer, 2001). Cameron (2012) suggests that within geography there has been a broad range of interest in stories and narratives. She draws attention to the relational aspect of stories 'between personal experiences and broader contexts' and argues that 'stories are both singular, 'true', and felt, and crafted, disciplined, and generic' (pp. 573-574). In relation to this, Polleta (2006) adds that stories are disciplined by dominant narratives and are also capable of shifting dominant narratives. Further, Bruner (1987) made an important contribution to understanding 'experience' and 'expression', making a distinction between 'life as lived' and 'life as experienced'. Life as lived refers to the events that happen in the individual's life. Life as experienced refers to the way that the individual interprets meaning about those events due to past experiences, background and contexts. Eastmond (2007) reflects on this interconnection between the personal and social aspect of stories in relation to the refugee experience. She suggests that within a broader socio-political context, refugee stories can provide accounts of their experiences of displacement, violence and of rebuilding their lives and communities. She observes that 'from personal accounts we may also glean the diversity

behind over-generalized notions of the refugee experience' (ibid, p. 10) and it is important for researchers to share the diversity of refugee stories in ways that do narrator's justice, even if this is challenging, particularly in times where refugee stories are being disregarded, othered or disbelieved (ibid).

This thesis has endeavoured to work with refugee biographical stories in many different ways in order to illuminate the diversity of their lived experiences, as well as their meanings and interpretations. I made efforts, when possible, to facilitate opportunities for stories to be self-represented or to be re-represented in ways that do the narrator's stories and voices justice. This might be through facilitating a conversational narrative interview space conductive for self-represented biographical stories to emerge or by offering spaces for participatory collaboration and interpretation of personal stories through their own photographic books. O'Neill (2007) argues that there is a necessity for new methodologies to understand the experiences of forced migration. She suggests that ethno-mimesis 'a combination of ethnographic work and artistic re-presentations of the ethnographic developed through participatory action research' (ibid, p.81) 'seeks to counter negative stereotypes in the public imagination and facilitate the production of refugee and asylum seekers self re-presentations of lived experiences through visual and biographical texts that speak of the utter complexity of lived relations through 'feeling forms' as 'sensuous knowing'' (ibid, p.72). This thesis' methodological framework and research aspirations are inspired and informed by ethno-mimesis as a practice and process and builds on this methodological work. Later in this chapter I will expand on the possibilities of self-representing personal stories and accounts with the use of photovoice as a participatory method and throughout this thesis I will share snippets of stories of loss, exclusion, resistance, weathering, social intimacy and belonging that emerged through these self-produced photographic representations.

Narrative interviewing as sites of collaboration and self-representation

This research used narrative interviewing method. A crucial distinction of this qualitative method is that during this type of interviews and on follow on analysis after the interview is that the interviewee is treated as a narrator (Chase, 2005). Therefore, there is a shift from the usual dynamics of interviewer – interviewee to a narrator – listener approach within the interview space (Kartch, 2018). Kartch further adds that the role of the interviewer in this method is not a passive one, it requires active listening, emotional attentiveness and skilled

facilitation inviting the participant to tell and control their story and narrative (ibid). Literature suggests that often narrative interviews require minimalist intervention from the researcher, limited to a single initial question (Wengraf, 2001).

To embrace this style of interviewing, I adopted a minimalist approach. At the start of each interview, I revisited the consent, ethical considerations, dissemination plans and aims of the research. During the interview, I invited participants to tell me their accounts of belonging from arriving here, allowing some flexibility about where they wanted to begin to narrate. Some started their story from the point of leaving their country of origin, others from the point of arrival to the UK, whilst others started from arriving in Tyneside. Although I didn't have a specific interview schedule, I prepared further sub-themes or open questions that enabled me to facilitate narration, particularly if the narrator needed to be actively supported but not directed with their storytelling, but often this were not needed. These themes explored what made it easier and harder to settle in Tyneside; structural challenges; relationships both local and abroad and how these were maintained; experiences of places, neighbourhoods, encounters and organisations; houses, homes, dwellings and home-making practices and finally hopes and dreams.

I also drawn from my extensive experience and training in one-to-one coaching gained whilst working in the charity sector. The flow and pace of the interview was led by the narrator. I didn't disturb the pauses and silences. I intervened at times to ask for clarification, elicit further meaning and interpretation, and occasionally, I shared insights of my own experiences of resettlement and belonging. This was an intentional approach as a way of inviting further reflections, richness and comparison and to promote a less hierarchical space for collaboration, dialogue and participation (Cotterill, 1992) within the interview space, particularly as there was often previously built 'friendship-liness' from my volunteering role at Comfrey Project (Blazek and Askins, 2021). This also allowed me to examine and check my own understandings and interpretations of their experiences of belonging which could have at times been influenced by my own experience, as well as highlighting points of connection and difference between our experiences. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours, some individuals were interviewed twice, and some were interviewed in family groups. Some interviews were assisted by community interpreters, who were already engaging with those individuals in some way, and some were conducted in Spanish, of which I am fluent.

I mostly offered participants to choose where they wanted their interview to take place. For some, who I didn't know very well, I opted for a public space to safeguard and manage risks. Interviews took place in individual's homes, temporary dwellings, hostels, community settings, parks, gardens, polytunnels, allotments, via Zoom and WhatsApp. Inviting the participants to make decisions about the location of the interview environment intended to facilitate a more collaborative research approach and with the hope that potential anxieties could be reduced. During interviews, particularly those which took place in homes, dwellings and other personal or intimate spaces, such as parks or community gardens, there were often references being made about those spaces and the materiality within them. Participants also often shared food or drinks with me and this also became prompts during interviews whilst also acting as an act of sharing and 'friendship- liness' (see more on food in chapter 4). Below (Figure 9) I share an image taken after my interview with Mehdi at an allotment site. After the interview, he offered to prepare lunch using some of the allotment produce and his own food. I helped him with chopping some vegetables whilst we talked, later I stayed at the allotment and helped tidying up some overgrown bushes.

Figure 9. Interview with Mehdi at one of the allotments in the Comfrey Project

Although I often felt slightly uneasy when participants prepared food for me, I was also aware that these acts of sharing and agency were positive signs which highlighted a level of care, comfort, trust and mutual respect. One of the volunteers from the Comfrey Project told me that there were things that she shared with me in her interview that she had never told anyone because 'there isn't a chance to speak about these things'. There were many more positive reflections from research participants about their involvement in the research process. These examples highlight the complex intimate entanglements, benefits and opportunities that emerge through this type of community-based collaborative research.

Accordion books of belonging: self-representing own narratives

In this section, I share reflections and insights from the *Belonging project*, the photovoice element of this research project which was developed in collaboration with a group of volunteers (participants) from the Comfrey Project.

Photovoice is a participatory action research (PAR) method in which participants photograph their lives, engage in critical reflection about their images and use these to communicate their life experiences to their community with the aim to advocate for change (Wang and Burris, 1994). Similarly, do-it-yourself (DIY) feminist methods, such as zines and bookmaking, have been used as a creative PAR and democratic method to explore issues, potential futures and action-oriented solutions with various communities and settings (Bagelman and Bagelman, 2016; Bagelman et. al, 2017). According to Elkin and Mistry (2022), accordion books offer opportunities for 'deep noticing', reflection, learning, dialogue and collaboration. Both photovoice and DIY methodologies have origins in emancipatory, feminist, postcolonial and participatory research practices, particularly Paolo Freire's (1972) process of conscientisation (conscientização), where communities become aware of both the structures that shape their everyday oppression and mechanisms for radical change (Kindon et al., 2007; 2009; Milne, 2020; Wang and Burris, 1997). Photography, as a research method, has also been used extensively within refugee related research particularly within social sciences (see Haaken and O'Neill, 2014; Humpage et al, 2019; Lenette and Boddy, 2013; Lenette, 2016).

In the spirit of these participatory philosophies and within the limitations of the PhD and the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Belonging* project aimed at offering an opportunity to a group of individuals seeking sanctuary and living in Tyneside to creatively explore and reflect on their

everyday lives, enter in conversations with other refugees within the group, craft their own accounts using images and accordion book practices and share these with the wider community through exhibitions.

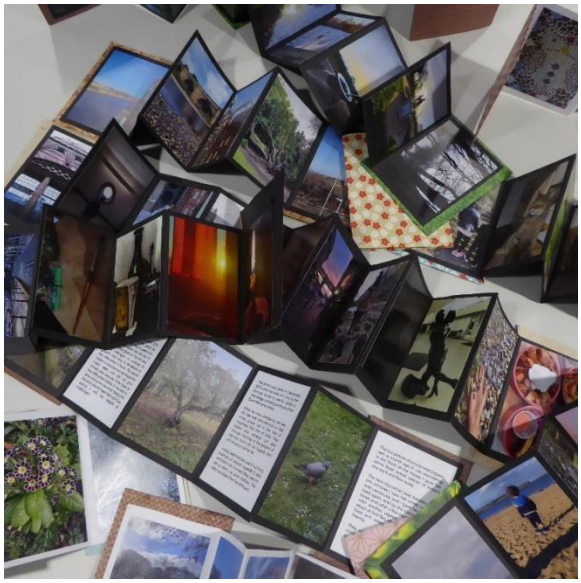

Figure 10. Accordion books from Belonging project

The photovoice project took place within the Comfrey Project session were I regularly volunteered. The membership was very fluid, there was a core group of volunteers (participants) who regularly attended and other individuals who came and went. As I knew most in this group already, I could talk to individuals about the project, and I designed a leaflet to promote it. Knowing individuals also helped me plan the project to suit their needs. The project was planned to incorporate a lot of flexibility and options for engagement. I talked to participants about the different ways that they could engage. They could try it for some sessions or engage in different capacities or not engage at all. This open and flexible approach turned out to be useful as on the first day around 20 participants turned up to take part in the project. This was exciting and challenging. Initially, I run some warming up activities to encourage everyone to get to know each other and feel more comfortable in sharing ideas. The set-up of the project was a bit more structured than other regular activities within this session, so this helped participants to feel more at ease with each other in a different context than the usual. Next, I offered some training on the photovoice method to explore techniques, risks and possibilities of photography and visual literacy. This was interesting and engaging for most.

Exploring the risks of photography was an important aspect of this training (see earlier discussion connected to risks and anonymity earlier in this chapter on ethics). Although the visual aspect of photography can support inclusivity particularly with individuals with language and literacy barriers, as a method it can also pose certain risks to participants, their communities and their stories. For example, by being recognised, misinterpreted or exposed (Milne, 2020). However, the participatory, self-representative and dialogic nature of this project facilitated participants with opportunities to explore and manage risk. By making their own informed decisions and choices in relation to their level and type of engagement at various stages of the project (i.e. choice of being involved in just the artistic side of the project and / or research, exhibition, level of exposure, visibility and outputs of images) the risky potentiality of this method was minimised (Milne, 2020).

After the training, the group began to explore photography and practice working with cameras. I offered simple cameras, but most individuals preferred to use the cameras on their phones. Some didn't have phones, so they used the cameras on offer. Participants then took images to depict a range of themes and emotions that represented what was important and meaningful to them as they crafted a new life in the area. The challenges, spaces, activities and people who were important to them and supported or hinder them in their settlement journey. Some brought old images to the sessions that they took before the project, so we incorporated this as an option too. With these images they created accordion books of belonging which narrated their own experiences and histories. Crafting the accordion books was very engaging. The performative act and materiality of building these books, was very enjoyable and inclusive for most regardless of any language barriers, and some new participants joined and others rejoined the project at this stage to engage solely in the artistic side of the project. Some built personal accordion books and added intimate images to take with them. For some, it was a very emotional experience to cut and paste images of loved ones who were separated from or who had passed away. Some tears were shed. I observed that these little books became little treasures to many. Particularly to those who were far away from loved ones or in hotels temporarily lacking opportunities to craft their own familiar homely spaces. At one point, there were queues of participants asking to create an accordion book and to print existing images to take with them, many were not really interested in exhibiting their work or to take part in an interview but just to create an accordion book. Perhaps this little book offered an opportunity to connect with loved ones by proxy (see more on this in chapter 5), a medium to bridge

disconnection from loved ones and reaffirming the importance of family and other intimate relationships in Tyneside and afar. Others were keen to engage in the exhibition and research elements of the project, and some created different versions of their accordion books (a personal and public or research version). This flexible approach (and practice) was developed during the project as I encountered various ethical and practical challenges, which were resolved in a collaborative dialogic negotiation with the participants. There are many more examples of the dialogic decisions that emerged through the project, for example, some individuals wanted to be credited for their work whilst others wanted to be anonymised. There were many personal artistic choices that participants engaged in such as deciding on the length of their books, the design and image content. These choices to engage in their own terms and to drive their own photo narratives, aesthetics and meanings was a characteristic attribute of this project.

Engagement in the project did come with its own limitations and challenges, individuals in the group were from a range of nationalities and backgrounds, had varying levels of English skills and were at different stages of their immigration journeys, some were newly arrived and were living in local hotels, some were experiencing health or personal challenges and Easter and Ramadan took place during the project. These circumstances affected some participant's attendance and levels of engagement in the project but also its outcomes. For example, initially I planned for participants to develop a narrative to accompany their books so that they could attach clear meaning to their books and avoid misinterpretations. However, due to language and literacy barriers this became challenging and hence opted for an open discussion where everyone shared their books and stories with the help of volunteers and friends who supported them with interpreting and literacy support. I took notes and then created a joint description of the exhibition about what was shared in that discussion. Interestingly, through challenges, new opportunities opened for dialogue and collaboration. By being vulnerable with each other in a safe, caring and welcoming space, we worked through challenges together. For instance, some volunteered to co-facilitate aspects of the project and support others with literacy and language barriers.

The creative process and final artistic outputs were also 'powerful opportunities for research' and to gather stories, experiences and ethnographic reflections (Fontana et al, 2023; Johnston and Pratt, 2019). During the project, I regularly reflected on my own practice, the project and

the group engagement and dynamics. I also interviewed eight of the participants to gain insights and elicit meaning from their accordion stories and to reflect on their engagement in the project and exhibitions.

Through this creative project and research many stories have been shared about the exclusions and precarities experienced by those seeking sanctuary in Tyneside. The challenges, feelings and realities that refugees encounter as they navigate new terrains and negotiate new and existing relationships. To provide an illustration of the type of stories and narratives that emerged through the project, I will share Ariana's accordion book. Her book demonstrates an example of how she used this project to explore and narrate her experiences, reflections and emotions about her life and that she was encountering in Tyneside as she was settling here.

Figure 11. Ariana's accordion book

Ariana's story will be unfolded further in later chapters. She is from El Salvador, and she has been in Tyneside with her son for 2 years at the time of her engagement in this project. For Ariana, making new friends, who support her both emotionally and practically, have been very important in her settlement experience. As she talks about her accordion book, she explains that her accordion book illustrates her evolving life and identity and how this was affected by her moving to the UK. It symbolizes her life in El Salvador and her new beginnings here: 'a change that wasn't easy, but now this is my new home and I feel good to be here', she says.

Ariana narrates that her book represents her as humble, creative and brave person, which she believes are her biggest strengths:

A woman who is not afraid of facing anything, who one day took her child and a few pieces of luggage and came to the other side of the world to start again, and who keeps opening doors in her long-life journey.

As Ariana explains that each photo in her book has an important meaning to her. For instance, the importance of family, engaging in creative activities, the people who have helped her settle and feel good here in the UK, her identity, culture and history and her new beginnings here in the UK.

In the stories that were shared through this photovoice engagement from Ariana and others an important message came to light. That even if refugees encounter challenging circumstances, they are not passive victims and they actively strategize and resist this to navigate and to recreate new senses of belonging, home, family and community locally, beyond bordering and borders. These stories will be shared across this thesis.

At the end of the photovoice project, we held a party at Comfrey where we shared and celebrated our achievements. Participants who were interested were also able to present their photovoice self-representations through two exhibitions. Decision to exhibit their photographic work was optional. One of the exhibitions was co-curated and collaboratively installed within the Comfrey project and was exhibited there for a week during refugee week in June 2022. During this exhibition participants were present to talk to visitors about their work and stories. This was a public event which was advertised widely and attended by friends, families, volunteers, practitioners and others.

The second exhibition was launched during refugee week in June 2022 and still features at the Destination Tyneside exhibition at Discovery Museum. This exhibition was collaboratively curated with Nicola Maxwell from the Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. This is a public exhibition open to public audiences that visit the museum. Both exhibitions were presented with a description of the project, 15 accordion books and the exhibition at Discovery Museum also featured a collage of all images (see Figure 12 and Figure 13).

The photovoice project also included a private launch at Discovery Museum where participants, their friends and families had the opportunity to see the work displayed in the museum. Ariana reflected on the project and exhibition:

> *I feel proud to see my book in the exhibitions because it is a visual message that I want to share with other people to teach them that in this life's journey there will always be obstacles and tests but there is always a new start. The project was brilliant because we could express with images what we sometimes cannot express with words because the right words don't exist to describe who we are inside us.*

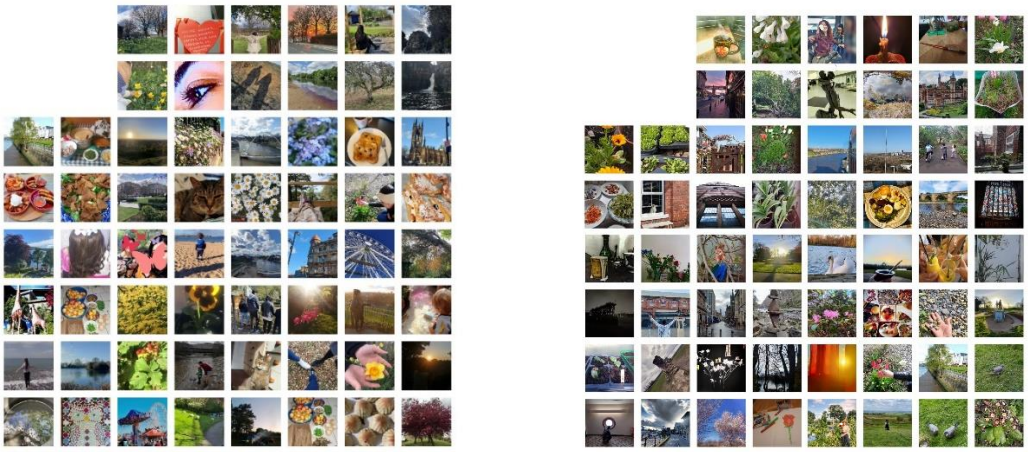

Figure 12. Collages of images for Discovery Museum exhibition, June 2022

BELONGING

22TH JUNE - 31ST AUGUST - DISCOVERY MUSEUM
DESTINATION TYNESIDE EXHIBITION

This exhibition explores the search for belonging of people with migration experiences seeking sanctuary in Tyneside.

Using photography volunteers at Comfrey Project voiced what was important in their lives whilst they build a new life in the area. They made their own accordion books to display their pictures which you will be able to see at the exhibition alongside a collaborative photo collage.

Project facilitated by Melisa Maida.

Belonging

This exhibition explores the search for belonging of people with migration experiences including those seeking sanctuary in Tyneside. Using photography (by taking new and using old photos) volunteers at Comfrey Project looked at what was important in their lives right now whilst they build a new life in the area. They made their own accordion books to display their pictures.

Settling in a new place is challenging as people often leave loved ones and cultures behind and have to navigate a new way of life. Despite these challenges, people are resilient and find varied ways of making home and a sense of belonging. Through family, friends and pets here and afar. Exploring the new city, attractions, nature, culture and history. Finding places that reminds them of past lives. By practicing old and new traditions. In food, objects and keepsakes. In old and new hobbies, meaningful activities, in memories and new experiences. By achieving goals, hoping and dreaming.

Home and belonging stretches from the local to afar like an accordion.

The artwork was created by Edjee, Keren, Manal, Maye, Lily, Victoria and many other, facilitated by Melisa Maida (PhD Researcher at Newcastle University) in partnership with the Comfrey Project. The exhibition was supported by Nicola Maxwell at Tyne and Wear Museums.

If you have a mobile phone please go into either 'App Store' or 'Play Store' and download Google Translate. This will provide you with translations in multiple languages.

ComfreyProject Newcastle University

Figure 13. Images and materials from Belonging Exhibition

In this section, I have shared insights and reflections of the Belonging project. I also shared images and accompanying narratives from Ariana's photographic work. Ariana's accordion book narrates her experiences and emotions as she is rebuilding her new lives in Tyneside. Many more stories were shared during the collaborative photovoice work and broader PhD research which will be discussed in later chapters. These stories highlight how refugees navigate precarious and challenging everyday exclusions, state-enforced violence and feelings of loss, isolation and longing. Yet these complex stories of endurance also show, how they weather, resist, strategize and find diverse ways to navigate and (re) connect with existing and new attachments to people and spaces.

Concluding reflections

My engagement with the Comfrey Project in this researcher - volunteering capacity came to an end in July 2022. Yet, as highlighted earlier the temporal and spatial boundaries of the field are messy (Hyndman, 2001) and my engagement with Comfrey, now as a Trustee, and some individuals who I meet through this research continues. This chapter provided an account of the fieldwork journey and methodological process of this research. It described the in-depth yearlong collaborative partnerships with the Comfrey Project and their volunteers. It also provided details of the methodological design and insights on researcher's history and positionality, participant's demographics and engagement in the research, as well as reflections on ethics and the recording, analysis and writing of the data. This chapter also explored the value and challenges of each of the methods used (i.e. community-based ethnographic volunteering, semi-structured and narrative interviews and participatory photography methods) and the interplay between them.

This chapter emphasized how this project hoped to practice a slower, creative and relational methodological approach grounded in a collaboration with members of the Comfrey Project. I argue that this approach endeavoured to facilitate a more caring and enriching research space, collaboration and outputs. The relationships built with volunteers at Comfrey through my volunteering positively influenced how I engaged with research participants providing opportunities for deeper, tailored and comfortable engagement and richer more nuanced understanding of the complex lives of the participants.

The reflections in this chapter highlighted the messiness and value of this type of rich engagement. This chapter adds depth to and engages with the many calls from geographers and social scientists who advocate for more participatory, relational, collaborative and ethical research (Kindon et al, 2007; Cahill, 2007; Blazek and Askins, 2021). This research and its methodologies also contribute to scholarship which advocates for renewed methodologies for research with refugee and asylum seekers in the UK (O'Neill' 2007).

This chapter draws attention to the possibilities of working creatively with bibliographical stories through participatory photography and narrative interviewing. This creative endeavour sits within and contributes to a sustained and growing interest within geography in creativity and creative methodologies (see Hawkins, 2015; Askins and Pain, 2011; Bagelman and Bagelman, 2016; Garrett, 2016; Pratt and Johnston, 2013; Pratt, Johnston and Bavta, 2017; Raynor, 2017; Riding, 2017). I explored how through the process of sharing and voicing own stories, by taking and choosing photos, eliciting their meaning and by crafting and designing accordion books those who took part in the research had an opportunity to take some time to reflect and critically explore their own and collective stories of home and belonging. These methods provided participants with the opportunity for deep noticing about their personal and shared day-to-day struggles, precarities and frustrations. They also illuminated the resilience and agency which emerges as refugees negotiate their identities, relationships and futures.

The creative photographic work and biographical stories of refugee participants offer an alternative narrative, an insight to their intimate, complex and emotional stories. This seems especially important when it comes to the stories of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, people whose lives and struggles are so often sensationalised or simply silenced, erased, ignored. As Nagar (2019) maintains: 'words and knowledge we stand on, but who have been systematically erased from, or made invisible, on the pages and spaces of formal learning' (p.5). The self-narratives produced in the photovoice work also disrupt popular discourses and imaginings that very often portray refugees and asylum seekers in extremes depictions, as the pure victims of structural violence, dangerous criminals or glorified heroes. Our photographic work sought more complex representations, to provide depth to popular and academic representations which tend to construct and circulate non-westerners or racialized others as 'powerless victims' in need of representation and rescue (Mohanty, 1984, p. 338). Photovoice

and DIY accordion books have been a vehicle to negotiate the terms of their own representation. To tell their own stories. It was an effort to decolonise my methodology, and in hindsight, offered me rich insight into the complexity of participant's 'intimate' and 'affective' lives (Tadiar, 2015, p. 155).

Overall, this chapter indicates that the interplay of methods which combined longer term community based ethnographic volunteering with narrative interviews and participatory photography-based methods offer opportunities to engage more deeply, ethically and in a more meaningful ways with refugee communities. The combination these methods and approaches offer a methodological framework to understand the complex lived and intimate experiences and accounts of belonging of refugee families.

Chapter 4: Home and Belonging

Introduction

Mehdi was born in Iran and lives in Newcastle. Our interview took place in a sunny wintery day in one of the allotments from the Comfrey Project. At the time, he had just recently heard that he received refugee status after 20 years and 8 months of waiting and uncertainty. Mehdi is a very active volunteer at the Comfrey Project and other organisations which have a connection with nature and the environment. For him, only gardening and caring for nature makes him feel at home and happy. He joined Comfrey 6 years ago and it has been a crucial space where senses a feeling of home and belonging: 'Most of the time I am in Gateshead [referring to the main Comfrey Project venue], when I am here, I feel home. I touch with soil, water, I feel different. It makes me feel happy'. Mehdi's connection to the soil, land and gardening is very personal and natural, having grown up in an Iranian family which has been farming for 4 or 5 generations. He recounts how his mother raised him on the land and this connection to the land, soil, water, and seeds extend to the environment here in Tyneside: 'It is still part of the nature'.

Figure. 14 Mehdi's accordion book of belonging from photovoice project

Mehdi explains that engaging in nature related projects connect him to homely feelings and that the friends that he made at Comfrey and other community groups are his 'family'. The image above (Figure. 14 and images below from Figure. 15) are from Mehdi's accordion book

of belonging which he developed during his engagement in the photovoice project at Comfrey. His book illustrates the important role that nature and gardening plays in his life and in making him feel at home.

Figure 15. Mehdi's images from photovoice project

When we spoke, Mehdi was living in temporary accommodation in Newcastle waiting to move to a more permanent council house. As he speaks about his previous and current accommodations, he describes the gardens that he cared for and the plants he took with him to his new temporary accommodation: 'In the new place, I moved four flowerpots and one tree lemon tree'. His relationship and connection to nature and the environment as a home-making practice extends to the way he cooks for himself at home and for others at the allotment: 'Most of the time I eat vegetables and boiling cook [boiled food]. Easier and healthy […]. I use product of allotment. I grow vegetables and herbs I use for making food. Sometimes I make soup, allotment soup. Anyone who comes here [one of Comfrey allotments] and have it, they love it!'.

Figure 16. Photo from interview with Mehdi (By Melisa Maida)

As we talk, he offers me dried fruits, which he explains are from this year's harvest from his family's land in Iran. His siblings send him a package of dried fruits each year after the harvest (Figure. 16). We sip black tea with bay leaves: 'to boost our immunity', he says, and we talk about his plans of visiting the UK (North to South) and working outdoors once he finishes college.

Mehdi's story illustrates the complexity of the notion of home for those who are displaced and rebuilding their lives in Tyneside. It is not merely a dwelling, a space where he lives, or he calls home. In his life, Mehdi subsisted multiple experiences of displacement. First, due to his experience of forced migration. Second, as he became destitute when he was seeking asylum which forced him into homelessness and now due to his newly acquired refugee status (after 20 years of waiting) when he is forced to move again to temporary accommodation until a more permanent dwelling becomes available. Yet for Mehdi, these homely feelings are still present and experienced in other places. He experiences them through home-making practices that he crafted for himself over the years. He does so through gardening, regularly tending and touching the soil and cooking for himself and his friends at Comfrey using vegetables from the allotment. These practices that he performs regularly help him recreate

a familiar space for himself which connects him to nature and his history and memories in the lands of Iran.

Home to him is remade through the materiality of his 'four flowerpots' and his 'lemon tree' and the dried fruits that his siblings send him every year after harvest season from his family's land in Iran. As Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue a house is not always a home and homes are not always located in houses. Home is a 'complex and multilayered geographical concept […] a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connects places (ibid, p. 2). This chapter explores these complex and diverse relationships which refugee and asylum-seeking families have with this concept of home. Homes that are lost, found, renegotiated, felt, practiced, and understood differently and in a very personal way. This chapter will highlight how refugees and asylum seekers disrupts the way in which home is understood, sensed and experienced. I consider how home is re-constructed by actively 'doing' across spaces, as well as temporalities (Ralph and Staheli, 2011). Day-to-day practices in dwellings, special or virtual spaces, through possessions and materiality, rituals, relationships and activities. This chapter connects with scholarship in which home is seen as processual, maintained and reconstructed through different practices (Blunt and Dowling, 2022; Brun and Fabos, 2015, Boccagni, 2022). As Boccagni (2022) highlights 'homing' attempts to look at the 'lived experience of home as an attempt to tread the fine line between past ascriptions and future-orientated potentialities' (p. 585). This chapter therefore will also explore how refugees and asylum seekers are carefully negotiating home by making temporal connections to their past histories or memories, their present routines and imagined futures. It will illuminate how home is crafted across multiple spatialities (locally, virtually, and transnationally). During the course of this research, participants shared many stories and accounts to describe how home is felt, carved out and imagined in Tyneside. These experiences not only add depth but also complicates conceptualisations of home, particularly within the context of forced migration. In relation to the other two empirical chapters, this chapter focusses on the more personal and intimate aspects of belonging.

This chapter is structured in three main sections. The first section explores how and where refugees and asylum-seeking families sense home. It delves into how home is understood and conceptualised by participants themselves in relation to spatiality, affect and social relations.

The second section examines how refugees and asylum-seeking families are homemaking. The tactics and practices that they employ to carve out their home spaces. Finally, this chapter will look at future imaginaries of home, the aspirations and hopes which participants envision as they attempt to rebuild their lives and families in Tyneside.

Sensing Home: spatiality, affect and relations

Mehdi story at the beginning of this chapter illustrates the many meanings that home has for him. Home is in the garden and in nature. His connection to nature runs like a connecting thread through his life. Home is as much a specific place or part of the world as the way Medhi nurtures, connects with and values natural spaces. For Andre, who originates from Cameroon and has been in Tyneside for 7 years, home is quite complex: 'I would say my house is in Gateshead, but my heart is in Africa'. He draws on his emotional attachment for his 'homeland' in Africa and he connects this to the significant people left behind. He describes how he will 'only' be able to feel at home in Tyneside if he is able to make a 'family'. When Andre talks about spaces where he feels at home, he talks about Glasgow where he spent some time and hopes to return one day. He explains that he feels drawn to spaces which are multicultural, friendly and 'open', perhaps where he could imagine himself fitting in as part of the community and which embrace the type of values that he considers important. Thus, it is not surprising that he feels less drawn to Tyneside, as the North East of England where he resides is the least ethnically diverse region in England (Business in the Community, 2023). Research participants explained what home meant to them in varied ways. This section addresses personal meanings and feelings of home. It explores where home is sensed by research participants, with whom and why.

One area that stood out in participants' descriptions of home was its contested spatiality (see Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Some individuals defined home as a very fixed space, a locality where one is present physically where one fulfils day to day basic needs. For example, Chioma from Nigeria referred to home as the place where you 'live', 'drink' and 'sleep'. In a similar way, when I asked Elnara from Turkey where home was for her and where she felt that she belongs to, she reflected that home was 'here', where she 'breathes'. This highlights the importance of the rooted and fixed aspects of home and belonging (see Clifford 1997; Gilroy 1993; Gustafson, 2001), as well as the relevance that localised, every day and mundane

experiences play in understandings of home (Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018; Antonsich, 2010). On the other hand, there were also participants who described and stressed an emotional connection to their homeland. Azhar from Syria, who has been in Tyneside for 5 years, narrated the impossibility of feeling home anywhere else than his homeland: 'Even when British people go to other countries, they cannot live without their country. In general, as feeling safe, it's here. Emotionally, and in my mind, I cannot forget Syria. It is impossible', Israa, who is also from Syria and have been in the UK for 3 years, expressed similar sentiments, sharing how she sometimes feels that she wants to leave because it is not possible to replace her memories from home: 'Syria is different because that home has memories, children were born there, growing up there', she explains.

For Israa, Azhar and Andre, their feelings of home are connected to emotionally charged memories and hard-to-replace attachments to people and places in their country of origin (see Clifford, 1997; Gilroy, 1993; Gustafson, 2001). Interestingly there was another group of individuals who identified 'home' as a more fluid, hybrid or transnational spatiality (see Ralph and Staheli, 2011). Originally from Iran and living in Tyneside for 2 years, Farzad, describes an in-between space; his home resides somewhere between the UK and Iran. Another example are Leila's reflections, who is from Iran and lived in the UK for over 10 years. She describes that she senses home in a complex way and in various locations. For her home is a borderless imaginary that correlates with her personal values, beliefs and identity:

> *More or less I have adapted to this country. Whenever I go, I feel I am away from my home, now this is home […]. It's me. I am Persian, British citizenship, I respect all the cultures from my hometown, here my new home, all of them. It doesn't matter where I live, everywhere is one place. Everywhere should be our home. It doesn't matter, we should be free to choose where to go, where to live. This is only one planet, we shouldn't divide people by naming them 'refugee, asylum seeker, Muslim, Christian, Iranian, Persian, British'. We are divided people from whatever we created.*

Similarly, Sanaya from Sri Lanka and who has lived in the area for 19 years reflects that she perceives 'home' as both here and there:

Hmmm, Sri Lanka, and where my mum is, is home. Sometimes I think here is home as well, when I go to Sri Lanka, a couple of month later is like, when do I go back, you know. It is hard to actually say, there are times when it is family and everything like that but people are already having lives without me there. People want me here and when I go there, it is like a holiday for me there. I say home is there and then I say home is here.

Finally, both Deniz and Ana Maria stress the emotionally exhausting labour and feelings of liminality that is felt when recreating 'home' in new environments: 'It is like a second childhood', says Deniz from Turkey. 'I still haven't adapted. I'm not seriously adjusting yet, not yet. I'm kind of getting used to it but I don't feel adapted here, not yet', says Ana Maria from El Salvador. This emphasises not only the emotional effort that is invested in carving out new senses of home, but also the processual aspects of homemaking.

The multiple accounts from the refugees and asylum seekers above demonstrate an unquestionable complexity, diversity and uniqueness in the ways they understand and sense home. Similarly, to scholars who examine migration through a transnational lens and highlight the dual lives of migrants (Ralph and Staheli, 2011; Portes, 1997) there were accounts in my research that emphasised this fluidity and hybrid spatiality in their understandings of home. However, there also some individuals who explained their homely feelings in more fixed or rooted manners either in relation to Tyneside or to their country of origin. There is complexity and diversity in the ways home is felt and described following forced migration. Particularly as the motivations for leaving the country of origin and the settlement experiences in their space where arrive as refugees are very different to those who might move to a new country as migrants by choice for work, love or education. The experiences of refugees and asylum seekers are often accompanied by trauma, loss and hostility. These factors can influence how home is perceived (or not perceived across multiple locations). These findings build on the work of Blunt and Dowling (2006) who suggest that what motivates or forces migration and the experience of settlement often substantively shapes feelings and experiences of home.

Participants often spoke about the important people in their lives when it came to reflecting on what home meant to them. Talking about loved ones or special people in their lives both in Tyneside or in their countries of origin was one of the most discussed topics and this will be

explored further in the next chapter. These reflections about loved ones in relation to home feelings were often accompanied with strong emotions. For instance, when I asked Sanaya where home is for her, her initial instinctive reaction was to say that home is 'where my mum is'. This is interesting because Sanaya's mum passed away a few years ago, but her response seems to be driven by her love and close intimate relationship with her mum and her longing to be with her even years after she passed. In a similar way, Israa from Syria talks about home as the place where memories were made with her children, and Chioma from Nigeria describes that home is in Tyneside because her children are here: 'my children are my family […] yes, they are my home. They are everything I have'. Elnara from Turkey explained that home is here because this is where she lives with her husband. Elnara and her children have only recently been reunited with their husband (and father) here in Tyneside and she reflects: 'maybe it be a very bad place, never mind, I am here with my husband that is very important. House, furniture and other things it is not important for me. Only important for me is family together, this is important'.

These strong affective interconnections felt between ideas of home and people were also observed in the way that individuals described home in relation to places. For instance, when Andre talks about his village and the emotional and sensorial memories associated with that place:

> *My home is in Cameroon, my village where there is fresh air, where there is quiet, because my village is far off the city. That's why I am not very used to noise. We have singing in the morning, nights. Very few transport, cars. It's so good there, it is so good.*

For some participants, home was closely related to the individual's personal beliefs, values and identity. Leila from Iran spoke about her beliefs of home as a universal place where 'we should be free to choose where to go, where to live'. Others described Tyneside as a home because of their perceived feelings of safety, democratic choice and freedom, these reflections were often linked to comparisons to previous lived experiences of danger, injustice or oppression in other countries. Elias from Eritrea receives no support from the UK government and relies completely on support from friends and local charities to survive. He explains his attachment to the UK in relation to beliefs that he values in this country such as democracy, gender equality, law and order. Feeling safe was an important attribute when it

came to expressing feelings of home and belonging and came up in many conversations, which is not surprising considering the traumatic experiences that some of the individuals that I meet might have encountered in other countries and journeys. Andre talks about the freedom, safety and sanctuary that he feels in his house: 'When I'm at home, in my house, I just do whatever I want to do. If I want to cook, play games. That area is mine and I feel safe there'. Similarly, Chioma reflects that the space where she lives is 'home' because she feels free, safe and relaxed within the dwelling and in her surroundings: 'I feel relaxed in my home. Whenever I'm in, I feel relaxed, I feel free because it's like I'm in my home […] people who live around me are ok. They are friendly, both of the ones in my left and my right side'.

Dola, who is from Nigeria, realised her emotional attachment and the special place that Gateshead played in her life when she went to another UK city and became homeless. She explains that during that experience she strongly longed to return to Gateshead. When she returned here, she received immense support from the local community and that made her realise how Gateshead was her home, the place that she belonged to:

> *Dola: 100% belong.*
> *Melisa: Is this your place? Is this your home?*
> *Dola: I'm not going anywhere, if tried to move out one time and I regret it so I'm not going anywhere.*
> *Melisa: Emotionally, do you feel attached to Gateshead? Do you feel attached to Nigeria as your home? Where is your home?*
> *Dola: This is my home, in fact if I go to Nigeria, I know I'm going to get lost because everything my life everything is here now in Gateshead. People say you don't know until you lost it. That prize was for me when I go to Manchester. Before I went to Manchester, I say Gateshead is such a crap place, there is no jobs […]. Coming back, I appreciate Gateshead a lot.*

In contrast, some individuals expressed not belonging or a feeling of detachment to Tyneside because of a lack of safety, everyday exclusions and precarious living conditions due to their immigration status. Azhar, from Syria, explained that even though he feels settled and safe here, he doesn't feel at home in his neighbourhood because young people there behave 'very badly', he doesn't feel 'safe'. This depicts the multi-layered aspects of how home is felt and

experienced by refugees living in Tyneside. It can vary depending on the circumstances, spaces and everyday experiences lived within those spaces (see Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018; Antonsich, 2010). Whilst Azhar feels a sense of belonging in some spaces, like the Comfrey Project, he also feels a sense of detachment and exclusion elsewhere and with other people. Natalia, who has been in a situation of precarity, forced family separation from her son and destitution for over a decade expresses similar feelings of not belonging. Despite liking Newcastle, she explains that she cannot feel at home here: 'I like it here, but I don't feel like it's quite home. First of all, I don't have home, I am homeless, and now my parents are dead, and my son isn't here with me'.

Others like Diego explained that they cannot feel at home in the dwelling where they currently live as it doesn't belong to them. Waiting for this asylum claim to process, Diego from El Salvador, explains that due to this he doesn't feel a sense of security and choice: 'I can't tell them, I want to stay in my house because I like it […], if they tell me that they are going to move us tomorrow to Scotland. We have no choice'. This sense of being unable to root themselves in their current dwelling due to the lack of control, safety and ownership was common amongst those who were in a situation of limbo with their immigration status. For these participants, home was unstable because their housing and situation was insecure, and temporal.

Findings in this section emphasize the multi-layered and complex meanings of home. Home is described by participants as both fluid, mobile and transnational, as well as a more fixed and rooted categorisation. Both seem to be relevant for refugees who took part in this research and descriptions of home seem to change over time as circumstances develop in refugees' lives. This complexity of home was also highlighted in Brun and Fabos' (2015) research with those who experience forced migration and protracted waiting (see also Sirriyeh, 2010). Participants' varied descriptions of home find similarity in the work of Fabos and Brun (2015), who suggest that feelings of home are intimately connected to personal beliefs, values, traditions, memories, and affects (see chapter 2 for more on Fabos and Brun). Safety was a theme that was frequently discussed by refugee and asylum-seeking families in relation to home feelings. Participants often invoked the importance of homely spaces that offered a sense of security and sanctuary to shelter from past traumas and present worries. Similar findings were observed by Sirriyeh (2010) in her research with young refugee women where

safety was one of the most important aspects of home identified by the young women. Duyvendak (2011) and Duyvendak et al (2016) also referred to safety in their 'home-as-haven' phrasing which relates to aspects of home that offer sanctuary, retreat and intimacy. Participant's images and imaginings of home were also often shaped by feelings and memories of nostalgia, which will be explore further in the following section. Similarly, to Duyvendak's research (2011; et al 2016) these feelings were often accompanied with longing for home places following a disruption of in their present situation, particularly relevant for those who experienced forced migration and are settling in new environments which might not always be welcoming.

Homemaking: tactics, objects and familiarity

When I met Valeria, she was living in Gateshead for one year. She is from El Salvador and came to the UK with her husband, two teenage children and her husband's parents and brother. They all lived together in El Salvador but here they were separated and now her husband's parents and brother live in different cities. When Valeria participated in the research her family were waiting to hear about their asylum claim. Valeria and her family arrived in the UK in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and this has influenced their ability to meet people and access services.

When describing her feelings of home, we chatted about her current accommodation, which she likes and where she feels safe and happy: 'The house is small, the house in El Salvador was small too, so we feel happy'. Despite knowing that her accommodation is temporary, she tells me how they have been trying to make it more homely with a few possessions:

> *My daughter loved to have her bed full of cuddly toys in El Salvador, so I have been trying to find places to get cuddly toys. I put them in her bed […]. In the kitchen, I bought some jars to put sugar and spices, so it looks prettier and more organised, but not bigger things because we know that we can't. In the fridge we stuck a family picture.*

She also explains with sadness that the only possession she could bring from El Salvador was a family album: 'I could only bring a photo album, photos of my mum, my sisters, my nephews, when mum took me to my graduation ceremony'.

Even if Valeria now considers her home in Tyneside, she still feels very attached to El Salvador and doesn't feel she has engaged much in the local culture or knows many British people. She tells me about how she has adapted her daily routines like cooking traditional El Salvadorian foods, even if her children are becoming more interested in eating pizza and sandwiches now and are changing their habits: 'Imagine! in one year they already don't want to eat our food, next year they won't even recognise 'frijoles' [beans – an essential ingredient in her country's cuisine]'.

Valeria's account emphasizes the tactics she has been using to make herself and her family feel at home in Tyneside. The comparison between her small UK house and the one in El Salvador rekindle memories of familiar feelings and emotional connections between two spaces as 'homing' tactics (Boccagni, 2022). When Valeria creates a little familiar sanctuary for her daughter to help her feel at home by placing cuddly toys in her bed, in a similar way to the one that she had in El Salvador, she is again crafting a familiar 'haven' for her daughter. When she buys some jars for her kitchen and places a family photo in her fridge, even if she knows that her current house is only temporary, again she is attempting to create a domestic space which is intimate and familiar to her (see also Duyvendak, 2011) or a 'homely bubble' or 'microspheres', as suggested by Boccagni (2022).

In a similar way when Mehdi described how he moved 'four flowerpots and one tree lemon tree' to his new temporary accommodation he attempted to make this space more familiar, recognisable and habitable to him. These possessions which represents Mehdi's history and his everyday habits of caring for nature are his way of negotiating disruptions in his feelings of home and *'homing*' himself in the new place. These attempts to make spaces more familiar, predictable and recognisable resonate with Duyvendak (2011; Duyvendak et al, 2016) who refers to how 'familiarity' is an integral aspect and process of homemaking. He explains how feelings of home are developed if a place is recognisable through the people who inhabit it or by the practices and habits that happen in that space.

There were many other examples of homemaking practices that individuals shared with me. For example, Leila from Iran explained that she put a Persian rug and hung Persian paintings and dishes to remind her of family in Iran. She also talks about how she adapted her Iranian

cultural practices to fit her evolving values and beliefs: 'In our culture women, they like gold, but for me now […] I don't care about it'. Instead, she describes how she adapted this practice when she was on holiday. She bought two lovely necklaces for 6 euro each: 'They all lovely necklaces, I'm so happy to have them'. Leila's reflections are an example of how belongings can represent a reminder of memories and history but also negotiations with new evolving and current beliefs and values. In her case, her home-making tactics and choices clearly show the entanglements of home and identity and represent not just what home was but also what home has become and is becoming (Boccagni, 2022). The processual and evolving aspect of homemaking.

Some families talked about other ways of making their houses homely. Inaya from Sri Lanka explained that when she moved to her new home several years ago, she spent time reorganising her garden. She made the garden look nice and planted an apple tree. As she is very creative and redecorated the home with crafted decorations and her daughter's artwork in her favourite colour pink. Deniz and Caria, a refugee family from Turkey, explained that the first thing that they did when they moved 2 years ago into their house was to clean it and make it comfortable:

> *When we first stepped into the house, we just immediately started cleaning and try to make it with our culture. Wash the carpets and stuff. Right now, it doesn't feel like a temporary house, we feel comfortable inside, but we want to move out to our home and have our own place. The furniture was not enough for us […] we had to find some stuff on Facebook market or some stuff our friends gave us to make it more homely and useful as well. That's what we've done. We have got a dining table that is more convenient for our family.*

Deniz and Caria also told me that they decorated and laminated the floor of their current house and they hope to make their future home 'more homely' in a more 'Turkish style' but they wouldn't do it in their current house as they want to move to a bigger house, hence they don't want to invest too much in their current house financially and emotionally. This highlights the importance of the more mundane and every day practical aspects of homemaking which was stressed by many of the individuals that I spoke to. In a similar way, Esther from Nigeria talked about routines and practical aspects of homemaking: 'I have

everything I need in my house. I listen to my radio, listen to my TV. If I like I put my TV on. I have food in my fridge, my freezer. I feel ok, I'm alright'.

On the contrary, Karim from Syria, explains how hard it is for him and wife to make their current house a home because of how different and unfamiliar the house here is from the one that they had in Syria:

> *We don't feel this building is our home. The house looks different, the size of the house is very small only one bedroom, only one living room, a very small house. In my country, the house has different rooms with mattress to sit on the floor, here we don't have anything like that […] I am not comfortable in this house because of the size of the house, it's very small […] the water taps are different to the ones in our house in Syria […] the toilet system is different and doesn't work well. I complain but it still doesn't work well.*

One notable aspect of home-making that has been frequently discussed was the importance of displaying memorabilia and artifacts. This has resonance with Tolia-Kelly's (2004) research with of South Asian migrant communities in Britain where she claims that artefacts and art allow embodied connections to memories of people, places, scents and scenes in their homes in Britain. She argues this enables South Asian migrant communities in Britain to create a sanctuary space which shields them from the challenges of negotiating their identity in a new culture and facilitates a sense of belonging (ibid.). Sanaya has been in the UK for 20 years and was born in Sri Lanka. She talks about the various objects that she displays at home, such as puzzles that she does in her free time, magnets of places that her and her family visited in the UK, and decorations that her children made and that she is very proud of. She describes the objects from Sri Lanka that evoke profound feelings and memories, like this prayer beads from her late mother (Figure. 17).

Figure 17. Prayer beads from Sanaya's mother

In her interview Sanaya narrated the story of how these beads came into her possession and the significance it has for her and her family:

> *When I went to Sri Lanka this time, it was very sad to go back to where my mum was and everything has been taken away and its very empty because she's not there anymore. But in the drawers, there were those prayer beads that she used to use, my sister-in-law had left that for me. That has an important place in my room. My little son he takes it and says this is important to us because it's something grandma had. He says it is important to him as well, so I believe it will be a family heirloom in the future. There are things that matter to us.*

Similarly, Diego from El Salvador explained he has a tiny pillow with a picture of friends from El Salvador with whom he used go hiking. This pillow was a gift from one of his friends and was one of the only possessions that he brought with him when he came to the UK. It was often recounted by participants the little they could bring with them when they left their home country to come to seek asylum in the UK. Individuals regularly stressed that they only could only bring some clothes and travel essentials as decisions to leave were often abrupt due to their circumstances. When they could take something, it was often something small like a family album, a small souvenir or something important, practical or of significance to them. These accounts differ from research on the home-making practices of other type of migrants where their mobility is perhaps more planned. For instance, Walsh's (2015) research with British expatriates which demonstrated how belongings brought from their country of origin

were used to recreate home spaces in new countries. As not many possessions were brought from their departure spaces, refugees adopted different tactics to recreate familiar spaces in Tyneside. Some of these homemaking practices involved purchasing and displaying traditional, cultural or religious objects in their accommodations. These objects were sourced in Tyneside or brought by others to the UK at later stage. With these objects refugees recreated familiar environments (i.e. floor seating arrangements, displaying religions items, home décor, rugs etc).

Objects were not the only means through which participants recreated homes for themselves. Many highlighted the role of technologies such as phones, laptops, social media platforms or even online storage drives in homemaking. For example, Natalia, who has experienced homelessness, destitution, family separation and mental health challenges due to her current immigration status, explains that her phone is a very important possession. It enables her to view images, her artwork, search information and connect with people here and abroad:

> *I can talk to my son, I can find what I want to find, ring who I want to ring. We did a quiz [in a community project that she attends] the question was: What would you like to take with you if you had to live on a desert island? I said my phone because you have all, your library, all your photographs, all your digital paintings, all connections actually. Everything.*

Laura recounted how sad she was that she couldn't bring anything with her when she came to the UK. However, she later discovered that she had pictures from El Salvador which were automatically downloaded to her Google drive without her realising. She explained how happy she when she realised that she had all these pictures. Later, she printed these images and now she displays them at home to remind her of her life in El Salvador: 'So, I started printing pictures, lots and lots of pictures and bought frames for them and I displayed them in the living room, in my room'. She emphasizes that these images from people and 'things' that she would like to have here from El Salvador but are not here: 'make her travel to those memories, helps her cope and help her remember'. Her account emphasises the importance that past memories play in homemaking and in negotiating her current present. Digital technologies and the creative ways that refugees and asylum-seeking families use them to maintain and

(re) create relationships and intimacy with those who are abroad will be explored further in chapter 5.

Refugees also often practice rituals to recreate home in Tyneside. Ariana from El Salvador described a family ritual that her and her son regularly engage in. She has a family album that she brought from El Salvador with family pictures and memories of the life they had there. 'When we feel cosy with my son', Arianna recounted, 'he sometimes likes to sit in that couch with me and he asks me: 'Tell me about when I was a baby, tell me' and so we talk about when he was little and all the things we used to do in El Salvador […], whilst we look at the pictures in the album, he asks me: 'how old was I here?, what did you do there?'. She also talked about other activities that she does with her son, like cooking and baking cakes or biscuits together. Arianna explains how her son likes to help her with cooking and he is always with her in the kitchen. These are acts of sharing and learning about memories of home, but they are also creating new experiences in their new environments. This resonates with Boccagni's (2022) active doing of home or 'homing', in this case through activities or rituals that are regularly exercised in their new environments in order to reproduce and recall emotions of home and to make the spaces more predictable, personal or private.

Rituals involving food was another important 'homing' activity. Refugee participants talked at length about crafting cultural dishes from home. These dishes allowed them to engage in sensorial aspects of homemaking by tasting, smelling, and recreating dishes that they ate in home countries. These flavours, smells and textures which are cooked and consumed are also emotionally charged with memories and past experiences. Whilst talking about his experience of settling here, Diego recalled that the first thing that he and his brother did was to cook food from home because they yearned for a traditional El Salvadorian breakfast. Unfortunately, in those early days, they kept failing to recreate these traditional dishes because they didn't have the right ingredients. They even got lost in trying to find a store where they could buy the ingredients as they were unfamiliar with the area. This was an attempt by Diego and his brother to reproduce a familiar habit and routine from home that they were longing for to make the new unfamiliar environment more habitable following disruptions due to fleeing El Salvador and settling here. These nostalgic feelings which follow a disruption of home are also highlighted by Duyvendak (2011) and Duyvendak et al (2016).

Food, traditional snacks and drinks where a common feature in interviews and throughout my fieldwork particularly when reflecting about home and belonging. Many stories where shared about how cooking food from their countries of origin and as well as other recipes helped them feel at home, shelter from challenges and find comfort. I also observed frequently during my fieldwork, the joy that refugees and asylum seekers felt when sharing their traditional culinary treasures with others. Refugees and asylum-seeking families talked about how food and eating brought people together from the same country of origin, as well as from other countries. They explained how they loved to share their traditional dishes, and other delicacies with others at home and in community settings that were important and intimate to them. They talked about the traditions practiced with their families here and virtually with those abroad but also with other important people in their community around Eid celebrations, birthday celebrations and neighbours. Food, snacks and drinks were regularly shared with me in interviews as a way of disclosing something homely and personal. Food also frequently featured in the photovoice project, as such, representing a fundamental aspect of homemaking for some individuals seeking sanctuary in Tyneside. Below are some images (Figure. 18) that emerged in the fieldwork, the first image on the left is an image of the food that Mehdi cooked for us after our interview in one of the Comfrey allotments. The other three images were used during the photovoice project to highlight how participants felt a sense of belonging and home when cooking and eating food from their countries of origin.

Figure 18. Images of food from ethnographic fieldwork and photovoice project

Inaya, for example, explained about how food plays and important role in her relationship with her neighbours who are from Pakistan: '[They are] very good people, we always sharing food, they come into my house […] that's how the friendships bond'. Ana Maria, Valeria and Ariana, who are close friends, talked about the importance of food in their regular gatherings and shopping routines. Valeria explained how much she worries that her children are not that

keen in eating food from El Salvador and that one day they might not even recognise *'frijoles'* (beans). This shows the strong value that food and food related rituals play in recreating home environments, memories and refugee identity.

Figure 19. Drinking Turkish tea with Talib during an interview (By Melisa Maida)

The above image (Figure 19) was taken when I interviewed Talib in a local park. Talib, who is from Turkey, was then living in a hostel. He was very recently granted refugee status and he was waiting to move into a council house and for his family to join him. He was living in a very small room at that time, and he told me how the ritual of preparing, drinking and displaying Turkish tea in the traditional glass teacup was a way making himself feel at home. This was his means of recreating a sanctuary in the middle of a very difficult situation. Whilst we talked, we drank Turkish tea and snacks, he shared:

> *This tea specially makes me feel at home. Yes, for example, this piece of glass, makes me like feeling at home since drinking tea not from a big cup, but drinking tea from this cup of tea glass and small. It makes me like feeling at home. I can say it is really important […] I come here this place is white [referring to his hostel room] I put my tea here*.

The role of food and the sharing of food in memory and in the reproduction of homes of refugees and migrants has been examined by researchers such as Johnston and Longhurst

(2012), Dossa (2013) and Longhurst et al (2009). My research findings have resonance, for instance, with Longhurst et al (2009) study which highlighted how food and cooking connected migrant women viscerally to their 'old home' and helped them rebuild a new sense of home in Hamilton, New Zealand. Johnston and Longhurst (2012) discuss how sharing food supported migrant women who were from ethnically diverse groups to develop strong affective ties through reciprocating cooking and sharing. Further, Dossa (2013) examines how Afghan women from Kabul remember the structural violence and devastation though narrating and cooking, highlighting the power that these food practices can have in relation to reviving memory and history. My research adds depth to these accounts by illuminating the significance of food as a homemaking tactic by which refugee and asylum-seeking communities negotiate belonging. Food and food related practices also had the capacity to reproduce deeply embodied senses: the smells and tastes of home, good memories and sanctuary. The performative process of cooking also seemed to connect individuals with home feelings and memories. The practice of sharing food and drinking rituals (i.e. Turkish tea) with others from same and other ethnic groups were acts of agency and generosity which bridged and bonded individuals without the need to engage in conversations and contributed to developing a sense of community. This will be explored further in chapter 6.

Individuals seeking sanctuary in Tyneside also recounted how they felt strong emotive feelings of home in special places to them. Places beyond dwellings that they discovered in urban areas or in natural spaces. These spaces connected with participants through deep and embodied sensations that reminded them of homely spaces or past experiences. Often as refugees recounted stories about these special places, their narrations evoked strong emotions that were linked to treasured memories from homelands. Elnara, from Turkey who had only just joined her husband Talib with her children at the time of her interview, explained an instant feeling of familiarity when she visited Newcastle city centre: 'I came to Newcastle. I see it's like Istanbul […]. All building and shops, I smiled, this weather is like Istanbul!'. She recounted how this instant familiarity evoked positive feelings for her in relation to the area as it felt like her country: 'many kinds of people here and in Istanbul many kinds of people, tourist, other people you can see'. She recalls telling her daughter with excitement: 'This is like Istanbul! It's a nice place and everywhere is clean. The weather also, it is near the sea, so the smell of the sea is coming'. Elnara articulates a feeling of familiarity to her new surroundings as if she is trying to make emotional and sensorial connections with places that evoke positive memories

and where she felt at home. She talks about the similarities in terms of visual aesthetics of the city, social constructions and familiar smells, which make her feel like she is in Istanbul. Interestingly, her husband Talib, who I interviewed months before they joined him in Gateshead, talked about very similar instances of familiarity to the natural places where he grew up in Turkey:

> *When I came here to the UK, I remember my childhood. The climate […] in some ways very similar. For example, when I was a child, there was a place where we collected blackberries […] and then strawberries, I remember as a small child, in our village, we were going to collect them under some kind of trees. And then the climate, maybe here, there is a little bit more rain but somehow, it's very similar to my village in Turkey. So, for example, today I was speaking with my father, I was showing to him: 'Look, look! This is our.... like our village'. Actually, in Tyneside, here, it reminded me a lot especially the parks, nature, the trees... I remember my home country. Two days ago, I went to Jesmond Dene and I take tea, go there and drink […] When I was in Gateshead, I went to Saltwell Park. I was going through for especially during the lockdown a lot. It was, like I said, like my place, my village in terms of nature, just trees a lot of things […] its very good for me, the atmosphere in the park. It's just really nice. And I was there often, also at the Comfrey Project [...] the nature. It was a very big place. I was taking my tea and then go to Comfrey, sit and then do something. Sometimes, I was taking my computer, sitting outside I especially during lockdown and then do some courses. For example, I listened on the garden of Comfrey project last year. So, I used to spend time during Covid […] especially this year I was growing something […] when I go to the Comfrey project, I was remembering of my village, my mother, my father, my mother as I mentioned, passed away this year […] the parsley I grow there it's because of my mother. When I come to Turkey, she was growing the parsley, lots of parsley. She was doing lots of different meals by using the parsley. So, for this reason I grow parsley […] my previous house, the room that I stayed was very good. This place [referring to his temporary hostel accommodation], this room is okay for staying, just a place […] the parks make me like feeling a little home.*

In this insightful passage from Talib, he emphasizes how nature and the local environment have a crucial role in homemaking; it acts as a connecting force with the important people and

places in his life. He talks about finding sanctuary and healing in these spaces because of this familiarity and actively uses it as a tactic to adverse situations such as the Covid-19 Pandemic and family separation. Further, he engages in regular routines which enables him to connect his past and present by for example drinking tea in nature or growing parsley in memory of his late mother and regularly attending the Comfrey project. With these 'homing' tactics he can reproduce past habits in his new environment. He evokes feelings or memories of home which become part of his new intimate and predictable routines here in Tyneside (Boccagni, 2022). In their recent research, Van Liempt and Staring (2020) used walk-along interviews to explore the meaning that certain spaces evoke to Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. They suggest 'certain places can trigger memories and emotions' that can make refugees feel at home. The authors add that these often green and open spaces, can 'heal and have a therapeutic value, but they might also harm' (p. 15). These connections and familiarity between certain natural spaces in Tyneside and memories of home were very commonly discussed by refugees who took part in this research. These special spaces also induced recollections of other important moments in participants lives, like this deeply reflective account from Laura from El Salvador which she shared with me during our over 2-hour long interview and which she later depicted through two images in the photovoice project (see below, Figure 20):

Figure 20. Images from Laura's accordion book of belonging from the photovoice project

The place is called White Horse, and it is like a small hill […] and there is a big rock with a white horse painted into it. That's why it is called that way. I went to visit it with my boyfriend and it is a very special place, not because my boyfriend took me there but because the day that I was to come here [to the UK], I went to the beach [in El Salvador] and I went there with my best friend and with my family. I already knew that I was

leaving so my life was not in the same place anymore even if I was still in the same country, I knew that I was leaving, you know. It was like if my life was ending in front of me, I couldn't do anything. That afternoon we watched the sunset at the beach […] in the national anthem to our flag it says purple and golden skies, because our sunsets are purple and golden, it is just beautiful! So, at the beach that day was really hard for me, one of the best and worst memories of my country, because it was so hard … not being able to tell my best friend who I grew up with from when I was 11 that I was coming here […] to not being able to say anything to him or other members of my family except my grandparents that we were coming here. So that day in South Shields we could see the sea and the sun was so beautiful and purple and golden […] so I started to cry and my boyfriend got really worried, but after a while I took a deep breath and I explained to him […] that I just relived the moment that I left my country and I explained to him […] how and why I came here because I didn't tell him much about that before. In that moment I lived again all those emotions […] and I saw the same sky. So that place is very special to me because it reminds me of home […] thinking about home is so beautiful but also so painful, for that reason I think that place is a very special place for me, not my favourite but a very special place.

As Laura explains that very moment as the sun was setting when she visited the site of the 'White Horse' made her relive the last sunset that she experienced in the beach in El Salvador. A very traumatic and emotional memory for her, where she was accompanied by loved ones for that last time and who she soon after would leave behind: 'I remember crying and asking myself when would I go back to the place where I grew up', she explains, 'I still don't know but when I miss home I come here and I feel like home'. This emotional account from Laura demonstrates how home is experienced and negotiated in different ways, sometimes within dwellings, sometimes in nature or urban spaces.

This special place for Laura, acts as bridge for her feelings of in-betweenness, a space that joins her local and the transnational identities. A space where she can feel at home and that has become a 'home' away from 'home' (see Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018; Ehrkamp, 2005), where she can remember a very important moment of her life El Salvador but also a place where she recalls experiencing a very intimate moment that she shared with her boyfriend here. This space also acts as a familiar place or a sanctuary that she can come to, to heal from

past traumas and seek comfort whenever she feels dislocated or yearning for all that she left behind.

Dreaming Home: Aspirations and future imaginaries

In our interview, Anahi who is from Central America talked at length about her dreams. She explained how moving here and not being allowed to work for several years now due to her immigration status has been difficult, specially, since she had a well-established career back home as a pharmacist. Yet, as she explains she turned this time of waiting as an opportunity to plan and reflect about her life aspirations and goals. Gavin et al (2010) suggest that future beliefs are hopeful and optimistic inner imaginations about possible outcomes. Blunt and Dowling (2022) highlight how 'ideas and meanings of home might be closely shaped both by memories of childhood and dreams for the future' (p.1). Boccagni (2022) also points out the future imaginary of home when he describes 'homing' as the 'lived experience of home as an attempt to tread the fine line between past ascriptions and future-orientated potentialities' (p. 585). This section builds on this temporal aspect of home by exploring how future dreams are being used as a homemaking tactic by those who experience forced migration and are settling in Tyneside.

When Anahi contemplates her future, she visualizes a social enterprise in which she will be making her own products and helping others to start their own businesses under a collective and supportive umbrella: 'It's going to be a company where we are going to sell and at the same time, we are going to contribute to the society we are in'. Yet, she explains how she also keeps herself grounded and realistic because she is doubtful about what might happen in the future, as much is out of her control, particularly in relation to her immigration status: 'nobody knows what will happen tomorrow'. Many other refugee participants talked about their future dreams and aspirations. As I talked to refugee participants about their futures many voyaged into imagined territories. Their minds began drifting into a world of belonging, stability and freedom. Families talked about aspirations that involved a more secure and active role in society, for example, by developing careers either by pursuing studies, getting jobs or by starting businesses, social enterprises or charitable organisations. Learning English and other aspects of the British culture were also considered very important in their future imaginaries.

Housing was also regularly discussed, and many individuals hoped to live in more secure or appropriate housing that would suit their needs and that they could make their home.

Obi from Nigeria dreams about going to university to study midwifery: 'I like babies […] I love babies, you know. Bringing them to this world would be amazing…'. Diego from El Salvador shared his detailed plans for his future:

> *I love this question. I have many personal plans. The first one is learning 5 languages […], I would also like to do a cocktail making course because I like what bartenders do, it is art! […] I would like a job that would allow me to travel […], and this one, this is a special one that must happen, it is a childhood dream, since childhood, I loved vegetarian food. I would like to have my own vegetarian restaurant […]*

Diego shared many other dreams related to music, nature and travelling which would allow him and others to connect in a 'deeper and more meaningful' way of living. For Talib from Turkey, who was separated from his family at the time our interview, his biggest dream was to bring his family to Tyneside. He talked about all the different activities that they would do together when they arrive here. He hopes he would get a job in the UK. Yet, he explained that longer term, if he is able to acquire British citizenship, he would like to return to Africa where he worked before as a teacher and where he feels he can make a difference: 'Yeah, what can I say? You know, my heart, if I get British passport, if they would give the passport to me today maybe next week, I would move […] there is an open position in Kenya […] to help people here maybe it is meaningless, but in Africa, it has a great value'. However, he worries that he might forget about this dream or that his dream might change if he gets too comfortable with his life here: 'I don't know from my soul in future and I am telling that I must not be like this, good life, everything, car, good job, then forget everything […] I'm praying to God, I mustn't be selfish, just think of myself, my life […] my vision is like this', he adds. It is not uncommon for dreams to change as life in the new country begins to take shape. Similarly, Boccagni (2017) identified that aspirations adapted and developed over time in a longitudinal study with immigrant domestic workers in Italy. Ariana from El Salvador explained how she dreams of setting up her own charity so that she can help others, she would also like to return to Urban House, the hostel where she was initially accommodated when she first arrived to the UK: 'I have this promise to myself that when I can, I would like to return to Urban House and help

people there, everyone not just people from El Salvador, because it is not easy […] to start from zero'. This dream of helping others going through similar experiences or who are less fortunate, has been a regular feature in plans that many participants discussed.

Others described how in the future they will be able to reunite with loved ones abroad or visit places that they aren't able to visit at the moment because of their immigration restrictions. This emphasizes the hopeful sanctuary that the future represents for many refugees. It is a space when they will be able to move freely again without immigration and financial restrictions. Some individuals haven't been abroad for many years and their motivations to travel were to visit friends or family, for leisure or to get to know places:

> *Melisa: I know you said you wanted to go to Germany to visit family*
> *Esther: Yeah, in the holiday time just for a visit for like a week.*
> *Melisa: is that the first time you would be out of the country for a holiday or have you been somewhere before?*
> *Esther: no, we haven't been to anywhere before. I'm saving money for that…*

Mehdi from Iran who was just granted refugee status after 20 years of waiting at the time of our interview described his plans to travel the UK after he settles into a new house and job: 'yes, after I am settled for my job and house, I plan to travel in the UK North to South, West to East. I'm living in Northeast, but in the UK, there is nice places to visit […] like the north, Scotland, Loch Lomond'. For Mehdi travelling as a deeper significance, perhaps a point of time when he will be able to start living again. Individuals who were not receiving any support from the Home Office as their asylum application was refused explained that dreaming about the future was challenging. Blessing from Nigeria cannot currently pursue her dream of becoming a Mental Health Nurse because she can't access student finance loans due to her current immigration restrictions. Natalia doesn't receive any financial or housing support from the Home Office and relies entirely on charities to survive. She explains that this situation of limbo makes it is impossible for her to imagine a future. She can't imagine that she could reunite with her son any time soon, let alone live with him as time has passed and he is a grown-up adult. Talib and his family's dreams of living together as a family were shattered when their daughter could not join them in the UK as she turned 18 before Talib was granted refugee status and is now not eligible for family reunification. Finally, Elias dreams of being able to

support his girlfriend financially and take her on a holiday. He currently completely relies on her for housing and financial support as he doesn't receive any support from the Home Office. Elias' future ideas illustrate what type of life and home he wants for himself and his family. Yet his imaginings are unattainable for him at the moment due to his immigration status. These dreams offer with hope that one day he will be able to realise his dreams and to care for his partner. In a similar way, Yildiz's (2020) research with Syrian and Iraqi asylum seekers in Austria point out how hope and resilience was a coping strategy and source of strength to challenges that they experienced within restricting situations. Mahamid and Berte (2020) note how Palestinian young people living in refugee camps across the West Bank experiencing instability, traumas and sadness were also hopeful for their future despite the challenges they experienced. This research builds on this scholarship and highlights how aspirations and dreams about an imagined home can act as a place of sanctuary, and often offers a means of coping emotionally with a difficult present. This research also emphasizes that for some refugees living in the most precarious situations, dreaming can also be a painful reminder of the precarity of their present and future uncertainty and this can exacerbate their feelings of exclusion and (not) belonging.

For many individuals dreams of financial and housing security were linked to providing a safe space and future for themselves or for their loved ones. Many described the aspirations they had for their children and the sacrifices that they had to endure to ensure a better future for them: 'there's lots of dream and hopes and it's all right if it doesn't go the way it's supposed to go […] the major thing is for the children to be happy', describes Sanaya from Sri Lanka (while weeping), 'there is a lot of things we have given up for them here […] a lot of sacrifices we have done to be here'. Deniz and Caria also described their dreams for their children and how they would like them to develop their own careers and studies:

> *Yes, I have a dream about my kids. I can imagine seeing one of them going to Cambridge University to get some study, for example, computer science or maybe the other a police officer, dentist, doctor and for the little one a vet [...] if they become a good person to everyone, is my dream.*

Karim from Syria also shared his dreams for the future: 'The only hopes I have, are regarding my family and my country, Syria'. He would like to be able to bring his second son to the United

Kingdom to live with him, and for Syria he hopes 'that the war stops, and all homeless Syrian people around the world can go back to their homes in Syria'. He explains that the only dream he has for himself is to return to Syria one day, at least once, but only to visit. Similarly, many other refugees, described reuniting with their families who are abroad either by bringing them here to live with them or for a visit or to return home, this will be explored further in the next chapter.

Many participating refugees considered the UK and Tyneside as their long-term home but had dreams of returning to their country of origin or to have more transnational lives in which they would work or live in multiple places. Andre knows that he will be going back home to Cameroon one day; he is hopeful that Africa is changing:

> *I will be in my home in the future. Maybe I will be coming time to time to visit here and the rest and then go back. I will be in Cameroon. A lot of things change in our country now and most African people are going back. Our country is not rich but not so poor. […] I think the ideology that is going on is that African people need to go step forward, that's why many things are changing in Africa. […] No place can replace the place you are coming from. I will be in the UK from time to time. I will be doing that, but at a time I will be very tired, and I will just stay in my country.*

Desire to return to home was commonly discussed and often intersected with a hope for positive socio-political or economic change in their country of origin. This correlates with the finding from Muller-Funk and Fransen (2022) who considered how future return aspirations of migrants in the context of protracted displacement acted as tactic to keep hope for change in their home countries alive (p.1).

Some participants expressed a different attachment. Leila explains that she loves the UK; she does not want to leave her permanent home in the UK but unfortunately her health condition struggles with the colder climate. She does not desire to return to Iran as they 'have made it very difficult for even normal people who haven't got any problems to live […] [People] are fleeing, there is nothing left because the government sold everything to China and Russia'. She describes her concerns about the future of our world: 'we hope the world to become a good place for everyone, for our children, for our next generation to live peaceful next to each

other […] hopefully, without borders', 'humans did a lot of bad things'. Similarly, Diego sees his future here, in the UK, somewhere very quiet, close to a forest and a river. Somewhere where he can feel safe and away from direct threats in daily urban life like he experienced in El Salvador: 'I would like to go to live somewhere peaceful […] somewhere where danger is not so frequent'. He explains that in El Salvador someone might try to kill him because they don't know who he is or because he is in another neighbourhood. Both Leila and Diego do not have clear desires or intentions of returning to their countries of origins. Highlighting how their past and present experiences (in this case negative) about their homelands have an impact on their decision making around future aspirations. This shows the interconnectivity of these time-spaces (past, present, future) which was also highlighted in the findings of Crivello's research (2015).

Finally, Inaya explains that her future dreams are right here in the present, she doesn't have any desires or dreams. She is content with the balance in her life and her situation here in the Tyneside. She feels at home:

> *My family still thinking I'm coming back to Sri Lanka. No, this is my home, this is my place. Even if I'm dying here, I'm happy, I don't want to go back. This is the good choice from my God, to bring me here, I have a peaceful life, I enjoy my life. I'm looking after myself and exercise and that's my list to live long. So, my goal is to continue this balance.*

This section explored how future aspirations and dreams shape and embody the homemaking of refugees in Tyneside. We have seen how complex future imaginaries are often influenced by past and present experiences of home (Crivello, 2015). For instance, how Karim keeps his hope alive that one day he will return to his homeland in Syria to visit when the war ends. Diego plans to live a peaceful countryside environment in the UK where he can escape from the violence that he experienced in El Salvador. The time-space of the future and its imaginaries of home can act as a sanctuary to cope with the disruptions of the present (Mahamid and Berte, 2020; Yildiz, 2020). On the other hand, this section has emphasised how for those participants living in more precarious situations, their inability to dream and plan exacerbates erasure and exclusion. Overall, this section emphasizes the role that the future as a home-making tactic and how these future goals are subjective and individualized, and

often related to deeply rooted personal values and experiences both from past and present. Future imaginaries can be a productive strategy as they offer hopeful alternatives to feelings and lived experiences of disruption and instability.

Conclusion

This chapter explored many reflections and stories of home from refugees and asylum seekers living in Tyneside. These stories demonstrated how home, particularly for those who experienced forced displacement is a complex, subjective and multi-layered concept which is developed in a processual manner and is influenced by experiences across time, space and emotions.

This chapter explored various aspects home. Firstly, it demonstrated that refugees and asylum seekers in Tyneside describe and sense home in many different spatialities. For some, understandings of home seem more fixed to one locality either their country of origin or Tyneside, whilst others described home in more fluid, hybrid and transnational ways. For some feelings of home were situated within the borders of a state or nations, yet for others those feelings of home were found in nature, people or materiality. Similarly, to Blunt and Dowling (2006), I argue that forced displacement, enforced precarity experienced through the process of seeking asylum and other challenges of refugee settlement complicates feelings of home for refugees. For this reason, homemaking processes are often experienced differently to other migrant groups who might have more rights, opportunities to maintain ties with home countries and access to resources to support their settlement. Further refugees' feelings and experiences of home and belonging also greatly vary from each other. For some the traumas experienced in their countries of origin forged greater emotional attachment in Tyneside, whereas others expressed a more present and direct connection to their countries of origin, often linked to emotive memories and relationships to people and places (see also Duyveyvak, 2011). Further, participant's experiences of inclusion or exclusion in Tyneside seems to substantively shape geographies of belonging and homemaking. The research also highlighted that whilst some individuals felt settled in Tyneside, there were specific spaces where this did not apply. I argue that feelings of safety (or not) have significant effects in the ways in which home is perceived and experienced (see also Sirriyeh, 2010). For instance, due to the insecurity of their current place of residence and settlement status, some asylum

seekers could not envision Tyneside as home. Whilst for others, their current dwelling was a space where they could feel free and safe. Safety in spaces, as well as personal values and beliefs (e.g. freedom, justice) in relation to countries or local spaces played a role in how refugees experienced a sense of home and belonging (see Fabos and Brun, 2015).

Secondly, this chapter explored the 'doing' of home. I argued that carving out homes in new environments is processual and therefore homemaking and (re) creating new homes involves agency. This aligns with and supports the extensive scholarship on home and belonging which points to this processual aspect of belonging (see Boccagni, 2022, Blunt and Dowling, 2022; Brun and Fabos, 2015; Wright, 2015, Antonsich, 2010). This chapter illustrated many different tactics that refugees and asylum seekers use to carve out and transform everyday spaces to make them more homely and personal. These practices involve using possessions and materials to reproduce familiar feelings, smells, or tastes. Yet, as highlighted most refugees aren't able to bring many possessions along with them when they are displaced as their departures are often abrupt and unplanned. This is different to other types of migrant groups who often carry possessions to the countries where they move as a way to recreate a sense of home for themselves (see Walsh, 2015). Nonetheless, as revealed in this research refugee families find ways to make their new surroundings more predictable and recognisable. They reorganise and decorate their accommodations with locally bought but familiar or significant objects and use technology to access memories and connections. I also illustrated how different rituals such as the use of food and the practice of cooking and sharing food and drinks was also a recurring way to rekindle old and personal feelings and memories of home and to establish new practices in new spaces and with new people (see Boccagni, 2022; Johnston and Longhurst, 2012; Dossa, 2013; Longhurst et al, 2009). I considered how spaces outside dwellings in nature and the city were also used as a strategy to appropriate and make sense of the new environment. Some refugees explained how some environments remind them of home or specific memories that they experienced in their home countries. This enabled them to relive memories and make new attachments to places locally which became familiar. I argue that these practices and special spaces, where connections between the 'old and familiar' and the 'new' merge together, were used as spaces to negotiate and bridge what home was and what home is becoming. These act as 'proxy' or transnational bridges where refugees can seek sanctuary, comfort and healing from adversity and unfamiliar circumstances making their

surroundings more habitable. They emerge as 'homely bubbles' within challenging, painful and precarious conditions (see Boccagni, 2022; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021).

Finally, this chapter explored the role of the future and dreams in homemaking. It was argued that future imaginaries of home are interconnected with past and present experiences (see Crivello, 2015), as well as personal beliefs and values. For instance, a participant explained that one of his future dreams was to live in a peaceful environment in the countryside in the UK and this was linked to painful memories of conflict experienced in urban spaces in his country of origin. For others, the future offered a hopeful alternative to the challenges they were experiencing in the present. Similarly, to Mahamid and Berte (2020) and Yildiz (2020), this chapter emphasized how the time-space of the future and its imaginaries of home can provide a sanctuary to cope with the disruptions of the past and present. Yet, this research also revealed that for those who were experiencing destitution and state abandonment, their situation affected their ability to dream. This lack of control of their future further intensified their feelings of exclusion and rejection. Therefore, I suggest that future imaginings can act as a powerful homemaking tactic, yet for some refugees, particularly those in the most uncertain situations, visualising the future was a painful remainder of their inability of having control over their lives.

The spatiality of home reveals the intimate aspects of belonging. Yet, as illustrated in this chapter and in past research (see Antonsich, 2010), the spatiality of home is shaped and interconnected to the wider socio-political aspects of belonging. The home is a personal spatiality of belonging in which refugees are able to actively carve out their space, identities and to an extent exert some control of their lives. An intimate space where they can be themselves, engage in homemaking practices and imaginings of the future. Yet, even with these sanctuary bubbles of home that they actively create there can be still reminders of the violence that they experienced and they are experiencing. Overall, this chapter stresses the complexity of how home is sensed, (re) made and imagined by refugee families living in Tyneside.

Chapter 5: Doing family and intimacy

Introduction

Valeria and Ariana are both from El Salvador and have been relatively recently dispersed to Tyneside (Valeria a year ago and Ariana 2 years ago). Valeria explained how she meet Ariana through another El Salvadorian friend, Laura. Valeria met Laura almost by chance in a supermarket as she overheard her speaking Spanish: 'Laura told me, I am from El Salvador, and I said, 'me too!', she recounts enthusiastically, 'Laura then told me, I know Ariana, she is also from El Salvador, and she introduced me to her'. Ariana is now a very important person in Valeria's life. Both Ariana and Valeria have children. Ariana is a single mum of a primary age child and Valeria and her husband have two older children. Both have family in El Salvador who they miss and who they are in touch with regularly through WhatsApp. Their shared separation from loved ones and experience of settlement in Tyneside helped to create a family-like relationship. Together, and with other friends, they are supporting each other in rebuilding their lives here in Tyneside. They perform mundane acts of care such as looking after each other's children, emotional support, socialising, shopping together, supporting each other with learning English and accessing services.

This opening story from Valeria, Ariana and their friends, offer an introduction to this chapter's the themes. The 'doing', vitality and spatiality of intimate relationships in the context of forced migration and how family and other intimate relationships work locally and transnationally in ways that challenge normative notions of 'the' family. The first empirical chapter of this thesis explored the homemaking tactics used by refugees and asylum seekers to carve out and make Tyneside more homely, familiar and personal to them. As I highlighted in previous chapter, rebuilding a sense of home is processual and requires active 'doing'. I also emphasised that homemaking was also deeply interconnected with the relationships that emerged through shared experiences both locally and transnationally. This chapter builds on this relational aspect of belonging by focussing on how intimate relationships are negotiated in the context of forced migration, where many refugees and asylum seekers experience being denied their right to family. It also further explores the 'doing' of family in these often-difficult circumstances and the different ways of care and support that emerge in the absence or

disruption of familial support systems. I highlight the significance and meaning of these relationships, as well as the realities and tensions of negotiating intimacy in the context of force migration.

In this chapter, I argue that exploring family through the lens of 'doing' rather than 'being family' seems a more suited way to understand refugee and asylum-seeking families (see Morgan, 2011). I will focus on this 'doing' of family or family practices to bring to light the many ways that refugees and asylum seekers engage in (re) building intimacy, care and support. As this chapter will suggests many refugees engage in relationships with biological family abroad to continue to exercise their right to family life despite immigration restrictions, whilst simultaneously they also build new intimacies, familial structures and relations locally beyond blood relations. This chapter offers a rich and nuanced account of these complex and diverse familial structures and practices that refugees and asylum seekers (re) create. I argue that this varied these relations are often a means through which refugees attempt to fill absences, manage challenges and create new forms of spatial attachment. This chapter supports and builds on the debates within social sciences which call to expand and decentre the normative ways of understanding family beyond conjugal or nuclear family (Aitken, 1998; Jamieson et al, 2006; Morgan, 2011; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). For example, Aitken (1998) argues that our understanding of spatial relations within families is more associated to family imaginaries of a century ago. Morgan discusses how the standard model of family fails to accommodate the diversity of familial structures (2011, p.4), and Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) advocate unsettling our understanding of the family, as intimacy and care are increasingly situated within networks of friends (2004).

Firstly, this chapter will highlight the harsh conditions, realities and experiences concerned with family separation. I argue that traditional ways of understanding family within policy are in tension with the natural and cultural practices of intimacy, care and support amongst refugees. Secondly, this chapter will focus on exploring the mundane and everyday practices and rituals which refugees and asylum seekers engage in to develop and maintain new social relations. I begin by discussing how refugee families who are separated manage their relationships transnationally. Then, I will examine the realities, practices and strategies which families who are together in Tyneside or who have reunited employ to manage the challenges of settlement in a new country and culture. Finally, I will explore the practices and support that

emerge through 'family like' friendships arguing that these fictive kins reinstate a sense of connection, intimacy and belonging locally in everyday life, when blood related kins might be physically absent due to the separation.

Family separation, systems and emotions

Talib is originally from Turkey and lived in many countries throughout his life. When I first met him, he was in in Gateshead on his own. Talib explained that it was difficult for him to socialised as a single man. He couldn't do family activities with other families and worried that people in his neighbourhood would misinterpret him if he tried to befriend them. His family were in a third country waiting for Talib's asylum claim to be processed and hopefully accepted as a refugee so that they could apply for family reunion (in the UK refugee families are eligible for reunion only when refugee status is granted and various other criteria for eligibility apply). The COVID-19 pandemic then hit and all asylum processes were suspended which resulted in extended prolonged waiting. Talib and his family waited and waited. As they struggled and lived separately from each other for over 2 years, they also adjusted their family practices and routines to sustain their family life and intimacy. In my interview with Elnara, his wife, here in Tyneside, she reflected on the pain and emotions that family separation inflicted on her family:

> *It was very difficult. A long time. Especially for my children it was their first time, with no father. What can we do? […] I can't breathe. How can I breathe […]. It was very difficult, mainly at night, I cried, cried... But I didn't show it to my children because I have to be in power. If I cry, cry, then how can they feel, my children. My children didn't see any time when I was crying.*

Around the time I interviewed Talib, he was living in temporary accommodation. He had been just granted refugee status and made an application for his family to join him here. Tragically, one of his daughters turned 18 as they were waiting for Talib's refugee status, and she became ineligible for family reunification. They had to make the tough decision for her to stay in a third country, but they are still hopeful that she will be able to join them at some point in the future. Elnara recounts about their bittersweet family reunion experience: 'It was very nice for us. We are very happy, but a little bit not happy because another daughter stays [behind],

my heart felt like, one half is happy, and one half is not happy'. Elnara also described how she worries about her daughter being far away from the rest of the family, but they regularly keep in touch. Despite the pain of their separation, she explains how her daughter is maturing and staying with 5 girls that she is studying with at university: 'She is growing […] my daughter telling don't worry mama everything is alright, I am studying, I am successful'.

This story from Elnara, Talib and their family highlights the pain and trauma of family separation. Such separation is common among refugee families. Many are denied their right to family due to current UK immigration policy. For instance, Valeria related her worry concerning her mother who lives in El Salvador and who is unwell. Valeria would like to bring her mother to the UK but knows that it is unlikely as she currently waiting for a Home Office decision on her asylum case. Even if she receives refugee status, it is unlikely that her mother will be eligible for family reunion, as she is will not be regarded as a close family member. Natalia came to the UK with her son 20 years ago. Unfortunately, her son was later deported and she explained that he is not allowed to return to UK, not even to visit her: 'He tried once [to come to visit her] but he was stopped in Heathrow [by immigration officials]. They said he has no reason to enter'. Natalia's immigration situation is complex. She currently receives no financial support from the Home Office and survives from the support from charities who provide her with accommodation and living cost support. Due to her immigration situation, she is unable to leave the country to visit her son abroad and they do not know when they will next see each other.

Many other refugee families find themselves unable to reunite temporarily or longer term because they do not meet the Home Office eligibility for reunion and due to other circumstances. For example, if they have not been granted refugee status or if their cases were refused, if their families aren't identified as close family members by Home Office guidelines or if their families have disappeared, missing or unreachable. There are also associated costs for family reunion which some refugees can't afford (application is free, but there are other costs i.e. tuberculosis tests, documentation to proof relationships and travel costs) (British Red Cross, 2020). British Red Cross (2020) explains that the refugee family reunion system is complex and there is little support to navigate the legal system:

Following the 2012 Act, […] refugee family reunion was no longer eligible for legal aid in England and Wales and people were left to either make their own applications, or hire solicitors at great financial cost, in order to see their families again.

Fortunately, there are charities like the British Red Cross who do their best within their funding limitations to support refugee families to navigate these complex systems and provide with funding to support family reunion. The reality remains that many families are not able to see each other again or for many years. A practitioner from a local Tyneside charity which support asylum seekers and refugees explained how challenging it is to deal with family separation and how this affects resettlement:

Being separated from family is just, such a difficult thing to deal with, […] sometimes, very sadly, it's actually what keeps people alive. Lots of people will say, I would've killed myself had it not been for the fact that my wife and my kids are still in my home country and I need to stay alive to provide for them. Family separation is just really difficult and it's a difficult issue in therapy for people to make progress because ultimately, they don't feel like they can make certain therapeutic steps and progress until they are reunited with that family.

Israa, who is from Syria, described how anxious she feels about her grown up children who are in Syria and Lebanon: 'I am always thinking, worrying about my kids, especially my daughter who lives in Syria. The war is still there so I always keep thinking about her and worrying. I can't feel settled because not all my family are here around me'.

Similarly, Karim who came to the UK from Syria with his wife 5 years ago explained that family separation was one of the most painful and challenging obstacles. He explains that in Arabic culture, families often live close to each other, often in same houses for their whole or most of their lives. Before the war in Syria one of his son's was married, and his grandchild was always with him. All his family lived very close to his house, and they spend most time together. Suddenly, when war started all his family was separated to different countries. Since this happened, he has been struggling with mental health problems, with sleep, stress and thinking a lot about his son. For 3 years, he tried to bring his youngest son to join him here in Gateshead and recently he has been able to join him, since then, he has been coping much better: 'It was

difficult to live without any of my children around us, I feel secure, safer [now]'. Karim describes how as a father he feels a biological and cultural need to support his children and ensure his son and his other children are safe: 'It's not about our son helping us with shopping, no, it's about him being with me, about helping him and supporting him. Because of our culture we are used to that, mums and dads give support from their children'. This emotional account from Karim illustrates the wellbeing effects and socio-cultural disruption that separation can have on families. Karim expresses a deep necessity and inability to fulfil his biological and cultural need as a father to support his son and family, to father them, and as a result he feels unsafe, insecure and incomplete.

Some studies document how family separation affected the mental wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers and had considerable negative impacts on the settlement of refugees (see Nickerson et al, 2010; Wilmsen, 2016). This scholarship also often refers to the worries that families have about relatives who they left behind and who might be at risk due to war or unrest in the countries of origin. In a similar way, this research also brings to light the emotional and mental health impacts that family separation has on refugee families and how this influences the ability of refugees to feel settled and safe in the new country. Further, this research also emphasizes how family separation disrupts the cultural and biological need to tend and care for children, parents and other family members who are abroad, unsettling family life as well as the ability to fully rebuild a new home in Tyneside.

Some refugee families who took part in this research described other ways that immigration policies negatively impacted familial or other intimate relations in the asylum process. For example, when Valeria, her husband and kids arrived in the UK, they did so with her husband parents and his brother. 'We all lived together in the same house in El Salvador, but when we arrived, they split us up', she says. Her husband's parents and brother ended up in another UK city whilst they came to Tyneside. Ariana and her child had similar experiences, when her close friend who used to live with them in El Salvador and arrived with them to the UK was separated from them. She stayed for many more months in the hotel whilst Ariana and her child were dispersed to Tyneside, her friend ended up elsewhere. And Ana Maria had her elderly parents in a hotel in London at the time of our interview. They arrived very recently and later than her to the UK. She explained that her mother was unwell, sick and struggling. She was worried that the Home Office could dispersed her parents far away from her without considering their

relationship and she wouldn't not be able to look after them. She didn't know how long they would stay in the hotel in London and Ana Maria had limited resources to get to London to see them. The situation was difficult for her and stressful for the whole family, but Ana Maria was happy that at least they were safe in the UK and didn't have to worry about their immediate everyday safety in El Salvador.

Phillimore et al (2023) offer useful insight relevant to this research and help contextualise these findings. The authors suggest that the main challenges in relation to family separation are associated with the conditionality, temporality and family definitions in policies (e.g. the costs of family reunion, bureaucratic barriers, the long waiting associated with family reunification and the narrow definitions of family within these policies) (ibid). They particularly point to the tension between how refugees understand family and the way that policies define family and make bureaucratic decisions in relation to families in receiving countries:

> *Although the right to a family life is widely recognised as a fundamental human right […] findings evidence a tension between the refugees' own understanding of family and definitions of family in policy in receiving countries, which often results in family separation or reconfiguration' (ibid, p.1).*

This narrow definition of 'the family' used in policy to make immigration decisions in relation to refugee families were also often in tension with how refugees in my research described family. Refugees talked about family in diverse ways often extending beyond 'nuclear family' notions. As this section suggests, state immigration policies in the UK affect families in many ways. They can deny asylum seekers their right to family in many different ways. This resonates with other research arguing that the family is being increasingly targeted as a form of exclusionary bordering tactic. For instance, Coddington and Williams (2022) refer to these family related bordering strategies as 'relational enforcement' (p. 590). Morris et al (2021) highlight that although the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees encourages states to use more flexible and inclusive family reunification policies, countries rarely consider members beyond the nuclear family structures (i.e. parents and their children). As evidenced in the lives of refugees in Tyneside, family reunification policies disregard wider family connections e.g. elderly parents, siblings, adult children or other types of kinship or intimate

relations. It also excludes separated children who arrived unaccompanied to the UK to bring their parents to UK (see also Beaton et al, 2018).

Transnational family life and virtual practices

Most of the participating families who were affected by family separation were in contact with family members abroad. These families were living complex transnational lives. Valentine (2008) defines transnational families as those physically divided between nation-states, but which maintain close contact. For instance, Talib was in Tyneside on his own hoping to bring his wife and children to the UK. Karim and Israa from Syria had grown up children abroad and many others had extended family members living in their countries of origin or other countries. This section explores the strategies and routines that transnational refugee families were using to cope with family separation. The strategies they deploy to try and maintain familial relations and endure the challenges associated with forced migration. Particularly, I will examine how they are using technologies to facilitate connection and intimacies.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Talib, Elnara and their children were separated for over 2 years whilst Talib was waiting for his case to be assessed by the Home Office. When I interviewed Talib, he was still separated from his family. I later interviewed his wife Elnara and asked her about that period of separation. Elnara recounted with great pain that period when she and her children were separated from Talib. She explains that the children never experienced separation from their father before and this was very difficult for all of them. She tried to stay strong for her children but admits that she used to cry when her children didn't see her. She narrates how she used to tell her children: 'don't be sad our father is living but not with us. He is living, not dead. Look, many fathers in Turkey have died, (they have) no father, no mother. I say (to) my children I am near you; your father is nearby'. She recalls that they would pray regularly to be reunited with their father and her youngest child was getting impatient that the time was passing so slowly. Elnara and her children were living in a third country. She recounts that their experience was not only challenging emotionally but also financially. Her mother, father and brother were very worried about them, and they sent her money to help them. She didn't want to tell them how they were struggling because she didn't want to worry them. She recalls her brother telling her: 'when you go to England my headache will pass […] [until you go to England] you are headache in my brain'.

Elnara's separation from her husband coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and this exacerbated the anxieties of their separation. Talib explains how living separated from his family in the pandemic was challenging for everyone:

> *Coronavirus started […] if at least if I had [my] family with me, it can be different. My family they are wondering about me since the corona [started, it was] very bad. They were wondering […] what will happen… One day, my telephone didn't work for one or two days. I became, very stressed, […] it fell inside water […] I tried to dry it but it was very bad, worse day for me since I had no communication with other people. My family no communication, at that time.*

In this account, Talib not only explains the challenges of being far away from his family during the pandemic, but also his reliance on technology and the significance of his phone to communicate with his family abroad and other people throughout the pandemic. When his phone fell on the water, he was not able to contact anyone for over two days and this was distressing for him, his family and others. Particularly as this was his only mean to communicate with others during the pandemic and because he could not let his family know that he was ok. Talib reflects about living abroad in the 90s and communicating with his mother in Turkey:

> *At that time, I couldn't call for a long time to Turkey […] it was like 20 years ago, [I had very little] communication with my family. I'm thinking about this, I cannot imagine, maybe [it was] even harder […] I remember. I sent a letter to my mother […] that letter arrived in Turkey in 45 days […] then she wrote a letter to me and then this letter arrived after 45 days.*

The changes in information and communication technology (ICTs) over the last 20 years, as highlighted by Talib, have been immense. It is now more accessible and cheaper to contact family abroad. As a result, families can now maintain regular transnationally contact. As Natalia explains: 'you feel like life is not connected if you don't have computer. I can talk to my son, I can find what I want to find, ring who I want to ring […] you have all your library, all your photographs, all your digital paintings, all connections, actually, everything'.

Elnara and Talib both described examples of how their family used ICTs to support them to facilitate regular family routines and remain present in each other's lives. In my interview with Talib, he explained about the regular contact that he had with his family through WhatsApp and how he helped his children with homework:

> *Every day I use WhatsApp to call them, I ask them, how are you? what are you doing? And then in evening also I call. And then sometimes […] I zoom and then I tried to explain some lessons. For example, last night, my daughter sends me questions because today she had an examination […] I connected to zoom and then I explained to her.*

And Elnara explained how she tried to make Talib present by regularly calling him through WhatsApp and placing her phone in the table at breakfast time: 'when we are doing breakfast, I put telephone here'. She recounts how her son used to talk to Talib during breakfast: 'Ok father, what are you eating? Look we are eating this […] What will do today? We will go that place'. She describes how her son would even put a plate by the phone and would tell Talib: 'Father, my mum will cook when we go England. My mother will cook food for you, what do you want. My mother will cook, and I will help'.

Talib, Elnara and most of their children are now in Tyneside. However, as mentioned previously, their daughter had to stay behind. Elnara explains how she regularly gives advice and supports her daughter through WhatsApp:

> *Every day I write, what are you doing? Did you go somewhere? Every time I am calling. She is also asking me, for example, sometimes there is problem at home (their daughter lives with other students), mama what will I do, this girl is doing like that, what can I do? […]. My daughter learns many things from me because she was near me every time, cleaning, cooking, behaviour […] but sometimes there is a little problem so she asks (for advice).*

Many other individuals shared stories about how they remained connected and maintained relationships with loved ones through routines assisted by ICTs. Valeria and Ariana both regularly speak to family abroad through WhatsApp. They explained that they have very close

relationships with their mothers in El Salvador and parting from them was painful. Valeria and Ariana regularly communicate with their mothers and other members of their family and continue to care and support them from the distance. Valeria calls her mother every day to check how she is doing and she worries if she doesn't hear from her each day. She also sends her audio messages regularly and she explains: 'I try to feel close to her in any way I can, because I can't see her or touch her, so at least calling her I feel her presence'. Ariana tells me that she also regularly talks to her mother and her sister through WhatsApp. She explains that as her mum is not able to read or write, they video call each other or sends each other voice messages and images. These modes of communication are more inclusive and helps them manage time differences. She also narrates how her son and mother miss each other and they maintained their very close relationships through ICTs. She explains that her son and mother regularly talk and share mundane activities with each over the phone: 'the other day we were cleaning the garden, and my son was talking to my mum […] and he tells her: look I am cutting the grass! or he tells her: look grandma we made pupusas! (El Salvadorian national dish usually a stuffed cornmeal tortillas)'.

Karim from Syria has a strong desire to continue to father his children who are living in different countries because of the war in Syria. He explains how ICTs have helped him re-established a relationship with his children and grandchildren. When he was in Syria and his children left the country, he wasn't able to communicate as often as now due to the cost of communicating and inability to access modern technologies. He tells me that now he speaks to his grandchildren through WhatsApp or Viber twice or three times a week for at least an hour each time: 'it's like building a bridge between us, we laugh and communicate. If they didn't speak with me, I can't imagine what would happen to me'. Similarly, Deniz and Caria recounted that their extended family all live in Turkey. They explained that they have various family groups in WhatsApp and they also contact family members via videocalls. Caria explains that they used to live together with Deniz's family in Turkey, so they really miss each other and explains that calling each other helps them to still feel 'special' and 'important'. Caria tells me that her children can't remember Turkey and that they have been having a virtual relationship with family for a long time: 'It is a difficult situation actually. My youngest daughter doesn't know about Turkey […]. They don't remember about Turkey. Everything is just like television ….]. She doesn't know about uncle, aunty'. And yet, she tells me how 'missing' and 'longing' for family is a very special feeling and it emphasizes that there is still a

strong sense of attachment and connection with her family abroad even if there is no physical contact. Missing each other keeps them connected. This account from Caria highlights that even with many years of little physical connection with her family in Turkey, her relationships and intimacy with her family in Turkey are maintained and fostered through technology.

Many participants described how they remained in contact with family through WhatsApp family groups. Andre told me about his group, which included one hundred family members: 'We have a very big family group like 100 people. Because in Africa family is very, very big. If one day I don't look at my phone, and I come back there is thousands of messages'. Andre admits that although he never reads all messages, it is good to feel connected to his large family and to know that everyone is well. Similarly, Sanaya explains that she is part of a large family some of which are in Sri Lanka, whilst others are 'all over the world'. Sanaya recounts how her family uses a range of WhatsApp family groups to negotiate family dynamics. Through these groups her family maintain regular routines and intimacy but they also encounter challenges, arguments and emotional interactions. She explains how there are different family groups for different purposes and membership of specific groups is variable and fluid as members leave and come back depending on happenings and dynamics:

> *We start by playing happy families, you know, then we have these huge arguments, then people leave the group [...]. We have a sister's group where we don't have one particular sister in there because she will cause trouble! My brother has a group, which has a few people. So, we've got loads of little groups. We as a family, we play quiz every day at a certain time about 3:15, […] we have this competition going around […] it's like an app we get together. The link comes on WhatsApp, we all join, and play, my kids play.*

Sanaya highlights the complexity and opportunities that applications like WhatsApp can provide as a platform to 'do' and practice family and develop family routines and rituals, such as playing daily quizzes. She highlights how typical family dynamics that would occur in family face-to-face gatherings continue to exist through these virtual platforms. Transnational refugee families negotiate these dynamics by creating virtual spaces which include and exclude individuals according to their needs. Many families mentioned that they also connect with loved ones for special occasions like birthdays and holidays, other traditional celebrations or

important events such as Eid, Christmas, Nowruz, birthdays and even funerals. Mehdi from Iran explains that for Nowruz, and other important Iranian festivals, he spends a long time on the phone to his family. Talib recounts how when his mother passed away, his family organised an online prayer for her via zoom: 'We were coming together, my wife, my family in Turkey on Zoom. We were praying some prayers, to my mother'. Talib also describes how during the COVID-19 pandemic, his wife Elnara and children joined him in virtual activities organised by organisations and communities in Tyneside. It was also helpful for the family who were abroad as they got to know Talib's friends and individuals in Tyneside virtually even before coming here.

There were other ways beyond virtual practices through which refugee families negotiate co-presence and care with loved ones abroad. For example, Talib mentioned that he sent his daughter a second-hand laptop to support her with her studies, and Mehdi explained that his brother regularly sends him a package of nuts and dried fruits from the harvest of their family lands every year. In previous chapter, I also highlighted many other examples in which objects, belongings and images that reminded participants of their country of origin and memories of home and loved ones were used to construct the presence of important people and places (Baltassar, 2008). Through these other acts of care, memories and materiality refugee families also negotiated presence in each other's lives despite the physical distance.

Most refugee families in this research were not able to travel abroad to see family due to their immigration status, finances, conflict or the political situation abroad. Yet, some refugee families were able to travel to see family in their countries of origin after conflicts ended or meet them in other countries. These individuals talked about how this helped them reignite a temporary type of physical presence. For example, Eric explains that he regularly meets with family in various European countries. Sanaya was able to return to Sri Lanka with her children after 7 years. Her account is a reminder of the importance that physical contact plays for transnational refugee families and how this is irreplaceable by technology:

> *The first time my children went to Sri Lanka, my husband hasn't been back, […] was in 2014. 7 years since all the trouble started that's when I could go back. It was such a relief to go back and connect with everybody there and family. I'm part of a big, big family so it was very hard to get this here. The connection with Sri Lanka is quite strong.*

These rich accounts of the virtual lives of refugee families discussed highlight the continuous desire to maintain a sense of presence and regularity between family members who are living in different countries. This emphasizes that simply being family members or belonging to a fixed family structure is not enough and that a feeling of family is cultivated through regular, every day, active and fluid practices and activities (Morgan,2011, pp. 6-7; Finch 2007). This research highlighted the active strategizing and adaptability that families engage in to transform, negotiate and maintain regular contact with loved ones abroad. Therefore, this research supports Morgan's (2011) claim that modern families are better defined by what they do together and the characteristics of these practices. For instance, through mundane family routines and rituals like Talib and Elnara's regular virtual video calling practices (e.g. eating breakfast together, offering homework support and other advice), the ongoing care given to elderly parents via WhatsApp, the recurrent contact through large WhatsApp family groups and important virtual family gatherings organised for occasions such as funerals or cultural celebrations (Wilding, 2006). Through these family practices bridged by ICTs or 'digital kinning' and other practices refugee families maintain and renegotiate everyday care, support and presence in each other's lives (see also Baltassar and Wilding, 2020; Baltassar, 2016; Leurs, 2019; Greenberg and Neustaedter, 2013). This research also emphasised the fluid nature and ongoing shifting and blurriness of family boundaries. For instance, in the way that Sanaya described how the changing dynamics and tensions which emerged in her family relationships included and excluded certain family members from certain virtual spaces (e.g. WhatsApp family groups) (see Morgan, 2011, Finch, 2007). Further as the findings shown the past and history shared between separated families seem to influence how families felt fulfilled or unfulfilled with current family relationships facilitated via virtual spatialities. For instance, as highlighted by Deniz and Caria the yearning for physicality with family from Turkey was impossible to replace by virtual contact. Yet, the missing of family, as Caria described, still demonstrated the strong attachment towards her family in Turkey despite the distance and lack of physical contact. Therefore, whilst virtual practices and other practices (e.g. sending packages abroad, presence through objects, image, etc) helped to manage separation and family life, they did not replace preference for physical contact for many. These findings build on Wilding (2006) research which reached similar conclusions.

Refugee families also discussed some of the challenges that they encountered to maintain virtual family practices and relationships. For example, Talib highlighted the expense and lack of financial resources to access the internet and how this restricted his relationship with his family:

> *I don't have proper internet, you know, asylum seekers only on the internet through their mobile phone. The only thing I had the challenge with was with the internet. I bought one internet; it was not working […] I paid around £12, for asylum seekers its big money, then it didn't work good. Then I changed to another company then another. So, for one or two months, it was hard for me to get internet.*

Talib explained that later he discovered that he could access a Wi-Fi connection for free as it did not require a password. Even if the Wi-Fi wasn't very stable, he was able to contact family more regularly as a result. Talib's ability to strategize and circumnavigate this barrier enabled him to reinstate more regular contact with this family. And yet, the use and access to communication technologies is often uneven. Elias explained that he only called his family in Eritrea briefly once in 8 years to let them know he was well due to worries that the Eritrean government could listen to their phone conversation and either him or his family could get in trouble. Inaya from Sri Lanka explained that she finds her family expectations very hard to manage and this influences and radically shapes her relationship with them:

> *They thinking I have a nice life, I have money, I'm picking money from the tree, they think. […] Oh, can you send some money, they say. They don't know how hard we are living here; they can't understand that you know. That why I'm not going, after 12 years I'm staying here. If I go, I need lump of money you know.*

Karim who narrated how communication disruptions and lack of technology in Syria affected his family relationships due to the war there. Some individuals also highlighted that they or their families abroad lacked access to technology or the IT skills to take advantage of this virtual practices. Finally, some explained that they lacked strong ties with their families abroad due to personal or political circumstances, family issues or lack of pre-existing strong relationships with them.

These findings highlight that although many refugee families are making use of different digital communication tools, there are still many barriers that limit the ability of transnational refugee families to sustain regular contact. Some of these are socio-political, structural or systemic barriers in the UK or abroad, whilst others were linked to personal, familial or cultural barriers or expectations. These barriers which are particularly significant for refugee families (but not limited to these groups) highlight how the development of communication technologies has not benefited everyone globally equally. These findings support other research which highlights similar barriers to maintaining relationships transnationally (see Roberston et al 2006; Zharkevich 2019; Parreñas 2005).

Doing family in Tyneside

Whilst many families experienced separation from loved ones, there were many families who were able to come together to the UK or managed successful reunification. This section focusses the 'doing' of biological families or couples who are living together under one household in Tyneside. I explore the everyday practices, tensions and challenges that these families experience as they are rebuilding their new (family) life here in Tyneside. This section considers biological family beyond 'nuclear family' notions to include siblings living together, unmarried couples and single mothers and fathers a with children.

After receiving his refugee status, Talib applied for family reunification and got a council flat. He could only apply for his own accommodation as his family weren't here yet. This was too small for his family and more suited to a single man but he could not apply for more suitable housing until his family arrived in the UK. This was one of their first challenges that the family encountered when they got here. The whole family of 5 lived in a very small flat. Thankfully after some months, they were able to find more suitable accommodation but space was a challenge for the family initially. A practitioner from a local Tyneside organisation describes how common these scenarios are and how the challenges of family unification can lead to family breakdowns:

> *They [a family arriving in the UK] probably have an idea in their head what it's going to be like in the UK. They arrive, dad hasn't got suitable housing for them, dad's benefit payment gets messed up because suddenly you're joining some more people onto it so*

there is a period where there is no money coming in or there's a delay in the benefits being paid. It's a period of instability, then you've got the whole family dynamics that come with that as well, maybe they are little toddlers when dad left and now, they are suddenly like horrible teenagers, that's a dynamic that is really difficult to deal with […] You think if they got a bit more support at the beginning of arrival then hopefully some of those issues could have been resolved or supported so they didn't get to that point.

Unfortunately, the little support available during the reunification process placed much stress on refugee families who are not only trying to navigate new bureaucracies, cultures and languages, but also new family dynamics. This practitioner also explains that with some of the more planned refugee resettlement programmes, like the Syrian and Afghan schemes, reunification can be planned and coordinated in advance so by the time the family arrives the groundwork is already done. Another practitioner from another local organisation highlights other challenges of family reunification, especially if the family has been separated for a very long time:

We work with families where dad has maybe been here for 5 or 6 years and then he has got refugee status and has applied for family reunion and been joined by his wife and child, and it's ended up being really difficult. There has been a lot of relationship conflicts as people adjust to each other again. And you know, mum has maybe been so used to dealing and managing on her own, and how dad then becomes the parent in that situation again, and some of the challenges that that throws up for the kids as well. We unfortunately deal with cases where the person might not have disclosed their level of torture to their family members and sometimes that just can cause relationship difficulties, as people don't understand what they've been through […] maybe they don't understand some of their anger issues […] And you certainly see that with women who have been sexually assaulted and they won't necessarily make full disclosures to their husbands and that can just cause so many problems.

Despite their housing issues, Talib and Elnara seemed to be coping remarkably well. Yet, Elnara explained that they have encountered parenting challenges. She narrated how her children stopped listening to her and go to ask their father instead. 'Before', she explains, 'when I said something, the children would listen […] now, they say my father said I can take it […] Every

time [they say] my father said OK […]'. Talib adds: 'I am a bit light, she is very strict'. As discussed by Talib and Elnara, the change in their family structure from one single parent, who attended most of the day-to-day parenting during their separation, to having two parents who use different parenting styles can cause tensions in households.

Some of the families who arrived together to the UK to seek asylum also disclosed some challenges. Diego from El Salvador recounted how at the beginning when he and his brother arrived in Tyneside they were getting on well. They were regularly cooking, eating together, and supporting each other. 'There was a union and it felt wonderful', he says, 'then, we totally lost that, and we went on many months separated, we lived in the same house but like two unknown individuals, sometimes, I wouldn't see him for 3 or more days in a week'. His brother explained that he was in his 'own world' with his own friends, but Diego didn't make new friends yet, so he felt lonely. Later, Diego and his brother mended their relationship and Diego now has developed his own friendships, so he feels less isolated. However, this is an example of how settlement journeys and adaptation to new environments take different courses and timescales and this can cause tensions. Additionally, expectations of support and of the role of family particularly during challenging situations might differ. This lack of support and connection with family specially during a period of social isolation (e.g. during settlement) can lead to relationship breakdowns and tensions.

A Tyneside practitioner who works with asylum seeking and refugee families and has personal experience of seeking sanctuary in this area illustrated these issues well with this example from his observations of working with refugee and asylum-seeking families:

> *One spouse might want total immersion into the new culture and the other spouse might be a bit resentful of that. Or both of them resent wanting to immerse themselves completely into the new society. What is always the common thing is that young people want to immerse themselves completely into the new culture as they don't want to appear different. Their processes are quite different from the processes of adults. Young people […] they immediately adapt their language compared to the adults. So, you find that conflict can happen in the home, where the parent is saying to the child, no this is not our way, our way is this. The child is trying to bring the new norm into the family, for example, a teenager might feel I want to do like what my friends, I want to bring my*

boyfriend or my girlfriend into the family and I want to sleep over. The family might say no because this is not our way. So that can lead to conflict between parent and children or husband and wife, or between the spouses.

These observations from this practitioner emphasize the pressures that a new culture and social norms can place on family relationships, particularly when individuals in the household have different expectations of how they envisage their new life in the new country. Further, family members can experience different trajectories as they adapt to the new way of life, and this can put tension between family members. For instance, many parents felt that their children were adapting well, making new connections and settling faster than themselves, particularly in relation to learning the English language. These varied experiences and timescales of adaptation and settling to the country can cause pressure. Further, parents often experience different set of challenges and barriers than their children. Refugee parents can experience substantial social isolation as they prioritise their children's resettlement. They have little time available to them and often lack support systems around them. They sometimes don't yet speak or understand English. These experiences can cause challenges and misunderstandings between family members.

Parental anxiety about a new cultural context was often discussed by refugee mothers and fathers with children in Tyneside. Many parents expressed their desire for their children to grow up respecting their moral, cultural or religious values or beliefs. For instance, Inaya who has two children who are teenagers and one who is his twenties explained how she parents her children according to her Sri Lankan culture and Islamic beliefs:

I'm telling them don't do bad things, this is good, this is bad. You can't get it, that doesn't belong to you […] You need to help others. Small, small things me and my husband teaching. My thought is before 10 years we give good advice to the children […] I always telling something to them so that's how they grow up. […] That's how I am telling and teaching everything to my children. My son when he come to the teenage time as well, my daughter, I'm asking about the friends. You know, friends can change their lifestyle and everything. […] I'm always saying don't bring him to this house, he is not good. So, he can't get the friend you know like bad people. Not everyone. That's why I said I'm teaching to my children.

Talib also reflects on his desire for his children to not lose their cultural and religious values. He recounts how he tells his daughter to go and make friends, but not to forget some of their cultural values. Similarly, Deniz explained that although he is respectful of others, as a Muslim, he sometimes worries about how his children could be influenced by ideas or information that they get from others when they are alone at school. And Blessing from Nigeria narrated with sadness how her children are slowly becoming more distant from their cultural traditions. Sometimes they prefer eating English style food rather than traditional meals from home, and they struggle to understand her when she speaks in her mother tongue.

Parents were also worried about other aspects of living in a new country. Ana Maria from El Salvador, who suffered traumatic experiences with gangs in El Salvador and sadly, abusive anti-social behaviour from a neighbour in Gateshead, voiced worries about her children being alone both outside and in the house: 'I don't like to leave them alone, and if I go out, I am always beside the phone in case something happens […] and I go back home as quick as I can, I prefer to be at home'. She explains that she has always been like this as it is very dangerous in El Salvador. Unfortunately, her negative experiences in her neighbourhood in Gateshead intensified the worries and anxieties about her and her children's safety that she carried from El Salvador. As discussed by Ana Maria, past traumas both experienced abroad and here in the UK can affect the way refugees' parent their children.

This research connects with other scholarship exploring the challenges that refugee families experience during settlement in the new country. For instance, McCleary (2017) who found that although it was beneficial to have family to rely on, the stresses of adapting to the new life, particularly during the first year of living in the United States was overwhelming and stressful and affected familial relationships of Karen refugees. Daniel et al (2019) argue that older generational refugee groups often found it harder to adapt to the Norwegian society and to learn the language than younger ones. McMichael et al (2010) observe that having families around during settlement can support the wellbeing of young refugees in Melbourne but the changing family dynamics that emerge during the period of readaptation can also negatively affect their wellbeing and settlement. Atwell et al (2009) explore how the expectations refugee parents can differ from their children's due to the different perceptions that they have of their new cultural environments and future visions. My research adds to this scholarship by arguing

that refugee family reunification can be a site of both support and tension, and which often affects family members sense of belonging, attachment and connection. It also demonstrates how the past experience of refugees (e.g. past traumas, family separation), as well as other cultural practices and settlement experiences often affect family relations. These factors can create tension between family members and put pressure in family dynamics and practices.

Participating refugee families also described how their family and gender roles and responsibilities had shifted and evolved as a result of settling in a new country. For instance, Eleni Venaki, Director of the Comfrey Project explained how children who are here with their families often grow up with substantive responsibilities: 'not just practical things but also emotionally. It is really hard for parents but also its really heavy for the children in many ways. So, it can be a different dynamic that can happen'. Parents explained that very often they relied on their children to translate and interpret as they couldn't yet communicate in their dealings with school, doctors and other encounters. Children were also often leaned upon to translate and write letters and other documents. Ana Maria explained how her son regularly supports her with interpretation: 'I tell him, ask this, ask that and he interprets it […] He is like an interpreter'. Her children, who are both teenagers have been taking many roles in the household, particularly as she has been experiencing depression since moving here. They helped her with shopping and cooking: 'They had to support me through this'.

Elias explained that because he is not allowed to work and has no financial support from the Home Office due of his immigration status, he and his girlfriend had to strategize to survive. His girlfriend who has refugee status provides him with a home, pays for the food and other expenses, and he cooks, cleans, and does most of the housework: 'I cook fresh food. My girlfriend, she is happy'. This situation has forced them to change their usual gender roles. He describes how in his culture he would be the one who would be working and supporting his girlfriend: '[In] my country no woman give money for man. Just man helps woman. This woman helps me here […], she saved my life', he says tearfully.

Many more families shared different types of strategies and changes in family roles and responsibilities as they navigated the many difficulties and challenges of adapting to living in Tyneside. They also shared how they motivated and encouraged their children to persevere through difficulties, reminding them that things are not too bad here and how they rely on

their children more than ever before as their children seem to be finding adapting to new cultures much easier than them. Many shared that these experiences have brought them closer together as a family, as Deniz and Caria recount in our interview:

> *Deniz: Children adaptation depend on their family stage. If father or mother are feeling down, children can also […] be unhappy. Our teenagers they can give some information to us because they can speak English clearly. When we go somewhere, they can translate […] My mother and father mean this … This makes us stronger.*
> *Melisa: It's beautiful. Many children seem to support their families. […] It changes the roles a little bit, they need to look after you […]*
> *Caria: Because of this position, I learnt to ask some question to my kids. My son, how we do that, […] I never used to ask my son, but I need him [now], you know […] I learnt to ask some questions to my kids.*
> *Deniz: They are strong.*
> *Melisa: So, you think this experience of moving has made you stronger as a family?*
> *Caria: Yes, Yes*

Several parents described how their children were a source of support, inspiration and strength. They explained how their children helped them to weather the challenges of the asylum process. Dola shared how she prefers being with her children at home as they are her source of company and social interaction. Obi explained that her children are her inspiration and remind her to keep going when she feels crushed by the hostility of the asylum process: 'Sometimes when I give up. When I see my children, I want to do more. Let me try harder. Let me try harder'. And Esther narrated how the many challenges that her and her son endured together (including deportation) strengthen their bond: 'He is the only one I have'.

These findings suggest that settling together as a refugee family affects familial dynamics and as its own set challenges and advantages. Refugee family dynamics is affected by the many stressors associated with settling in a new country such as adapting to cultural differences and language, as well as the shifts in roles and responsibilities which emerge within families as they strategize to cope with the challenges of adaptation (see Deng and Marlowe research, 2013). My work illustrates that family can be a source of support, motivation and a resource to navigate and persist these challenges; for instance, by adapting gender and familial roles

and responsibilities and supporting each other emotionally and practically during testing times. This research also indicates that although these shifting dynamics put extra pressure on families it also strengthens their bond, reliance and appreciation for each other.

Many families also talked at length about how they adapted and are maintaining their family relationships here in Tyneside through many routines and activities that they did together. They explained how they relied on their family support and company particularly when they first arrived in Tyneside when they lacked social connections and this brought them closer together as a family. Valeria reflected on how her children and husband became closer and more united since they have been in the UK, particularly at the beginning when they had fewer local friends. She recounted how they used to go to the park by bike to play or have a bit of fun together, they would play jenga, puzzles or other games at home. They spent a lot of time playing family games. She tells me that now that they all have their own routines and responsibilities the spend less time together, but they still have most dinners together where they usually eat traditional food from El Salvador: 'beans, eggs, plantain and sometimes pupusas'. Valeria explains that her and her husband often have breakfast and lunch together, when their kids are at school. Sometimes they go out to visit local attractions or museums. The images below were taken by Valeria during the photovoice project. Figure 21 shows her kitchen where she makes traditional food for her family and where she practices her mum's recipes. She explains that all her family likes cooking and that cooking together and eating food is a practice that they enjoy doing together. The second image (Figure 22) shows an outing to Ouseburn farm with her family and friends. 'We love animals', she says, 'so we really enjoyed this visit, every time we go out, even if much less now, we talk and we have a great time'.

Figure 21. Valeria's family kitchen where they cook and prepare traditional meals.

Figure 22. An outing at Ouseburn farm with family and friends.

Valeria explains how her family, cooking and her new friendships have helped her to find her way in this new country, and she feels like she is slowly starting to adapt to her new life here. This highlights the importance that family relationships and the practices and routines that are performed regularly with them play in adapting and re-establishing a new a sense of belonging and family life.

Many other families talked at length about their family routines, their everyday, regular and not so regular family activities. Some families like Deniz and Caria explained that their family life involves several regular structured activities. Deniz and Caria's family routines revolve around food: 'Eating! drinking [Turkish tea] and watching TV together', Deniz says. He recounts that they eat around the table every day, some days they drink tea once a week they watch a movie and every single day they read together. He describes that they read a page from the Holy Quran every day and then each of them choses a book of their choice to read. Caria adds that their children are currently studying for exams, so they spend time revising. She tells me that she is the one that usually cooks, which she loves. Caria also explains about her love for travelling and camping but she explains that Deniz doesn't like it so in the summer the children and her go to visit places or go camping like Yorkshire, London or the Lakes and Deniz stays home. Dola from Nigeria narrates that her family enjoys spending weekends together watching movies and they enjoy celebrating birthdays. She also describes how in her household everyone enjoys cooking a mix of Nigerian and British food: 'Sometimes I cook,

sometimes the boy and sometimes the girl [cook]. We all cook […] I have one [child] who is very picky, he loves pizza and all that. We go along with everybody, sometimes we eat Nigerian, sometimes we eat British. Just depends on whatever is available', she says.

Other families explained that their busy daily schedules and independent routines get on the way of regular daily family activities, however, they still try to do something regularly as a family as a way of getting together. For example, Azhar from Syria described how his family likes to go shopping to Newcastle at least once a month and to share together a traditional meal called 'Mahshi'. Inaya from Sri Lanka narrated that when her children were little, they used to have dinner together every night but now that her children grown up, they eat together once a week. Either on Friday or Sunday evening and specially during Ramadan, they all sit down, eat together and talk to each other: 'we are sitting down together with mat and eating together big plate, 5 people together'. Her son now lives in London, and Inaya explains how they really miss each other. She explains that her son can 'feel' the love of her food now that he is far away.

Finally, Sanaya who has lived in the UK for 20 years articulates at length her family life. She describes how her husband, teenage children and herself have very different routines and timetables. They are all very flexible with each other but come together for some activities. She tells me that her 17-year-old has a schedule that she sticks to each day whilst her 14-year-old daughter variates hers a little. During holidays, her kids and husband like to stay at home whilst she enjoys going out and seeing things. If they go somewhere together, she is the one that tends to plan it and sometimes even packs for the whole family. She explains that her and her husband are very easy going, they don't like to enforce timetables or rules around sitting at the table to have dinner: 'eat when you are hungry, and if you are not hungry, it's fine, […], food is there for you', she demonstrates how fluid their family life is. Her husband and her share the domestic responsibilities but have very defined roles that they can do whenever they wish. Sanaya is responsible for washing clothes and cooking and her husband cleans the whole house. Her kids also take ownership of some regular household chores. Everyone has their own homely spaces in their own rooms with TVs, PS4s or use their phones to watch something they want but sometimes they watch Disney+ together. They all enjoy watching Marvel and during holidays they spend more time together and play board games. Sanaya reflects on how they 'do' family: 'It's totally different […] our family set up. It's not a typical

family routine that we have. It's different.' She goes on to say that she believes that this set up is not really 'correct', showing a level of discontent with the lack of regular family connection:

> *The only time we actually are together and have a sense of belonging is in Ramadhan. We have to eat at the correct time because […] you have to break your fast at the same time, and we make sure […] we start fasting at the same time. That time the family does come together.*

Sanaya explained that her children also do recitations and practice on the Quran every Monday and Tuesday with a Sri Lankan teacher over Zoom. 'This is very important me' she says, 'They are good children, they teach me a lot of things as well, you know. They keep me right. I keep them right. […] We learn from each other'. Sanaya reflects that she has an easy-going nature with her children but sometimes, she worries that she should've been a stricter parent: 'They are kind, polite and respectful but sometimes they take everything so easily', 'but as long as they are happy and keep themselves mentally happy, that's what my thing is'. Sanaya and her family life seem to have more flexibility, fluidity and less structure than that of other families discussed earlier. Although their timetable is looser and more flexible, their family values based on reciprocity, easy-going parenting, care and mutual respect seem to form part of their family culture. Elnara reflects on her family life in a similar way to Sanaya: '[we don't] have routines, every time it changes, for example one day we can play games together as a family or […] sometimes we watch a little TV. We go outside, go to café to drink milkshakes or other things […]'. Interestingly, even if Elnara explains that her family routines are not very fixed, the family engaged in more regular and structured family routines and when they were separated, they relied on these activities as a way to maintain a sense of family transnationally.

These findings demonstrate the different practices and relationships which refugees enact to restore their familial lives and routines. Families had their own distinct ways of 'doing' family. Some refugee families had very structured schedules whilst others more fluid and flexible ways of practicing family. Some did a mixture of both every day and irregular family activities. Framing refugee families through the lens of 'doing' is useful as it helps to understand how families operate, survive and strategize as they are rebuilding a new home here in Tyneside

(Morgan, 2011). Further as the findings of this research indicated family life is influenced by the challenges and barriers of the refugee experience. For instance, refugees use families strategically to navigate settlement (e.g. as source of support, strength and motivation and by shifting roles and responsibilities of family members). Yet, family can also be a site of struggle and tension which can negatively impact the settlement and feelings of belonging of refugees.

Friendships and crafting kin relationships

In the introduction of this chapter, I shared the story of the friendship between Valeria and Ariana and their other friend and how important this relationship is for both of them as they settle in Tyneside. Specially as both Ariana and Valeria are separated from their biological families who are in El Salvador. In the absence of biological family, many refugees and asylum seekers are nonetheless 'crafting' kinship and 'family-like' bonds with friends. These new attachments are often means through which to alleviate some of the effects of family separation and navigate the challenges of settlement. This chapter narrates the ways in which refugees are forging new attachments, and these support systems seem to exist alongside and beyond the structures of 'the' heteronormative family unit.

'I miss my mum', says Ariana, 'at least having good and close friends here, like Laura and my other friends, fills the emptiness a little, especially for important occasions […] we are very close, we are circle of friends who is very attached to each other, I know other people from El Salvador, but we don't share the same bond'. In the image below (Figure 23), which originates from the photovoice project, Ariana depicts the love and connection that she feels for her friends in Tyneside.

Figure 23 Ariana's image that represents the people that made her feel at home in Tyneside

Valeria also expresses similar feelings when she talks about her friendship with Ariana, and how she has helped her rebuild an important support system: 'She helped me a lot, I don't feel so alone anymore. She comes to my house to have coffee with me and on Thursdays, she tells me, come to mine after your class. I can teach you a bit of English. She has been teaching me. […] I am very close to Ariana; on Mondays we do the weekly shopping together. If I tell her, I need this for the children. She tells me come on; I know where they sell it.' As Valeria explains, Ariana plays a significant part in her weekly routines, and they support each other with mundane tasks. This level of reliance on each other on practical support and the physical and emotional availability at local level is very important for both. Ariana has been in Tyneside a little longer than Valeria and she is often supporting her, other friends and new arrivals with informal translating and interpreting, accessing various services in the community, connecting individuals and organising social activities. She is very proactive and valued amongst friends as well as Comfrey Project. She acts as a 'connector' or 'bridge maker' and is willing to support others with various practical and emotional needs. In the absence of services and biological family members, it was not uncommon for participants to point out how they completely

relied on friendships or kind and welcoming members of the community to support them through the asylum and settlement process. Participants explained that there was often a serendipity to these new relationships, often meeting these individuals by chance in shops or community settings, and then becoming close friends over time. Friends offered them support or shared knowledge about local services and how to access them. These encounters then opened doors to more opportunities for support and connection. Esther recounted how scared, isolated and worried she was when she was first dispersed to Tyneside where she knew no one. Like many other refugees, Esther was dispersed by the Home Office to areas of the UK where she had no prior connections. Esther explains: 'Then I saw a lady like me, a Black lady. She asked me: Do you live in this area? I said I'm new here, I don't know anyone. She is the one that introduced me to Comfrey project'. From this encounter, critical community support was accessed via the Comfrey Project.

Ariana is also close friends with Ana Maria. In our interview, Ana Maria, who is also from El Salvador, explained how Ariana has also been a critical source of practical and emotional support. When newly arriving in Tyneside she didn't know where to shop, she was feeling alone, and struggling to access medical and mental health support. Ariana started to accompany her to different shops and services so that she could get familiar with the area. Ariana accompanied Ana Maria to the Comfrey Project as she was worried about going alone. They also shop together and share the costs of onions, chillies or other foods to save money, as it is very difficult to survive with the little support they receive from the Home Office. Together they are withstanding the many challenges of seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Ariana, Valeria, Laura and Ana Maria also meet to eat traditional food like 'pupusas' (traditional cornmeal flatbreads from El Salvador). Valeria says excitedly: 'Ariana invites me to her house and she says, let's do pupusas and bring all your family! So, I brought my husband and kids along to eat with her'. Ariana describes how food is very important and how she has learnt to cook traditional El Salvadorian food. She explains how her mum, used to ask her to help her with the cooking in El Salvador, but she wasn't interested, but since moving to Tyneside, Ariana often asks her mother for cooking instructions. Cooking and sharing traditional food with her friends is now a practice that enables Ariana to connect with them, but also reconnect with her culture, mother who is in El Salvador, and her memories of home.

Ariana's friend Laura shares that she has a strong bond with Ariana's son, Adam, whom she regularly cares for. As Ariana is a single mother with no family in the UK, having someone that she can trust to look after her child is very important. For Laura, she considers Ariana and Adam as members of her family given the care provided in these relationships:

> *I love Adam […]. For me, Ariana is family, we are not blood related, but feels like family. She is the second person that I met here that speaks Spanish and we are still friends. There have been many people who came and went, but she never left me. She has been very important to me, the best support I have had, the best.*

The image below (Figure 24) was taken by Laura and was used in her accordion book. This image was taken on an outing with her close friends from El Salvador. They went to the Baltic, a local art gallery in Gateshead. She explains that this day was an important day for her and she was very happy because she felt at home with close friends and in this city.

Figure 24. Image taken by Laura in a day out with close friends

These accounts from Valeria, Ariana, Ana Maria and Laura show the strength of their friendship bond and the importance of these 'family-like' relationships in their lives. They fill in absences of love, care and connection. They also act as a strategy to managing the everyday challenges of settling in a new country and reconstructing a sense of belonging and home. These

relationships provide a source of emotional and physical presence, and practical support to navigate struggles of settlement.

There were many more stories about family-like relationships. Elias (from Eritrea) and Ahmad (from Ethiopia) consider themselves brothers. They attend various community activities together and help each other through many practical and emotional challenges. This support is particularly important for Elias who has no recourse to public funds due to his immigration status. Elias explains how his brother Ahmad motivates him when he is feeling low: 'Maybe sometimes he is helping me. He sometimes notices I'm worried and he says, do not worry, life is too short, this time is gone. Next step is to be better your time is coming'. Dola, from Nigeria, explains that she has a few best friends, who are all African and who she met at the Comfrey Project. They chat every day, they give each other 'advice and support', and sometimes they stay for a sleepover: 'that's how close we are', Dola says, 'we share a lot in common, some of them are refugees. We all have our pasts, so we have almost everything in common. I always feel free to be in their mix, we have a lot in common and that's it'.

Some participants described close bonds with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Karim and his wife made a close relationship with a young British woman who they met through a research project. It was at the time when their son was still not here in the UK with them. Karim explains that this relationship remains very close and sometimes he calls her daughter: 'She always keeps in touch or visits them and asks them if they need anything'. Leila from Iran recounted the painful death of her very close English friend who was 91 years old. He became a very close person to her family, and she cared for him and took him everywhere when he couldn't walk anymore. He was a strong role model for her. He went to university at the age of 75 and always encouraged her to achieve her goals and supported her with her studies, she recounts:

> *We both helped each other. I was always looking after him, cooking for him, doing shopping for him. He was part of my family, very, very important to me, he was. When he passed away, I lost everything, and I moaned for him like a family member. Even I told my husband, I spend more time with him than you. It has been a big loss for me. I don't think anybody understands these things. […] When I cried, he always said don't*

upset yourself, don't cry. Be nice and kind to yourself. When I cry now, and I remember his compliment and then try not to be upset.

This section indicates that friendships form a valuable form of social attachment for refugees in Tyneside. Friendships are often sensed as 'family' and are produced through varied practices. Family-like relationships are a crucial aspect of the practical and emotional support that refugees receive. This 'crafting' or 'doing' of family and kinship through friendships is particularly important for those who experience family separation and are denied the right to family life. As well as for other groups whose lives do not fit neatly into normative forms of familyhood, for instance in gay groups (Weston, 1991; Nardi, 1999; Weinstock and Rothblum, 1996) or migrant and transnational communities (Bunnel, 2010; Bunnel et al, 2012; Conradson and Latham, 2005), or working-class families affected by poverty and the effects of austerity (Hall, 2019). As these findings suggest, family-like relationships often emerge during challenging periods when refugees and asylum seekers yearn for the physicality, love and support from those who they left behind. The attachments and relations can (and often do) help refugees and asylum seekers navigate and cope with challenging and uncertain conditions (see Verdasco, 2020), supporting a new sense of belonging.

More-than-human relationships

Some participants discussed the care, affection and connection that they experienced through their pets, animals and nature. Laura and Valeria talked about Tommy the cat (Figure 25), who is owned by Laura but often looked after by Valeria. Despite not being allowed to have pets in their accommodation, these animals provide them with a sense of connection and support. Valeria also explained that she used to have lots of cats in El Salvador, and so, Tommy offers her a sense of home and familiarity which is useful to her as she rebuilds her life here in Tyneside.

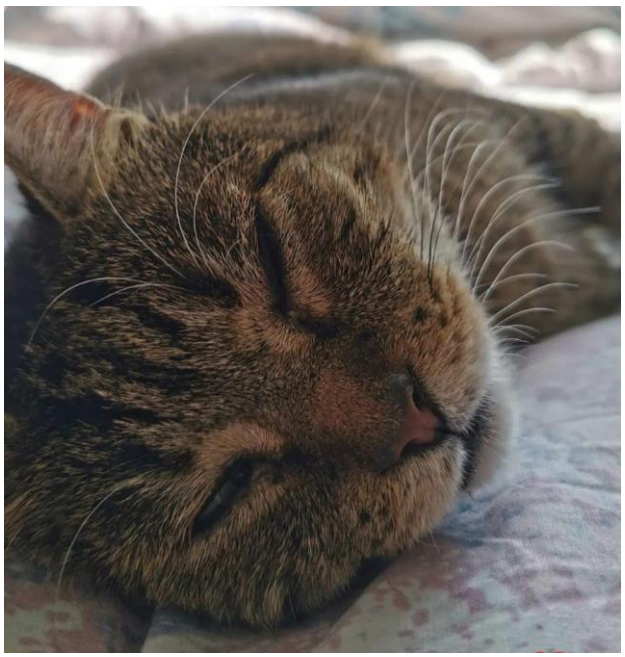

Figure 25. Tommy the cat, Laura's pet

Karim shared images of his pigeon during the photovoice project (see Figure 26). The pigeon started to visit him in his garden and he began to regularly feed him. One day this pigeon brought another pigeon along and they both now visits him every day. Karim narrates the story of his friendship:

> *This is a picture of a cute wild pigeon, over a month ago it was wandering in the front of the house, I gave her some food (small pieces of bread) she ate it and flew away. The next day while I was standing by the window, I saw her come calmly and cautiously, and I gave her some food again. And so, she came several times and after a few days she came with another pigeon, but she was afraid at first! But after we gave them food and water, they became our friends. They visit us every day more than once, eat and drink and then fly away.*

Figure 26. Karim's pigeon friends

Diego recounts that he bought a plant as a companion (see Figure 27). He explains how he sometimes chats to his plant: 'you are looking beautiful', he says, 'I treat it as if it was a human being'. He explains how he looks after it and waters it regularly. He recently brought it in from his backyard to protect it from the cold weather and now it is in his bedroom. He narrates the joy that gives him seeing that his plant is growing well. During my volunteering at the Comfrey Project one of the staff there explained how caring for plants can give individuals a sense of responsibility and connection. This Comfrey staff member explained that when refugees are struggling because of family separation or because of their asylum situation, caring for something like a plant can help them direct the care that they are yearning to give towards something and they can also help them feel useful and needed. As Diego explains his plant is a companion who depends on him for his regular care and as it grows healthy and well, it reciprocates a sense of reliability, attachment and company during darker days (see Figure 27).

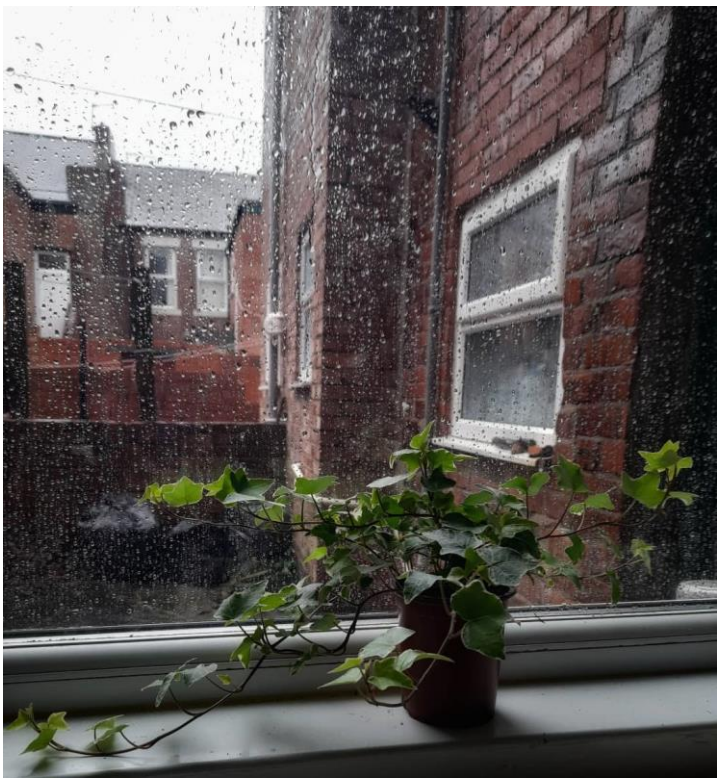

Figure 27. Diego's plant

These findings highlight intimacy that extends beyond human interaction, suggesting how plants and animals often offer refugees critical companionships, support and care. Research has pointed to how animals are often classed as part of family due to the care and support that they provide (Nast 2006; p. 894; Hall, 2019). Further, as this section suggests, 'doing' care for animals as well as plants can offer refugees and asylum seekers a regular sense of responsibility and reliance which can bring joy to those who yearn to care for others. These findings show that intimacies beyond human attachment have also an important role in the lives of refugees who experience separation from loved ones abroad and who are rebuilding new connections, attachments and lives in Tyneside.

Conclusion

This chapter offers a rich reframing of 'the family' by examining how refugee and asylum-seeking families who are rebuilding their life in Tyneside forge intimate relations both locally and transnationally. This work argues that we cannot lose sight of the political rights of refugee families, their moral and ethical right of reunification. As we have seen in the UK, there are a myriad of institutional, legal and systemic barriers in place to disrupt familial relations amongst participating families. This echoes recent research that points out that the family is being

increasingly targeted as a form of exclusionary bordering tactic (Coddington and Williams, 2022).

This research has examined the multiple and varied ways in which refugees are negotiating family in their respective resettlement experiences. Firstly, this chapter addressed the emotional challenges of refugee family separation. I suggest that refugee family reunification and dispersal policies disregard refugees' right to family life, and that UK resettlement policy revolves around a traditional definition of the heteronormative nuclear (see Phillimore et al, 2023). Such policy articulates a narrow and exclusionary understanding of family relations. Secondly, this chapter focused on how refuges are negotiating complex transnational families. Refugee families maintain relationships with loved ones abroad through regular and active practices mostly aided by ICTs but also other through other methods such sending packages, visiting or through materiality which connects them with loved ones left behind. I highlighted that some refugees use ICTs in ways that helps them navigate barriers in communication that they face, for instance by sending voice messages through WhatsApp as a way to maintain regular presence with family members who aren't able read and write or to manage time differences. This research emphasized that transnational refugee families engage in regular routines in a myriad of ways, such as helping children with homework, caring for elderly parents or attending virtual family gatherings. I argue that whilst virtual presence can alleviate some of the emotional traumas of separation, the absence of physical contact with biological family is extremely difficult for many (see also Baldassar, 2008; Wilding, 2006) and virtual connection cannot fulfil this need. This research also emphasized that there are still many socio-political, structural or systemic barriers to accessing ICTs, demonstrating that advancements in technology hasn't benefited all migrant groups in the same way (Parreñas, 2005). This chapter also reveals the realities of navigating family life for biological families and married couples who came to together to the Tyneside area or who have been (re)united. There are many challenges to family reunification and families must often reimagine new routines, gender and family roles to rebuild their family life as they settle in Tyneside. This research also demonstrated that these shifting family dynamics can put extra pressure on families but having family close by, is also a source of socialization, support and motivation. Refugee families emphasized they felt a deeper bond with family, as a result of the challenges that they are facing and solving together.

At the same time, this research documents the new attachments and intimacies which asylum seekers forge in the absence of biological family members in Tyneside. Refugees are forming relationships in ways that extend beyond traditional family structures; these relations are critical for their emotional and material survival in Tyneside. Many refugees sadly are denied the right to family or to have resettled with a very small family unit. In such cases, it is not uncommon to see refugees and asylum seeking crafting new kin relations to build critical support networks. These friendships also help refugees and asylum seekers navigate and cope with challenging and uncertain conditions, and often are bonded by a deep connection because of the mutual forced migration experience. We have seen the incredible importance of new friends; these relationships signal the many ways in which asylum seekers produce new intimacies which substantive expand our understanding of family.

This chapter suggests that kinship in the context of forced migration takes shape in many different forms (see also Aitken, 1998; Jamieson et al, 2006; Morgan, 2011; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). These forms often unsettle fixed understanding of the traditional nuclear family and should be considered in policy and practice. As Carsten (2020) argues both 'kinship by doing' and 'kinship by being' (birth, ties of descent and ascriptive status) have relevance for refugee and asylum-seeking families. These families engage in relationships with biological family abroad to continue to exercise their right to family life despite hostile immigration restrictions which impedes family reunion and at the same time they also build new intimacies, familial structures and relations locally beyond blood relations. These various forms of and types of kinship and relatedness which refugee families craft and develop through various practices in everyday live both locally and transnationally ('lived experience of relatedness') is vital as refugees and asylum seekers experience the traumas of family separation, hostility from the state and the challenges of rebuilding a new life in Tyneside (see Carsten, 2001). These complex terrains that refugees navigate to negotiate intimacy deeply affects how they sense belonging and intimate attachment. This research highlighted the active strategizing and adaptability that refugee families engage in to transform, negotiate and maintain intimacy and connection.

Chapter 6: Hostility, togetherness and agency

Introduction

Diego and his brother arrived from El Salvador to London in 2020. As Diego speaks about his first days in the UK, he recalls the unpleasant and unwelcoming first encounter they had at the borders with a Border Force Officer who kept ignoring them: 'for us it was a horrible experience'. He recalls the officer telling them: 'Do you speak Spanish? You have to go to Spain. They will help you there'. He also remembers waiting for extended periods at the airport after disclosing that they were fleeing from El Salvador. This is the beginning of Diego's emotional journey of settling in the UK. As Diego describes enduring the first days and weeks in the UK, he explains that he had almost no clothes suited for the winter climates of the UK and he experienced feeling really cold. He stayed in a hotel in London where he waited for 2 months before he was transferred to another facility.

Figure 28. Queuing to enter a church group which gave him support in London

Despite explaining how he encountered the effects of an unwelcoming system directed towards refugees in the first few months in the UK. He also describes some of the solidarity that he encountered. The image above (Figure 28) was taken whilst he was waiting in a queue to enter a church which was about 40-minute walk from the hotel where he was residing. In this church group he received warm clothes and a meal. He also met with friendly volunteers

who were interested in him and spoke a little Spanish: 'so I started to feel welcomed', Diego explains. This was one of the first acts of kindness and solidarity that he encountered here in the UK.

Figure 29. A park in Wakefield which Diego used to relax and escape his frustrations

Diego was then transferred to another hotel in Wakefield where he waited for another 4 months until he was finally dispersed to Gateshead. He explains that these 4 months where very challenging for him. Diego took the above image (Figure 29) in a park in Wakefield which he would regularly visit. He recalls going to this park to run and relax because at that time he was feeling stressed and disappointed with his situation: 'I had nothing to do or nobody to do anything with, so I was going out to breathe, change the environment, spend time in the sun, lie down […] without money, options, without much, when I was out at least I saw people, I felt alive'.

This opening story from Diego encapsulates some of the main themes of this chapter. It aims to explore how refugee's feelings of belonging are profoundly affected by both state bordering and everyday hostilities experienced in public life. This chapter seeks to explore not only the effects of hostility and exclusion but also the welcome, solidarity and care which refugees experience. Whilst previous chapters explored how refugees and asylum seekers negotiate belonging within more personal and intimate spatialities, I now turn to address how state

immigration policy and everyday encounters shape feelings of welcome, exclusion and (not) belonging.

This work takes up Van Liempt and Staring (2020) argument that in the lives of refugees there are spaces that both harm and that heal. Convivial interactions that emerge within these spatialities (Valentine, 2008; Darling and Wilson, 2016) play an important role in shaping how refugees and asylum seekers negotiate belonging (Van Liempt and Staring, 2020; Antonsich, 2010). Many asylum seekers experience discrimination and hostility throughout their settlement experience, which often begins with their first point of contact with the state and extends into their everyday interactions. And yet, the lives of refugees are never fully understood in their lived experiences of violence, and this chapter argues that settlement also needs to be framed through experiences of welcome and resistance (see Hughes, 2016; 2020; Benwell et al, 2023; Ghorashi et al, 2018; Schiller and Caglar, 2013; Van Liempt and Staring, 2020; Van Liempt, 2023). Refugees and their allies are carving out their space in Tyneside despite difficult circumstances.

This chapter is organised into two sections. First, I narrate the reflections of refugees who are experiencing the violence of state bordering as well as frequent hostility in their everyday encounters. Secondly, this chapter will focus on sites and spaces of sanctuary and solidarity which are mobilised to resist violence and forge a sense of togetherness in the city.

Experiencing hostility and exclusions

In the opening story, Diego expressed his feeling of being unwelcomed, stressed and disappointed during the first 6 months of seeking asylum while living in London and Wakefield. He explained how the precarity of having no money, no options and no connections started to wear him down. Diego reflects further on how the asylum system and the challenges of forced migration are affecting his feelings of belonging and wellbeing in this next image from his accordion book of belonging (Figure 30). In this image below Diego reproduced a moment in his departure from El Salvador. The image shows Diego looking out of a window which resembles that of an airplane; he is reflecting on what he is leaving behind in El Salvador and wonders what he will encounter in his new life.

Figure 30. Diego reflecting on leaving El Salvador and experiencing disappointment with his new life in the UK

> *Then we left […] it was something very abrupt. I had to leave everything … I thought about the distance […]. I am crossing an entire ocean and it is going to be, kind of like falling into another new world. I remember a lot the absence of my mother. It was as if I was comparing this window to an airplane window because it looks like that. And I cried, I cried, I cried with this photo, the absence of having left everything […] no one said it was going to be easy. This is the price to pay, and the good things always cost something […] You have to even love your tears. [...] I feel like a stranger, because I am to a certain extent, because I feel as if I have no rights to many things, I am an outsider to this country. I feel some people think that you want to take what is theirs but that is not really my intention. So, I feel entitled to nothing, sometimes [...]. If they tell me 'No!', well, they have more rights than me, so it's not easy to start over, to put your feet on the ground and settle, it's like breaching a wall. It is like even ducking my head, but I keep going.*

Reflecting on the meaning of the above image, Diego voices feelings of loss, disappointment, and exclusion experienced in seeking asylum in the UK. He describes feeling entitled to nothing, having no rights, feeling like an outsider and he describes settling in Tyneside as

'breaching a wall'. Diego's experiences of insecure housing in Gateshead have been especially difficult:

> *I can't tell them; I want to stay in my house because I like it. If they tell me tomorrow that I have to go to Scotland. We have no other option than going. I must pack my things and wait until they take us and start from scratch again. So, I am living in limbo, not knowing what will happen next. Uncertain […] I don't know if they will move us from here, or what will be the outcome of my case […]. It is not our house. I don't feel it belongs to me or that I have any entitlement to anything.*

State policy has Diego stuck in a precarious situation, and he feels he cannot settle under the threat of further displacement in the UK. Such feelings were not uncommon, and many participating refugees explained how the hostility of the asylum system made them feel excluded and unwelcomed. As Talib reflected: 'I think the Home Office wants to give a message to people who want to come here to apply for asylum. This country [is] very bad'.

Many individuals waiting for their asylum claims to be processed described how the uncertainty of their immigration status negatively affected their mental health. This 'not knowing' was producing great anxiety in asylum seekers' daily lives. Ariana described how waiting and waiting for state bureaucracy is producing experiences of substantive anxiety: 'I get insomnia, then it makes me feel stressed and then the stress makes me anxious, it all gets on top of me, but I try to keep going'. There are days where she feels very depressed; it's hard to get out of bed, but she perseveres because of her son: 'There are times that this process makes me very depressed, it is very difficult for us'. Obi, from Nigeria, echoes similar sentiments, explaining how the process of seeking asylum has been a traumatising experience and has affected her blood pressure: 'You are doing interview, they refuse and sometimes when you are talking, you are telling truth and they tell you back that you are lying […]. Since 2018, I have high blood pressure'. Obi explained that she often felt disbelieved by the Home Office and she asked me to explain: 'please, when you are writing your something [can you explain], if you are comfortable with your life, you can't just go to somebody's country and tell them I want asylum. It's not easy to leave your family, leave everything and come to somewhere and say I need asylum. So, they [Home Office] should know that somebody that come to them is in pain, is in problem. Something is chasing them, you know'.

Talib, who just recently received refugee status when I interviewed recounted how hard it was for him when he was waiting to hear from the Home Office about his invitation for his first interview. On top of leaving a very good job, his friends, family, trying to adapt to his new life here and enduring isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he recalls the pain of waiting every day in vain: 'After three months, you're just an asylum seeker […] you are falling from the highest position, and it was very hard for me […] Quickly, I felt like useless. The second thing, living in limbo during the asylum process. It is the horrendous part because you don't know the target […] you can't say okay, in one year time, I will reach it in one year time but you don't know […].' Talib explains that during the COVID-19 pandemic the processing of asylum cases was interrupted. He felt like he was waiting in vain and his hopes were shattered. Every day felt like a disappointment as he eagerly waited for the postman to come by his house but no letter from the Home Office arrived: 'ah it's the postman!', he shows me how he used to run to the door when the postman came by, 'maybe you have a letter then it means Home Office is calling your for interview or any good news in interview results'.

Talib's experience of being wore down by the asylum system and process was very common. Some individuals that I interviewed told me that they waited for a decision for a very long time, the longest was Mehdi who waited for over 20 years: 'After more than 20 years and 8 months I received my refugee status. Very emotional. Fighting this immigration'. Natalia and Elias were not receiving any support from the Home Office when I interviewed them and were relying on friends and charities to survive. Their situation was very precarious, uncertain and bleak. Elias described his life as 'a detention life' and explained how his 'age is gone'. He describes that his life doesn't feel like a life because of the lack of control that he has over his present and future. He relies on his girlfriend and the kindness of others to survive. He is not permitted to work or to go to college: 'I am not allowed anything'. Natalia who has lived in Tyneside for 20 years and experienced homelessness and destitution recalls various encounters with Home Office officials where she experienced hostility right in front of her eyes. She recalls being denied water during an interview, and another time when immigration officers tried to force her to sign papers on behalf of her parents who had capacity: 'nobody has the right for me to sign on behalf of an adult. They try to force me to do so'. Natalia believes that refugees are often treated by the state as if they were less than human.

Esther who experienced deportation to Nigeria with her British born child explained how she lived in fear: 'I felt unsafe, sometimes when I was not good mentally, somebody knocked on the door […] and I was afraid to open […], they come to your house and they take you […]. They took me and my son away', 'when I came back […] everything was gone'. I will share more about Esther's story and how she was deported and returned to the UK later in this chapter.

Some individuals discussed how they felt that they were losing the confidence and skills necessary to perform their professions due to prolonged waiting. 'Doctors, […] many teachers they are waiting, some lawyers, some police officers who could be contributing to society', says Deniz, who also worries about the many young people who cannot go to university due to their status. Other parents highlighted how their children are affected by the uncertainty of not knowing what will happen tomorrow. Asylum seekers often express the sheer exhaustion of dealing with a system riddled with exclusions, uncertainty, temporal dislocation and state-enforced precarity. 'You don't have peace', says Sanaya, 'It's not easy to build your life, to plan for the future when you don't know what's happening tomorrow'.

The situation is made worse by the acute lack of support from services when refugees are first dispersed to Tyneside: 'zero support, all by ourselves thanks to google maps. Imagine what it would be like if we didn't know how to use google maps', says Laura. The absence of support services is happening at a most critical time for many refugees.

Beyond the scarcity of settlement resources and state-enforced destitution, many refugees described hostile encounters and receptions in Tyneside. For instance, Aysen, from Turkey, explained an encounter with a staff member from their housing provider. He knocked on their door aggressively, refused to take his shoes off, even after they explained it has cultural and religious significance. 'We hated that […], he didn't listen, and he came in his with shoes'. Aysen explained how the housing provider has a spare key to the property, which is in a box outside their house locked with a code. Workers enter their house without giving any warning or notice and sometimes whilst her daughters are in the house without wearing their hijab: 'They could be getting changed or be in the bathroom'. These microaggressions disregards refugees right to privacy, cultural and religious practices, and leaves the family feeling vulnerable, frustrated, and disrespected. Leila from Iran explained how a colleague at work

keeps making fun of how she speaks and purposely annoys her. She noticed that this colleague treats service users from other countries disrespectfully. The situation has not improved over the years even after speaking to her manager about it. Leila explains that this sustained intimidation from her colleague has affected her confidence due to this she is now looking for a new job.

Several individuals recounted experiencing racist abuse. For example, Elias described that someone shouted at him from a car calling him a 'monkey', and young people at the gym have physically pushed him. Sanaya has been keeping a record of such racist incidents experienced by the Sri Lankan community. She has documented many cases: 'There are so many incidents […] even in the neighbourhood I live in, I was standing at the bus stop and someone […] thrown a stone at me, shown signs like shooting guns'. She also explained that many families and friends have experienced unpleasant incidents in public transport by bus drivers or other passengers. In her opinion, Muslim women are more vulnerable to racist abuse because of the hijab: 'He [husband] might be targeted because of his colour but nothing else […], it is difficult being a woman, being a Muslim woman and being a woman of colour […]. Lot of things we have to deal with'. Here, she reflects on how race and religion render her more vulnerable to abuse. Inaya recalls an upsetting incident in a shop in Newcastle when she was pregnant: 'one man he pushed me and he was swearing a lot'. Diego recounts how elderly people in Wakefield purposely crossed the road to distance themselves from him: 'one feels automatically excluded, it's like if they would feel disgusted by me'. He also narrated many negative experiences in public spaces, such as at college, which made him feel uneasy about sharing details about his life. He experienced several instances where as soon as individuals found out that he is an asylum seeker they started questioning him and behaving negatively towards him. These students at college told him that he is living of their taxes, had everything free and was living better than them.

Diego and other individuals also recounted negative experiences or apathy in neighbourhoods where they lived. 'People are very closed, nobody acknowledges you, I think that Europeans are quite racist', Diego says. Azhar explains that he feels very uncomfortable in his neighbourhood because young people behave very badly. He explains that most neighbours are respectful, but there is one neighbour that doesn't even say hi, and he feels like this neighbour dislikes him. Leila also explained how she would like to move as she feels there is

tension from some neighbours in her neighbourhood even if she tries her best to be friendly: 'They want to raise an argument or want to do something […] Most of them are very nice, but we've got awkward one as well'. Inaya described how living in a deprived neighbourhood in the West End of Newcastle was very challenging for her family: 'I don't like the words, very bad words. I don't want my children to grow up with attitude at all. I can't move because I was an asylum seeker. The boys and girls, throwing dirty things to my house. So had lots of challenges that time. One time I went to the GP centre; someone took my bag and ran away'.

A local practitioner who works with asylum seekers and refugees in Tyneside described the complex socio-economic landscapes of the neighbourhoods in which refugees are typically dispersed to:

> *Some people really struggle, in the neighbourhoods they are living in […] we've had quite a lot of cases up in Ashington […] and Blyth […] the communities are historically massively deprived themselves. Again, there's no funding going into those areas, because of austerity […], there's lots of trauma relating to the mining industries closing in those areas, and mass unemployment and then you place these really vulnerable people who look very different and sound very different to the rest of the sort of white British population living in those communities and so often you get those racial tensions, […] that's another thing to deal with, another thing they don't need to deal with and shouldn't have to deal with […]. We used to speak to the local police fairly regularly and certainly there was pockets of Benwell [Newcastle] that they wouldn't accommodate, certain streets, that they knew there was issues with racism, so they stopped accommodating people on those specific streets, although Benwell itself is actually quite a multi-cultural area, but they knew there was particular problems, and they were concerned about that. […] But then equally we have had people live really successfully and happily in other places that you wouldn't necessarily, yeah, think they would do well.*

Individuals and practitioners described many other challenges that made settlement difficult. Some narrated feelings of disorientation and isolation in a completely new environment, particularly with the lack of resources and services available to refugee communities to support them with settling. Others mentioned issues with poverty, the challenges of surviving

with little income and of living in inadequate and dangerous housing. Some explained their confusion in navigating the asylum process, legal system and the lack of support that they received in this regard from the state and other organisations. Some mentioned how not being able to speak English was a barrier and emphasized how they had to wait for study at college. They also felt there were lack of opportunities to get to know British nationals. Finally, most individuals mentioned how the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated some of these challenges (see also Finlay et al, 2021).

'It's like breaching a wall', Diego says to envision the multiple hostilities that he is experiencing whilst trying to settle in Tyneside. This hostility takes shaped in the form of state violence who denies him of full rights and forces him to live prolonged periods of uncertainty. It is evident in the rejections that he experiences in his everyday life as he encounters exclusions to services, misrepresentation and microaggressions in public spaces. It also manifests through the lack of support and inadequate resources that Diego and other refugees and asylum seekers receive that could make their life more bearable. These nuanced accounts also bring to light how these hostilities and precarities that refugees experience harms their wellbeing. This section builds on scholarship documenting the effects of punitive state legislation and bordering processes (see for example, Cassidy, 2018; Loyd and Mountz, 2014; Hyndman, 2012; Yuval-Davis et al, 2018 Darling, 2009; Sauters and Al-Om, 2022). It also adds to scholarship which explores the geographies of encounters (Jacobs, 2020; Amin, 2002; Massey, 2005; Gilroy, 2004, Darling and Wilson, 2016), particularly by observing how convivial life in cities affects the feeling of belonging of refugees. This section offers contributions to these scholarship by bringing to light how these political and everyday processes of exclusion are felt and experienced in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in Tyneside. It reflects on how exclusionary policies and encounters can (and often are) sites of harm and (not) belonging which affects refugee lives.

And yet, this is only part of the picture. I now turn to instances of care and support that refugees experience in their everyday lives, and argue that despite many substantive challenges, many who are seeking asylum in Tyneside are forming communities of solidarity, kindness and welcome.

Welcome, resistance and forging sanctuary spaces

Diego discusses the significance of an encounter with a local charity in London during the first very harsh days in the UK. He explains how they made him feel welcomed and offered him warm clothes and a meal. At the time, when he only just arrived and was feeling lost and vulnerable, this act of kindness was very meaningful to him. Diego described many other welcoming encounters and support that he received in Tyneside. For example, a friendly shop assistant in local charity shop who gave him a leaflet and directed him and his brother to other services and a support worker at a local charity who offered them support to settle in and pointed them to other services in the area. He also mentioned that this charity offered him with opportunities to volunteer there. Later, Diego would come to know other local services including the Comfrey Project. Laura from El Salvador recounted how challenging were the first days in Tyneside. She explained that her and her family relied on Google maps to get around. Later, she started accessing a friendly local charity which supports refugees and this helped her feel supported and understood:

> *You had to be very independent in a place that you know nothing about. And it was very difficult, but then we found [charity name] and started to walk again, to walk a little […] this type of people understand you […] they help you to acclimatise and to regain a feeling of being whole again, to try things on our own again.*

There were many other examples of welcome and support. Ana Maria who told me about how she feels happy and welcomed at college where she has friendly teachers and classmates who encourage her. She receives support from a local foodbank which helps her with food and other items when she struggles to afford to feed her family. This support from local charities and individuals makes critical differences in the settlement of refugees arriving in Tyneside.

Although some neighbourhoods were identified by individuals as sites of tension or apathy, there were also many accounts from participants describing friendly neighbours, who regularly greeted them, took packages for them or helped them taking bins in or out, and who became friends. For example, Emir and Aysen got to know all their neighbours during the COVID-19 pandemic:

We created a Facebook group during the lockdown […] so on that Facebook group one neighbour said, I am going to sing a song every day at 12 pm for 100 days, I want everyone to join me and dance together and stuff […] Everyone was joining her singing with her, dancing with her. It was really nice for us and something really positive for us. I think we were the lucky ones in this lockdown by having a chance to meet our neighbours and feeling the community […]. We know everyone now, we know every neighbour in our street, like most of them. We say hello to each other […] say good morning and have small chats with them. They are really nice people.

Similarly, Inaya from Sri Lanka described how she now lives in part of Newcastle where her neighbours are friendly and welcoming, which highlights how areas of dispersal have a substantive impact on settlement. Inaya has a very close relationship with her neighbour next door who is from Pakistan. Their relationship is close and they regularly help each other. Inaya took care of her children when her neighbour had to go to the hospital with her newborn baby who was unwell. During Ramadan they take turns to cook and they share meals: 'everyone shares'. These positive encounters and neighbourly relationships, alongside the critical role played by charities, can have a 'transformative capacity' (see also Wilson, 2017, p. 464). They can transform by providing a more friendly and compassionate environment, where refugees and asylum seekers can feel accepted and welcomed in their local community.

Returning to Esther's story who was deported to Nigeria with her son. She recounted the emotional story of her return to the UK. She narrated how her neighbours and local community in Tyneside stood by her and her son and fought to bring them back to the UK:

People fight for us to bring us back! Because there is no place for us to stay [in Nigeria]. We just roaming around in the streets, me and my son. My son was about five years old […]. People go to court on our behalf […] they make some Go Fund for me on internet […] they used to send me money every week to feed myself and my son and to pay for the hotel. We stay in that hotel for three months. The judge asked them to bring us back.

Esther and her son were able to return to the UK because of the legal efforts made by the local community in Tyneside. They now have residency status in the UK. Esther reflects on the

community's perseverance and compassion: 'They really try, I couldn't believe what they did. It is like dreaming'. She now feels a strong sense of belonging in the Gateshead. These welcoming and caring encounters and relationships are significant, and in some cases, exceptional. They provide asylum seekers and refugees with an environment of care and solidarity that radically disrupts and unsettles their experiences of the UK's hostile environment and racism.

One example of this was the 'No to Hassockfield campaign' which fights for the closure of the Women's Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) in County Durham (No to Hassockfield Campaign, 2023). I took the images below during one of their demonstrations in the vicinity of the removal centre, which can be seen in the distance. It was an overwhelming experience to witness how vulnerable women who were seeking a refuge and safety were imprisoned inside this centre. It was also emotional to witness the support of the community who gathered regularly to campaign and protest to end these inhumane practices and free those women. The images below highlight the tension between both the hostility and violence and the welcome, resistance and solidarity that refugee communities experience in their daily lives. Many of the campaigners themselves, were individuals with lived experience of seeking asylum and some of being detained who were now standing here to support and acknowledge those who are now experiencing this violent, uncertain and precarious conditions.

Figure 31. Images taken whilst attending 'No to Hassockfield' demonstration

There are many examples of resistance and opposition to violence and hostility which were discussed during this research. Inaya talked about how she now, that she has more experience, retaliates if she encounters hostility: 'Before I was scared and run away and keep quiet. Now I'm talking back you know […]. Before when I came […] I don't know how people

are, now I'm not scared. Now I learn a lot. Before someone who is throwing a stone or something, I'm scared and running. Now I'm standing and taking my phone and I'm asking why. Now I know. I had done lots of community work and police interviews and lots of things. I'm brave now, I think.' Her friend, Sanaya, always report any negative experiences: 'she tells me, take the bus number and time. The shop, the time and lady's name. Then she reports everything. So, we are brave now'. Her actions highlight her agency and role in resisting and challenging everyday hostility experienced by refugees in Tyneside (and beyond).

Many refugees discussed how they tactically used their 'waiting' as a chance to grow and develop. Therefore resisting a site which is intended to of harm and turning it into a site of agency and opportunity (see also Ghorashi et al, 2017; Ramachandran and Vathi, 2022; Brun, 2015; Khosravi, 2019; Lipatova, 2022). This is evident in Sanaya's account of resisting the harms of prolonged waiting: 'Once we realised, right, we have to make use of what we have, this opportunity […] I can't work, I'll just take this opportunity to learn things and maybe take this opportunity to say I'm resting from work and find something to do'. Talib also explained how whilst he was waiting to hear about his asylum case, he spent this time studying and acquiring new skills that later would help him gain employment. Anahi also used her time of waiting as an opportunity to plan and reflect on her life goals and her future. She hopes to set up a social enterprise in which she will be making her own products and will be helping others to start their own businesses under a collective and supportive umbrella: 'It's going to be a company where we are going to sell and at the same time, we are going to contribute to the society we are in'. There were many more accounts of how refugee and asylum-seeking families used their time of waiting and uncertainty to volunteer, retrain, study, focus on hobbies, plan future enterprises and many more.

Even those who faced the most violent of exclusions, who were ignored and pushed to the margins of society by the state and were surviving by the support and kindness from charities and friends, also continued to craft their own ways of coping and resisting violence. Natalia who had been living precariously for over a decade has found ways of creating her own sanctuary amongst the harshness that the UK immigration system has on her. In the photovoice work, she illustrated how she creates a calming space. Her accordion book included images she had been collecting over years (Figure 32). In these images, we can see her love for yoga, painting, coffee drinking, aromatherapy, lighting candles, and her ability to

relish memories of loved ones through special keepsakes. She appreciates special moments like sunsets and memorable views. Through these activities, Natalia crafts spaces of healing which help her cope with her everyday challenges.

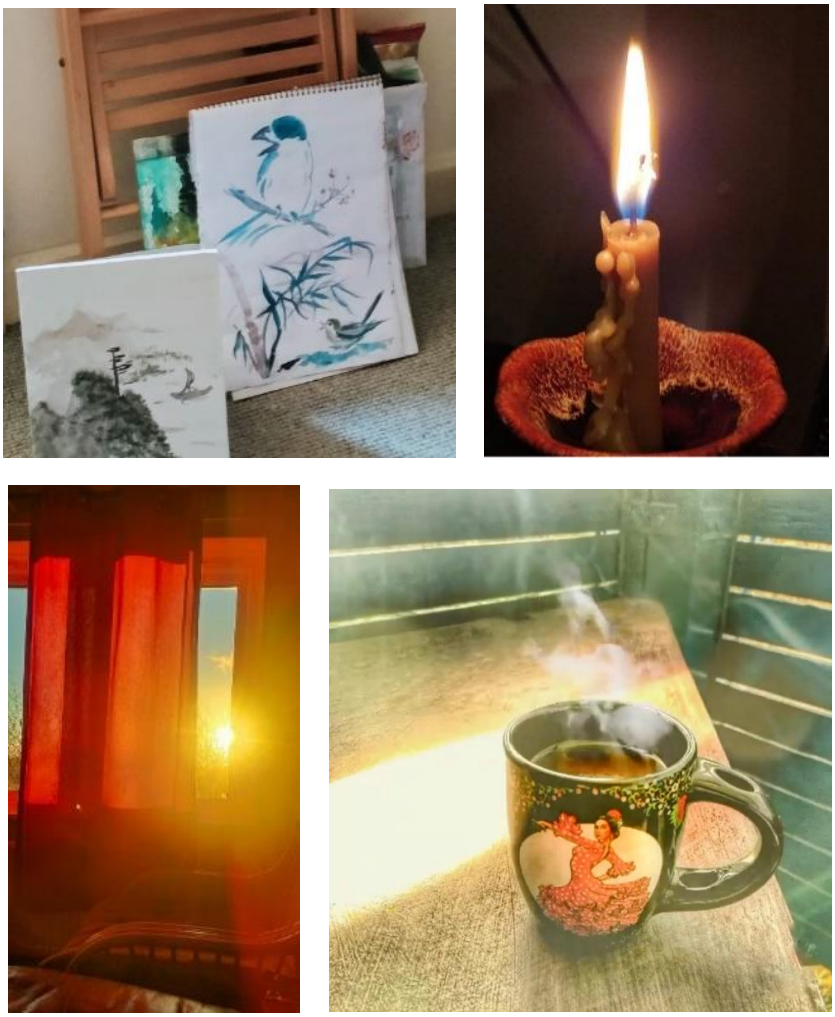

Figure 32. Images from Natalia's accordion book of belonging

Leila from Iran, who has been here for over ten years, reflects on settling in Tyneside, and describes the importance of her own resilience and self-determination:

> *I wanted to find my way. I wasn't kind of dependant on someone to show me anything. I just wanted to find way myself, not just waiting for things to happen. I had to find ways myself with other classes, how can I improve my English, how can I find work, how can I improve my lifestyle here in a new country to adapt to myself to a new community and society […] I was walking long long way, for example, to go to the churches once a week for one hour to be with them, to join their classes.*

This self-determination, to find a way, to do something and engage was not uncommon. Although some individuals struggled to participate in opportunities due to language, health barriers, travel expenses, immigration status or confidence, most individuals were actively involved in arts, sports, cultural activities, volunteering, employment or education. In a similar way to Hughes (2020), I argue that these strategies represent every day, emergent forms of resistance. These acts, which are framed around the everyday violences experienced by refugees and asylum seekers (encounters and structural), disrupt the status quo by shifting the attention from the hostility (Benwell et al, 2023). For instance, through engaging in meditative practices, in projects and activities tactically used to weather the effects of prolonged uncertainty, by standing up against and challenging violence and discrimination through organised activism or reporting.

There were also many accounts which highlighted how asylum seekers and refugees and their supporters from local charities, refugee and other communities participated and engaged in co-constructing spaces of care, restoration, togetherness and sanctuary. Diego explained that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, he volunteered in a local charity providing food for families in need: 'I wanted to be useful. To give something back to this country because they are helping me with food, housing […]. I want to give something back. To be grateful'. Laura from El Salvador explains that she volunteers in a drop in for the same charity that provided her support when she had newly arrived in Tyneside. Volunteering in this charity has also helped to develop her English language skills, and to get to know individuals from other countries and cultures. 'Maybe not everyone will need me to say Marhaba [hello in Arabic – she learnt this to greet Arabic speakers in their language]. How wonderful it would have felt if that would have happened to me, if someone would have made me a coffee […]. I am doing this because perhaps it could make a difference in the day of that person', she explains.

Many participants stressed how important the Comfrey project was for them. For many, the project was now a central part of their lives in Tyneside. It is a place where they could meet people from many different parts of the world, learn and share skills and information, participate in activities like gardening, cooking, art, volunteering and more. For Elias, from Eritrea whose current immigration situation is very complex and precarious, Comfrey is part of his 'family' and supportive system. 'The Comfrey Project just help my life', he says. He

explains how everyone in the project are his family: 'manager, all people, all staff, just brothers'. He describes the activities and the relaxing and friendly environment that he encounters when he accesses the project: 'People joke, work hard, speak, cook together, go to trips and have fun […] help me with transport'. For Elias, Comfrey has a very positive impact in his life and wellbeing. It is particularly important for him as he is not permitted to work or study, and he gets no support from the Home Office because of his immigration status. For Elias, the Comfrey Project is a place of shelter and restoration.

Dola from Nigeria explained how Comfrey has been a crucial place to meet people and socialize. Their support was vital at a time when she was struggling: 'it has helped me to motivate me, to please me, at that time when I was seriously down'. Dola refers to the strength of the relationships that develop within the group: 'We meet different nationalities, if you see the bond, the friendships, it looks like we are coming from the same place but we are not'. Mehdi also calls the Comfrey community 'a family' and refers to the solidarity, understanding and encouragement that emerges amongst individuals in the project: 'yes, this community same as my family […] my brother or sister […]. They are all friendly, good atmosphere. I know we are from different culture, but we all got one situation in this country. That thing we know we can manage; we can say positive things to each other'. Andre refers to the culture of inclusivity, openness and sanctuary that develops within the Comfrey Project: 'It was open to everyone to sit somewhere and free their minds'. Similarly, Ariana commented on how it is a space for her to destress and forget of the worries that asylum seekers have, as well as a space to learn English without worrying of making mistakes: 'they understand us, that is what matters, they understand us'. Finally, Diego reflects on the purpose of spaces like the Comfrey Project. A space where people from different parts of the world are joint together under one community with one purpose:

> *We all want to get to know others. We want to feel good, want to learn something. We want to explore and explore each other; we want to be human. This is why these spaces are so important.*

The Comfrey Project Director, Eleni Venaki, talked at length about the approach that Comfrey project uses to create an environment where individuals feel ownership, community and belonging: 'I think openness and sharing, and giving people responsibility. The language we

use for example we call people volunteers and not service users, that is intentional. That is to reinforce that sense of ownership, community and belonging'. She explains that the Comfrey Project offers individuals an opportunity to feel accepted at community level and to create connections with others. For example, the Comfrey Project offers individuals a space where they can speak their language, celebrate their cultural traditions and eat their food, as well as to share these celebrations and cultural practices with others. Eleni reflected on the reasons that many Comfrey project volunteers consider the project as their 'family':

This thing about family where you don't have to be perfect, you don't have to necessarily choose them but there is an underlined understanding that we are in it together and we care for each other, even if we don't quite agree or always see eye to eye but we are here and have a common purpose which is to come here, look after this place, make things happen […] it is that security that you have that you don't need to necessarily be best friends with them but they are there for you. There is a community there, they understand you, and they will be there […] that's why a lot of people call this place home, a second home, a family here.

Eleni explains that their approach is to create a space where people feel at home because they are free to do engage in the project in the way they want and need, where they can relax and there is little structure. She gave me an example of a volunteer who was suffering depression and liked to drop in at times to hang out with other people and one day she said to her: 'Eleni can I have some oil, the toilet door in the women's toilet is really creaking'. Without saying anything she just went and put some oil in the door. For Eleni, this example highlighted how volunteers feel ownership and responsibility of the space; they can engage in their own terms and feel responsible for making the space better for everyone.

Such ethos also resonated with approaches used in other community projects which were identified by refugee participants as spaces of belonging and community. For instance, the Curious Monkey Theatre Company was often talked about by those who engaged in the research. Amy Golding, Artistic Director and Joint CEO pinpointed many aspects of their approach which intentionally foster a sense of belonging amongst participants of the group. The project prioritises taking time to build trusting relationships. They provide opportunities for regular 'check in', to be listened to and to celebrate successes (i.e. through their WhatsApp group and in the weekly session). Amy explained that the project provides leadership and

volunteering opportunities for participating refugees and they also employ individuals with lived experience of seeking sanctuary. Amy explains the importance of cooking and eating together something that they do in each session. Another important aspect of their flexible ethos is that participants engage in the project in different ways and for different reasons (i.e. to learn English, to have an escape, to be an activist, to engage in the arts). The project also offers opportunities for participants to meet with different members of the Tyneside community through public activities, something that refugees often identify as a barrier. Finally, she also talked about specific approaches used within their theatre and drama practice such as never asking anyone to tell their personal stories but offering a safe space where stories can be shared if participants wish to, using physical ways to bridge language barriers and the opportunities that theatre and relatable universal stories can offer to refugees. 'The safety of drama which is a very powerful thing in theatre,' Amy Golding explains, 'you reflect on something, and it makes you heal in some way'. Drama and theatre can provide a platform to understand and explore own realities.

As highlighted by participants, these two projects offer refugees with an opportunity to feel at home within a community and forge a sense of belonging. Although the regular activities delivered by these two charities are quite distinct, there are many similarities in relation to their ethos, cultures and approaches. These projects provide refugees with a space where they can exercise their agency, feel a sense of ownership and reclaim their right to Tyneside. These caring spaces offer a space where refugees can be themselves, explore their and other's identities and realities and feel valued. They also provide refugees with a space to restore, heal and shelter from their hostility encountered in other aspects of their lives. The Comfrey project and Curious Monkey Theatre Company use different activities, the former offers opportunities to engage in nature, community and culture whilst the later offers a space to engage in drama, culture and creativity. Yet, they were some similarities in their ethos, culture and approaches and were regularly identified as spaces of welcome, community and belonging by research participants.

Several individuals also shared how they were actively involved in developing community organisations and activities. For instance, the Sri Lankan and Turkish refugee groups in Tyneside were regularly running projects and events for members of their communities and others. Sanaya and Inaya who play an active role in leading the Sri Lankan community explain

how they regularly meet for cultural and religious celebrations, and welcome parties for new Sri Lankan families and individuals. Around 15 families usually come along, as well as University students. Sanaya describes that they also organise women only spaces within larger events and activities like bridal and baby shower parties: 'so many get togethers, we were same colour, nice hair, because we are always covering our hair, so we are doing hairstyle and everything. Lots of parties!'. The Sri Lankan community also acts as a 'web of connections': 'if it is something to do with medicine I could ask the person who is a doctor in the community, or if it is with law then we could ask this person who is a lawyer in the community […] we want to lend a helping hand but our ultimate goal is for them to have their independence to do things themselves'.

Sanaya explains the importance of these groups in forging a sense of community, belonging, and solidarity. Particularly for those who are newer in the community:

> *It's just a sense of belonging you have with your country [Sri Lankans] […], you see, what I do now getting people together is what people did for me at that time [when she was seeking asylum and new to this country]. They invited us for things, they understood if we took our time, which is what we do with people, because some people don't gel altogether, you know. They are not all ready to mingle and get to know all about each other. Some people do take their time, so we got to understand that as well, because people have different situations when they come here […]. They can express in their own mother tongue. That kind of belonging, I think is what majorly contributes to what I do […] the main reason is not because they are proud or not because they want to be secular in their things but it's the language that is a barrier for them most of the time. Sri Lankans are very friendly, welcoming, they do their best to make you feel very good.*

Many individuals from Turkey described the vital role of their community activities. Deniz and Caria explain that since they have arrived here in Tyneside, more and more families from their community have arrived in the area. They are now about 40 families. Deniz and Caria articulate how their community has become very active and strong. They add that this might be because they share a common history and background. They have experienced similar persecutions, suffering and separation from family. They also have similar ideas about life and the future.

They feel a sense of togetherness, which is different to other relationships or support they get here:

> *Deniz: Everyone has the same problem […] no one has family or some other person to help us, just friends. There are so many good people around you […] but national friends different, you can feel the same, you can imagine the same, you have the same background.*
> *Caria: the same case, you have mostly the same idea about future. You feel [the] need [to be] together.*

The Turkish community in Tyneside organise regular weekly gatherings where families meet to share information and worries and support each other practically, morally and emotionally. They motivate each other and have fun: 'it is very useful to adapt and integrate', says Deniz, and the children attend lessons run by young Turkish volunteers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Turkish community weekly meetings continued to happen online. They also organise regular events for Christmas, Easter, Eid and other religious and cultural occasions where members of the wider community are invited to celebrate together. There is usually traditional Turkish food cooked by women, music and other activities available for everyone to enjoy: 'We need to celebrate with them [wider community] and share something […]. We invite different people from different communities, it makes me feel good. We have done a good job, as a person, as a community, this feeling is very useful'. Deniz and Caria explain that for them, the Turkish community provides them with a sense of friendship and family which is 'useful mentally and physically'. Being together and doing activities together gives them a positive feeling Caria and Deniz explain.

The support from the Turkish community extends beyond their weekly gatherings and events into everyday lives. For example, during the pandemic some Turkish individuals were very isolated so others cooked and delivered food to them so that they didn't feel so alone. They also have a WhatsApp group, which they use to support each other regularly:

> *Caria: We say to each other, we are community, we have each other. For example, we have friends' whose roof is broken. They have to stay hostel, no halal food, they have children. Yet, everybody helps them. Today I cook something for them, I bring, other*

day another person. It is very important. They feel happy, I think for them. I know if I have difficult, my friends help me.

Melisa: That's amazing, that's security and safety within the community, isn't it?

Caria: Yes, I feel safe yes. It is very important.

These are examples of communities of care and solidarity which are built by refugees for themselves. As highlighted the activities of these refugee groups bridge support and connection between individuals from same countries of origin but also with other members of the wider community. They offer a space to restore, heal and belong. These welcoming community groups that refugees develop for themselves provide a space where individuals seeking sanctuary can develop a safety net and close bonds with others. They are spaces where refugees support each other to navigate the complexities of rebuilding a new life in Tyneside with the help of individuals who have similar pasts, presents and aspirations. These spaces also provide opportunities for individuals to speak their own language, practice their cultures, provide a sense of familiarity and belonging, a transnational refuge of home away from home (Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2005; Ehrkamp, 2006).

Concluding reflections

This chapter began with the story of Diego which illuminated the effects that exclusion, structural inequalities, and racist hostility has in his everyday life as a refugee. The UK's hostile environment is increasingly denying basic rights to refugees and stripping their access to critical resources (Darling, 2009; Sauters and Al-Om, 2022). Asylum seekers in the UK experience many challenges in daily life: racism, poverty, discrimination, and more. As seen through the chapter, these conditions were harmful to refugee communities (see Van Liempt & Staring, 2021).

And yet, refugees are rebuilding their lives. They are settling and forging sites of compassion and solidarity (Sirriyeh, 2018). This research suggests that there are moments of care and welcome which emerge within public spaces such as neighbourhoods, colleges, streets, charities and community projects which positively affects refugees and asylum seekers feelings of belonging and which counters and ameliorates, but do not undo, the exclusions that refugees and asylum seekers also experience (see Bagelman, 2016, p. 29). These sites also offer

shelter from daily challenges and are restorative (see Van Liempt & Staring, 2021). Therefore, as this chapter suggests encounters and interactions with people, places and systems both positive and negative matter and shape refugees and asylum seekers feelings of belonging (see also Antonsich, 2010; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2017). As refugees go on their daily lives they interact with different people, spaces and materiality which shapes how attached and accepted they feel to Tyneside. These experiences significantly affect their feelings of belonging. I argue that refugees actively seek and avoid certain interactions in order to attempt to experience more positive encounters. For instance, as Diego explained by choosing not to share details about his immigration status at college to avoid harmful rejection from certain students.

This chapter also highlights that community groups are vital to refugees and asylum seekers. For instance, the way that the Turkish and Sri Lankan communities craft spaces to engage in transnational practices, speak their own language and support each other practically and emotionally to settle in Tyneside. Or the incredible work of local charities like the Comfrey Project and the Curious Monkey Theatre Company which provide a platform, for those seeking sanctuary, to actively engage in activities and form communities. These spaces offer familiarity, haven (security and safety) and heaven (place for self-expression and free identity) (Duyvendak, 2011) to refugees and emerge as communities of belonging and togetherness.

This research indicates that refugees and asylum-seeking communities (and their allies) are not just passive receivers of welcome and often play vital roles in developing and sustaining these friendly spaces (see Ghorashi et al, 2018; Benwell et al, 2023). As this chapter demonstrates refugee communities are resourceful and find ways to resist hostility in their everyday lives. They participate in and organise communities to exercise their agency and right to Tyneside. Through the mobilising highlighted this chapter (and many other activities) refugees and asylum seekers emplace themselves to new environments (Van Liempt, 2023; Lounasmaa, 2023).

Finally, this chapter also argues that there are many ways that refugees and their supporters resist, interrupt and oppose the status quo and hostility that the state imposes (Katz, 2004; Hughes, 2016; 2020, Saunders and Al-Om, 2022). Within this context of violence and exclusion, resistance emerges in many different forms. For instance, in the private meditative practices

that Natalia performs to cope with the abandonment and denial of her rights from the state, in the way asylum seekers tactically navigate their prolonged 'waiting', in the safe and healing spaces that refugee communities and their supporters develop together and in standing up and organising against racism, detention, deportation and other state enforced hostile practices. These examples illustrate refugee's active role in carving out their place in Tyneside and their commitment to make the area more welcoming not just for themselves but also for others around them.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

‘It is a tree that has grown in a wall of stone and cement, on the edge of the Tyne River in Gateshead […] I chose this photo for two reasons. First, that it grew in an inappropriate place like the rest of the trees that grow on flat dirt land, but it managed to continue its growth and cling to life despite all the difficulties it faced. The second reason is that the tree has resisted for many years and did not grow horizontally because of the place or the difficulties! Rather, it was able to grow like other trees to the top and raise its head high as if it was saying I will live despite all challenges!’

Figure 33. Growing despite difficult circumstances (Image taken by participant)

With this image and narrative from Karim he wanted to share a message of hope and strength to everyone who is going through a difficult situation: ‘They should not give up. They should

keep going. Despite challenging circumstances and being out of place, this tree in Tyneside has grown and flourished'.

This reflection from Karim echoes the story of this thesis. It is a story about how refugee families are negotiating belonging in Tyneside. A story which demonstrates that despite an increasingly hostile political landscape and discrimination experienced in the everyday lives of refugee families, they are weathering and resisting these difficulties. Refugees are strategizing, mobilizing and rebuilding their lives, communities and intimacy within and beyond borders and bordering.

In this concluding chapter, I will offer a brief summary of this research and thesis chapters and outline how this thesis contributes to ongoing concerns among geographers (and others) on issues relating to refugee settlement in the UK, particularly within geographies of belonging, home, encounters, bordering and family. I will also discuss the conceptual and methodological contributions of this PhD project. Finally, I reflect on some of the limitations and opportunities for future research.

Thesis summary

This thesis explored how refugee and asylum-seeking families living in Tyneside negotiate belonging both locally and transnationally. It examines the central theme of belonging within various distinct yet interconnected spatialities (home, intimacy, community and public space). It also reflects on how the growing hostile politics and harmful rhetoric that frame refugees' settlement experiences are lived and profoundly felt by refugee families affecting their feelings of acceptance and belonging. This thesis explored refugee families' stories and reflections about how they are carving out and negotiating belonging to bring to light their own interpretations and accounts about their lives. As this thesis emphasized refugee accounts are often undervalued, ignored or silenced and efforts have been made in this research to bring to light the many complexities, emotions and diversities of their lived experiences. This research combined the personal life accounts and photographic work of refugees which emerged in a collaborative partnership with the Comfrey Project, a local charity in Tyneside providing support for refugees and asylum seekers where I volunteered for a year. This qualitative research involved a period of rich ethnographic community-based observation where I engaged with volunteers (participants from refugee background) at Comfrey and

developed friendly relationships with them as I volunteered in the project. I also conducted 38 in-depth narrative interviews with refugee families (32 participants) and 14 Tyneside-based practitioners working with refugee communities. Research participants also partook in a participatory photography project (photovoice) named 'Belonging' and together we explored the possibilities of their self-representation. Their creative work was exhibited at the Comfrey Project during refugee week (June 2022) and at the Discovery Museum was launched during refugee week June 2022 and is still featuring in the museum.

This PhD research has focussed in these 5 questions. The first and second questions are overarching question whereas question 3, 4 and 5 invite deeper analysis of different spatialities where belonging unfolds. Later, in this concluding chapter I will explore how findings have contributed to scholarship in relation to the themes of these questions.

1 - In what ways do refugee families negotiate and forge a sense of belonging locally in Tyneside and transnationally?

2 - How are the feelings of belonging of refugee families shaped by structural violence and hostility in their everyday lives?

3 - How do refugees describe and sense home, engage in homemaking practices and home dreaming as they are rebuilding their lives in Tyneside?

4 - How do refugees practice family relationships and other intimate relationships locally and across borders?

5 - How do the day-to-day interactions with people, communities and places contribute to the feeling of belonging in the Tyneside area?

Chapters content

Chapter 1 introduced this research and presented the aim to examine the negotiation of belonging of refugee and asylum-seeking families both in Tyneside and transnationally. I situated this research within a context a hostile political context which frames the lived experiences of belonging of refugee families. I discussed how this research had the intention

to focus on the personal and intimate accounts from refugees about their own lives endeavouring to give space for what falls away from mainstream discourses. I shared the main contributions of this thesis (empirical, conceptual and methodological) and reflected on the rationale for conducting this research within Tyneside. I also provided a summary of the methodology, contents and motivations for developing this research. Chapter 2 offers a review of the scholarship central to this research and introduces the theoretical framework of this thesis. I explore scholarship which is concerned with belonging and then delve deeper into the specific spatialities that this thesis is concerned with. I review ideas from geographies of encounter, home, transnationalism, family and kinship literature, amongst others to develop deeper analysis of these spatialities. I propose that a framework which combines various ideas and concepts helps unfold the complexities of how refugee families negotiate belonging as they settle in a new environment. Chapter 3 reflects on the methodological journey of this thesis. I introduce the collaboration with the Comfrey Project and give a brief synopsis of the methodological premises of this research project (researcher's positionality, the recruitment and demographic data of participants, ethical considerations, methods of recording and data analysis). I offer a deep reflection of the various methods used in this research which combines longer term ethnographic community-based volunteering with narrative interviews and participatory photography methods. I argue that the interplay of these methodologies offers opportunities to engage more deeply, ethically and meaningfully with refugee communities. Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter of this thesis where I explore the personal and intimate aspects of belonging by examining the multi-layered complexities of how home is negotiated as refugee families are rebuilding their lives in Tyneside. This chapter examines how home is conceptualized and described by refugee themselves, how they engage in homemaking practices and how home is dreamt in future imaginaries. Chapter 5 explored the 'doing' and vitality of intimate relationships in the context of forced migration. I examined how family and other intimate relations work locally in Tyneside, as well as transnationally in ways that challenge normative notions of the family. I draw from Morgan (2010) to examine how the lens of 'doing' can reveal a more nuanced understanding of how refugees negotiate intimacy with family and others across different spatialities. This chapter focusses on the realities of family separation resulting from hostile family immigration policies which deny asylum seekers the right to family. I explore how transnational refugee families are maintaining their family life with loved ones abroad, how families who are in Tyneside together adapt to their new life and how refugees develop new kinds of kinship relationships with friends locally. Finally, chapter 6

examined how structural violence directed from the UK state and encounters in public and community spaces shape how refugees and asylum-seeking families' sense (not) belonging. I argued that there are certain spaces that forge a sense of belonging and healing whilst others exclude and harm (See Van Liempt and Staring, 2020). I explored how refugees and their allies resist structural violence and play an active role in creating spaces of belonging and togetherness.

Findings and contributions

This section examines this research finding and contributions to academic scholarship particularly within geographies of belonging and home, encounters, family geographies, kinship and to ongoing concerns among geographers (and others) on issues relating to refugee settlement in the UK. I focus on the themes related to questions that this research endeavour to address. I also address the conceptual and methodological contributions of this research.

Negotiating belonging

First, this research contributes novel empirical knowledge to an expanding area of scholarship interested in understanding the complex, intimate and lived experiences of belonging of refugees and asylum seekers (see Sirriyeh, 2010, Van Liempt and Staring, 2021; Van Liempt and Miellet, 2021, Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018). Particularly, by examining how refugees themselves negotiate, experience and sense belonging. As emphasized by Antonsich (2010) the personal aspects of belonging, the feeling of 'being at home', has received less academic interest than the macro aspects. This thesis contributes to this growing area of interest by proving nuanced evidence on how refugee families experience, negotiate and sense belonging within the spatialities of home, intimacy, public space and community where belonging unfolds, whilst reflecting on and acknowledging that the socio-political aspects of belonging (i.e. structural violence and encounters) play an important role in shaping refugees' feelings of belonging. Similarly, to Antonsich (2010) this thesis suggests that the different aspects of belonging the personal, social, public and structural are interlinked. For refugee families as a group, the interconnections of these different spatialities of belonging are particularly significant because of the multiple challenges that they experienced, that they are currently facing and that they will encounter in the future (e.g. traumas, forced displacement, family separation, state hostilities, prolonged waiting, settlement challenges and discrimination in their everyday lives) (see Blunt and Dowling, 2006). For instance, as emphasized in this

research for some asylum seekers the home environment represented both a sanctuary space that they carved out for themselves but also a space that reminds them of the uncertainty of their situation and the lack of ownership that they had of their accommodation and their lives because of their immigration status.

Second, this research contributes to the extensive geographical scholarship which investigates the increasingly hostile tactics that states like the UK are adopting to intentionally exclude refugees both at the border and within countries (see Darling, 2009; Cassidy, 2019; Ehrkamp, 2019; Yulal-Davis, et al, 2018; Hall, 2021; Hyndman, 2012; Loyd and Mountz, 2014). As well as recent scholarship which examines how states are increasingly extending these exclusionary tactics to deny refugees the right to family life, this is referred as 'relational enforcement' (Coddington and Williams, 2022). My research contributes to this area of scholarship by presenting the personal accounts from refugee families about how the violent tactics from the UK state and hostile political rhetoric deeply affects them practically and emotionally in their everyday lives with consequences not only to their feelings of belonging and acceptance but also to their family life and mental and physical wellbeing (Nickerson et al, 2010; Wilmsen, 2016). This research demonstrates that refugees experience regular reminders of their exclusion and of the hostile terrain around them and this is experienced beyond state and official encounters. It infiltrates in to their everyday life at home through uncertainty, as they endeavour to negotiate family life and in public spaces. It instils fear and distress. It dehumanises refugees and it has long term effects.

Thirdly, this research also contributes to scholarship concerned with how migrants and refugees maintain ties to their places of origin, while simultaneously adapting to their new environments (Ralph and Staheli, 2011; Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018, Ehrkamp, 2005). Findings in this research emphasize that refugee families interweave local and transnational spatialities to forge a sense of belonging and engage in practices that enables them to negotiate their evolving identities, cultures and ties. This research uncovered that within the spatialities that this research explored (home, intimacy and public space) refugee families engage both in local and transnational practices and these are often interconnected with each other. Therefore, as previous research suggests both local and transnational spatialities are important and it is often in the interweaving of the transnational and the local that refugee families negotiate and sense belonging (Clifford 1997; Ralph and Staeheli, 2011; Blunt and

Dowling, 2006). For instance, in the way that refugee families carve out or associate familiar environments and practices to them locally which helps the remember and connect with memories of home (see Boccagni, 2022; Duyvendak; 2011), in how they construct or engage in local community spaces where they can celebrate and practice their transnational identities (see Huizinga and Van Hoven, 2018; Ehrkamp, 2005) and in the way that transnational refugee families develop practices to maintain their relationships with family abroad whilst simultaneously settling in the new country (Baldassar, 2008; Baldassar and Wilding, 2020; Wilding, 2006).

Fourthly, this research also provides evidence about how refugee families negotiate belonging locally in Tyneside, an area which is predominantly white and is one the poorest regions in England. There is no research to my knowledge which explores the lived experiences of belonging of refugee families locally and this research addresses this gap. For instance, by demonstrating the realities encountered by refugee families settling together in Tyneside or highlighting how the local socio-political and community context affects the settlement experiences of refugees. Therefore, this research offers and extends much needed knowledge in relation to local refugee settlement (see Askins, 2015; 2016 and Askins and Pain; 2011; O'Neill et al, 2022; Benwell et al, 2023) and to the experiences of Tyneside families, an area where most research as tended to focus on white working-class families (see Shildrick et al, 2016; MacDonald et al, 2005). This research also reveals how local spatialities influences process of homemaking and belonging and can heal and harm (the contributions in this area will be explored later in this chapter).

Finally, a central argument in this thesis has been that refugee families are actively carving out a sense of belonging both locally and transnationally despite the hostility that they encounter by the UK state and in their everyday lives. Throughout this thesis I demonstrated how refugee families are actively 'doing' home, intimacy and community in order to reinstate a sense of belonging. This contributes to scholarship that is concerned with the processual and performative aspects of belonging within various spatialities (see Boccagni, 2022; Wright, 2015; Morgan, 2011; Van Liempt, 2023). This thesis argued that despite challenges, refugees and asylum seekers display agency through various practices and coping strategies that they carve out for themselves. This builds on growing scholarship which examines the agency-in-waiting of those who are in protracted situations (see Ghorashi et al, 2017; Ramachandran and

Vathi, 2022; Brun, 2015; Khosravi, 2019; Lipatova, 2022) and to a renewed scholarship on resistance (see Benwell et al, 2023; Hughes, 2016) or slow resistance (see Saunders and Al-Om, 2022) which argues that the practices and strategies that refugees engage in, and which disrupt the status quo by shifting the attention away from the enforced hostility, could also be framed as an everyday, emergent forms of resistance. Next, I will reflect on the findings and contributions which relate more specifically to the spatialities of home, intimacy and public space.

Home, homemaking and home-dreaming

This research contributes to an extensive body of literature within geography and across the social sciences on the concept of home (see Blunt and Varley, 2004; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; 2022; Boccagni, 2022; Sirriyeh, 2010; Ralph and Staeheli, 2011; Duyvendak et al, 2016; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021).

First, this research revealed the diverse and complex ways in which refugees and asylum seekers described and sensed home across varying spatialities. Some described home in fixed ways either in relation to their home country or to their new home here in Tyneside, whilst others described home across various spatialities in more fluid and transnational ways. These diverse ways of describing home were often connected to their complex histories and realities in relation to certain spatialities. These findings suggests that for refugees' home is often intertwined with the complexities of their forced migration and settlement experience (see Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Their experiences abroad and in the UK complicated their feelings of home. For some the traumas experienced in their countries of origin formed stronger local attachments to Tyneside, whilst for others the longing to return and the memories of their homeland and people there were too strong to be replaced with local attachments to Tyneside and some felt strong connections to various spaces simultaneously. This research indicates that refugees who took part in this research sensed home in both sedentary and mobile ways, suggesting that both descriptions of home are relevant in the context of forced migration (see also Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). The findings of this research also indicated that refugees also sensed and described home in other spaces beyond nation states, for instance feelings of home were found in nature, people, rituals or materiality. These were often connected to spatialities that made the current environment more familiar or predictable (see also Boccagni,

2022; Duyvendak; 2011) or that felt safe (see Sirriyeh, 2010) or which connected with their personal values, beliefs, traditions (Brun and Fabos, 2015).

Secondly this research brough to light a plethora of the ways in which refugees were rebuilding new senses of home in Tyneside. I argued that carving out homes in new environments is processual and performative and involves agency. This echoes extensive scholarship which points to the processual aspect of home and belonging (see Boccagni, 2022, Blunt and Dowling, 2022; Brun and Fabos, 2015; Wright, 2015, Antonsich, 2010). In this thesis I demonstrated the many homemaking tactics that refugees in Tyneside were engaging in to create their environments more personal and recognisable. This involved practices beyond dwellings in nature, in the city and within dwellings. Refugees were using possessions, rituals and food to forge feelings of home. Findings indicated that some of these practices were unique to the refugee experience. For instance, in comparison to other migrants who are often able to bring objects along from their countries of origin as a way to make their spaces more familiar, refugees were often unable to carry objects with them in their journeys to the UK or to return to their countries of origin for prolonged periods due to war or other conflict. Refugees also lacked funds to engage in certain homemaking practices and often felt their accommodations were temporal and couldn't put down roots there. Nonetheless, refugees engaged in other homemaking tactics such as reorganising accommodations, gardening, buying objects from charity shops and visiting spaces in nature or in the city that made then recall past memories. I argue that these practices and special spaces, where connections between the 'old and familiar' and the 'new' merge together, were used as spaces to negotiate and bridge what home was and what home is becoming. They emerge as 'homely bubbles' where refugees can seek comfort from the challenging situations that they are experiencing (see also Boccagni, 2022, Duyveyvak, 2011; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021).

Finally, this thesis indicated that dreams and future imaginaries of home are also a powerful homemaking tactics, as the time-space of the future can act as a coping strategy and hopeful alternative to past and present challenges (see also Mahamid and Berte, 2020, Yildiz, 2020, and Crivello, 2015). Yet, this research also emphasized that for some refugees who were not accessing support from the UK state due to their immigration status, the lack of control over their present extended to their future imaginaries. For these refugees envisaging the future

was a remainder of their exclusions and lack of control over their own lives and futures. This offers much needed empirical evidence of the role of dreams in relation to homemaking.

Family relationships and other intimate relationships

This thesis offers innovative empirical evidence on the complexities and realities of familial and other intimate relationships in the context of refugee settlement and homemaking. Van Liempt and Miellet (2020) identified that there is currently lack of research focussing on the role of transnational families and existing connections in relation to refugee settlement and homemaking. Thus far most research tended to examine the transnational relationships of other migrant groups (Baltassar, 2016; Wilding, 2006, Parreñas, 2005). Yet, to my knowledge little is known, particularly within geography, about how refugee families 'do' family transnationally (see Robertson et al 2016), the other types of kinship relationships that emerge during exile (Verdasco, 2020) and the complexities of settling together as a family in a new country (Deng and Marlowe, 2013; Atwell et al, 2009; Huang and Lam, 2022; Eltanamly et al, 2022; McCleary,2017; McMichael et al 2010).

This thesis offers much needed empirical evidence on the emotional effects and trauma which surges as a result of the myriad of systemic and institutional barriers to family reunification and a UK system that disregards refugee's right to family life. This evidence adds to recent research suggesting that UK family resettlement policies revolve around a traditional definition of the heteronormative nuclear family (see Phillimore et al, 2023) and that the family has surged as another exclusionary bordering tactic (Coddington and Williams, 2022).

Further this research contributes knowledge to the different ways that refugee families are strategizing to continue to exercise their right to family and to establish intimacy as they are settling in a new country. First, I illuminate the transnational practices that refugee families engage in facilitated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) to reconnect with loved ones abroad (see also Baldassar and Wilding, 2020). For instance, the regular WhatsApp calls, voice messages, family groups, amongst other virtual practices. Transnational refugee families share regular virtual routines like eating breakfast, supporting children with homework, caring for elderly parents and celebrating important events. I reveal that although ICTs are supporting refugees to maintain presence with those with whom they are separated from, this virtual contact did not replace their need for physical contact. Physical contact with

loved ones abroad was often unreachable due to immigration restrictions or lack of funds (see also Baldassar, 2008; Wilding, 2006). Further there were many barriers to maintaining contact with families through ICTs in both countries. For instance, lack of access to WI-FI, the expense of technology, due to fears of putting families at risk and disruptions of communication systems due to war. This demonstrates that although ICTs alleviate refugee family separation, there are still many barriers for accessing technological advances (Parreñas, 2005) and this often doesn't completely replace the longing for physical closeness.

This research also offers insights to the complexities of navigating biological family as refugees settle together or when they have been reunited. I reveal that there are many challenges to family reunification and navigating settlement together. For instance, the settlement experiences of different family members can vary and this can put strain in their relationships. There are also challenges for relationships and parenting following longer term separation and there are structural and systemic challenges associated with family reunification. Yet, family can also be a source of social connection, motivation and support which can help families foster a sense of belonging in challenging times. Further this research uncovered that many families reimagine routines, gender and family roles in order to navigate the challenges of settlement in a new country and this can bring families closer together but can also put strain in relationships (see McCleary,2017; McMichael et al 2010; Deng and Marlowe, 2013).

Finally, this research offered novel insights into the importance of friendships that emerge during refugee settlement. These are a critical source of physical closeness for refugees who are longing the physical intimacy of loved ones from whom they are separated. Friends are also important sources of emotional and practical support who help navigating the challenges of settlement and day to day life (Verdasco, 2020, Askins, 2015; 2016). This research revealed that refugees craft new forms of kin with these friends who become family. This research points to the incredible importance of new friends in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers and how these relationships produce new 'chosen family intimacies' which expand our understanding of the family (see Weston, 1991; Bunnel, 2010; Bunnel et al, 2012; Conradson and Latham, 2005).

Overall, this nuanced empirical evidence about the social, familial and intimate spatiality of belonging contributes to much needed evidence on the role that these relationships, both

local and transnational, play in the process of refugee settlement and as refugees are forging new senses of belonging in a new country. This evidence about the complex intimate lives of refugees also contributes to the many calls within social sciences to decentre and expand the notions of 'the family' beyond traditional heteronormative compositions (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004, p. 135; Carsten, 2003; Morgan, 2011).

Resistance and encounters in public spaces and communities

This thesis offered empirical insights on how encounters and interactions in public and community spaces shapes feelings of belonging. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this thesis offered insights on the effects that exclusions and structural inequalities has on refugees' feelings of belonging. This research also brought to light many examples of harmful encounters in public spaces such as colleges, workplaces and in neighbourhoods which instilled refugees with a sense of rejection or apathy.

Yet, this thesis also claims that there were many public and community spaces which were welcoming, healing and which countered the violence that refugees also experienced in their daily lives. This thesis suggests that encounters and interactions with people, places and systems either positive, indifferent or negative matter and shape refugees and asylum seekers feelings of belonging (see also Antonsich, 2010; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2017). As refugees go on their daily lives, these encounters shape how welcomed or rejected they feel in their surroundings and refugees actively seek to engage in spaces which are more welcoming and in which they feel accepted and part of. Further, this research reveals that refugees are not just passive receivers of welcome, they are often deeply embedded in creating cultures and spaces of solidarity and togetherness. Refugee communities are resourceful and find ways to resist hostility in their everyday lives by participating in and organising communities to exercise their agency and right to Tyneside. In this research I provided examples of how, for instance, the Turkish and Sri Lankan communities craft spaces to engage in transnational practices, speak their own language and support each other practically and emotionally to settle in Tyneside. I also demonstrated how local community groups like the Comfrey Project and the Curious Monkey Theatre Company are a platform for refugees to build communities by actively engaging in activities and taking ownership of these spaces. These community projects intentionally develop an ethos where refugees can forge a sense ownership and emplace

themselves within Tyneside (Van Liempt, 2023; Lounasmaa, 2023). They create spaces where refugees feel safe and can be themselves (Duyvendak, 2011).

Finally, this research illuminates that there are many sites of resistance created by refugees and their allies which emerge intentionally and unintentionally, and which oppose the status quo of violence that the UK state seeks to construct (see Hughes, 2016; 2020). Through many stories and accounts, I demonstrated in this research how resistance emerges in unexpected spaces, for instance, in private meditative practices that refugees perform to cope with the many exclusions they experience, in the way asylum seekers strategize prolonged periods of 'waiting', in the safe and healing spaces that refugee communities and their supporters carve out together and in standing up and organising against racism, detention, deportation and other state enforced hostile practices. These sites of sanctuary and resistance offer hopeful counter spaces to violence and rejection.

Conceptual contributions

This research also offers important conceptual contributions. In this research I draw heavily on Antonsich's (2010) framework of belonging and argue that his conceptualization of belonging is useful as a structure which enables us to make sense of the different aspects of belonging and of the interconnection between these spatialities. This interweaving between the personal and socio-political have been noticeable in the empirical findings and has been emphasized throughout this thesis. Nonetheless, I argue that Antonsich's (2010) framework doesn't offer sufficient analytical theorization of the individual spatialities that he identifies within his conceptualization of belonging. In this thesis I offer a dynamic theoretical framework which combines conceptualisations of belonging (including Antonsich's framework) with other ideas from geographies of encounter, transnationalism, geographies of home, kinship and family. I argue that this combined framework enables deeper exploration of the ways that refugee families negotiate belonging within various spatialities and the way that these spatialities interweave and influence each other to shape feelings of belonging.

Methodological contributions

Finally, this research also offers methodological innovation. This research combined an embedded community-based ethnographic and collaborative engagement, where I negotiated dual roles as a volunteer-researcher in a local charity Comfrey Project, with

participatory photography (and DIY methods) and narrative interviewing. This research draws from and contributes to geographic scholarship which calls for more participatory and collaborative methodologies (Kindon et al, 2007). It also sits within and contributes to academic engagement which advocates for 'new methodologies to understand the experiences of forced migration' and proposes 'ethno-mimesis' as a methodological frame (ethnographic work combined with artistic re-presentations developed through participatory research) (O'Neill, 2007). It also contributes to a developing, yet limited, academic scholarship which examines the role of practitioner or volunteer - researcher methodologies and calls for a 'relationship-centred perspective on geographical ethics' (see Blazek and Askins, 2019). Finally, the creative engagement of this methodological frame sits within and contributes to a growing interest within geography in creativity and creative methodologies (see Hawkins, 2015; Askins and Pain, 2011; Bagelman and Bagelman, 2016; Garrett, 2016; Pratt and Johnston, 2013; Pratt, Johnston and Bavta, 2017; Raynor, 2017; Riding, 2017).

Limitations and further research

In this final section I consider some of the limitations and potential avenues for future research.

Firstly, this thesis focused on the negotiation of belonging of refugee families in Tyneside and examined how they navigate family both transnationally and locally. Yet, one area which could benefit from further and deeper analysis and which this research was only able to touch upon lightly would be the experiences and challenges experienced by the family members and loved ones who are left behind. Parreñas (2005) and Pratt (2012) offer insights into the experiences of children left behind as their mothers, Filipina labour migrants, work abroad and a similar analysis of the experiences of refugee families from both perspectives could offer more nuanced reflections about the complexities of family separation.

Secondly, as highlighted in the methodology chapter, this research looked beyond ethnicity as a unit of analysis, recognising the diversity of experiences that exist within groups, and focussing on specific locality Tyneside (Schiller et al, 2008). However, for future research it could of interest to explore how feelings of belonging is experienced and negotiated for different groups in relation to their gender, age or ethnicity.

This research focussed on the use of technology to aid the negotiation of the transnational lives of refugee families. Yet, many more questions emerged during fieldwork about how these technologies are being used to maintain intimacy amongst family members. Future research could examine this area more deeply by using specific methodologies which could offer more insightful analysis of how technologies are being used by transnational refugee families. Perhaps in a similar way that Madianou and Miller (2011) examined how Filipina migrant workers and their families, maintained intimacy and kinship with loved ones through crafting love letters and recording cassettes in the 1970s.

Finally, future research could build on the findings from this research in relation to how different community groups intentionally construct spaces which cultivate a sense of belonging and togetherness. Particularly exploring how these cultures are produced and what practices emerge in within these spaces.

Bibliography

Ackerly, B. & True, J. (2010) *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science*. Macmillan Education UK.

Ahmed, S., Castada, C., Fortier, A.-M., & Sheller, M. (2003). *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (1st ed.). London: Routledge

Aitken, S.C. (1998) *Family Fantasies and Community Space*. Rutgers University Press.

Aitken, S.C. (2009) 'Parenting/Motherhood/Fatherhood', in *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography*. [Online]. Elsevier. pp. 72–76.

Alencar, A. (2020) 'Mobile communication and refugees: An analytical review of academic literature', *Sociology Compass*, 14(8), p. 12802.

Amin, A. (2002) 'Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 34(6), pp. 959–980.

Anthias, F. (2006). 'Belongings in a globalising and unequal world: rethinking translocations'. In N. Yuval-Davis, K. Kannabiran and U. Vieten (eds) *The situated politics of belonging*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 17-31.

Antonsich, M. (2010) 'Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework', *Geography Compass*, 4(6), pp. 644–659.

Askins, K. & Pain, R. (2011) 'Contact Zones: Participation, Materiality, and the Messiness of Interaction', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29(5), pp. 803–821.

Askins, K. (2015) 'Being Together: Everyday Geographies and the Quiet Politics of Belonging', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14 (2), pp. 470–478.

Askins, K. (2016) 'Emotional citizenry: everyday geographies of befriending, belonging and intercultural encounter', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41(4), pp. 515–527.

Askins, M.B., Kye (2021) 'Volunteer-practitioner research, relationships and friendship-liness: Re-enacting geographies of care', in *Research Ethics in Human Geography*. Routledge.

Atwell, R., Gifford, S.M. & McDonald-Wilmsen, B. (2009) 'Resettled Refugee Families and Their Children's Futures: Coherence, Hope and Support', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 40(5), pp. 677–697.

Bagelman, J, Silva, M. A. N. and Bagelman, C. (2017) 'Cookbooks: A Tool for Engaged Research', *GeoHumanities*, 3(2), pp. 371-395

Bagelman, J. (2016) *Sanctuary City: A Suspended State*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Bagelman, J. (2018) 'Who hosts a politics of welcome? – commentary to Gill', *Fennia - International Journal of Geography*, 196(1), pp. 108–110.

Baldassar, L. & Wilding, R. (2020) 'Migration, Aging, and Digital Kinning: The Role of Distant Care Support Networks in Experiences of Aging Well' Barbara J Bowers (ed.), *The Gerontologist*, 60(2), pp. 313–321.

Baldassar, L. (2008) 'Missing Kin and Longing to be Together: Emotions and the Construction of Co-presence in Transnational Relationships', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 29(3), pp. 247–266.

Baldassar, L. (2016) 'De-demonizing distance in mobile family lives: co-presence, care circulation and polymedia as vibrant matter', *Global Networks*, 16(2), pp. 145–163.

Baldassar, L., Ferrero, L. & Portis, L. (2017) 'More like a daughter than an employee': the kinning process between migrant care workers, elderly care receivers and their extended families', *Identities*, 24(5), pp. 524–541.

Beaton, E., Musgrave, A., & Liebl, J. (2018). Safe but Not Settled: The impact of family separation on refugees in the UK. Oxfam. [Online]. Available at: https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620409/ rr-safe-but-not-settled-refugees-uk-310118-en.pdf?sequence=1 (Accessed: 15th December 2023)

Benwell, M.C., Hopkins, P. & Finlay, R. (2023) 'The slow violence of austerity politics and the UK's "hostile environment": Examining the responses of third sector organisations supporting people seeking asylum', *Geoforum*, 145p. 103845.

Blazek, M. & Askins, K. (2019) 'For a relationship perspective on geographical ethics', *Area*, 52(3), pp. 464–471.

Bloch, A. (2017) '"Other Mothers," Migration, and a Transnational Nurturing Nexus', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 43(1), pp. 53–75.

Block, K., Warr, D., Gibbs, L. & Riggs, E. (2013) 'Addressing Ethical and Methodological Challenges in Research with Refugee-background Young People: Reflections from the Field', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 26(1), pp. 69–87.

Blunt, A. & Dowling, R. (2006) *Home*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group.

Blunt, A. & Dowling, R. (2022) *Home*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge.

Blunt, A. & Varley, A. (2004) '*Geographies of home*,' *Cultural Geographies*, 11, pp. 3-6.

Boccagni, P. (2017) 'Aspirations and the subjective future of migration: comparing views and desires of the "time ahead" through the narratives of immigrant domestic workers', *Comparative Migration Studies* (2017) 5(4) pp. 1-18.

Boccagni, P. (2017) *Migration and the search for home: mapping domestic space in migrants' everyday lives*. Mobility & politics. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Boccagni, P. (2022) ‘At Home in the Centre? In Beeckmans, L., Gola, A., Singh, A. & Heynen, H. (eds.) *Making Home(s) in Displacement: Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice*. Leuven University Press, pp. 139-154.

Boccagni, P. (2022) ‘Homing: a category for research on space appropriation and “home-oriented” mobilities’, *Mobilities*, 17(4), pp. 585–601.

Bowlby, S. (2011) ‘Friendship, co-presence and care: neglected spaces’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(6), pp. 605–622.

British Red Cross (2020) Applying for refugee family reunion. British Red Cross [Online]. Available at: https://familiestogether.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Guide-to-Refugee-Family-Reunion-version-for-most-countries-2020-4.pdf (Accessed: 15th December 2023).

Brun, C. & Fábos, A. (2015) ‘Making Homes in Limbo? A Conceptual Framework’, *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees*, 31(1), pp. 5–17.

Brun, C. (2015) ‘Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement’, *Social Analysis*, pp. 59(1).

Bruner, E. M. (1986) ‘Experience and its Expressions’. In Turner, V. W. and Bruner, E. M. (eds) The Anthropology of Experience, pp. 3–30. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Bunnell T (2010) Routes of identity: Malay Liverpool and the limits of transnationalism. Pacific Affairs 83, pp. 459–479.

Bunnell, T., Yea, S., Peake, L., Skelton, T. & Smith, M. (2012) ‘Geographies of friendships’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(4), pp. 490–507.

Business in the community (2023) ‘Regional Insights on Race’, Business in the Community [Online]. Available from: https://bitc-factsheet-race-raw-regional-insight-south-east-march23.pdf (Accessed 21 January 2024).

Cahill, C. (2007) ‘Repositioning Ethical Commitments: Participatory Action Research as a Relational Praxis of Social Change’, ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, pp. 360-373.

Calhoun, C. (2003). ‘Belonging' in the cosmopolitan imaginary’. *Ethnicities* 3(4), pp. 531-568.
Cameron, E. (2012) ‘New geographies of story and storytelling’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(5), pp. 573–592.

Carsten, J. (2001) ‘Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship’, *American Ethnologist*, 28(3), pp. 690–692.

Carsten, J. (2003) *After Kinship*. New departures in anthropology. Cambridge: University Press.

Carsten, J. (2020) ‘Imagining and living new worlds: The dynamics of kinship in contexts of mobility and migration’, *Ethnography*, 21(3), pp. 319–334.

Cassidy, K. (2019) ‘Where can I get free? Everyday bordering, everyday incarceration’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 44(1), pp. 48–62.

Cassidy, K., Griffin, P. & Wray, F. (2020) ‘Labour, carcerality and punishment: “Less-than-human” labour landscapes’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(6), pp. 1081–1102.

Castles, S. and A. Davidson (2000). *Citizenship and Migration. Globalization and the Politics of Belonging.* New York: Routledge.

Chase, S. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, and voices. In Creswell, J. W. (2013). Qualitative inquiry & research design (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Cheung Judge, R. (2016) *Transformational journeys: Volunteer tourism, non-elite youth and the politics of the self.* Unpublished PhD thesis. London: University College London.

Clifford, J. (1997). Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century. London: Harvard University Press.

Coakley, L. (2002) 'All over the place, in town, in the pub, everywhere – a social geography of women's friendship in Cork'. *Irish Geography,* 35, pp. 40-50.

Coddington, K. & Williams, J.M. (2022) 'Relational enforcement: The family and the expanding scope of border enforcement', *Progress in Human Geography*, 46(2), pp. 590–604.

Coddington, K. (2018) 'Landscapes of refugee protection', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 43(3), pp. 326–340.

Comfrey Project (2023) 'Comfrey Project Website'. [Online] Available at: https://thecomfreyproject.org.uk/ (Accessed 28th March 2023).

Connolly, H. (2019). *Without my family: The impact of family separation on child refugees in the UK.* Amnesty International UK, the Refugee Council and Save the Children. Available online at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Without-my-family-report-AW-Jan2020-LoRes.pdf (Accessed June, 2023).

Conradson, D. & Latham, A. (2005) Transnational urbanism: Attending to everyday practices and mobilities, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 31:2, pp. 227-233.

Cotterill, P. (1992) 'Interviewing women: Issues of friendship, vulnerability, and power', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 15(5), pp. 593–606.

Crang, M. and Cook, I., (2007) *Doing Ethnographies.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Crivello, G. (2015) '"There's no future here": The time and place of children's migration aspirations in Peru', *Geoforum*, 62pp. 38–46.

Cronin, A.M. (2015) '"Domestic Friends": Women's Friendships, Motherhood and Inclusive Intimacy', *The Sociological Review*, 63(3), pp. 662–679.

Crowley, J. (1999). 'The politics of belonging: Some theoretical considerations'. In A. Geddes and A. Favell (eds) *The politics of belonging: Migrants and minorities in contemporary Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 15-41

Curtis, F. and Mee, K.J. (2012) 'Welcome to Woodside: Inverbrackie Alternative Place of Detention and performances of belonging in Woodside, South Australia, and Australia' *Australian Geographer,* 43. pp, 357–375.

Czarniawska, B. (2004). *Narratives in social science research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Daniel, M., Ottemöller, F.G., Katisi, M., Hollekim, R. & Tesfazghi, Z.Z. (2020) 'Intergenerational perspectives on refugee children and youth's adaptation to life in Norway', *Population, Space and Place*, 26(6), p. e2321.

Darling, J & Wilson, H.F. (2016) *Encountering the City. Urban Encounters from Accra to New York*., London: Routledge.

Darling, J. (2009) 'Becoming Bare Life: Asylum, Hospitality, and the Politics of Encampment', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27(4), pp. 649–665.

Darling, J. (2011) 'Giving space: Care, generosity and belonging in a UK asylum drop-in centre', *Geoforum*, 42(4), pp. 408–417.

Darling, J. (2016) 'Asylum in austere times: instability, privatisation, and experimentation within the UK asylum dispersal system', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29 (4), pp. 483–505.

Darling, J., & Bauder, H. (2019) *Sanctuary cities and urban struggles: Rescaling migration, citizenship, and rights*. Manchester University Press.

Deng, S.A. & Marlowe, J.M. (2013) 'Refugee Resettlement and Parenting in a Different Context', *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 11(4), pp. 416–430.

Dickens, L. & Butcher, M. (2016) 'Going public? Re-thinking visibility, ethics and recognition through participatory research praxis', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41(4), pp. 528–540.

Dickens, L. (2017) 'World Making, Critical Pedagogies, and the Geographical Imagination: Where Youth Work Meets Participatory Research', *Antipode*, 49(5), pp. 1285–1305.

Diminescu D (2020) 'Researching the connected migrant'. In: Smets K, Leurs K, Georgiou M, et al. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*. London: SAGE, pp. 74–78.

Doná, G. (2015) 'Making Homes in Limbo: Embodied Virtual "Homes" in Prolonged Conditions of Displacement', *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 31(1), pp. 67–73.

Dossa, P. (2013) 'Structural Violence in Afghanistan: Gendered Memory, Narratives, and Food', *Medical Anthropology*, 32(5), pp. 433–447.

Duyvendak, J.W. (2011) *The Politics of Home*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Duyvendak, J.W., Reinders, L. & Wekker, F. (2016) 'Homing the Dutch', *Home Cultures*, 13(2), pp. 87–100.

Dwyer, S.C. & Buckle, J.L. (2009) 'The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), pp. 54–63.

Easthope, H. (2009) 'FIXED IDENTITIES IN A MOBILE WORLD? THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOBILITY, PLACE, AND IDENTITY', *Identities*, 16(1), pp. 61–82.

Eastmond, M. (2007) 'Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20(2), pp. 248–264.

Ehrkamp, P. & Leitner, H. (2006) 'Rethinking Immigration and Citizenship: New Spaces of Migrant Transnationalism and Belonging', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 38(9), pp. 1591–1597.

Ehrkamp, P. (2005) ‘Placing identities: Transnational practices and local attachments of Turkish immigrants in Germany’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(2), pp. 345–364.

Ehrkamp, P. (2017) ‘Geographies of migration I: Refugees’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(6), pp. 813–822.

Ehrkamp, P. (2019) ‘Geographies of migration II: The racial-spatial politics of immigration’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(2), pp. 363–375.

Elkin, T. and Mistry, A. (2022) ‘The Accordion Book Project: Reflections on Learning and Teaching’, in Chemi, T. and Du, X., *Arts-Based Methods in Education Around the World*. 1st ed. New York: River Publishers, pp. 107–151.

Eltanamly, H., Leijten, P., van Rooij, F. & Overbeek, G. (2022) ‘Parenting in times of refuge: A qualitative investigation’, *Family Process*, 61(3), pp. 1248–1263.

England, K.V.L. (1994) ‘Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research’, *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), pp. 80–89.

Fenster, T. (2004). ‘Belonging, memory and the politics of planning in Israel’. *Social & Cultural Geography* 4(3), pp. 403-417.

Fenster, T. (2005). ‘Gender and the city: the different formations of belonging’. In L. Nelson and J. Seager (eds) *A companion to feminist geography.* Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 242-257.

Fenster, T. and Vizel, I. (2007) ‘Globalization, sense of belonging and the African community in Tel Aviv Jaffa’. *Hagar,* 7, pp. 7–24.

Finch, J. (2007) ‘Displaying Families’, *Sociology*, 41(1), pp. 65–81.

Fonow, M. & Cook, J.A. (2005) ‘Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(4), pp. 2211–2236.

Fontana, L., Miramonti, A. and Johnston, C. (2023) 'Women in Wildfire Crises: Exploring Lived Experiences of Conflict through Forum Theatre (Creative Intervention)', *Studies in Social Justice*, 17(2), pp. 269–279.

Frazer, R. (2020) 'Becoming-friend and the limits of care in refugee resettlement', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 37p. 100733.

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Garrett B, Moss A and Cadman S (2016) *London Rising: Photographs from London's Illicit Heights*. London: Random House.

Geddes, A. & Favell, A. (eds.) (1999) *The politics of belonging: migrants and minorities in contemporary Europe*. Aldershot: Brookfield.

Ghorashi, H., de Boer, M. & ten Holder, F. (2018) 'Unexpected agency on the threshold: Asylum seekers narrating from an asylum seeker centre', *Current Sociology*, 66(3), pp. 373–391.

Gill, N. (2018) 'The suppression of welcome', *Fennia - International Journal of Geography*, 196(1), pp. 88–98.

Gill, N., Riding, J., Kallio, K.P. & Bagelman, J. (2022) 'Geographies of welcome: Engagements with "ordinary" hospitality', *Hospitality & Society*, 12(2), pp. 123–143.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gilroy, P. (2004) *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Abingdon: Routledge

Glick Schiller, N. & Çağlar, A. (2016) 'Displacement, emplacement and migrant newcomers: rethinking urban sociabilities within multiscalar power', *Identities*, 23(1), pp. 17–34.

Goodman, S., Sirriyeh, A. & McMahon, S. (2017) 'The evolving (re)categorisations of refugees throughout the "refugee/migrant crisis"', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 27(2), pp. 105–114.

Greenberg, S. & Neustaedter, C. (2013) 'Shared Living, Experiences, and Intimacy over Video Chat in Long Distance Relationships', in Carman Neustaedter, Steve Harrison, & Abigail Sellen (eds.) *Connecting Families: The Impact of New Communication Technologies on Domestic Life*. [Online]. London: Springer. pp. 37–53.

Gustafson, P. (2001) 'Roots and Routes: Exploring the Relationship between Place Attachment and Mobility', *Environment and Behaviour*, 33(5), pp. 667–686.

Haaken, J.K. & O'Neill, M. (2014) 'Moving images: Psychoanalytically informed visual methods in documenting the lives of women migrants and asylum seekers', *Journal of Health Psychology*, 19(1), pp. 79–89.

Haldrup, M., Koefoed, L. & Simonsen, K. (2006) 'Practical Orientalism: Bodies, Everyday Life and the Construction of Otherness', *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, 88(2), pp. 173–184.

Hall, S.M. (2019) 'Everyday austerity: Towards relational geographies of family, friendship and intimacy', *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(5), pp. 769–789.

Hall, S.M. (2021) *The Migrant's Paradox: Street Livelihoods and Marginal Citizenship in Britain*. University of Minnesota Press.

Hall, S.M., Jayne, M. (2016) 'Make, mend and befriend: Geographies of austerity, crafting and friendship in contemporary cultures of dressmaking'. *Gender, Place & Culture,* 23(2): pp. 216–234.

Harding, S. & Norberg, K. (2005) 'New Feminist Approaches to Social Science Methodologies: An Introduction', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(4), pp. 2009–2015.

Hawkins, H. (2019) ‘Geography’s creative (re)turn: Toward a critical framework’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(6), pp. 963–984.

Hochschild, A.R. (2000) 'Global care chains and emotional surplus value' in W. Hutton and A. Giddens (eds), *On The Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, London: Jonathan Cape.

Holloway, S.L. (1998) Local childcare cultures: Moral geographies of mothering and the social organisation of pre-school education. *Gender, Place & Culture* ,5, pp. 29–53.

Huang, G.H.C. & Lam, E.T.C. (2022) ‘Resettled Refugee Families: Parenting Practices and Educational Involvement’, *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(6), pp. 181–195.

Hughes, S.M. (2016) ‘Beyond intentionality: exploring creativity and resistance within a UK Immigration Removal Centre’, *Citizenship Studies*, 20(3–4), pp. 427–443.

Hughes, S.M. (2020) ‘On resistance in human geography’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(6), pp. 1141–1160.

Hugman, R., Bartolomei, L. & Pittaway, E. (2011) ‘Human Agency and the Meaning of Informed Consent: Reflections on Research with Refugees’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24(4), pp. 655–671.

Huizinga, R., Hopkins, P., De Backer, M., Finlay, R., Kirndörfer, E., Kox, M., Bastian, J., Benwell, M. C., Felten, P., Haack, L., Hörschelmann, K., and van Liempt, I. (2023) Researching refugee youth. Doing geography. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide.

Huizinga, R.P. & van Hoven, B. (2018) ‘Everyday geographies of belonging: Syrian refugee experiences in the Northern Netherlands’, *Geoforum*, 96pp. 309–317.

Humpage, L., Fozdar, F., Marlowe, J. & Hartley, L. (2019) ‘Photovoice and refugee research: The case for a “layers” versus “labels” approach to vulnerability’, *Research Ethics*, 15(3–4), pp. 1–16.

Hunt, L. (2023) ‘Creative (en) counterspaces: Engineering valuable contact for young refugees via solidarity arts workshops in Thessaloniki, Greece’, *Migration Studies*, pp. 1-20.

Hyndman, J. & Giles, W. (2011) ‘Waiting for what? The feminization of asylum in protracted situations’, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 18(3), pp. 361–379.

Hyndman, J. (2001) ‘The Field as Here and Now, Not There and Then’, *Geographical Review*, 91(1/2), pp. 262–272.

Hyndman, J. (2012) ‘The Geopolitics of Migration and Mobility’, *Geopolitics*, 17(2), pp. 243–255.

Jacobs, J. (2020) ‘The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety’, in Richard T. LeGates & Frederic Stout (eds.) *The City Reader*. 7th edition [Online]. Seventh edition. New York: Routledge, pp. 189–194.

Jamieson, L., Morgan, D., Crow, G. & Allan, G. (2006) ‘Friends, Neighbours and Distant Partners: Extending or Decentring Family Relationships?’, *Sociological Research Online*, 11(3), pp. 39–47.

Jayaweera, H. and T. Choudhury (2008). *Immigration, faith and cohesion. Immigration and inclusion*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Jenkins, S. (2013) ‘Counselling and Storytelling How Did We Get Here?’, *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 11(2), pp. 140–151.

Johnston, C., & Pratt, G. (2019) *Migration in performance: Crossing the colonial present*. London: Routledge.

Johnston, L. & Longhurst, R. (2012) ‘Embodied geographies of food, belonging and hope in multicultural Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand’, *Geoforum*, 43(2), pp. 325–331.

Jones, H., Gunaratnam, Y., Bhattacharyya, G., Davies, W., Dhaliwal, S., Forkert, K., Jackson, E. and Saltus, R. (2017) *Go home?: The politics of immigration controversies*. Manchester University Press.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) 'UK Poverty 2023', Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Online]. Available from: https://www.jrf.org.uk/work/uk-poverty-2023-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk (Accessed 21 January 2024)

Kale, A., Kindon, S. & Stupples, P. (2018) '"I Am a New Zealand Citizen Now—This Is My Home": Refugee Citizenship and Belonging in a Post-colonizing Country', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 33 (3), pp. 577 – 598.

Kallio, K.P. & Häkli, J. (2019) 'Care as mundane politics: contested familial refugee lives in Finland', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 26(6), pp. 795–812.

Kartch, F. (2017) 'Narrative interviewing' In: *The SAGE encyclopaedia of communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Katz, C. (2004) *Growing up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children's Everyday Lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Khosravi, S. (2019) 'What do we see if we look at the border from the other side?', *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie sociale*, 27(3), pp. 409–424.

Kindon, S., Pain. R. and Kesby, M. (ed.) (2007) *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place*. London: Routledge.

Lenette, C. & Boddy, J. (2013) 'Visual ethnography and refugee women: nuanced understandings of lived experiences', *Qualitative Research Journal*, 13(1), pp. 72–89.

Lenette, C. (2016) 'Writing With Light: An Iconographic-Iconologic Approach to Refugee Photography', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 17(2).

Lenette, C. (2019) *Arts-Based Methods in Refugee Research: Creating Sanctuary*. Singapore: Springer.

Leurs, K. (2019) 'Transnational connectivity and the affective paradoxes of digital care labour: Exploring how young refugees technologically mediate co-presence', *European Journal of Communication*, 34(6), pp. 641–649.

Linn, S. (2021) 'Solicited diary methods with urban refugee women: Ethical and practical considerations', *Area*, 53(3), pp. 454–463.

Lipatova, M. (2022) 'Waiting for what? Hope and endurance in situations of uncertainty for asylum-seekers in Greece', *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(6), pp. 1093–1103.

Longhurst, R., Johnston, L. & Ho, E. (2009) 'A visceral approach: cooking "at home" with migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34(3), pp. 333–345.

Lounasmaa, A. (2023) 'Emplacement in hostile spaces: hopeless notes – commentary to van Liempt', *Fennia - International Journal of Geography*, 201.

Loyd, J.M. & Mountz, A. (2014) 'Managing migration: scaling sovereignty on islands', *Island Studies Journal*, 9(1), pp. 23–42.

MacDonald, R., Shildrick, T., Webster, C. & Simpson, D. (2005) 'Growing Up in Poor Neighbourhoods: The Significance of Class and Place in the Extended Transitions of 'Socially Excluded' Young Adults', *Sociology*, 39(5), pp. 873–891.

Madianou, M., & Miller, D. (2011). Crafting Love: Letters and Cassette Tapes in Transnational Filipino Family Communication. *South East Asia Research*, *19*(2), pp. 249-272

Mahamid, F. & Berte, D.Z. (2020) 'Happiness, Sadness, and Hope for the Future in Narratives of Palestinian Refugee Children', *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 18(6), pp. 1638–1651.

Malkki, L.H. (1996) ‘Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 11(3), pp. 377–404.

Massey, D. B. (2005) *For space*. London: Sage Publications.

Matejskova, T. & Leitner, H. (2011) ‘Urban encounters with difference: the contact hypothesis and immigrant integration projects in eastern Berlin’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 12(7), pp. 717–741.

Mavroudi, E. and Nagel, C. (2016) *Global migration: patterns, processes, and politics*. London, New York: Routledge.

McCleary, J.S. (2017) ‘The impact of resettlement on Karen refugee family relationships: A qualitative exploration’, *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(4), pp. 1464–1471.

McMichael, C., Gifford, S.M. & Correa-Velez, I. (2011) ‘Negotiating family, navigating resettlement: family connectedness amongst resettled youth with refugee backgrounds living in Melbourne, Australia’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(2), pp. 179–195.

Mee, K. & Wright, S. (2009) ‘Geographies of Belonging’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 41(4), pp. 772–779.

Meziant, K., (2022). ‘Forced migration and anticolonial geographies of regrounding: an ethnography of the Voluntary and Community Sector in North East England’. *University of Northumbria. PhD thesis*.

Miller, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*). London: Routledge

Milligan, C., & Wiles, J. (2010). ‘Landscapes of care’. *Progress in Human Geography*, *34*(6), pp. 736-754

Milne, E.J. & Muir, R. (2020) 'Photovoice: A Critical Introduction', in Mannay, D. and Pauwels L. (ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 282–296.

Mohanty, C.T. (1984) 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *boundary 2*, 12/13, pp. 333–358.

Morgan D H J (2011) *Rethinking family practices*. Palgrave Macmillan studies in family and intimate life. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morris, S., Lenard, P.T. & Haugen, S. (2021) 'Refugee Sponsorship and Family Reunification', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(1), pp. 130–148.

Moss, P. (2001) *Feminist Geography in Practice: Research and Methods*, Wiley-Blackwell.

Mountz, A., Coddington, K., Catania, R.T. & Loyd, J.M. (2012) 'Conceptualizing detention: Mobility, containment, bordering, and exclusion', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(4), pp. 522–541.

Müller-Funk, L. & Fransen, S. (2023) '"I Will Return Strong": The Role of Life Aspirations in Refugees' Return Aspirations', *International Migration Review*, 57(4), pp. 1739–1770.

Nagar, R. (2019) 'Hungry Translations: The World Through Radical Vulnerability', *Antipode*, 51(1), pp. 3–24.

Nardi, P. M. (1999). *Gay men's friendships: Invincible communities.* University of Chicago Press.

Nast, J. H. (2006) 'Critical Pet Studies?', *Antipode*, 38(5), pp. 894–906.

Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (2023). [Online]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-nationality-and-borders-bill (Accessed 21 January 2024).

Nayak, A. & Kehily, M.J. (2014) '"Chavs, chavettes and pramface girls": teenage mothers, marginalised young men and the management of stigma', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(10), pp. 1330–1345.

Nayak, A. (2008) 'Young People's Geographies of Racism and Anti-racism: The Case of North East England', in *New Geographies of Race and Racism*. Routledge.

Nayak, A. (2017) 'Purging the nation: race, conviviality and embodied encounters in the lives of British Bangladeshi Muslim young women', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 42(2), pp. 289–302.

Nickerson, A., Bryant, R.A., Steel, Z., Silove, D. & Brooks, R. (2010) 'The impact of fear for family on mental health in a resettled Iraqi refugee community', *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 44(4), pp. 229–235.

No To Hassockfield Campaign (2023), [Online] Available at: https://www.notohassockfield.org.uk (Accessed: 15th December 2023)

O'Neill, M. (2007) 'Re-Imagining Diaspora Through Ethno-Mimesis: Humiliation, Human Dignity and Belonging', in Olga G. Bailey, Myria Georgiou, & Ramaswami Harindranath (eds.) *Transnational Lives and the Media*. [Online]. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 72–94.

O'Neill, M., Erel, U., Kaptani, E. & Reynolds, T. (2019) 'Borders, risk and belonging: Challenges for arts-based research in understanding the lives of women asylum seekers and migrants "at the borders of humanity"', *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, 10(1), pp. 129–147.

Oliker, S. J. (1998) 'The modernization of friendship: individualism, intimacy and gender in the nineteenth century'. In Adams, R. G. and Allen, G., (eds), *Placing friendship in context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pahl, R. & Spencer, L. (2004) 'Personal Communities: Not Simply Families of "Fate" or "Choice"', *Current Sociology*, 52(2), pp. 199–221.

Pain, R. & Kindon, S. (2007) 'Participatory Geographies', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 39 (12), pp. 2807–2812.

Parreñas, R. (2005) 'Long distance intimacy: class, gender and intergenerational relations between mothers and children in Filipino transnational families', *Global Networks*, 5(4), pp. 317–336.

Pessar, P.R. & Mahler, S.J. (2003) 'Transnational Migration: Bringing Gender In', *International Migration Review*, 37(3), pp. 812–846.

Phillimore, J., D'Avino, G., Strain-Fajth, V., Papoutsi, A. & Ziss, P. (2023) 'Family reunion policy for resettled refugees: Governance, challenges and impacts', *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 5.

Plummer, K. (2001). *Documents of life 2*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
Polletta, F. (2006) *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Polychroniou, A. (2021) 'Towards a Critical Reconstruction of Modern Refugee Subjectivity: Overcoming the Threat–Victim Bipolarity with Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben', *Open Philosophy*, 4(1), pp. 252–268.

Portes, A. (1997) 'Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities', *International Migration Review*, 31(4), pp. 799–825.

Pratt G and Johnston C (2013) 'Staging testimony in Nanay'. The Geographical Review, 103, pp. 288–303

Pratt G, Johnston C and Banta VA (2017) 'Traveling script: Labour migration, precarity and performance'. *The Drama Review,* 61(2), PP. 48–70

Pratt, G. & Johnston, C. (2022) 'Dementia Care for Europeans in Thailand: A Geography of Futures', *American Behavioural Scientist*, 66(14), pp. 1880–1895.

Pratt, G. (2012). *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*. University of Minnesota Press.

Pratt, G., & Rosner, V. (2012). *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*. Columbia University Press

Ralph, D. & Staeheli, L.A. (2011) 'Home and Migration: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities', *Geography Compass*, 5(7), pp. 517–530.

Ramachandran, N. & Vathi, Z. (2022) 'Agency in waiting? Everyday tactics of asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow', *European Journal of Social Work*, 25(6), pp. 1104–1116.

Raynor R (2017) 'Dramatising austerity: Holding a story together (and why it falls apart ...)'. *Cultural Geographies* 24, pp. 193–212.

Reinharz, S. & Davidman, L. (1992) *Feminist methods in social research*. Feminist methods in social research. New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.

Riding J (2017) *Land Writings: Excursions in the Footprints of Edward Thomas*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Rigo, E. (2005) 'Implications of EU Enlargement for Border Management and Citizenship in Europe', *EUI RSCAS Working Papers*, 2005/21.

Robertson, Z., Wilding, R. & Gifford, S. (2016) 'Mediating the family imaginary: young people negotiating absence in transnational refugee families', *Global networks (Oxford)*, 16(2), pp. 219–236.

Robinson, F. (1988) Post-industrial Tyneside an Economic and Social Survey of Tyneside in the 1980s (City of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle).

Roseneil, S. & Budgeon, S. (2004) 'Cultures of Intimacy and Care beyond "the Family": Personal Life and Social Change in the Early 21st Century', *Current Sociology*, 52(2), pp. 135–159.

Said, E. W (2003) *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Modern Classics.

Salih, R. (2001) 'Moroccan migrant women: Transnationalism, nation-states and gender', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(4), pp. 655–671.

Saunders, N. & Al-Om, T. (2022) 'Slow Resistance: Resisting the Slow Violence of Asylum', *Millennium*, 50(2), pp. 524–547.

Schiller, N.G., Çaglar, A. & Guldbrandsen, T.C. (2006) 'Beyond the ethnic lens: Locality, globality, and born-again incorporation', *American Ethnologist*, 33(4), pp. 612–633.

Seedat, S., Pienaar, W.P., Williams, D. & Stein, D.J. (2004) 'Ethics of research on survivors of trauma', *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 6(4), pp. 262–267.

Shildrick, T., MacDonald, R. & Furlong, A. (2016) 'Not Single Spies but in Battalions: A Critical, Sociological Engagement with the Idea of So-Called "Troubled Families"', *The Sociological Review*, 64(4), pp. 821–836.

Sirriyeh, A. (2010) 'Home journeys: Im/mobilities in young refugee and asylum-seeking women's negotiations of home', *Childhood*, 17(2), pp. 213–227.

Sirriyeh, A. (2018) *The Politics of Compassion: Immigration and Asylum Policy*. 1st edition. Bristol University Press.

Smart, C. (2007) *Personal life: New directions in sociological thinking*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Staszak, J. F. (2009) 'Other/Otherness', in Rob Kitchin & Nigel Thrift (eds.) *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. [Online]. Oxford: Elsevier. pp. 43–47.

Stenning, A. (2020) 'Feeling the squeeze: Towards a psychosocial geography of austerity in low-to-middle income families', *Geoforum*, 110pp. 200–210.
Sturge, G. (2023) 'Asylum Statistics', UK parliament [Online]. Available from: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01403/ (Accessed 21 January 2024)

Tadiar, N.X.M. (2009) *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization*. Post-Contemporary Interventions. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Tadiar, N. X. M. (2015). 'Decolonization, "Race," and Remaindered Life under Empire'. *Qui Parle*, *23*(2), pp. 135–160

Thorne B. & Yalom M. (1992). *Rethinking the family: some feminist questions*. Northeastern University Press

Tilbury, F. (n.d.) *'We are Family': The Use of Family Tropes in Refugee/Advocate Talk*, p. 25.

Tolia-Kelly, D.P. (2004) 'Materializing post-colonial geographies: examining the textural landscapes of migration in the South Asian home', *Geoforum*, 35(6), pp. 675–688.

Toth, A. (2023) 'Suella Braverman's most controversial quotes', *Independent*. [Online]. Available from: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/suella-braverman-controversial-quotes-migrants-woke-b2339097.html (Accessed 21 January 2024).

Trapp, M.M. (2015) 'Already in America: Transnational Homemaking among Liberian Refugees', *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 31(1), pp. 31–41.

UNHCR (2023) 'About UNHCR'. [Online] Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees (Accessed 20th January 2024).

Valentine, G. (1993). '(Hetero) Sexing Space: Lesbian Perceptions and Experiences of Everyday Spaces'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *11*(4), 395-413.

Valentine, G. (2008) 'Living with difference: reflections on geographies of encounter', *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(3), pp. 323–337.

Valentine, G. (2008) 'The Ties That Bind: Towards Geographies of Intimacy', *Geography Compass*, 2(6), pp. 2097–2110.

Valentine, G., Sporton, D. & Nielsen, K.B. (2009) 'Identities and Belonging: A Study of Somali Refugee and Asylum Seekers Living in the UK and Denmark', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27(2), pp. 234–250.

Van Liempt, I. & Miellet, S. (2021) 'Being far away from what you need: the impact of dispersal on resettled refugees' homemaking and place attachment in small to medium-sized towns in the Netherlands', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(11), pp. 2377–2395.

Van Liempt, I. & Staring, R. (2021) 'Homemaking and Places of Restoration: Belonging Within and Beyond Places Assigned to Syrian Refugees in the Netherlands', *Geographical Review*, 111(2), pp. 308–326.

Van Liempt, I. (2023) 'Becoming part of the city: local emplacement after forced displacement', *Fennia - International Journal of Geography*, 201(1), pp. 9–22.

Vaughan-Williams, N. (2010) 'The UK Border Security Continuum: Virtual Biopolitics and the Simulation of the Sovereign Ban', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(6), pp. 1071–1083.

Verdasco, A. (2020) 'Everyday Rituals of Migration: Constructing Relatedness and Agency among Young Refugees in Denmark', *Ethnos*, 85(3), pp. 550–574.

Vertovec, S. (2004) 'Cheap calls: The social glue of migrant transnationalism'. *Global Networks*, 4, pp. 219–224.

Vincent, C., Neal, S., & Iqbal, H. (2017). 'Encounters with diversity: Children's friendships and parental responses'. *Urban Studies*, *54*(8), pp. 1974-1989

Walsh, K. (2006) 'British Expatriate Belongings: Mobile Homes and Transnational Homing', *Home Cultures*, 3(2), pp. 123–144.

Wang, Caroline and Burris, Mary Ann (1997) 'Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment', *Health, Education and Behaviour*, 24, pp. 369–387

Waters, J.L. (2002) 'Flexible families? "Astronaut" households and the experiences of lone mothers in Vancouver, British Columbia', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 3(2), pp. 117–134.

Watson, A. and Till, K. (2010). Ethnography and Participant Observation. In: *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*. London: SAGE Publications, Inc. pp. 121-137

Weeks, J., Heaphy, B. and Donovan, C. (2001) *Same sex intimacies: families of choice and other life experiment.* London: Routledge.

Weinstock & E. D. Rothblum (2004.), *Lesbian ex-lovers: The really long-term relationships.* Harrington Park Press/The Haworth Press

Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: SAGE Publications

Weston, K. (1997) *Families we choose: lesbians, gays, kinship*. Between men--between women. New York; Oxford: Columbia University Press.

Wilding, R. (2006) '"Virtual" intimacies? Families communicating across transnational contexts', *Global Networks*, 6(2), pp. 125–142.

Wilkinson, E. (2014) 'Single People's Geographies of Home: Intimacy and Friendship beyond "the Family"', *Environment and planning. A*, 46(10), pp. 2452–2468.

Wilmsen, B. (2013) ‘Family separation and the impacts on refugee settlement in Australia’, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 48(2), pp. 241–262.

Wilson, H.F. (2017) ‘On geography and encounter: Bodies, borders, and difference’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(4), pp. 451–471.

Wilson, H.F. & Darling, J. (2021) *Research Ethics for Human Geography: A Handbook for Students*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: SAGE Publications, Limited.

Wood, N. and Waite, L. (2011) ‘Editorial: Scales of belonging’. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 4, pp. 201–202.

Wright, S. (2015) ‘More-than-human, emergent belongings: A weak theory approach’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 39(4), pp. 391–411.

Yıldız, A.D. (2020) ‘The Role of Hope to Construct a New Life: Experiences of Syrian and Iraqian Asylum Seekers’, In Derya Güngör & Dagmar Strohmeier (eds.) *Contextualizing Immigrant and Refugee Resilience: Cultural and Acculturation Perspectives*. Advances in Immigrant Family Research. Cham: Springer International Publishing. pp. 143–162.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006) ‘Belonging and the politics of belonging’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40(3), pp. 197–214.

Yuval-Davis, N., Wemyss, G. & Cassidy, K. (2018) ‘Everyday Bordering, Belonging and the Reorientation of British Immigration Legislation’, *Sociology*, 52(2), pp. 228–244.

Zharkevich, I. (2019) ‘Money and Blood: Remittances as a Substance of Relatedness in Transnational Families in Nepal’, *American Anthropologist*, 121(4), pp. 884–896.