IMISCOE Research Series

Paolo Boccagni
Sara Bonfanti *Editors*

Migration and Domestic Space

Ethnographies of Home in the Making

IMISCOE

OPEN ACCESS

Springer

IMISCOE Research Series

This series is the official book series of IMISCOE, the largest network of excellence on migration and diversity in the world. It comprises publications which present empirical and theoretical research on different aspects of international migration. The authors are all specialists, and the publications a rich source of information for researchers and others involved in international migration studies. The series is published under the editorial supervision of the IMISCOE Editorial Committee which includes leading scholars from all over Europe. The series, which contains more than eighty titles already, is internationally peer reviewed which ensures that the book published in this series continue to present excellent academic standards and scholarly quality. Most of the books are available open access.

Paolo Boccagni • Sara Bonfanti
Editors

Migration and Domestic Space

Ethnographies of Home in the Making

Springer

Editors
Paolo Boccagni
Università di Trento
Trento, Italy

Sara Bonfanti
Università di Trento
Trento, Italy

ISSN 2364-4087 ISSN 2364-4095 (electronic)
IMISCOE Research Series
ISBN 978-3-031-23124-7 ISBN 978-3-031-23125-4 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4

This work was supported by IMISCOE

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Barbara Bertolani is a sociologist with a PhD from the University of Parma. She was a post-doctoral fellow at Ferrara University and an adjunct professor at the University of Molise. She had done extensive qualitative and ethnographic research on North African, South Asian and Sikh migrants in Italy. Her research interests include inter-marriages, ethnic and kin networks, transnationalism, second-generation Sikh youth in Italy, Sikh women and gender violence. She has written essays in various international studies on Punjabis and Sikhs in Italy, as well as in journals such as *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Religion*, *Geoforum* and *Ethnicities.* From 2019 to 2021, she has been a research fellow at the University of Trento (ERC HOMInG Project). Besides her academic commitments, she collaborates with the anti-violence centre of Modena in Italy.

Paolo Boccagni is a professor in Sociology and has been PI of ERC HOMInG (University of Trento). He has done research into the lived experience of home and the contentious field of views, emotions and practices associated with it, particularly in majority-minority relations and among immigrant and refugee newcomers. Drawing on collaborative and interdisciplinary work with colleagues in several countries, he is trying to contribute to an open-ended, dynamic and relationally thick view of home, as a situated question of homing. Last co-authored publications include *Thinking Home on the Move* and articles like "Home in question" (*European Journal of Cultural Studies*), "Homemaking in the public" (*Sociology Compass*), "Entering into domestic hospitality for refugees" (*Identities*). He is the editor of the forthcoming *Handbook on Home and Migration* (Edward Elgar).

Sara Bonfanti is a social anthropologist with expertise on South Asian diasporas. From a background in cultural studies, she gained a PhD conducting multi-sited ethnography between Italy and India in 2012–2015, where she analysed generational change among Punjabi transnational families. Keen on participatory and visual methods, her interests include kinship, religious pluralism and media cultures, approached through intersectionality and life stories. Visiting fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, since 2017 she

has collaborated in the ERC HOMInG Project, exploring the home-migration nexus across European cities with a multiscale lens and mixed qualitative methods. Her recent publications include *Shifting Roofs: Ethnographies of Home and Mobility* (2020, coauthored) and *Finding Home in Europe* (2023, coedited).

Adriano Cancellieri, PhD in Urban and Cultural Sociology, is working at the Iuav University of Venice where he is a member of the Unesco Chair SSIIM (Social and Spatial Inclusion of International Migrants) and coordinator of the U-Rise Master Program in Urban Regeneration and Social Innovation. His publication and research interests are in urban and migration studies, in particular on marginalized neighborhoods, everyday multiculturalism, homemaking, urban religion, social and urban innovation and theory of space. This is mainly by using qualitative methodology and adopting a pragmatic and spatial perspective. He is a founding member of the interdisciplinary network *Tracce Urbane* and part of the Editorial Committees of *Tracce Urbane. Italian Journal of Urban Studies* and *Mondi Migranti*.

Gabriel Echeverria is a post-doctoral researcher at the Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales of Madrid. He holds a BA in International Relations from the University of Bologna and a PhD in International Migration and Social Integration from the Complutense University of Madrid. His research interests have focused on international migration and social and political theory. His doctoral research, published as a monograph in 2021 (*Towards a Systemic Theory of Irregular Migration*), inquired into the experience of irregular migrants in different contexts by adopting a social systems theory approach. His themes of research also include citizenship, the differential inclusion of migrants in hosting societies and the home-migration nexus.

Enrico Fravega, PhD in sociology (University of Genoa), is a research fellow at the University of Trento. He is a member of the HOASI research group (Home and Asylum-Seekers in Italy). His research activity focuses on migrants' housing pathways, housing conditions and home-making practices in informal settlements, as well as in institutional reception facilities. His recent publications include *L'abitare migrante. Racconti di vita e percorsi abitativi di migranti in Italia* (2002) and, coauthored, *La lotta per il tempo* (2023).

Daniela Giudici is an anthropologist and a research fellow at the Department of Psychology and cognitive science, University of Trento. During her PhD and post-doctoral studies, she conducted ethnographic research in the Italian asylum system, both in institutional reception centres and in informal settlements. Her main research interests include politics and regimes of care; migration, citizenship and asylum; urban politics and social movements. She has been a visiting research fellow at McGill University (Montreal), IRIS – Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Sciences Sociales (Paris) and Freie Universität (Berlin).

Nicholas DeMaria Harney, Dean of Social Science at Western University since 2021, was previously Chair of Departments at the University of Western Australia (2010–2012) and the University of Windsor (2016–2021) and Associate Dean International in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Western Australia (2013–2015). Nick has taught undergraduates and graduates on four continents about migration and cities. Since 2012, he has been a visiting professor at the Università degli Studi di Trento's Department of Sociology and Social Research as well as a visiting professor in Catania, Messina and Naples with over 20 years of research on migration, urban space and global processes.

Alejandro Miranda-Nieto is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Diversity Studies Centre Oslo, Oslo Metropolitan University. His current research looks at homemaking, dwelling and dynamics of integration among migrant professionals in Oslo. He is the author of academic articles on mobilities, home, migration, music and ethnography. His monograph *Musical Mobilities* has been published in the Routledge Advances in Ethnography series, and the co-authored book *Ethnographies of Home and Mobility* in the Routledge Home series.

Anna Pechurina is an associate professor in Sociology at Karlstad University, Sweden. She was born and studied Sociology in Russia, moving then to the UK where she conducted her PhD on Russian migrants' homemaking. Her research interests include home and homemaking, belonging, culture, migration and qualitative methods. In relation to home and migration, her work engages with qualitative, ethnographic and autobiographical methods to uncover relationships between the meaning and use of material objects and migrants' shifting sense of identity. She has published in a number of journals including *Current Sociology* and *Sociological Research Online*. She is the author of *Material Cultures, Migrations, and Identities* (2015).

Luis Eduardo Pérez Murcia holds a PhD in Development Studies from the University of Manchester and has recently finished a three-year post-doc position at the HOMInG Project, University of Trento. His research interests include the study of home, conflict-induced displacement, transnational migration and the temporal and spatial intersections between human mobility and home. Recent publications include "Physically sheltered but existentially homeless": Losing home in the aftermath of conflict and displacement (*Migration Studies*, 2021) and "Selling a house, staging a dream: Real estate agencies and transnational housing between Spain and Ecuador" (*Migration and Development*, *2021*, coauthored).

Francesco Vietti is an anthropologist with a research interest in the intersection of migration, tourism and heritage. He got a PhD in "Migration and Intercultural Processes" at the University of Genoa (2011), and currently, he is an assistant

professor at the University of Turin (Italy). He carried out fieldwork in Eastern Europe (Moldova, 2006, 2016–2018), the Balkans (Albania and Kosovo, 2008–2011) and the Mediterranean (Lampedusa, 2018–2021). He is the scientific coordinator of the European project "Migrantour. Intercultural Urban Routes" and co-coordinator of the summer school "MEDITHERITY – Mobility and Heritage in the Mediterranean".

Chapter 1
Introduction: Stranger, Guest, Researcher – A Case for Domestic Ethnography in Migration Studies

Paolo Boccagni and Sara Bonfanti

1.1 From Researcher *vs* Informant to Guest *vs* Host: An Emerging Research Perspective

Is there anything like "domestic ethnography"? There is, in a way there has always been, and yet it requires specific elaboration to fully reveal its epistemological potential. This is particularly the case in migration studies, with a view to producing knowledge that bridges across divides such as *us* vs *them* and *native* vs *immigrant*, but also *public* vs *private* and, more fundamentally, *host* vs *guest*. This is, in a nutshell, the substantive and methodological message at the core of this book.

Being invited into the home of someone else is not a random or ubiquitous experience. The status of guest displays a significant relationship between two or more people, on which a remarkable tradition in social sciences has coalesced over time (Herzfeld, 1987; Candea & Da Col, 2012). Being let in the home of someone else, however, is not only an experience with a relational and emotional significance of its own. It is also an occasion on which something new is learnt with, and about, the host. It is likewise, potentially at least, a setting that nourishes a deeper interpersonal relationship between host and guest. Both developments, with the attendant downsides and dilemmas, have long been central to the ethnographic endeavour. Both developments, and the very experience of *guesthood* as a form of (and way into) fieldwork, have however been marginal in migration studies thus far. It is from this marginality, and from a recent comparative study aiming to address it, that this book begins.

What does home mean and entail, the initial research question was, for people on the move such as international migrants and refugees? How much does home have to do with their housing and dwelling arrangements? And what do dwellings reveal

P. Boccagni (✉) · S. Bonfanti
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy
e-mail: paolo.boccagni@unitn.it

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_1

about people's life stories, everyday routines and lifestyles, as well as their societal conditions and prospects? *Migration and domestic space* illustrates the benefits of extending the scope of fieldwork in migration and refugee studies accordingly, from the bottom-up and from "within". This is meant to achieve a threefold aim: (i) get attuned to the day-to-day built environments in which migrant personal lives unfold, as individuals and members of more or less supportive and unequal household arrangements; (ii) explore how people relate with their dwellings along their migration and housing pathways, and draw out of them diverse and often contrasting emotions – from estrangement to safety, from vulnerability to some sense of being at home; and (iii) understand how migrants' dwelling conditions articulate, and to some extent shape, their attitudes towards majority societies, the (dis)continuities with their earlier lives and the perceived life horizons ahead of them.

None of the fundamental functions and meanings associated with one's dwelling place is unique to people on the move (Carsten & Hugh-Jones, 1995; Cieraad, 1999, 2018; Miller, 2001). None of the inherent tensions between a place being, at the extremes, a basic shelter and a full-fledged home is a migrant prerogative. Quite the opposite – dwelling makes for an obvious and yet remarkable commonality across national boundaries, social divides and cultural backgrounds (Oliver, 1987; Buchli, 2013; Hentschke & Williams, 2018). The need for some shelter at the very least, and arguably the search for a place to call home, is a rather generalizable trait of the human experience (Tucker, 1994; Heller, 1995; Barrie, 2017; Boccagni, 2022a). However, after displacement, mobility and (re)settlement, dwelling conditions and arrangements – including those of "nonmovers" that are involved in migrants' transnational relationships – make for a significant and under-appreciated research field. Based mostly on qualitative case studies within the ERC HOMInG and MIUR-HOASI research projects, this book advances an original research agenda on the substantive, methodological and practical significance of fieldwork in the housing, domestic or dwelling spaces of individuals and families with a migrant background. We are interested in learning more of people's lived experience from within these settings, including the most precarious ones. As we aim to illustrate, a respectful and sensitive way of being within them marks a critical threshold for ethnographic engagement, and for a more fine-grained understanding of everyday life, material cultures and intimate relations. By domestic space, here, we mean and compare a whole range of housing infrastructures, not all of them overlapping with an ordinary dwelling place (Briganti & Mezei, 2012; Kusenbach & Paulsen, 2013; Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020).

Each chapter in the book starts from a reflexive analysis of *home encounters* in distinct housing settings, with different social actors and groups having a direct or indirect experience of international migration. These configurations include multi-ethnic condominiums (Cancellieri, Vietti), multigenerational households in co-living arrangements (Bonfanti), shared flats on rental (Miranda-Nieto), asylum reception centres (Boccagni), immigrant informal settlements, urban (Giudici) and rural (Fravega), houses of worship (Bonfanti and Bertolani), dwelling places of left-behind family members (Pérez-Murcia), including in-laws of researchers themselves (Bertolani), and so-called remittance houses (Boccagni and Echeverria). The

substantive and methodological commonalities across chapters are eventually revisited in an afterword (Harney). All authors, in conducting their respective fieldwork, have followed the ethic codes and procedures of the universities employing them. All their informants, participants and interviewees have been anonymized throughout the book in order to protect their identities. The bulk of the relevant fieldwork was conducted between 2016 and 2019, aside from some cases in which ethnographers revisit older studies (Cancellieri, Pechurina, Bonfanti and Bertolani) or extend their research up to 2022 (Boccagni, Fravega). The ethnographic material underpinning the book covers a variety of immigrant national backgrounds – Latin America, North and West Africa, Western Europe, South Asia – and an equally diverse range of housing, household and legal arrangements. Regardless of the target population, all chapters articulate a productive tension between methodological issues – access, relationships, positionalities, boundary-making – and substantive findings regarding the lived migration experience and the attendant social, political and cultural developments. In-depth fieldwork in these settings is instrumental to innovate and enrich the repertoire of qualitative research in migration studies. However, it is also a way to produce substantive and original knowledge in several respects. Likewise, it has meaningful implications at a practical and experiential level, as we illustrate below.

1.2 Why Domestic Ethnography, Why with Migrants and Refugees: Four Research Directions

Qualitative research on the lived and embedded experience of home has grown significantly in the last two decades, at the intersection between anthropology, cultural geography, housing studies and architecture. A number of ethnographies have been done by valuing the potential of "ethnographic encounters" (Lenhard & Samanani, 2020) "behind the closed doors of domestic homes" (Miller, 2001: 1). Fieldwork within the home can serve a number of analytical purposes (Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013; Pink et al., 2017). Among the others, it illuminates the biographies and life conditions of those living there, as well the interdependence between different time spaces (past/present, host/home countries) that leave meaningful traces in domestic material cultures (Noble, 2002; Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Levin & Finchner, 2010; Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020; Pérez-Murcia & Boccagni, 2022). For sure, this approach raises practical and ethical issues that should not go unnoticed, on which all contributors to this volume reflect. Nonetheless, the attendant research agenda does justice to a dimension of the everyday – what happens in the mutual interaction between people and their dwellings, and what that means and entails – which is as invisible as constitutive of the ordinary existence.

In principle, there is nothing inherently distinctive in a migrant dwelling in these regards, unless for the possibility that its infrastructure and interior lay-outs and decorations reflect non-local domestic cultures and building styles, especially in

post-migration and multi-ethnic societies (Lozanovska, 2019). However, little of the domestic ethnographies done so far has concentrated on migrant or refugee dwellings, even less so in a comparative optic (see, however, Levin, 2015; Beeckmans et al., 2022; see also, on refugee "shelters", Scott-Smith & Breeze, 2020). In fact, domestic ethnography is also a way to expand the scope of research on home and migration in several directions. Four of these cut across the chapters of this book and can be briefly summarized as follows.

1.2.1 Entering into the Domestic and Its Faceted Interaction with the "Outside"

For one thing, the book feeds into the burgeoning interdisciplinary literature on domesticity and the home, with a privileged focus on the dwelling conditions, histories, aspirations and trajectories of international migrants and refugees. As an emerging research perspective, *home studies* engages with the diverse places, settings and material arrangements in which people articulate and tentatively enact a sense of home (Kusenbach & Paulsen, 2013; Lloyd & Vasta, 2017; Bahun & Petrić, 2018; Blunt & Dowling, 2022). Home is understood as a contested, relationally based question of place attachment and appropriation. Forms of homemaking can occur on any scale across divides like house vs neighbourhood (Blunt & Sheringham, 2019), private vs public (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021), local vs transnational (Rapport & Dawson, 2023) or lay vs sacred (Bertolani et al., 2021). All this being said, the domestic built environment remains the basic unit of everyday life for most people. For sure, this is nothing natural or "given". The unequal ways in which people on the move negotiate access to decent housing or are marginalized from it, at different stages of their migration trajectories, make for a societal and political question in itself. Indeed, housing may effectively operate as an internal, and highly discriminatory, border (Lukes et al., 2019; Bonizzoni et al., 2023). That said, their ways of seeing, using and reshaping the domestic space accessible to them are by no means an epiphenomenon. Rather, they deserve specific investigation. By looking at how people interact with(in) the domestic realm, we gain a better understanding of their lived experience and of their social position, i.e. the structure of opportunities available to them and their ways to cope with it.

As long as domesticity lies at the core of the life experience of most of us, it is a privileged entry point into debates of larger significance. One of them regards individual and household social reproduction; put differently, homemaking in the literal sense of relational, practical and emotional activities for the maintenance and care of the home and its members, with the underlying tensions and inequalities across genders and generations (Kofman, 2012; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). In this respect, *staying in* unpacks the external and normative image of the home as a

necessarily warm, protective and safe space. For sure, this may not be enough to capture the roots and developments of intimate family conflicts and tensions. Nonetheless, it does afford us the opportunity to embody people's self-accounts into the constellation of everyday spaces, objects and thresholds that household members negotiate between them. This holds true in the domestic space of migrants or refugees, we argue, as much as in any other one. Consistent with this, domestic ethnography is also a valuable option to delve into the subjective meanings of dwelling and the material affordances and culture on which it relies (Miller, 2001; Povrzanovic-Frykman, 2019). This has to do with interior decoration and "beautification" as, among other things, an everyday statement about taste, alignment, status and aspirations (Clarke, 2001; Woodward, 2001; Dibbits, 2009; McMillan, 2009; Savaş, 2010). However, as the chapters in this book show, there is a broader range of ways in which dwellers inform the domestic space with their presence, connect it with significant others (including people who passed away, or moved to live elsewhere) or, instead, neglect to invest in their dwellings.

In the third place, domestic conditions and arrangements in the here and now are the starting point to explore questions of housing marginality, informality and exclusion (Giorgi & Fasulo, 2013; Darling, 2017), and to reconstruct migrant housing pathways over time. In that respect, the present dwelling conditions may embed significant traces of past-related memories and lifestyles, and possibly articulate future-oriented concerns and aspirations (Bolt & van Kempen, 2002; Robinson et al., 2007). Furthermore, the domestic space is a key infrastructure and affordance for boundary-making, relative to the outside world – inside vs outside, private vs public. As important are its internal forms of boundary-making, thresholding and affective and functional differentiation (Gauvain & Altman, 1982; Lawrence, 1987; Garvey, 2005; Martsin & Niit, 2005; Hadjiyanni, 2019).

All this being said, the lived experience of any home shows how blurred and permeable the boundaries are, all the more so under disadvantaged or "mobile" housing arrangements (Jansen & Löfving, 2009); in fact, how external or internal thresholding ends up in a selective, situated and ongoing endeavour – an open-ended social field which has little of the apparent stability of the bricks and mortar (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017; Rapport & Dawson, 2023). Put it otherwise, the domestic experience is typically an ongoing matter of home unmaking, as much as home-making (Baxter & Brickell, 2014; Bertolani & Boccagni, 2021). Last, domestic interiors as a research setting are fundamental in order to advance empirical research on hospitality and host-guest relations – a basic foundation of home, and yet a relatively unexplored one through the categories of home studies (see, however, Herzfeld, 1987; Lenhard & Samanani, 2020; Harney & Boccagni, 2022).

Once again, none of these debates is unique to migration or refugee studies. Nevertheless, approaching them through the experience of people on the move, in a comparative framework, helps us to move beyond any monolithic and sedentary approach to the home.

1.2.2 Tackling Societal Questions from the Bottom-Up and from the Inside-Out

Home matters, societally speaking, because it holds public and political dimensions that are as constitutive of it as the private one, as decades of critical research have shown, in feminism and beyond (Price, 2002; Kaika, 2004; Brickell, 2012). More fundamentally, each home can be approached as a societal unit which (re)produces, at a grassroots level, questions of larger societal import. This is part and parcel of its promise as a research site. Doing ethnography within people's domestic space, as ethnographers and guests, is also a research strategy with a significant external potential and relevance: enable a micro, fine-grained understanding of questions that are relevant at a macro level, well beyond a particular case study. Again, this has long been an aspiration for ethnography as a means to generate and communicate knowledge, behind its seemingly descriptive simplicity (Burawoy, 1991; Fitzgerald, 2006; Atkinson, 2015). However, it is a knowledge-building process for which the domestic has a profound and relatively under-studied significance. All contributors to this book aim to develop further, for the benefit of migration and refugee studies, a crucial point that has long been made within the social study of the home: the lived space of a house is also a microcosm of societal constellations of identities, values and inequalities. This is substantiated in the internal organization of the home environment, including the division and allocation of domestic space along gender(ed) and generational lines (Bourdieu, 1970; Carsten & Hugh-Jones, 1995; Birdwell-Pheasant & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 1999). It is at a house(hold) level that ethnographers can capture the bases and mechanisms of reproduction of societal orders and inequalities.

This is particularly visible and striking under substandard or marginalized housing conditions, such as those experienced by a number of migrants and refugees. And it has become even more powerful after the covid-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented forms of "enforced domesticity" whereby, under institutional lockdowns or unremitting *stayhome* appeals, the domestic space is over-inflated with tasks and expectations. This makes the inequalities that inform its access, use and ownership still more critical, less visible and harder to contrast for public policy (Hadjiyanni, 2023).

Furthermore, as the case studies in this book show, the interdependence between the domestic and the societal illuminates the everyday life of immigrant or refugee newcomers in two major respects. The first has to do with the process of hospitality in which the home plays a central role. Importantly, hospitality operates on and across multiple scales – not just the domestic one. The inside/outside and host/guest divides that the domestic space embodies are frequently scaled up, as metaphorically as effectively, to non-domestic scales – the neighbourhood, the city, even entire nation-states (Walters, 2023). However, what hospitality means and what it should imply out of a narrowly domestic domain is a question on which ideological and principled accounts outnumber empirical studies. This is possibly the reason why hospitality is both intriguing and elusive as an analytic (Harney & Boccagni,

2022). In this optic, host-guest relationships, including informant-researcher interactions in a domestic setting, are but micro iterations of ingroup-outgroup relations that operate at a systemic level, often borrowing the moral and affective repertoire of the home for political, mostly exclusionary purposes (Duyvendak, 2011). "Domestic ethnographers" should be fully aware of this background, as well as of the interlocking axes of power inequality that often separate them from their interlocutors in terms of legal status and possibly of class, race, gender, education and thus forth. While such inequalities are embedded in migrant dwelling conditions and tend to reproduce them, it is worth remarking that fieldwork power relations are not unidirectional, even less so within a domestic setting. Like all ethnographers, researchers-as-guests are fully dependent on their interlocutors' protracted disposition to host them, and on negotiating the underlying mutual interests and expectations. This is not to dismiss, of course, the power inequalities that are part of each ethnographic encounter, and the range of obligations and responsibilities that come along with that. Starting from the bottom line of providing rich, respectful and potentially transformative accounts to a broader audience, all ethnographers, including the contributors to this volume, address this delicate point in their own ways.

In the second place, the significance of home in the public sphere has multiple and ambiguous implications. One of them, of course, is the question about "whose home" the public actually is (Koch & Latham, 2013). This creeps across majority-minority relations, with native or long-resident groups being often in a position to define it in their own terms (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021). At the same time, the public space may end up being a source of appropriation and attachment, if only due to a lack of alternatives, for all those whose housing circumstances are poor and unsatisfactory, up to having little to do with a normative idea of home – once again, a rather frequent development among vulnerable migrants, as in some of the chapters that follow. The literature in migration and refugee studies is dotted with examples about this, generally among people with similar national, ethnic or religious backgrounds (Law, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2017; Damery, 2020). For sure, this extra-domestic scalarity militates against any automatic conflation between domestic space and home. Relative to the former, home as a concept encompasses many more dimensions, sites and scales. And yet, it is only from the domestic space that an in-depth understanding of home, and of migrant's struggle for better living conditions, can actually start.

1.2.3 Advancing Reflexive and Qualitative Research on Migrants and Refugees

Visiting the domestic space of one's informants has historically been a central way for ethnographers to develop rapport and trust in the field and gain greater insight into the lives of those they study. In a sense, then, this book is an invitation to make the most of what many ethnographers already do to some extent. At the same time,

we aim to show the potential of a systematic approach to the domestic environment to delve into the diverse alignments, attachments and material living conditions associated with a migrant background.

The preparation of this book followed an exploratory and comparative design. Broadly similar research questions and methodological options were used across different housing and dwelling contexts, on multiple scales. All contributors draw on home visits that were meant as entry points into broader research concerns and ended up being meaningful in themselves. Such home encounters are a challenge to set in advance. They typically come after in-depth fieldwork engagement with the relevant informants, or at least some of them. Research within the domestic space makes sense and works out in the moral economy of broader relations of hospitality and possibly of friendship, with all the promises, dilemmas and tensions this entails.

In practice, the underlying research design includes occasional visits, related to the collection of interviews or life histories in a private space, and far more extended stays; ordinary ways of being with one's participants in the everyday; and home tours with an explicit observational purpose. The latter may involve pictures, maps or drawings, instrumental to discuss the functions, meanings or memories associated with certain domestic objects or spaces. This inevitably requires a participatory orientation, which can be made explicit and generated through techniques like photovoice, elicitation from objects or images, self-diaries, sketches of home and other "creative" options (Ratnam, 2023; Ratnam & Drozdzewski, 2020; Pink, 2020). Consistent with this orientation, all chapters consider the joint contribution of researchers and participants to make sense of otherwise intangible and sensorial dimensions of domestic space.

In certain settings, such as informal settlements and squats, researchers may be unable to move beyond the doorstep – of an occupied building, a make-shift shack or a slum. This requires them to engage in a delicate balancing act between contrasting positions and expectations. Fieldwork in precarious and fragile dwelling arrangements raises practical, relational and ethical intricacies. It also testifies to meaningful forms of resistance – less to a researcher per se, than to forms of external knowledge production and media overexposure that may fuel infantilizing, sensationalist and stigmatizing accounts. Whether in these cases or in more ordinary housing arrangements, domestic ethnography demands that researchers be sensitive in negotiating the reach and implications of their access to the field, in order to appreciate migrant ways or attempts of making themselves at home.

With these precautions and ambiguities, the substantive yield of this approach can hardly be underestimated. At a cumulative and comparative level, it allows an in-depth view of the spatial organization of home spaces, and hence a unique understanding of migrant attitudes and expectations towards receiving and sending communities. What is displayed in the domestic space, where and why; how people orient functionally and symbolically the interiors; how such spaces are differentially occupied and experienced along gender and generational lines; what kind of memories are displayed, and what specific rituals are performed – on these micro-underpinnings of post-migration everyday life, little insight can be gained unless through ethnography across domestic settings.

Along these lines, the book advances an extended research programme in which domestic fieldwork is both a source of micro-data and of macro-insights replicated across multiethnic societies. This holds a promise to expand and refine the remit of qualitative research with migrant populations (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). It can also enhance a critical conversation between migration studies and research into housing, social reproduction and material culture, even within sub-standard or utterly marginalized dwelling arrangements.

1.2.4 Getting Closer to Migrant Life Conditions and Prospects, Both "Subjective" and "Objective"

Overall, this book is an invitation to acknowledge the significance of the lived domestic experience for researchers and practitioners concerned with migration, housing and home. All the case studies that follow show migrant domesticity to be a complex, critical and inherently meaningful matter. Studying it, however, cannot be reduced to formulaic indicators of residential or housing satisfaction. For sure, access to decent housing is a critical and far from obvious or irreversible step in migration pathways (Eurostat, 2021; Fravega & Boccagni, 2023; Skovgaard-Nielsen & Skifter-Andersen, 2023). That said, a dwelling as such has more than an instrumental value. It is worth investigating in light of the ways and extents to which it operates as a proxy of home in a normatively positive sense, thereby illuminating a repository of reactions, tactics and adaptations. In this optic, the domestic space is revealing both of migrants' agency and of the structural exposure of many of them to poverty, marginalization and discrimination. It reveals both sides of the same coin, which should be equally taken in earnest at a policy level, for housing and social welfare provision.

In-depth research on how people engage with the material and symbolic aspects of their living spaces – given the resources available to shape them, their housing tenure and their long-term life projects – provides valuable data and advice for local policy-making in several fields: housing, social and health care, diversity management and community development, among others. How people are oriented (or not) to take care of, and invest in, the built environments accessible to them is a major question, for policy no less than personal purposes. In a research domain, moreover, the personal constructions of housing and of the distance between experienced and ideal arrangements illuminate the subjective dimension of migrant integration, away from the lures of prescriptive, ideological or essentialist accounts. While migrant housing may have a transnational side that sits along with the local one, sometimes uneasily as some contributions in this book show, it is from dwelling circumstances in the here and now that a more profound understanding of migrant conditions can, and should, begin.

1.3 Twelve Ways to Enter Migrant Homes: An Overview of the Book

The twelve case studies in this book unveil dwelling arrangements that can mark migrants' housing pathways and biographies at different stages, not necessarily in a linear or sequential way. Migrant ways of dwelling may be based on individual accommodation, a household one, or one shared with strangers. They may be formal or informal, as well as autonomous or "heteronomous" (e.g. in refugee camps). They may be on rental or possibly, over time, shifting to homeownership. In short, the book takes fully into account the variety of housing arrangements associated with migration. It also looks at the influence of the houses of their non-migrant counterparts (including properties built with migrant remittances) and at the domestic significance of semi-public infrastructures such as places of worship. This enables an unprecedented scope for comparative analysis of the potential of different and unequal dwelling arrangements to make for home-like spaces, given dwellers' demographics, their backgrounds, their (over)exposure to discrimination and racialization and their position in the life and migration course. All the contributions that follow combine methodological reflexivity with theoretical and societal relevance. All contributors, moreover, show the value of an intersectional approach in exploring disadvantaged housing conditions, to find out how migrant/ethnic background interplays with variables such as class, length of stay, education, legal status, density and distribution of informal social networks.

In Chap. 2, *A House of Homes*, Adriano Cancellieri revisits his long-term research involvement with Hotel House. This is an isolated high-rise building inhabited mostly by immigrant households – some would say, a "vertical ghetto" – close to a seaside location in Central Italy (cf. Cancellieri, 2017). Drawing on his past experience as a guest in some apartments, and then on recurrent follow-up visits, the author reconstructs the dwelling history of the building. This is marked by a combination of "white flight", temporary or permanent settlement of residents from dozens of different backgrounds, and an ongoing dialectic between external stigmatization and internal mobilization to improve infrastructural conditions. The building is worth researching as a place in itself and a diverse hub for immigrant communities, thanks also to the ethnic businesses and initiatives it has hosted over time. Cancellieri provides a thick account of the field relationships with his hosts, who enabled him to have an insider understanding of everyday life in the high-rise. Based on this protracted ethnographic effort, the author discusses several forms of "material, spatial and affective everyday homemaking", including their ambivalence. Space attachment and appropriation, as enacted through everyday sociability and meaningful collective practices, may lead to pervasive social control over community members, discouraging those forms of individuation that are critical to their local integration. This leads to a risk of "double closure" – from the mainstream society towards Hotel House, from without; from the hegemonic communities towards individual members, from within. On one hand, residents' ways of homemaking do not necessarily overlap with the brick and mortar of the building, as they

can involve multiple scales at the same time. On the other hand, the homely atmosphere that is nourished in many apartments cannot obscure the reproduction of deep-rooted gender boundaries – "the dark side of home" – inside them. In sum, entering the domestic space of one's informants is a unique research option to capture the tensions and contradictions inherent in their homemaking practices, at the intersection between cultural continuity, shared ways of sociability and variable degrees of openness or closure to the larger society.

In a different perspective, the lived experience of super-diversity on a built environment scale lies also at the core of Chap. 3, *The Next-Door Migrant*, by Francesco Vietti. This is an auto-ethnography of everyday life in a multi-ethnic condominium within the "ethnoscape" of Turin's Porta Palazzo, Italy. With a main focus on the ways of interaction and appropriation in the "liminal" inner courtyard, Vietti outlines another rich house biography. The author privileges the interplay between domestic spaces and semi-public ones, which he reconstructs by means of participant observation and exemplary life stories of native and immigrant residents. Thanks to this combination of personal narratives and reflexive fieldwork notes, categories such as hospitality, conviviality or contact zone lose their abstract or normative connotations and get embedded in the complexity of day-to-day interactions, including inter-group tensions and conflicts. Such interactions are typically shallow, and yet always hold a potential for more profound encounters across ethnic, religious and generational divides. Importantly, Vietti's account shows the relevance of an insider, qualitative understanding to pave the way for community development initiatives such as those presented at the end of the chapter.

In Chap. 4, *Welcome upon Conditions*, Sara Bonfanti explores the domestic homemaking of South Asian diasporas in Britain. In doing so, she builds on Derrida's (2000) conceptualization of "hos(ti)pitality" and draws from anthropological reflections of how the guest-host relationship is foundational to fieldwork as much as to structuring the social world. The chapter proposes an ethnographic tour across London's Black-and-Minority-Ethnic districts, stopping at three addresses where descendants of Bengali, Sri-Lankan and Sikh Indians live. By means of repeated home visits and stays, Bonfanti sieves through the internal diversities of the South Asian collective in order to see how the house is governed (de L'Estoile & Neiburg, 2020), from within and bottom-up. Her observation and analysis shift from the private dwelling to the neighbourhood, interrogating to what extent transnational kinship and ages of migration shape the experience of home and the politics of belonging in the diaspora. With a comparative lens, the author advances parallel considerations on her methodology and findings. As a guest-and-ethnographer, Bonfanti reflects on the conditionality of her status in the houses of her informants, as well as on the conditional *(par)desh* (lit. home away) that South Asian diasporas have pursued since decolonization in their ultimate 'host' country.

In Chap. 5, *Shared Flats in Madrid*, Alejandro Miranda-Nieto gives us an insightful account of everyday life in shared flats in peripheral and multi-ethnic neighbourhoods of Madrid. "Dwelling with strangers", he argues, produces "a peculiar relation between attachment to place and control over space". While some of his informants do connect a sense of home to their dwelling environments, others tend

to discard the question outright. This may be out of nostalgia for the country of origin or, less obviously, due to a deliberate prioritization of other concerns – work, leisure, hanging out with friends – over all that is domestic but, in fact, "non-home" (Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022). Instrumental needs and functional adaptations, argues Miranda-Nieto, may crowd out normative concerns about home, including preoccupations to make the place a little "better", or more of "one's own". This can also be a tactic that informs the negotiation of common space and the synchronization of everyday routines, as a part of shared living arrangements with strangers.

How fieldwork takes place within the homes of research participants is also discussed, in a more reflexive and intimate guise, in Chap. 6, "*Visiting Home" as a Method and Experience*, by Anna Pechurina. Entering the home of an informant, even only for the purpose of doing an interview, raises questions of positionality as much as of privacy. It is a step that should preferably be taken after a certain rapport has already been built. Even then, it is not exempt from mixed reactions that may have to do with gender, age, class and ethnicity, among other factors. This reveals the need for emotional and relational work to underpin rapport building, and then data collection. Still, being *in* is a requisite to capture the situated interdependence between belonging, migration and cultural identity, in Pechurina's study. Central to this research effort is an exploration of the usages of meaningful objects and of the sensorial dimensions of homemaking, as exemplified by cooking and eating. As the author eventually shows, the host-guest relationship that is embedded in the home – and encompasses ethnographic rapport, as a particular variant of it – is informed by a whole set of implicit expectations and boundaries. These are subject to ongoing negotiation between the parties and require further elaboration, as this chapter does.

In Chap. 7, *Rooms with Little View*, Paolo Boccagni revisits everyday forms of homemaking and the tension between private space and collective constraints and obligations within an asylum centre in Northern Italy. Being in, in this case, means negotiating respectful and empathic ways of access to the residents' own rooms, as "guests of the guests". This enables an ethnographer to make better sense of people's day-to-day routines and material cultures (including memories, tastes and aspirations), as well as of their orientations towards the receiving society, on all scales from the nation to the very building in which they are hosted. While asylum centres are typically associated with liminal temporality and protracted waiting, which may have deeply disempowering effects, they are also safe havens where people strive to invest in new life opportunities despite all constraints and discriminations. Within the life course of young people who have repeatedly risked their lives to reach Europe, living in a shared room in an asylum centre may be more than a short-time parenthesis. This is less a non-place than a meaningful location in which biographically significant things happen anyway. A readapted version of domestic ethnography has to navigate across organizational, relational and ethical dilemmas, and yet proves invaluable in illuminating them.

For a number of migrants and refugees, particularly those with a weak legal status (e.g. asylum seekers and undocumented migrants), suitable housing conditions are often impossible to achieve. This means, among other things, that all that has to do with home and homemaking does not necessarily rely on standard and formal

accommodations. There is no paucity of cases of precarious housing and hidden homelessness, even for people who have settled for several years, as a part of fragmented migration, legal and work trajectories. And there is a promise, we contend, in approaching them through the conceptual and methodological frame of our book. Along these lines, in Chap. 8, *(In)Visibility*, Daniela Giudici reflects on her field relations with activists and residents in a large, highly visible and eventually cleared informal settlement in Turin. There may be little remarkable in the reactions of indifference and suspicion the author notices among several residents, regarding all sorts of outsiders. However, Giudici suggests, such stances point less to an ethnographer's failure than to a form of resistance – a claim of one's "right to opacity" – and indeed of homemaking, however residual. The author's contribution, at the "doorstep" of the squat, illuminates questions such as the meaning of silence and invisibility, the tension between observing and being observed, the impingements of one's positionality and the uncanniness of fieldwork (hence, the deep emotional work it demands). At the same time, Giudici invites fellow ethnographers not to be content with the lures of self-reflexivity, as well as of romanticized or overpoliticized accounts of the refugee plight. Overall, the chapter reveals a genuine appreciation for the forms of space adaptation, appropriation and improvement that occur even inside a provisional, deprived and soon-to-be evicted shelter, as a provisional home for hundreds of asylum seekers and refugees.

In a parallel guise, Enrico Fravega elaborates on *Looking for Home in Migrant Informal Settlements* (Chap. 9). The ethnographic research target, here, has to do with informal rural settlements built up by immigrant workers in areas of strong labour demand and exploitation such as Foggia, Southern Italy. These places often lack access to the infrastructures that underpin the "normality" of daily social reproduction – water, energy and so forth. However, seeing them only through the lens of marginality would be misleading. As the author shows, the harsh living conditions in these settlements do not necessarily result in questions of home being irrelevant or out of place. Emotions and social practices associated with a sense of home do take place in so-called agricultural ghettos, in spite of very poor infrastructures and living conditions. They have little to do with dwelling in makeshift and very basic shelters, though. The latter do not afford the ordinary forms of domesticity, in terms of "specific functions" being permanently allocated "to different regions of the house (i.e. rooms)". Much of people's homemaking is rather oriented towards certain public areas of the settlements. Here, ethnic businesses attend to migrant needs and interests in food consumption, leisure, religious practices and sex, among other aspects. These are all hidden faces of an everyday life that, while being heavily dependent on exploitative work conditions, retains significant if ambiguous aspects of shared sociability. Overall, the "sensuous infrastructures" for homemaking in agricultural ghettos go hand in hand with substantive marginalization and very limited connections with the broader societal environment.

Interestingly, the interplay between homemaking in domestic and larger spatial regions does not pertain only to deprived housing environments. The tension between private and semi-public environments can be revisited also among relatively well-settled immigrant groups, as constitutive of their sense of home on

extra-domestic scales. In this vein, Sara Bonfanti and Barbara Bertolani explore, in Chap. 10, the potential and constraints of *Attending Houses of Worship as Homes Out of the Home.* Religious infrastructures, the authors contend, can be affordances for homemaking – or domestic space writ large – in multiple senses: as social milieus that facilitate the retention of meaningful traditions, values and rituals from the communities of origin; as locations that, while pertaining to the public domain, provide a deep sense of intimacy, communion and protection to the believers; as societal institutions and built environments that make visible migrants' claims for recognition and continuity – in a way, their claims for home as a question of both appropriation and attachment (Boccagni et al., 2020). Drawing on extended fieldwork in Sikh and Hindu temples in Italy, the authors advance a critical and original reflection on their own positionalities. They also reveal the reach, as well as the functional and symbolic limitations, of the analogy between a private house and a semi-public house of worship.

Starting from Chap. 11, by Luis Eduardo Pérez Murcia, our collective conceptualization and application of domestic ethnography take still another bent. This is towards the transnational set of ties, attachments and very concrete practices, including house-related ones, which connect labour migrants with their dear ones left behind. Central to the author's argument is the study of the *Transnational Circulation of Home Through Objects.* While visiting, in Peru, the domestic space of the kin of his research participants in Europe, Pérez Murcia finds himself in lively and deeply evocative milieus. These are far more than backgrounds for his in-depth interviews. Rather, the spatial organization and material cultures of the dwellings in which he is hosted reveal the protracted influence of international migration; or, to be precise, of the emotional and practical connectedness between people on the move and their significant others. A range of rather simple and everyday objects, including a baby Jesus statue, a childhood cloth or certain pictures set up in particular ways, emerge as powerful elicitors of mnemonic and emotional connectedness with those living elsewhere. Once again, such connectedness may yield an ambivalent impact over time, if people find out that they are not in a position to engage in more "tangible" co-presence through mutual visits, occasional at least. Nonetheless, the intimate and profound role of these materialities gives further evidence of the importance of domestic ethnography, even within transnational family networks that tend to multiply, and possibly blur, the meanings and locations of home (Boccagni, 2022b). As Pérez Murcia powerfully shows, a visit to migrants' kin can end up in an immersive ethnographic experience in itself. Once researchers are in and have sensorial access to the everyday life world of migrants' kin, they may themselves act as physical mediators – or metaphorical bridges – between separate home spaces. What an ethnographer is then expected to bring back (to the immigrant), literally or symbolically, matters as much as what he/she is bringing into the home of the family members left behind.

In the following chapter, *Migrant Domestic Space as Kinship Space*, Barbara Bertolani enriches the study of transnational homemaking with yet another dimension –transnational kinship and kin work. The author revisits her fieldwork in Indian Punjab, as well as in Italy, within the homes of informants who are also family

members. In a deeply relational, emotional and moral sense, the researcher herself is part of the field she is approaching as a guest and a family member. This reveals significant intricacies and a unique knowledge potential, which Bertolani disentangles by revisiting her home visits and stays. Her multiple positionality enables her to have a very close experience of migrants' domestic space, including in the countries of origin, while certainly affecting the kind of data she collects – and the circumstances under which she does so. Drawing on a range of vivid examples from everyday domestic life, Bertolani analyzes the interplay between differently situated ways to define the same social settings and the roles of different family members and dwellers inside them. She also unveils the "relational thresholds", as constraints and opportunities related to role and belonging, that her positioning work brings into data co-production and analysis.

Last, in Chap. 13, *Whose Homes?*, Paolo Boccagni and Gabriel Echeverria revisit their long-standing research experience in Ecuador, including recent stays in the places of their friends and informants, through the emerging literature on remittance houses (Lopez, 2015; Boccagni & Bivand-Erdal, 2021). What does *entering home(s)* mean, and what does it enable a researcher-as-guest to understand, when a house embodies migrants' efforts to improve their life conditions and "remit" this into their communities of origin? By comparing a range of housing arrangements, the authors discuss several questions of broader interest, including hospitality, the (in) visibilization of the absent ones through material cultures, the transnational negotiation of family and house work, and the tension between the exceptionality of migration and the autonomy and continuity of everyday life in the communities of origin. In all these regards, a house is like a palimpsest to reconstruct and make sense of individual and family life courses, through their mutual influence and feedback.

Much of these methodological and conceptual remarks are relevant for the book as a whole, rather than only for this chapter. Expanding further upon them, Nicholas Harney, in his *Afterword*, invites us to appreciate the full potential of ethnography for an aptly "expansive" understanding of home, along with the negotiation of key boundaries such as host vs guest and domestic vs public. Altogether, these tales from the (domestic) field are themselves an invitation for researchers to take home and hospitality seriously – as a site of social analysis and understanding no less than a place for protection, reproduction and intimacy, or at least as a struggle towards it.

Acknowledgements Research for this book has taken place in the framework of distinct research projects, including ERC HOMInG (The Home-Migration Nexus, StG 678456 [2016–2022] – Chaps. 4, 5, 10, 11, 12 and 13) and MUR-FARE HOASI (Home and Asylum Seekers in Italy [2018–2022] – Chaps. 8 and 9).

References

Atkinson, P. (2015). *For ethnography*. Sage.
Bahun, S., & Petrić, B. (Eds.). (2018). *Thinking home: Interdisciplinary dialogues*. Bloomsbury.
Barrie, T. (2017). *House and home. Cultural contexts, ontological rules*. Routledge.

Baxter, R., & Brickell, K. (2014). For home unmaking. *Home Cultures, 11*(2), 133–143.
Beeckmans, L., Gola, A., Singh, A., & Heynen, H. (Eds.). (2022). *Making home(s) in displacement*. LUP.
Bertolani, B., & Boccagni, P. (2021). Two houses, one family, and the battlefield of home: A housing story of home unmaking in rural Punjab. *Geoforum, 127*, 57–66.
Bertolani, B., Bonfanti, S., & Boccagni, P. (2021). At home in the gurdwara? Religious space and the resonance with domesticity in a London suburb. *Religion, 51*(3), 423–442.
Birdwell-Pheasant, D., & Lawrence-Zúñiga, D. (Eds.). (1999). *House life: Space, place and family in Europe*. .
Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2022). *Home*. Routledge.
Blunt, A., & Sheringham, O. (2019). Home-city geographies: Urban dwelling and mobility. *Progress in Human Geography, 43*(5), 815–834.
Boccagni, P. (2022a). Homing: a category for research on space appropriation and 'home-oriented' mobilities. *Mobilities, 17*(4), 585–601.
Boccagni, P. (2022b). Transnational migration and homemaking. In B. Yeoh & F. Collins (Eds.), *Handbook on transnationalism* (Chapter 9, pp. 141–154). Edward Elgar.
Boccagni, P., & Bivand-Erdal, M. (2021). On the theoretical potential of 'remittance houses': Toward a research agenda across emigration contexts. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47*(5), 1066–1083.
Boccagni, P., & Brighenti, A. M. (2017). Immigrants and home in the making: Thresholds of domesticity, commonality and publicness. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*(1), 1–11.
Boccagni, P., & Duyvendak, J. W. (2021). Homemaking in the public. On the scales and stakes of framing, feeling, and claiming extra-domestic space as "home". *Sociology Compass, 15*(6), e12886.
Boccagni, P., & Miranda-Nieto, A. (2022). Home in question. Uncovering meanings, desires and dilemmas of non-home. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 25*(2), 515–532.
Boccagni, P., Murcia, L. E., & Belloni, M. (2020). *Thinking home on the move: A conversation across disciplines*. .
Bolt, G., & Van Kempen, R. (2002). Moving up or moving down? Housing careers of Turks and Moroccans in Utrecht, the Netherlands. *Housing Studies, 17*(3), 401–422.
Bonizzoni, P., et al. (2023). Making home at the borders of citizenship. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook of home and migration*. Edward Elgar.
Bourdieu, P. (1970). The Berber house or the world reversed. *Social Science Information, 9*(2), 151–170.
Brickell, K. (2012). 'Mapping' and 'doing' critical geographies of home. *Progress in Human Geography, 36*(2), 225–244.
Briganti, C., & Mezei, K. (Eds.). (2012). *The domestic space reader*. UT Press.
Buchli, V. (2013). *An anthropology of architecture*. Bloomsbury.
Burawoy, M. (Ed.). (1991). *Ethnography unbound: Power and resistance in the modern metropolis*. University of California Press.
Cancellieri, A. (2017). Towards a progressive home-making: The ambivalence of migrants' experience in a multicultural condominium. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*(1), 49–61.
Candea, M., & da Col, G. (2012). The return of hospitality. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) Special Issue: The return to hospitality: Strangers, guests, and ambiguous encounters, S1–S19.
Carsten, J., & Hugh-Jones, S. (Eds.). (1995). *About the house*. UP.
Cieraad, I. (Ed.). (1999). *At home: An anthropology of domestic space*. Syracuse UP.
Cieraad, I. (2018). Home. In H. Callan (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of anthropology*. Wiley.
Clarke, A. (2001). The aesthetics of social aspiration. In D. Miller (Ed.), *Home possessions: Material culture behind closed doors*. Berg.

Damery, S. (2020). *At home 'outside'*. PhD Thesis, Université de Liege.
Darling, J. (2017). Forced migration and the city: Irregularity, informality, and the politics of presence. *Progress in Human Geography, 41*(2), 178–198.
de L'Estoile, B., & Neiburg, F. (2020). Governing the house: An ethnographic approach. *Etnográfica, 24*(3), 655–664.
Derrida, J. (2000). Hostipitality. *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities, 5*(3), 3–18.
Dibbits, H. (2009). Furnishing the salon: Symbolic ethnicity and performative practices in Moroccan-Dutch domestic interiors. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 33*(5), 550–557.
Duyvendak, J. W. (2011). *The politics of home*. Palgrave.
Eurostat. (2021). Migrant integration statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics
Fitzgerald, D. (2006). Towards a theoretical ethnography of migration. *Qualitative Sociology, 29*(1), 1–24.
Fravega, E., & Boccagni, P. (2023). Housing and home. In M. Cvajner, P. Kivisto, & G. Sciortino (Eds.), *Research handbook of sociology of migration*. Edward Elgar.
Garvey, P. (2005). Domestic boundaries. Privacy, visibility and the Norwegian window. *Journal of Material Culture, 10*(2), 157–176.
Gauvain, M., & Altman, I. (1982). A cross-cultural analysis of homes. *Architecture and Behavior, 2*, 27–46.
Giorgi, S., & Fasulo, A. (2013). Transformative homes: Squatting and furnishing as sociocultural projects. *Home Cultures, 10*(2), 111–134.
Hadjiyanni, T. (2019). *The right to home*. Palgrave.
Hadjiyanni, T. (2023). Why (and how) home matters in the "stay-at-home" order and beyond. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook of home and migration*. Edward Elgar.
Harney, N. D., & Boccagni, P. (2022). Calibrating home, hospitality and reciprocity in migration. *Anthropological Theory*. online first.
Heller, A. (1995). Where are we at home? *Thesis Eleven, 41*, 11–18.
Hentschke, R., & Williams, J. (Eds.). (2018). *To be at home: House, work and self in the modern world*. De Gruyter.
Herzfeld, M. (1987). 'As in your own house': Hospitality, ethnography, and the stereotype of Mediterranean society. In D. D. Gilmore (Ed.), *Honor and shame and the unity of the Mediterranean* (pp. 75–89). American Anthropological Association.
Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2017). At home in inner-city immigrant community gardens. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*(1), 13–28.
Jansen, S., & Löfving, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Struggles for home: Violence, hope and the movement of people*. .
Kaika, M. (2004). Interrogating the geographies of the familiar. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 28*, 265–286.
Koch, R., & Latham, A. (2013). On the hard work of domesticating a public space. *Urban Studies, 50*(1), 6–21.
Kofman, E. (2012). Gender and skilled migration in Europe. *Cuadernos de relaciones laborales, 30*(1), 63–89.
Kofman, E., & Raghuram, P. (2015). *Gendered migrations and global social reproduction*. Springer.
Kusenbach, M., & Paulsen, K. E. (2013). Home: An introduction. In M. Kusenbach & K. E. Paulsen (Eds.), *Home: International perspectives on culture, identity, and belonging* (pp. 1–22). Peter Lang.
Law, L. (2001). Home cooking: Filipino women and geographies of the senses in Hong Kong. *Ecumene, 8*(3), 264–283.
Lawrence, R. (1987). What makes a house a home? *Environment and Behavior, 19*(2), 154–168.
Lenhard, J., & Samanani, F. (Eds.). (2020). *Home: Ethnographic encounters*. Taylor & Francis.
Levin, I. (2015). *Migration, settlement, and the concepts of house and home*. Routledge.

Levin, I., & Finchner, R. (2010). Tangible transnational links in the houses of Italian immigrants in Melbourne. *Global Networks, 10*(3), 401–423.
Lloyd, J., & Vasta, E. (2017). *Reimagining home in the 21st century*. Edward Elgar.
Lopez, S. L. (2015). *The remittance landscape: Spaces of migration in rural Mexico and urban USA*. UCP.
Lozanovska, M. (2019). *Migrant housing*. Routledge.
Lukes, S., et al. (2019). Slippery discrimination. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45*(17), 3188–3206.
Martsin, M., & Niit, T. (2005). The home as a territorial system. In R. Garcia Mira et al. (Eds.), *Housing, space and quality of life*. Ashgate.
McMillan, M. (2009). *The front room. Migrant aesthetics in the home*.
Miller, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Home possessions: Material culture behind closed doors*. .
Miranda-Nieto, A., Massa, A., & Bonfanti, S. (2020). *Ethnographies of home and mobility*. Routledge.
Noble, G. (2002). Comfortable and relaxed: Furnishing the home and nation. *Continuum, 16*(1), 53–66.
Ochs, E., & Kremer-Sadlik, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Fast forward family*. UC Press.
Oliver, P. (1987). *Dwellings. The house across the world*. University of Texas Press.
Pérez-Murcia, L. E., & Boccagni, P. (2022). Do objects (re)produce home among international migrants? *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 43*(5), 589–605.
Pink, S. (2020). *Home truths: Gender, domestic objects and everyday life*. Routledge.
Pink, S., Mackley, K. L., Morosanu, R., Mitchell, V., & Bhamra, T. (2017). *Making homes: Ethnography and design*. Taylor & Francis.
Povrzanovic-Frykman, M. (2019). Transnational dwelling and objects of connection. *Journal of European Ethnology and Cultural Analysis, 1*, 28–45.
Price, J. (2002). The apotheosis of home and the maintenance of spaces of violence. *Hypathia, 17*(4), 39–70.
Rapport, N., & Dawson, A. (2023). Migrants of identity: Cosmopolitan actors at home in the world. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook of home and migration*. Edward Elgar.
Ratnam, C. (2023). Visual research and participatory research methods. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook of home and migration*. Edward Elgar.
Ratnam, C., & Drozdzewski, D. (2020). Detour: Bodies, memories, and mobilities in and around the home. *Mobilities, 15*(6), 757–775.
Robinson, D., Reeve, K., & Casey, R. (2007). *The housing pathways of new immigrants*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
Savaş, Ö. (2010). The collective Turkish home in Vienna: Aesthetic narratives of migration and belonging. *Home Cultures, 7*(3), 313–340.
Scott-Smith, T., & Breeze, M. (2020). *Structures of protection? Rethinking refugee shelter*. Berghahn.
Skovgaard-Nielsen, R., & Skifter-Andersen, H. (2023). The importance of the housing market for the housing opportunities of immigrants. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook of home and migration*. Edward Elgar.
Tolia-Kelly, D. (2004). Materializing postcolonial geographies. *Geoforum, 35*(6), 675–688.
Tucker, A. (1994). In search for home. *Journal of Applied Philosophy, 11*(2), 181–187.
Walters, W. (2023). Governing the state as home: Domopolitics and migration. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook of home and migration*. Edward Elgar.
Woodward, I. (2001). Domestic objects and the taste epiphany: A resource for consumption methodology. *Journal of Material Culture, 6*(2), 115–136.
Zapata-Barrero, R., & Yalaz, E. (2018). *Qualitative research in European migration studies*. Springer Nature.

Chapter 2
A House of Homes: On the Multiscalarity and Ambivalence of Homemaking in a Multicultural Condominium in Italy

Adriano Cancellieri

2.1 Introduction

"Entering other people's homes" means crossing an incredibly significant symbolic and physical boundary, as the home is the private place *par excellence*, the backstage space in which our lives and personal possessions should be protected and made less visible. For a researcher, entering other people's homes means making visible that which is perhaps "the most important place where people live" (Miller, 2020: 94). In recent years, research on the concept of home and on homemaking has significantly increased thanks to the contribution of geographers, anthropologists, architects, environmental psychologists and sociologists (Miller, 2001; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Duyvendak, 2011; Boccagni, 2017; Boccagni et al., 2020). These studies, despite their heterogeneity, have shown that the domestic space is not a fixed and bounded place to protect, but is a precarious arena made up of multiple social actors and struggles (Ahmed et al., 2003). Home is not a 'being' but a 'becoming' (Nowicka, 2006).

Researchers are thus going beyond the 'static' and conservative perspective that romanticised and essentialised the conception of home and that, amongst other things, gave the possibility to use domestic metaphors to underpin restrictive or hostile policies towards immigrants or other minorities (on this, see Walters' [2004] domopolitics). Focusing on the processuality of homemaking requires an analysis of "what happens in the mutual interaction between people and their dwellings, and what that means and entails" (Boccagni and Bonfanti, Introduction). This requires a particular focus on the everyday material, social and affective practices used by subjects in order to transform a place into a home (Hammond, 2004) also in the most inhospitable conditions (Giorgi & Fasulo, 2013; Neumark, 2013; Read, 2014). The significance and processuality of homemaking is even more evident when

A. Cancellieri (✉)
Università IUAV di Venezia, Venice, Italy
e-mail: acancellieri@iuav.it

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_2

studying populations in movement, such as migrants. By definition they have left their home of origin and therefore have fragmented 'housing careers' (Boccagni, 2017; Miranda-Nieto, 2020). Indeed, migrants are constantly engaged in homemaking (Taylor, 2013; Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017) because in their new settlement context they have to find a home from both a material (a roof over their heads) and a symbolic (a place that feels like home) point of view. And usually they struggle to have their own 'spatial needs' (Cancellieri & Ostanel, 2015) recognised, because they are usually considered 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). Therefore, for migrants the concept of home is an interweaving of a past space that has been left behind (that can also be, as in the case of many refugees, a 'place of pain'), an often highly precarious present space and a future space, which is generally aspired to (Kabachnik et al., 2010). There is therefore a constitutive tension between home and migration. However, we must stress that "there is no migrant home […] to be set against an equally essentialized native, autochthonous or long-resident home or house" (Boccagni, 2021: x).

The continuous work of *uprootings and regroundings* (Ahmed et al., 2003) does not only concern the migrant population. On the contrary, we could say that the experience of migrants is a powerful litmus test of a constant and growing dialectic between home (making) and mobility that increasingly also involves so-called non-migrants (Urry, 2007). The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the processes of homemaking in a multicultural condominium called Hotel House, located in the small Italian town of Porto Recanati. In the last twenty years, and despite continuous transformations, Hotel House has always had an average of 2000 residents, 90–95% of whom have been of migrant origin. The research work was carried out through a lengthy process of participant observation within both the domestic and communal spaces of the condominium. The case study of this multicultural high-rise is a clear example of how home-searching and the importance of having a part of the world in which what you do has some effect and some 'weight' (Jackson, 1995) is a basic trait of human nature. In Hotel House migrants produce home both by imbuing domestic spaces with their own memories and meaning and by creating public and collective spaces characterised by 'homely relations', whereby they produce material and symbolic resources.

After laying out the case study and the methodology used, this chapter looks at the ethical and practical implications of entering other people's homes. It firstly focuses its analysis on the field access and the researcher's positionality; it then emphasises how entering Hotel House allows us to explore the daily material and affective construction of multisensory atmospheres and landscapes in the domestic spaces. The next part analyses practices of sociability and mutual aid that take place in the domestic spaces of Hotel House, with particular focus on a number of Senegalese families. The ambivalence of these practices will be brought to light, showing that they often end up generating tight and restrictive community ties, bringing about a continual negotiation between the public, community and private realm. The article ends by analysing the multiscalarity of homemaking processes and their possible emergence outside of the boundaries of domestic spaces. Again, I focus on the ambivalences of these processes that vary strongly across different ethnicities and, above all, genders.

2.2 Case Study and Methodology

This paper analyses the everyday processes of homemaking in a high-rise former holiday resort, called Hotel House (Fig. 2.1), composed of 480 flats and situated in the small city of Porto Recanati (about 12,000 inhabitants), at the centre of the Italian Adriatic coast. Since 2005 the building has been largely inhabited by migrants (95% of the total inhabitants) coming from forty different countries (half of them from Senegal and Bangladesh and the rest mostly from Pakistan, Tunisia and Nigeria).

The Hotel House project was explicitly inspired by Le Corbusier's idea of '*l'unite'd'habitation'*, which is a self-sufficient private condominium[1] characterised by verticalism and repeated straight lines. Nowadays it is a very recognisable multicultural enclave in the southern suburbs, clearly separated from the rest of the town of Porto Recanati. At the end of the 1960s, the firm that built Hotel House went bankrupt and the constructor committed suicide. Thus the completed condominium was left without services (even without a car parking), and the majority of flats, even if sold, remained empty for many years. These flats have been periodically occupied

Fig. 2.1 The Hotel House condominium in Porto Recanati, Italy. (Author's picture)

[1] Hotel House is managed by a condominium administrator, who has changed several times. This is appointed by the assembly of the flat owners, as required by Italian law.

by a few hundred Italian holidaymakers and some very heterogeneous populations such as people who evacuated their homes after the Ancona earthquake in the 1970s or by aeronautic officers working in the nearby town of Potenza Picena in the 1980s. By the middle of the 1990s, when large numbers of migrants began to arrive in Italy, many of them saw the Hotel House as an ideal (because almost empty) place to settle. This new presence of migrant tenants was strongly opposed by the traditional Hotel House residents: the more the number of migrants increased, the more the Italians decided to sell their flats. This 'white flight' (Kruse, 2005) was encouraged by the interests of real estate agents, who could buy Hotel House flats at very low prices and then charge high rents for them. In a second phase, the relative ease of taking out a mortgage encouraged many migrants to buy their homes. In the middle of the 2000s, in only a few years, migrants had bought more than half of the condominium's flats.

The most substantial part of this research is based on lengthy ethnographic work conducted in Hotel House from October 2004 to July 2013. In the first period (2004–2006), I lived in Hotel House, first hosted by a Senegalese woman and then by a young Italian man who was working in the condominium as a lift technician. My intensive and continuous presence at Hotel House in this period allowed me to share the spaces and times of daily life with some of its residents, gradually widening my circle of trusted relationships. In the second long period I often went back for single days, routinely visiting friends in their domestic spaces and spending time in the collective spaces throughout the condominium. In this period I witnessed some major transformations, firstly the 2007–2008 economic crisis, which transformed the condominium from a place with a very low percentage of unemployed people to one with high economic precarity. I also discovered that some of the building's dynamics seemed to repeat themselves periodically. In particular, there were continual phases in which the building was strongly stigmatised and marginalised, resulting in the progressive worsening of people's life conditions which would then be responded to by a small group of residents who would self-organise to (re)build some collective services (e.g. from janitor service 24 h a day to a small library and a family doctor), and to demand more support from outside. Although these cycles of mobilisation have led to partial improvements, they have always been very fragile (as the institutional support they have received) and so have had a limited duration each time (Cancellieri, 2013; Camilli, 2018).

During this long and in-depth participant observation, I always informed people met in the fieldwork that I was doing research for the university in order to study everyday life in Hotel House. Generally speaking, at first I was mainly concerned with creating relationships of trust. Later on, I conducted and taped almost forty interviews in order to have residents' first hands accounts. In these cases I always asked the participants if I could record our conversations. All extended quotes in the article were taken from these taped interviews and all names are fictitious to preserve privacy and anonymity.

2.3 How I Entered Migrant Homes: Field Access and the Researcher's Positionality

Studying processes of homemaking by entering directly into other people's homes presupposes a long and complex process of trust building and the gradual negotiation of thresholds of domesticity and intimacy (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017). Indeed, people need to be put at ease to be convinced to allow a guest into their domestic backstage. Building and obtaining that trust in a context such as Hotel house could prove even more complicated, because the building and its residents are strongly stigmatized. Like so many places where socially disadvantaged populations due to national origin, ethnicity and/or socio-economic conditions are concentrated, Hotel House is in fact subject to powerful discursive practices of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007). In particular, local media have heavily contributed towards the representation of the town of Porto Recanati as a 'clean' fortress threatened by a high-rise that is increasingly perceived as a social 'rubbish dump' for unwanted 'alterity' (Cancellieri, 2013, 2017). Those "external" subjects that are generally interested in knowing more about these stigmatized places are law enforcement agencies engaged in social control or journalists who usually reproduce its stigmatisation. At the beginning of my research, I was lucky enough to be able to use the relationships of trust built by a fellow anthropologist (Giorgio Cingolani) who had just ended a period of participant observation in the condominium during which he developed a strong relationship with a group of Senegalese residents. Thanks to his intermediation a Senegalese woman (called Fatou) immediately accepted my request for a space and let me stay in her apartment, where she was living with two other Senegalese people, in exchange for a small payment. This flat soon became my permanent base in Hotel House, and remained so for the rest of the first period of my research. During my presence in the spaces of the condominium I had to engage in the daily confirmation and negotiation of the residents' trust, both with those who hosted me, and with those whom I gradually came to know in Hotel House's public spaces. In this daily work I discovered the fundamental importance of the 'desacralization' and de-institutionalisation of my role as a (white) university researcher. Indeed, often I felt that my position as 'white' and highly educated was experienced with a certain level of subjection, with people saying: "You understand a thousand times better than me" or "You know everything". To counter this reticence and to build trust I constantly tried to demonstrate my willingness to listen and to discover their lives and share their everyday experiences (e.g. eating together with a dozen Senegalese residents, helping and supporting all the residents in minor everyday tasks such as doing brief translations or giving them a lift somewhere). I also always tried not only to speak in Italian but in English and French, and gradually also to use the Wolof words I was learning (Wolof being the predominant language among the Senegalese residents). Last but not least I always tried to be the object of the gaze and questions of others, thus accepting that the depth of the observers' gaze would be turned onto me.

Entering migrants' homes presupposes trust but at the same time it is a practice that contributes to trust building because it allows the migrant to be transformed into the host, reversing the 'domopolitical' rhetoric of the migrant as a guest in 'our home'. Becoming guests within migrant's domestic spaces is therefore potentially also a device for the realignment and rebalancing of power, as it transforms the migrant into the host. Sometimes this had a negative effect on my research, most of all in the first period, as having adopted the respectful attitude of the host meant I could not ask too many questions. But at the same time, putting listening and recognition at the centre of my research brought to light migrants' desire for recognition, and to show and tell their daily lives. Often requests for greater 'invasion' ("Why don't you take photos?") prevailed over the fear of being subjected to the researcher's gaze. Ethnographic work, in particular that which takes place in the intimacy of domestic spaces, is thus transformed into the possibility offered to social actors of being listened to and legitimated. On this subject, Bertaux (1999: 76) invites researchers to

> get rid of your sense of guilt, because you are not robbers of lives but gatherers of testimonies […] giving 'social recognition' to the subject that they are perhaps not granted elsewhere. By interpolating them, you show that they know things that you don't know, even though you are an academic. Things that 'society' does not know. (Author's translation)

From being a place to be avoided because it was heavily stigmatised, Hotel House thus becomes an object of interest for universities, institutions which are still considered authoritative and prestigious. Research fields containing stigmatised subjects require special attention and a particular capacity to listen, but at the same time they are also inhabited by subjects who are more likely to be interested in being (finally) recognised and so willing to make the researcher's ethnographic experience strongly cooperative and collaborative (Colombo, 2001). This relative ease of accessibility into the spaces of everyday life of the Hotel House residents was strongly accentuated by my condition as a 'biographical stranger' (Lofland, 1998), that is, a person who was not involved in the relations of reciprocity and control of the building's everyday life. This freedom to easily cross some thresholds has also been experienced by other researchers in research contexts that have characteristics in common with Hotel House, for example, by Ferdinando Fava in his lengthy ethnography in the ZEN neighbourhood in Palermo. This specific condition of stranger was made very clear in the ethnographic note in which Fava discusses his access to the apartment of Vita, who is a resident at ZEN:

> I crossed, because she let me, the threshold of her house, transgressing, in front of the neighbours, the identitarian code that governs gender relations in the public space of the insula and that regulates the permissions and prohibitions regarding who can do what, such as entering into a family, for example, when the 'man of the house' is not there. My clear exteriority to the neighbourhood (I was not from Palermo, I was not a 'man from ZEN', and I was not a locatable resident in one of its insulae) authorised me to enter her domestic space; this however would not be sufficient in justifying our prolonged association. Vita would herself create the conditions for my frequent presence within her family, considering me (and acting accordingly) as neither male nor female, but as a person. Otherwise how would it be possible? I was not a member of her immediate nuclear family nor a relation in her extended family, not a boyfriend or a "friend of the family" who had become like one

> of the family, and neither was I renting one of their shared rooms. To be in this space, in which I was asked 'only' to listen, while never being asked personal favours, money, advice, solutions, personal opinions on the discourses and the events I was told, I had to be stripped of every connotation of social gender with which Vita constructed her daily actions, constituting myself only as "listener", the catalyser of a word that was otherwise unspeakable. (Fava, 2013: 44) (Author's translation).

The ambivalence between inhabiting the spaces of daily life in a particular context and at the same time remaining a stranger and not being radically involved in the personal and social events of that place is the structural condition of ethnographers. They are suspended between observation and participation, constantly searching for the correct level of involvement and the right distance to take. In my case, this ambivalence was reinforced by the fact that I constantly tried not to bind myself to specific social groups, but to systematically traverse the social boundaries of the condominium, in terms of gender, age and cultural origins.

2.4 Material, Spatial and Affective Everyday Homemaking

Entering Hotel house, and, in particular, its apartments, allowed me to clearly see how in some cases migrants had reterritorialized themselves by breathing new life into the condominium's domestic spaces and decorating them with 'biographical objects' to recreate the sensorial landscapes of their country of origin: in many of Hotel House's flats, satellite dishes emitted familiar sounds and languages, the incessant import–export trade filled the air with the smells, scents and flavours of their home countries, and the pictures and videos allowed the residents to see people and places to which they were more attached. An example is given by the photos on the wall of many of the flats of Senegalese people in Hotel House, of the prophet Ahmadou Bamba (also known as Serign Touba, founder of Mouridism, the Islamic religious brotherhood to which many of the Senegalese residents of Hotel House belong) (Figs. 2.2 and 2.3). As Fatou clearly told me:

> For Mouridism, photos of Ahmadou Bamba on the walls show who you are. Everyone has them. When you enter a house and you see them you know who he is. There's no need to ask anything. (Fatou, 41 years old, Senegalese woman, Hotel House resident)

The following ethnographic note expresses the processes of homemaking that can be seen "behind the closed doors of domestic homes" (Miller, 2001: 1) in the condominium (cf. Boccagni, Chap. 7):

> I left the dark and grey corridor to enter Mamadou and Fatou's flat. All at once I am immersed in a dense and multisensory atmosphere: tangs coming from the kitchen, passionate mbalax music on the Senegalese satellite channels, Islamic prayers in the background coming from Malick's room. On the walls you can see a lot of photographs of relatives and religious leaders. The big images of Amadou Bamba, the founding prophet of the main Senegalese brotherhood, stand out. When the delicious food prepared by Fatou arrives, tastes, smells, colours and sounds are combined together to give rise to a total 'synaesthesia'! I like to move quickly from one apartment to another, and, by simply crossing a short corridor, trespass boundaries between different 'worlds'. I therefore find an excuse not to

Fig. 2.2 Living room of a Senegalese family inside Hotel House. (Picture by Francesca Pieroni)

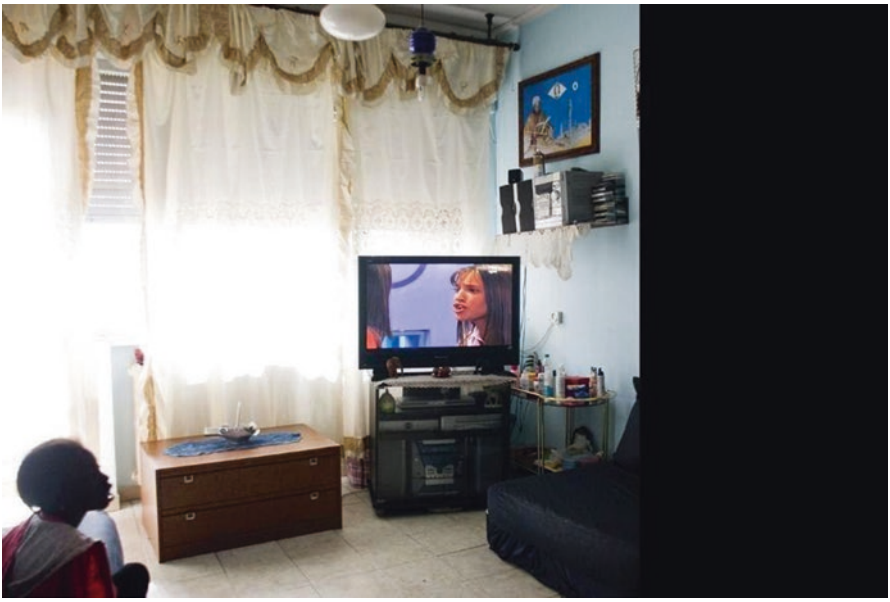

Fig. 2.3 The "landscape" of the living room of another Senegalese family. (Picture by Francesca Pieroni)

> stop for lunch and I leave Fatou's flat. A few steps down the hall and I knock on the door of Abbas' flat. He opens it and immediately I hear the music and smell the Indian chapatis that are cooking. The room is full of his paintings: many are portraits, many others are of Pakistani or Italian landscapes. Abbas is a talented painter and complements his salary as a kitchen assistant in a restaurant by selling paintings. You can see this is a room of first generation immigrants without a family taking care of the house. There is a certain disorder but nevertheless the atmosphere that is recreated within the domestic space is strongly recognisable. The music of Bollywood movies mixed with the smells, colours and everyday practices create a sensory landscape that reminds me of Pakistan. I don't stay for long because I want to go to greet Nader, who by this time should be back from work. I take the elevator and in no time at all I am at the front door of his house. As soon as he opens it, I do not even have time to say hello before I'm listening to the Arabic language of Tunisian TV channels and smelling the couscous that is almost ready. On the walls and shelves there are the photos and the objects that tell Nader's stories, his main relationships and his need to feel at home. (Ethnographic diary, 7 March 2006)

This does not mean that all the flats inhabited by migrants living in Hotel House are always characterised by these explicit cultural and biographical traces. On the contrary, there are a number of flats in which the inhabitants do not seem to have made any particular symbolic investment. In some cases, these are the flats hosting people in transit or who are precarious. In other cases, it is probably a 'volitional mode of non-home' (Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022), that is, the refusal to attach a sense of home to an (unsatisfactory) dwelling place. For, when it is argued that the process of home-making is an open-ended struggle (Tucker, 1994), that "may also result in the negation of home itself" (Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022: 530).

2.5 Between Private, Community and Public: The Ambivalence of Homemaking Practices

Entering the homes (of migrants) also means analysing, from a privileged position, the continual negotiation between the public, community and private realms (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017). Indeed, the domestic spaces at Hotel House are not only spaces of family relations but are spaces of a series of fundamental collective and semi-public relations and rituals. If we take the example of the apartments in which some Senegalese people live, which I was able to observe with more continuity, we could say that they are inserted in very relevant and continually (re)produced social, economic and cultural practices. These Senegalese people spend a large part of their spare time in Hotel House's flats. They gather with relatives and friends to chat for hours on end, drinking mint tea or a *toufam* (a mix of yoghurt and sugared water), braiding hair, watching new Senegalese films, or videos of weddings, baptisms or other feasts in Senegal and they prepare collective meals in which individuals sit together in a circle around a big plate, generally of rice. These Senegalese people living in Hotel House have not only reorganised and appropriated their home interiors, marking them with elements of their personal and collective identities, they have also transformed their flats into 'parochial spaces' for social and

community practices (Lofland, 1998). Their daily behaviours often seem reminiscent of Simmel's (1949) concept of 'sociability', that is the art of talking for the pleasure of staying together. These movements happen in a sort of small 'circulatory territory' (Tarrius, 2010) in which the nodes are the different flats. The doors in this path are usually open, as a Senegalese woman confirmed:

> We don't have cooking times like the Italians, who have breakfast, lunch and dinner, no. Someone is always coming to visit. It could be that the person who visits is tired and sleeps here. I could go to their house. In any event, this is how it's done, there's no difference. One person was on furlough and he was here for three months. He was in Loreto amongst the Italians, he left his house and came here. Or, as for the computer, I don't know how to use it, there is no network, I go to someone else's place. (Binda, 29, Senegalese woman, Hotel House resident)

These social and homemaking practices also have an ambivalent 'nature'. Some Senegalese residents have highlighted that using domestic spaces in this way increases tension between community and individual needs:

> We do the same as in Africa. The room's door is always open. It's only closed before sleeping. But it began to bother me. When I go to Africa they say to me that I have become white! Did you see Aminata this morning? She came in on the phone, without greeting anyone, and she went to the bathroom. It could seem funny to you but if she was European, she wouldn't have done that. It's a civilisation question, because maybe I was doing something private! (Fatou, 41, Senegalese woman, Hotel House resident)

This social density can favour strong forms of social control, as witnessed by Modou, a Senegalese man who confessed feeling restricted by this network: *Staying here is like living in Senegal. It's even difficult to learn the Italian language!* (Modou, 29, Senegalese man, Hotel House resident). Thus, some young people leave Hotel House just to escape from these bonding communitarian ties and this social control: *Why did I leave Hotel House? Because there are too many people that don't mind their own business!* (Ndiaga, 23, Senegalese man, Hotel House ex-resident). The risk of this homemaking process is to discourage innovative behaviours and to favour conservative practices and representations. This dynamic risks weakening the role played by the Hotel House as a space for homemaking and capability and even risks creating a kind of double closure. In fact, as well as these forms of control from the inside, as outlined above, Hotel House's residents find the 'outside' an alienating environment in which their dignity is usually denied and their voices and possibilities of making and taking place are largely restricted (Phillips, 2008). The ambivalence of the conditions of the residents of Hotel House is therefore very significant: on the one hand the building allows for continuous homemaking processes; and, on the other, it facilitates forms of control from both inside and outside. As we will see in the next paragraph, if we widen our gaze beyond the domestic spaces of the condominium, this ambivalence becomes even stronger.

2.6 The Multiscalarity of Homemaking

Entering Hotel House also means discovering the multiscalarity of the practices of homemaking that can emerge outside of the boundaries of domestic spaces (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020; Brun, 2020). As Kusenbach emphasises (2020: 31), "home is not located *in* a building or other physical place yet refers to particular emotional bonds and practices that connect people *with* certain places". At Hotel House homemaking is often extended to the entire condominium, that is a sort of 'condominium-refuge'. Hotel House in fact represents the possibility for migrants to have a territory in which they can construct communitarian and identitarian places, in which to generate material and symbolic resources. One example is the network of mutual aid that holds together many of the Senegalese people. This becomes particularly evident during the summer, when some of them work all day on the beach as street vendors. In this period some of the Senegalese women cook for hours every day to prepare 40–50 meals that are taken to and distributed at three or four points along the coast where small groups of street vendors meet. A clear confirmation of the Hotel House's social networks can also be heard in the words of a Tunisian resident:

> Here for some things it's much better. Here even if you leave a woman at home in the evening, or you have a sick child, you go down to the reception and you call an ambulance; whereas if you go to Porto Recanati no one knows you, and they definitely won't help you! Here wherever you go, you go, even if someone doesn't know you it's enough that you go and knock at their door, you say that you have a sick person at home… here people help each other… yes, yes, there are people who were really surprised when they came here and they saw how people help each other even if they don't know each other… even if they're not of the same race, but they help each other… that is also a positive thing. (Taoufik, 40, Tunisian, resident)

Homemaking practices in the Hotel House involve public and collective spaces at the ground floor of the big condominium, in particular in the four small squares created by the intersection of the two rectangular boxes that constitute the building. This area was originally designed for hosting many small shops. However, until the end of the 1990s, it was nearly empty with only a pizzeria, a hairdresser and a supermarket that were all managed by Italian people. In 2003, it was closed to vehicular traffic and filled with benches, which resulted in the opening of small enterprises. In a few years, the ground floor was transformed into a lively commercial area with a dozen small shops which have changed frequently over the years (e.g. minimarkets, phone centres, a *halal* butchers and barber's shops). The shops, managed by people from many different countries (almost all men), are not only commercial spaces but have also become social spaces for meeting people, chatting and getting information.

The most important space situated in the ground floor is the so-called mosque, created in 2003 by the transformation of three different small shops into an Islamic prayer room. Considering that the large majority (approximately 80%) of the residents practice the Islamic faith, the condominium's mosque has become a fundamental place (also for many Muslims living nearby), to share a religious identity and to confront their stigmatisation as a result of the world's growing Islamophobia

(for the Italian situation, see Saint-Blancat & Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005). The meaningful role played by the mosque is clearly explained by Saber, the condominium's handyman:

> It's beautiful in the Mosque; we are like a family. I don't say this because we are Muslims, but we are all equal, all workers, all far from our country. Otherwise it's home and work, home and work. It would be better to dig a grave and throw yourself inside! (Saber, 42, Hotel House handyman and resident)

The cumulative experience of a place in which you can find physical and symbolic resources can create a relationship with it, resulting in a sense of continuity and order (De Martino, 1977). Thanks to a job market with low unemployment and the wide availability of bank loans, a large majority of migrants bought the flats they lived in. Residential stability and flat ownership contributed to material and symbolic homemaking (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Sampson et al., 2002). Indeed, the increasing territorial settlement of migrant families seemed to mean that they started taking more responsibility for their homes, as Saber, a young father of two children, attested:

> You become more serious when you have a family. Before marrying, when you were alone, nothing mattered. With a family you care, because you think about your children's future. I don't think about me, I don't care, I don't need to protect myself, I am a warrior. But now I have to protect my children, for their future. (Saber, 42, Tunisian man, Hotel House handyman and resident)

For many residents the high-rise has become a part of their personal history, creating a cognitive, physical and affective connection. There is a sort of biographical relationship with the condominium as we can see from Rasul's words:

> I have been here since 1992. I was one of the youngest in 1992. Hotel House was quiet, everything worked, and there was a porter 24 hours a day. Now we have created a committee made up of Senegalese, Bangladeshi and Pakistani people: everybody is involved. We formed a group to control the ground floor and the entire condominium. We started to talk with the municipality. We want to totally change Hotel House. We will succeed. If I listen to bullshit related to the condominium I get angry. I have been here almost twenty years and I will not allow anybody to ruin it: twenty years is a history! (Rasul, 29, Senegalese man, Hotel House resident)

This process largely differentiates Hotel House from other similar places in Italy, which are mostly places in which residents are in a 'transitory' space-time and where there are poor homemaking processes (Zorbaugh, 1929; Vianello, 2006). This functions as a temporary refuge required in particularly difficult situations is also a fundamental function of Hotel House, but during my time on the field it played a limited role.

The capacity of places like Hotel House to give rise to homemaking does not apply only to migrants. Italians who live in the condominium provided various testimonies that recognised the importance of this place for the networks of solidarity and mutual aid that have been generated there over time:

> I am happier now that five years have passed from when I bought it than I was before I arrived. Because the years pass and I see the use of it more. If I had been alone in a house I

> would have always been anxious, afraid of old age…[…] here you never feel alone, here you are not isolated as perhaps you could be living in a beautiful villa in an isolated place. (Mario, 70, Italian man, Hotel House resident)

A sign of these new intercultural identifications based on the same living place is in the creation of a residents' committee composed of residents coming from different countries, with the aim of protecting the condominium against institutional abandonment and stigmatisation. This process is emphasised well by Antonio, a Hotel House resident for more than thirty years:

> For too many years Hotel House was not considered a place to be defended, that's the truth. Maybe the authorities thought that considering that there were some criminals, it would be better to attract others to this place. But now we are paying for that, because some of them have established their presence and it's not easy to uproot them. Now we have to be determined, because otherwise it would be like shouting but not solving the problems. We cannot do a lot of things, but we have to speak up about that. The authorities have to listen to our voice. (Antonio, 65, Italian man, Hotel House resident)

As mentioned above, I often came across these intercultural mobilisations during my time in the field, confirming that places like Hotel House, far from being immutable territories of invariable marginality, are instead processual fields rich with endogenous potentialities and resources that intertwine and daily come into confrontation with external resources and constraints.

2.7 The Reproduction of Gender Boundaries as the Dark Side of *Home*

The multiscalar homemaking experiences of Hotel House's residents vary strongly across different ages, ethnicities and, above all, genders. Indeed, the ground floor is largely a space of sociability for men. For a significant percentage of women they are sites of exclusion rather than places of symbolic and material resources (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). The number of women and girls living in Hotel House is increasing, but they are still largely a minority. Women's presence in the collective spaces on the ground floor is even more limited, and the majority of them do not have their own spaces other than their flats. The rich homemaking practices analyzed above are largely men's practices. Even if the situation is very different for some Senegalese and Nigerian women who are more present in the condominium's public spaces, we could say that women's local condition reveals the 'dark side' of these homemaking practices. For example, these are the words of two male residents in Hotel House:

> A woman… doesn't go into a bar where there is alcohol, the normal North African woman doesn't go into a bar where there is alcohol. For example, in Tunisia a woman absolutely doesn't go into bars where there is alcohol, neither with or without her husband. (Hamed, 28, Tunisian man, Hotel House resident)

> Most of the women from Bangladesh are rarely seen, you almost never see them, actually you don't even know if they exist! Also those from Pakistan, some people you see one day

> and then you see them again a month later. Some you see only when they are taking their child out. (Michele, 44, Italian man, Hotel House porter and resident)

Most of the women who live in Hotel House spend their days segregated in houses taking care of the housework and the children. Many of them never go out alone and are always accompanied by their husband or one or more other women, generally from the same nationality. We are faced with the "traditional" double spatial partition between private- domestic/female spaces and public-work/male spaces (Rose, 1993; Massey 1994; Strüver, 2004). Therefore, unlike what happens in many of the apartments occupied by Senegalese people that were analysed above, in lots of other cases domestic spaces are a sort of more or less gilded "cage" that is protected from the outside: places that are difficult to get out of and which it is not easy to enter into. This is evidenced in the testimony of Saber:

> At a Bangladeshi person's home, if I have to go in to fix a leak or for another job, if there is only a woman at home she won't let me in! Her husband has to be there. Or she is authorised by her husband who says: "At a certain time this guy is coming, so open the door!". Even in this case she opens the door but then runs away immediately and shuts herself in her room. You can't even ask: "Madam, what is this? What do I have to do?" Nothing! Bangladeshi women just run away! (Saber, 42, Tunisian man, Hotel House handyman and resident)

Living in a stigmatised and marginalised context, as outlined above, poses an even greater risk of a double closure for the women in Hotel House. They experience further stigmatization by both race and gender, which creates stronger geometries of oppression in their everyday life (Valentine, 2007). This has been effectively highlighted under the rubric of intersectionality, to describe the interconnections and interdependence between race and other categories (Crenshaw, 1993; Mason, 2013). As Valentine argues (2007: 19), intersectionality is a situated accomplishment: "in particular spaces there are dominant spatial orderings that produce moments of exclusion for particular social groups". This is manifested for instance in the difficulty of reaching the centre not only due to the lack of a pedestrian walkway, but also because many women from the condominium that walk there are considered by those from Porto Recanati as potential prostitutes, as explained by Antonio:

> Hotel House's women go to Porto Recanati to learn the language, but on the way there they sometimes meet people that come here hoping to have sex. And women are angry about it! Probably it was even true that there were sex workers before and that some people from the city were used to coming here to find someone. But when they look at these people who are totally different types of people, also in traditional dress, they should be able to see the difference! (Antonio, 65, Italian man, Hotel House resident)

This account clearly shows how the relation with the outside plays a fundamental role in structuring a spatial ordering that reinforces the entrapment of some of the women within the domestic spaces of the condominium.

2.8 Conclusion

This study, which began from the interior spaces of the multi-ethnic condominium of Hotel House, allowed for the emergence of the whole heuristic power of focusing on the processes of homemaking and, in particular, of entering into the domestic spaces of migrants as a research tool. Entering migrants' homes entails highly significant ethical negotiations involving trust-building, reciprocal gazes and recognition mechanisms. These processes open up interesting reflections on both field access and the researcher's positionality, which call for ever greater research efforts.

Entering domestic spaces means radicalising the ethnographic intuition of doing research by sharing the spaces of the everyday lives of the subjects being studied, i.e. from within and from below. Primarily it gives centrality to material domestic cultures, that is, to the 'traces' left in domestic spaces (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). The migrants at Hotel House have created familiar multi-sensory atmospheres and landscapes to support a sense of cultural continuity between pre-migratory and post-migratory life. The research has cast light on the variety and creativity with which people recreate home and reconstruct community, intimacy and familiarity. It could be said that reflections about home lie at the centre of the emotional and affective turn that has characterised the humanities and social sciences since the mid-1990s (Thrift, 2004; Davidson et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Entering migrants' homes means having a privileged point of view on the daily tension between structure and agency. Indeed, homemaking is not a subjective process but is powerfully intersubjective, political and social. This is even more the case for migrant populations who suffer heavy discrimination in their access to housing because they are often indiscriminately considered undesirable tenants (Dion, 2001; Van der Bracht et al., 2015) and therefore often have to "cope with quickly shifting and often unfamiliar environments" (Boccagni et al., 2020: 137). Entering their homes makes the vulnerability and harsh living conditions of migrants visible, but at the same time prevents us from forcing or locking them into a victim status. At Hotel House we found an extremely rich and daily construction of spaces of sociality, identity and mutual aid: a wealth of homemaking practices that bring *publicness* into domestic spaces and *home* into the traditionally public spaces of the condominium (such as those on the ground floor). Homemaking turned out to be a multiscalar process that can "move 'up' (from a dwelling to a street, a neighbourhood, a city, a nation) or 'down' (to a room, a bed place, or maybe just one's body)" (Boccagni et al., 2020: 139). The multiscalarity of homemaking, and in particular the case study of Hotel House, also reveals that the process of homemaking can produce new intercultural identifications based on the same living place. The constitution of the committee was an interesting dynamic which demonstrated that being subjected to the same exclusion processes can create a common living experience that can be used to rally people together in a collective 'homely' identification and mobilisation (Baumann, 1996). This reveals 'the threshold-crossing capacity of home to extend and connect people and places' (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011: 518). Homemaking practices can evidently play a role in empowering and connecting different subjectivities. Through this

struggle over space, the local residents have tried to 'be subjects not objects' and to defend a place where they can restore the 'dignity denied [to them] on the outside in the public world' (Hooks, 1981: 42). Spivak (1988) talked of 'strategic essentialism': although always at risk, home can be a place through which to connect people and try to rebuild power.

Last but not least, entering migrants' homes allows us to better see the dark sides of homemaking processes. Spaces of sociality are also spaces of tight and restrictive community ties, in particular for a significant portion of the women in Hotel House who experience the domestic spaces of Hotel House as a "cage" protected from the outside world. The process of self-exclusion and enclavism is strongly reinforced if the 'outside' is an alienating environment in which their voices and the possibility of making and taking place are largely restricted (Phillips, 2008; Cancellieri, 2013, 2017). There is a risk of a double closure: from inside and from outside. This shows the interconnection between instances of homemaking and structural vulnerability and the necessity of analysing the construction of 'home' in relation to the outside. Entering (migrants') homes appears therefore as a powerful research tool that allows us to analyse this plural and conflictual field of action from a privileged position, as invisible and taken for granted as it is constitutive of ordinary existence (Boccagni and Bonfanti, Chap. 1).

References

Ahmed, S., Castañeda, C., Fortier, A. M., & Sheller, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Uprootings/regroundings: Questions of home and migration*. Berg.

Baumann, G. (1996). *Contesting culture: Discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London*. UP.

Bertaux, D. (1999). *Racconti di vita. La prospettiva etnosociologica*. Angeli.

Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006). *Home*. Routledge.

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home*. Palgrave.

Boccagni, P. (2021). Mainstreaming the study of home and migration. In A. Miranda-Nieto et al. (Eds.), *Ethnographies of home and mobility in Europe*. Routledge.

Boccagni, P., & Brighenti, A. M. (2017). Immigrants and home in the making. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*(1), 1–11.

Boccagni, P., & Kusenbach, M. (2020). For a comparative sociology of home. *Current Sociology, 68*(5), 595–606.

Boccagni, P., & Miranda-Nieto, A. (2022). Home in question. Uncovering meanings, desires and dilemmas of non-home. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 25*(2), 515–532.

Boccagni, P., Pérez Murcia, L. E., & Belloni, M. (2020). *Thinking home on the move: A conversation across disciplines*. Emerald.

Brooks-Gunn, J., Duncan, G., & Aber, J. L. (Eds.). (1997). *Neighborhood poverty: Context and consequences for children* (Vol. 1). Russell Sage.

Brun, C. (2020). Home as a multiscalar concept. In P. Boccagni et al. (Eds.), *Thinking home on the move*. Emerald.

Camilli, A. (2018). Dentro l'Hotel house, il ghetto verticale di Porto Recanati. *Internazionale*, 3 maggio.

Cancellieri, A. (2013). *Hotel House. Etnografia di un condominio multietnico*. Professional Dreamers.

Cancellieri, A. (2017). Towards a progressive homemaking: The ambivalence of migrants' experience in a multicultural condominium. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*(1), 49–61.
Cancellieri, A., & Ostanel, E. (2015). The struggle for public space. *City, 19*(4), 499–509.
Colombo, E. (2001). Etnografia dei mondi contemporanei. Limiti e potenzialità del metodo etnografico nell'analisi della complessità. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia, XLII, 42*(2), 205–230.
Crenshaw, K. W. (1993). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. In M. Albertson Fineman & R. Mykitiuk (Eds.), *The public nature of private violence*. Routledge.
Cresswell, T. (1996). *In place/out of place: Geography, ideology and transgression*. University of Minnesota Press.
Davidson, J., Bondi, L., & Smith, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Emotional geographies*. Ashgate.
De Martino, E. (1977). *La fine del mondo*. Einaudi.
Dion, K. L. (2001). Immigrants' perceptions of housing discrimination in Toronto: The housing new Canadians project. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(3), 523–539.
Dupuis, A., & Thorns, D. (1998). Home ownership and the search for ontological security. *The Sociological Review, 46*(1), 24–47.
Duyvendak, J. W. (2011). *The politics of home*. Palgrave.
Fava, F. (2013). Chi sono per i miei interlocutori? L'antropologo, il campo e i legami emergenti. *Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo on line, 15*(2), 43–57.
Giorgi, S., & Fasulo, A. (2013). Transformative homes: Squatting and furnishing as sociocultural projects. *Home Cultures, 10*(2), 111–133.
Hammond, L. (2004). *This place will become home: Refugee repatriation to Ethiopia*. Cornell UP.
Hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman?* South End Press.
Jackson, M. (1995). *At home in the world*. Harper Perennial.
Kabachnik, P., Regulska, J., & Mitchneck, B. (2010). Where and when is home? The double displacement of Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 23*, 315–336.
Kruse, K. M. (2005). *White flight: Atlanta and the making of modern conservatism*. Princeton University Press.
Kusenbach, M. (2020). Home as emotions, identities and relationships. A symbolic interactionist view. In P. Boccagni et al. (Eds.), *Thinking home on the move*. Emerald.
Lofland, L. (1998). *The public realm. Exploring the city's quintessential social theory*. Aldine Transactions.
Mason, K. (2013). Social stratification and the body: Gender, race, and class. *Sociology Compass, 7*(8), 686–698.
Massey, D. B. (1994). *Space, place, and gender*. University of Minnesota.
Miller, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Home possessions: Material culture behind closed doors*. Berg.
Miller, D. (2020). Home as an essential domain, 'offline' and 'online'. In P. Boccagni et al. (Eds.), *Thinking home on the move*. Emerald.
Miranda-Nieto, A. (2020). Temporalities. In A. Miranda-Nieto, A. Massa, & S. Bonfanti (Eds.), *Ethnographies of home and mobility in Europe*. Routledge.
Neumark, D. (2013). Drawn to beauty: The practice of house-beautification as homemaking among the forcibly displaced. *Housing, Theory and Society, 30*(3), 237–261.
Nowicka, M. (2006). Mobility, space and social structuration in the second modernity and beyond. *Mobilities, 1*(3), 411–435.
Phillips, D. (2008). The problem with segregation: Exploring the racialisation of space in Northern Pennine towns. In C. Dwyer & C. Bressey (Eds.), *New geographies of race and racism*. Ashgate.
Ralph, D., & Staeheli, L. A. (2011). Home and migration: Mobilities, belongings and identities. *Geography Compass, 5*, 517–530.
Read, C. J. (2014). Un-settlement: Demolition, home remaking, and the everyday politics of citizenship in a low-income Delhi neighborhood. *Home Cultures, 11*(2), 197–218.
Rose, G. (1993). *Feminism and geography*. Polity.

Saint-Blancat, C., & Schmidt di Friedberg, O. (2005). Why are mosques a problem? Local politics and fear of Islam in Northern Italy. *Journal of Ethnic and Migrations Studies, 31*(6), 1083–1104.
Sampson, R. J., Morenoff, J. D., & Gannon-Rowley, T. (2002). Assessing neighbourhood effects: Social processes and new directions in research. *Annual Review of Sociology, 28*, 443–478.
Simmel, G. (1949). The sociology of sociability. *American Journal of Sociology, 3*, 254–261.
Smith, M., Davidson, J., Cameron, L., & Bondi, L. (2009). *Emotion. Place and culture*. Ashgate.
Spivak, G. (1988). Subaltern studies: Deconstructing historiography. In G. Spivak (Ed.), *Other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*. Routledge.
Strüver, A. (2004). Boundaries under construction: Linking body politics to space. *Espace, Populations, Sociétés, 9*(1), 121–130.
Tarrius, A. (2010). "Circulatory territories" and the urban stages of transmigrants. *Regards croises sur l'economie, 8*(2), 63–70.
Taylor, H. (2013). Refugees, the state and the concept of home. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 32*, 130–152.
Thrift, N. (2004). Intensities of feeling: Towards a spatial politics of affect. *Geografiska Annaler, 86*, 57–78.
Tolia-Kelly, D. P. (2004). Materializing post-colonial geographies: Examining the textural landscapes of migration in the South Asian home. *Geoforum, 35*(6), 675–688.
Tucker, A. (1994). In search of home. *Journal of Applied Philosophy, 11*(2), 181–187.
Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Polity.
Valentine, G. (2007). Theorizing and researching intersectionality: A challenge for feminist geography. *The Professional Geographer, 59*(1), 10–21.
Van der Bracht, K., Coenen, A., & Van de Putte, B. (2015). The not-in-my-property syndrome: The occurrence of ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market in Belgium. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 41*(1), 158–175.
Vianello, F. (Ed.). (2006). *Ai margini della città. Forme del controllo e risorse sociali nel nuovo ghetto*. Carocci.
Wacquant, L. (2007). Territorial stigmatization in the age of advanced marginality. *Thesis Eleven, 91*, 66–77.
Walters, W. (2004). Secure borders, safe haven, domopolitics. *Citizenship Studies, 8*(3), 237–260.
Zorbaugh, H. W. (1929). *The gold coast and the slum: A sociological study of Chicago's near north side*. University of Chicago.

Chapter 3
The Next-Door Migrant: Autoethnography of Everyday Home Encounters across Difference

Francesco Vietti

The courtyard is slowly filling up. The condominium administrator is sitting behind a stall brought in for the occasion. We residents arrange ourselves in front of it: some are standing, and some have come down from their flats carrying a chair or a stool. For six years I have been taking part in this biannual ritual by voting, trying to assert my rights, getting exasperated, learning to extricate myself from ordinary and extraordinary expenses, arrears and so on. Often the issues are boring and prosaic, but nevertheless, if observed as a whole, they circumscribe the negotiations necessary for the fundamental practice of coexistence. We discuss what makes it difficult to live together and what needs to be done to live better under one roof.

Tonight, on the agenda there is a particularly important topic for our condominium: ways to access the Peace Mosque, that is, the Islamic prayer room located on the ground floor of the building which one can only enter by crossing the courtyard of the building. For years the matter has been handled informally: the entrance door had been in bad condition for some time, as was the rest of the condominium, and had therefore always remained open at any time of the day or night, providing an easy way to enter and exit. Now, however, a major renovation of the building, and the related investment of money from old owners, along with the entry of many new residents, seem to have changed the situation. As always, the meeting will go on for hours. It is now dark when Antonio,[1] my 70-year-old neighbour, born in Apulia but residing here in Turin since adolescence, says, looking around us: 'You know, Francesco, I still remember when in this courtyard all of us children went down to

[1] Throughout the chapter, the names and some details of the biographies of my interlocutors have been changed and pseudonyms are used to protect their right to privacy. I take this opportunity to thank my coresidents and the administration of the condominium for their research collaboration.

F. Vietti (✉)
Università di Torino, Torino, Italy
e-mail: francesco.vietti@unito.it

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_3

celebrate birthdays. There were also benches to sit on; we'd be here chatting all evening. It would be nice if it went back to being like that, if instead of arguing about how to divide this space, we could think about how to use it together' (Fieldnotes, June 2015).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the various dimensions of living together and conviviality practices as crucial elements of the home-making processes involving migrant people. The case study I analyse here concerns a condominium in the city of Turin, Italy, characterised by the stratified social uses that residents make of the building's large courtyard: a "contact zone" that connects the house and the city, the public and the domestic spheres. The approach I adopt is autoethnographic, since it is the building in which I myself have lived for many years. The contribution is therefore based on the network of relationships I have built up over time with my neighbours and is prompted by a reflection on the limits and opportunities associated with my positioning. The aim of the chapter is not only analytical, but also applicative, as I intend to show and discuss the ways in which it is possible to strengthen solidarity and mutual collaboration between residents, with particular reference to the relationships between different generations of internal and international migrants.

The ethnographic sketch that I have presented as a prologue recalls the initial moment of a path of reflection on my 10-year experience of life in an apartment building in Porta Palazzo, a district of the city of Turin, Italy, characterised by a long and stratified history of internal and international migrations (Black, 2012). It is a large six-storey building with around 100 apartments. Built in the second half of the nineteenth century, in its century and a half of life the building became the home of several generations of immigrants: first from the Piedmont countryside and mountains; then from the regions of north-east and southern Italy; and finally, starting from the 1990s, from a multiplicity of countries all over Europe and the world. At the beginning of the 2000s, the building boasted a double record in the context of Turin: it had become the most overcrowded in the city (with a density of 1026 inhabitants per hectare, four times higher than the surrounding neighbourhood, in turn the densest in Turin) and the most 'multi-ethnic', with over 75% of residents registered as 'non-Italian citizens' (ATC, 2004). The condominium is an empirical space of observation that mirrors, and exaggerates to some extent, the socio-cultural features of the surrounding neighbourhood. Porta Palazzo and its large open-air market have been described as a context where people "practice differences", experiencing the "everyday multiculturalism" produced by situated interactions, conflicts, and exchanges (Semi et al., 2009; Semi, 2008). This part of the city appears to be 'rooted in mobility' (Clifford, 1997). Various flows of people and goods have constituted its peculiar imagery of a borderland: the gateway to the city, a central yet already peripheral area, a symbol of Turin's identity but at the same time a segregated, marginal space full of inequalities. Porta Palazzo is an "ethnoscape" of

globalisation (Appadurai, 1996), where internal and international migrations intersect a quite recent increase in tourism, attracted by its peculiar exotic atmosphere, at once familiar and alien (Vietti, 2019).

The history of this condominium, like that of many other buildings in Porta Palazzo and similar neighbourhoods in other urban contexts, recalls the need to consider the homemaking process as a long-term dynamic, involving several generations of migrants and various national, international and transnational mobilities (Dolkart, 2006). According to Janet Carsten's acute observation, houses can 'be analysed as "biographical objects" (…) in the sense that houses have biographies that are inextricably entwined with those of their inhabitants' (Carsten, 2018: 107). These are biographies that can be examined by 'thinking through the houses' about the different dimensions of social life in which individual biographical events, the dynamics of family relationships and the broader economic and political contexts at the local and general level are intertwined (Mathews, 2011).

The reciprocity and mutuality of the relationship between the biography of the building and those of its inhabitants (Martínez, 2018: 124) also applies to the writer. Autoethnography is a research method that entails analytical virtues, but also clear limitations (Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011). Here, I would like to briefly highlight two reasons that prompted me to adopt this particular approach and to reflect on the connection between my personal life and my scholarly interests and activities. The first aspect concerns the possibility which autoethnography offers in terms of access to the dimension of everyday interactions. As pointed out by Semi and colleagues, "the everyday dimension is relevant […] because it is defined by relations, as a 'place', that is, as a set of ordinary, banal, constitutive, incorporated practices" (Semi et al., 2009: 69). It is precisely this flow of daily practices that I have been experiencing since I moved into the Porta Palazzo condominium in 2009. My family certainly belongs to the group of 'pioneers' of the gentrification taking place in this part of the city. The reasons that led us to choose to live here correspond perfectly to the list of 'push factors' that Schlichtman and Patch (2014: 1493) include in their 'diagnostic tool' to identify the 'gentrifiers': the low cost of housing, the aesthetic appreciation of the neighbourhood atmosphere and a fascination for its history, interest in social relations and interaction with people of different backgrounds and social classes, and flexibility about accepting annoyances and inconveniences related to the area (petty crime, dirt). I moved to the condominium during my doctorate in 'Migration and intercultural processes', and daily life in this housing context shared with fellow citizens of about 20 different nationalities accompanied all my subsequent studies about migration and urban transformation. However, for many years I did not think of the condominium as a research object. Certainly, impromptu meetings on the stairs and along its landings, time spent together with the neighbours, the relationships of friendship and trust that I was able to establish with some of them, and participation in some important moments of collective life such as condominium meetings made it possible for me to hear stories, collect anecdotes and physically enter the lives and homes of several other residents in the building. At the same time, many of my neighbours, both migrants and non-migrants, have entered my apartment frequently during this decade, dined with me

and my family, helped me make repairs or lent me various items. This is the point where the second valuable feature of autoethnography comes in: the openness towards collaborative and participatory dimensions. As pointed out by Ellis and colleagues, co-constructed narratives illustrate the meanings of relational experiences and

> use the personal experience of researchers-in-collaboration to illustrate how a community manifests particular social/cultural issues. Community autoethnographies thus not only facilitate "community-building" research practices but also make opportunities for "cultural and social intervention" possible. (Ellis et al., 2011: 279)

In my own case, moments of conviviality with my neighbours (Hemer et al., 2020; Neal et al., 2019; Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014; Wise, 2009; Wise & Noble, 2016) and the experience of life in common have become, starting from 2018, the basis for a participatory research project on the history of the building that I conducted together with other residents. In order to share the stories we collected, we decided to organise a "house party" involving all of the residents, which was held in the courtyard of the building in June 2019. This initiative was in some ways the outcome of a process started during that meeting, in which some neighbours, speaking about the Mosque, began to imagine a way to use and experience the space of the large condominium courtyard together.

The intersectionality between my gender, age, class, ethnicity and the social identities of my interlocutors influenced the types of conversations I was able to open with them and the social interactions I was allowed to observe (Rose, 1997; Valentine, 2007). In particular, my positionality in the condominium has been characterised by instability and dynamism in the condition of "insider" and "outsider" of the different groups of residents (Mullings, 1999).

In the following sections, I therefore move from the everyday home encounters I have had with the 'next-door migrants' over the course of a decade to contribute to the general objective of the volume: entering migrant homes and exploring how people relate to their dwellings along their migration and housing pathways. Research on homes and housing in the context of migration studies has been consolidated in recent years according to different lines of analysis that have allowed the domestic sphere to leave its place in the background, often implicit and therefore not discussed, and instead assume a new centrality in terms of reflection and conceptualisation (Boccagni, 2017). Housing has thus emerged as the context in which to observe different 'social scales', which can be grasped by paying particular attention to the processual dimensions and to the stratifications of meaning. As always happens with social dynamics, by placing oneself at the 'margins', one can better grasp the dynamics of power, the inequalities, and the ambivalences that characterise the practices of living (Boccagni et al., 2020). I analyse here the process of homemaking from a doubly marginal position: that of the migrants living in the Porta Palazzo condominium, and that of the courtyard, a place peripheral to the intimacy of domestic space. In the first part of the chapter, I offer an ethnographic account of the multiple uses of the condominium courtyard: a liminal, porous space that acts as a threshold between the private and properly domestic spaces of the

apartments and the public space of the city. The courtyard is ideally a common space, shared among all the residents, but it is also a communication channel between the house and the city, between those who live in the condominium and those who enter or transit there for the most diverse reasons. As I aim to show, it is a space that performs various functions and hosts various forms of exchange – economic, social, and cultural. In the second part of the contribution, I focus on the methodological approach that allowed me to assume a posture that is not only analytical, but eminently applicative. The various steps of the transformative intervention I developed to increase the opportunities for interaction, sharing and solidarity among residents are here under scrutiny. The commitment to making the courtyard, through the active participation of residents, a 'transversal space' capable of responding to the aspiration of living together 'through difference' represents, in my experience, what is necessary for a politically and ethically committed study. This self-reflexive engagement constitutes a precondition to fight 'from below' and 'from within' the inequalities that mark the fragile housing biographies of many migrants who live in Italy, as in many other parts of the world (Lenhard & Samanani, 2020).

3.2 The Courtyard as Liminal Zone

In architecture, borrowing a typically anthropological concept, the courtyard is interpreted as a 'liminal space', neither completely public nor totally private, which presents itself as a threshold capable of connecting and separating at the same time (Rapoport, 2007; Varga-Harris, 2016). This *limen* (Latin: threshold) characteristic makes it particularly relevant from the perspective of an ethnographic study of homemaking and homing processes which, as has been highlighted (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017; Miranda Nieto et al., 2020), is based on the challenge of moving beyond the domestic thresholds of his interlocutors, and entering homes where there are rules about the use of spaces that are linked to the spheres of intimacy, familiarity and common belonging.

The courtyard is a porous space. It lets things pass through, but holds some things back. Its significance and ambivalence can perhaps be further captured by relating this type of space to the concept of hospitality (Selwyn, 2000). Just as hospitality refers to a relationship that is always connected to dimensions of power and control of the other, the courtyard is also a space in which the management of the proximity/distance between 'us' and 'others' is crucial.

The courtyard belongs to everyone and no one. It is here that the senses most clearly grasp the heterogeneous panorama of cultural diversity in a condominium (Bonfanti et al., 2019): the smells of the food cooked in the apartments coming out of the open windows; the rhythms of Asian, South American and African music played at full volume on satellite televisions and web radios; clothes of different shapes hung out to dry on the balconies. The sensescapes (auditory, tactile, olfactory…) are a significant element to take into account when analysing the interaction between residents in the urban environment (Low & Kalekin-Fishman, 2019).

Indeed, it is often through these sensory dimensions that the logics of distinction are practised, the repulsion against mixing is expressed, or conversely, the interest in hybridisation is conveyed (Earl, 2018). The relationship between urban sensescapes and migration is particularly captured in two aspects. On the one hand, tastes, smells and sounds take on a translocal character, activating memories of mobility and dwelling that revolve around references, contrasts and assonances between the contexts of origin and immigration (Lahiri, 2011). On the other hand, particular attention should be paid to the question of power expressed by the politics of senses. According to Low (2013: 223), the perception of a "sensory invasion" of neighbourhoods characterised by a strong migratory stratification can be traced back to the existence of a "local sensory order", with respect to which the sensory behaviours of migrant bodies produce infractions and "hence are interpreted as transgressive conduct".

Referring to the well-known formulation that James Clifford (1997) originally proposed for post-colonial museums, courtyards can therefore be usefully thought of as 'contact zones', which make dialogue and intercultural collaboration possible, but which can also generate misunderstandings and frictions.

In this section I discuss some ethnographic notes relating to the various practices and opportunities for contact that I have been able to observe in the courtyard of the building where I live, in Turin. Given the variety of activities that this space hosts, it is useful to first map the different uses of the courtyard, which I analyse below (Fig. 3.1).

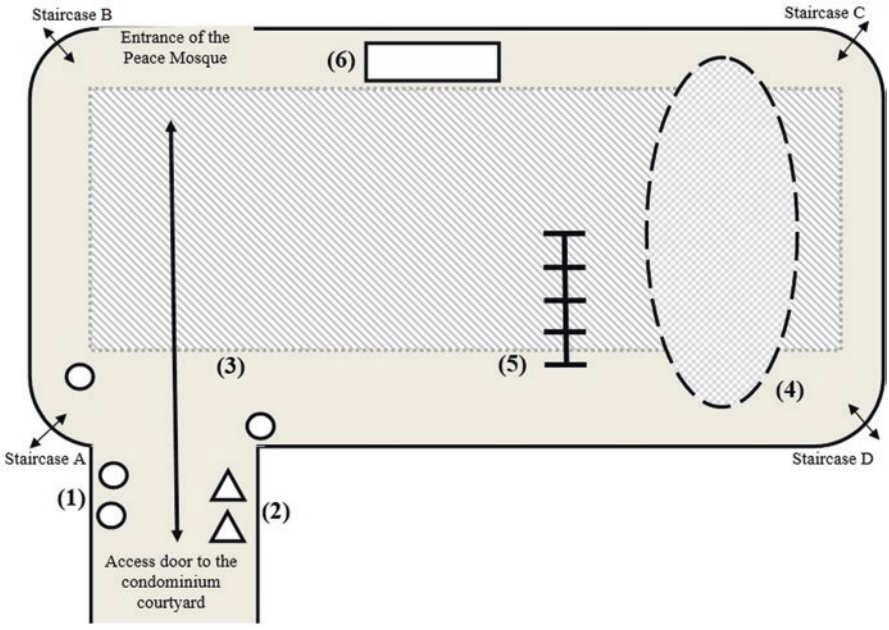

Fig. 3.1 Map of the condominium courtyard. (Author's elaboration)

My reflection is arranged in three sections, focusing on three stories which, while involving entire families and a plurality of people, revolve around the figures of three women of different ages and origins: Fatima, 39, originally from Morocco and a resident of the building for fourteen years; TingTing, 27, born in China, was reunited with her family at the age of 12 and since then growing up in the building, in the apartment owned by her parents; and Maryna, 61, from Ukraine, who has lived in her apartment for three years. In addition to being my neighbours, I personally played a role in the biographies of these three people and my position has allowed me to interact with them over a long period of time: Fatima took part in a social inclusion project I coordinated in Porta Palazzo; TingTing was my pupil during her studies and Maryna assisted my grandmother before moving into the apartment block following a new job opportunity. The interviews were collected within a longstanding relationship of reciprocity and exchange between the participants and the researcher. In this perspective, the courtyard has become for us a new 'positional space', an area "where the situated knowledges of both parties in the interview encounter engender a level of trust and co-operation" (Mullings, 1999: 340) that allowed us to reflect about the different positionalities we experienced in the subsequent stages of our relations.

The activities that these women carry out in the communal courtyard are, in my opinion, significant in illustrating the three main functions that this space fulfils: economic, recreational and social. In each of the three stories, these functions appear intertwined and mutually interdependent. It is also interesting to note how the courtyard, with its role as a threshold between the city and the house, highlights how certain domestic activities usually performed by women inside the apartments (cooking, and caring for children and the elderly) could emerge on the public scene, so that they acquire visibility and new meanings (Ring, 2006).

3.2.1 Fatima: Baking for the Community

Fatima was born in Casablanca where she received a certificate in baking and pastry arts. In 2002, she emigrated alone to France, in the footsteps of a cousin already abroad, who facilitated her travel and first placement. After two years, Fatima decided to move to Italy, taking advantage of a job opportunity she had been offered through a friend living in Turin. Here, Fatima settled in Porta Palazzo and after a few months she was reunited with her husband, Abdel, who had remained in Morocco until then. The two rented a small two-room apartment in the building, the same accommodation where they still reside. For a couple the size of the apartment could be considered adequate, however today, with a growing family, it has become decidedly insufficient: Fatima and Abdel have three children, a boy and two girls, aged between twelve and six. Much of the family's life is linked to Porta Palazzo: Abdel is a hairdresser and his shop is a few blocks away; the children attend schools in the neighbourhood.

The activity that Fatima carries out in the courtyard is linked to the presence of the Peace Mosque. The prayer room is not only a place of spiritual and social gathering, but also a catalyst for numerous commercial activities, some formal (for example the *halal* butchers located in the surroundings), others informal, as in the case of street vendors who stand every day, but especially on Fridays, next to the entrance and inside the courtyard, offering different types of goods to those who attend the mosque *(no. 1 on the map).* Next to them, there are also some young Roma women, originally from Romania, who, wearing the veil and respectfully greeting people in Arabic, ask the faithful for alms *(no. 2).*

On the occasion of Friday prayers, the entire courtyard is covered with carpets *(no. 3).* While the faithful gather, trucks and stalls are set up along the access paths to the place of worship. Immediately outside the building, on the pavement, the sellers who need more space are positioned, especially the vans that are full of watermelons in the summer months. In the entrance hall leading to the courtyard, on both sides there are sellers of dried fruit, mint, *lben* (fermented milk) and bread. Among these is Fatima:

> My specialty is *m'semen,* a type of Moroccan flaky bread, which I prepare plain and also stuffed with meat. And then also the *baghrir,* you know, which looks like a spongy crepe, which is eaten with honey or sauces and which I sell especially during Ramadan. I prepare everything at home, every day; I put the bread in the cart, and I go to sell it. On normal days I am in the square, next to the market stalls, but on Fridays and throughout Ramadan I am here at the mosque. I sell to those who come for prayer, but also to the residents of the building who are returning home. I don't earn much and it's a very tiring job, summer and winter, but it still allows me to get by.[2]

Through Fatima's work, the connective role of the courtyard gains materiality: bread, produced inside an apartment of the condominium, is sold to buyers who enter the building from the outside, creating an economic exchange with the neighbourhood thanks to the social aggregation function of the mosque.

3.2.2 TingTing: Playing with Differences

I remember well the first period of TingTing's life in Turin. At that time, I was collaborating with the middle school where she was placed as soon as she arrived from China. I taught first literacy courses for Chinese-speaking students and TingTing was one of my students. In one of the compositions that she managed to write after a year of school, about the many difficulties of her daily life, she told in simple words about the challenges she was facing: she had left her friends and the beautiful house where she used to live with her grandparents in China and found herself from one day to the next in Italy, in a small apartment, in an unknown school, where besides studying Italian she had to spend many hours helping her parents with the

[2] Interview with Fatima conducted by the author in Italian (Turin, 30 March 2019).

shoe stall at the market (Hu & Vietti, 2016; Marsden, 2015). As she recounts, years later:

> When I was at school, I was sorry not to be able to invite my friends over. The others went to parties or met for homework, but I was ashamed to let people into our house, I didn't want them to see where I lived. Luckily there was the courtyard. I spent many hours playing badminton with my sister. In China, they teach it at school – I was good – but here in Italy nobody plays this sport. Even today for my little brother it is the same: he is never at home, he is always on the balcony or down in the courtyard playing football with his Moroccan friends.[3]

The portion of the courtyard farthest from the entrance to the building is often transformed into a playground. Especially in the afternoon, when many children and young people who live in the tenement return from school, there are challenges and matches *(no. 4)*. There are some chasing each other, some playing badminton and some playing football, transforming into football goals the racks where the riders and the Bengali rose sellers who live in the building leave their bicycles *(no. 5)*. Beyond the different origins of their parents (China, Morocco, Romania, Nigeria, Pakistan), the courtyard as a playground becomes a common meeting ground for second-generation children and young people who grew up in Turin, and who find a safe space here for transition between school and family, between town and home, where they can hang out independently (Güney & Kabaş, 2017).

As for TingTing, now grown up, it is interesting to note how life in the condominium has contributed to an unexpected turning point in her working life. In fact, nine years ago the numerous neighbours from different sub-Saharan African countries present in the building convinced TingTing's parents to try a different commercial enterprise: leaving behind the market stall, they acquired a small convenience store in the block next to the condominium, specialising in the sale of gastronomic and aesthetic products for African customers, and in particular for Senegalese migrants. Thanks to daily contact with these customers, and certainly also due to her own particular talent, TingTing (who encountered many difficulties in her Italian school career, dropping out at age 16 after twice failing the first year of high school) has learned to speak Wolof, the most widely spoken language in Senegal. This skill, which soon became known within the Senegalese community of Turin, ensured good business for the family shop, which TingTing now manages herself.

3.2.3 Maryna: Remembering Together

The country Maryna comes from no longer exists, and neither does her home. She was born in a small town near Donetsk in 1960, in what was then the Soviet Union, which later became Ukraine and which has been part of the unrecognised Donetsk People's Republic since 2014. The house where she spent her childhood, and which she had renovated by sending remittances from abroad, was bombed during the

[3] Interview with TingTing conducted by the author in Italian and Chinese (Turin, 21 February 2019).

Donbass war and is now reduced to rubble. Moreover, Maryna has never had housing stability throughout her life: as a young woman, during the time of the USSR, she worked on cruise ships, perpetually travelling between China and Cuba. Then, at the beginning of the 2000s, when her husband was the victim of a mining accident, she went abroad to Italy, like many other Ukrainian women, to work as a *badante* (live-in care worker). She has changed houses many times since, moving from time to time into the homes of the elderly she assists. She first lived in the province of Naples, then near Cuneo and finally in Turin. In the Porta Palazzo condominium Maryna lives with Lucia, 87, originally from Abruzzo, who has lived in the building for over 60 years, and is one of the last residents who witnessed life in the neighbourhood and in the house in the immediate post-war period.

Lucia's apartment is quite large, with three rooms, because her children grew up here. Today one of the 'children's rooms' has passed to Maryna, who has settled in, along with two suitcases of clothes and personal items with which she has been moving from house to house. Her life is marked by the perennial cycle of being a companion to her 'grandparents' in their last years. By now Maryna also feels old, she is often tired, and in the long hours spent in the courtyard listening to Lucia she happened to mention that she thinks that she will soon be in need of help:

> I don't like this neighbourhood very much – there are no gardens, no green spaces – so in the morning when I go out with my 'grandmother' I prefer to stop here in the courtyard. Luckily a few months ago someone from the building brought this old sofa down to throw it away and they never came to pick it up, so we also have a comfortable place to sit! *(no. 6)* I like being here; in the Soviet Union all the town houses had common courtyards, where clothes were spread out, there were swings for the children, the elderly played chess, it was nice. Then Lucia knows everything about this condominium, she tells me the stories of the Fifties. Do you know that part of the building was a hotel? She worked in the kitchen of the restaurant: right where the children play, she peeled the potatoes. The world she lived in as a young woman reminds me a little of the life I led in my country.[4]

For Maryna and Lucia, the courtyard appears as a place for sharing memories, a connector between the present and the past, between Italy and Ukraine. This transnational connection becomes materially tangible when Maryna connects with her smartphone via video call with her two daughters residing in Kiev. Once every three months, she piles up boxes in a corner of the courtyard: boxes full of consumer goods and gifts bought in supermarkets in Turin, to send to Ukraine via the couriers that shuttle between Italy and Eastern Europe.

3.3 Conviviality and Transversal Rituals

The home encounters of Fatima, TingTing and Maryna that I briefly described highlight the opportunities, but also the pitfalls of a certain fragmentation of the inner condominium space. The various population groups I have examined (the visitors to

[4] Interview with Maryna conducted by the author in Russian (Turin, 7 May 2019).

the Mosque and the street vendors who offer them bread and mint, the children who play football and badminton, the elderly who rest and chat with those who assist them) use different areas of the courtyard, at different times of the day and week, and with a certain indifference (if not annoyance) towards each other (Cancellieri, 2017; Killias, 2018; Cancellieri, Chap. 2).

Conviviality, alongside other somewhat interconnected concepts, such as 'super-diversity', 'cosmopolitanism' and 'everyday multiculturalism', has emerged as one of the interpretative paradigms for exploring the socio-cultural dynamics linked to migration in an urban context (Wise & Noble, 2016: 427). This is a concept with a complex genealogy, which in recent years has been at the centre of a wide debate within anthropology and between different disciplines. A growing body of case studies on convivial collectivities, spaces and everydayness has thus been consolidated, providing a basis for a comparative approach aimed at grasping how this category is situated in different contexts (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014). Living together is a process, located in a specific space and time, which requires work to build connections, relationships and meanings (Heil, 2015). The authors who focused on the ambivalence of this analytical category highlighted how the reference to conviviality should not be understood as a simplistic celebration of the 'joy of differences', but as an invitation to expand on the concrete practices, efforts, negotiations and conflicts that run through the attempt to live together while trying to understand each other through differences (Hemer et al., 2020). In a remarkable contribution, Meissner and Heil (2020) drew attention to the conviviality-integration nexus. In particular, they note how the concept of integration is used in a normative way, prefiguring an idealistic, pacified, stabilised, "integratable society" where differences do not matter. In contrast to this assumption, Meissner and Heil provocatively propose the option of a "convivial disintegration" capable of giving space to the dimensions of conflict, uncertainty and alternative possibilities. In this perspective, the use of the category of conviviality should point "to difference never ceasing to matter" and invite us "to think about the necessary interventions that strengthen resilience in living with difference" (Meissner & Heil, 2020: 14). The differences, importantly, are not necessarily or only related to the sphere of ethnicity. As much broader comparative studies have clearly shown (Pastore & Ponzo, 2012), alliances and conflicts between groups in immigration districts are defined on the basis of the intersection between different criteria, among these being age and length of residence.

Taking into account this complexity and inspired by the desire expressed by my neighbour Antonio to imagine ways of using the condominium courtyard space together, in autumn 2018 I came to the conclusion that my task as 'resident anthropologist' could consist precisely in applying my vocation for "cultural translation" to the building where I had chosen to live. Following Wise (2009), I proposed myself to my coresidents as a *transversal enabler,* or 'facilitator', understanding this concept as the practice of relationships of knowledge and meaningful exchange through differences (Wise, 2009: 23). I thought of a participatory research path that revolved around the three axes that I had already seen at work in the condominium courtyard: (a) the connection between the building and the surrounding area;

(b) playful interactions between the youngest residents; (c) and sharing of memories among older residents.

My initiative began with the dissemination of a simple flyer in which I proposed to all coresidents to create a collection of stories of the building, sharing anecdotes, photographs and their points of view about everyday life there. My intention was to collect the testimonies myself over the following months, to then circulate them as part of a 'house party' to be held in the courtyard, open not only to residents of the building, but to the whole neighbourhood. My goal was to trigger a process of consolidation of a shared history of the condominium, considering it the basis for fostering communication and collaboration among different generations and different groups of residents. The connection between home and memory, as highlighted by Ratnam (2018), is a fundamental part of the identity-making process, on an individual and collective level. In this sense, what counts are not only the memories of the 'past homes' where people lived – and, in the case of migrants, were very often left behind in their countries of origin – but also the awareness of the experiences of 'past inhabitants' who had lived in the buildings where they live: a memory embedded in the materiality of domestic objects, in the physical structures of the house, in its spaces and in the transformations that have shaped it over time (Pink, 2004). From this point of view, as Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) argued several years ago, an interdisciplinary approach that brings architecture and anthropology into dialogue can illustrate that "the house and the body are intimately linked. The house is an extension of the person […] a ready-made environment fashioned by a previous generation and lived in long before it becomes an object of thought" (Carsten & Hugh-Jones, 1995: 2). Houses are, at the same time, built environments and cultural constructions that accumulate more significations through association with their resident social groups over time (Birdwell-Pheasant & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 1999: 4).

The first weeks after the dissemination of the flyer brought a new and unexpected development: in addition to learning of the availability of some coresidents who would tell me what they knew and remembered about the building, I was contacted by several others who offered to help me to interview their neighbours. I welcomed their collaboration with great pleasure, being able to count on the active participation of a greater number of people. The collection continued throughout the spring of 2019 and allowed us, together, to reconstruct the events of the building over its 180 years of history. Although more informal and less ambitious, our initiative shares similar premises as other participatory research projects aiming to trace "home-city biographies" through the experiences, memories and narratives of residents. Blunt and colleagues, writing about their study in Hackney, east London, noted how this approach allowed them to investigate the multi-layered and entangled temporalities of home and the city. The intersection of migration, housing, and family histories helps to articulate narratives of domestic and urban change in terms of stability and instability, exploring the traces of the past in the present (Blunt et al., 2020: 2). These biographies not only connected the life stories of urban residents to particular dwellings, but outline "the interplay of their home lives with streets, neighbourhoods and the wider city" (Blunt & Sheringham, 2018: 13). We thus discovered that many aspects of the mobility that seemed peculiar to the present time

of the condominium also actually belonged to its past and its very origins. Shortly after it was built in 1836, the building had begun to host hotels and inns for the workers and customers of the nearby large Porta Palazzo market. Its mission to provide rest and refreshment to people arriving in the city would last for many decades, until the last hotel-restaurant was closed in 1975 (as Mrs Lucia, who worked there for decades as a cook, still remembered). After giving refuge to the evacuees from the bombings during the Second World War, in the early 1950s the courtyard of the condominium was filled with new production and commercial activities: a dairy, a butcher, an umbrella factory, the warehouse of a cheesemaker, a printing house and even an exotic pet shop, complete with an enclosure full of parrots and turtles, to the delight of the many resident children. These were the years in which many new coresidents from other Italian regions, in particular from Veneto and the South, began to join former Piedmontese residents. The memories of those who spent their childhood in the building during that time highlight not just the difficulties of everyday life, but also a certain nostalgia for the sociability and solidarity that existed among the tenants. As Antonio recollects:

> I arrived in Turin from Apulia, with my parents, in 1958. There was poverty, there were many living in one room and we warmed up with the stove, but it was also a beautiful period: there was solidarity, we got by and helped each other. My father worked for what is now called AMIAT, that is, he collected garbage on the streets – at that time it was still done with pitchforks and baskets. In the building there were many children, all from southern families. I spent all my time in the courtyard playing with them with the shavings we took from the carpenter who worked on the ground floor.[5]

It was with this background that the building entered the new phase of international immigration from the early 1990s. The Porta Palazzo district was the settlement area for the pioneers of the various immigrant communities and the building faithfully recorded on its apartment intercom buzzers the multiple layering of Moroccan, Chinese, Nigerian, Senegalese, Egyptian, Bengali, Tunisian, Peruvian, Albanian, and Romanian surnames. Before the end of the decade, the building became the only one in the city where the foreign population outnumbered native-born residents (CICSENE, 1997: 31). High population density and high incidence of foreign residents were two related phenomena: the building's inhabitants remember how in that period the apartments served as a shelter for many immigrants who had just arrived in the city, almost exclusively young men, living in extremely precarious conditions with a large number of compatriots. According to Fabrizio, a tenant in the building and an anti-eviction activist, exploitation by the Italian owners of the flats was widespread: they didn't hesitate to rent out the few square metres available in the semi-ruined attics for illegal profit.

Despite these difficulties, during the 1990s the condominium established itself as a point of reference for the new inhabitants of the neighbourhood, in particular for the Muslim faithful who began to identify it with the Islamic prayer room that had

[5] Interview with Antonio conducted by the author in Italian (Turin, 9 April 2019).

been established here in 1995. In the words of Hassan, now head of the association that runs the Peace Mosque:

> We opened the prayer room here certainly because the rent for the spaces was lower than elsewhere, but above all because this was the centre of our community and we knew that many of our brothers in difficulty, who needed the support of the mosque, lived here. Every week hundreds of people come here to pray, but also to ask for information and help, today just as it was 25 years ago. Over time, this has also led to clashes with residents, especially because of the issue of access through the courtyard and the large number of people entering the building for Friday prayers.[6]

As I mentioned in the ethnographic vignette at the beginning of the chapter, the renovation of the building carried out in the first decade of the 2000s triggered ambivalent reactions from the residents regarding the presence of the Islamic prayer room. At the meeting, there are some who take this opportunity to ask outright that the Mosque be moved elsewhere: only then, they say, can the renovation of the building be complete. Others recall instead that it is only thanks to the presence of the mosque that the problem of drug dealing and other illicit activities involving the condominium and the surrounding block in the Nineties has significantly decreased over the last years.

These tensions concerning the management of the Peace Mosque are part of the broader conflicts about the "compulsory redevelopment plan" for the building, imposed by the municipality of Turin in 2001 and completed in 2012. The renovation is part of the initiatives carried out by the public administration and private investors in Porta Palazzo, which boosted the ongoing gentrification of the neighbourhood (Bourlessas et al., 2021). A significant number of inhabitants were consequently forced to move elsewhere, and in the last decade, a further flow of new residents has transformed the residential dynamics of the building. The proximity to the new university campus made the building particularly attractive for students: young people who once again brought mobility-related stories to the condominium, as Cristina recounts:

> My boyfriend and I are both doing our PhDs in Turin. I am originally from Rome and he is from Palermo. We are renting here and the owner, Luca, is a doctor more or less the same age as we are. He is abroad, in London, for a specialisation course. We have been here for a year and we will stay for another year, then he will come back and we will have to find another accommodation.[7]

It was precisely these students who, after the collection of the stories, in the spring of 2019 made an important contribution to the participatory planning of the 'house party' day in which the memories of the house were shared with the neighbourhood through recreational activities organised in the courtyard. The party was configured as a 'transversal ritual', to adopt Wise's (2009) concept, capable of enhancing collective awareness of the opportunities for mutual understanding and solidarity among the residents. The point was not to display a pacified, univocal and official

[6] Interview with Hassan conducted by the author in Italian (Turin, 2 March 2019).

[7] Interview with Cristina conducted by the author in Italian (Turin, 13 January 2019).

Fig. 3.2 A moment from the party in the courtyard of the condominium. (Author's picture)

story of the condominium under the banner of integration. On the contrary, building on the "convivial disintegration" of the house (Meissner & Heil, 2020), the party was intended to provide room for differences and unpredictable encounters (Fig. 3.2).

In sum, one Saturday afternoon in June, over 150 people gathered in the courtyard, attracted by word of mouth and some simple flyers posted in the surrounding block. About half were residents, and half were people from the neighbourhood, friends and schoolmates of the children of the building, together with their parents. A dozen Chinese and Senegalese teenagers arrived at the party at the invitation of TingTing, who for some time had been working as an educator in a very active cultural association in the neighbourhood. The programme was specially designed for the youngest: it began with a circus performance staged by a family of street artists, also living in the house, known as the 'Circo Famiglia Show'. To watch the performance, the public sat on carpets made available by the mosque, normally used by the faithful for Friday prayers, which in this case instead became a shared space for all those present. Whoever could, sat cross-legged on the ground, as the others took their seats: among them, Maryna and Lucia, who laughed heartily at the jokes and sleight of hand of the circus performers. A treasure hunt then continued the entertainment: six teams of children and adults challenged each other to find clues scattered in the courtyard and in all the common areas of the building, solving riddles about the history of the house, for which they had to interact with some of the coresidents. Finally, all participants were invited to enjoy a snack based on almond

paste pastries prepared by Fatima and other Moroccan cooks and offered inside the Islamic prayer room. For many coresidents, this was the first opportunity in many years to remove their shoes and enter their neighbours' place of worship. The issue of access to the Mosque arose that day in a brand new and different fashion.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted some aspects of homemaking inside an apartment building in Turin's Porta Palazzo – a building characterised, today as in the past, by a high proportion of residents of immigrant origin. My analysis developed from my particular position as a resident of the building. It was therefore from an autoethnographic approach that I reflected on the unique role that the large condominium courtyard plays in the daily life of the building's inhabitants.

Most notably, the courtyard acts as a liminal area of contact, which makes it possible to meet different groups of people: those who live in the building and those who come from outside to pray in the mosque, which is accessed through the always-open door of the building; Moroccan women who, like Fatima, cook bread at home to sell to the faithful who pass through the courtyard entering and leaving the prayer room; children, sons and daughters of Chinese, Nigerian or Pakistani parents, who after returning from school spend their afternoons playing football or badminton together; the 'old' and 'new' residents, as in the case of Maryna and Lucia, who can find a way to interact and communicate by sharing memories and stories.

Long-term observation of this common space, as well as the critical issues that emerged from the condominium meeting described in the prologue of the chapter, gave me the opportunity to consider the house not only with an analytical purpose, but also with a strong applicative commitment. This led me to propose to my "next-door migrants" to undertake participatory research on the history of the building with the goal of creating a convivial moment addressed to the residents and the neighbourhood.

In my analysis, the condominium courtyard emerged as a 'space of transversality' (Wise, 2009) where it was possible to create a habit of interaction, exchange and mutual learning. Contact, Wise points out (ibid.: 37), offers opportunities in terms of mutual understanding and solidarity, but also presents risks linked to the unease and conflicts that can arise from missed or failed encounters. It is therefore necessary for 'transversality facilitators' to work to create 'spaces of intercultural care' by paying attention to the differences in power and inequalities that affect conviviality (Wise & Noble, 2016). The same critical stance should be applied when we look at the 'community' that is created through the practices of conviviality: a community that we can precisely define as 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998), without defined and stable boundaries (determined by ethnic or other differences), but rather produced and reproduced through continuous activities of interaction, cohabitation and sharing (Neal et al., 2019).

Reflecting on the potential and limits of conviviality with respect to the intersection of home and migration seems to me to be particularly crucial in the context of the pandemic period that began a few months after the activities analysed in this chapter. Starting from spring 2020, because of the Covid-19 epidemic and the consequent lockdown, millions of citizens were forced to stay at home: a condition that for many migrants meant being confined to cramped domestic spaces and discovering, or rediscovering, the importance of the common spaces of the buildings, and connections and solidarity with their neighbours. For adults, and especially for children, courtyards have long been the only open-air space that can be used for socialising, asking for help, blowing off steam and escaping, for at least a few hours, conditions of discomfort and overcrowding. This rediscovered centrality of encounters and exchanges with coresidents, mostly informal and spontaneous, emphasises the need to reflect on the methods and conditions that will allow these practices of coexistence and conviviality to play a significant role in contrasting, or at least mitigating, the new forms of poverty, exclusion and marginality that the current economic and social crisis is generating (Bargna et al., 2020).

References

Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 373–395.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.

ATC. (2004). *Piano di Recupero Quartiere Borgo Dora – Porta Palazzo, Lotto 3. Relazione illustrativa*. Agenzia Territoriale per la Casa della Provincia di Torino.

Bargna, I., Vietti, F., Santanera, G., Pozzi, G., & Bonelli, I. R. (2020, May 18). Back to the future in Milan. *Anthropology News Website*. https://doi.org/10.1111/AN.1404

Birdwell-Pheasant, D., & Lawrence-Zúñiga, D. (1999). Introduction: Houses and families in Europe. In D. Birdwell-Pheasant & D. Lawrence-Zúñiga (Eds.), *House life: Space, place and family in Europe* (pp. 1–36). Routledge.

Black, R. (2012). *Porta Palazzo, the anthropology of an Italian market*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Blunt, A., & Sheringham, O. (2018). Home-city geographies: Urban dwelling and mobility. *Progress in Human Geography, 43*, 815–834.

Blunt, A., Ebbensgaard, C. L., & Sheringham, O. (2020). The "living of time": Entangled temporalities of home and the city. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 46*, 149–162.

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home: Mapping domestic space in migrants' everyday lives*. Palgrave.

Boccagni, P., & Brighenti, A. M. (2017). Immigrants and home in the making: Thresholds of domesticity, commonality and publicness. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*(1), 1–11.

Boccagni, P., Pérez Murcia, L. E., & Belloni, M. (2020). *Thinking home on the move: A conversation across disciplines*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Bonfanti, S., Massa, A., & Miranda Nieto, A. (2019). Whiffs of home. Ethnographic comparison in a collaborative research study across European cities. *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa, Rivista quadrimestrale, 2*, 153–174.

Bourlessas, P., Cenere, S., & Vanolo, A. (2021). The work of foodification: An analysis of food gentrification in Turin, Italy. *Urban Geography*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.1927547
Cancellieri, A. (2017). Towards a progressive home-making: The ambivalence of migrants' experience in a multicultural condominium. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*, 49–61.
Carsten, J. (2018). House-lives as ethnography/biography. *Social Anthropology, 26*, 103–116.
Carsten, J., & Hugh-Jones, S. (1995). Introduction. In J. Carsten & S. Hugh-Jones (Eds.), *About the house. Lévi-Strauss and beyond* (pp. 1–46). Cambridge University Press.
CICSENE. (Ed.). (1997). *Un mercato e i suoi rioni: studio sull'area di Porta Palazzo*. Agami.
Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Harvard University Press.
Dolkart, A. (2006). *Biography of a tenement house in New York City: An architectural history of 97 Orchard Street*. Center for American Places.
Earl, C. (2018). Senses of distinction: Social differentiation, metro-mobilities and daily life in Ho Chi Minh City. In K. E. Y. Low & D. Kalekin-Fishman (Eds.), *Senses in cities: Experiences of urban settings* (pp. 39–54). Routledge.
Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research, 36*(4), 273–290.
Güney, S., & Kabaş, B. (2017). Migrant spaces and childhood: Growing up in Kreuzberg. *Urbana, 18*, 1–23.
Heil, T. (2015). Conviviality. (Re-)negotiating minimal consensus. In S. Vertovec (Ed.), *Routledge international handbook of diversity studies* (pp. 317–324). Routledge.
Hemer, O., Povrzanović Frykman, M., & Ristilammi, P. M. (Eds.). (2020). *Conviviality at the crossroads. The poetics and politics of everyday encounters*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Hu, F. M., & Vietti, F. (2016). Bridging identities among Chinese in Italy. A journey across life stories, borders and disciplines. In T. Previato (Ed.), *Moving across borders in China. Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of cultural diversity in marginal areas* (pp. 117–126). Aracne Editrice.
Killias, O. (2018). Distant friends and intimate strangers: On the perils of friendship in a Malaysian apartment building. *Urban Studies, 55*(3), 554–569.
Lahiri, S. (2011). Remembering the city: Translocality and the senses. *Social & Cultural Geography, 12*(8), 855–869.
Lenhard, J., & Samanani, F. (2020). *Home: Ethnographic encounters*. Bloomsbury Academic.
Low, K. E. Y. (2013). Sensing cities: The politics of migrant sensescapes. *Social Identities, 19*(2), 221–237.
Low, K. E. Y., & Kalekin-Fishman, D. (Eds.). (2019). *Senses in cities: Experiences of urban settings*. Routledge.
Marsden, A. (2015). Second-generation Chinese and new processes of social integration in Italy. In L. Baldassar, G. Johanson, N. McAuliffe, & M. Bressan (Eds.), *Chinese migration to Europe* (pp. 101–118). Palgrave Macmillan.
Martínez, F. (2018). *Remains of the Soviet past in Estonia: An anthropology of forgetting, repair and urban traces*. UCL Press.
Mathews, G. (2011). *Ghetto at the center of the world: Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong*. Hong Kong University Press.
Meissner, F., & Heil, T. (2020). Deromanticising integration: On the importance of convivial disintegration. *Migration Studies*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnz056
Miranda Nieto, A., Massa, A., & Bonfanti, S. (2020). *Ethnographies of home and mobility: Shifting roofs*. Routledge.
Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum, 30*, 337–350.
Neal, S., Bennett, K., Cochrane, A., & Mohan, G. (2019). Community and conviviality? Informal social life in multicultural places. *Sociology, 53*(1), 69–86.

Nowicka, M., & Vertovec, S. (2014). Introduction. Comparing convivalities: Dreams and realities of living-with-difference. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 17*(4), 341–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413510414

Pastore, F., & Ponzo, I. (Eds.). (2012). *Concordia Discors. Convivenza e conflitto nei quartieri di immigrazione*. Carocci.

Pink, S. (2004). *Home truths: Gender, domestic objects and everyday life*. Berg.

Rapoport, A. (2007). The nature of the courtyard house: A conceptual analysis. *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, 18*(2), 57–72.

Ratnam, C. (2018). Creating home: Intersections of memory and identity. *Geography Compass, 12*, e12363. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12363

Ring, L. (2006). *Zenana: Everyday practice in a Karachi apartment building*. Indiana University Press.

Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography, 21*(3), 305–320.

Schlichtman, J. J., & Patch, J. (2014). Gentrifier? Who, me? Interrogating the gentrifier in the mirror. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 38*(4), 1491–1508.

Selwyn, T. (2000). An anthropology of hospitality. In A. Morrison & C. Lashley (Eds.), *In search of hospitality*. Routledge.

Semi, G. (2008). The flow of words and the flow of value': Illegal behavior, social identity and marketplace experiences in Turin, Italy. In D. T. Cook (Ed.), *Lived experiences of public consumption. Consumption and public life* (pp. 137–157). Palgrave Macmillan.

Semi, G., Colombo, E., Camozzi, I., & Frisina, A. (2009). Practices of difference: Analysing multiculturalism in everyday life. In A. Wise & S. Velayutham (Eds.), *Everyday multiculturalism* (pp. 66–84). Palgrave Macmillan.

Valentine, G. (2007). Theorizing and researching intersectionality: A challenge for feminist geography. *The Professional Geographer, 59*(1), 10–21.

Varga-Harris, C. (2016). *Stories of house and home*. Cornell University Press.

Vietti, F. (2019). 'A crooked, open, modest city' – Intercultural tourism as a tool to grasp urban super-diversity and build social cohesion. *Geo Progress Journal, 6*(2), 61–78.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Wise, A. (2009). Everyday multiculturalism: Transversal crossings and working class cosmopolitans. In A. Wise & S. Velayutham (Eds.), *Everyday multiculturalism* (pp. 21–45). Palgrave Macmillan.

Wise, A., & Noble, G. (2016). Convivialities: An Orientation. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 37*(5), 423–431.

Chapter 4
Welcome upon Conditions: On Visiting a Multigenerational Immigrant House(hold)

Sara Bonfanti

Un acte d'hospitalité ne peut être que poétique,
J. Derrida (in Michaud, 2020: 387)

4.1 Introduction

The quote reported above extends Derrida's much cited work on 'hostipitality' (2000), term which the author coined to reflect on the shared etymology of host/ing and hostility, which, he argues, need not be taken as antonymic but should instead be seen as intrinsically mutual. While the French philosopher's considerations have been popularized to address migration and integration by alluding to state sovereignty and the recognition of Others (Faist, 2009), his original musings emerge from the youth spent in Algeria with his family, and from the lived experience of Bedouin hospitality.

Anthropologists have written extensively on the cultural rules of hospitality in different times and contexts, reserving great attention to the Mediterranean and the Middle East with a comparative purview (Pitt-Rivers, 2012 [1977]). Before entering the tool-box of political theory, and becoming the beacon of tourism studies, in the wake of social functionalism anthropology convincingly maintained that hospitality serves to establish a relationship (between individuals or groups) or promote an already established one. As Selwyn (2000: 19) captured: "Acts of hospitality achieve this in the course of exchanges of goods and services, both material and symbolic, between those who give hospitality (host) and those who receive it (guest)". Between the dancing partners of offer and acceptance, there is always the possibility that such exchange goes astray, due to some faultiness from either party (or both). "Hospitality is a stance toward strangers", writes Michael Herzfeld, toward beings

S. Bonfanti (✉)
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy
e-mail: sara.bonfanti@unitn.it

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_4

who can become "useful, dangerous, or irritating" (1993: 173). Returning to Derrida then, hospitality cannot be other than an elaborate communication ritual, whose promises and perils can be as extreme as turning the stranger into a friend or a foe.

This chapter engages with the generative potential intrinsic to the interaction between the ethnographer as guest and the informants as hosts, as seen and exercised from within their homes. Taking South Asian diasporas in Britain as research partners, the fieldwork starts in the private domestic space and proceeds from there to consider the neighborhood and the socio-spatial relations that are there imbued. As a result, continuous entanglements of local and temporal dynamics, which bear traces of other locations and migratory processes, will affect and reflect the modes and depth of ethnographic engagement. First, the chapter will review the literature on diaspora studies, with reference to South Asian transnational migration flows as the British Empire withdrew from newly formed independent states but leaving a conditional access to the former mother country (Brown, 2006; Harper & Constantine, 2010; Lal & Jacobsen, 2015). While I will not expand on the structural injustice that sustained the colonialist enterprise throughout (deep-seated in the lives of South Asian diasporas, for better or worse), the luring imaginary of a Commonwealth of Nations (and the aspiration to actively taking one's place in it) persisted among many population strata in the Indian Subcontinent. As this chapter is built on "domestic ethnography" (Bonfanti, 2016, 2018, 2020), a methodology section will follow to explain in detail how home visits, narrative exchanges and walks-along in the borough took place. Besides, a critical look at the suburban scale elucidates what it means to do fieldwork in BME (Black-and Minority-Ethnic) locations.

Three case studies are presented, which give evidence to the internal diversity of the British Asian diaspora, with regard to countries of origin, religion and age of migration. While embedded in peculiar districts with certain demographics and immigration trends (Newham, Wembley, and Ealing), the analysis follows the experience of the ethnographer-and-guest in making sense of the domestic lives of her hosts-and-informants. Then, with an attempt to look at those three home studies side by side, a comparative discussion will follow. This zooms on three topics, seeing how these emerge from the empirical material: a. the positionality of the guest-and-ethnographer within the homes of her hosts-and-participants; b. the double perspective on seeing how each house is hold from within, and how far the external social context contributes to it; c. the flickering experience that South Asian diaspora subjects in London live, with a range of homeland orientations and translocal connections. As the case-studies proposed appear irreducibly diverse, bringing the discussion back to hospitality as a discourse, lived practice and method will provide further insights. Last, a provisional conclusion will recap the main arguments, insisting on the potential and limits of the hos(ti)pitality paradigm for understanding social reality, and on the open-endedness of domestic ethnography.

4.2 Diaspora Studies and British Asian Ages of Migration: A Literature Review

Since the 1980s, scholars from the humanities and religious studies (Baumann, 2000; Knott & McLoughlin, 2010) contributed to the re-invention of "diaspora" as a notion (beyond the historical displacement of the Jews from Palestine in Biblical times), posing the question "what is at stake in contemporary *invocations* of diaspora?" (Clifford, 1989: 302). Given its political pliability, as an analytical tool diaspora built into the semantics of "expatriate minority communities" and travelled across disciplines. Against the erratic course of diaspora studies, a few works eased my understanding of South Asian diasporas and enhanced my communication with their members in Britain.

Notably, Vertovec (1997) stressed the continuity of diasporas with transnational communities, considering "three modes of diaspora" among South Asian religions as "a social form, a type of consciousness, and a mode of cultural production". Recognizing the triadic relation between dispersal, homeland and new emplacement, he also signaled the tensions between diasporic multiple *loyalties* and the economic connections among their many *locations*. The "place which is diaspora" was further probed by Werbner (2002), whose contribution in untying the knot between chaos and order, elusive centers and multiplying peripheries of the South Asian diaspora will come fruitful for discussing the three case-studies further presented. Similarly, Lal & Jacobsen (2015) observed that, although the Indian diaspora is plural and divided in its aspiration, this univocal label emerged in the last three decades (when neoliberalism began to dictate global labor flows) after having existed for the past two centuries (literally *bonded* to British Imperialism). Diasporas are not given communities. Rather, they belong to Anderson's (1991) "imagined communities", fecund of narratives and discourses that sustain relevant frames for self-identification and collective action. In his overview, Cohen (2008), once transcended the Jewish benchmark, typified four diasporas based on their empirical manifestations (victim, imperial, trade and imaginative). Indian diasporas altogether would fall under the imperial or (post)colonial category, while the Sikh one would stand aside, embodying the lure for a home that never came concrete on the maps.

While acknowledging these influential readings, my person-centered research called for a more nuanced view in order to grasp the lived reality of those who made the British Asian diaspora, its diasporans. Commenting on Brah's work, Hall (2015: 27) observed that diaspora is also "an interpretive form to face the perplexing interfaces between the social and the psychic". This stance is shared by Tölölyan (1991, 2018), who reasoned over the "construction of home and belonging" in diaspora conditions by overcoming the binary between loss and link, exilic nationalism and diasporic transnationalism. As my ethnography unfolded, it became clear that South Asian diasporans construe their existence on the move (even when migration has

turned into settlement) with no clear cut between home and away, *desh/pardesh*[1] (Ballard, 1994). Following Bhabha (1994: 312), "[T]he nonsynchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences". People's sense of belonging in diasporic contexts is always in progress and emerges in constant interplay with 'host' cultures, as Brah's seminal work on diasporas reminds us:

> What is *home*? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of return, even if it is impossible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day… all this, as *mediated by the historically specific of everyday social relations*. (Brah, 1996: 192)

Diaspora studies contributed many insights which then informed our *homing* approach to study migrant homemaking. Transforming our conceptualization of home from a static noun to a gerundive verb, we infused movement across times and spaces to understand people's experience of home under conditions of mobility. In particular, we conceived of home as a complex notion which is always socio-culturally umpired and can comprise a specific idea, location, set of practices, relations, and emotions (Mallett, 2004). Following Boccagni (2017), we put to test the definition of home as a situated attempt to emplace 'safety, familiarity, and comfort', through ethnographic investigation. Doing so, we recognised how a plurality of spaces and times conflated in the experience of migrant home-making (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017). We thus considered the domestic space as being both multiscalar (shifting from dwelling place to neighbourhood, city and nation) and processual, embedded within plural temporalities (across one's life-course, household cycle and historical time).

An ethnographer myself, I stepped into the field of South Asian diasporas aware that my research subjects made, (re)produced and circulated their homes on a translocal ground, with practices and within social fields which are as local as global (Brickell & Datta, 2011). As a result, I tried to look sideways, within the interstices situated between the household and the outer society, considering kinship dynamics as well as race relations as they are framed in British public discourse. Furthermore, carrying out 'domestic ethnography' requires paying extra attention to how the materiality of one's home affects and reflects (Bonfanti, 2020) the stories that are there emplaced and rendered. This applies whether we consider the recollection of one's home-places in migrant biographies (and family oral histories; Bonfanti & Pérez Murcia, 2023), or we read through the domestic vignettes that the ethnographer writes with their informants, as they share food and words ad libitum or ad interim. Acts of hospitality and moments of conviviality take place in anyone's home upon specific conditions, whose agreeability and duration go largely

[1] While this notion of 'home in awayness' is given in hindi-urdu-punjabi, and as such recognised across South Asia, it is equivalent to the dynamic *desh/bidesh* as expressed in Bangla. The sense of homemaking upon migration is aptly captured within that indissoluble knot of experience.

unanticipated but depend on the internal social hierarchy of the household and get done as the guest-host relationship evolves (Bonfanti et al., 2019). This chapter maintains that homemaking in the diaspora can be fruitfully explored from within the home and bottom-up, while reasoning on the progressive and always conditional welcome that the researcher (guest) ultimately receives from the researched (hosts).

4.3 Methodology in Context

Compared to my intensive fieldwork with Punjabi diasporas in Italy (engaged in domestic ethnography with only four partner households), when I started collaboration in a large-scale project such as HOMInG it took me months to overcome my skepticism of 'quick and dirt' fieldwork (cf. Vindrola-Padros, 2021). Let aside research preferences, I learnt to conduct shorter but more various fieldtrips and reconsidered the value of shallower engagement in the lives of informants. A new appreciation of methods and results came out of those home visits which seemed less demanding to a *momentary* guest-and-ethnographer. Turning up at the doorstep of my hosts (and hostesses), presenting my business card as if it was a lock-pick, paved the way for anticipating light-hearted *moments* of hospitality from both parties.

Once acknowledged the overall research project's aims and design, and drawn my own plan within, I laid open a London GMap and spent days pre-visualising my fieldtrips. It was a matter of imagination and cognition: which areas would better fit my research, which districts did host a conspicuous number of people with a South Asian background? After all I had adopted the same process for successfully constructing the field in Brescia, Italy (the city with the highest concentration of Punjabi migrants in the country). I was not aware yet that "London is *Brown* to the core". So said one of my first respondents in the East end: a white middle-age woman who managed a public library where most posters, books and activities on display were advertised in Hindi, Urdu and Bangla. Newham, Wembley and Ealing were the three districts I took into consideration. According to the Census data, each of those suburban areas of London (respectively East, North and West) is demographically diverse beyond the median range of a global capital. In particular, their connotation as BME areas implicates the existence of specific policies whose implementation should foster inter-group communication and promote equality for the disadvantaged one (Goulbourne, 1998). While my ethnography relied on home visits and stays, informal conversations,[2] and walks-along, the importance of the home-at-large and of the temporal dimension(s) of migration there inscribed could never go underestimated. On the contrary, as a guest-and-ethnographer, but also a foreign visitor to London, my hosts-and-informants did not disdain to take on the role of

[2] This is one the reasons why few verbatim quotations appear in this chapter. In such exploratory home visits/stays I preferred not to use the vocal recorder, which might disrupt the progressive development of a 'sense of familiarity' I was after (unless a formal life interview was arranged).

'city experts' and be my chaperons as time and life constraints allowed them. Giving practical travelling suggestions, they often made poignant critiques of the public space they inhabited.

A peculiar feature of this strand of my research in the UK was the impromptu method adopted to recruit interlocutors. Apart from some snowballing (i.e. being referred to their relatives by South Asians in Italy), finding a British Asian host/ess was a shortcut to visit their homes and stay over for a while. For three years (2017–2020) I took nine fieldtrips to the UK of several weeks at a time, I met and mingled with dozen South Asians in London and Birmingham, had hundreds of informal conversations and recorded 42 interviews focused on their experience of home and migration (14 of which took the form of life-history and were administered in more than one session). Ethnographic (and interviewing) settings were as diverse as home places as well as houses of worship, occasionally work places and sometimes public spaces like parks or restaurants. Concerning the ethics of research, while I did comply with the standard requirements imposed by the ERC project and with my university Ethical Board (in terms of informed consent and anonymization procedures), each and every home I visited opened up specific challenges for framing my ethnographic stay and even for naming those who were my hosts-and research 'interlocutors-informants-partners'. It is on the basis of this research collaboration that I selected the three cases hereafter discussed (under as many pseudonyms).

Differently from the Italian Punjabi homes where I was a regular attendant (Bonfanti, 2016, 2018), my positionality with(in) British Asian households was easier to manage although not lighter to consider. On the one hand, not being a native British I was spared requests of help. I wouldn't have been able to fill in the paperwork of my hosts-and-informants on issues such as tax payments, school enrolments, medical care registries (a know-how which came useful in transacting reciprocity with migrants in Italy). On the other hand, as a European national abroad for work-study reasons (it's always hard to frame a precarious anthropologist as someone doing a proper job), I was perceived as a migrant myself, who shared some of the same frailties which my interlocutors admitted (not the least speaking English with a foreign accent), but with the privilege of Whiteness. While many South Asians joked on the cultural likeness between their 'food and family-oriented' mindset and the Mediterranean one, being an Italian young woman did arise different responses from my research partners: from curiosity to protectiveness, from mild advances to slight reproaches (how could I leave my two young kids at home and stay away for weeks… for such little money?). Positionality is a matter of entangled (self)representations (Salzman, 2002), where reflexivity on gender and age identity remains crucial in shaping the ethnographic rapport (Bonfanti et al., 2018), and dis/allowing access to the homes of informants.

While the idea of liminal space and the potential for passing domestic thresholds (Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020) is the prime focus of this volume, the contributions proposed show an endless variety of such experience. The intensity of the transition from the street to the house (from one room to another, and all the way back, once and again) provides the coordinates for drawing in-depth maps of how migrant lives

are emplaced. This multiple process of 'thresholding' (crossing socio-spatial borders that define in/out spaces and people, between welcome and proscription) is key to observe how Asian diasporas hold their houses in Britain without losing sight of their contexts of origin (Cohen, 2008; see also Bonfanti and Bertolani, Chap. 10). Without iterating the quaint metaphor of 'roots and routes' (Clifford, 1994), the diaspora houses which happened to host me were the 'cultural sites' (Fog Olwig, 1997) where the irreducible simultaneity of translocal belonging took place. That does not mean that such domestic environments functioned as memorializing private spaces (although people could recreate specific and emotionally-laden corners for remembrance of personal or collective events[3] – cf. Pérez Murcia, Chap. 11). Rather, in the selective process of retention of *other* practices and of objects coming from *afar*, diaspora homes were co-agent in shaping their residents' subjectivity and life worlds, creating a scenography on which roles and performances were played out between continuity and change.

Between due respect for South Asian cultural mores and values, and vernacular 'cosmopolitan attitudes' (both mine and of my interlocutors), domestic ethnography was a tremendous exercise in human sociability. Following Da Col (2019: 42), hospitality could be the prime field for investigating the productivity of uncertainty at the heart of human sociality: "At stake in this process is the role of anticipatory cognition and imagination, which find their ideal testing ground in a hospitality setting". In this chapter, migrant domestic spaces functioned as exceptionally productive sites (or poetic, in the sense given by Derrida), where to exercise the mundane and yet complex rituals of hospitality.

4.4 Visiting Diasporic Homes in London: Three Case Studies

As I conducted domestic ethnography throughout my fieldwork in London, I felt spoilt for choice: which homes shall I consider for 'lateral comparison' (Bonfanti et al., 2019), putting each case side by side, giving evidence to their peculiarities, allowing for broader reflections? The three households selected responded to the criteria of categorical diversities, as they belonged to different diaspora groups with reference to nationality and religion, as well as age of migration. They were also part of the local 'ethnic majority' in the BME districts considered. In fact, these homes could provide a lived view of that simultaneous chaos and order which the diaspora is (Werbner, 2002). Paraphrasing Jackson (2000), how could my hosts-and-informants make themselves at home in the diaspora, amid multiple loyalties

[3] In many South Asian diaspora houses I visited, mundane artefacts which evoked the crippling memories of critical events (such as the Partition, 1984 persecution of the Sikhs, civil riots against the Muslims in the Nineties) were often treasured and passed on from the generation who had lived the experience to those who were absent or not born yet. Such material anchors (Turkle, 2011) serve both as cognitive triggers for the memories of places left behind, and as scaffolds for certain affective states related to them.

(co-ethnics or co-religionists, but also professional bodies or peers) and personal positions within multiscale locations (their transnational family, city, homeland and host-land)?

Regarding *class-cum-caste*, which remains a crucial social marker in South Asia, I did not ascribe such tags to those three households, partly because of their faltering middle-class ambitions, partly because the discourse on *varna-jati*[4] sounded unsolicited to my hosts. As I wrote elsewhere (Bonfanti, 2016), 'caste' was often a taboo argument with South Asian migrants, whose fringe was easier to breach with those who recognized themselves as lower placed in the ranking and were not shy with showing their anger.

Each of these case studies follows an argumentative outline that considers, first, my ethnographic access, and then four substantive questions: (1) the interplay between the house and the home, with regard to the material culture and domestic practices we shared in a setting of multigenerational house-holding; (2) the hospitality performances which we played out, and the imperfect reciprocity of giving-taking in visiting someone's home or even temporarily staying there; (3) the oral (his)stories that inhabit those dwelling places in the diaspora (i.e. biographical memories and family tales, as embedded in migration trajectories); (4) the everyday experience of hanging out in the neighborhood with its residents, commenting on race relations and social difference as these unfold in the public space.

Diaspora homes are the repository of uncountable stories and the setting where a 'global sense of migrant place' is always rearranged (Gielis, 2009), upholding the need for a geographical lens in looking at transnational social networks. The richness of empirical ethnographic data that I harnessed from within and bottom-up the house(hold)s visited was often puzzling and open-ended. Faced with the serendipity of fieldwork, the vignettes and commentaries that follow are as provisional as the hospitality dynamics into which I took part.

4.4.1 How Poplar Became Popular: The Domestic Space of Saeed

It's my second fieldtrip to London since I started collaborating in the HOMInG project. Tracking my reference groups from the Subcontinent, I drifted towards West Ham, where I was advised that different cohorts of Indo-Pakistani communities lived (Dench et al., 2006). I got off at Upton Park and enjoyed mingling with the

[4] The *varna-jati* system (lit. colour-birth group) should be understood as a graded social stratification, where the contemporary dissociation between caste and traditional occupations brought about a reshuffling of the deck and increasing protests (Jaffrelot, 2010). The latent persistence of caste discrimination in diaspora contexts started to be re-coded as class difference, while bearing the marks of a colonial mindset for understanding intra-ethnic difference (Dirks, 2011).

crowds who were shopping after worktime in 'Desi[5] stores', in and out of warehouse and convenience stocks. Eventually, I rang the doorbell of the terraced house where I was supposed to sleep over, after concluding via email a private b & b arrangement. My host was the 'brother's cousin[6]' of an Italo-Punjabi man who had 'migrated onward' to Manchester in search of greener pastures (Della Puppa & King, 2019).

Through the windowsill I caught a glimpse of shoes neatly lined up, and of a woman peeping at me behind a lace curtain, before she sent two young girls to greet me. Within minutes, their teenage brother came rushing from the street: sorry as he was, there was no room for me to stay at their home. Their father, who had agreed online to host me, had left for Pakistan six weeks earlier; their connection had been interrupted since, and his phone rang a dead call. In his new role of paterfamilias in charge, the guy apologized regretfully: they would not host a stranger in their home. Stranded in Newham, passers-by diverted me to Rumford Road, where a stripe of cheap guesthouses stood, with quite unappealing welcome signposts. I picked the first inn that seemed decent enough and found a flock of men at the reception desk who kept blinking amused, as I explained my unexpected turning up (in a Brit-Pakistani hostel) after being turned down (from a Brit-Pakistani family). Between a faded green and white flag and a torn portrait of Elisabeth II, my fieldtrips to London started. There I met by chance the other guests: Punjabi men of all walks of life, recently moved to London and seeking for work and accommodation. Wrapped in a black *dupatta* (shawl), the cleaning lady who came to tidy my room took pity on me, and gave me the contact of a couple who might provide me lodging for a cheap rent.

Saeed and Zoya made a remarkable British-Bangla duo: undecidedly partners or flat-mates. A young man born in London from Bangladeshi parents, he managed the reservation but was rarely at home, busy with miscellaneous trade in Brick Lane at a market stall inherited by his father. A third generation Bangla young woman, she worked as a divorce specialist in Canary Wharf, defending Muslim women involved in 'sham marriages' (Qureshi et al., 2014). Mentally exhausted after work, Zoya changed her clothes and her veil, for a lighter fabric that could better attune with the lightness of being at home (Dwyer, 1999). As we sat at their dining table from Chittagong, unwrapping Cadbury's bites among a paraphernalia of domestic appliances (Fig. 4.1), we talked about the place. Explicit references to Bangladesh as their homeland were almost nonexistent, little of the material dialectics between the London flat and the Sylheti *bari* (homestead) as recounted by Zeitlyn (2012). My hosts were both "too modern (and) British" to remember the livelihoods of their Bengali ancestors.

Their house bore the effort of making its guests feel at home: gross pictures and plaques exalting homeliness were almost excessive. Besides, in every single room (except for the bathroom), landlord Saeed had mounted a small camera to keep

[5] Lit. *home stores* in the South Asian way to reframe anything which is part and parcel of the diaspora everyday life.

[6] That is to say a 'loose relative', in the Punjabi habit of disguising vague commercial relations under the shield of kinship, like Baumann (1995) recorded.

Fig. 4.1 Translocal laundry in the East End. (Author's picture)

surveillance and people's safety. As I voiced my uneasiness, Zoya explained that they took that measure after burglars had broken in, ruining the house, in spite of CCTV systems being installed all over their residential slot, which was signposted *neighborhood watch zone*. The room where I slept, planned as a lounge, had been converted from prayer area into a dorm for occasional guests. A crimson carpet stood in a corner pointing southward, where I guessed the owners kneeled at Salah times when the room was vacant.

To gain extra income by putting on rent a portion of one's home is an activity many long-term immigrants have taken up (evermore since AirBnb made this business easier). Bangladeshis did the same throughout East London, starting from their historical neighborhood in Tower Jorges. They bought City Council estates, improved them, and began letting places to newcomers; a chain of sub owners and letters have come next (cf. Miranda-Nieto, Chap. 5), some with opaque dealing and misdeeds (Alexander, 2011). My guest-and-informant concludes that London owes to the Bangladeshi home-business (trading at the docks or rehousing the working class) to have made Poplar a popular area for tourists. The borough takes its name after the tree native to its marshes (bot. *Populus*), but its 'popularity' rose in the early twentieth century when it gained a reputation for political radicalism.

When a Saturday night Ashraf (Saeed's cousin, a student at LSE) took me out for a marathon through British pubs in Brick Lane, we rode across Whitechapel and run into their uncle Nadeer. The old man was about to deliver his ritual alms to one of

the banks which had sprung up around the East London Mosque: the modern infrastructure of *zakat*. That noon though, it was not the *adhan* we heard, calling Muslim worshippers to pray, but a young busker attracting people to Altab Ali memorial park. Named after a Bangla textile worker who fell victim of a racist murder in Brick Lane in 1978, Altab Ali Park is the most politicised of all (semi)public spaces in Tower Jorges: a site for the local community to gather for political events and informal rallies (Eade, 1989). How the Bengali residents use and conceive of this iconic park is revealing of different patterns of emplacement. 70ys-old Nadeer explained that London Bengalis meet there to celebrate International Mother Tongue day every year at the Shahid Minar, which is a replica of the national monument[7] in Dhaka. 28ys-old Ashraf emphasized: "Altab Ali Park is the only park in Tower Jorges that has been re-named after a local Bengali resident. […] It is a park which many people can enjoy and I am proud of its history". For a British Bangla young man the murder of Altab Ali sounded hagiographic but fundamental to vindicate one's right to the city as a minority ethnic.[8] Altab Ali memorial is disseminated with photographs: 'Here to stay, here to fight', one placard read. The militant response to Altab Ali's murder, led by Bengali youth movements, was a turning point for local co-ethnics first, for all BME communities then (Statham, 1999). Newer generations of British Bangladeshis, who were born in the diaspora or joined it (or even "fell into it", like Ashraf said of himself) are taken to the Park by their elders as if it were a pilgrimage site of British-Bangla political consciousness. This reveals a dual notion of home and belonging, kinship and the nation blended into each other (Gardner & Mand, 2012). British Bangladeshi identity is built (and transmitted) on its racialized diaspora status and on a wider ethics of antiracism (Hoque, 2019). Although, even within the same migrant family, personal trajectories take different turns, the political background of being a minority settles in the homes of 2nd generations (Zeitlyn, 2015). Saeed might not share the same radical arguments as his scholarly cousin Ashraf, but a copy of *The Battle of Brick Lane* took place on his book shelves, a free reading to any tenants or temporary guests.

4.4.2 Faking Elitism in Wembley: The Domestic Space of Padmini

I am sipping a golden smoothie in a North-London café, invited out by the pioneer scholar in South Asian diaspora studies, and my personal heroine. The professor laments she would have taken me home if not for the plumbers that were deranging her apartment, but she quickly makes up for it recommending 'a reliable host in the

[7] The monument commemorates those killed during the Bengali Language Movement demonstrations of 1952 in what was then East Pakistan.

[8] On 4 May 1978, election day, the young Bangladeshi man was stabbed by three teenagers supporting the far-right National Front. Later at the trial they declared having attacked Ali because he was a 'Paki'.

area'. After two-hours conversation, she hands over to me a piece of paper where she scribbles down the name of a dear friend who is keen on taking up 'responsible guest students' at her place.

Padmini's house sits on the verge of two districts, where Brent turns into Wembley.[9] As the city expanded after WWII, so the numbers of former colonized immigrants soared. North-west London became a pinnacle for the Indian communities from Gujrat since the late 50s. Westminster College, which graduated the first Hindu elites in Britain, was the traction force behind the development of Harrow and its ultimate Neasden Temple, "the largest *mandir* outside India". Padmini and her husband were just a young couple in the 70s when they left Sri Lanka, or the island of Ceylon as she often refers to her homeland inadvertently, as if the country was still a Dominion ruled by the British. With a degree in accounting and a lump of savings, setting up a new household in London was an option that many educated Sri Lankan Sinhala ventured in the 70s, before the civil war broke out, and another flow of Tamils sought refuge in Britain (David, 2012). The couple followed after Padmini's elder sister and brother-in-law, who had already moved to Greenhill and opened a restaurant catering for the local South Asian palates. Although their families had come from the Buddhist Theravada tradition, interreligious conviviality had never been an issue for them, at least with the Hindus with whom memories of trade between South India and Sri Lanka were vivid.

The spouses moved houses a few times, going up the social ladder from outer to inner north London, from council flats to a terraced house, and finally in Willesden. When I rang the doorbell, their white-washed and timber-wooden semi-detached property did not seem any different from the bourgeois buildings running up on that hilly avenue. A woman in her sixties, sporting a tracksuit and a soft smile, opened the door and let me in, greeting me with a proper *Namaste* and gently *rubbing*[10] her warm hands over mine. October afternoons were for yoga and tea, and by the time I dropped my bags Padmini had already brewed one cup for her 'guest student'. We took our time to know each other in her sitting room, accompanied by the rhythmic sound of a pendulum clock brought from Sri Lanka ages ago: a carved and painted jungle-fowl (bird endemic to the island and national icon) beat all the conversations we held since, whether small or intense.

The muffled stomps on the carpeted staircase that went up the three floors were the next sound coming to my mind when I think of the days and nights spent at her place. While I was reserved a small self-unit extension in the garden (quiet and bright, with a toilet en-suite, but terribly cold at night with no heating other than a

[9] The district was chosen to host the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, resulting in the development of landmarks like the Empire Stadium, later known as Wembley and still regarded as the iconic soccer field.

[10] As Monaghan (2006) writes, fieldwork is always embodied. Bodily encounters make the fabric of ethnographic knowledge. Evermore in the case of domestic ethnography, where the home-field is relatively small and enforces physical closeness among its dwellers, bodily contacts would deserve an important consideration (also in regard of kinship rules for gendered codes of behaviour and intimacy), which does not feature in this chapter for lack of space.

portable electric stove), Padmini's elder son, his Polish young bride and their toddler lived in the attic room. Her youngest son slept in a room on the first floor, sharing the bathroom and kitchenette with a couple of MBA students freshly arrived from Gujrat. Provided they did not misbehave, rent-paying boarding guests made a nice addition to Padmini's livelihood, especially since her husband had left the family about ten years earlier, early retiring and going back to the highlands of Sri Lanka.

As I returned time and again to find solace in Padmini's place, our tea times evolved into 'authentic' Sri Lankan-style suppers. She grilled the veggies I bought from the local Sainsbury's, we added the mixed chutneys homemade by her sister, and washed it all down with coconut water. Our mutual trust leavened until reciprocal secrets were not more meant to be kept (Coleman, 2013). Among the others, I learnt that her husband had not returned to the homeland for nostalgia or for curing his arthrosis in the tropical climate. Following his involvement in a fatal car accident, the man took to heavy drinking, frequenting the local pubs (run by a sizeable Irish community) instead of showing up at work. In fact, as we walked downtown for errands, Padmini quickened the pace and rolled her eyes when we passed by those *public houses* of perdition. Neither medical rehab nor spiritual healing provided by the local Bodhisattva restored Reman's wellbeing. Shoved to resign from his job, hounded with guilt, he agreed with his wife to take a long vacation in their home village. That time out stretched into months and then years, until Padmini and Reman fell out of their marriage. Divorce was filed from abroad and the woman, well into her fifties with two sons at college, felt the bangers of loneliness and the sharp taste of "not being an achiever anymore". Her gendered form of mobility had lost its bite (Sheller, 2008).

While the Ceylonese Women's Association in the UK was founded in 1959 to coordinate social activities for their members upon new arrivals in the country (and eventually morphed into an enterprise for British Sri Lankan professionals; Jazeel, 2006), middle-age called Padmini back to the Buddhist Theravada society, where her sons had once learnt writing Sinhala (Deegalle, 2004). In refurbishing the place, worn-out desks were given away for free, and my hostess had put one in the bedroom where I slept. When I stayed up late writing on my PC, I could see the traces of other alphabets, indecipherable but supple graphs, inscribed on the wooden table which was now one of her 'home possessions' (Miller, 2001).

One day, walking into my room and finding that I had carelessly placed one of her books on Buddhism next to a copy of the Quran, my hostess unexpectedly complained that Islam had taken over the city, turning pre-existing churches into mosques. When I objected that the conversion of Christian churches into other places of worship was a recurrent urban realignment everywhere in London (Dwyer et al., 2015), she sighed with disbelief. Although a *graffiti* right in front of her house heralded interreligious conviviality in the borough (Fig. 4.2), Padmini's depreciative remarks did not spare any creed: the Hindu temple in Neasden was a mirror for larks, and the nearby Buddhist shrine, run by Americanized monks, could not compete with the *ashram* in the countryside where she promised to take me.

One Sunday we rise before dawn to meet her Bhadanta, Buddhist monk and spiritual master. He drives us in his electric car to the monastery where the practice

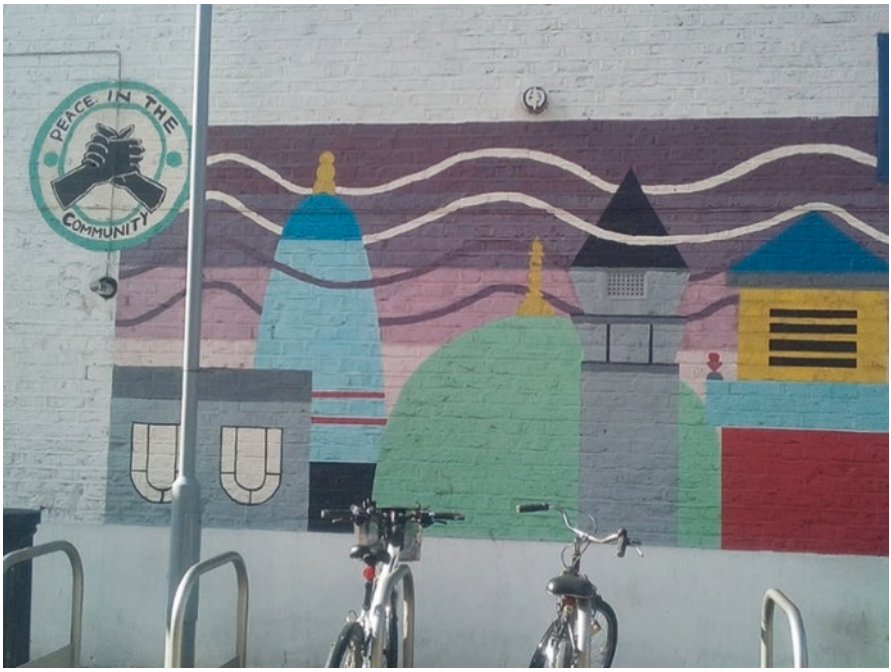

Fig. 4.2 Multifaith Suburbia in Brent. (Author's picture)

of meditation has gathered twelve people irrespective of religion that day. Prolonged cross-leg sitting, purred chants and one-day fast make me feel dizzy: only the intermittent sound of chimes breaks the hypnotic spell. It's dusk when we get home, and I am taken by surprise in hearing that a similar chain dangles down the entrance to Padmini's place. My hostess responds to my awe that the item has always been there. She can't even remember who brought it to the house. Her son Surya will then recount that the piece was as a gift from his sweetheart on a return visit to Sri Lanka. As the memories faded away and he entered into another love relationship, he just moved it down from his bedroom to the entrance door. Sensory and material encounters with objects in migrants' houses, as Ratnam (2018) argued, awaken remembrances and identifications with home(lands). However, they can also signal a progressive detachment from that lost experience, as in this case (Turkle, 2011). Surya offers to take me to a nearby shop where similar artifacts are sold. While the family-store is run by Indians, seashell wind chains do come from Ceylon, according to the vendor who is trying to make a good deal with a curious white foreigner. My chaperon giggles and concludes the payment on my behalf, so that his naïve guest is not being served an overpriced article.

I stayed countless times at Padmini's over three years, each time re-packing my bags with a food gift from her kitchen. At every return visit, my hostess cut down on the rent she used to ask from me, until she went beyond my expectations on her last birthday. Elated with the bunch of flowers I got for her, as I had become a *miturā*

(lit. friend in Sinhala) by then, my short visits would always be welcome. No charges applied.

4.4.3 *Rituals of Home Screening in Southall: The Domestic Space of Bachan*

As I contended earlier, migrants' objects within or across their domestic spaces connote deeper experiences and larger issues, as "a *synecdoche* of home and mobility, a part which is made to represent the whole" (Bonfanti, 2020: 43). Recollecting how I literally sat 'on a round of sofas' in my exercise of domestic ethnography within diaspora houses, I emphasized how domestic material culture provides the chance to speculatively travel across space and time along a household's migratory rhythms. My fascination with stories of *diwan* (Hindi-Urdu for the English 'sofa') sits well in the ethnographic relationship I developed with Bachan's family, and cultivated across Punjab and Britain.

Travelling back to the Indian Punjab a few years ago, I would sit every night on a brand-new *diwan*, a buttoned leather chesterfield set still wrapped in cling folds, which my Sikh host had positioned right in the middle of his son's remittance house in a remote countryside village. A widower in his sixties, the man lived alone in a new flat downtown, close to other younger relations, but he drove back and forth every week to oversee that house much dreamed by his emigrated offspring. As Taylor (2014) reminds us, Punjabi transnationalism is engraved in complex 'home-to-home' dynamics from the homeland to the host-land and back. When I suggested stripping off that sticky top (stained with varnish and smears caused by casual guests dripping their teas), my host looked at me in dismay. Only his son, or his grandson, would be entitled to do that, but neither had been able to return since the house had been completed. The sitting room, which was designed to offer comfort for family intimacy, was then open to welcome dear neighbours for socialising. On long winter nights, when the village was almost deserted after many of its young residents had moved overseas, that *diwan* was the fulcrum of hospitality for those left behind and those on rare return visits. Dozen neighbours dropped in during my visit and crowded it with *chai*-chats. Among the neighbours of my host in Punjab, I happened to mingle with another Sikh family on a return visit, which had since relocated to London Southall, the epicentre of Sikh resettlements in the UK since the 1950s (Baumann, 1995). Little did I know at the time that I would meet them again there, following their diaspora trails along my ethnographic vagaries.

Bachan, Jasbinder and their two young children soon became my easiest-to-go acquaintances during those weeks in the north Punjab. Not only did they speak excellent English, compared to the strain for understanding/interpreting most of my Punjabi-speaking informants onsite. The kids, who were used at being cultural-brokers as native British Sikhs, were happy to take me around the *pind* (village), scouting for wild animals, or inviting me over to their remittance house, which was

still under construction but promised to become even 'larger and grander' than the 'nice one' where I was currently staying. After all, their family was highly reputed in the village, not just in class-cum-caste terms (they were Jatt landowners), but also because in their property under renovation lived the oldest woman in the district, who was believed to have reached her 90th birthday. In accordance with Punjabi patri-lineage, and addressed as *Nani Ji,* the lady was Bachan's paternal grandmother; a great-grandmother to Kaur and Singh, or *paradadi*, as the kids explained. To me, pining for my own children left at home, spending leisure time with Kaur and Singh (then 8 and 4) was extremely heart-warming. Receiving a daily blessing from Nani Ji's bedside was equally reassuring. Bachan and Jasbinder were overtly kind and generous with me, at times remarking our common condition as Europeans going on home visits through India. Of course, I was a guest-and-ethnographer, they were (temporarily) returning migrants (Brettell, 2006). Both husband and wife though were busy managing their affairs. He spent the day with his sharecroppers in the fields, she was often on the phone or reading from an e-book device. I learnt then that she was preparing for a competition notice as she worked in the London Met Police. Years went by, and I only heard from Bachan on occasions, when he would repost on FB pictures of our meeting in Punjab.

By the time I met again that Brit-Sikh family in the UK, he had become the head of a fitted furniture company. Paying a visit to their showroom in West London, crowded by generations of British Punjabi buyers, sofas abounded, just like on his commercial webpage. When I quizzed Bachan about which furnishing was more essential in a home, he cut it short: "Well, on a bed you crush and get a good sleep. On a couch you can have someone else to crush, not just for sleep." His sibylline words spoke of the countless social relations that a *diwan* could host, in private and public spaces, from family intimacies to political dealings (Dibbits, 2009; Savas, 2010). In Bachan's view, as a producer and seller of quality sofas in Ealing, these articles seemed to make home a more amenable place, open to welcome those *others* who could be – selectively - admitted to enter and be entertained at one's home-space. The sofa set which his wife had chosen to complement their sitting room was a case in point (Fig. 4.3): a piece that blended in the functions of ethnic symbol, affluence and fashionability.

Doing fieldwork in a variety of domestic spaces with South Asians, homeland and in the diaspora, private or semi-public (like houses of worship – Bonfanti and Bertolani, Chap. 10), the *diwan* literally backed my participant observation and many conversations with informants. As a key element in furnishing a sitting room and structuring the domestic space as to allow practices of hospitality, a *diwan* could not be missing from Bachan's family home in Southall. My friends' house stood in the newer area of town, just off the Green shopping boulevard. Differently from most of my local British-Asian participants, for whom patrilocality remained the norm in setting up a new household, when Jasbinder and Bachan got married (after a not-so-combined first date at a friend's event), the wife imposed her provisos for buying a property in a specific suburban location where she already felt at home. As a second-generation British Sikh herself, born to a couple who had fled Tanzania in the late Sixties ("twice migrants" – Bhachu, 1984), that lateral street nearby the

Fig. 4.3 Inviting sofa from Southall – Chota Punjab. (Author's picture)

Ramgharia gurdwara spoke of her infancy in Southall's urban Kaleidoscope (Nasser, 2004). One generation later, her children also attended the next door Ramgharia community hall. The fluent Punjabi they could spoke at home was more the outcome of that weekly community education than an everyday family habit. English and Punjabi were both spoken in their house, with a slight preference for the first; at least this was my perception upon reiterated home visits. Despite our long-time connection and mutual trust, I never slept over at Bachan and Jasbinder's. Declining their initial invitation, I thought it unpractical and rude to over-impose my presence, as their terraced house had four-bedrooms but all were occupied at the time. Although there was a large, black-tanned leather 6-seater sofa in my friends' sitting room, neither I nor they would ever think of it as a place for 'couch-surfing'. Not even Kaur's girlfriends were allowed to sleep there during pyjama-parties, since the family *diwan* functioned as a relational and ostensive piece which embedded normative ideas of house-holding and micro-politics. A sofa in the home thus acts as a *liminal* object: the threshold between common and private, hosts and guests, possibly reinstating male and female spatial segregation. The license of couches for joining or separating is an interesting dynamic. It reveals the agency that subjects themselves exert on the space they occupy through the mediation of furnishings (Bonfanti, 2020).

Upon yet another home visit to my friends' in Southall, I was invited to celebrate, together with Jasbinder's aged parents, the first anniversary since their

remittance house in Punjab had been completed. I came along with a box of fine Indian pastries bought on the Green and we all lined up on the sofa (young Singh sitting on the carpet). As if at a home-cinema screening, on their 50′ inch flat TV the show started. For about 90′ minutes the film that Bhachan had made professionally recorded took us back to the *pind.* Their *khoti* (remittance house) was being inaugurated with a throng of villagers celebrating, and even the Guru Grant Sahib (the Sikh holy book) was brought on his throne to visit the house. Sadly, Nani Ji had passed away. However, Kaur said, her great-grandmother would have been proud to see her family villa accomplished. It is hard to foresee who will ever go and live in that fabulous house in the Punjabi countryside. Its owners are solidly emplaced in London, and even their accent sounds more British day after day. By now, the story of this South Asian diaspora household (mixed in ages and homelands of migration) is seen and told on that *diwan*, and a feeling of homesickness for a house which we all cherished in our memories with different affective intensities (Ratnam, 2018) overwhelms me too.

4.5 Discussion: The Mirroring Game of Hos(ti)pitality

As my periodical visits to the UK run consistently for three years (after which the pandemic enforced remote follow-ups), but were ephemeral if compared to my sustained ethnographic practice with Punjabi families in Italy, the kind of observation and participation I was able to conduct and reflect upon in British Asian homes were more in tune with a less engaged and more detached co-presence (Hall, 2014). While this ethnographic position as a fleeting guest might have spared me some emotional distress that comes with being actively involved in the lives and homes of informants, it did afford me to consider that 'third space' evoked by Homi Bhabha (1994) in a possibly neater lens.

Domestic ethnography within diaspora homes allowed moments for intimacy and discussion, material sharing and cognitive elaboration. These proceeded rapidly as the ethnographic relation between the host(s) and their guest evolved, one threshold at a time, notwithstanding misinterpretations or missteps. On one side, intimacy invokes emotion and the senses. Home visits in migrant domestic spaces pick up on the 'sensuous re-turn' in anthropology and involve contextual and reflexive, ethnological and ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and thick description (Pink, 2004; Stoller, 2010). Narrative, memory, ways of dealing with migration and social change, the construction of identities in a globalising and unequal world are just some of the objects that the researcher can observe, and the topics on which s/he can engage their informants in debate. On another side, if anthropology as a discipline has recognized different levels of engagement and collaboration between ethnographers and their informants (Low & Merry, 2010), the sort of domestic ethnography I conducted with my research partners in the UK felt like at a crossroad between pure research and public anthropology. Albeit restricted within their homes, the main purpose of knowledge production turned into the possibility of exercising

social critique in our informal conversations (Susser, 2010), discussing what it meant to be at home in the diaspora and what it took to (possibly) get there.

> My focus, however, is not on houses per se but on the multiple entanglements that houses illuminate between the lives and relations that are enacted within them and the historically inflected social and political contexts in which they are situated. Houses are not only embedded in the biographies of their inhabitants and vice versa, they embody the interconnections between individual trajectories, kinship and the state. (Carsten, 2018: 103)

Looking from within (and without) South Asian diaspora house(hold)s, situated in certain BME neighborhoods, called for an appreciation of cultural formations such as the Punjabi *parivaar* (the nuclear unit) and *biraderi* (the extended family), but also the binarism between *ghar* and *makan*, respectively (affective) home and (material) house. Being the domestic space symbolic and physical at once, morally and politically oriented, an awareness of hierarchies and intersectionality within the household is equally central. At the end of the day, "*domopolitics* starts in the home, proceeds from there, and often comes home" (Bonfanti, 2020: 119).

Having said that, micro-politics at home influences whether and how acts of hospitality are enacted. While the practice of hosting presumes the idea of a stranger who is turned into a guest, the prescriptive manner in which this transformative social process take place is a defining element of the household (Roy, 1994). As a crucial unit within which production, distribution, and consumption are organised, and individuals are differentially socialised, the household can maintain its order insofar as it enters in a distributive network with others, enabling some to enter its precincts by providing essential aid such as food and shelter, as well as wider social support (and at the same time excluding others from the same courtesies).

In looking comparatively at the three home-studies detailed above, one needs to consider not only their categorical diversity (nationality, religion, age of migration, and urban location), but also the different ways of house-holding that each of my informants (and their co-living kin or non-kin) pursued. Their homemaking projects did take many forms: from the efforts of a Bangla couple to defend their racialized community in Newham, to the multiscale nostalgia of a Ceylonese woman getting old in Wembley, to the translocal connections of a mixed Sikh family in Ealing. Easy conclusions cannot be drawn, but overarching comments allow.

Upon reiterated home visits, spending a considerable amount of time in a longitudinal manner with the households recruited for research gave me a chance to investigate daily life and the negotiation of urban diversity from below, as continuously reenacted by different actors. Furthermore, stepping out and going about the neighborhood where my hosts resided meant to learn their awareness of local policies and the role of state actors in managing diversity from above, in a global city where certain migrant groups have been settled for long in the aftermath of decolonization. Since the establishment of South Asian diasporas in Britain has occurred over decades with a constant intake from different regions, their immigration has affected the process of postcolonial urbanization. As a result, to situate their dwelling places in a lived-mapping of London, walking the streets along with my informants, allowed me to grasp some socio-economic and political dimensions of

British Asian homemaking beyond the dwelling space (Dwyer et al., 2015; Blunt & Sheringham, 2019; Butcher, 2019). This chapter thus makes a contribution to the emergent discourse on 'radical cartography' that urban ethnographers have raised in the UK (Duggan & Cohen, 2021). This is with the aim to see, beneath the surface of maps, which actual territories exist and how these are experienced and transformed by their inhabitants as they attempt at constructing already existing boroughs into home places.

Looking at how space is (re)territorialized by its residents, and especially by mounting migrant groups different for backgrounds and cohorts, means not only to focus on place-making frictions and developments. Spatial practices of homemaking also incorporate those flickering moments that diaspora subjects experience here and now, with (un)predictable reference to other times, places and network: what Hage (2021) defines a "lenticular" form of being-in-the-world. Based on his long-term (auto)ethnography with Lebanese worldwide, the author maintained the salience of singular locations in studying migrant transnationalism, and conceptualized "the diasporic condition" as being simultaneously actant upon one's place of settlement, and embedded in 'a (not so imaginary) community' with whom social, economic and political relations remain vibrant (Hage, 2005).

As being and feeling at home in the diaspora is situational, based on multiple social interactions and cultural processes of hybridization (Appadurai, 1996), a focus on locality and location was also fruitful in developing a critical perspective, beyond a generic recognition of internal differences based on religion, nationality, language and so forth (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thus, in the same way that breaking through the category of British Asian-ness produces a confusion of the possibility of both terms, so, too, attempting a domestic ethnography with South Asian Londoners has provided with a window to look inside the house and out onto the street, flickering understandings of *desh/pardesh*. There I stood in the threshold which is the South Asian diaspora: amid their multiple places and temporalities, whose irresolvable simultaneity pulsed in the acts of hospitality that my hosts conceded in postcolonial Britain. Doing a domestic ethnography with South Asians in London reveals that the idea and practice of home, in its multiscale realization, is crucial to understand the conditions on which rules of hospitality are deployed: be they the regimes of mobility and multicultural policies allowed in postcolonial Britain (Harper & Constantine, 2010; Meer & Modood, 2009) or the domestic habits which my hosts/esses and I shared, out of the mutual familiarity we were able to reach case by case, day after day (Herzfeld, 2016; Bonfanti, 2019, 2020).

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I considered the possible forms of *homing*, i.e. homemaking under conditions of mobility, that three South Asian diaspora households experienced in the capital city of their former colonizing power. London remains a target destination for new South Asian migrations (or for swelling the ranks of those

long-established; Hoque, 2019). It is also the most revealing place of their internal diversity and peculiar accommodation in the country since the early twentieth-century (Peach, 2006). Londoners with an Asian heritage have been at the forefront of the political scene for decades, shaping the policies and attitudes to migration and multiethnic relations. Public figures as pole-apart as Sadiq Khan, Mayor from the Labor Party, or Priti Patel, former Home Secretary and Conservative MP (respectively second generation Pakistani and second generation Indian) are the most recent examples. While their deeds sit at the opposite ends of political hos(ti)pitality, between cosmopolitan conviviality and immigration restrictions, both characters have been repeatedly brought up in conversation by my research partners. Belonging to the South Asian diaspora does not equate with homogenous political stances. On the contrary, it seems to fuel harsh disputes,[11] based on different affiliations and life experiences. The families whose homes I visited and whose stories I reported here make just a tiny patchwork of such prime British Asian canvas. These three cases give evidence to the peculiarity of home experiences under the one tag of being British-Asian. From my position of guest-and-ethnographer, I went through the home lives of my hosts-and-informants and made sense of their diaspora houses as 'biographical objects', which embody the interconnection between individual trajectories, kinship and the state (Carsten, 2018; Gardner, 2002). This ultimately reveals the close interdependence between domestic and urban ethnography (cf. Boccagni and Bonfanti, Introduction). Taking the homes of British-Asian diaspora informants as a safe base and starting point (notwithstanding their many frictions barely concealed to my eyes), I ventured out with them in the neighborhoods to understand how a sense of belonging to the place one inhabits can be claimed for, contested and ultimately (re)produced and transformed (Brah, 1999; McLoughlin et al., 2014).

Although an ethnographer remains an outsider, as close to the lived experience of their research subjects as s/he may come to, I can still recall each and every scent of all my home addresses in London. As much as I treasure vibrant memories of them all, the hospitality I received had its own penchants and neglects. How I did (or did not) gain a progressive intimacy within the dwelling spaces of research participants was a matter of reciprocal perceptions, intensity of sharing and happenstances. Reasoning on the potential but also on the limits of hospitality in doing ethnographic home visits means to recognize how a key set of practices for mutual recognition between dweller and stranger depends on categories of identification as much as on the social relations within and without the house that literally hold it.

The project funding this research work has since ended, but, as explorative as my visits were, many of the diaspora homes I attended explicitly remain 'open' to possible return visits from their guest-ethnographer. If anything, instant messages on social media maintain hospitality a reachable horizon. The multigenerational

[11] As the 'Nationality and Borders Bill' was being discussed in the House of Common in autumn 2021, upon my casual enquiries about their opinion, I received messages from former British-Asian research participants which ranged from rage to support, also and consistently in tune with the migration history of the subjects concerned.

house(hold)s of my former participants may have already changed and likely will change their course. Seasoned ethnographers contend that the fieldwork is never really done. I would add that 'domestic ethnography' is possibly even more engrossing for an anthropologist with a flair for it.

References

Alexander, C. (2011). Making Bengali Brick Lane: Claiming and contesting space in east London. *The British Journal of Sociology, 62*(2), 201–220.

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large*. University of Minnesota Press.

Ballard, R. (1994). *Desh/Pardesh: The South Asian presence in Britain*. Hurst.

Baumann, G. (1995). Managing a poly-ethnic milieu: Kinship and interaction in a London suburb. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 1*, 725–741.

Baumann, M. (2000). Diaspora: Genealogies of semantics and transcultural comparison. *Numen, 47*(3), 313–337.

Bhabha, H. K. (2012). *The location of culture*. Routledge. (1st ed., 1994).

Bhachu, P. (1984). East African Sikhs in Britain. *Immigrants & Minorities, 3*(3), 276–296.

Blunt, A., & Sheringham, O. (2019). Home-city geographies. *Progress in Human Geography, 43*(5), 815–834.

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home*. Palgrave.

Boccagni, P., & Brighenti, A. (2017). Immigrants and home in the making. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*(1), 1–11.

Bonfanti, S. (2016). Dislocating Punjabiyat: Gendered mobilities among Indian diasporas in Italy. In I. Goetz et al. (Eds.), *Bounded mobilities* (pp. 183–205). Transcript Verlag.

Bonfanti, S. (2018). Heimweh und Heimweh. Translokale Strategien der Hausarbeit in indischen Diaspora-Familien. In H. P. Hahn & F. Neumann (Eds.), *Das neue Zuhause* (pp. 265–287). Campus.

Bonfanti, S. (2019). Walking along in Southall: Changing frames of a fabled ghetto in greater London. *Lo Squaderno: Explorations in Space and Society, 53*, 11–16.

Bonfanti, S. (2020). (Im)materiality. In A. Miranda-Nieto, A. Massa, & S. Bonfanti (Eds.), *Ethnographies of home and mobility* (pp. 39–65). Routledge.

Bonfanti, S., & Pérez Murcia, L. E. (2023). Bringing the migrants' voices to the home-mobility nexus. In L. E. Pérez-Murcia & S. Bonfanti (Eds.), *Finding home in Europe*. Berghahn.

Bonfanti, S., Massa, A., & Miranda-Nieto, A. (2018). *Setting the table, having a seat: A reflection on positionalities while searching for home and mobility* (HOMInG Working Paper no. 3).

Bonfanti, S., Massa, A., & Miranda, A. (2019). Whiffs of home. Ethnographic comparison in a collaborative research study across European cities. *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa, 2*, 153–174.

Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. Routledge.

Brah, A. (1999). The scent of memory: Strangers, our own, and others. *Feminist Review, 61*, 4–26.

Brettell, C. B. (2006). Introduction: Global spaces/local places: Transnationalism, diaspora, and the meaning of home. *Identities, 13*(3), 327–334.

Brickell, K., & Datta, A. (2011). *Translocal geographies*. Ashgate.

Brown, J. M. (2006). *Global south Asians: Introducing the modern diaspora* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

Butcher, M. (2019). Re-working encounter: The role of reflexivity in managing difference. *Social & Cultural Geography, 20*(9), 1198–1217.

Carsten, J. (2018). House-lives as ethnography/biography. *Social Anthropology, 26*(1), 103–116.

Clifford, J. (1989). Notes on travel and theory. *Inscriptions, 5*(5.29), 11.

Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology, 9*(3), 302–338.
Cohen, R. (2008). *Global diasporas: An introduction*. Routledge.
Coleman, L. (Ed.). (2013). *Food: Ethnographic encounters*. Berg.
Da Col, G. (2019). The H-factor of anthropology. Hoarding, hosting, hospitality. *L'Homme, 231–232*, 13–40.
David, A. R. (2012). Embodied migration: Performance practices of diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil communities in London. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 33*(4), 375–394.
Deegalle, M. (2004). Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism in London. In *South Asians in the diaspora* (pp. 52–73). Brill.
Della Puppa, F., & King, R. (2019). The new 'twice migrants': Motivations, experiences and disillusionments of Italian-Bangladeshis relocating to London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45*(11), 1936–1952.
Dench, G., Gavron, K., & Young, M. (2006). *The new east end*. Profile.
Derrida, J. (2000). Hostipitality. *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities, 5*(3), 3–18.
Dibbits, H. (2009). Furnishing the salon: Symbolic ethnicity and performative practices in Moroccan-Dutch domestic interiors. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 33*, 550–557.
Dirks, N. B. (2011). *Castes of mind*. Princeton University Press.
Duggan, M., & Cohen, P. (2021). *New directions in radical cartography*. Rowman & Littlefield.
Dwyer, C. (1999). Veiled meanings: Young British Muslim women and the negotiation of differences. *Gender, Place & Culture, 6*, 5–26.
Dwyer, C. L., Gilbert, D., & Ahmed, N. (2015). Building the sacred in Suburbia. *Built Environment, 41*(4), 477–490.
Eade, J. (1989). *The politics of community: Bangladeshis in East London*. Ashgate.
Faist, T. (2009). The transnational social question. *International Sociology, 24*(1), 7–35.
Fog Olwig, K. (1997). Cultural sites: Sustaining home in a de-territorialised world. In K. Fog Olwig & K. Hastrup (Eds.), *Siting culture: The shifting anthropological object* (pp. 17–38). Routledge.
Gardner, K. (2002). *Age, narrative and migration: The life course and life histories of Bengali elders in London*. Berg.
Gardner, K., & Mand, K. (2012). 'My away is here': Place, emplacement and mobility amongst British Bengali children. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 38*(6), 969–986.
Gielis, R. (2009). A global sense of migrant places. *Global Networks, 9*(2), 271–287.
Goulbourne, H. (1998). *Race relations in Britain since 1945*. Macmillan International.
Hage, G. (2005). A not so multi-sited ethnography of a not so imagined community. *Anthropological theory, 5*(4), 463–475.
Hage, G. (2021). *The diasporic condition*. University of Chicago Press.
Hall, S. M. (2014). Ethics of ethnography with families. *Environment and Planning A, 46*(9), 2175–2194.
Hall, S. (2015). Cultural identity and diaspora. In *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory* (pp. 392–403). Routledge.
Harper, M., & Constantine, S. (2010). *Migration and empire*. Oxford University Press.
Herzfeld, M. (1993). *The social production of indifference. Exploring the symbolic roots of Western bureaucracy*. University of Chicago Press.
Herzfeld, M. (2016). *Cultural intimacy* (3rd ed). Routledge. (1st ed., 2005).
Hoque, A. (2019). *Being young, male and Muslim in Luton*. UCL Press.
Jackson, M. (2000). *At home in the world* (Vol. 10). Duke University Press.
Jaffrelot, C. (2010). *Religion, caste, and politics in India*. Primus Books.
Jazeel, T. (2006). Postcolonial geographies of privilege. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 31*(1), 19–33.
Knott, K., & McLoughlin, S. (2010). *Diasporas: Concepts, intersections, identities*. Bloomsbury.
Lal, B. V., & Jacobsen, K. A. (2015). Dispersals, migrations, diversity of communities and the notion of an Indian diaspora. In *Routledge handbook of contemporary India* (pp. 159–171). Routledge.

Low, S. M., & Merry, S. E. (2010). Engaged anthropology: Diversity and dilemmas: An introduction to supplement 2. *Current Anthropology, 51*(S2), S203–S226.
Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding home. *The Sociological Review, 52*(1), 62–89.
McLoughlin, S., Gould, W., Kabir, A. J., & Tomalin, E. (Eds.). (2014). *Writing the city in British Asian diasporas*. Routledge.
Meer, N., & Modood, T. (2009). Refutations of racism in the 'Muslim question'. *Patterns of Prejudice, 43*(3–4), 335–354.
Michaud, G. (2020). Jacques Derrida: politique et poétique de l'hospitalité. *Philosophiques, 47*(2), 369–392.
Miller, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Home possessions*. Bloomsbury.
Miranda Nieto, A., Massa, A., & Bonfanti, S. (2020). *Ethnographies of home and mobility: Shifting roofs*. Routledge.
Monaghan, L. F. (2006). Fieldwork and the body. In *The Sage handbook of fieldwork* (pp. 225–242). Sage.
Nasser, N. (2004). Southall's Kaleido-scape: A study in the changing morphology of a west London suburb. *Built Environment, 30*(1), 76–103.
Peach, C. (2006). South Asian migration and settlement in Great Britain, 1951–2001. *Contemporary South Asia, 15*(2), 133–146.
Pink, S. (2004). *Home truths*. Berg.
Pitt-Rivers, J. (2012). The law of hospitality. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 2*(1), 501–517.
Qureshi, K., Charsley, K. A. H., & Shaw, A. (2014). Marital instability among British Pakistanis. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 37*(2), 261–279.
Ratnam, C. (2018). Creating home: Intersections of memory and identity. *Geography Compass, 12*(4), e12363.
Roy, K. (1994). Defining the household: Some aspects of prescription and practice in early India. *Social Scientist, 22*, 3–18.
Salzman, P. (2002). On reflexivity. *American Anthropologist, 104*(3), 805–813.
Savas, O. (2010). The collective Turkish home in Vienna. *Home Cultures, 7*(3), 313–340.
Selwyn, T. (2000). An anthropology of hospitality. In C. Lasheley & A. Morrison (Eds.), *In search of hospitality: Theoretical perspectives and debates* (pp. 18–37). Butterworth-Heinemann.
Sheller, M. (2008). Gendered mobilities: Epilogue. In T. P. Uteng & T. Cresswell (Eds.), *Gendered mobilities* (pp. 257–265). Ashgate.
Statham, P. (1999). Political mobilisation by minorities in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 25*(4), 597–626.
Stoller, P. (2010). *The taste of ethnographic things*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
Susser, I. (2010). The anthropologist as social critic. *Current Anthropology, 51*(S2), S227–S233.
Taylor, S. (2014). The diasporic pursuit of home and identity: Dynamic Punjabi transnationalism. *The Sociological Review, 62*(2), 276–294.
Tölölyan, K. (1991). The nation-state and its others. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, 1*(1), 3–7.
Tölölyan, K. (2018). Diaspora studies: Past, present and promise. In *Routledge handbook of diaspora studies* (pp. 22–30). Routledge.
Turkle, S. (Ed.). (2011). *Evocative objects: Things we think with*. MIT press.
Vertovec, S. (1997). Three meanings of "diaspora", exemplified among South Asian religions. *Diaspora, 6*(3), 277–299.
Vindrola-Padros, C. (2021). Introduction. In *Rapid ethnographies* (pp. 1–17). Cambridge University Press.
Werbner, P. (2002). The place which is diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 28*(1), 119–133.
Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the politics of belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice, 40*(3), 197–214.
Zeitlyn, B. (2012). The Sylheti *bari* and the Londoni flat. *Space and Culture, 15*(4), 317–329.
Zeitlyn, B. (2015). *Transnational childhoods: British Bangladeshis, identities and social change*. Springer.

Chapter 5
Shared Flats in Madrid: Accessing and Analysing Migrants' Sense of Home

Alejandro Miranda-Nieto

5.1 Introduction: Accessing the Shared Household

Shared flats are households in multiple occupation in which people who have no family ties or close relationship inhabit a common dwelling place. This type of households has been portrayed as one of the many forms of housing precariousness, particularly in urban settings (Veness, 1993; Garvie, 2001), as well as a way to cope with the shortage of affordable housing in large cities (Parutis, 2011). Although sharing accommodation has also been associated with forms of student housing and young people (Thomsen, 2007), there is evidence that the decline in home ownership and increasing housing precarity in many cities around the world is leading people to share accommodation for longer periods of time, across widening age groups (Maalsen, 2019). It is clear that people resort to this arrangement mostly because of issues of housing affordability (Nasreen & Ruming, 2020). Yet, shared flats are more than an outcome of precarity. They are also an entry point to the analysis of a variety of meanings of home that emerge from the roles flatmates play within these dwelling places. This chapter addresses some methodological issues arising from an ethnographic examination of such roles. It particularly focuses on the tension between dwelling and developing a sense of home in the context of shared flats, and some of the ways in which this tension can be approached from an ethnographic angle. I argue that the subjective meanings of dwelling in a shared flat emerge through conscious volition: dwellers voluntarily attach a sense of home in various ways – or refuse to do so. Examining the roles played out within shared flats and the control that flatmates exert over very small settings within the flat offer entry points to the study of people's sense of home (or its refusal) in conditions of informality and marginality.

A. Miranda-Nieto (✉)
Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_5

My access to shared flats, and the opportunity to conduct participant observation in them, was inadvertent. Between 2018 and 2019 I conducted fieldwork in Madrid, seeking to understand how South Americans living in that city develop a sense of home in relation to their migratory experiences. I started building a network of research participants through snowball sampling that allowed me to conduct semi-structured interviews and gave me access to some of their dwelling places. Parallel to this process, I became a member of a WhatsApp group of Peruvians living in Madrid. The group aimed to gather people of that nationality to go out to eat, drink and socialise. When I met them at first and mentioned that I do not come from Peru, but from Mexico, they appeared surprised, although my interest in joining the group became clearer when I explained that I was conducting fieldwork for a research project on home and migration. Academic research was unfamiliar to most of them, but neither my role as a researcher, nor my nationality were an obstacle to the members of the group. They welcomed me with a gentle curiosity and over time I developed a friendly relationship with some of them. We always communicated in Spanish, our first language. Their ages ranged between 30 and late 40s (I was in my mid-30s at that time), there was about the same number of men and women in the group, most came from urban backgrounds in Peru and none of them had higher education degrees, although some had technical or vocational degrees. The difference in our educational backgrounds was sometimes brought up in the conversations in the form of jokes, to which I also contributed, making the issue a matter of laughter. Most people in this group were permanent residents in Spain or had dual citizenship, although a few had arrived rather recently, had expired tourist visas and were expecting to regularise their migratory status at some point. Still, neither migratory status, nor educational background constituted significant markers of difference because the group's main objective was to socialise in a friendly atmosphere.

We first gathered in cafes, restaurants and bars; later on we met in their own apartments because eating and drinking in their places was more affordable. I expressed to them my intent to conduct participant observation in their dwelling places, to which several agreed. Although I conducted one-on-one interviews in their apartments, I also attended gatherings that allowed me to participate in the dynamics of the flats, meeting other flatmates and interacting as a guest. In this group there were about 10 regulars, from which 8 were renting individual bedrooms or subletting bedrooms to others in their own apartments. Only another person and I were renting non-shared studios.

In this chapter I take four cases from this group to illustrate how their sense of home is constructed in the context of shared accommodation. This chapter draws from empirical materials stemming from HOMInG, a larger project that involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation and life histories. The four cases on which I concentrate show how dwelling and developing a sense of home are related, yet distinct spheres of homemaking. To some of these research participants, there is ambiguity in the way in which their flat constitutes a place of home attachment, while for others, the shared flat is a place devoid of the aura of familiarity, security and control that is often associated with the notion of home (Boccagni, 2017). Either home or non-home, shared flats offer the possibility of looking at the

home-migration nexus from a special angle because dwelling with strangers produces a peculiar relation between attachment to place and control over space (cf. Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022).

The following sections of this chapter briefly situate the discussion about shared flats in recent changes in household composition, particularly in the city of Madrid. I then turn to three different ways of dwelling in a shared flat, namely as a tenant, lease-leader and landlord. While these roles may change along people's housing trajectories, they produce specific engagements with the flat in question and the development of a sense of home. The meanings stemming from these dwelling practices also show certain agency among dwellers, despite their disadvantaged housing conditions.

5.2 Sharing Rentals in Madrid

Housing has considerably changed in many European cities over the last 50 years. Since the 1970s there has been an upsurge of new household arrangements that differ substantially from the nuclear family (Clapham, 2005). Single-person households and couples with no children have been relatively well documented in the literature (Kurz & Blossfeld, 2004), as well as groups of students sharing accommodation, against a background of pervasive gentrification in large cities (Moos et al., 2018). Yet, shared housing has received less scholarly attention, perhaps owing to the fact that most studies focus on housing markets in which a family or individuals rent or acquire a dwelling place (Dräger, 2020).

As with many other countries, household structures have changed in Spain over the last decades. The prevalence of a housing model based on home ownership has given place to more diversified housing contexts (Módenes et al., 2012). Data from the latest census of 2011 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021a) show that 9% of the total households in the country are composed of one person. Couples with no children have doubled from 2001 to 2011, and the figure is expected to turn higher in the upcoming census results. In Madrid, 10.5% of the total number of households are shared among people who are not from the same family (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021b). Calculating the exact number of shared households, however, is a daunting task because of the informal character of the majority of the arrangements and the speed at which they are formed and dissolved, as most people offering or soliciting bedrooms for rent use online platforms or hand-written advertisements on phone booths, as illustrated in Figs. 5.1 and 5.2.

In a qualitative study in the early 2000s, García Almirall and Frizzera (2008) describe the housing careers of migrants in Madrid in relation to their arrival, settling and stabilisation in the housing market. The first period, often lasting a few years, tends to be spent in shared flats found in the informal market (García Almirall & Frizzera, 2008: 45). The settling phase involves longer-term rent contracts in non-shared accommodation. During the stabilisation period, some opt for buying a flat, although – as we will see in the following section –, sharing a flat with strangers

Fig. 5.1 Hand-written advertisements stuck on a telephone booth, offering bedrooms for rent in shared flats in 2018. (Author's picture)

may continue over several years. Transitioning from renting a bedroom to paying a mortgage while subletting single bedrooms to strangers is a common housing trajectory in which people continue sharing accommodation for extended periods of time, while changing their role within the flat. Identified as an 'ascendant trajectory' by García Almirall and Frizzera, shifting from renting a single bedroom to renting bedrooms to others is a progression from insecure and precarious living conditions to relatively more stable arrangements. Over the last decades, these housing trajectories have been greatly impacted by economic crises, particularly during the bursting of the so-called *burbuja inmobiliaria española*, the Spanish housing bubble (Campos Echeverría, 2008). García Almirall and Frizzera note that many housing trajectories are not always ascendant, but full of vicissitudes, as migrants' capacity to access the Spanish housing market depends on complex configurations of economic, social and cultural dynamics.

The motivation for sharing a flat with strangers is indeed affordability, but there are other aspects that require further investigation. Some dwellers, for instance, share accommodation because it is close to work or public transport, or because they prefer to live in a specific neighbourhood instead of moving to a cheaper, yet distant part of the city. In doing so, they develop distinct senses of home that stem from the entangled relations with dwelling places, flatmates and the status as migrant or non-migrant. Sharing a flat is a common experience in the city of Madrid;

Fig. 5.2 Exchange of messages among members of a group of Peruvians in Madrid, soliciting and offering a bedroom for rent on a social media platform in 2019. (Author's picture)

a living arrangement that differs from other forms of co-housing, such as student lodges, living with friends or dwelling with one's extended family. In Spain, this form of subletting is regulated by the 'Ley de Arrendamientos Urbanos' [Law of Urban Renting] (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2019), requiring a written consent from the landlord, as well as tax declarations from both the landlord and the tenant subletting the bedroom. In practice, however, many subletting agreements are informal.

Subletting arrangements that are mere verbal agreements are part of larger social dynamics in which precarious work and living conditions are often intertwined. On the one hand, spatial segregation has long been identified by studies documenting how migrants tend to find it more difficult to access the rental market (López-Gay et al., 2019). Bosch et al. (2015), for instance, show how in Madrid and Barcelona there is a negative attitude towards migrants looking for rented accommodation, in comparison with the local population. On the other, many migrants in Madrid face precarious work conditions while having to confront a comparatively expensive housing market. In the specific case of Latin American migrants in Madrid, the structural dynamics that shape the precarious housing conditions of many of them are not fully considered in the literature (Masterson-Algar, 2016: 94). It is clear that migrants and non-migrants who resort to sharing flats, do so as a strategy to solve basic housing needs. So, what happens to people's sense of home while they share a flat? In what follows I analyse four cases to illustrate how different roles are related to the development of this sense, or its refusal.

5.3 Geometries of Flat Sharing

5.3.1 The Tenants

Karlita[1] is subletting a bedroom in a peripheral district in the south of Madrid. A Peruvian immigrant who moved to Spain in 2018, she found accommodation through friends she had in her previous place of residence, Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a serial migrant with an open outlook for further displacement (Ossman, 2013), Karlita has had a long experience renting single bedrooms: first moving from her hometown in a northern province in Peru to Lima, the capital; then migrating to Buenos Aires and living in different shared flats for 15 years. The economic instability and inflation in that country made it difficult for her to see any gains from her work as a cook, so she decided to move to Madrid as an undocumented migrant. She has worked in kitchens most of her life, first washing dishes as a teenager, then learning to cook full dishes by observing and assisting cooks in the restaurants that employed her. In our conversations she emphasised the importance of the relative economic independence that she gained from her work. Since an early age, earning her own money and renting her own space gave her the emotional force to assume and assert her identity as transgender. Throughout her migratory trajectory she has sought help from friends or acquaintances to find her next dwelling place. 'It is not easy to find accommodation, there is a lot of prejudice against people like me, I've always relied on friends, or friends of friends', she said. She would certainly prefer to have a flat of her own, but has not been able to afford it so far.

In talking about her relationship with the Spanish couple subletting her current bedroom, she mentions that her friend from Buenos Aires 'told them how I am and they were OK with it, they understand'. A young couple with no children, they leave early in the morning and return late in the evening. She sees them occasionally, even on weekends. Karlita and I met several times in the flat where she lives, a small two-bedroom apartment on the ground floor. When I asked her if she felt at home in that place, she shrugged her shoulders and stared outside through the window. 'I'll be home when I go back to Peru, when I have my own business and I'm close to my mom. She knows how I am and understands me'. 'So, if home is back in Peru, what is this flat to you?', I asked. She then described the ambiguous feelings of having the whole flat almost to herself because her flatmates are not home most of the time. Yet, she cannot change the place of the objects, modify the decoration beyond her bedroom, leave a corner untidy or buy and accumulate things. That flat was indeed small and already filled with the couple's furniture and personal objects. Her bedroom and the kitchen were the only realms that allowed her to exercise a degree of domesticity. Still, her way of practising domesticity lacks the security and control that characterises a sense of home (Easthope, 2014).

If home takes the shape of an imagined future for Karlita, in the case of Ricardo there is a sound refusal to cultivate a sense of home. Ricardo has lived in different

[1] All participants' names are pseudonyms.

shared flats since he moved from Lima to Madrid 15 years ago. As a documented immigrant with a technical certification and a stable job, he is not in a precarious job situation. He could probably access the rental market if he wanted to, although in our conversations he was reluctant to elaborate if he had any experiences of dismissal or discrimination in searching for a place to live. In any case, he finds renting single bedrooms a more convenient arrangement. He is convinced that renting a bedroom requires less maintenance, less money and less worries. For him, home is neither back in the place of origin, nor in an idealised past or in future expectations. Ricardo simply relegates a sense of home in the ranking of his personal priorities. Compared to other personal issues, such as doing well at work or being careful with his spending habits, a sense of home is simply irrelevant. This is not to say that Ricardo does not like comfort in dwelling. He sublets a bedroom in eastern Madrid, one more in his long list of shared flats. He has got a double bed and a large closet in which he tries not to accumulate too many things because storage is limited to his bedroom. He also tries not to keep too much food in the kitchen because his flatmates sometimes pick things from his cupboard or side of the fridge. His approach to dwelling is pragmatic: as he spends little time in the flat, he merely needs a place in which to sleep, shower and eat simple meals.

Cultivating a sense of home is crucial to many of the people I met during my fieldwork in Madrid. Located either in their current dwelling places, or constructed as an idealised past or anticipated future, home constitutes an emotional locus for their migratory trajectories. Contrastingly, Ricardo dwells in a realm of functionality where cleaning up, cooking and spending casual moments with flatmates – a young woman from Peru and a couple from Chile – are felt as unavoidable homemaking activities. Dwelling is a human condition, but for Ricardo, a sense of home is not a necessity. Deciding not to evoke feelings and emotions of home in his current and previous shared dwelling places does not bring him into a precarious or disempowered condition. He merely prefers to share a flat because it suits his way of life, bringing him closer to an indifferent hotel guest than to an enthusiastic homemaker. In doing so, he creates a wide distance between dwelling and attaching a sense of home.

5.3.2 The Lease Leader

Olga has been living in her current flat located in the south of Madrid for more than a decade. Her relationship with this place started when she and a group of acquaintances – also recently arrived migrants from Peru – teamed up to look for a flat to rent. She portrays these early years as a truly collective effort: re-painting the walls and sourcing second- hand furniture allowed them to develop a shared sense of home. Over time, the members of the initial group left and new flatmates moved in. Since then, Olga has taken the lead in managing these transitions, searching for and carefully choosing new flatmates. Her daughter and her have shared the same bedroom all these years, while the other two bedrooms change guests every now and

then. Throughout, she has achieved certain security of occupancy by developing a good relationship with her landlord, who accepts the subletting arrangement and trusts her as the person in front of the lease contract. Her situation, however, is just slightly more secure than that of Karlita and Ricardo.

García Almirall and Frizzera (2008: 46) identify the figure of the *encargado del piso* (person in charge of the flat), which refers to the person holding either a rent contract or a mortgage. This role brings certain benefits: they generally pay less than their flatmates for their accommodation, and can establish rules of interaction within the flat (regulating gatherings, noise levels or even the use of common areas at certain times of the day). Throughout these years, Olga has been the *encargada*, in charge of her rented flat. A sense of attachment to this apartment has grown from the fact of having spent a part of her adult life and seeing her daughter growing up there. When we conversed about her emotions towards the flat, she unequivocally feels at home in it despite having to share common spaces with people she barely knows. This is not to say that the relationship with her flatmates is totally distant; in some cases she has developed long-lasting friendships. Yet, her privileged position in the flat produces asymmetrical and rather distant relationships with most of her flatmates.

Her sense of home does not stem from her relationships with co-dwellers, but rather from having certain control over some settings inside the flat. This control is not evident at first sight: the unadorned character of the living room resembles more a semi-public space than a private environment. There are practically no personal items (no photos or mementos), but plain, functional furniture and walls decorated with a small mirror and a painting of a generic landscape. On weekdays Olga eats dinner in her living room while watching TV, sometimes with her daughter, often by herself because their schedules differ. The other flatmates – a Bolivian couple and an Argentinian man – eat in their bedrooms, mostly at the end of the day. The kitchen is austere and practical, compartmentalised in clearly defined cupboards, sides of the fridge and drawers that flatmates tend to use at different moments of the day to avoid overlapping on the same reduced space.

In a flat only to her daughter and herself, Olga highlighted during our interview, she could have more space and privacy. But she cannot afford to rent a flat so close to her workplace and daughter's school. Why risk going to a distant and more expensive location when she is content? She knows the neighbours, gets along with some of her flatmates and does not plan to seek other living arrangements for the time being.

5.3.3 The Landlords

Berta and Juan are a couple from Lima who obtained a credit for a three-bedroom apartment in eastern Madrid in 2007, just one year before an economic crisis that had dramatic consequences on the housing market in Spain (Albertos Puebla & Sánchez Hernández, 2014). They do not exaggerate when considering themselves

lucky to have kept their flat all these years. Because they could not afford to pay the mortgage with their salaries, they have been subletting two bedrooms in their three-bedroom apartment since they moved in. For them, subletting is a mere spoken agreement that generally lasts for some months or years.

Their current flatmates are a Spanish young man who works night shifts as a security guard and sleeps during the day. The other is a Canadian teacher of French who spends three days a week in Madrid and then goes back to Valladolid, where her partner lives. They find the current arrangement convenient because the place is all to themselves at different points of the week. Sharing their flat is a compromise between affordability and discomfort: it allows them to pay the mortgage while losing certain intimacy. Similarly, for their tenants it provides an affordable place in which to fulfil basic needs. They have sustained this arrangement for almost two years and it seems to work well for all the parties. 'They are the longest tenants we have had so far!', Berta proudly said, indicating that the stability of this living arrangement is benefiting everyone involved.

The length of the sublease is important to Berta and Juan because it reflects a certain stability in the way the flat is used. There are routines and rituals that they control: the times and ways of having dinner, the availability of their living room to watch TV at night. They use the kitchen and living room with ease, almost as if they had the whole flat to themselves.

5.3.4 Roles, Attachment and Control

A shared flat is an arrangement of multiple trajectories, a geometry that structures different dwelling experiences and domestic roles. The apartments to which I referred above are materially similar to each other: three-bedroom units located in the South and East of Madrid, with a small living room, bathroom and kitchen. Yet, the relationships that are forged and dissolved in them, and the uses of the different settings within the flats vary substantially. These dynamics are framed by the flatmates' roles.

The common denominator among these cases is the fact that several (migrant and non- migrant) people in Spanish cities cannot afford renting or buying a flat for them and their nuclear family (Nasarre Aznar, 2016). Sharing a flat is a strategy to confront this situation, producing various domestic configurations. Berta and Juan, the landlords, have a clear sense of control and ownership over the space, which is reflected in the decoration of the living room and their prominent use of the kitchen. For Olga, the lease-leader, the situation is similar in some regards, as she exercises certain control over the use of the living room and the general dynamics of the flat. She can influence, for instance, how the other flatmates use the common areas or how often they invite guests. But despite her 'managerial' role, the material culture in the common areas remains rather impersonal, sober and functional. Karlita and Ricardo, the tenants, have a similar role in their respective flats, but their approach

to home is driven by their volition. While Karlita projects a sense of home into a future located in her country of origin, Ricardo deems irrelevant such a sense.

Control over space is an important mechanism through which people develop a sense of home, but in the context of a shared flat, it is crucial (Easthope, 2014: 583). The roles that the aforementioned dwellers play in their shared flats allow them to exercise different degrees of control. On one side, the landlords are able to regulate the activities in the flat to a certain degree and use of the living room and kitchen with ease. The lease-leader can also control certain dynamics in the flat and, ultimately, decide who stays and who leaves. At the other end, the two tenants described above have similar dwelling circumstances (subletting a single bedroom), while emotionally evoking home in contrastingly different ways.

The sense of home of most of my research participants is loosely connected to their current dwelling place. In their narratives, they rather described the relationship of such a sense to diverse spatial locations (places of origin and other locations that have been relevant in their migratory trajectories), as well as past, present and future circumstances. This variety of spatial and temporal dimensions give a durable quality to their sense of home because it is constructed as a sedimentation of relationships and emotions.

Dwelling, on the contrary, consists in living in a specific place which in the context of the shared flat tends to be rather impermanent. In contrasting dwelling and the development of a sense of home I do not intend to present them as opposite processes. Instead, I am arguing that they are related, yet distinct social dimensions of home – which raises a number of methodological issues, to which now we turn.

5.4 Dwelling and Developing a Sense of Home

The discussion above about three different roles in shared flats is intended as cases of engagements with domestic space and emotions of home. I have suggested that there is a degree of agency involved in the development of a sense of home – or its refusal in one of the cases. For the landlords and the lease-leader, home is cultivated through a series of practices that rely on spatial control. For the tenants, home is also a matter of control, yet, their subordinate position gives them a less privileged access to the semi-public settings in the flat. A methodological issue that arises is how to examine the ways in which the dwellers of a shared flat exercise degrees of control over pockets of domesticity and how their sense of home develops within and beyond the domestic space.

It is worth noticing that in the cases that I referred to, people spend most of their active time outside, in public space. At the end of the day, when the dwellers retreat to the privacy of their own bedrooms, they are only related to each other by the fact of living under the same roof. These households are not integrated by people who compose a community such as a family or a group of friends. Since their personal objectives and trajectories are significantly different, their only common aim is reduced to the fulfilment of basic housing needs. They have an individual sense of

home; that is, a subjective construction of the idea of home evoked through feelings and emotions. But this sense is disassociated from the interaction among dwellers: they are homing separately while living in the same locale.

This 'atomised' development of a sense of home is one of the key characteristics of the shared flat, at least in the experience of South American migrants in Madrid. Therefore, the analysis of shared flats constitutes an entry point to the development of individual emotions of home that emerge in the context of semi-public and very private settings within the same dwelling place. Bedrooms are the setting for the very personal: one retreats to an intimate outpost from which the other co-dwellers are excluded. This character contrasts with the dynamics of the rest of the apartment: the use of bathroom and kitchen are negotiated, mostly through unspoken understandings of each other's routines. The living room is mostly used by those who can exercise direct control over the flat. This spatial differentiation takes place through everyday rituals: times for showering and length of individual showers, specific moments for cooking or eating; or ways of watching TV in the living room, as opposed to retiring to one's bedroom. Yet, the individuality and privacy of the bedrooms is protected, regardless of their individual roles in the flat. Bedroom doors are closed most of the time, as keeping this intimate space away from the sight of others becomes crucial to differentiate it from the other semi- public settings of the flat. From a methodological point of view, the analysis of how discrete pockets of privacy are sustained can give us access as researchers to the nuances of the power relationships among dwellers. Most importantly for the ethnographer of a shared flat, it reveals how control over the domestic space is a matter of compartmentalisation.

5.4.1 Compartmentalising Domestic Space

The compartmentalisation of space into semi-public settings, such as living rooms and kitchens contrasts with the very private character of bedrooms. Can a bed feel like home? (Ramphele, 1993). Can a bedroom become a home? (cf. Cancellieri, Chap. 2; Boccagni, Chap. 7). The use of very different settings in a reduced space raises the question of access to the researchers seeking to observe and participate in these places. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, I began my encounters with these shared flats by conducting semi-structured interviews and life histories with these and other research participants. Those were occasions in which we explicitly talked about their current home and migratory experiences, their past and future expectations. I also conducted participant observation in their flats by paying them a visit in which we casually talked about different topics, as well as joining the gatherings in which the roles of researcher/researched were put aside, as we were merely 'hanging out'.

The narratives of my research participants were crucial to understand what home means to them, particularly in relation to the geographical and temporal dispersion of their sense of home. It was through dialogue that I could capture how their sense of being at home is not tied to a particular place, but spread across several locations,

mostly connected to family and other meaningful relationships, and situated in past, present experiences and future hopes. But it was by being there, in their flats, that I became more familiarised with their homemaking practices, with their tacit ways of relating to materials and people. Despite the trust and amicability that we developed with each other, the compartmentalised flats were never fully accessible to me. Here I refer to bedrooms, which constitute an important threshold of domesticity and a stronghold of privacy and intimacy. In the context of the participant observation I conducted, it would be atypical for a man like me, in his late thirties, to have access to the bedroom of somebody else, be it a woman, a man or a couple. Notions of privacy among the Latin American migrants I met – which are probably similar to those found in many other places of the world – afford unproblematic access to semi-public settings of the shared flat, while foreclosing the entry to bedrooms. If I brought the topic of their bedrooms into the conversation, the issue was addressed with just a few words. This is perhaps not just a matter of privacy. My interpretation is that, for these research participants, there was not much home to look at or to talk about in those bedrooms, as the very personal was sometimes regarded as trivial.

5.4.2 A Dispersed Sense of Home

How to interpret narratives of home and migration when people's sense of home is not clearly related to their dwelling place? For example, in the case of Karlita there is a marked distinction between where she lives and what home is to her. Her current shared apartment is a way to fulfil housing needs, while home is located in her place of origin, constructed as a hopeful return. While people's sense of home is closely associated with their biographical past, recreating such a sense in the context of a shared flat is often condensed to ordinary experiences: the smell of a dish (Taylor, 2015: 111), a song (Schreffler, 2012), a conversation with friends or family through a video call (Bonfanti, 2020). Many of these ordinary activities may occur or not in their actual dwelling place. This is not to say, of course, that location is irrelevant to develop a sense of home. Rather, that migrants' sense of home is related to their dwelling place in intricate ways that the ethnographer needs to disentangle. Miller et al. (2021: 221), for instance, highlight how a sense of home can be produced in a 'transportal home' through the use of smartphones, which reinforces the idea that a sense of home and a dwelling place are increasingly different phenomena.

What is home for those sharing an apartment? It is a set of relationships beyond their bedrooms and their flats. This is so because for many people (including those not sharing a flat), a dwelling is at its core a place in which to sleep, store things, eat and shower. Ethnographers seeking to understand people's experiences of home in a shared flat may benefit from approaching these settings in a flexible way, making enough conceptual and methodological space for addressing multiple ways of dwelling that might not fall into conventional definitions of home. In other words, if we researchers look for homes, we may probably find them – not only in the places

people inhabit, but in their imaginaries, memories, future expectations, or across geographically dispersed locations.

The difference between dwelling in place and attaching a sense of home to a place (or multiple places) is a matter of depth. A sense of home requires a relatively durable and established set of relationships and emotions. Dwelling, on the contrary, can span across a variety of temporal scales, from the fleeting experience of the traveller to the long-term resident of a particular location. This temporal difference is significant for the study of shared flats because these living arrangements tend to be transient: although some flatmates can remain years in the same apartment, most of them change places with great speed that ranges from a few months to a few weeks (see, for instance, Nasreen & Ruming, 2020). Precarious or not, the experience of the shared flat is that of a lack of continuity, which often produces a great need for anchoring a sense of home beyond the dwelling place. This is why people's efforts to make themselves at home are not always tied to their actual address. Herein lies the relevance of shared flats as an area of investigation in which senses of home are contradictory, frequently referring to past experiences, future expectations or distant locales, while ambiguously alluding to people's dwelling places. Furthermore, shared flats show how the material bases of a dwelling place and the development of a sense of home among its dwellers might be discordant, since homing and dwelling are not the same.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how shared flats are a context in which migrants' sense of home can take multiple forms beyond the quest to solve issues of finding affordable accommodation. Through four cases of Peruvian migrants in Madrid, I have argued that there are various ways of engaging with the domestic space and other dwellers. These relationships are to a large extent shaped by the roles that the members of the household play; that is, the variation in their entitlement to shape the material culture (through personal decoration, for example) or use more or less actively certain settings (such as the living room or kitchen). The cases I present are, of course, not exhaustive and further studies would encounter many other ways of dwelling in a shared flat. Based on the cases that I studied in Madrid, I have emphasised the methodological relevance of looking at the control that dwellers exert over the domestic space and the ways in which the flat is compartmentalised.

Control, a well identified component of home (Douglas, 1991: 289), is the engine that sustains the dynamics of domesticity within the shared flat. When and how to engage in certain activities in a setting of the apartment – think of inviting friends over for dinner in the semi-public living room – differs among dwellers. This fact differentiates the dynamics of control in the shared flat from those exercised in other kinds of households. A single-family household, for example, may never pose certain kinds of questions that in a shared flat are crucial for cohabiting. Keeping areas

out of the gaze of strangers, which in a single-family household is less of a problem, becomes a crucial marker of privacy in the shared flat.

Behaviours and self-expression are also shaped by living with strangers because of the coexistence of semi-public and private settings in just a few metres. This compartmentalisation of private and semi-public in a small space is reminiscent of the 'compartmentalised intimacy' that Sammells (2016) finds in migrant-run restaurants in Madrid. Intimacy that extends across various scales, from cabinets, cupboards, and corners in the fridge to doors preventing flatmates to stare at or access individual rooms. There is much to be investigated regarding homemaking and domesticity at different spatial and temporal scales. Studies comparing a variety of dwelling arrangements at multiple scales hold the potential of refreshing our current approaches to home and bringing new questions to current debates.

Shared flats are provisional spaces: despite having the role of the tenant, lease leader or landlord, my research participants hope that such a dwelling arrangement will change at some point. Tenants and lease leaders look forward to having their own space, and landlords dream about the necessary solvency to have their whole flat for themselves. However, there are cases in which a shared flat is more convenient than renting a full flat: apart from being more affordable, it requires less commitment and maintenance. Overall, sharing a flat is a strategy to confront socio-structural difficulties, but there is a volitional component in it. For those refusing to cultivate a sense of home in their dwelling place, the distinction between home and dwelling is clearly marked. In methodological terms, we should avoid conflating these two by looking carefully at how people's sense of home is developed, helping us to better understand some of the ways through which people make themselves at home.

References

Albertos Puebla, J. M., & Sánchez Hernández, J. L. (2014). *Geografía de la Crisis Económica en España*. Universitat de Valencia.

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home*. Palgrave.

Boccagni, P., & Miranda-Nieto, A. (2022). Home in question: Uncovering meanings, desires and dilemmas of non-home. *Journal of European Cultural Studies, 25*(2), 515–532.

Boletín Oficial del Estado. (2019). Ley 29/1994, de 24 de noviembre, de Arrendamientos Urbanos. Available at: www.boe.es/biblioteca_juridica/abrir_pdf.php?id=PUB-PR-2019-115

Bonfanti, S. (2020). Materialities. In A. Miranda-Nieto, A. Massa, & S. Bonfanti (Eds.), *Ethnographies of home and mobility: Shifting Roofs*. Routledge.

Bosch, M., Carnero, M. A., & Farré, L. (2015). Rental housing discrimination and the persistence of ethnic enclaves. *SERIEs, 6*, 129–152.

Campos Echeverría, J. L. (2008). *La burbuja inmobiliaria española*. Marcial Pons.

Clapham, D. (2005). *The meaning of housing: A pathways approach*. Policy Press.

Douglas, M. (1991). The idea of a home: A kind of space. *Social Research, 58*(1), 287–307.

Dräger, J. (2020). The impact of statistical discrimination in shared housing markets: A correspondence study on ethnic discrimination in Germany. *Informationsdienst Soziale Indikatoren, 64*, 16–21.

Easthope, H. (2014). Making a rental property home. *Housing Studies, 29*(5), 579–596.

García Almirall, P., & Frizzera, A. (2008). La trayectoria residencial de la inmigración en Madrid y Barcelona. Un esquema teórico a partir del análisis cualitativo. *ACE: Architecture, City and Environment,* Año III, núm. 8, Octubre.

Garvie, D. (2001). *Far from home: The housing of asylum seekers in private rented accommodation*. Shelter.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística. (2021a). Censos de población y viviendas. Available at: www.ine.es

Instituto Nacional de Estadística. (2021b). Hogares según tamaño del municipio por tipo de hogar. Available at: www.ine.es

Kurz, K., & Blossfeld, H. (2004). *Home ownership and social inequality in comparative perspective*. Stanford University Press.

López-Gay, A., Sales-Favà, J., Solana, M., Fernández, A., & Peralta, A. (2019). Midiendo los procesos de gentrificación en Barcelona y Madrid: Una propuesta metodológica. In *XIII CTV 2019 Proceedings: XIII international conference on virtual city and territory: "Challenges and paradigms of the contemporary city": UPC, Barcelona, October 2–4, 2019*. CPSV.

Maalsen, S. (2019). I cannot afford to live alone in this city and I enjoy the company of others: Why people are share housing in Sydney. *Australian Geographer, 50*(3), 315–332.

Masterson-Algar, A. (2016). *Ecuadorians in Madrid: Migrants' place in urban history*. Palgrave.

Miller, D., Rabho, L. A., Awondo, P., de Vries, M., Duque, M., Garvey, P., Haapio-Kirk, L., Hawkins, C., Otaegui, A., Walton, S., & Wang, X. (2021). *The global smartphone: Beyond a youth technology*. UCL Press.

Módenes, J. A., Bayona, J., & López-Colás, J. (2012). Immigration and residential change in Spain. *Population, Space and Place, 19*(3), 294–310.

Moos, M., Revington, N., Wilkin, T., & Andrey, J. (2018). The knowledge economy city: Gentrification, studentification and youthification, and their connections to universities. *Urban Studies, 56*(6), 1075–1092.

Nasarre Aznar, S. (2016). Cuestionando algunos mitos del acceso a la vivienda en España, en perspectiva europea. *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales, 35*(1), 43–69.

Nasreen, Z., & Ruming, K. J. (2020). Shared room housing and home: Unpacking the homemaking practices of shared room tenants in Sydney, Australia. *Housing, Theory and Society*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2020.1717597

Ossman, S. (2013). *Moving matters: Paths of serial migration*. Stanford University Press.

Parutis, V. (2011). "Home" for now or "home" for good? *Home Cultures, 8*(3), 265–296.

Ramphele, M. (1993). *A bed called home: Life in the migrant labour hostels of Cape Town*. David Philip Publishers.

Sammells, C. A. (2016). Frosted windows and compartmentalized intimacies: Forging relationships in a Bolivian restaurant in Madrid. *Food and Foodways, 24*(3–4), 213–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2016.1210900

Schreffler, G. (2012). Migration shaping media: Punjabi popular music in a global historical perspective. *Popular Music and Society*, iFirst, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2011.600516

Taylor, H. (2015). *Refugees and the meaning of home: Cypriot narratives of loss, longing and daily life in London*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Thomsen, J. (2007). Home experiences in student housing: About institutional character and temporary homes. *Journal of Youth Studies, 10*(5), 577–596.

Veness, A. R. (1993). Neither homed nor homeless: Contested definitions and the personal worlds of the poor. *Political Geography, 12*(4), 319–340.

Chapter 6
'Visiting Home' as a Method and Experience: Researching Russian Migrants' Homes in the UK

Anna Pechurina

6.1 Introduction

The increased interest in the subject of home in recent years has resulted in a number of studies that approach it not only as the main site of data collection to explore issues related to identity, personal life, family and, more recently, migration, but also as the key subject of research. As a result, there has been growing acknowledgement of the significance of the home and of its interconnection with various aspects of personal, social and political life. This has become even more acute recently in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (Boccagni, 2020; Brickell, 2020).

To contribute to these discussions, in this chapter I revisit a study which examined the interrelation between home, migration and cultural identity (Pechurina, 2015), using home-based qualitative interviews as the main method of data-collection. By focusing on the experience of interviewing participants in their homes and building on the sociology of personal life, the chapter discusses how being a researcher and a guest at the same time may have affected the interview situation and the subsequent analysis and presentation of the results. As my research showed, while the domestic spaces in my study provided welcome and hospitality, they also imposed boundaries and rules. However, these rules were not always clearly defined, but rather negotiated and co-constructed throughout the interview. Activities such as going food shopping, walking in the nearby park and cooking together with the participant(s) before or during the interview contributed to better rapport and created a more informal interview setting. At the same time, the exposure to more intimate and sensitive moments of people's lives made me reconsider my interview strategy and affected my behaviour during my home visits. In other words, the role of a researcher required me to go further and inquire more, but the constructed role of a guest prevented me from doing so. However, while

A. Pechurina (✉)
Department of Social and Psychological Studies, Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden
e-mail: Anna.Pechurina@kau.se

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_6

acknowledging the challenges and limitations presented by these encounters, I also believe that these moments directed me to important methodological insights and discoveries about ethics, positionality and emotions which were implicitly present throughout the study. Here, I follow Jordan's (2006) argument about the negotiated and evolving role of the researcher who continues to maintain relationships with their research subjects and the data long after the analysis. I also agree with Rose's (1997) classic argument about the ongoing need to question the gaps and uncertainties that arise throughout the process of knowledge production. I hope that revisiting a past project will enable me to explore further my memories, perceptions, and uncertainties, thereby offering ways to enhance reflexivity in qualitative research more generally.

The chapter will start with an overview of approaches to the study of homes followed by a description of my positionality and the methods deployed for my research project into Russian migrants' homes – how they were designed and then developed as the study progressed. I will specifically focus on approaches developed within sociology of personal life and visual anthropology as these were the ones I used as a guidance for my work. The chapter will then proceed to discussing situations that illustrate how my awareness of rules and personal boundaries affected my behaviour during the interviews.

6.2 Researching Homes: A Personal Life Perspective

The subject of home has long been part of sociological research, including studies that work within feminist and/or personal life research frameworks and deploy in-depth qualitative, ethnographic, and (auto)biographical methods (see for instance, Goode, 2007; Hurdley, 2006; Smart, 2007; Widerberg, 2010). Feminist scholars approached home as a site of gendered labour, domestic work, and unequal power relations (Mallett, 2004; Marion Young, 1997), as well as looking at it through the prism of consumption and value (Casey & Martens, 2007; Madigan & Munro, 1996; Skeggs, 1997). Adding to this, researchers of personal life paid attention to home, and objects that permeate it, in close connection with notions of family, privacy, and intimacy (Hämäläinen & Rautio, 2013; Rose, 2010; Woodward & Greasley, 2015). Conceptually, this viewpoint has been reflected through understanding of home as complex, changeable and multilayered, where its material, practiced and sensory qualities are of equal importance (Ahmed, 1999; Blunt, 2005). For scholars exploring personal life and the family this conceptualisation has been instrumental in showing how home both reflects and constitutes relationships, and (re)constructs memories and attachments (Hecht, 2001; Smart, 2007). Thus, home in this context has not been approached merely as a background to everyday life, but rather as an integral part that constitutes and defines it (Casey & Taylor, 2015; Miller, 2001).

Correspondingly, the methodologies developed within the personal life framework have been closely linked to researchers' feminist standpoint (Letherby, 2003). This means that they have been largely concerned with navigating the process of

knowing through existing intimacies and sensitivities of domestic environment as well as paid attention to different types of reflexivity and power relations that develop between researchers and research participants (England, 1994; Mullings, 1999). The questions surrounding research ethics and related responsibilities and vulnerabilities of research subjects have also been paramount for feminist researchers (Birch & Miller, 2002). More specifically, in relation to research within domestic setting, Hämäläinen and Rautio (2013) reflect on the contradictory or ambivalent nature of home as an interview setting for studying sensitive family issues, which can equally appear as a familiar and comfortable environment where participants feel at ease, as much as a highly sensitive place, where a researcher may feel like an intruder. As a result, while offering a suitable setting for research on personal life and sensitive issues, home also brings challenges for the researcher who observes life 'behind closed doors' (Hockey, 2002; Mason & Davies, 2009). Adding to this, Gabb (2010) suggests that uncomfortable 'home truths' and 'messiness' of everyday life uncovered by the researcher during her visit should be retained and responsibly incorporated into the research as they constitute an important part of family life as it is lived every day in all its complexity.

Important methodological contributions into studying homes have been made by Sarah Pink as part of her work on visual and sensory ethnography (Pink, 2004a, b, 2006). Pink coined the concept of 'sensory home' which she studied through a method of video- interviews, accompanied by more in-depth involvement of the researcher in the interview process. As Pink argues, during the home interview researchers should pay greater attention to participants' responses as well as to their own experiences and feelings, aiming to engage their senses (Pink, 2006). This also means that one has to reflect more on the interview context and develop awareness of their own reactions and contributions into the interview setting. In other words, a researcher conducting home interviews should see oneself as an active participant rather than an independent observer, thereby turning to either a 'sensory apprentice' (Pink, 2009: 69–72) or a 'sensory participant' (Pink, 2009: 81–96).

In addition, in her earlier work, Pink discussed the process of video-interview in more detail (Pink, 2004b), paying particular attention to how home was presented to her by research participants. As Pink showed, the presence of the camera prompted participants to incorporate a number of home-presentation narratives which were borrowed from everyday discourses and practices. Importantly, these produced video-narratives, which Pink referred to as 'Hello magazine', 'estate agent' and 'self-analysis' (2004b: 62), enabled participants to construct individual stories 'about the everyday relationship between a particular self and her/his material/visual home' (ibid: 66). At the same time, while these narratives did not deviate entirely from 'the concerns of the research' (ibid: 75), they would still require the researcher to be able to recognise and negotiate them throughout the interview, and situate them within the relevant cultural context later, during the analysis.

Overall, the above examples advocate for a methodological approach that recognises various dimensions of the home and enables greater involvement and sensitivity of the researcher throughout the research process. It is possible to see how this strategy can be applied to research of homes in the context of migration. In fact, the

number of recent studies that use visual and home ethnographies to explore the meaning of migrant homes are illustrative of the potential of such an approach (Bonfanti et al., 2019; Dibbits, 2009; Levin, 2014; Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2013). These studies, which often deploy methods that generate rich and multi-layered data, proved to be effective in grasping the complexity of everyday experiences and embodied practices of homemaking (see Giorgi & Fasulo, 2013). At the same time, methods that may get us closer to lived experiences of home and enable us 'to access difficult stories' (Ratnam & Drozdzewski, 2020: 771) can also 'challenge our capacities to read, sense, and try to grasp the enormity of what is untold…' (ibid). Importantly though, as academic work in relation to better defining and conceptualising migrant home has been expanding in recent years, less attention has been paid to discussion of methodological aspects of doing research on and in the homes of migrant and mobile people. Recent work that has emerged as part of the HOMInG project (Belloni et al., 2019; Boccagni et al., 2020; Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020; Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020) has stimulated the methodological discussion on research of migrant homes by taking into account the relational and multi-scalar nature of home. However, with the burgeoning research on home across contexts and disciplines there is a clear demand for critical discussion of ethical issues, researcher's reflexivity and positionality, as well as knowledge production – the issues that have long been the focal point of feminist research (Rose, 1997).

The study of Russian migrants' homes discussed in the following section reflects the ideas presented above. My engagement with sociology of personal life and visual ethnography influenced the methodology of the study. It also offered me tools for reflecting on my positionality and relationships with the participants during the study. By revisiting this research and reflecting more on the interview experience I hope to be able to unpack further complexities and uncertainties of the process of home interview, which were not fully visible to me at the time. In what follows I will describe this approach by first presenting the designed methodology of the study and then showing what changed along the development of my fieldwork. As I will eventually show, home is a special place for research that affects both participants and researchers.

6.3 A Case Study of Russian Migrants' Homes

6.3.1 Research Design

The research project 'Creating a Home from Home. Russian Communities in the UK' was carried out in 2006–2010 as part of my PhD dissertation. It aimed to investigate how Russian migrants in the UK negotiated and (co)created a sense of connectedness with their national culture through the organisation of their domestic life and the materiality of their homes. Thus, such aspects of domestic life as home décor, material objects, and the practices surrounding cooking and mealtimes have

been used as a 'way in' to explore broader concepts related to home, belonging and cultural identity. Importantly, when it comes to material cultures, the focus of the study was not narrowed to finding out which objects migrants had brought from the home-country or acquired later and kept in their homes. It rather was guided by exploring the meanings and significance of those objects for my participants' identity and culture.

Correspondingly, I chose in-depth home-based qualitative interviews as the main method of data-collection. Following Jennifer Mason's argument about the situated and contextual nature of qualitative interviews, I aimed 'to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced' (Mason, 2002: 63–64). In this regard, the home as an interview setting was expected to illuminate those contexts for myself and my participants, as well as allow me to get closer to intangible and embodied aspects of homemaking which constituted an important aspect of its meaning (Mason & Davies, 2009). Thus, when deciding to conduct the interviews at participants' homes I aimed to be able to combine multiple roles and contexts of inquiry: a researcher and a visitor, i.e. someone who can analytically 'observe' the home and practically experience it at the same time.

I designed the interview as a semi-structured one, with general questions on participants' background and their migration history as well as topics related to everyday activities, social networks, Russian culture in immigration, and important reminders of Russia, including objects and food. Additionally, as a way of uncovering some of the participants' deeper thoughts and reflections in relation to their culture and identity, the interview involved a focused discussion about significant objects and related memories, associations and life stories they may evoke, similar to Money's idea of object narratives (Money, 2007). As Money put it, conducting the interview in the home setting made it possible to 'observe people in the actual context of their everydayness, and see and feel the objects they referred to in their narratives' (Money, 2007: 374).

Furthermore, building on Pink's work discussed above, I asked participants to do a home tour for me during the interview. This allowed me to learn about participants' homes and to have an opportunity to engage my senses more. As the interviews were conducted during my first years living in the UK, of which I did not have much knowledge, visiting homes was a way for me to get to know different homes (i.e. houses and apartments) and their materiality. In addition to seeing what the homes were like it was also a way to feel the materiality – to experience it as a visitor, or as a guest. On some occasions I spontaneously participated in the domestic routines, e.g., cooking, or getting ready for work. While prioritising the sensory experience of visiting home, I still wanted to add a visual dimension to my data. Occasionally, the interviews were supplemented by photographs of objects and interior details taken during the interview, such as walls with pictures, fragments of furniture and original interior details. However, my ideas about the use and value of these photographs changed throughout the project – something I will discuss further in this section.

My understanding of positionality was situated within a broader feminist tradition that defines it as contextual and dynamic, with continuously shifting boundaries

(Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Ganga & Scott, 2006; Merriam et al., 2001). Throughout my study I experienced various points of shared positionalities with my participants (Mullings, 1999) based on changing categories of class, age, gender, ethnicity, and stage of migration. As a white heterosexual single woman of Russian origin in my mid-20s, first in the family to get an education above a Bachelor level and who, at the time of the fieldwork, was on a temporary visa and had little knowledge of life in the UK, I was perceived differently by different groups of Russian migrants. This was due to complex and situated intersection of our identity categories (Valentine, 2007), something I have reflected on in my earlier work (Pechurina, 2014). Similar to Mullings (1999) I could consider myself as a 'partial insider' (344) whose identity categories afforded varied levels of closeness with participants at different points of the research. I was born in a small town in Altai and moved around both as a child and then later as a young adult to pursue an education in Moscow. This exposed me to different geographical and cultural contexts across Russia and helped me to expand my contacts and establish relationships with participants of different backgrounds and occupations from different parts of Russia and former USSR. However, while shared ethnic and linguistic background could help me achieve an 'insider' status, my affiliation with the University distanced people and affected their desire to share details of their lives with me. Furthermore, younger women both married and single were more willing to trust me, while men were more reluctant to invite me and to show me their homes. This also points, importantly, to the sexualised nature of an interview situation (Harries, 2016).

My condition of relative, and at times fluid, proximity required a strategy of reflective balancing of power both before and during the interview. One of the ways of finding a point where a sense of trust could be established between my participants and me was achieving a status of a 'familiar face' or a 'friend' i.e. either be known well to my interlocutors or to be recommended by a friend of a friend. For instance, some people may not have answered my emails if I had not introduced myself as 'someone's' friend, and there were people who I could only meet through socialising activities (e.g. as a guest in birthday parties). While becoming a familiar face enabled me to know more people and arrange more interviews, it was not always a smooth experience. Being involved in friendship circles also meant observing details of people's relationships and not having control over discussions of the interview experiences between people who knew each other. There were people who became my close friends and because of that I never asked them for an interview. There were others I felt more connected with, but the encounter did not last. Some contacts lasted longer, but many had a natural end, which was not always easy to deal with on a personal level.

Overall, in 2007–2008 I conducted 30 in-depth interviews with participants of varied socio-demographic backgrounds who resided in different parts of the UK and who defined themselves as ethnic Russian. Four people were retired, while the rest were employed in a range of professions including academia, catering, sales, and office work. The interviews were conducted in Russian and then translated into English. From thirty interviews conducted, nine were carried out with men, seventeen with women, and four with men and women together. Although I identified

some typologies of my participants during data analysis, e.g. by their time of arrival (Pechurina, 2015: 100–101), or the way they expressed attachment to the UK (ibid: 100–103), each interview experience was unlike the others, thus reflecting the unique story of each participant and of their homes (Hämäläinen & Rautio, 2013). People could have had similar objects (such as national souvenirs) and could have done similar things at home (e.g., celebrating national holidays) but the experiences related to those objects and their stories of migration were very individual. In this respect, a deeper reflection on the interview process is a valuable exercise which can help with the analysis and interpretation of the data.

6.3.2 Changing Fieldwork Experience

As my approach to data collection was open and flexible, so my methods and strategies have been continuously adjusted to the contexts I studied. Consequently, as the fieldwork progressed, my understanding of migrant homes and the ideas of how best to approach them have changed too. Below I wish to reflect on several key changes that my research followed as a result of shifting understandings of the research process and of my position within it. By focusing on specific aspects of knowledge production such as negotiating access to interviews and balancing my role as a researcher and guest, I aim to uncover gaps and uncertainties that these situations and contexts produced. However, I also wish to acknowledge that such insights cannot account for the full complexity of the relationships between researchers and their interlocutors.

The first change refers to establishing trust and finding ways of *entering* people' homes. Similar to other researchers of migrant communities, my invitation to someone's home depended on gaining people's trust and on our mutual cooperation (Lazzaro-Salazar, 2019; Stachowski, 2020). The other aspect is related to discussed earlier cultural specifics of Russian friendship which required me to gain the status of a 'friend in need', or somebody who needed a favour – in my case, a 'young' female researcher who needed participants for her project (see Pechurina, 2014). As a result, I spent considerable time socialising and getting known to people before I was able to gain their trust and arrange an interview in their homes.

Furthermore, I see parallels with Jordan (2006) who points out that inviting a researcher into a house may require time for participants to figure out a set of rules with regards to hosting him/her. In a similar way, participants of my study who had not experienced this kind of research before may have needed time to understand what I was looking for and what role their homes could play within this process. For instance, these expectations may have been reflected in the reasons for not inviting me that some of my participants gave me: 'I don't have anything from Russia', or 'My home is too messy' and 'I don't have any *matryoshka dolls*' were some of the typical responses which would also indicate a particular perception of what can be meant by the 'Russian objects' and 'Russian homes' I was investigating.

Consequently, these circumstances affected my initial fieldwork strategy. As I spent more time with and within the community, the original method of qualitative interviews at home expanded to include elements of the ethnographic study of a relatively cohesive migrant group with the majority of participants recruited through the snowball method. As a result, some of my data was collected when visiting public places, revisiting interviewees' homes, by email or in day-to-day conversations. I also kept a research diary to record the information and observations which I obtained outside of my interviews.

Importantly, the process of taking photographs was modified because participants were keen to have more control over the subject of the photographs, i.e., asking me to take photos of particular objects only and/or avoid interior details. On some occasions, participants wanted to take photographs themselves and/or used their own cameras to do so. Involving participants in the research process certainly had a positive effect on the process of the interview, but it was not always effective for keeping control of the quality of the produced images. For example, having souvenirs (such as *matryoshka dolls* or traditional crockery as shown on Fig. 6.1) was not uncommon, but the reasons for collecting and keeping these items could have been different for different people. The items on a shelf in Fig. 6.1 were important for N. because she inherited them from her family. However, I was not allowed to photograph all of them. For others, a souvenir on display could be a reminder of the recent trip to Russia rather than signifying any family ties. The question of what

Fig. 6.1 A fragment of home interior, photographed during the interview. (Author's picture)

the image showed was also important from an ethical point of view as I had to consider how revealing some of the images were and where there might be a chance of unfavourable reactions from the audience that could judge the interiors based on their class-related aesthetics where souvenirs could be treated as an indicator of kitsch and low taste.

Another important reason was related to the quality of the photographic equipment that I had access to at that time, which limited my ability to produce images that would 'speak up' and add value to the verbal data (for more on this see Heng, 2016). Thus, by photographing objects from a close-up angle (a kind of photograph which many of my research participants would be comfortable with), I could miss the important contextual details of the interior. The example of this can be a photograph of Russian bast shoes (*lapti)* in Fig. 6.2 which, following my interlocutor's request was taken from a close up and so did not include surrounding contextual details of the interior. Also, many photographs were not in a format that would suit print publishing (e.g. due to small size and low definition). Consequently, although the research project contained an element of visual research, it did not produce a visual output – something that I could refer to as a limitation of the study. Having said that, reflecting on this experience also allowed me to evaluate visual research more critically as well as to rediscover its potential, not only in terms of its ability

Fig. 6.2 Many participants requested that pictures be taken from a close up. In fact, this may overemphasize certain specific objects and shift the focus away from their contextual backgrounds. (Author's picture)

to make things visible, but also as a way of producing knowledge which is visual (Rose, 2013). This can mean, for instance, using various formats of academic writing (such as visual essays) or designing a research methodology that can contain a creative element from the outset (e.g. by collaborating with artists or participants to produce a visual narrative for further presentation).

Despite the initial challenges of getting access, the interviews offered a chance to share and hear memories, stories, and emotions. Sometimes I was invited to stay for a meal after the interview that led to further 'non-recorded' discussion. In this sense, and adding to the previous point, putting less focus on the photographic component of the study offered a way to (re)emphasise the value of the context of the interview and avoid stereotypical focus on souvenirs (many of which, in fact, revealed complex meanings and memories: see Pechurina, 2020). I wanted to see the home but I also wanted to highlight elements that were not directly visible to the eye thus bringing in focus the collected ethnographic data. This also meant not only accepting things that were shown and words that were said, but also the ones which were hidden and/or silenced, but nevertheless constituted an essential part of the narrative and co-created knowledge (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010). Deploying a personal life framework helped me to acknowledge the significance of my position as a researcher and these difficult moments. It also equipped me with tools to reflect on these moments later, as I continued living and working in the UK thus gradually evolving from a researcher of migrants into the female migrant- researcher. Naturally, some of my own experiences have become more attuned to my participants' narratives, while some impressions have become more distant. I believe that the temporal character of my positionality is also reflected in my writing which features personal reflections as a way of building dialogue and connections between my participants' narratives and my changing ways of seeing them.

6.4 To Invite and to Be Invited: Some Reflections on Home-Based Interviews

Below I will describe the examples of two interviews that show different ways of conducting research about home while being at home. Being among the first interviews I did for the study, I believe that they reveal important moments of decision making in relation to my expectations and behaviour, both as a researcher and a visitor.

I will start with an interview I conducted with a single man in his mid-30s who lived in Scotland. As we arranged the interview, P[1] indicated that there is 'not much to see in his typical bachelor flat' so on my arrival he suggested that we walk around

[1] Here and throughout in the chapter I use capital letters to refer to participants' names. While I used pseudonyms in my earlier work as a way of anonymising participants, I switched to letters as a way of avoiding using personal names unless there was participant's consent to do so.

town and his favourite places first. I agreed and we met in one of the parks where I proceeded with my questions. Most of the interview was conducted while walking, first in the park, and then in the city on the way to P's flat. P talked about how he arrived and settled in Scotland, his experience of adjustment, his likes and dislikes. Standing next to birch trees we discussed Scottish nature, which P loved and which, as he noted, was reminiscent of his native place in Russia due to their similar latitude. Being mobile was important for P., which meant regular trips to the countryside with a hiking group or going to the other cities in the UK for a break. Later, as we walked through town, he pointed to the architecture of the buildings whose greyness and scale reminded him of the feeling of being in a Russian city, the atmosphere of which he sometimes missed. He talked about getting used to living abroad and the struggle to build 'his' circle of Russian friends around him. Throughout this walk the idea of home and feeling of home gradually started to emerge. This was not something that was particularly linked to the materiality of P's dwelling. Eventually, we came to his flat where P invited me in and told me that I could have a look 'if I want to'. He showed me some objects which he brought from his regular trips back to Russia, including kitchen items and some tools. However, there was a feeling of the situation being too forced and that I had overstayed my welcome – I did not feel I was fully invited. I did not see myself walking around and picking up the objects I could see any longer. I started being cautions, wondering whether I wanted to see or discover more. I stayed in the living room for about 15 min, then finished the interview and left.

The other interview was conducted with a family who had been living in a northern city in the UK for several years. I was invited by a common friend, a person who initially helped me to get to know my first research participants. The interview was arranged as part of a dinner invitation. I asked to allocate specific time for the recorded part and the home tour during the interview. The hosts were very friendly, the atmosphere was welcoming and light, despite the fact that we had not met before. The discussion continued well after the recorded part when we shared tea and cake. Once again, as it was one of my first interviews, I intuitively relied on clues from my hosts and participated in the dinner as well as staying afterwards. I was given a home tour during which I asked about objects I saw. My hosts also gave me suggestions of other people I could interview.

As both of these examples show, the interviews involved complex dimensions related to class, gender, and culture. However, they also illustrate various 'difficult' moments that can be experienced by a researcher, which in this case refer to visiting someone's home and experiencing it either welcoming or not and the subsequent decisions that followed from it. While in one case I felt it was time to end a visit sooner, in another I decided to stay – which was not solely because the participants explicitly invited me to. My ambiguous position as someone who is invited but not welcomed reflects Lenhard and Samanani's (2020) point that home can be equally hospitable and excluding for a visitor. Similarly, Heath and Scicluna (2019) refer to the ambivalence of home in which host- guest relationships can be characterised by both hospitality and hostility. Significantly, though, my awareness and co-construction of boundaries was not only the result of a presumed lack of welcome

on behalf of my host. As I noticed, the more I got to know people, the more cautious I became with regards to how far I could go and how much I could ask during my visit, thus trying to fulfil a 'visitor' role, who knows one's place. The two scenarios described above formed part of my experience in other interviews: it was not uncommon for me to be taken for a walk around before visiting home or to share a meal or coffee. People asked me about my train or bike journey to their homes, referred to some landmarks if we walked to their home together, sometimes took me for a short drive around. Occasionally, I went with my participants shopping for food to cook our lunch or participated in cooking and eating it together. At the same time, while observing various aspects of life clearly brought me closer to the participants, it also made me think how to incorporate the role of the person (a 'friend' as I earlier indicated), a researcher and a visitor who had to be entertained (Jordan, 2006).

One of the consequences of such closeness that emerged between me and my participants during the interviews was the strategy of deploying 'ethics of responsibility' (Birch & Miller, 2002: 93) in order to protect some of the participants' personal stories which were revealed to me. My interview with S, a female participant in her 70s who I met through the Russian Orthodox Church, lasted for several hours. As she talked about her initial hardships as she arrived in the UK through Germany as a young girl, working at the local textile factory and a gradual adjustment to life abroad, S showed me around the house where she lived for more than 50 years, first with her husband and then alone. We talked about her roots and relatives in Russia and her closest friendships in the UK. As she showed me some of the photographs from a recent visit to Russia she also mentioned that she felt hurt by her encounter with a journalist who was interested in her story some years ago. While she was open to me throughout the interview and allowed me to photograph her home and interior, she was reluctant to show me some of her most significant possessions partly because of her previous experience. As S. pointed out, some of the objects she cherished were kept in her drawer, but she was not going to open it. However, we carried on talking about her life, her friends, the Church. I had a strong emotional response to her story and felt connected to her. Something definitely happened there, during that interview, which was not only significant for the subject of my study, but also for me as a person. As I sat on the bus back home, I could not hold my tears. What was it that made me cry? Was it, perhaps, the overwhelming hospitality and openness of this woman who talked to me, a stranger, for hours in her own home? Or maybe this reminded me of my own grandmother, who was far away and who I deeply missed? The important point here is that the personal reaction that this interview triggered was part of the encounter which I had to accept as it was. Dealing with personal lives and home, as a special kind of place for everyone, means accepting and learning about the emotions and senses it may bring, which can be not just the participants' but also one's own.

This experience also made me feel particularly cautious and reflective on how much more I should ask and see during the interview and how should I proceed with it afterwards. I felt very welcomed and confused at the same time, both grateful and indebted for such profound experience and knowledge. My interview with S illustrates a case where a formal arrangement of the interview can emerge into a more

sensitive and emotional encounter for both researcher and participant. As with other interviews of similar nature that I also experienced during my study, the emotional aspects were closely intertwined with knowledge production (Lumsden et al., 2019) and thus brought important questions about interpreting the interview narratives, presenting participants' stories and not speaking over their 'voice' at the same time. Trying to reflect on and balance various perspectives, including my own could be one way of dealing with it. But there is also value in recognising the changing and emergent nature of the research process and associated data which can evolve with time and be retrospectively revisited by the researcher, whose feelings and interpretive frameworks may also change and thus enable a more 'distant' view of the situation. This is something that I have also been trying to engage with throughout this chapter.

6.5 Conclusion

As Jordan (2006) points out in relation to her study of families in home environments, the roles of researcher and participants evolve during the process of research and reflect the ways in which these roles are defined and constructed both before and during the interview. Conducting the interviews in the interviewees' home was an important way of getting to know practical and contextual aspects of homemaking in a study that concerned itself with aspects of identity, belonging and home. For example, the setting of the interview (e.g. kitchen or living room) and/or activities that accompanied it (coffee, food, cooking together, participating in family activities) certainly affected the dynamic of the interview and my experience within participants' domestic space. However, while having access to fragments of participants' personal lives provided valuable insights into practiced aspects of everyday homemaking, it was also an indicator of how the visitors were welcomed and treated within different households. In other words, the co-shared moments were part of the life that was shown to me, that I was invited into, but still were not something I had a full overview of.

By deploying home-based qualitative interviews as the main method of data collection, my study aimed to uncover both tangible and intangible dimensions of the home, the former including material objects and elements of home décor, and the latter – the feeling of being at home and the homely atmosphere. As such, although the interviews were focused on material and practical dimensions of homemaking, they also aimed to explore connections between home, everyday life and the experience of migration into the UK. As a result, my task as a researcher was not only in finding the references to belonging and Russianness but also in understanding and contextualising them, or, trying to 'write in' my participants' stories into the broader narrative of post-Soviet migration abroad. As I continue to revisit the collected data I discover further complexities and interconnections between participants' stories of home as well as my own. In this chapter I focused more on the more challenging and critical moments of the home visits, reflecting on the ambiguous position of a

researcher. This is shaped by various internal and external factors related to social and personal backgrounds, and expected norms of behaviour. I also suggested that the homes one studies and visits are not always experienced in a positive way, hence the host-guest encounters that happen may not necessarily be defined in straightforward terms. In this sense, home both as a subject and location of research is a special kind of place which we continuously rediscover.

References

Ahmed, S. (1999). Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 2*(3), 329–347.

Belloni, M., Bonfanti, S., Massa, A., Pérez Murcia, L.-E., Miranda-Nieto, A., Vari-Lavoisier, I., & Boccagni, P. (2019). On the complexities of collaborative ethnography: Ethical and methodological insights from the HOMInG project. *IMISCOE-Cross-Migration Briefs, 12*.

Birch, M., & Miller, T. (2002). Encouraging participation: Ethics and responsibilities. In M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop, & T. Miller (Eds.), *Ethics in qualitative research*. Sage.

Blunt, A. (2005). Cultural geography: Cultural geographies of home. *Progress in Human Geography, 29*, 505–515.

Boccagni, P. (2020). #StayHome, forced domesticity, the kids playing in my condominium garden, and some unsettling parallels between insiders and outsiders. https://homing.soc.unitn.it/2020/03/23/paolo-boccagni-stayhome-forced-domesticity-the-kids-playing-in-my-condominium-garden-and-some- unsettling-parallels-between-insiders-and-outsiders/. Accessed 30 July 2020.

Boccagni, P., & Kusenbach, M. (2020). For a comparative sociology of home: Relationships, cultures, structures. *Current Sociology, 68*(5), 595–606.

Boccagni, P., Perez Murcia, L. E., & Belloni, M. (2020). *Thinking home on the move: A conversation across disciplines*. Emerald.

Bonfanti, S., Massa, A., & Miranda-Nieto, A. (2019). Whiffs of home: Ethnographic comparison in a collaborative research study across European cities. *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa, 2*, 153–174.

Brickell, K. (2020). Stay home, stay safe? A political geography of home in Covid-time. https://blog.geographydirections.com/2020/07/08/stay-home-stay-safe-a-political-geography-of-home-in-covid-times/. Accessed 30 July 2020.

Casey, E., & Martens, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Gender and consumption: Domestic cultures and the commercialisation of everyday life*. Ashgate.

Casey, E., & Taylor, Y. (Eds.). (2015). *Intimacies, critical consumption and diverse economies*. Palgrave.

Dibbits, H. (2009). Furnishing the salon: Symbolic ethnicity and performative practices in Moroccan-Dutch domestic interiors. *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 33*(5), 550–557.

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), 54–63.

England, K. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer, 46*(1), 80–89.

Gabb, J. (2010). Home truths: Ethical issues in family research. *Qualitative Research, 10*(4), 461–478.

Ganga, D., & Scott, S. (2006). Cultural 'insiders' and the issue of positionality in qualitative migration research: Moving 'across' and moving 'along' researcher-participant divides. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 7*(3).

Giorgi, S., & Fasulo, A. (2013). Transformative homes: Squatting and furnishing as sociocultural projects. *Home Cultures, 10*(2), 111–133.
Goode, J. (2007). Whose collection is it anyway? An autoethnographic account of ‘dividing the spoils’ upon divorce. *Cultural Sociology, 1*(3), 365–382.
Hämäläinen, K., & Rautio, S. (2013). Participants’ home as an interview context when studying sensitive family issues. *Journal of Comparative Social Work, 8*, 41–70.
Harries, B. (2016). What’s sex got to do with it? When a woman asks questions. *Women’s Studies International Forum, 59*, 48–57.
Heath, S., & Scicluna, R. (2019). Putting up (with) the paying guest: Negotiating hospitality and the boundaries of the commercial home in private lodging arrangements. *Families, Relationships and Societies, 9*, 399.
Hecht, A. (2001). Home sweet home: Tangible memories of an uprooted childhood. In D. Miller (Ed.), *Home possessions: Material culture behind closed doors*. Berg.
Heng, T. (2016). *Visual methods in the field: Photography for the social sciences*. Routledge.
Hockey, J. (2002). Interviews as ethnography? Disembodied social interaction in Britain. In N. Rapport (Ed.), *British subjects: An anthropology of Britain* (pp. 209–222). Berg.
Hurdley, R. (2006). Dismantling mantelpieces: Narrating identities and materializing culture in the home. *Sociology, 40*(4), 717–733.
Jordan, A. B. (2006). Make yourself at home: The social construction of research roles in family studies. *Qualitative Research, 6*(2), 169–185.
Lazzaro-Salazar, M. (2019). Researchers as brokers: Reflections from a study of migrant physicians in Chile. *The Social Science Journal, 56*(4), 609–616.
Lenhard, J., & Samanani, F. (Eds.). (2020). *Home. Ethnographic encounters*. Routledge.
Letherby, G. (2003). *Feminist research in theory and practice*. Open University Press.
Levin, I. (2014). Intersectionality in the migrant house: Homes of migrants from the former Soviet Union in metropolitan Tel Aviv, Israel. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 35*(4), 421–441.
Lumsden, K., Bradford, J., & Goode, J. (2019). Emotions and reflexivity in social research: Theory, method, and practice. In K. Lumsden, J. Bradford, & J. Goode (Eds.), *Reflexivity. Theory, method, and practice*. Routledge.
Madigan, R., & Munro, M. (1996). ‘House beautiful’: Style and consumption in the home. *Sociology, 30*(1), 41–57.
Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding home: A critical review of the literature. *The Sociological Review, 52*(1), 62–89.
Marion Young, I. (1997). House and home: Feminist variations on a theme. In I. Marion Young (Ed.), *Intersecting voices: Dilemmas of gender, political philosophy, and policy* (pp. 134–164). PUP.
Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching*. Sage.
Mason, J., & Davies, K. (2009). Coming to our senses? A critical approach to sensory methodology. *Qualitative Research, 9*(5), 587–603.
Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M.-Y., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G., & Muhamad, M. (2001). Power and positionality: Negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 20*(5), 405–416.
Miller, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Home possessions: Material culture behind closed doors*. Berg.
Miranda-Nieto, A., Massa, A., & Bonfanti, S. (2020). *Ethnographies of home and mobility: Shifting roofs*. Routledge.
Money, A. (2007). Material culture and the living room: The appropriation and use of goods in everyday life. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 7*(3), 355–377.
Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas ofinterviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum, 30*, 337–350.
Ochs, E., & Kremer-Sadlik, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Fast forward family: Home, work and relationships in middle-class America*. California University Press.
Pechurina, A. (2014). Positionality and ethics in qualitative research of migrants’ homes. *Sociological Research Online, 19*(1), 4.

Pechurina, A. (2015). *Material cultures, migrations, and identities: What the eye cannot see*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Pechurina, A. (2020). Researching identities through material possessions: The case of diasporic objects. *Current Sociology, 68*(5), 669–683.
Pink, S. (2004a). *Home truths: Gender, domestic objects and everyday life*. Berg.
Pink, S. (2004b). Performance, self-representation and narrative: Interviewing with video. In C. Pole (Ed.), *Seeing is believing? Approaches to visual research. Studies in qualitative methodology* (Vol. 7). Elsevier Science.
Pink, S. (2006). *The future of visual anthropology: Engaging the senses*. Routledge.
Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. Sage.
Ratnam, C., & Drozdzewski, D. (2020). Detour: Bodies, memories, and mobilities in and around the home. *Mobilities, 15*(6), 757–775.
Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography, 21*(3), 305–320.
Rose, G. (2010). *Doing family photography: The domestic, the public and the politics of sentiment*. Ashgate Press.
Rose, G. (2013). On the relation between 'visual research methods' and contemporary visual culture. *The Sociological Review, 62*(1), 24–46.
Ryan-Flood, R., & Gill, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Secrecy and silence in the research process: Feminist reflections*. Routledge.
Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender*. Sage.
Smart, C. (2007). *Personal life: New directions in sociological thinking*. Polity.
Stachowski, J. (2020). Positioning in 'relational claustrophobia'- ethical reflections on researching small international migrant communities in rural areas. *Journal of Rural Studies, 78*, 176–184.
Valentine, G. (2007). Theorizing and researching intersectionality: A challenge for feminist geography. *The Professional Geographer, 59*(1), 10–21.
Widerberg, K. (2010). In the homes of others: Exploring new sites and methods when investigating the doings of gender, class and ethnicity. *Sociology, 44*(6), 1181–1196.
Woodward, S., & Greasley, A. (2015). Personal collections as material assemblages: A comparison of wardrobes and music collections. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 17*.

Chapter 7
Rooms with Little View: Reluctant Homemaking and the Negotiation of Space in an Asylum Centre

Paolo Boccagni

7.1 Introduction

Reception centres for asylum seekers, and "camps" more broadly, have recently been the subject of a burgeoning critical interest in refugee, housing and border studies (e.g. Turner, 2015; Kreichauf, 2018; Willems et al., 2020; Zill et al., 2020). Only a fraction of this literature, however, draws on ethnographies done within the relevant infrastructures, hence on people's everyday practices therein, rather than on indirect or "external" accounts. This chapter builds on one of these case studies, an ethnography within the dwelling space of the residents, mostly West-African males in their early 20s, in an asylum centre in a mid-size town of northern Italy (2018–2022). My research focus was on the lived experience of the indoor built environment (common spaces, rooms, affordances for social reproduction) and on the ongoing boundary-making between the personal space of each resident and the space shared by necessity with other residents and with service providers. Within rooms and kitchens that feel unhomely, and yet operate as proxies of domestic space, asylum seekers do not simply "wait". They engage in meaningful routines and forms of space appropriation that are often inadvertent, at odds with each other (and with top-down regulations and time scheduling), and yet illustrative of a major point – home, and homemaking, matter even in spaces that are temporary and inhospitable by definition (Boccagni et al., 2020; Gronseth & Thorshaug, 2022). Even in an asylum centre, moreover, the social and material inner space is far from homogeneous. In contrast to accounts of camps as undifferentiated ghettos or non-places, this chapter casts light on the lived thresholds of domesticity that refugees as guests negotiate, and that an ethnographer can capture as guest of the guests (cf. Boccagni and Bonfanti, Chap. 1; Bonfanti, Chap. 4).

P. Boccagni (✉)
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy
e-mail: paolo.boccagni@unitn.it

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_7

Following a brief overview of the recent literature and a presentation of my case study, I first discuss the tensions surrounding the ways to stay in the centre, even before the covid-related "stayhome" orders would come. I then show the value added of doing research inside people's everyday life spaces, including their rooms, to make sense of their routines and ways to arrange and display one's personal space. This reveals an ongoing tension along the boundary between private and semi-public, temporary and settled, individual agency and external constraints. The attendant boundary work informs the lived experience of residents in the centre, and leaves its traces over time. Overall, the rooms in a refugee centre are both spaces of protection and isolation, in which dwellers have little "view" on the surrounding social environments and on their future life prospects. Still, such rooms are invariably turned into meaningful and special places. As such, they demand an inner view for a better understanding of refugees' life conditions and prospects.

7.2 Approaching Refugee Accommodations via "Domestic" Ethnography

7.2.1 Ethnographies of/in Camps: An Overview

There is no paucity of literature on facilities for asylum seekers and refugees, often generically referred to as camps, especially after the so-called refugee crisis in Europe. Much of this literature has emphasized aspects like the territorial (Hauge et al., 2017) and social (Whyte, 2011) isolation of these infrastructures from local populations, the "exceptional" character associated with their function of confinement and surveillance (Agier, 2011; Turner, 2015), the lack of control over time inside them (Thorshaug & Brun, 2019), and the permanent impermanence embodied by these settings. Without denying any of these developments, some recent studies have revisited all sorts of refugee accommodation through the interdisciplinary repertoire of home studies. This can be relevant to camps (Hart et al., 2018) and informal settlements (Paju et al., 2023), as much as institutional infrastructures (Archambault, 2012) and dedicated housing schemes (Kim & Smets, 2020). Such a perspective starts from acknowledging the fundamental significance of home, and of the mixed memories associated with it, for forcibly displaced people (Taylor, 2016). While the notion of home opens unique, if often painful horizons of memory, self-understanding and aspiration in the life trajectories of forced migrants (Dossa & Golubovic, 2019), it is also instrumental to revisit their experience of place in the here-and-now (Gronseth, 2023).

For sure, there is often little of a similarity, or even only of a functional equivalence between a temporary accommodation for refugees and a "proper" domestic space. Nevertheless, there is a promise in exploring how people tend to operate elementary, and yet meaningful forms of homemaking under similar circumstances, in several respects (Brun, 2015; Boccagni, 2022): by carving out portions of special

or private space out of impersonal and supposedly provisional dwelling circumstances, also through material readaptations (Hart et al., 2018; Steigemann & Misselwitz, 2020); by enacting distinctive material cultures that articulate continuities with their lifestyles, identities, or ultimate concerns (Dudley, 2011; Vandevoordt, 2017); by engaging in micro acts of beautification within the places in which they spend more time (Neumark, 2013); more generally, by displaying tangible (if "reluctant") forms of place attachment and care for the built environment in which they stay, for the time being (Gronseth & Thorshaug, 2022).

Importantly, homemaking from below operates in critical interaction with the infrastructural characteristics of the built environment and with the ways in which it is designed, maintained and managed over time. It is no coincidence that the study of refugee accommodations "from below" has been paralleled with a burgeoning debate in architecture, urban planning and design on the ways to improve refugee housing, both functionally and aesthetically, for different resident targets and purposes (Kuhl & Behrens, 2018; Willems et al., 2020; Beeckmans et al., 2022; Seethaler-Wari et al., 2022). This perspective, of course, is not without constraints and dilemmas, particularly for dwelling in refugee camps and shelters (Scott-Smith, 2019). It also needs to take into account that housing infrastructures "can trigger different affective and emotional states", and that "the meaning of architecture is not interpreted by everyone in the same way" (Zill et al., 2020: 497). With this premise, several case studies have explored the effects of housing conditions on refugee health and wellbeing (Ziersch & Due, 2018). Nonetheless, little of this literature has reached into the day-to-day use and perceived meanings of quasi-domestic environments for residents themselves (Rainisio, 2015). How do the interior and the everyday organization of a refugee accommodation shape the residents' experience of home? What forms of home-related boundaries, struggles and claims do they reveal?

In addressing these questions, drawing also on the few ethnographies that have systematically engaged with asylum facilities from the inside-out (van der Horst, 2004; Archambault, 2012; Gronseth & Thorshaug, 2022), this chapter aims to a more profound understanding of the interplay between dwelling place and home under asylum. This is done from within a particular centre in which I have tried to make my theoretical concern with home and refuge more anchored in, respectful of, and fruitful for the lived experience of the young asylum seekers I was in contact with.

7.2.2 Lived Experience and Inner Thresholds in Asylum Centres: A Case Study

From February 2018 to June 2022 I have been staying two or three times per week in an asylum centre in Northern Italy (Fig. 7.1) – a four-storey building that hosted young male asylum seekers, as a form of "intermediate" accommodation. Its seventy guests had already been living in the country one or two years before getting

Fig. 7.1 The centre, seen from the outside. (Author's picture)

there, and were mostly at the stage of "appeal" after an early denial of their applications.[1] In doing so, I was often hosted for a while in the rooms of the residents with whom I had built more familiarity and trust over time. At the core of my self-designed mandate, initially facilitated by my academic status but soon to shift into a "thing" in itself, was simply the possibility to stay there. No particular capacities on my side or expectations about me, other than what I used to do in practice – chatting and getting along with whomever would like to do so.

Once I was allowed in (after the authorization of the local authority and the service provider), as someone interested in writing a book on asylum seekers and supposedly staying for some months, I simply kept attending the place one month and year after another. My way of being there was fundamentally the same across different seasons, organization wise (different service providers taking over); politics wise (different national and local political majorities resulting in decreasing budget allocation); and even history wise (before and during the covid emergency). All across these seasons I gained some legitimacy out of my own irrelevance. Whatever my reasons for being there, which few residents seemed to be interested in, I was an

[1] On the organizational arrangements and local policy-making of asylum reception in Italy, typically marked by low and uneven quality standards, lengthy case assessment and little to no support to recipients after the early accommodation stage, see Marchetti (2020), Campomori and Ambrosini (2020), Semprebon (2021) and Degli Uberti (2021).

ordinary presence – someone people were used to seeing around. If anything, some of my closer contacts seemed surprised whenever I did not show up for a while. As it turned out, the power of habituation (sometimes, of friendship) shaped my rapport with a number of interlocutors more than our mutual distance in terms of legal status and ethno-racial background, but also of age (I was closer to a father than a brother, for most of them), class, education and role to be played out. I was certainly not a caseworker; no power prerogatives on my side, no expectations to be cultivated accordingly on their side. As long as I complied with the routine ways of mutual greetings with residents and caseworkers, my hanging around was not perceived as problematic, not even under the protracted covid emergency, when visits from non-residents were forbidden. This unwritten legitimacy turned into a major ethnographic asset. To an extent, I was part of the ways of apparently "doing nothing" (Ehn & Lofgren, 2010) that are well exemplified by an asylum centre, as long as people stay in rather than searching, and hopefully finding jobs and other things to do outside. Even as they do so, their livelihood is tied to the centre, with its own rules and expected patterns of behaviour.

As is often the case with asylum accommodation (Hauge et al., 2017), this centre has a downward housing history of its own. Originally built as a motel for the gasoline station nearby, still at walking distance from the city centre, it was readapted as a university facility and then "reconverted" at the outset of the so-called refugee crisis. Interestingly, its entrance still bears the signboard of a student dorm and has no mention of its current use. In all these respects, there is nothing really distinctive in this particular asylum centre, relative to many more in Italy (Semprebon, 2021; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapansky, 2021) and elsewhere, in Europe at least (van der Horst, 2004; Kreichauf, 2018; Zill et al., 2020). This is part of its significance as an ethnographic setting; that is, as an ordinary place of shared, free and yet highly controlled dwelling for a number of young male asylum seekers, mostly West Africans in their early 20s. These have effectively made it their provisional home, even as they ended there after territorial dispersion policies rather than by choice, under a supposedly short-term "contract". By staying in and complying with the rules set by the local authority (and to a lesser extent by service providers), asylum seekers have access to free accommodation and basic economic support for some years, parallel to the processing of their applications. This makes the centre a key step in their migration, legal and housing pathways.

The place as such and its interiors are far more than a neutral background. Most notably, the residents' rooms and kitchens have much to do with the reconstruction of a domestic space by proxy, if not a home. In a collective housing arrangement with over 70 people, a room with two beds is a semi-autonomous portion of domesticity, on which one can attach some more sense of comfort and privacy than on the outer environment. Unlike the latter, the room and the adjacent kitchenettes protect residents from the common gaze and control (although, by the centre rules, caseworkers are entitled to get in whenever needed).

Being invited or let in the rooms, as a guest of the guests (Vandevoordt, 2017), was the turning point of my fieldwork. In practice, this often meant sharing food and drinks, or having tea or coffee together under a regime of tacit reciprocity that did

take place regardless of the obvious power differential between us. Whenever I offered first, my counterpart would return the favour in the following round. In a few cases, though, being in a room revealed something different – a very limited sense of privacy and place attachment among my interlocutors. In these particular circumstances, who was in a room for a while seemed to be irrelevant. The formal occupant was hardly interested in anything else than the micro space he was occupying – the physical one of his bed, the sensorial one of his ear phones. In any case, once I was in, typically on the chairs or beds of someone else who was eager to invite me there, my stay was not an issue. Crossing the doorstep – the ways, rationale and mandate to do so – was more of a tacit negotiation that was open to different outcomes. Against the objection that I might abuse my power position, as I could afford to visit people in "their" place and not the other way round, one fact is clear: it was all a matter of invitations. Even my closer informants were more or less inclined to host me in, from one day to the next, depending on their personal circumstances, and I just reacted accordingly. Moreover, I invariably encountered also people who did not trust, engage or hang out with me. As long as they dwelt in the centre, their rooms remained inaccessible to me.

Throughout the chapter, I explore common patterns in the use(s) of the rooms and in the ways to negotiate the centre inner space, rather than focusing on the narratives on individual residents. While this analytical focus is particularly promising for the remit of this book, I expand on the narrative side of day-to-day life in the centre elsewhere (Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022; Boccagni, 2023). All over, I use the present tense rather than the past one in an endeavor to do justice to the lived experience of the field. This is certainly not meant to "freeze" or "de-temporalize" people in "any ethnographic present" (Hastrup, 1990). Rather, it aims to acknowledge the fact that the centre is no relics from the past – it keeps being operational, here and now. As my follow-up fieldwork shows, it still fundamentally reproduces, with different clients, the organizational and relational patterns that are discussed in this chapter, and that resonate across the lived experience of many similar facilities.

7.3 "It's not good to always stay home"

As a semi-private space, a refugee centre is made primarily of rooms, as units of dwelling and, here, of analysis. In this particular infrastructure, the rooms are designed for two guests each. In fact, they provide some degree of privacy, ideally to host adult asylum seekers that have transitioned through collective shelters – and are accordingly expected to have a certain degree of "integration" – rather than newcomers. Part of the mission of the organization managing the centre, initially at least, was to try and "activate" people in a number of respects – learning the language, investing in training, looking for a job – rather than leaving them alone in

their rooms, as long as some of them did. Interestingly, staying-in-the-room is not appreciated much by residents either. Even before covid and the related stay-home orders came, all my interlocutors tended to see "staying always home" as an undesirable and inherently problematic state of things. "That's not good", people used to tell me whenever we started to chat about their everyday life in the centre. This was not, however, because their room space was necessarily uncomfortable or felt alien to them. The opposite was more likely the case, as time passed by. Nor was it only for the structural limitations and constraints of a refugee centre: strict rules on the entry and exit time, no right to invite people in, and a constant need to negotiate the right distance and an acceptable division of "domestic" space and tasks with one's flatmate.

More fundamentally, staying in all the time would mean having nothing to do, possibly falling prey to one's own "thoughts" – about the past, the journey across desert and sea, the time spent in Libya, the dear ones far away (or possibly passed away) and the failure to meet one's aspirations, at present at least. The oft-discussed (at least since Bachelard, 1964) social function of a house, not only as an archive of past memories but as an intimate space to nourish them anew, would turn into a negative force for people who have a heavy burden of memories and little space or resources to re-elaborate them. Rather than staying always in, "it's better", my interlocutors would repeat, "when you work" – one stays out the whole day, possibly struggles hard, but then is left with little mental room for thoughts. You just come back here for rest, only to move out again the next day. While exploitative work conditions make this inside/outside transition far from smooth or painless, they still make a difference. It is the existence of (or at least the prospect for) something meaningful, tangible and fruitful to do outside what gives a meaning, and a dignity, to the time spent inside. The actual threshold between inside and outside is then defined by the social practices and opportunities negotiated by each resident, rather than only by a concrete boundary (cf. Fig. 7.2).

However, for a number of reasons, including the paucity of job opportunities and of sufficient skills to meet them, the time spent inside is often not so limited. As important, it is not necessarily one of empty and passive waiting, as some accounts of the "refugee condition" might suggest. Things do happen, in terms of routines, practices and material cultures. These belong to the private sphere of everyone, as long as this is retained in an asylum centre. Nonetheless, they can be respectfully approached in ways that allow a better understanding of the residents' life predicament. People in asylum centres may well live in a sort of warehouse (Vianelli, 2021) that reflects, and contains, their condition of being "stuck" in "waithood". Metaphors like that of a storage place, or a (free) parking lot, would capture something of the place I have studied. So do other metaphors people are more likely to use, such as prison (some of them, when in a particularly bad mood), or camp, as a general way for the English speakers to call the facility. However, meaningful things do happen inside. The place itself "does" things as a social actor, rather than being a simple background (Gronseth et al., 2016).

Fig. 7.2 On the threshold between inside and outside: a balcony in the centre. (Author's picture)

7.4 Inside the Rooms: Routines, Displays of the Self, Traces

Whenever I entered a resident's room in the centre, I felt like I was crossing a qualitative threshold, from the cold and transitory space of a corridor into a more intensely inhabited one. Room interiors are invariably more lively and sensorially thicker than the surrounding semi-public space. This holds even when a room is messy, untidy, possibly dark or almost suffocating for lack of fresh air. However, as I realized, the difference between common and semi-private space is not only a sensorial or affective one. Being in is also a condition to investigate and better understand routines and ways of coping during everyday life in "waiting" (Rotter, 2015) and in "liminality" (Ghorashi et al., 2018). Even a room in a refugee centre has something of a private and invisible space. It gives people some degree of freedom to do whatever they like – even when this means, as they say, "doing nothing". It is a space of protection, as much as isolation. It is also a setting in which there are higher chances that ordinary, superficial talk turns into deeper fragments of self-disclosure and personal narration, although not necessarily on the topics one would like to prioritize (in my case, migration and everyday life before it, whereas my interlocutors would

prioritize work, papers and housing in the here-and-now, as both more urgent and more "tellable" concerns). Following this premise, a cumulative experience of room visits is a source of insights on topics of deeper and larger significance.

7.4.1 Inner Domestic Routines and Cultures

All rooms in the centre include the same standard and basic furniture – two beds per room, with one shared kitchenette between each couple of rooms. Despite their impersonal layout, most rooms hold some minimal sign of their cumulative dwelling over time, or of the absent presence of past dwellers – writings on the walls, old posters or calendars, stickers, objects that held some function in the past and have been abandoned since. Most visibly, the rooms carry some trace of their present dwellers, through their material cultures and their ways of inhabiting them. This in itself is an experiential aspect of refugee everyday lives that can be appreciated only by being in – by making some respectful, but necessarily proximate efforts to observe people's practices, rather than relying only on their narratives. One visit after another, this leads an ethnographer from a shallow perception of chaotic, semi-empty or worn out interiors, to an appreciation of the inner orderings and domestic cultures at work. These micro-mechanisms of material and social ordering (Bochmann, 2018) operate regardless of the little material resources available and of the residents' unclear prospects to stay in Italy, let alone in the centre (Boccagni, 2022).

At the core of each room and of one's (extra-bodily) personal space lies, unsurprisingly, a bed. Tidying it up or not, staying on it for long or for not-so-long, using the free blanket (or possibly a newly purchased one) to cover some part of one's body or the whole of it are all micro details that match different emotions and ways of being. The space under the bed, and in particular the interstice between mattress and bed springs, is possibly the most separate and less visible region in the room, where one may keep an envelope with his documents or some cherished belongings. The safest place, where the wallet and phones are kept, is instead a small bed table with a locked drawer. That the bed table is a special place and deserves extra care is a feeling some residents display by keeping a clean towel to cover it. Each room also includes one table (which used to be a student desk) and a cupboard (originally, a library) to be shared by the two residents, plus two wardrobes. Every dweller has his own way to distribute and store food – rice, bread, tea, sugar, oil, vegetables – between the room and the kitchen space. This does not necessarily follow any fixed rule or functional requirement. Rather, it has something to say on the degrees of trust, and on the perceived quality of the lived experience with one's flatmate and neighbours (i.e. people in the other room adjacent to the kitchenette).

Within the limitations of a heteronomous dwelling condition, one has certainly more freedom to do things in the room than out of it. Although, many residents would add, there would be little point in staying in the room if only one had something "better" to do elsewhere, a fact is clear: there are many things one can do in

his room, alone or in co-presence with his flatmate. No room in the centre is used or meant only for sleeping – along a timeline shaped by external commitments and by one's own psychological condition – or for eating, whenever one does not use the adjacent kitchenette, the room of someone else or just a bench outside, in summer. A room, or at least a bed inside it, is fundamentally a place to stay separated, materially, relationally and atmospherically, from the outside world. It is a place where one can take a shower, possibly several times a day, and take care of his body and hair. It is a space to relax, watch movies, communicate with people or wander in the virtual world with one's mobile, listen to music, chat and engage in playstation matches with other residents. Sometimes it is a place to stay alone with one's burden of memories, sufferings, and isolation. Or possibly a safe enclave for people to smoke or have alcohol, while being obviously aware that they're not allowed to. On other occasions, a room is a place to pray – generally alone – thereby carving out a timespace of further intimacy and separation within the pre-existing semi-private space. Hardly ever, instead, is the room a place where one reads a book or uses a laptop, as long as there is one, for anything else than gaming or chatting. And never, unless at high risk for the dweller, is it a place for heterosexual intimacy. In several respects, then, what residents do in their rooms is not radically different from what their peers in terms of age, social class and education would do in their own rooms. Except for the fact that this is a place for males only, under 24/7 vigilance (if generally mild) of a porter and a caseworker, inhabited only by people with the same legal status and life predicaments (and still so different from each other, in any other respect). And except for another fact – while "doing nothing" is not necessarily a major issue for native males in their early 20s, it is perceived at best as a violation of trust or a form of ungratefulness for their refugee counterparts.

As long as one dwells in the centre, he marks the area around his bed, or possibly the entire room, as more own and exclusive than the rest. Unless when a caseworker gets in, generally (but not necessarily) after knocking on the door for a while, it is up to the occupant to let in some, but not many more (who would have probably little interest to get in anyway). It is the dweller who lays out his material belongings, typically limited at the outset but far more numerous after a couple of years, in different corners, wardrobes or shelves. In doing so, a dweller sets clear boundaries between what is to be made secret or personal and the rest. It is the dweller who takes care of the room (and kitchen) cleaning, or possibly resists caseworkers' pressures to do so, while also staying indifferent to the disapproval of those – flatmates, neighbours, co-nationals – who would "clean much better", or so they claim. It is the occupant, more fundamentally, that through the ways of arranging and using the room interior tells something about himself and about his needs, tastes and achievements.

There must been some reason, I thought while going across the same rooms again and again, whereby, all other things being equal (i.e. legal status, waithood, lack of a job), some have a very tidy room and make up their beds every single day, whereas others don't. Some leave on the wall some visible sign of their presence, like a poster or a writing, and others do not. Some arrange their belongings in ways that suggest some aesthetic care, as in a mini-domestic museum, whereas most

others accumulate them wherever there is space available, or they are easier to reach out. That "something" may have to do with one's personality, and maybe with the expectation to be highly transient in that place – if so, why bother to take care of it. Whatever the case, it is worth taking up as an object of analysis in itself.

7.4.2 Taste, Aesthetics and Group Alignments

Even a provisional, barely personalized and shared room in an asylum centre has much to tell of its occupants – of the resident himself, and to some extent of his ascribed national, ethnic or religious belonging. The scarcity of material resources does not prevent people from cultivating their own styles of consumption, taste and aesthetic. At least a part of these are meaningfully embedded in the material cultures of the rooms and in their ways to relate to them. A colorful prayer rug carefully folded on a chair or a shelf, for instance, is enough to say (and display) that the dweller is a practicing Muslim. So does a make-shift nativity, or a cross hanging somewhere in the room (or as a pendant around one's neck), for Christians. However, domestic micro-signs of one's day-to-day activities, and possibly of more profound alignment and belonging, are also attached to more mundane details. The big sports bag of a local football team, or an Islamic calendar of a Pakistani-run grocery nearby, are cases in point. Likewise, a grammar book or a small dictionary on the table, or possibly a collection of tales for beginners, is enough to suggest that people are actively learning Italian, or at least they are expected to. Less frequent, but still more telling, are symbols of national belonging, such as the drawing of a flag, hanging on the wall; of closer religious affiliation, e.g. the text of a religious invocation, or a prayer *tasbih*; or of one's own biography, including pictures of oneself and of some close friends albeit, interestingly, never of left-behind family members, unless in the private space of one's mobile phone. Moreover, it is not so rare, and more surprising to me, to see a teddy bear on the bed. This seems to be a sign of affective reconnection to childhood, and possibly of feeling, sometimes at least, closer to a child than to an adult. People would joke with me about their teddy bears inside the rooms, but they would have never shown one out of that private space.

While all these material objects stay there and send a message of their own, it is relatively infrequent that they are arranged in ways that suggest a deliberate "beautification". As a rule, albeit one with several exceptions, rooms bear little traces of intentional personalization. And yet, signs abound of what really matters for people. Among the objects scattered around in most rooms, shoes are a fascinating example of a good that matters well beyond the basic threshold of necessity, or of an instrumental use. To have eight or ten pairs of shoes (mostly sneakers), all of them accurately laid out on the upper levels of what used to be a bookshelf (in the previous life of the centre as a student dorm), means many things. People like doing sport and playing football, of course, but the affordances for that matter in themselves. As such, they are to be displayed up there, like trophies, rather than be kept in a wardrobe or under one's bed. More fundamentally, young asylum refugees – like

anybody else – have their own styles and myths of consumption. New shoes, as much as mobile phones, are cases in point. Lingering on them might be judged as an unnecessary luxury for people who struggle to make ends meet and have repeatedly risked their own lives, as a necessary condition to make it to Europe. And expanding on them might be perceived as a politically incorrect choice, which diverges from the master narrative of young refugees as victims, desperate people or, just apparently less essentialized, emerging and counter-hegemonic "subjectivities". In fact, for all the young people I stayed with in the centre, becoming "normal", or getting some access to the mainstream – not to question or run against it – was a treasured aim in itself (cf. Hajer, 2021). This was not in contradiction with their keen awareness of, and continuous complaints about, the structural racism and marginalization they were subject to.

In short, having access to a room's material culture enables a more nuanced and diverse account of the life conditions and prospects of its inhabitants. Perhaps unsurprisingly, residents in an asylum centre do value some possessions over others and are very keen to show it. In doing so, they display to the others and to themselves a measure of what they have achieved, everything else notwithstanding. While shoes are the most blatant example in the centre, caps and body lotions seem to perform a similar function. Some rooms include a special corner to lay up a number of caps. Likewise, body creams and hair lotions are well visible on the bed tables even in the rooms with fewer things in. The number of these items in each room, as well as the possession of a TV set or of a cooling fan, are markers of a visible social stratification across rooms, at least as far as consumption and lifestyles are concerned.

7.4.3 Tracing Back What Is No More There, over Time

Like any inhabited space, an asylum centre includes some trace and imprint of those who dwelled there over time (Davidson, 2009). Some of these traces remain utterly visible, and equally irrelevant, for years. And again, they are particularly pervasive and meaningful inside the rooms. For administrative purposes, once an asylum seeker has ended the period of their allowed stay – once they are out, for their own will or for being enforced to – their files are closed and archived. While several former guests retain ties with other residents and caseworkers, institutionally speaking they are no longer relevant for that particular place. They reacquire the same invisibility, or at least irrelevance, they have always had to the eyes of most people outside. Nonetheless, several traces remain inside: menial and often cumbersome objects and belongings, old TV screens or parts of bicycles, but also small writings on the wall, or even only the brunt of a punch into a door or a drywall. Some of these are helpful props for conversation with the residents. Others just stay there, silently and yet visibly, as long as one wishes to see them. While this whole range of material signs can hardly be traced back to someone in particular, it does embody

potential stories to be told. Or at least, it offers some hints about issues, stances or emotions that cut across the lived experience of residents, past and present.

Although a full inventory of material cultures, old and new, is beyond the scope of this chapter, some notes are worth making on wall writings. These are relatively infrequent and yet telling reminders of questions that typically remain silent, intractable, or out of the reach of what caseworkers can afford to do. "Enough with volunteering", someone wrote, for instance, on a wall in the TV room, when this was still a meaningful gathering point. People need a real job and real money – not to get only involved in pro-social activities that are eventually tokenistic, the message was. "Fuck off operators" was another, less surprising message on the stairwell, the interesting thing being that caseworkers deliberately left it there for long, as if to say that they did not feel challenged by it. "I'm thinking of my future – back to my country?", another message said on a wall room, half-hidden by an old calendar. This was a rather uncommon case in which one's interior flow of thoughts and anxieties had found some external and semi-visible outlet (but, by all likelihood, not a solution). Or different again, "Super Mario Balotelli", a large pen writing would say on another room wall, on top of a half-size drawing of the famous and contentious football player – a black, Italian guy who had "made it" and thereby could be taken as a model, at least by one particular dweller in a particular moment.

All these writings are ephemeral, disconnected from each other and, by now, from those who happened to jot them down. In different ways, however, they convey the same message to my eyes – even the background matters, if only to give some fragments of broader stories that no one will be able or interested to recollect fully. And yet the stories, and the people, were there. This in itself demands respect, care, and sociological imagination in trying to combine words, practices and leftovers within one and the same analytical framework.

7.5 Across the Rooms: Shifting Boundaries of Appropriation, Attachment and Care

"What is mine?", or "What should I take care of?", are questions that may sound out of place in a refugee centre. No resident would explicitly articulate them, if only because the point-blank response would be all too clear – little to nothing. In or out of the rooms, forms of place appropriation are generally limited (if somewhat expanding over time), pragmatic, and focused only on a few, sometimes status-related possessions. The reach of what should be taken care of is often still more limited. "This is not my place", people would often reply whenever they are asked to be more "responsible" (possibly grateful for their free accommodation) and take "more care for the place", including its common areas. "No reason for me to take care of it", they would typically add. Whether due to social and material poverty, to precarious housing and legal predicaments or to the burden of their past life experience, most residents would hardly show any attachment to the place in which they

are living. However, once again, the time spent in the centre, and most notably in the rooms, reveals a more complex and ambiguous state of things.

It was very clear to me, after staying in for a while, that some forms of "reluctant" homemaking, or of carving some special timespace out of the broader life routines in the centre, do take place anyway (Gronseth & Thorshaug, 2022). Food, music and religious practices are all powerful ways to enact some purposeful readaptation and personalization of one's timespace there. Not a single resident would probably call the centre home, in the normatively positive sense of the term. However, the interplay (indeed, the friction) between place attachment and appropriation (Boccagni et al., 2020) is helpful to illuminate their lived experience in the here and now. All my interlocutors have marked different thresholds of privateness through their day-to-day routines, both inside the rooms and in the common space. Some space, ranging from the bed to the entire room, and beyond, is typically meant as more "special", but also more "theirs" than the others. This generally involves less the place as such than the exclusive use of certain technological goods, including mobile phones, TVs and music devices, inside it. However, place appropriation does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with attachment. Taking care of the place, as far as cleaning or ordering things around is concerned, is often not seen as a worthwhile occupation, beyond a basic threshold to comply with the managers' rules and conditionalities (and often not even up to that, according to most caseworkers).

Some of my informants do perceive their rooms (and more rarely, a broader portion of common space) as a good to be taken care of, judging from the regularity and intensity of their cleaning efforts. However, this is less a rule than an exception. On the opposite of the continuum, in the most radical version, the boundaries of the field of attachment – put otherwise: the space to be taken care of – may narrow down to one's body. Everyday care for the body, in terms of assiduous cleaning, perfuming, moisturizing, hair cutting, shaving and so forth is a constant across the young people I met, regardless of their background. This is often paralleled with a special care for clothing (cf. Parrott, 2004; Schneider, 2022). Taking special care of one's body and clothes – the inn-most home and its walls – is also a pragmatic response to racist stigmas, as well as a way to make the most of the only space that lies under one's full control. All that exceeds that basic unit of space, including one's bed and its surroundings, is for some less of a priority, in a particularly harsh form of "non-home" (Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022).

The narrow scope for place appropriation and attachment is not only an individual and micro concern, though. It also articulates a faultline between the centre residents and caseworkers. The latter, interestingly enough, had initially made major and almost enthusiastic efforts to facilitate a more convivial atmosphere all around. This included, for instance, providing a sitting room and a shared TV room with some couches, nice wall decorations and books for loan. "We all live and work better in a nicer place", the argument was. Yet, these top-down efforts at beautification encountered mixed reactions over time. Most residents oscillated between mild and no participation in the common spaces, with instances of inappropriate use that multiplied over time, even before the covid emergency would radically desertify them. It seemed that the longer people stayed there (and possibly gained more

resources, out of occasional jobs that stayed often undeclared in order not to lose benefits), the more they would cultivate some private space of their own, as a part of their own autonomy, in their rooms (with their private TV sets, playstations, music equipments, etc.). One year and a half after my arrival at the centre, the common room that was to facilitate conviviality was empty and upside down most of the time. People with apparently weaker amical and support networks were the only attendants, each of them on their own. This was not necessarily bad news for all the residents who had successfully built their own networks, albeit mostly mono-ethnic ones, out of the centre. However, it was a clear demonstration that investing in sociability inside was not so critical for people's construction of their own autonomy and integration outside. The latter aim would almost invariably entail more privatization and self-interest – an attitude that is not unreasonable for their future housing and life trajectories, but is still at odds with any sustained attempt to make the centre a "better" place. "This is no home", most residents would repeat.

7.6 Views from the Room: Looking Out, Looking Forward

On the outer wall of every room in the centre lies a spacious window, right opposite to the entrance door. Just as in any residential setting, both the window and the doorstep operate like openings in the borders, or orifices in the body of each room. How these windows are kept, and what they make visible (Garvey, 2005), can be taken from the outside as measures of the decency and appropriateness of the refugee lifestyle (Larsen, 2011). However, what do they reveal, once seen and used from the inside?

None of my informants, I noticed after a while, would hardly spend time watching out of "his" window (cf. Fig. 7.3). While they do lean out to greet or call fellow residents passing by, and possibly to engage in protracted interactions aloud with them, it is infrequent that they would just stay at the window to look around. Maybe the outside is just irrelevant, as long as one has a place for shelter anyway. Or possibly, there is some concern to be seen and "pointed at" by native passers-by. On the back side of the centre, all windows would give some glimpse into the everyday life of "ordinary" families in the small building behind – the same people whose complaints, years ago, had pushed the manager to forbid residents to leave their shoes in plain sight on the window sills. On the front side, the view would open up to a larger panorama, with the gasoline station at the lower boundary and the mountains on the horizon at the upper one. All in-between, the trafficked street ahead of the building and the equally busy railway behind likely transmit the same message – a sense of mobility, progress, and direction that is precisely what people seem to miss, at least while staying at the centre.

More often than not, rolling shutters are down most of the day – in some rooms, almost constantly so. While this may well have to do with irregular sleeping routines, there is more to it, I have realized over time. It is as if people, while staying in, unconsciously wished to be radically protected, separated and invisible from the

Fig. 7.3 The world outside, seen from a room window. (Author's picture)

outside world. Even a shuttered window can articulate an emotional state – sometimes, a psychological suffering – that feeds into the sense of parallel life, or of parallel (and ancillar) normality, which I have got used to feeling in the centre. It is as if getting some protection and a sense of normality out of everyday routines were possible only through substantive separation from the outside world. How fictitious and short-lived this normality would be, an ordinary walk around the city to search for a job is enough to reveal. In fact, the sense of (parallel) normality holds only as long as people stay in the centre. The more they find ways to build external networks, thereby using the centre as little more than a resting place, the higher their likelihood to gain autonomy and strengthen their social and cultural capital for their future immigrant life out of the centre.

The fact remains that at least for some residents there is little "view" out of the rooms anyway, regardless of window shutters being up or down. This metaphorically points to an ultimate impossibility to envision a horizon beyond the everyday struggles – unless by jumping directly into an imagined, undetermined and long-term future populated with a "good" job, a family, a house, and a certain number of children "like anybody else", people would simply say. No claim for distinction, beyond the one the fate has already forced into their lives in terms of utter inequality (if not of endangered lives), and of the need or obligation to flee in order to redress that. Not much of a view into the way (if any) to get there, however, standing at the window of a refugee centre room.

7.7 To Conclude: The Analytical Difference of Being in, the Practical Difference of Being (Also) Out

Living in a room in an asylum facility, in a temporary and heteronomous condition, is more than a parenthesis made of an "empty" or "suspended" timespace. It actually marks a meaningful and not so short-lived step in the housing and life trajectory of an asylum seeker. In a similar vein, having some sensitive and respectful access to that dwelling space marks a qualitative threshold for an in-depth understanding of everyday life in asylum.

For sure, this research option is not without risks and dilemmas. The "protection" of one's informants, and in fact hosts, involves far more than data anonymization. There is a fine line to tread between an empathic and respectful account and an awkward fall into sensationalism, reality show-style reporting, voyeurism or pornography of poverty. Similar tensions and dilemmas creep across all research into the domestic space of someone else. However, they are especially striking whenever that person or group lies at the bottom of economic, racial and legal status hierarchies – up to the point of having little right or interest to call home any space. Having said that, the relational and epistemological promise of this research option cannot be dismissed. Experientially speaking, this is nourished through protracted, non-judgmental and non-instrumental relationships with people. There is some parallel between the neverending time residents feel they are wasting in a centre, and the time researchers that are not ethnographers would feel they are wasting in the same place. Still, that need not be empty or useless time, for either party.

Doing ethnography in an asylum centre room, as my experience shows, is ultimately one more expression of the host-guest relationship (Harney & Boccagni, 2022). It is ambiguous and asymmetrical by definition, and yet potentially relevant to any social setting, regardless of power asymmetries or concerns. Hosting me for a while was a source of pride, or at the very least a not unpleasant way to spend some time, among my key interlocutors in the centre. Telling something of their stories, and making sense of their ways of doing meaningful things while "waiting", may still be a poor form of reciprocity, on my side. It is enough, however, to underpin interpersonal relationships that are not necessarily bound to the here-and-now of one's stay in a centre. It is enough, likewise, to confirm the knowledge-production potential of domestic ethnography on all scales of human dwelling, whenever an outsider is a legitimate, welcome and insightful guest inside it.

References

Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the undesirables: Refugee camps and humanitarian government*. Polity.

Archambault, J. (2012). 'It can be good there too': home and continuity in refugee children's narratives of settlement. *Children's Geographies, 10*(1), 35–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2011.638177

Bachelard, G. (1964 [1958]). *The poetics of space*. Orion.
Beeckmans, L., et al. (Eds.). (2022). *Making home(s) in displacement*. LEP.
Boccagni, P. (2022). At home in the centre? Spatial appropriation and horizons of homemaking in reception facilities for asylum seekers. In L. Beeckmans et al. (Eds.) (pp. 139–154).
Boccagni, P. (2023). La stanza del non ancora. *Rifugio e domesticità fra i richiedenti asilo in attesa,* forthcoming.
Boccagni, P., & Miranda-Nieto, A. (2022). Home in question: Uncovering meanings, desires and dilemmas of non-home. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 25*(2), 515–532.
Boccagni, P., et al. (2020). *Thinking home on the move*. Emerald.
Bochmann, A. (2018). The power of local microstructures in the context of refugee camps. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 32*(1), 63–85.
Brun, C. (2015). Home as a critical value. *Refuge, 31*(1), 43–54.
Campomori, F., & Ambrosini, M. (2020). Multi-level governance in trouble. *Comparative Migration Studies, 8*(22), 1–19.
Davidson, T. (2009). The role of domestic architecture in the structuring of memory. *Space and Culture, 12*(3), 332–342.
Degli Uberti, S. (2021). Unveiling informality through im/mobility. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 26*(5), 528–551.
Dossa, P., & Golubovic, J. (2019). Reimagining home in the wake of displacement. *Studies in Social Justice, 13*(1), 171–186.
Dotsey, S., & Lumley-Sapansky, A. (2021). Temporality, refugees, and housing. *Cities, 111*, 1–11.
Dudley, S. (2011). Feeling at home. *Population, Space and Place, 17*, 742–755.
Ehn, B., & Lofgren, G. (2010). *The secret world of doing nothing*. University of California Press.
Garvey, P. (2005). Domestic boundaries. Privacy, visibility and the Norwegian window. *Journal of Material Culture, 10*(2), 157–176.
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), 373–391.
Gronseth, A. S. (2023). Refugee housing and homing: Negotiating self and humanity. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook on home and migration*. Edward Elgar.
Gronseth, A. S., & Thorshaug, R. (2022). Struggling for home where home is not meant to be. *Focaal, 92*, 15–30.
Gronseth, A. S., Stoa, E., Thorshaug, R., & Hauge, A. (2016). *Housing qualities and effects on identity and Well-being* (Lillehammer University College, Research Report no. 169/2016).
Hajer, M. (2021). *Claiming to be normal.* UvA PhD dissertation, Amsterdam.
Harney, N., & Boccagni, P. (2022). Calibrating home, hospitality and reciprocity in migration. *Anthropological Theory,* online first.
Hart, J., Paskiewicz, N., & Albadra, D. (2018). Shelter as home? Syrian homemaking in Jordanian refugee camps. *Human Organization, 77*(4), 371–380.
Hastrup, K. (1990). The ethnographic present: A reinvention. *Cultural Anthropology, 5*(1), 45–61.
Hauge, A. L., Stoa, E., & Denizou, K. (2017). Framing outsidedness: Aspects of housing quality in decentralized reception centres for asylum seekers in Norway. *Housing, Theory and Society, 34*(1), 1–20.
Kim, K., & Smets, P. (2020). Home experiences and homemaking practices of single Syrian refugees in an innovative housing project in Amsterdam. *Current Sociology, 68*(5), 607–627. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120927744
Kreichauf, R. (2018). From forced migration to forced arrival. *Comparative Migration Studies, 6*, 1–22.
Kuhl, K., & Behrens, J. (2018). Spaces of migration: Architecture for refugees. *Architectural Design, 88*(4), 86–93.
Larsen, B. (2011). Drawing back the curtain: The role of domestic space in the social inclusion and exclusion of refugees in Denmark. *Social Analysis, 55*(2), 142–159.
Marchetti, C. (2020). Cities of exclusion. In M. Ambrosini et al. (Eds.), *Migration, borders and citizenship*. Palgrave.

Neumark, D. (2013). Drawn to beauty: The practice of house-beautification as homemaking among the forcibly displaced. *Housing, Theory and Society, 30*(3), 237–261.
Paju, E., Nare, L., & Merikoski, P. (2023). Home and homemaking during refugee journeys. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook on home and migration*. Edward Elgar, forthcoming.
Parrott, F. (2004). "It's not forever". The material culture of hope. *Journal of Material Culture, 10*(3), 245–262.
Rainisio, N. (2015). These places do not understand us: Environmental psychology of the refugee centers. In E. Giunta & A. Rebaglio (Eds.), *Design research on temporary homes* (pp. 72–89). AADR.
Rotter, R. (2015). Waiting in the asylum determination process: Just an empty interlude? *Time & Society, 25*(1), 80–101.
Schneider, C. (2022). Making a home in the world. *Journal of Material Culture*, online first.
Scott-Smith, T. (2019). Beyond the boxes: Refugee shelter and the humanitarian politics of life. *American Ethnologist, 46*(4), 509–521.
Seethaler-Wari, S., Chitchian, S., & Momic, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Inhabiting displacement. Architecture and authorship*. Birkhauser.
Semprebon, M. (2021). Towards a parallel exceptional welfare system. *Urban Geography*, online first.
Steigemann, A., & Misselwitz, P. (2020). Architectures of asylum. *Current Sociology, 68*(5), 628–650.
Taylor, H. (2016). *Refugees and the meaning of home*. Palgrave.
Thorshaug, R. O., & Brun, C. (2019). Temporal injustice and re-orientations in asylum reception centres in Norway. *Fennia, 197*(2), 232–248.
Turner, S. (2015). What is a refugee camp? *Journal of Refugee Studies, 29*(2), 139–148.
Van der Horst, H. (2004). Living in a reception centre: The search for home in an institutional setting. *Housing, Theory and Society, 21*, 36–46.
Vandevoordt, R. (2017). The politics of food and hospitality. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 30*(4), 605–621.
Vianelli, L. (2021). Warehousing asylum seekers. *Environment and Planning D*, online first.
Whyte, Z. (2011). Enter the myopticon: Uncertain surveillance in the Danish asylum system. *Anthropology Today, 27*(3), 18–21.
Willems, S., De Smet, S., & Heylighen, A. (2020). Seeking a balance between privacy and connectedness in housing for refugees. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 35*, 45–46.
Ziersch, A., & Due, C. (2018). A mixed methods systematic review of studies examining the relationship between housing and health for people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds. *Social Science & Medicine, 213*, 199–219.
Zill, M., van Liempt, I., Spierings, B., & Hooimeijer, P. (2020). Uneven geographies of asylum accommodation. *Migration Studies, 8*(4), 491–509.

Chapter 8
(In)Visibility: On the Doorstep of a Mediatized Refugees' Squat

Daniela Giudici

It is a warm and sunny afternoon in the Spring of 2019, and I am visiting the refugees' squat for the first time. The housing squat, locally known as Ex MOI, is located in a peripheral and impoverished neighborhood of Turin. It consists of four buildings, two of them with doors and windows sealed after a recent eviction (see Fig. 8.1). In between the buildings there is a wide yard, where several young men are hanging out. Some of them are chatting or playing soccer, while others are busy wrapping secondhand appliances waiting to be delivered to their countries of origin. I am accompanied by Francesco,[1] a photographer and long-term activist in the squat, who knows many inhabitants and starts chatting with some of them. Then Marco, an activist engaged in the occupation since its very beginning, shows up with a young man, whom I quickly discover to be another researcher. Someone cracks a joke, saying that it is difficult to be in such a place without the presence of one or more researchers. The African inhabitants of the buildings rapidly leave our group and go back to their daily activities. A volunteer from MSF also shows up. […] A couple of hours later, I walk back to the wide street that faces the occupied buildings. There I see two military vehicles. Francesco tells me they are always parked there, day and night. Then I meet two Italian students, who are wandering around with a lost attitude. "We want to shoot a documentary", they tell me. "But something more introspective, different from the usual activist denunciation" (Fieldnotes; April 2019).

[1] All names have been changed, in order to protect research participant's anonymity.

D. Giudici (✉)
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy
e-mail: daniela.giudici@unitn.it

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_8

Fig. 8.1 A door bricked up after the eviction of one of the squat's buildings. Next to it, a graffiti reads: "Home is peacefulness. Rights for everybody". (Author's picture)

8.1 Introduction

I have been involved in research in the field of asylum and humanitarianism in Italy since 2010 and, yet, only after 2015 did I feel that the field sites I was trying to approach were so intensely populated and "over-researched" (Neal et al., 2016). In fact, in the wake of the European "refugee crisis", housing squats like ex-MOI have turned into popular field sites that lure journalists, humanitarians, researchers and funding bodies (Cabot, 2019; Dadusc et al., 2019; Rozakou, 2019). Drawing on some encounters that took place at the doorstep of a refugees' squat between April and July 2019, this chapter engages with a reflection on the ethical and political dilemmas of ethnographically approaching such a place in times of "migration crisis" (De Genova, 2017). Entering a housing squat, inhabited by documented and undocumented migrants, is nothing but obvious. A refugees' squat is in fact a kind of home, albeit often precarious, marginal and temporary (Lafazani, 2018; Lancione, 2020). In my case, this task was complicated by an intense mediatic attention – experienced as deeply violent by the squat's residents – as well as by an imminent eviction, which entailed a heightened sense of precarity and suspicion. The housing squat evoked overlapping histories of social and spatial abandonment. It came to represent, in political and media narratives, a symbol of governmental failure and urban decay. It consisted of four buildings originally erected to host athletes and

journalists during the 2006 Winter Olympics and then left abandoned. Built specifically for that event, the village included a series of large, modern concrete buildings painted blue, orange and grey, lined up alongside the train tracks on the border with Lingotto – a former industrial area in the Southern part of the city. Those buildings, locally known as ex-MOI,[2] were left to crumble after the end of the Olympics. They were later occupied in March 2013 by a group of refugees supported by a network of local activists.

In light of an increased mediatic and academic attention to migration and refugees, a renewed critical engagement with research access, power relations and ethical responsibilities within fieldwork seems to be particularly necessary. The recent scholarly fascination around issues of refugees and displacement risks reproducing the pitfalls of "crisis" as a social imaginary and as a dominant explanatory frame, which informs both our understanding and our responses to particular historical circumstances (Roitman, 2014; Vigh, 2008). As Heath Cabot recently argued, anthropological enhanced interest in refugees may risk participating in crisis-chasing, that is, the propensity to take crisis as a driver of scholarship; assuming that 'refugees experiences' need to be studied; and, finally, heeding the call to 'do good' through scholarship in ways that deflect attention from anthropology's own politics of life" (Cabot, 2019: 262). Following this call for a renewed reflexivity in times and spaces of "crisis", I reflect on the methodological and ethical implications of doing ethnography in a migrant informal settlement besieged by journalists, researchers and humanitarians.

The issue of self-reflexivity has been introduced in anthropological research in the 70s (Scholte, 1972; Briggs, 1970) and reached full bloom in the 80s (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989). Embedded in a broader shift of anthropology from a "scientist" approach to an "interpretative" one, the idea of self-reflexivity mainly refers to an increased awareness of the ethnographer's own positionality within fieldwork. This may include an explicit account of the complex process of entering a specific research field, as well as an engagement with the politics of representation and the "landscapes of power in which we, as researchers, are embedded" (Laliberté & Schurr, 2016). Yet, while the issue of self-reflexivity has been embraced by most ethnographers, critics recently note that it is often used in an instrumental manner, as a device intended to invite the reader's trust, but deployed merely to authenticate one's work (Behar & Gordon, 1995; Coffey, 1999; Geschiere, 2010).

In this chapter I interrogate a quite common, but rather underexplored, issue of ethnographic research: how should we understand research participants' indifference, reluctance, if not open hostility to the process of academic research itself? In other words: how to understand their refusal to be "domesticated" for academic purposes? Whereas asymmetric power relations within fieldwork are often made explicit, research participants' "resistance" to the very process of ethnographic research is rarely openly debated. By addressing the interplay between visibility

[2] The name comes from the former wholesale fruit market (*Mercati Ortofrutticoli all'Ingrosso*) that was once the area's main landmark.

and invisibility on the doorstep of a very peculiar domestic context – a refugees' squat – I reflect on my own role as a white female ethnographer, as well as on broader methodological and ethical issues that go beyond the question of access. I argue that a self-reflexive awareness may be an opportunity to engage more deeply not only with the researcher's side, but also with our "informants'" practices, feelings, and intentions. Indeed, the issue I want to explore here is not only how ethnographers aware of the politics of representation may end up silencing, circumscribing or amplifying particular refugees' voices (Cabot, 2016). Rather, it is also about how ethnographers should understand and perhaps acknowledge research participants' willingness to stay silent or invisible. Those "strategies of invisibility" (Rygiel, 2011), often enacted by migrants living in informal or irregular conditions, have important implications when it comes to the task of entering and exploring the private and intimate sphere of the domestic. Furthermore, those strategies, while most of the times implicit, have something to say about the multiple "constellations of home" constituted by displaced migrants (Brun & Fábos, 2015). This approach is in line with the recent scholarly attention to silences and "the unsaid" as actual social actions and, thus, appropriate objects of social research to be carefully interpreted (Murray & Durrheim, 2019). If representing the "voices" and experiences of ethnographic subjects – in particular, the marginalized ones – has been a longstanding task of ethnographic research, what remains unsaid emerges as a slippery but very powerful dimension of human sociality. Not everybody is entitled to speak up (Spivak, 1988), but maybe not everybody *wants* to speak up, at least in some specific setting and to some specific interlocutors (Simpson, 2007). By refusing to be domesticated for academic purposes, refugees may indeed enact something that anthropologists working with marginal groups often seek actively to retrace, namely, their political agency.

8.2 Overlapping Histories of Abandonment

I became interested in the refugee squat in Turin in 2019, in the framework of a research project focused on home experiences and housing pathways of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy.[3] When my colleague and I decided to approach the squat, we aspired to conduct ethnographic research, if not proper participant observation, in a big informal settlement and gain some insights on everyday life in such a place. Furthermore, as the squat was threatened by an imminent eviction, we also planned to examine the perspectives of different social actors on the squat experience, its upcoming conclusion and aftermath.

Most of the squat inhabitants were holding a regular residency permit (in most cases "humanitarian protection") and had arrived in Italy between 2011 and 2012.

[3] The HOASI (Home and Asylum Seekers in Italy) project, based at the University of Trento. Fieldwork in Turin was conducted in collaboration with my colleague Enrico Fravega.

In that period, following the so-called Arab Spring and a consistent increase in migrant boat landings, the Italian government set up a short-lived and largely inadequate reception program ("North Africa Emergency"), through a network of temporary reception centers across the country (Campesi, 2011; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013). In this respect, it is noteworthy that the reification of the crisis – to which the scholarly literature has certainly contributed – tends to neglect the historical continuities that have produced, the current adversities that migrants face (Cabot, 2019). In Italy, for example, a chronic emergency rationale seems to be a landmark of migration and border management, at least for the last twenty years (Campesi, 2011; Albahari, 2015). After the abrupt end of the "Emergency North Africa" program in 2013, many refugees in Italy suddenly found themselves on the streets. In the city of Turin many of them, mostly with humanitarian visas, found themselves without job, accommodation or future prospects and resorted to squatting in the area of the abandoned Olympic village (Bolzoni et al., 2015; Stopani & Pampuro, 2018). As an activist involved in the occupation since its very beginning explained:

> The main reason why we chose to occupy this place is that… well, there was space obviously but, apart from that, there was a striking parallelism between those buildings' abandonment and refugees' abandonment. Public money was stolen and wasted in those buildings and, in the same way, public money was stolen and wasted in ruinous asylum reception projects. (Marco,[4] 35, Italian activist)

The dwelling conditions inside the squat were extremely poor, with the majority of inhabitants living in large rooms hosting up to thirty people, lack of proper kitchens and no hot water or heating.

Many of the squats' inhabitants were complaining about this:

> It's just not possible to live in these conditions. I am thankful that I have a bridge over my head, but a room with 30 people…you can understand it. It just drives you crazy. (Victor, 23, Nigeria)

However, ex-MOI rapidly became home to dozens of nationalities and was repeatedly referred to, in national and international media, as one of the "biggest refugees' squat in Europe", with peaks of over 1400 people living inside its four buildings.[5] One of its overcrowded buildings, built to accommodate fewer than 100 athletes, was home to as many as 500 people. During the years of occupation ex-MOI became "a city in the city" (with two pop-up barber shops, several small stores, a school of Italian, etc.), as well as a sort of information hub and temporary shelter for many migrants moving between different Italian and European cities in search of work opportunities.

[4] All names and some recognizable details have been changed to protect research participants' identity. Interviews have been conducted in Italian and then translated by the author.

[5] The group was always quite heterogeneous, with people coming from 28 different sub-saharan African countries. In the first years of the occupation there was also a large presence of women and children, but not during our fieldwork. Indeed, in 2019 two of the four buildings had already been cleared by eviction orders and the most vulnerable segment of the squatting population have been relocated elsewhere.

8.3 Unsettled Homes

My first contact with the housing squat came through Francesco, a photographer and activist, engaged in a long-term photographic project within Ex-MOI. As he explained, the process of getting access inside the squat had not been an easy one for him either:

> At first I started volunteering in the Italian school. It was also a sort of "visual" issue. Because ex-MOI was really a small African city inside Turin. And let's put it bluntly, I was white, and all the refugees were African black guys. You could really feel the color of your skin there. So, I tried to make them familiar with my presence. […] I always introduced myself as a photographer to everybody I met. But I did not take any photographs for several months. I mean, even if it was a squatted place, that was their home. *And you cannot just take pictures in someone's home*.

In popular and humanitarian discourse, refugees have often been portrayed as "uprooted", chronically detached from a taken for granted territorial belonging, a lost home that will never return (Malkki, 1992). As a matter of fact, refugees often find themselves living in conditions of "protracted displacement" (Brun, 2015), as they spend years in transit between different countries and cities, waiting for documents, struggling to build meaningful lives and livelihoods in a new and often hostile environment. Yet, the increasing scholarly interest in home has led to a critical scrutiny of idealized notions of displacement and belonging, thereby producing a more complex understanding of home as an "unsettled, changing, open and more mobile entity" (Brun & Fábos, 2015: 7). In this light, refugees' temporary housing arrangements presents a fertile field to study home as a precarious arena constituted by multiple social actors, feelings, places, and projects (Ahmed et al., 2003). In fact, a more dynamic and open-ended understanding of home opens the way to tracking some forms of homemaking even within challenging and difficult contexts, such as informal settlements and squats.

While not being a conventional "domestic space", Ex-MOI retained some fundamental attributes of a home-like environment, in that it embodied material belongings, (semi)private spaces, personal relationships and often ambivalent emotional attachments (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Boccagni, 2017). For example, the ground floor of one of the occupied buildings, while being a passageway to the stairs that brought to the collective rooms, was a multi-functional space, rich of personal belongings, meaningful objects, and decorations. On one side there was a small makeshift café with colorful curtains and posters hanging on the wall. On the other side, a big room leading to a storage place was painted with murals and African flags. Several people were often hanging out on the ground floor of the building, some of them chatting, laughing, ranging stuff, preparing coffees, etc. The courtyard between the buildings also constituted a surprising assemblage of people and things. In particular, the yard landscape was dominated by discarded metal that some squats' inhabitants were collecting for resale, and by second-hand appliances, carefully wrapped to be sent as presents to families back in African countries. The constant presence of packages and appliances to be dispatched to the countries of origin evoked the multiple, material and "transnational" nature of home, as those objects

were indeed allowing the nurturing of bonds with distant loved ones (Giorgi & Fasulo, 2013). All in all, the personal appropriation and decoration of spaces, which was ubiquitous inside and around Ex-MOI buildings, reflected "pattern of regular doing, furnishing and appurtenances" (Douglas, 1991: 290), which fashion and reproduce the domain of the domestic. Geographers have long argued that acts of homemaking are intrinsically political, as home is a porous place at the intersections between the public and the private, the domestic and the political (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Massey, 2013). In this sense, ex MOI was a precarious shelter, but still not as temporary or uncontrollable as, for instance, an asylum reception center. In fact, state-run centers and institutional accommodations are often neutral spaces with limited room for autonomy, personal interventions or appropriations. While living in an institutional reception centre gives access to basic services and infrastructures, asylum seekers' lack of control over material spaces, biographical and everyday time may hinder the possibility of taking control over their living spaces, and their lives (Dadusc et al., 2019; Thorshaug & Brun, 2019). In contrast, self-organized settlements such as ex MOI, although lacking decent housing infrastructures, can become sites of a plurality of sometimes ambiguous attachments and relationships. Through the materiality of the built environment, objects and everyday practices, migrants at ex MOI were indeed enacting a domestic dimension and a sense of control over their lives, even within conditions of extreme precarity and deprivation.

The ex-MOI buildings were open, with no lockers or closed doors at the main entrances. In this sense, the housing squat was an open and semi-public space, potentially crossed by anyone. Yet, it was still very difficult to enter without being invited or noticed. On the one hand, the constant menace of being displaced was a defining feature of that dwelling environment. On the other hand, ex MOI constituted a predominantly black setting, in which the consolidated minority-majority relations of an Italian city were reversed. Hence, as I will detail further, the housing squat was immersed in a landscape, and a research field, where normative emotional geographies of *whiteness* and *blackness* were destabilised (Faria & Mollett, 2016). Since the very beginning of the occupation, the housing squat came to represent a source of anxiety and negative representations, as well as a target of intense mediatic attention at the local and national scale. The European migration "crisis" obviously stressed further this biased interest. At the time of our study (between March and July 2019) the squat was once again in the spotlight, because of an upcoming eviction and a highly controversial relocation project for its inhabitants (Belloni et al., 2020). This entailed a heightened sense of precarity and suspicion towards "outsiders".

8.4 (In)Visibility

It is my second time at the refugees' squat, and I am accompanied by my colleague and Francesco, our main "gatekeeper". It is a sunny afternoon, and we are sitting in the yard trying to look both relaxed and discreet. Yet, as the housing squat is mainly inhabited by

> African male migrants, I quickly realize that, rather than observing, I feel intensely observed. We are the only white persons around and I sense our "instantly visible" presence in that landscape. This awkward feeling is somehow complicated by me being the only woman around, in a predominantly male setting. Some guys approach me, asking if I am married to one of my friends. A group of young men is staring at us, with a suspicious and puzzled attitude. At some point, a man who is playing soccer says loudly: "White men, go back home!" Then, a friend of Francesco comes and invites us inside the building to drink a cup of coffee. (Fieldnotes; April 2019)

After many years of disrespectful mediatic attention and multiple incursions from different social actors (local politicians, journalists, social workers, humanitarians, researchers) who, in most cases, the squat inhabitants could not tell from each other, some refugees had started reacting with an openly hostile attitude towards newcomers. Whereas only a tiny minority of the residents showed unwelcoming attitudes, a mixture of suspicion and indifference seemed to be the most common reaction towards outsiders, in a space that was at once public and domestic. Interestingly, the dismissive attitude of some inhabitants pushed a friend of our gatekeeper to open the door of the squat and let us in. He invited us to the big room on the ground floor of the building, which served as a storage room for common provisions, but also hosted his own bedroom and living space. That was a semi-private area of the informal settlement, usually kept far from external eyes, but well known by Francesco, who had gained a "trusted outsider" role (Bucerius, 2013). Unlike the young men who were hanging out in the yard, Lamin (Francesco's friend) was very welcoming, offering us coffee and cookies, while also telling us – in a mostly sad and hopeless tone – about the hardships of his life in Italy.

Racialized relationships and, in particular, historically-situated perceptions of *whiteness* powerfully shape field research and knowledge production (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Faria & Mollett, 2016). Several scholars have highlighted how whiteness, because of its status of normal, natural, non-category, is often taken for granted and thus becomes invisible (Bonnett, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2012). However, being at ex-MOI as a white person meant to feel like an instantly visible presence, in an interesting reversal of the ordinary experience in a city of the Global North. As Faria and Mollett (2016) argued, paying critical attention to processes of racialization within fieldwork means also to complicate normative assumptions of white researchers being always in a position of power over research participants. In fact, bodies associated with colonizing pasts or presents can evoke not only privilege and authority but also prompt suspicion or disdain.

The perception of being observed – rather than observing – was intensified by me being a woman in a predominantly male setting. In this sense, while trying to get access to refugees' temporary and marginal "homes", I was also experiencing a powerful feeling of *uncanniness*, a destabilizing point of slippage between the homely and the unhomely (Ahmed et al., 2003). Feminist epistemologies have long addressed positionality and power relations across lines of gender, ethnicity and class within field sites (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 1990; Behar & Gordon, 1995). In this vein, female ethnographers in male-dominated settings have highlighted how gender and sexuality have a significant impact on both *what* we see and *how* we come

to see it (Orrico, 2015: 474; see also Coffey, 1999). Notwithstanding the multiple challenges of this kind of setting, several studies argued that there could be also "advantages", either because of normative stereotypes of women as "unthreatening" or "good listeners' '(Grenz, 2005; Pini, 2005), or through the acquisition of an outsider role with insider knowledge (Bucerius, 2013). In my previous research experiences, I often came to realise that the development of trust with research participants did not necessarily depend on insider status. Yet, building relationships of mutual trust requires time and my presence at ex-MOI was in fact too short, as I will explain. However, through my ostensibly visible presence in the field and the kind of reactions it engendered, I became increasingly aware of my own politics of representation, as well as of the multi-layered significance of (in)visibility within such a space.

Migrants' squat experiences have been often analysed in terms of "politics of presence" (Darling, 2017) or, in other words, as an embodied taking-up of the public space of the city. By *being there*, in public space, and by *being seen* to be there (McNevin, 2012: 167) migrants enact citizenship rights even when they are excluded from them (Isin, 2009). Hence, according to this perspective, the political subjectivity of migrants is constituted precisely through representation and visibility (see also Rancière, 1999). However, other scholars have argued that political subjectivity can be achieved also via invisible means. Migrants, especially those with an irregular status, often attempt to stay "out of sight", in order to circumvent governmental techniques of classification and control (Papadopoulos et al., 2008; Giudici, 2013). Invisibility becomes an essential strategy in the everyday life of illegalized migrants, as Kim Rygiel has elucidated: "If visibility and voice are a key part of the struggles of some irregular migrant group… others have found it necessary to navigate the increasingly restrictive regime of border controls through strategies of disembodiment and invisibility" (Rygiel, 2011: 157).

Even though most of ex-MOI's inhabitants held a regular residency permit, the issue of (in)visibility was a crucial one in their case too. On the one hand, as Ananya Roy argued, urban informality highlights the "ever-shifting urban relationship between the legal and the illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized" (Roy, 2011: 233). On the other hand, a composite interplay between autonomy and exploitation, resistance and marginalization, pride and shame was a constitutive element of life experiences within the refugees' squat. To a closer look, the issue of (in)visibility had also more subjective and emotional implications. According to Francesco, many refugees were experiencing a deep sense of shame at the idea of being possibly seen by friends and relatives in their country of origin, while living in such a marginalized and run-down place. The fear of being seen, mainly through social media, had also hindered his long-term photographic project, as he explains:

> I often gave them some prints of my work at the squat. However, refugees were mostly worried that some photographs could be uploaded on social networks and, thus, seen by their relatives and friends at home, in Africa. They don't want them to see how they live here in Italy. Their relatives have no idea of their real situation here.

8.5 Resisting Observation

In order to portray the intense – and not always well-received – attention towards some specific marginal communities, some scholars and activists have talked about "research fatigue" (Clark, 2008; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2013). This is commonly understood as a feeling of exhaustion and exasperation by communities and individuals who receive sustained attention from social scientists, and yet have not felt any positive effects from this attention (Wajsberg, 2020: 129). Ex-MOI's inhabitants were probably suffering from that kind of fatigue, very much related to the temporality of the crisis, which made border crossers into targets of policing, intervention and study (Cabot, 2019). A feeling of exhaustion and stuckedness permeated more generally their life experiences in Italy. As Lamin commented while offering us some coffee:

> It's been seven years that I've lived here and it's always the same. No real job, no real house. It is as if I never got off that boat.

Lamin's words evoke a sense of deep hopelessness that is at odds with the view of migration as a form of physical mobility in search of existential mobility (Hage, 2009). As I previously mentioned, the complex task of gaining research access to the housing squat was complicated by intense mediatic attention, experienced as deeply violent by the refugees. In local news, ex-MOI was often described as a "hell on earth" (*inferno sceso in terra*). Incursions from journalists and politicians were an everyday affair, as the governmental pressure to evict the refugees was mounting, in a political landscape of rising xenophobia (Giudici, 2021). Yet, after years of invasive mediatic attention, the squat inhabitants had started reacting to the constant presence of "external" eyes. They were doing so by temporarily confiscating the journalists' cameras and promising to give them back only after the erasure of their memory card. As Marco explained:

> If a journalist came during the day, introduced himself quietly, first without cameras, the guys would certainly talk to him. But what they mostly do is to come during the evening or night, without even asking, just to craft another deceptive and sensationalist picture of this place. Well, it's obvious that the inhabitants started reacting. In the end, this is their home, and you don't act like that in somebody else's home.

As a matter of fact, as I was trying to become acquainted with some of the ex-MOI inhabitants for research purposes, I started feeling increasingly uncomfortable. I was questioning my position in such a space, the unavoidable responsibilities of whatever account I could possibly produce, as well as refugees' generalized reluctance to be scrutinized by external eyes – mine included. By entering this space as a researcher, I had to acknowledge my own role in the accumulation of frustration and fatigue, even while I was trying to document refugees' voices and experiences (Wajsberg, 2020). Someone might say that a sensitive ethnographer would have a very different approach in such a context. In fact, I was trained to think that these hardships were part of the "ethnographer's job" and that the initial resistances would have been overcome through the building of relationships of intimacy and mutual

trust. But what does this resistance to the "external gaze" speak about? What if we take this refusal to be "domesticated" for academic purposes seriously into account? Audra Simpson (2014), while discussing anthropological imperfect attempts of giving "voice" to Indigeneous people (Mohawks), has written about how refusal and disengagement structure possibilities, as well as produce subjects, histories, and politics. She writes of refusal as shedding light on something we've missed:

> There was something that seemed to reveal itself at the point of refusal – a stance, a principle, an historical narrative, and an *enjoyment in the reveal.* (Simpson, 2014: 107)

While I was trying to gain access to such a complex place, embedded in multiple histories of marginalization, struggle and solidarity, I started realizing that my presence there and my search for "people's worlds and experiences" could also be perceived as intrusive by refugees themselves. I was feeling increasingly uncomfortable at the idea of interviewing people that I knew had been compelled to expose their biographies several times, in order to negotiate their right to stay with state institutions (Sorgoni, 2019). What was I supposed to reveal and why? Who would eventually benefit from it? I was inspired by Audra Simpson's approach and yet, unlike her, I could not certainly say that I was doing ethnography in the familiar. On the contrary, within the squat, my gender, class and ethnicity were paradigmatic of an outsider role within fieldwork.

My own positioning entailed some margins of negotiation about research methodologies and objectives. Thus, I decided to avoid interviews with refugees, and mainly to listen, instead of "compelling" them to speak. At the same time, I started thinking about experimenting with alternative methodologies, which would eventually overcome those obstacles. With my colleague and some local activists, we tried to design a participatory project, with the aim of working on a collective memory, both visual and discursive, of the ex-MOI housing squat. However, the "foretold death" of the space – the coming eviction – which many refugees experienced with a deep sense of resignation, entailed a widespread lack of collective involvement. As a matter of fact, feelings of exhaustion and helplessness permeated also the words of local activists, even though at different scales and with different outcomes. As an activist told me:

> We feel as if we are doing assisted dying here. I mean, last year many refugees were taking part in the meetings. […] But then they realized that history was repeating itself and that they were going to face again incertitude and precarity, over and over. So, they lost any interest. (Marco, 35, Italian activist)

Eventually, the premature and fast eviction of ex-MOI in July 2019 put an early end also to my conundrums and attempts of conducting fieldwork there. However, those strategies, everyday resistances and silences became, retrospectively, profoundly telling. On the one hand, they pointed to the need of a deeper engagement with the methodological and ethical implications of doing ethnographic research within such a peculiar domestic context. On the other hand, they signaled the presence of different implicit thresholds, which marked the "stubborn everyday strategies" (Thorshaug & Brun, 2019) through which refugees were attempting at building homely spaces and forms of belonging, even from uncanny and marginal positions. In this sense,

my own internal conflicts over the purpose, benefits and ethics of the research process were not unconstructive. They made me aware of the need for highly flexible, and possibly participatory, approaches within such a context, as well as providing insights on emerging, albeit precarious acts of homemaking.

8.6 Concluding Remarks

In order to seek to avoid the major pitfalls embedded in doing fieldwork in times of "crisis-chasing" (Cabot, 2019), we certainly need more reflexive accounts of ethnography as an affective, embodied and historical encounter. And yet accounts of self-reflexivity may risk being used in an instrumental manner, thereby avoiding taking seriously into account the issues they were supposed to tackle. In other words, accounts of self-reflexivity can become a sort of panacea, a device deployed to authenticate one's work. They can end concealing – rather than revealing – the tensions and dissonances between different priorities, vocabularies and forms of representation within fieldwork (Simpson, 2007). In this sense, I share Peter Geschiere's concerns that in the self-reflexive turn there is a risk of paying too much attention only to the researcher's side and, paradoxically, of producing monological, if not narcissistic accounts (Geschiere, 2010).

Yet, trying to access a refugees' squat – at once a public and private environment – as a white female researcher entails shifting emotional reactions and representations, which should not be dismissed. In this vein, Laliberté and Schurr (2016) recently argued that a deeper exploration of the "stickiness of emotions" within fieldwork holds the potential of reinvigorating practices of reflexivity and positionality. It also challenges the reification of consolidated categories of otherness. In fact, a critical awareness of racialized emotional geographies within field sites not only enables a more robust understanding of non-linear power dynamics embedded in the research encounter but offers also a space "for the recognition of other kinds of agency and authority among those with whom we work, learn from, and otherwise interact" (Faria & Mollett, 2016: 88). As I claim, a critical engagement with emotions in the field may prevent us from reproducing romanticised views of occupations as unambiguous spaces of autonomy, political claim and self-determination (Raimondi, 2019). At the same time, it can also open a space for recognition of unexpected, and maybe troublesome, forms of agency of our "research participants".

Anthropological studies of forced migration and international aid have long critiqued the de-politicizing ethos of humanitarianism, by underscoring the exclusionary and potentially violent nature of humanitarian practices. Yet, as Heath Cabot (2019) poignantly notes, both anthropological and humanitarian thinking seem to be grounded in a paternalistic fascination for the "suffering other" (see also Robbins, 2013). On the one hand, anthropologists themselves may risk enacting their "own politics of life: a hierarchization of which people, things, situations, and places are worthy or deserving of study" (Cabot, 2019: 251). On the other hand, ethnographies of migration may become complicit in reproducing the same reified identities they

attempt at scrutinizing with their critical work (Rozakou, 2019). Furthermore, I argue, ethnographic accounts of migration may risk overlooking what they often seek actively to retrace, namely the political possibilities emerging from marginal positions. In fact, refusals and silences do tell us something: they act as a critique toward official forms of recognition and representation, including academic ones (Simpson, 2007). In this respect, Shahram Khosravi (2018) insisted on migrants' "right to opacity" in encounters with researchers or, in other words, the right not to be known and represented (Besteman, 2014). Ex-MOI's residents, by actively deflecting external eyes and narratives, may enact this kind of political agency. Their search for invisibility and their resistance to the "ethnographic gaze" can be interpreted as more or less explicit attempts at re-gaining control over the representation of their lives.

Finally, their claim for a space of invisibility and privacy evokes their – albeit precarious and contested – attempts at making a home; of building and maintaining a sense of identity and self-worth, even from within marginal positions. In contrast with nationalist notions of homeland, Brun and Fábos refer to making homes as the ways in which people try to gain control over their lives, and which involves negotiating particular regimes assistance, and the control over specific locations and material structures (Brun & Fábos, 2015: 14). Refugees' resistance to external gazes was also a way to exert some degree of control over their domestic space and, thus, demarcate some legitimization of their rights to home. In this context, the recurrent intrusions of journalists in those "unsettled homes" were pointing at the stigma faced by some subjects, ultimately seen as less deserving of homemaking opportunities. Thus, places like ex-MOI remind us that home is a porous place, constituted at the intersection between domestic and political worlds (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Massey, 1994). The everyday forms of agency embedded in homemaking practices are rarely identified as political – least of all by those enacting them. Yet, acts of homemaking are intrinsically political, in that they are shaped by governance practices and, in turn, actively impact wider politics.

References

Abu-Lughod, L. (1990). Can there be a feminist ethnography? *Women and Performance, 5*(1), 7–27.

Ahmed, S., Castada, C., Fortier, A. M., & Sheller, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Uprootings/regroundings: Questions of home and migration*. Routledge.

Albahari, M. (2015). *Crimes of peace: Mediterranean migrations at the World's deadliest border*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Behar, R., & Gordon, D. A. (Eds.). (1995). *Women writing culture*. University of California Press.

Belloni, M., Fravega, E., & Giudici, D. (2020). Fuori dall'accoglienza: insediamenti informali di rifugiati tra marginalità e autonomia. *Social Policies, 7*(2), 225–244.

Besteman, C. (2014, November 10). On ethnographic unknowability. *Savage Minds*. https://savageminds.org/2014/11/10/onethnographic-knowability/

Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006). *Home*. Routledge.

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for Home. Mapping domestic space in migrants' everyday lives*. Palgrave.

Bolzoni, M., Gargiulo, E., & Manocchi, M. (2015). The social consequences of the denied access to housing for refugees in urban settings: The case of Turin, Italy. *International Journal of Housing Policy, 15*(4), 400–417.
Bonilla-Silva, E. (2012). The invisible weight of whiteness: The racial grammar of everyday life in contemporary America. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 35*(2), 173–194.
Bonnett, A. (1997). Geography, "race" and whiteness: Invisible traditions and current challenges. *Area, 29*, 193–199.
Briggs, J. L. (1970). *Never in anger: Portrait of an Eskimo family*. Harvard University Press.
Brun, C. (2015). Active waiting and changing hopes: Toward a time perspective on protracted displacement. *Social Analysis, 59*(1), 19–37.
Brun, C., & Fábos, A. (2015). Making homes in limbo? A conceptual framework. *Refuge: Canada's Journal of Refugees, 31*(1), 5–17.
Bucerius, S. M. (2013). Becoming a "trusted outsider": Gender, ethnicity, and inequality in ethnographic research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 42*(6), 690–721.
Cabot, H. (2016). "Refugee voices." Tragedy, ghosts, and the anthropology of not knowing. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography., 45*(6), 645–672.
Cabot, H. (2019). The business of anthropology and the European refugee regime. *American ethnologist., 46*(3), 261–275.
Campesi, G. (2011). *The Arab spring and the crisis of the European border regime: Manufacturing emergency in the Lampedusa crisis*. Working paper, EUI RSCAS, 2011/59, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute.
Clark, T. (2008). "We're over-researched here!" Exploring accounts of research fatigue within qualitative research engagements. *Sociology, 42*(5), 953–970.
Coffey, A. (1999). *The ethnographic self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity*. Sage.
Dadusc, D., Grazioli, M., & Martínez, M. A. (2019). Introduction: Citizenship as inhabitance? Migrant housing squats versus institutional accommodation. *Citizenship Studies, 3*(6), 521–539.
Darling, J. (2017). Forced migration and the city: Irregularity, informality, and the politics of presence. *Progress in Human Geography, 41*(2), 178–198.
De Genova, N. (2017). Introduction: The borders of 'Europe' and the European question. In N. De Genova (Ed.), *The borders of Europe: Autonomy of migration, tactics of bordering* (pp. 1–36). Duke University Press.
Douglas, M. (1991). The idea of home: A kind of space. *Social Research, 58*(1), 287–307.
Faria, C., & Mollett, S. (2016). Critical feminist reflexivity and the politics of whiteness in the 'field'. *Gender, Place & Culture, 23*(1), 79–93.
Garelli, G., & Tazzioli, M. (2013). Arab Springs making space: Territoriality and moral geographies for asylum seekers in Italy. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 31*(6), 1004–1021.
Geschiere, P. (2010). The self-reflective turn in ethnography: From dialogue to narcissism? *Etnofoor, 22*(1), 137–146.
Giorgi, S., & Fasulo, A. (2013). Transformative homes: Squatting and furnishing as sociocultural projects. *Home Cultures, 10*(2), 111–133.
Giudici, D. (2013). From "irregular migrants" to refugees and back: Asylum seekers' struggle for recognition in contemporary Italy. *Journal of Mediterranean Studies, 22*(1), 61–85.
Giudici, D. (2021). Beyond compassionate aid: Precarious bureaucrats and dutiful asylum seekers in Italy. *Cultural Anthropology, 36*(1), 25–51.
Grenz, S. (2005). Intersections of sex and power in research on prostitution: A female researcher interviewing male heterosexual clients. *Signs, 30*(4), 2091–2113.
Hage, G. (2009). Waiting out the crisis: On Stuckedness and governmentality. In G. Hage (Ed.), *Waiting* (pp. 97–106). Melbourne University Press.
Isin, E. F. (2009). Citizenship in flux: The figure of the activist citizen. *Subjectivity, 29*(1), 367–388.
Khosravi, S. (2018). Afterword. Experiences and stories along the way. *Geoforum, 116*, 292–295.

Kobayashi, A., & Peake, L. (2000). Racism out of place: Thoughts on whiteness and an antiracist geography in the new millennium. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 90*(2), 392–403.

Lafazani, O. (2018). Homeplace Plaza: Challenging the border between host and hosted. *South Atlantic Quarterly., 117*(4), 896–904.

Laliberté, N., & Schurr, C. (2016). The stickiness of emotions in the field: Complicating feminist methodologies. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography, 23*(1), 72–78.

Lancione, M. (2020). Radical housing: On the politics of dwelling as difference. *International Journal of Housing Policy, 20*(2), 273–289.

Malkki, L. (1992). National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees. *Cultural Anthropology, 7*(1), 24–44.

Marcus, G. E., & Fischer, M. M. J. (1986). *Anthropology as cultural critique*. Chicago University Press.

Massey, D. (1994). *Space, place and gender*. Polity Press.

Massey, D. (2013). *Space, place and gender*. Wiley.

McNevin, A. (2012). Undocumented citizens? Shifting grounds of citizenship in Los Angeles. In P. Nyers & K. Rygiel (Eds.), *Citizenship, migrant activism and the politics of movement* (pp. 165–183). Routledge.

Murray, A. J., & Durrheim, K. (Eds.). (2019). *Qualitative studies of silence*. Cambridge University Press.

Neal, S., Mohan, G., Cochrane, A., & Bennett, K. (2016). You can't move in Hackney without bumping into an anthropologist': Why certain places attract research attention. *Qualitative Research, 16*(5), 491–507.

Orrico, L. A. (2015). 'Doing intimacy' in a public market: How the gendered experience of ethnography reveals situated social dynamics. *Qualitative Research, 15*(4), 473–488.

Papadopoulos, D., Stephenson, N., & Tsianos, V. (2008). *Escape routes*. Pluto Press.

Pini, B. (2005). Interviewing men: Gender and the collection and interpretation of qualitative data. *Journal of Sociology, 41*(2), 427–442.

Raimondi, V. (2019). For "common struggles of migrants and locals". Migrant activism and squatting in Athens. *Citizenship Studies, 23*(6), 559–576.

Rancière, J. (1999). *Disagreement: Politics and philosophy*. University of Minnesota Press.

Robbins, J. (2013). Beyond the suffering subject: Toward an anthropology of the good. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute, 19*, 447–462.

Roitman, J. L. (2014). *Anti-crisis*. Duke University Press.

Rosaldo, R. (2000 [1989]). Grief and a headhunted rage. In R. Jon McGee & R. L. Warms (Eds.), *Anthropological theory* (pp. 521–535). Mayfield Publishing.

Roy, A. (2011). Slumdog cities: Rethinking subaltern urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 35*, 223–238.

Rozakou, K. (2019). "How did you get in?" research access and sovereign power during the "migration crisis" in Greece. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale, 27*(S1), 68–83.

Rygiel, K. (2011). Bordering solidarities: Migrant activism and the politics of movement and camps at Calais. *Citizenship Studies, 15*(01), 1–19.

Scholte, B. (1972 [1969]). Toward a reflexive and critical anthropology. In D. Hymes (Ed.), *Reinventing anthropology*. Pantheon.

Simpson, A. (2007). On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, "voice," and colonial citizenship. *Junctures, 9*, 67–80.

Simpson, A. (2014). *Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states*. Duke University Press.

Sorgoni, B. (2019). The location of truth: Bodies and voices in the Italian asylum procedure. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review, 42*(1), 161–176.

Spivak, G. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Macmillan.

Stopani, A., & Pampuro, M. (2018). Despite citizenship. Autonomie migranti e diritto alla città. L'occupazione dell'Ex Moi a Torino. *REMHU-Revista Interdisciplinar Da Mobilidade Humana., 26*(52), 55–74.

Thorshaug, R. Ø., & Brun, C. (2019). Temporal injustice and re-orientations in asylum reception centres in Norway: Towards critical geographies of architecture in the institution. *Fennia, 197*(2), 232–248.

Vigh, H. (2008). Crisis and chronicity: Anthropological perspectives on continuous conflict and decline. *Ethnos, 73*(1), 5–24.

Wajsberg, M. W. (2020). Following fatigue, feeling fatigue: A reflexive ethnography of emotion. *Social Inclusion, 8*(4), 126–135.

Chapter 9
Looking for Homes in Migrants' Informal Settlements: A Case Study from Italy

Enrico Fravega

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is inspired by ongoing research on the homemaking practices of migrants dwelling in informal settlements located in rural contexts. This is part and parcel of a broader research project on the nexus between home and migration, also being a further step along a path of a personal research which has led me to address this issue from multiple angles (Belloni et al., 2020; Fravega, 2022).[1] Within this framework, I will draw some lessons from my fieldwork, showing how home in informal settlements is a multifaceted research object. It reveals both migrants' agency and the symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2003) they are exposed to. It shows the complex and multifarious patterns of social interaction that permeate homemaking practices, as well as the intricate interweaving between labour market structures, social exclusion and segregation which are at the heart of practices of "housing from below".

Before getting to the core of these questions, it is necessary to articulate the underlying methodological approach. The decision to investigate migrants' informal settlements came during the pandemic crisis, as an attempt to develop a better understanding of the interplay between migrants' homemaking and covid-19 official prevention measures.[2] With a view to achieve this I first organized three online

[1] HOASI, that is, Home and Asylum-Seekers in Italy, is a project funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) through the FARE (Framework per l'Attrazione e il Rafforzamento delle Eccellenze) scheme.

[2] A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the XIV ESPANET Italia – Conference (8–11th September 2021). See Fravega (2021).

E. Fravega (✉)
Università di Genova, Genoa, Italy

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_9

focus groups. These were attended by operators of several NGOs (Caritas, CUAMM Doctors for Africa,[3] Emergency, Intersos, MEDU Doctors for Human Rights[4]) providing social and health care for migrants in informal settlements in various regions of Italy (Piedmont, Lazio, Sicily, Calabria and Apulia). After that, aiming to expand on the main issues emerging from the focus groups I carried out an ethnographic study of migrants' informal settlements in the province of Foggia. This was no accidental choice, as this area includes some of the oldest and most populated migrants' informal settlements in the country. I spent several weeks there during summer and winter 2021, staying in and wandering across the densest settlements – *Ex-Pista* of Borgo Mezzanone, *Gran Ghetto* of Rignano, *Ghana House* in Borgo Tre Titoli – as well as accessing some micro-settlements in isolated farm houses across the countryside. I got access to the field following my contacts in CUAMM Medici con l'Africa, and Caritas, joining their activities across various informal settlements, and through my own personal acquaintances. Furthermore, some of the people I met decided to become my informants and gatekeepers. All the empirical materials I use in this chapter are taken from my own ethnographic diary.

My access to migrants' informal settlements involved crossing a "color line," or indeed an "immigration line" (Back, 2007), thereby questioning several dimensions that define positions of power and privilege in society. A multiplicity of markers related to physicality (gender, skin colour, strength, dexterity and other external signs of the habit of accomplishing heavy jobs), social class (education, clothes, health and wealth, etc.), and culture (language, religion, lifestyle, etc.) defined my "otherness", relative to the migrants dwelling there. Such markers affected the whole research process and shaped my access and permanence in the field (Manning, 2018; Reyes, 2020). Yet, as Knorr-Cetina (1988; 24) pointed out, individuals are far from "stable and unproblematic sources of social action." Ethnography happens in a dynamic social context which evolves through social interaction. As a result, my field positionality changed over time, shifting from simple visitor to guest, and from guest to friend (to someone), depending on the possibility to establish mutual trust relations. The time I spent together with migrant daily labourers, from late afternoon – when they got back from work – to late night, was crucial in this regard. It actually enabled us to find commonalities and build strong personal relationships.

Although this work is still ongoing, it already affords to advance some key reflections on migrant homes in informal settlements. I first introduce the research context, including the social and economic conditions that account for the proliferation of migrant informal settlements in Italy. Work has a crucial role in this perspective, both as a human activity and a key component of the organisation of the agro-industrial production chain. In the following section I discuss the main aspects of housing in informal settlements. This means to highlight the poor housing conditions experienced by migrants in these places and their limited access to so-called

[3] CUAMM stands for *Collegio universitario aspiranti medici missionari*: i.e. "Aspiring medical missionaries university college".

[4] MEDU is the acronym of *Medici per i Diritti Umani* – Doctors for human rights.

"civil infrastructures" (electric power, water and wastewater management, waste collection, transport, etc.). In the third section I elaborate on the inherently social character of the idea of home in migrants' informal settlements. Finally, I briefly reflect on what researchers should expect when they look for homes in similar settlements.

9.2 On the Structural Constraints to Housing and Homemaking

In order to grasp what home means for migrants dwelling in informal settlements, it is imperative to understand its entanglements to housing (Handel, 2019). It is equally important to figure out the complex social and working conditions migrants experience daily, as they also shape their housing and home-making practices. In this optic, dwelling is no standalone issue, which might be considered out of its historical, economic, and cultural context. It is rather a matter of embodied experience, rooted in structural conditions (Lancione, 2020). Following this premise, migrants' houses/homes in informal settlements are constituted and permeated by power relations that shape up a specific and racialised housing regime (Clapham, 2018; Ruonavaara, 2020).

Importantly, migrants' informal settlements are increasingly widespread in the Italian *ruralscape*.[5] Informal rural settlements in Italy are a phenomenon rooted in time – the first of them date back to several decades ago. Their diffusion is due to the particular importance of a cheap labour force for an underdeveloped agro-industrial production chain. Moreover, migrants' informal settlements are fundamentally shaped by work, both in a physical/material sense and in a cultural and social one. These dwelling infrastructures are the outcome of the combination between housing practices "from below" and institutional strategies that oscillate between measures of control, or containment, and practices of abandonment.

An extensive literature has shown the crucial role of the migrant labour force in the Mediterranean agro-industrial production chain (Caruso & Corrado, 2021; Caruso, 2018; Corrado et al., 2016; Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Palumbo & Corrado, 2020). Yet, the use and circulation of migrant labour, within and across the national borders of Italy, Spain, France, Malta, and Greece, has made it possible to cope with some of the structural weaknesses of agro-industrial economies in Southern Europe. This holds in particular for the population decline in rural districts (Caruso, 2018) and for the underdevelopment of agricultural production techniques. Following the harvests seasons, a large number of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and

[5] According to Jean-René Bilongo, head of *Inclusiveness & Legality Dpt.* – FLAI CGIL (Federazione Lavoratori Agro Industria – the agroindustrial branch of Confederazione Generale Lavoratori Italiani, the largest Italian trade union), and President of the "Placido Rizzotto" Foundation, there are about seventy major rural informal settlements across Italy.

"dubliners"[6] move after the peaks in labour demand, thereby evoking the idea of an "industrial reserve army" (Castronovo, 2018; Colloca et al., 2013; Corrado & D'agostino, 2018; Dines & Rigo, 2015; Ippolito & Perrotta, 2021; Perrotta, 2017). However, they also dwell across the countryside, creating temporary shelters to meet their social reproduction needs, and making them grow and consolidate across time. This scenario somehow evokes the literary *topoi* of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath.*

According to Corrado (2018), the proliferation of migrants' informal settlements in Italy is a consequence of a *rururbanization* process (McAreavey, 2018). This is due to the accumulated effects of several factors: (i) the 2008 economic crisis, which uprooted many migrants, previously working and dwelling in Northern urban centres; (ii) the multiplication of migration flows during the European "migration crisis" (2011–2016); (iii) the geographical dispersion measures of asylum seekers, involving the opening of extraordinary reception centres and *hotspots* across the whole Italian territory.

As a result, a growing migrant population has been settling in the regions with a stronger demand for unskilled labour in agriculture, to be employed in a variety of seasonal, precarious, and often illegal jobs. The area of Foggia is a case in point. This has triggered a significant repopulation of the countryside (Castronovo, 2018; Corrado, 2018; Corrado & D'agostino, 2018; Dines & Rigo, 2015), but also the growth of settlements where migrant workers can stay, or be temporarily hosted (Colloca et al., 2013; Perrotta, 2017). As Schierup and Jørgensen (2016) remark, migrants experience unsafe and vulnerable working and housing conditions. Even so, they are not superfluous. This resonates with the idea of *informal proletariat* as a stealth workforce for the formal economy and with the crucial role of subcontracting networks (Davis, 2017).

Within this framework, informal settlements reproduce a pervasive condition of spatial and material precariousness. Many of the informal settlements around Foggia are located far away from urban centres, with poor public transport connections and civil infrastructure networks. Still, they occupy a barycentric position, relative to the location and organization of the main agricultural districts. For instance, the *Gran Ghetto* of Rignano is about ten miles away from any inhabited centre around. At the same time, it is placed amid a limitless extension of tomato fields, vineyards and olive groves. In short, the progressive growth of informal settlements appears to be tolerated, or encouraged, due to the interests of specific groups that benefit from exploitative relations with low paid agricultural workers in the area (Kellett, 1997). From this standpoint, the location of informal rural settlements is revealing of the close interdependence between processes of social segregation and of exploitation of migrant labour.

[6] "Dubliners" are migrants who after having been registered in the country of first arrival have extended their mobility to other EU countries to apply for asylum. According to the Treaty of Dublin (Regulation No. 604/2013) whether they ask for asylum or are found as undocumented migrants in another country they are liable to be transferred to the country of first arrival.

> I'm about twenty minutes in advance to the scheduled time of the meeting at the headquarters of the CGIL[7] workers' union in Foggia. The two entrances are quite crowded with people waiting to enter; almost all are Africans. I've been in town for a few days by now, but I had never seen so many foreigners all together. Indeed, while strolling around, including when watching the European football championship matches in some public space, I was impressed by the very little presence of migrants. The people I am about to meet at CGIL will later confirm my impression: there's a clear-cut distinction between the living and working places of Italians and migrants. Yet, as they tell me, the crowds out of their offices on that particular day are due to the fact that the asparagus harvest has already ended and the tomato harvest is still to come. So, they can come to town to attend to bureaucratic issues. Most migrants in the Foggia area live far away from town, in those places they themselves call ghettos, or in abandoned farm houses scattered in the countryside. (Excerpt from ethnographic diary, July 2021)

In this case, the boundary between urban space and countryside is also a mechanism to separate "whites" from "blacks". Following Davis (2017), this is a process of a space reorganisation that involves a drastic decrease in the intersections between the lives of local and immigrant populations. Migrant workers themselves evoke a separation from the surrounding environment, calling *ghettos* the informal rural settlements where they happen to dwell.

The concept of ghetto refers mainly to urban contexts. It is often used as a rhetorical device to activate the blame toward a stigmatised group or category (Wacquant, 2013, 2016). Yet, if we stick to its "classic" meaning as a homogeneous enclave, it seems a suitable conceptual tool to understand migrants' rural informal settlements too. Such settlements are inhabited by an extraordinary homogeneous population. This holds both from a racial point of view (most of them are Sub-Saharan people) and, unsurprisingly, from a social class point of view (most of them are daily laborers in the agricultural sector).

As for the first aspect, the unofficial topography of rural informal settlements across the Foggia area has much to tell about their story, as well as their ethnic composition. Apart from *Gran Ghetto* – a label that points to its large dimensions, both in population and in number of nationalities[8] – *Ghetto dei Bulgari*[9] (in Pozzo Monaco) and *Ghana House* (in Borgo Tre Titoli) reveal the role of specific national groups in founding, crowding, and organising a rural informal settlement. Regarding social class, only the most populated settlements (*Ex-Pista* of Borgo Mezzanone and *Gran Ghetto* of Rignano) include a noticeable presence of people that are not employed in agriculture. These are mainly sex workers, traders/merchants, cookers, artisans, along with some religious personnel (both Christian and Muslim). Race and class conflate in the production of the settlement space (Lefebvre, 1996). The widespread "ghettoization" of migrant workers in the Italian countryside seems to

[7] CGIL, or *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro,* is the largest Italian national trade union.

[8] Until the last fire, which happened in 2017 and caused the death of two Malian citizens, Gran Ghetto was the most crowded informal settlement in the Foggia province.

[9] *Ghetto dei Bulgari* evokes a massive presence of people coming from Bulgaria, or more broadly from Eastern Europe. This was a peculiarity of this district until a few years ago, prior to the Covid19 pandemic.

operate both as a system of storage and distribution of the labour force, and as a system of concealment and reproduction of migrants.

It would be misleading, however, to see informal settlements merely as the product of housing practices "from below". The notion of informal settlement suggests also an extraneity from the surrounding territories. As a matter of fact, self-construction housing practices escape both from the grid of urban planning legislation (Cutini & di Pinto, 2018), and from the meshes of political control of residence and settlement policies (Saitta, 2015). Yet, for the same reasons, informal settlements can be considered as sites of disenfranchisement (Appadurai, 2004).

The dynamics from which these places originate are not exclusively attributable to the sphere of informality. Instead, "informal" and "formal" aspects are combined with each other, and hybridize each other (McFarlane & Waibel, 2012; Roy, 2009). For instance, the *Ex-Pista* of Borgo Mezzanone was raised alongside (and in relation to) the ex-CARA,[10] (re)using its abandoned structures and growing close to its porous borders. The *Gran Ghetto* of Rignano, after a succession of fires, evictions and reorganizations, juxtaposes a "container village" (with housing modules connected to electric power network, water plants and toilets) and a makeshift ensemble of shacks cut aside from any public infrastructures. Still, the unbearable housing, health, and sanitation conditions of these places are very well known to local authorities, which carry out only minimal interventions. Put differently, the production of informal spaces is made possible, and at the same time fuelled, both by a selective and institutionally supported suspension of laws and rights (Peano, 2017), and by the pitfalls of housing policy measures. These push migrants into the difficult private housing market. As critical are the shortcomings of the rental market, which are amplified by the lack of sanctions against illegal renting (Coin, 2004; Dotsey & Chiodelli, 2021; Tosi, 2017).

9.2.1 Residual Housing

Informal settlements evoke the effects of unequal chances to access social resources. At the same time, they reveal migrants' capacity to establish alternative relations with their habitat, deploying transformative effects on space, and prefiguring unconventional ways to stay together (Vasudevan, 2014, 2015). Accordingly, the materiality of housing has a crucial relevance. It is enough to cast a glance at the materiality of one of the largest migrants' informal settlements in Europe to realize that "housing talks".

[10] CARA is the acronym of Centro di Accoglienza Richiedenti Asilo (Reception Centre for Asylum-Seekers). CARA were established following the Italian reform of the right of asylum, consequent to the transposition of two Community directives (DPR 303/2004 and Legislative Decree 28/01/2008 n.25). They are ruled directly by the Ministry of the Interior through Prefectures, which, through tenders, outsource the reception services to private bodies.

Fig. 9.1 *Ex pista* (Borgo Mezzanone): between "Colombia" and "Paris". (Author's picture)

In the *Ex-Pista* of Borgo Mezzanone, local inhabitants call the oldest part of the settlement "Colombia". Here, the makeshift buildings are built with mismatched pallets joined to some window fixtures, only sometimes covered with plastic tarps. All together these unpaired elements define and close the perimeter of the chaotic buildings which compose the area, shaping what we are used to call walls. Inside, one's feet trample on chipboard panels and old carpets, while the view of the sky is occluded by assemblages of wooden planks, corrugated sheet metal and other recycled materials (see Fig. 9.1). The doors operate also as windows. The roads in this area are dirt, except when it rains, because then they are muddy. On the contrary, the "Somali neighborhood" is built on concrete and the "houses" are mainly made up of old containers crammed with stuff and people. Even "Paris" – an area of *Ex-Pista* currently under construction – is built on concrete, but here, the "houses" are mainly built with gasbeton blocks. Unlike many other "districts" of *Ex-Pista*, here many buildings have lodges. Some have been plastered and painted.

As Staid (2017) points out, rural informal settlements are inhabited and built by people living at the margins; people who, through housing, give shape to alternative ways of being together and at the same time open new opportunities for interaction and sociability. In this sense, informal settlements break with the so-called modern way of dwelling and lead us back to pre-modern housing models.

Along these lines, the partitioning of the dwelling space operated by modern architecture, which assigns specific functions to different regions of the house (i.e.

rooms), loses its meaning in informal settlements. It also loses its relationship with a tradition, a form of authority and a common ideal of household (Baudrillard, 1996).

As Georges Perec (1974) pointed out, space begins with the words that are used to describe, name and trace it. Space can therefore be considered as both an inventory and an invention. However, if we look at housing in migrants' informal settlements from the inside, it seems that our own vocabulary needs to be revised. In order to grasp radically different housing practices, "as weird as those might seem from the standpoint of the white Westernized middle class doxas through which we operate," it is essential "to advocate a displacement of our epistemologies of housing" (Lancione, 2020, p. 2). As a matter of fact, we are unlikely to encounter any specific domestic spaces (in terms of a division between bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, etc.) nested within these housing perimeters.

Following Perec again, in order to understand how this housing space is socially produced we should get back to the meanings and functions of housing in migrants' informal settlements. In the *Ex-Pista* settlement, the "private space" is generally reduced to a mattress (or a few more) – a bunch of pallets leaning one against the others up to covering almost the entire surface of the containers, or shacks, used as houses. Moreover, people's need for aggregation is not met through the organization of a kitchen or a living room inside the building. Although many shacks have camp stoves, the need for a common space is more likely to be satisfied by attending one of the many bars or shops that dot the informal urban agglomerations. People meet and spend time together there. They also stroll and meet up along the "streets" that give shape to the urban structure of the settlement. Likewise, the space for intimacy (given that there are very few families) is not necessarily identified through the attribution of the role of "bedroom" to a portion of the inhabited space. It is rather based on the use, ephemeral and exclusive, of a common space as a meeting place or, alternatively, in accessing one of the many recesses used by sex worker women. Given that only a small minority of migrants in these informal settlements live on their own (alone, or with family members), it is remarkable that the lack of a "private space" for specific household functions is compensated either by time-zoning practices (Madigan et al., 1990), or by the spreading of the same functions across the whole settlement. As a result, the same space can be a private space or a workplace, for instance a red-light house, in different time slots. Housing in migrants' informal settlements, therefore, is scattered out of the dwelling across time, space, and social relations.

However, housing is also a node within a wider network of infrastructures. And infrastructures can also be considered means to achieve a sense of permanence (Sheikh & Apurba, 2019). Normally, a dwelling is a terminal point of water, gas, and electric power distribution networks. It is also a gateway for the sewer system. Yet, these places lack adequate connections to these networks and to other essential services, such as garbage collection. How do the informal settlement dwellers compensate (or suffer) for these shortcomings?

When I happened to visit *Gran Ghetto* with a group of Caritas volunteers, as we were moving back to Foggia, one of the inhabitants asked us to follow him by car. He wanted to let us know the hardships experienced by some of his acquaintances.

After driving on dirt and poorly paved roads for about 20 min, we came to a complex of two abandoned farmhouses. Almost twenty people had been living there for about three years. They were used to staying there with no water, either for drinking or washing themselves. They only had one car to reach the closest non-drinking water tank, about five miles away. It was not uncommon that they would arrive there too late, when the tank was already empty. The young man who accompanied us there meant to ask Caritas for some help, and possibly for a water tank to be placed closer to the place where his friends lived.[11] As I was looking around, I noticed some blue tanks (see Fig. 9.2). These were very much like those I had already seen everywhere, in other informal settlements. However, at that moment I understood that those tanks were far more than tanks.

"*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" is the title of a famous artwork by René Magritte. But it is also the caption under the illustration of the pipe drawn by the artist. This is an iconic artwork going far beyond painting; a reflection which, by playing (seriously) with the relationship between reality and representation, highlights the limits of the conventions we use to interpret the environment we are immersed in. In a similar

Fig. 9.2 Blue tanks in Ghetto dei Bulgari, Pozzo Monaco. (Author's picture)

[11] Five months later, when I got back there, I discovered that despite the efforts of Caritas to bring this issue to the attention of the Regional Government nothing had happened. People were exactly in the same conditions.

vein, these tanks can help us to understand a specific dwelling condition. Their almost ubiquitous presence can be considered as a visual marker of an informal housing condition. In other words, blue tanks are not blue tanks. More than this, blue tanks can be considered as the tip of the iceberg; an open window on a lively "infrastructure" (Amin, 2014).

In this regard, sanitation in informal settlements bears the signs of the lack of connections with public services and with the network of civil infrastructures. This recalls the "collapse" of public institutions which, Wacquant (2016) says, is a crucial factor in the transformation of the ghetto into a "hyper-ghetto" with substantive race and class segregation. What happens in migrants' informal settlements is a dwelling process deprived by the complex exoskeleton through which the body satisfies the need for water, heat, light and so forth (Gandy, 2014).

Although it has been more than ten years since the United Nations recognized the right to water and sanitation as a fundamental human right,[12] the possibility to meet the needs for drinking water, personal hygiene and care in migrant informal settlements around Foggia does not depend on public infrastructures. It rather depends on a bottom-up process of active participation shaped by (and shaping) sociability and community organization. For instance, washing oneself after a working day is an activity that cannot be taken for granted. It requires the availability of a water reserve, and water must have been previously collected from a cistern, or from a public fountain which, as we saw above, can be several kilometres away from the dwelling place. Furthermore, it must be collected in a sufficient number of tanks, at least for the needs of the day; then it must be carried "home" and made available in a time and space which has been previously identified and dedicated to personal care activities. We are therefore dealing with a creative and compensatory act with respect to the negative affordances (Clapham, 2011; Gibson, 1986; Heft, 1989) ensured by these places. It is a continuous process of negotiation, discussion, and organisation, which Lancione and McFarlane (2016) conceive as "infra-making".

All this points to the importance of social variables to compensate for the consequences of dwelling in a cramped and residual space. As I show in the next section, social relations are equally crucial to the definition of a home space.

9.2.2 The Social Foundations of Home in Informal Settlements

> I had access to the Ex-Pista of Borgo Mezzanone for the first time, by invitation. I have spent a whole day together with a group of volunteers from an Italian NGO delivering social and health assistance in migrants' informal settlements. At that point Karim,[13] an Ivorian guy joining the team as a cultural mediator, spontaneously told me: "When we are

[12] Resolution 64/292, adopted on 28th July 2010 (URL: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/687002?ln=en).

[13] In order to protect research participants' anonymity, all names are fictional.

> done here, you come with me". When, about four hours later, we arrived at the Ex-Pista, he took me around almost the entire settlement. We walked for over half an hour. During this time I had the opportunity to know the different neighbourhoods of the settlement, the many commercial and craft activities, as well as its churches and mosques. We then stopped at the outside tables of a little bar. Karim introduced me to his friends and played the music he liked by accessing the club's Spotify. I was offered food and drinks and we spent the whole evening together talking or commenting on the music. In the following days, I will always meet Karim in the same little bar. (Excerpt from ethnographic diary, July 2021)

At first I did not understand that, while welcoming me in *Ex-Pista,* Karim was accomplishing the same rituals of hospitality that happen whenever someone enters another's home. Indeed, the ritual of hospitality always starts with an invitation, or a request to be welcomed in. And this is the preliminary, yet essential step to cross the system of thresholds separating the guest from the host's physical and social/symbolic space. And it is up to the host to outline the space the guest must move within and respect (Camargo, 2016; Pitt-Rivers, 1997). Visiting the whole settlement to illustrate its peculiarities, finding the best place to stay and wasting time together was, at the same time, the reproduction of a conventional performance of togetherness, a practice of social control, and a way to redefine the borders between "inside" and "outside", as well as between stranger and friend (Lynch et al., 2011). Importantly, there is no social bond, or culture, without the principle of hospitality (Derrida, 2005). And despite the fact that *Ex-Pista* is a rather "open" place – crossed daily by many native white-skinned people (NGO workers, activists, local smugglers, etc.) – this approach reframed my position in the settlement. I was no more merely a white guy strolling around and browsing here and there. Instead, I was a guest in Karim's home.

As a matter of fact, due also to the extremely poor housing conditions, home-making practices "in-the-public" are a key factor in the production of social space in informal settlements. The multitude of bars, take-away restaurants, shops, brothels, etc. does not merely represent the flourishing of informal small businesses in *Ex-Pista*. These are rather spaces where the imagination seeks to change, appropriate and recreate the physical space by making symbolic use of it, thereby revealing *loci of passions*, actions and lived experiences (Lefebvre, 1992).

In one of his most recent works, Sennett (2019) highlights the deep asymmetry existing between the *ville* – to be intended as the "built city" – and the *cité,* that is a way to express how people live, or experience a place. Although he refers to a rather different type of urban experience – he focuses on a contemporary westernized metropolitan experience and his standpoint is by no means comparable to a migrant one – this remark can illuminate the peculiar relationship linking migrant dwelling in informal settlements to their home spaces. In Sennett's perspective, in migrants' rural informal settlements, *ville* and *cité* largely coincide. And this coincidence is peculiar to the relationship migrants develop with the *ghetto.*

In this sense, the crowds of young men who frantically swarm through the streets of *Ex-Pista* every day after 4 p.m., upon returning from work, are not simply shopping, or strolling. They are actually producing the space they live, as they emplace a variety of home-making practices by joining together, exchanging rituals of

deference, exhibiting, and sharing the same cultural, ethnic, or religious codes, and, of course, organizing their own time for social reproduction.

Here, home is conceived not merely as a localized place, but as a site of practices where familiarity, mutual recognition and intimate sociability occur (Botticello, 2007). It is a place whose inhabitants are always in relation with each other. Its atmosphere does not arise merely from the creation of a landscape, but rather from the creation of a multisensorial scape interacting and generating the built environment.

> When I cross Ex-Pista a whole ocean of sub-Saharan languages lulls me, while music coming out from bars floods into my ears at incredibly loud volume. At the same time a confusing and overwhelming fusion of smells and fragrances of roasted lamb, fruit, vegetables and spices hits my nostrils. (Excerpt from my ethnographic diary, July 2021)

Within this perspective, music and food are sensuous affordances that allow the reproduction of a sense of home through connections between here and there, present and past (Berger & Mohr, 2010; Bonfanti et al., 2019; Miranda-Nieto & Boccagni, 2020). Soundscapes facilitate the performance of migrants' belonging by echoing familiar sounds and creating centres of attachment (Alfonso, 2013; Li, 2013; Walsh, 2011). As Berger and Mohr (2010, p. 200) wrote, "music takes hold of the present, divides it up and builds a bridge with it, which leads to the life's time. The listener and singer borrow the music's intentionality and find in it a lost amalgam of past, present, and future. Over the bridge, for as long as the music lasts, he passes backwards and forwards. When the music stops, the meaninglessness seeps back". Music acts at the same time as an identity marker, a generator of nostalgia and a way to emplace home away from home. Within this framework, food – its preparation, distribution and consumption – plays a similar role. It is crucial to home-making practices and it reflects traditions, habits and cultural practices, giving shape as well to senses of belonging and connections across a diasporic space (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Food, then, can be conceived as a message vehiculated by smell and taste, which creates visceral associations between the country of origin and the place where migrants dwell (Longhurst et al., 2009). In a nutshell, it is an affordance for the retention of biographical ties with other times and spaces (Bonfanti et al., 2019; Miranda-Nieto & Boccagni, 2020).

In sum, as I have shown, both the structure and the appearance of migrants' homes in rural informal settlements are shaped by the conjunction between extreme housing poverty and a multiplicity of housing practices based on cultural aspects. Furthermore, the boundaries of home as a space are not merely defined by walls but extend to public and common spaces, overlapping between each other (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021; Koch & Latham, 2013; Kumar & Makarova, 2008).

This means that the social and affective space of home may reach out to small businesses, along porous boundaries that shift across the daytime. Or alternatively, what was conceived as an economic activity can be recursively transformed into a home. From this standpoint, the boundaries between the public and private space are weak and reveal a transitional space marked by thresholds (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017) that, in migrant's informal settlements, are ephemeral and

recursive. The space for migrants to feel somehow at home, in these contexts, is highly fluid. Public and private, production and social reproduction coexist inside it (Laguerre, 1994), nested into each other.

Last, and as important, migrants' rural informal settlements are home to many migrants also because they have a chance to enhance their ethnic social capital there. While these places perhaps offer them the worst dwelling conditions in Europe, they also give access to job opportunities, information, and many different forms of mutual help (Howard & Forin, 2021). In other words, migrants' informal settlements convey social resources within a familiar socio-cultural *milieu*, making sense and making home. Along similar lines, Massa and Boccagni (2021), in a study on Somali Swedes in the popular district of Rinkeby (Stockholm), have shown that home-making practices can inform public spaces in which local inhabitants experience a peculiar kind of social proximity. However, this is strictly related to the impossibility to feel free from stigmatisation or discrimination outside of the neighbourhood. In a similar vein, informal settlements in the Italian rural scape are home to migrants, as long as these cannot find any place to call home in the urban space.

9.3 Migrants' Homes in Informal Settlements and How to Find Them

Summing up, the idea of home for migrants in informal settlements such those analyzed here cannot be taken for granted. Rather, it needs to be explored and (re) defined through research work.

Home, as a concept, is multifaceted and full of meanings. Analysing them can bring crucial advancements in the field of migration studies. As a matter of fact, home sheds light on incorporation processes, both from a micro-perspective revealing emotional geographies and practices of space appropriation, and from a macro-perspective allowing to understand the social, material and economic conditions and processes that structure housing and home-making (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). At the same time, home conveys a normative social representation of household, comfort and safety that lies at the core of a white, western and middle-class imaginary. Yet, following Sayad's (2004) argument on the *mirror function* of migrations, I can affirm that studying migrants' homes in informal settlements reveals how Italy give shape to form of differential inclusion (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), combining migrant economic incorporation with politics of abandonment (Stopani, 2017) and a wide array of segregation practices.

To conclude, three questions of broader societal relevance emerge from my fieldwork. These can be succinctly phrased as follows: (a) migrants' homes in informal settlements blur and entangle the boundaries between public and private space; (b) the domestic space of migrants living in informal settlements is profoundly shaped by sociability; (c) migrants' housing and home-making practices are ambivalent and cannot be merely conceived as the outcome of their own agency.

For one thing, migrants' homemaking in informal settlements challenges our capacity to recognize what home is, mainly because it does not merely rest on a shelter. The very idea of home, along with everyday home-making practices, does not overlap with the housing perimeter. It is actually spread across an informal settlement and contributes to shaping both its materiality and its sociality. Within settlements such as those analyzed here there is a variety of sites where one can engage in what we (i.e. white, native researchers) are used to call private behaviour (Kumar & Makarova, 2008). These could be the barracks, the places used to gather together and drink or eat, the places to dance and find some form of intimacy, etc. Homemaking in informal settlements, then, is a process of building, domesticating, and giving meaning to specific public spaces. This entails denying and defying a binary conception of space (i.e. private vs. public), while replacing it with a system of mobile boundaries and thresholds. Thus, for instance, in the little bar that Karim attends at the *ex-Pista,* his personal space is not fixed once for all. Instead, it is defined by a series of social rituals made up of greetings, requests for opinions or favours and small acts of deference. It is Karim himself who decides who can sit next to him. In a similar vein, the public and private spheres in informal settlements are not sharply defined. Rather, they deborder the one into the other, in a relation of continuous interaction and mutual constitution (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2017; Kumar & Makarova, 2008).

In the second place, the experience of home in informal settlements is deeply shaped by sociability. As I highlighted previously, the informal settlements that have emerged in response to the demand for workforce in the agro-industrial districts of Southern Italy are extraordinarily homogeneous, regarding both national/ethnic composition and class. This allows a manifold set of practices embedded in specific cultural patterns (e.g. food preparation, time use and holidays, ways of being together, etc.). "*It seems like Africa, don't you think*?", said Karim, showing me the goats and rams crowding *ex-Pista,* ready to be sacrificed, the day before the Eid al-Adha celebration (known also as "Feast of the Sacrifice"). Furthermore, informal settlements facilitate the gathering of communities based on national, ethnic, or religious criteria. As a result, they enable specific forms of comfort and familiarity (Botticello, 2007; Massa & Boccagni, 2021). Thus, within this context home is conceptualized not merely as a place, but as a site of social practices, encounters and relations (Boccagni, 2017; Lenhard & Samanani, 2019).

At the same time, home-making practices are not detached from the social and economic conditions experienced by migrants. Quite the opposite – they are embedded in a specific combination of exclusionary processes that constrain migrants' access to housing markets and public provisions, while pushing them into forms of labor exploitation. As a result, housing and home-making in informal settlements are ambivalent. On one hand, they can be considered as an expression of migrants' agency, (self-)satisfying an unmet need of housing (and home). On the other, they are the effect of the economic and social liminality of migrants around Foggia. Along these lines, migrant informal settlements evoke the idea of a *gray space* (Yiftachel, 2009). This concept allows us to avoid any binary approach to urban margins. These are continuously reproduced through a mix of legal and illegal

practices, tolerance and intolerance (see also Holston, 2007; De Genova & Roy, 2020). Such spaces shape an invisible social boundary that reveals how marginalised groups, unable as they are to get access to equal conditions (whether in public housing or in the real estate market), can deliberately disengage themselves by societal mainstream. Their construction of new collective identities is critically mediated by their housing practices.

In sum, as Kellett (1997) pointed out, a complex interrelation exists between the microcosm of the places migrants call and construct as home and the macrocosm of the power conditions that account for their position in the local social hierarchy. In spite of the latter, migrant workers continue to search and build, one day after another, a place where they can feel at home. Home, then, is the node that articulates the communication, as well as the tension, between these two universes.

References

Alfonso, I. D. (2013). Melodies from the past, melodies from the present: Music and identity in the Cuban diaspora. *Hispanic Research Journal, 14*(3), 256–272.

Amin, A. (2014). Lively infrastructure. *Theory, Culture and Society, 31*(8), 137–161.

Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition. In V. Rao & M. Walton (Eds.), *Culture and public action* (pp. 63–64). The World Bank.

Baudrillard, J. (1996). Structures of interior design. In *The system of objects* (pp. 15–29). Verso.

Berger, J., & Mohr, J. (2010). *A seventh man*. Verso.

Belloni M., Fravega E., & Giudici D. (2020). Fuori dall' accoglienza: insediamenti informali di rifugiati tra marginalità e autonomia.*Politiche Sociali, Social Policies 2*, 225-244. https://doi.org/10.7389/97987

Back, L. (2007). *The art of listening*. Berg.

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

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home: Mapping domestic space in migrants' everyday lives*. Springer.

Boccagni, P., & Brighenti, A. M. (2017). Immigrants and home in the making: Thresholds of domesticity, commonality and publicness. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment., 32*, 1–11.

Boccagni, P., & Duyvendak, J. W. (2021). Homemaking in the public. On the scales and stakes of framing, feeling, and claiming extra-domestic space as "home". *Sociology Compass, 15*(6).

Boccagni, P., & Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2021). Integration and the struggle to turn space into "our" place: Homemaking as a way beyond the stalemate of assimilationism vs transnationalism. *International Migration*, online first.

Bonfanti, S., Massa, A., & Miranda-Nieto, A. (2019). Whiffs of home. Ethnographic comparison in a collaborative research study across European cities. *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa, 12*(2), 153–174.

Botticello, J. (2007). Lagos in London: Finding the space of home. *Home Cultures, 4*(1), 7–23.

Bourdieu, P. (2003). Symbolic violence. In R. Célestin, E. DalMolin, & I. de Courtivron (Eds.), *Beyond French feminisms*. Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-09514-5_3

Camargo, L. O. d. L. (2016). The interstices of hospitality. *Research in Hospitality Management, 5*(1), 19–27.

Caruso, F. S. (2018). Dal ghetto agli alberghi diffusi: l'inserimento abitativo dei braccianti stagionali nei contesti rurali dell'Europa meridionale. *Sociologia urbana e rurale, XL*, 116.

Caruso, F. S., & Corrado, A. (2021). *Essenziali ma invisibili. Analisi delle politiche e delle iniziative di contrasto allo sfruttamento e per l'inclusione dei lavoratori migranti in agricoltura nel sud Italia*. Rosenberg & Sellier.

Castronovo, A. E. (2018). Dentro un limbo Marginalizzazione e resistenza dei richiedenti asilo del Cara di Mineo. In C. F. Benvegnù & E. Iannuzzi (Eds.), *Figure del lavoro contemporaneo: un'inchiesta sui nuovi regimi della produzione*. Ombre Corte.

Clapham, D. (2011). The embodied use of the material home: An affordance approach. *Housing, Theory and Society, 28*(4), 360–376.

Clapham, D. (2018). Remaking Housing Policy: An International Study (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315639086

Coin, F. (2004). *Gli immigrati, il lavoro la casa: tra segregazione e mobilitazione*. Franco Angeli.

Colloca, C., Corrado, A., & Calvosa, F. M. (2013). *La globalizzazione delle campagne: Migranti e società rurali nel Sud Italia*. Angeli.

Corrado, A. (2018). Migrazioni, processi di rururbanizzazione e lavoro. *Urban@ It*, 2-20.

Corrado, A., & D'agostino, M. (2018). Migrations in multiple crisis. New development patterns for rural and inner areas in Calabria (Italy). In S. Kordel, I. Jelen, & T. Weidinger (Eds.), *Current immigration processes to European peripheries: Status quo, implications and development strategies*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing House.

Corrado, A., de Castro, C., & Perrotta, D. (2016). *Migration and agriculture: Mobility and change in the Mediterranean area*. Routledge.

Cutini, V., & di Pinto, V. (2018). Space-in-between. Assetto configurazionale e sostenibilità urbana degli insediamenti informali. In *XXI Conferenza Societá Italiana Degli Urbanisti*.

Davis, M. (2017). *Planet of slums*. Verso.

De Genova, N., & Roy, A. (2020). Practices of illegalisation. *Antipode, 52*(2), 352–364.

Derrida, J. (2005). The principle of hospitality. *Parallax, 11*(1), 6–9.

Dines, N., & Rigo, E. (2015). Postcolonial citizenships and the "Refugeeization" of the workforce: Migrant agricultural labor in the Italian Mezzogiorno. In *Postcolonial transitions in Europe: Contexts, practices and politics*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Dotsey, S., & Chiodelli, F. (2021). Housing precarity a fourfold epistemological lancet for dissecting the housing conditions of migrants. *City, 25*(5–6), 720–739.

Fravega, E. (2021). *L'abitare virale. Pratiche abitative e salute dei migranti ai tempi del Covid19 (working paper)* (Panel: "Precarietà abitativa, pratiche e politiche di contrasto alla lente della pandemia"; ESPANET-Italia 2021.

Fravega, E. (2022). *L'abitare migrante. Racconti di vita e percorsi abitativi di migranti in Italia*. Milano: Meltemi. ISBN: 9788855195980.

Gandy, M. (2014). *The fabric of space: Water modernity, and the urban imagination*. MIT Press.

Gertel, J., & Sippel, S. R. (2014). *Seasonal workers in Mediterranean agriculture: The social costs of eating fresh*. Routledge.

Gibson, J. J. (1986). *The ecological approach to visual perception: Classic edition*. Psychology Press.

Handel, A. (2019). What's in a home? Toward a critical theory of housing/dwelling. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 37*(6), 1045.

Heft, H. (1989). Affordances and the body: An intentional analysis of Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 19*(1), 1–30.

Holston, J. (2007). *Insurgent citizenship: Disjunctions of democracy and modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press.

Howard, N., & Forin, R. (2021). I raccoglitori di pomodori, moderni "schiavi"? Una riflessione sulle rappresentazioni dell'agricoltura italiana. In I. Ippolito, M. Perrotta, & T. Raeymaekers (Eds.), *Braccia rubate dall'agricoltura. Pratiche di sfruttamento del lavoro migrante*. SEB 27.

Ippolito, I., & Perrotta, D. C. T. (Eds.). (2021). *Braccia rubate dall'agricoltura. Pratiche di sfruttamento del lavoro migrante*. Edizioni SEB27.

Kellett, P. (1997). Santa Marta. *Cities, 14*(6), 393–402.

Knorr-Cetina, K. D. (1988). The micro-social order: Towards a reconception. In N. G. Fielding (Ed.), *Actions and structure: Research methods and social theory* (pp. 21–53). Sage.

Koch, R., & Latham, A. (2013). On the hard work of domesticating a public space. *Urban Studies, 50*(1), 6–21.
Kumar, K., & Makarova, E. (2008). The portable home: The domestication of public space. *Sociological Theory, 26*(4), 324–343.
Laguerre, M. S. (1994). *The informal city*. Palgrave.
Lancione, M. (2020). Radical housing: On the politics of dwelling as difference. *International Journal of Housing Policy, 20*(2), 273–289.
Lancione, M., & McFarlane, C. (2016). Life at the urban margins: Sanitation infra-making and the potential of experimental comparison. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 48*(12), 2402–2421.
Lefebvre, H. (1992). *The production of space*. Wiley-Blackwell.
Lefebvre, H. (1996). The right to the city. In *Writings on cities* (Vol. 63181). Blackwell.
Lenhard, J., & Samanani, F. (Eds.). (2019). *Home. Ethnographic encounters*. Bloomsbury.
Li, W. W. (2013). *Shifting selves in migration: Home, ageing in place and well-being*. Central Compilation & Translation Press.
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), 333–345.
Lynch, P., Molz, J. G., Mcintosh, A., Lugosi, P., & Lashley, C. (2011). Theorizing hospitality. *Hospitality and Society, 1*(1), 3–24.
Madigan, R., Munro, M., & Smith, S. J. (1990). Gender and the meaning of home. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 14*(4), 625–647.
Manning, J. (2018). Becoming a decolonial feminist ethnographer: Addressing the complexities of positionality and representation. *Management Learning, 49*(3), 311–326.
Massa, A., & Boccagni, P. (2021). The neighbourhood as home away from home? Potentials and dilemmas of homemaking in the public among the Somali Swedes in Rinkeby, Stockholm. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures, 30*(1), 1–26.
McAreavey, R. (2018). *New immigration destinations, migrating to rural and peripheral areas*. Routledge.
McFarlane, C., & Waibel, M. (2012). *Urban informalities: Reflections on the formal and informal*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
Mezzadra, S., & Neilson, B. (2013). *Border as method, or, the multiplication of labor*. Duke University Press.
Miranda-Nieto, A., & Boccagni, P. (2020). At home in the restaurant: Familiarity, belonging and material culture in Ecuadorian restaurants in Madrid. *Sociology, 54*(5), 1022–1040.
Palumbo, Letizia, Corrado, Alessandra (editor/s), COVID-19, agri-food systems, and migrant labour : the situation in Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden, Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI), 2020, [Migration Policy Centre] - https://hdl.handle.net/1814/68030
Peano, I. (2017). *Containment, resistance, flight: Migrant labour in the agro-industrial district of Foggia, Italy*. Open Democracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/containment-resistance-flight-migrant-labour-in-agro-industrial-district-o/
Perec, G. (1974). *Species of spaces and other pieces*.
Perrotta, D. (2017). Processing tomatoes in the era of the retailing revolution. Mechanization and migrant labour in northern and southern Italy. In *Migration and agriculture. Mobility and change in the Mediterranean area*. Routledge.
Pitt-Rivers, J. (1997). The law of hospitality. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 2*(1), 501–517.
Reyes, V. (2020). Ethnographic toolkit: Strategic positionality and researchers' visible and invisible tools in field research. *Ethnography, 21*(2), 220–240.
Roy, A. (2009). Strangely familiar: Planning and the worlds of insurgence and informality. *Planning Theory, 8*(1), 7–11.
Ruonavaara, H. (2020). Rethinking the concept of 'housing regime'. *Critical Housing Analysis, 7*(1), 5–14.

Saitta, P. (2015). Poteri e resistenze. Economie informali, illegalità, subalternità. *Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale, 107*, 5-26,. https://doi.org/10.3280/SR2015-107001
Sayad, A. (2004). *The suffering of the immigrant*. Polity Press.
Schierup, C.-U., & Jørgensen, M. B. (2016). An introduction to the special issue. Politics of precarity: Migrant conditions, struggles and experiences. *Critical Sociology, 42*(7–8), 947–958.
Sennett, R. (2019). *Building and dwelling*. Penguin Books.
Sheikh, S. H., & Apurba, P. (2019). The politics of "home" in urban informal settlements. In *Architecture in a changing landscape (ARCASIA FORUM 20, DHAKA 19)* (pp. 171–180).
Staid, A. (2017). *Abitare illegale. Etnografia del vivere ai margini in Occidente*. Milieu.
Stopani, A. (2017). Abbandoni e sospensioni. In A. Romeo (Ed.), *Abbandoni. Assembramenti umani e spazi urbani: rifugiati e negligenti politiche di accoglienza*. Edizioni SEB27.
Tosi, A. (2017). *Le Case dei Poveri: è Ancora Possibile Pensare un Welfare Abitativo?* Mimesis.
Vasudevan, A. (2014). The autonomous city: Towards a critical geography of occupation. *Progress in Human Geography, 39*(3), 316–337.
Vasudevan, A. (2015). The makeshift city: Towards a global geography of squatting. *Progress in Human Geography, 39*(3), 338–359.
Wacquant, L. (2013). *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. Wiley.
Wacquant, L. (2016). Revisiting territories of relegation: Class, ethnicity and state in the making of advanced marginality. *Urban Studies, 53*(6), 1077–1088.
Walsh, K. (2011). Migrant masculinities and domestic space: British home-making practices in Dubai. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 36*(4), 516–529.
Yiftachel, O. (2009). Critical theory and 'gray space'. Mobilization of the colonized. *City, 13*(2–3), 240–256.

Chapter 10
Attending Houses of Worship as Homes Out of the Home

Sara Bonfanti and Barbara Bertolani

10.1 Introduction

> This gurdwara is one of the local tourist attractions. Italians who visit it ask about Sikhism and the history of our Gurus. Anyone can enter, regardless of religion or social origin. Everyone is offered a free ritual meal. We also welcome schools, but instead of spicy Punjabi food, children are given French fries with ketchup or pizza and soft drinks. By now the Italians know us, but there is always someone in the gurdwara who speaks Italian well and can explain who we are. (Informal conversation with Daljit Singh, September 2015)

This chapter revisits the development of fieldwork in settings that are not domestic *stricto sensu*, and yet bear significant resemblances with the domestic, such as Sikh and Hindu temples (gurdwaras and mandirs, respectively). These semi-public places are often perceived as home-like by the faithful (Bertolani et al., 2021) and, as in the case of homes, their access presupposes the overcoming of physical thresholds, but above all of symbolic and relational ones. Entering places of worship can be challenging for a white Western researcher, since beyond the formal rules valid for all, there may be informal ones based on gender or seniority. Moreover, internal spatial thresholds may entail differentiated access to certain spaces based on social stratifications, revealing tensions and conflicts within the religious community. Starting from the authors' experiences on the field, we analyse how the entry took place, through whom, with what difficulties or resistances, examining the role of gatekeepers which may be fundamental. Although not necessarily the hosts, they are the ones who may open the door for us and literally let us in, to observe and participate in the worship as far as possible. While it has been argued that ethnographic hospitality consists of social, ritual and cognitive elements (Selwyn, 2001), the host and guest

S. Bonfanti (✉)
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy
e-mail: sara.bonfanti@unitn.it

B. Bertolani
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_10

relationship in a house of worship is laden with multiscale political negotiations. In particular, doing fieldwork in minority temples allows us to see not only how these are carved out as spaces of religious belonging for a given community, but also which roles and positionalities ethnographers may have upon their visits.

The chapter is divided into five sections. In the next one we discuss some theoretical concerns about entering the field and identify the main concepts underlying our empirical analysis. In the third one we present in a comparative perspective the main characteristics of the places of worship examined, methodologically explaining the reasons for our choice. Their internal complexity and social stratification are highlighted as well as the existence of inclusion/exclusion thresholds that may act towards the researcher and also the members of the same ethnic-religious community. We then reflect on the social spatiality that operates within places of worship, analysing how the aesthetics of a house of prayer, its architecture, planning and interior design produce significant boundaries between inside and outside spaces and groups. In the fourth section we reflect on the issue of positionality: of the researcher's as well as the gatekeepers' and informants'. Starting from some case studies, we discuss how thresholding processes affect the researcher's positionality and how this latter influences the analytical gaze in entering, but also remaining and leaving places of worship. In the conclusions we argue that entering houses of worship is fundamental to better understand social differentiations and tensions within the ethnic-religious community that might otherwise remain unexplored in migration and diaspora studies.

Our work draws on two analytical perspectives. The first is a socio-spatial analysis that leads to the investigation of the physical and social thresholds that regulate access to places of worship. The second deals with positionality and how the researcher can navigate identity politics in the field. These perspectives are conceptually interconnected: the activity of thresholding is a process of control of the social and geographical space, for example in relation to religious, ethnic and gender characteristics. This defines groups, spaces and access rules, as well as the power relations between members of the same group, or between them and the outside world. Above all, thresholding itself generates a distinction between insiders and outsiders, that is, it defines a mutual positioning among the social actors which feeds back on dynamics of spatial and social inclusion or exclusion (Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020). Researchers, gatekeepers and informants negotiate each other's position throughout the research process, shifting the threshold that defines their positionality (Herod, 1999). The latter is the result of social, dynamic and contextual relationships that must be studied, as they influence the researcher's analytical gaze, allowing access to certain data rather than others (Mullings, 1999). Before getting there, however, we situate our argument in the relevant theoretical background.

10.2 On Considering Houses of Worship as Semi-public Home Spaces

This chapter engages with the multi-scalarity of homemaking in migration contexts, arguing that minority places of worship may function at once as community hubs and as "claims" for domestication over the public space (Gale & Naylor, 2002; Singh, 2006). As an increasing number of studies across social sciences have effectively shown, people attach a sense of home to places other than their private dwellings, and this can be evermore the case of migrants (Peterson, 2017). Not only individuals and households may face challenges in terms of finding adequate housing, but ethnic groups often negotiate their social accommodation depending on how far they can legitimately appropriate public spaces (Knott, 2010). For religious minorities, the establishment of a worship house thus serves, quite literally, as a landmark for advancing their right to the city and claiming participation in public life at large (Baumann, 2009). At the same time, this spatial appropriation on the ground of religious freedom grants group members a separate place to freely express, perform and reaffirm one's collective identity against processes of marginalisation (Meer et al., 2012). It is in the interplay between community and public spaces that our chapter addresses the peculiarity of Hindu and Sikh houses of worship in Italy.

As migration researchers who have explored the Indian diaspora experience in Italy for almost twenty years, we recognized local mandirs and gurdwaras as strategic places for in-depth study of the social life of these minorities (also taking advantage of the welcoming attitude of Punjabis which exceeded the formal accessibility of their temples, Gallo & Sai, 2013). On one hand, Indian migrants in Italy have exhibited a large degree of self-encapsulation. Put it differently, without entering into private homes, schools or job places it would not be possible to observe their patterns of socialisation, which instead are continuously at work within the temple (Kumar, 2015). On the other hand, entering minority religious spaces meant approaching ideas and practices of home in a multidimensional manner; that is, paying attention to ritual as well as mundane relations as they simultaneously unfold, questioning the migration process itself as a never-ending process of homemaking that strongly builds on religious belonging (Saunders et al., 2016). Although there is nothing like a "threshold theory" across disciplines, by using the concept of threshold we point to the symbolic meaning beyond the materiality of a doorway or any other architectural element that divides an outside from an inside (Buchli, 2013). In particular, we highlight the process of marking spatial forms of social inclusion or exclusion, and consider these boundaries as zones of passage, where social actors can be admitted or barred at different times (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017). Drawing on our research visits to gurdwaras and mandirs in northern Italy, this piece explores the predicaments of demarcating a safe haven for its faithful in a diaspora setting, by considering a plurality of thresholds that have to do with stakeholder relations, intra-ethnic boundaries and ethnographic accessibilities.

This leads us to consider the researcher's positionality and the circumscription of the field as a result of political negotiations which blur the boundaries between what is "inside" and "outside" and redefine who is admitted and under what conditions (Hirvi & Snellman, 2012; Salemink, 2015). Not only the unequal power relationships between researcher, informants and gatekeepers affect the process of knowledge production (McDowell, 1992; Mullings, 1999), the ethnographers can also be "escorted to the door" of the place of worship at any time, as a result of intersectional logics and power relations enacted in the field that may result in open or latent confrontations (Chacko, 2004; Herod, 1999). Since positionality and social roles influence what is seen and what kind of data can be collected (Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008), they cannot be taken for granted but must be analysed as part of the research itself, along with the researcher's subjectivity, biography and preferences (Magolda, 2000) which can steer the interpretation process in unforeseen directions.

Methodologically speaking, this chapter emerges from the ERC HOMInG project in which both authors have collaborated since 2019. In fact, while the analytical framework here suggested takes after this cooperation, Bertolani had started to conduct her research with Sikhs in Emilia Romagna since the early 2000s, while Bonfanti had carried out her fieldwork with Punjabis in Lombardy since 2012. As a result, the argument discussed in this chapter benefits from a long-term, multi-sited and comparative perspective (Vari-Lavoisier et al., 2019). The themes of thresholding and positionality run across both ethnographic experiences. The authors have made an effort to put their accumulated findings into dialogue in order to provide a more nuanced reflection on the value and pitfalls of visiting houses of worship as public homes for the Punjabi diaspora. The starting point of our joint quest was the urge to give a complex and ethnographically grounded answer to a simple question: what does it mean to consider minority prayer houses as community homes? What remains untold under such a plain metaphor? In the next two sections we advance two parallel perspectives that may be conducive to a coherent answer. The first is a socio-spatial analysis of places of worship like mandirs and gurdwaras, while the second deals with the researcher's positionality. In the end, it will become apparent that attending houses of worship "as homes out of the home" means to navigate overlapping politics of identity in the field, possibly learning how religious diasporas relocate despite uncertainties, amidst old and new forms of stratification (Waghmore, 2020; Jacobsen & Myrvold, 2012).

10.3 Hidden in Plain Sight? Social Relations Within Sacred Spaces

In this section we discuss the specificity of mandirs and gurdwaras as minority places of worship and the possibility for the researchers to debate the access and characteristics of such premises. Under which conditions were the authors able to enter these houses of prayer? Furthermore, what could they observe by visiting,

staying and partaking in the everyday community worship of the groups studied? If home visits in private spaces impinge on the relations between hosts and guests and allow for a close look at domestic spaces and routines for the household considered (Lenhard & Samanani, 2020, cf. Bertolani, Chap. 12), visiting houses of worship adds an extra layer of complexity insofar as these can be considered as 'semi-public' homes: i.e. community hubs for an ethno-religious minority but also visible landmarks in the public space (Dwyer, 2016; Bertolani et al., 2021). Tackling these emergent questions, two paragraphs will follow. The first situates the places of worship that we consider with respect to the localities where they are established. The second analyzes how space is socially organised within such temples, focusing on internal thresholds.

10.3.1 The Emplacement of Indian Religious Minorities in Italy: An Overview

Indian migration to Italy, mostly from Punjab, dates back after the 1984 Sikh pogroms occurred in the homeland, peaking in the last decade, with recent figures topping over 150,000 admissions into the country (CARITAS and MIGRANTES, 2019). Initially clustered in rural areas in North-central Italy, most first-time Indian immigrants were young males often employed as *bergamini*, temporary agricultural labourers, at once sheltered and excluded in a condition of relative invisibility. Employment diversification, longer settlements, family reunifications, generational changeover and recent naturalizations have reshaped the landscape of these migration flows and of Sikh minorities in Italy. Punjabi Diasporas include a Hindu as well as a Sikh component which is majoritarian, although both are inherently plural, being made up of different social groups, based on their *jati* (caste-lineage, in spite of Sikhism ideally backing egalitarianism), or their affiliations to intra-religious orders. In addition, regional and idiom commonalities bind together Hindu and Sikh Punjabis in immigration settings, beyond their diverse spiritual or political associations. For both authors, who have long been engaged in fieldwork with Indian Punjabi migrants in northern Italy (Bertolani et al., 2011; Bonfanti, 2016), focusing on gurdwaras and mandirs was instrumental to find key interlocutors first, and then to reason on the importance of such places for their respective communities.

The role of houses of worship for the *emplacement* of the Punjabi community in Italy is well established in the literature. With that term, we refer to the progressive appropriation of place where a migrant community has relocated, "their efforts to settle and build networks of connection within the constraints and opportunities of a specific locality at a particular time" (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016: 961). The concept of emplacement enables us to capture the instantiation of a set of dynamics in space and time. As Gallo (2012: 2) wrote, "current literature significantly highlights the role of religious places in connecting members of ethnic minorities across generations, in promoting continuity with different diasporic locations and in

allowing migrants to enter the public sphere in receiving contexts". Besides, the establishment of different *gurdwaras* in Italy is made differently meaningful in generational migration histories. The mandirs and gurdwaras that Bertolani and Bonfanti have visited reflect collective histories of status transformation among Indian migrants: from irregularity to long-term stay, from individual movements to family reunifications, up to naturalisation and the coming of age of second-generations. Moreover, the spatial distribution of mandirs and gurdwaras reveals a topographical story of emplacement. From makeshift prayer rooms in private houses, the establishment of formal places of worship in the urban outskirts or more often in the countryside took off thanks to the alms-funding developed by the Sikh and Hindu communities, alongside the process of reciprocal recognition with local authorities. Building on Baumann's (2009) concept of 'templeisation', we consider that a shift of religious observance and ritual practice from private homes to established temples (which also determined the rise of new authorities) has taken place among the Indian diaspora in Italy over the past twenty years. In the case of the Sikhs this occurred through a direct dialogue with local city councils and the Catholic church, as the extreme internal fragmentation of the community has so far prevented the formal recognition of Sikhism as a distinct faith (gurdwaras are still regulated as cultural associations). In the case of the Hindus, the process of accommodation benefited from the affiliation to national associations also sponsored by Italian devotees (namely Hare Krishna groups). This led to the official recognition of Hinduism, notwithstanding its various currents, by the Italian State (thus mandirs are regulated as religious places, including tax benefits). Hindu and Sikh minorities in Italy then represent an interesting case for comparison between two groups that, while sharing the same Punjabi ethnicity and immigration history, come to terms with different shades of emplacement according to their religious affiliation.

Following Michell (1988), *Mandir* is a Sanskrit word for where the mind becomes still and the soul floats freely to seek the source of life, peace and comfort. A mandir is not primarily considered a place for communal worship but the home of God, or of the particular deity. Temple activities revolve around the sacred image(s), the *murti*, installed upon the altar. An appointed priest, or team of priests, normally perform the *puja*, i.e. the ritual offering to the deities. As Hinduism has many sects, and each of them has slightly different beliefs in religion, it becomes difficult to gather the entire community under the same dome to one dedicated deity, especially in a foreign country. A temple becomes the centre and grounding point of the Hindu community. Mandirs in the diaspora often double up as community centres where Hindus can meet and organise social, cultural, and charitable events. As one of Bonfanti's informants explained:

> It is the mandir that fuels our faith in God, strengthens our society and teaches us to trust one another. Schools will educate the mind, but who will educate the soul? Especially for us who have come far away from home and our new generations are growing up here. In the mandir we care for our youth to learn the traditions they come from.

If a mandir in an immigration context functions as a focal point where Hindu devotees can reproduce their cultural identity and transmit it to their youth, the same

applies to gurdwaras in the Sikh diaspora. Among our research participants, the young Italian Sikhs who attended their local gurdwara actively, oftentimes performing *seva* i.e. free social service for the community, were highly conscious of their apprenticeship within 'the house of the Guru'. Following Nesbitt (2005), the literal meaning of *gurdwara* is 'the residence of the Guru', or 'the door that leads to the Guru'. Since the succession of living Gurus ended three centuries ago, the living Guru who finds abode in any gurdwara today is not a person but the book of Sikh scriptures called the Guru Granth Sahib. Like a mandir, a gurdwara fulfils essential social purposes. It is a place to learn spiritual wisdom, for religious ceremonies, where children learn the Sikh faith and customs, and a community centre which offers food, shelter, and support to those who need it. Unlike a mandir, there are no idols in a gurdwara. The only object of reverence is the Guru Granth Sahib, which is treated with the respect that would be given to a human Guru. The Guru Granth Sahib is kept in a room of its own during the night and carried in procession to the main hall at the start of the day's worship. There, the book is placed on a raised platform (*takht*, meaning 'throne') under a canopy and covered with a fine cloth when not being read (see Fig. 10.2). Although Sikhs show reverence to the Guru Granth Sahib, they do so to its spiritual content (*shabad*), not to the book itself. Within a gurdwara reading of *Gurbani*, hymns taken from the Guru Granth and possibly accompanied with music (*kirtan*), is at the core of Sikh worshipping. Worshipping within a mandir is instead performed mainly through the act of *darshan*, lit. the adoration of *murti*, statues of gods and goddesses which are considered divine themselves once they have been consecrated. Likewise, the role of music in Hindu *pujas* is not to be underestimated, as Beck (2012) reminded us revealing a template of interwoven ritual and music in Hindu tradition that he terms 'sonic liturgy'.

10.3.2 Making Sense of Thresholds within Hindu and Sikh Houses of Worship

While they house two different faiths that both originated in India (e.g. polytheistic vs. monotheistic, visual vs. aural devotion), Mandirs and Gurdwaras share some similar features in relation to the ways to access them and the occupation of their internal spaces. In both temples, entry requirements concerning bodily practices are maintained. Shoe-racks and lavatories before the entrance demand all visitors to purify their bodies in order to respect the holiness of the place and attune one's mind to it (see Fig. 10.1). Going barefoot and sitting on the floor (as well as covering one's head with a handkerchief in gurdwaras) constitute embodied prescriptions that any visitor has to comply with, somehow mimicking the gendered expectations of the devotees (Bonfanti, 2020). These rules are meant to manifest one's respect to the divine, as well as underpin ideal human equality. In fact, these mandatory behaviours reflect the dual nature of a worship place, which is at once the house of the

Fig. 10.1 Entrance area in front of an Italian mandir. (Bonfanti's picture)

deity and the communal home of the devotees. Like a *sevadar* (volunteer) said to Bonfanti as she was expressing gratitude for being admitted to film within their gurdwara: "We are the housekeepers here, the Guru is the lord of the house".

Not dissimilar from any household, where certain authorities and functions are taken up by particular actors, a set of custodians, clergy and a management committee operate in both temples, establishing hierarchical relations that cut across each religious community. Introducing oneself to a *granthi* or a *pujari* (equivalent of a Sikh officiant or Hindu priest who carries out daily ritual services, the first reading the Guru Granth Sahib, the latter performing puja) was a prerequisite for the authors to legitimise their visits. Besides many casual conversations with the attendees in the entry halls of the temples, biographical interviewing of worship leaders was crucial to latch what goes on in the temple to what happens outside, for the individual concerned and for the community as a whole. The feasibility of this research method, which demanded a certain mutual trust, depended on the actual linguistic skills of the interviewee as well as on how the interviewer was received by their hosts. (Since Hindu *pujaris* and Sikh *granthis* in Italian mandirs and gurdwaras were often male newcomers, their availability as informants did raise some concerns for the authors as western women. For instance, once within the temples, Bertolani reported being usually steered towards female interlocutors, while Bonfanti occasionally hired second-generation youth as informal interpreters).

Entering a house of worship in a diaspora context means to understand how social and spatial thresholds can be negotiated, in relation to the inner dynamics of an immigrant group and to the inclusive capacity of the outer society. Thresholding as a spatial process is inherent to any place of prayer, which defines its 'sacredness' by means of separation from the flow of ordinary life (Evans, 2003). Having said this, our analysis will focus upon the ways in which internal and external thresholds are demarcated in each of these temples, creating spaces for ritual as well as

mundane activities that are structured along several axes of social difference (gender and age, but also caste/class and sectarian belonging).

As far as their exterior is concerned, gurdwaras and mandirs in Italy often occupy former warehouses. The creation of such minority worship places in a suburban area met with no opposition from the local authorities, which preferred moving 'migrant life' to well-contained and less visible places (Gallo & Sai, 2013). While both temples may sacrifice the ideal architecture of a religious site made in India, with their white marbles and golden pinnacles or domes, it is the interior arrangements that qualify these spaces as functional to the ritual and social needs of the community. Although the material culture and architectures of each temple may differ, depending on its geographical location and financial assets, both gurdwaras and mandirs are internally organised with two fundamental but separate spaces: one for the prayer room (*darbar*), another for sharing meals (*langar*). While the institutionalisation of *langar* as a common kitchen and dining space derives from gurdwaras (as it actualizes the notion of human equality and the practice of *seva* free service), mandirs soon followed through (on a minor scale or with makeshift infrastructures), especially in diaspora contexts where Hindu Punjabis found the provision of homelike food convenient and comforting (Ramey, 2008). This dual thresholding is instrumental to the ritual and mundane practices that take place within Hindu and Sikh houses of worship, which host a two-fold form of religious and ethnic homemaking. As argued extensively elsewhere (Bertolani et al., 2021) in relation to gurdwaras in West London, a dual way of domesticity can be observed in such temples: a vertical one (regarding mystical concerns, making the place home to God) and a horizontal one (regarding mundane concerns, making the place homelike for the community).

Overall, the internal thresholds in gurdwaras and mandirs are revealing of a differentiated access to spaces and performative roles, mainly depending on gender. As Dohmen (2004) convincingly argued in relation to housework in south India, 'threshold design' is a fundamental way to perform gender relations according to shared cultural codes (or possibly transgress them). In particular, in the darbar female and male attendants sit separately on either side of the room while the religious service in front of the community of worshippers tends to be the preserve of men. The langar is a place for fostering community cohesion, where attendees can talk and share a free vegetarian meal (*roti* bread and rice pudding, pulses and vegetables, with water and tea). However, while some food preparation in the kitchen may be reserved to women, food is generally distributed by men. (This also applies to the consumption of *prashad*, a food ritual gift that in Hinduism consists of fresh fruit and water offered to the deity and then returned to the worshippers as being consecrated, while in Sikhism it is a porridge made of flour, sugar and butter blessed by the guru and distributed among the Sangat after ceremonies.) A visiting ethnographer, especially western women like the authors, risks putting at stake such gendered division by virtue of their very presence. Both of us learnt to juggle, case by case, between complying with what was expected from us as women and advancing research requests that may breach such code. As Bertolani discusses in the next section, her positionality affected each of her visits. Entering a temple, participating in

rituals and ceremonies, engaging in conversations with worshippers were not only methodological conundrums. They also became interpretative keys for theoretical analysis, revealing the interplay of power and gender within seemingly male-centred religious spaces.

Besides this gendered codification of space, gurdwaras and mandirs in Italy may reveal internal differentiation with reference to caste and class. That is the case of the *Ravidassias*, an offspring of Sikhism which is grounded on anti-casteism and has thrived in the European diasporas for the last decade (Lum, 2012). When Bonfanti was drawn to do research in a Ravidassi darbar in Bergamo, she realised how that house of worship functioned as a space of political identification for people discriminated against because of their low caste status. While the general layout of the darbar resembled that of a mainstream gurdwara, significant visual elements conveyed the revolutionary charge of the temple: the adoption of the Amrit Bani (a text composed of verses by outcaste Sant Ravidass) in lieu of the Guru Granth Sahib; the presence of several portraits other than the ten recognized gurus (including political leaders like anticasteist Rao Ambedkar); and the Hari flag at the entrance gate instead of the Khalsa flag of Sikhism. While this may be a most remarkable case of internal diversity among the Punjabi communities in Italy, both gurdwaras and mandirs stand out for their association with specific social and religious identities. These often remain invisible from the outside and are downplayed by their actors themselves, in order to give a more coherent and reassuring image of Sikhism and Hinduism (Gallo & Falzon, 2013). In fact, they become significant when entering their places of worship and collecting interviews from gatekeepers and attendees. While first-time migrants remember mandirs and gurdwaras as cohesive institutions when they reached Italy and needed shelter and assistance, nowadays different migrant generations admit that internal Hindu or Sikh factions often part from one another and set up new places of worship as a form of individuation (Searle-Chatterjee, 2013). As stated by Rakesh, the patron of a new mandir initiative, interviewed in 2017:

> When I rejoined my wife we moved house. We made a larger circle of Hindu families and started funding a new mandir. The old one still remained, but we wanted to back up something more proper, a grander place, a Maha mandir.

The new mandir found an abode in a warehouse that had closed down after the 2009 recession. As if compensating for the starkness of the industrial site, the interior design of the mandir required that the idols were of "1st class order".

> It was our duty to make a temple suited for us, who had worked hard to make a better life in Italy. […] We had *murti* sculptures delivered from Rajasthan. It was a big investment but we deserved it.

This proliferation of minority worship places follows from the diversification and stabilisation of these immigrant communities over time. Yet, not all splits sound confrontational: while some are (based on internal disagreements on how a committee managed the first temple built), others merely represent the expression of other religious ways and sensibilities. A case in point is the new darbar opened in Brescia in 2019 on a plot of land which had been agreed for sale by another Sikh gurdwara

committee after years of bidding: financial transactions appeased both parties, and the two temples have since been run independently with mutual friendly visits. The historical Singh Sabha Gurdwara still functions as the main Khalsa hub in the province, the newer Sachkhand darbar as a less politicised Sikh venue for hundred families in the city (Fig. 10.2).

To sum up, gurdwaras and mandirs in Italy are revealing of how the emplacement of Indian migrants is progressing in an ever-more complex landscape. This reflects both the reception of the Hindu and Sikh minority in the country and the emergence of internal cleavages in specific localities that would otherwise remain unnoticed. At the same time, visiting these houses of worship yields interesting reflections on the lexicon of home and migration studies, questioning the relation between hosts and guests, as the focus of analysis shifts in scale from the public space to the ritual place and vice versa, between the urban neighbourhood and the worship house, where the kaleidoscopic process of minority home-making unfolds. As we have seen, mandirs and gurdwaras are instrumental to construe and transmit a coherent and reassuring cultural representation of religious diversity to the outer society (Bertolani et al., 2011; Gallo, 2012). What could better give proof to the proverbial Punjabi hospitality (Bush et al., 1998) than sharing a homemade meal in the *langar*? It is precisely there that a communitarian food preparation becomes the means to integrate the visitor in an all-welcoming practice (Nesbitt, 2005). Yet, by the habitual experience of loitering in either temple and participating in everyday

Fig. 10.2 Prayer hall in an Italian gurdwara. (Bonfanti's picture)

doings, the authors were able to discern some cracks in the picture, stepping on thresholds that separated centre/periphery and insiders/outsiders on multiple grounds. As we illustrate in the next section, the positionality of an ethnographer-as-visitor is replete with ambivalences and contradictions, not the least depending on their own allegiances.

10.4 Methodological and Ethical Implications of Our Case Study

The positionality of researchers and of their interlocutors depends on social characteristics that are mutually attributed and negotiated, as well as on the attendant power relations. At the same time, as we have already illustrated, it is linked to thresholding activities and identity politics within houses of worship as semi-public homes. The three case studies that follow show that the positionality of the ethnographer and of other social actors can change over time as a result of biographical experiences, attributed social characteristics and context-specific conflicts, with consequences on the information collected.

10.4.1 Changing Positionality Due to Biographical Experiences

> It is 2pm on a hot and sultry Sunday. I arrive at the gurdwara when the service is over and the place is almost deserted, carrying a projector and slides under my arm. A few weeks earlier I took photos during a religious festival and would like to find someone to discuss them with. At the entrance, a young man seems about to leave, but seeing me he asks in perfect Italian "Are you a photographer?" I explain why I'm there and he immediately offers to act as a linguistic mediator while I show the slides, as most of the people there struggle to speak Italian and I don't know Punjabi. I am amazed by this welcome. This man is both an insider and an outsider. Upstairs we find a dozen men and I have the opportunity to introduce myself, but the most important thing is that I have finally found my gatekeeper. He and I have mutually positioned ourselves. I was the "photographer" (after all, isn't the work of the ethnographer also to give back a glimpse of reality?). He was the mediator that would connect me with that reality by "translating" some aspects of it. (Bertolani's field-notes, May 2002)

At the beginning of Bertolani's fieldwork, her gatekeeper's positionality was that of an unconventional insider. As a Punjabi Sikh man, he was certainly part of the local religious community. Although belonging to the numerically most representative caste, he did not have a solid family network in Italy and as a result he was marginalised and discriminated against. The lack of a stable income forced him to periodically ask the gurdwara for hospitality, in exchange for *seva* (voluntary work) inside the place of worship. His excellent knowledge of the Italian language, law and bureaucracy made him a useful presence, although sometimes poorly tolerated. His unconventional positioning allowed the author to have access to "unofficial"

information from the margins of the religious community and to capture ongoing thresholding practices that resulted in relationships of power and control in the gurdwara. The latter were invisible to outsiders and mirrored forms of exploitation within the Punjabi community as well as existing conflicts within the place of worship (Bertolani, 2015). This contradicted the prevailing narrative about Sikhs conveyed to the mainstream society of a united, supportive and non-conflictual community and of the gurdwara as a welcoming and reassuring home-like place. In fact, such a view downplayed hierarchical relationships based on caste, gender and generation as well as the innumerable internal religious stratifications in favour of a single prevailing identity linked to the Khalsa (Bertolani & Singh, 2012).

Thus, the positionality of the gatekeeper influenced the collection and interpretation of data, but also that of the author within the gurdwara. Because of her relationship with the gatekeeper, her presence as outsider was perceived with a certain circumspection: she was an Italian researcher, and a young single Western white woman who dealt directly with marginalised male individuals, challenging the conventional moral order in male/female relationships. As she spent Sunday afternoons with the gatekeeper, sitting in the langar or in the courtyard of the gurdwara to discuss her research, she became the subject of gossip. Her stay contradicted the tacit and ordinary use of community spaces.

Once the research was completed, this collaboration and friendship have over time transformed into a marital relationship. The positionality of the author and her former gatekeeper have therefore radically changed with respect to the community. Bertolani is now considered an insider "by acquisition" and her presence in the gurdwara is perceived as a sign of belonging to the community and appreciation of the Sikh religion. At the same time, her biographical experiences linked to that specific gurdwara inevitably condition her analytical interpretations. Her Sikh wedding was celebrated in that place of worship, and ambivalent emotions and memories are connected to many of its spaces. Although she experienced both dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, reciprocity and control, she feels she has some sort of moral commitment to that place, and keeps confidential any information that can be harmful, relative to the local community. In short, certain biographical experiences change the meanings and emotional reactions to certain religious spaces. The latter can be considered "active" and productive (Lefebvre, 1991), as they can influence the critical view of the researcher (Magolda, 2000).

10.4.2 Changing Positionality Due to Social Characteristics and Internal Conflicts

In the early 2000s Bertolani conducted research in a small mandir that was the founding nucleus of what later became a larger mandir in northern Italy. Initially, the place of worship was managed informally in a shed close to a private house by a large Brahmin-caste kin network of Hindu Punjabis, with the involvement of a group of Italian Hare Krishna. From the beginning, a conflict arose between those

who wanted the mandir to be affiliated with the Hare Krishna movement and those who instead owned it and refused the interference of the Italians, considered too inattentive to Punjabi traditions. The disputes concerned ritual, religious and cultural aspects, but also economic and managerial ones. Bertolani was introduced to the small Hindu community by a Punjabi couple, who were close to the demands of the Italian Hare Krishna, and who presented her as a student conducting university research. She was immediately positioned as a young white catholic single woman, an outsider to the Punjabis as well as the Italian faithful. Her presence was viewed with some caution. Her male Punjabi counterparts were friendly but kept their distance to avoid gossip. Moreover, the leader of the large Punjabi kin network had always evaded her request for an interview, thus also discouraging other potential informants. Italians were equally elusive, especially if her questions concerned the mandir. At the same time, the language barrier prevented Bertolani from talking to women. After a few months, an episode changed her status. One Sunday, her gatekeeper asked her to join her as she approached the Shiva lingam, poured milk over it, and sprinkled it with red powder, showing the ritual gestures to the researcher and asking her to do the same. In her fieldnotes the author reports what happened immediately after:

> She appreciates what I have done and with a quick and unexpected gesture she pulls away the scarf that covers my head and sprinkles the red powder in my hair. She laughs at my puzzled expression, as I still don't know the reason for that. We go back to sit among the women and I immediately notice that something has changed: many of them, who have never spoken to me before, approach and congratulate me, telling me that they did not know I was married. After the service, I get involved in the kitchen by women in the preparation of ritual food. Although it is difficult to understand each other, they ask me aspects of my private life: how long have I been married? Do I have children? Evidently my status and positionality has changed. I have made a social leap in their eyes. We now share the same social identity as married women, despite the many differences. As I eventually understood, my informant's gesture was a sign of inclusion. They socially re-framed me through the use of their own symbols. (Bertolani's fieldnotes, May 2002)

After this critical episode, it was no longer inconvenient to talk to Bertolani, especially for young men. This enabled her to carry out a series of informal interviews that proved decisive, much more so than the semi-structured ones she had already conducted.

Shortly before the end of the fieldwork, a decisive conflict broke out. This marginalised the Hare Krishna group and led to the expulsion of the Italians, putting the author's gatekeepers in serious difficulty within the community. At that point, the leader of the kin network asked them the reason for the author's presence, instrumentally assimilating her to the Italian counterpart. Bertolani decided to physically abandon the fieldwork site in order not to further compromise the position of her gatekeepers, while still remaining in contact with them. Her positionality had changed again as a result of the conflict (Herod, 1999).

This example shows that positionality is context-dependent, linked not only to personal characteristics as they are perceived by people, but also to mutual and evolving relationships. Conflicts or alliances within groups may change people's access to the field, while questioning power relations between members. This can

favour or hinder data acquisition, including or excluding the ethnographer from the place of worship. It anyway challenges the idea that an insider will produce better knowledge than an outsider simply by virtue of their positionality (Herod, 1999). The relationship between the researcher and the gatekeepers can expose them to exploitation and retaliation from other group members and insinuate doubts about their loyalty and belonging, eventually leading to their marginalisation. This may be a direct consequence of the unequal power relations associated with research and the indomitable authority of the author (Mullings, 1999). The researcher has the power to write and generate a narrative of reality before leaving the field. Instead, gatekeepers and informants are part of the field and, especially if the research is carried out on small and encapsulated groups, they are held accountable for having brought the outsider into the group, providing contacts and information. Research can therefore lead to ethical dilemmas and mixed loyalties (Williams, 2016). In the example above, the author decided to stop direct data collection to avoid damaging the gatekeepers, but once again the decision on what to do can only be contextual.

10.4.3 The Author's Positionality as a Political Tool

During a recent research in a small gurdwara, Bertolani was introduced to a woman that would act as her gatekeeper and to a group of other young women between the ages of 25 and 35. They had lived in Italy for a long time, were very active in the voluntary service (*seva*) and spoke fluent Italian. The author involved them in some focus groups on the role of women in Sikhism, which soon turned into animated and participatory discussions. Finally, these women asked the researcher to help them make a series of requests to the male leadership of the gurdwara during a public assembly. These demands concerned the participation of women in religious services. During the focus groups the women had realised that they were only marginally involved in them. Indeed, religious service remained firmly in the hands of the *granthi* and the male leadership and most of the women's volunteer work involved teaching Punjabi to children, cleaning and preparing food in the gurdwara kitchen. Furthermore, they had realised that they were capable and willing to perform religious *seva* like their male counterparts, but that they needed community authorization to do so. They knew that this desire would be thwarted even by their mothers, because it defied Punjabi customs and gender roles (Bertolani, 2020).

Initially, this request puzzled the author because it overturned pre-existing power relationships. It was no longer the researcher who asked informants or gatekeepers to do something but the other way round. The request also revealed her positionality as a white Western woman who could relate equally to older men in charge of prestigious roles. Few days later an assembly was organised at the end of the religious service. The hall was full of people sitting on the ground and the spatial arrangement of those present followed the hierarchical order within the community: the president of the gurdwara and a dozen other elders were sitting in a row, while the author was sitting in front of them with one of her informants acting as an

interpreter. All the other men sat on her right, while the women sat with the children on the left. During the assembly it was reiterated that in Sikhism women are equal to men and that they can also perform religious voluntary service. The author asked if this was really happening in that gurdwara and what were the obstacles that prevented it. A discussion arose in Punjabi between those men who argued that this required specific skills to be acquired by attending religious schools, and those who believed that women could be taught if they so desired. Since the president supported this second solution, five women timidly raised their hands and asked to participate in the training.

The episode was significant in revealing intersectionality in that religious community and that place of worship, on the basis of gender and generation. The women who had legitimised themselves by making a series of requests through the author were not "ordinary" faithful. They were the daughters and nieces of the president of the gurdwara, together with their friends. They therefore enjoyed an informal status that empowered them to put their ideas forward. However, they were young women who found themselves within unequal power relationships based on gender and generation, and often had conflicting expectations, relative to their mothers, about gender identity and traditional Punjabi customs. They had taken advantage of the focus group discussions on gender equality in Sikhism and had used the author as an intermediary for a public confrontation, aware that her presence and her power linked to writing (Mullings, 1999) would have forced gurdwara male leaders to take a clear and official position, consistent with the theoretical teachings of Sikhism. The episode also clarified the researcher's positionality according to them, as a white Western woman who could relate equally to older men in charge of prestigious roles. After that episode, the author's analytical awareness changed too. She had experienced firsthand a sort of "examination" and had placed herself for a moment in the position of the women she had represented. Although she was only the spokesperson for some instances, she had sensed the effect of a hierarchy based on gender and generation and the weight of any negative judgement linked to the contestation of the established order. She had voluntarily experienced the positionality of those young women that were looked upon with condescension and paternalism rather than with real attention, both by their "fathers" and "mothers".

As this example highlights, the power relationships between researchers and informants can reverse and change over time. Gatekeepers or informants may use a researcher's presence for their own advantage. Since the production of knowledge is a relational process and is about constructing social meaning (Magolda, 2000; Herod, 1999), awareness and attention are required from the researcher, who can hardly ever be neutral or irrelevant. This can also raise political demands for change and contestation of power balances, with potentially unpredictable outcomes. There is no longer a clear distinction between being in the field and leaving it, Salemink (2015) claims, as long as relationships with informants or interlocutors are retained over time. However, the author may leave a number of unresolved conflicts as a by-product of the research, which constitutes an ethical dilemma (Williams, 2016).

The three vignettes above allow us to highlight some aspects of positionality as a methodological issue, when it comes to doing research in places of worship. In the

author's experience, her positionality was the outcome of an ongoing relational process, but it was also a matter of perception. The researcher's impression of being an insider rather than an outsider did not always coincide with that of her informants, both being self-attributed by the researcher and externally attributed from others. Moreover, her positionality had different dimensions. From a material point of view, it translated into the possibility of physically accessing and remaining (or not) within certain religious spaces. Instead, from the emotional point of view, positionality involved emotions linked to biographical memories or experiences or implied mixed loyalties towards the community or certain places of worship (Williams, 2016). The criteria by which the researcher's positionality was defined relied on changing social characteristics (e.g. gender, age, marital status, caste or class belonging), but also on cultural and ethnic origins. The researcher, her gatekeepers and informants had to mutually negotiate these criteria, translating their positionality into a more or less stable condition. Conflict or negotiation allowed for changes in positionality which thereby assumed different rhythms, like those caused by a disruptive event or by a cumulative process. Finally, the social actors have used their own and others' positionality for different purposes ranging from heuristic ones (linked to research purposes) to political ones. As one of the vignettes shows, some interlocutors have tried to introduce change or, conversely, maintain existing power relations within a place of worship, using the positionality of the researcher for their goals.

10.5 Conclusions: Doing 'Community Home Visits' Within Migration and Diaspora Studies

The relevance of minority religious places has gained momentum in migration studies since the late nineties, starting with the South Asian diaspora experience (Vertovec, 1997; Johnson, 2012; Hausner & Garnett, 2015). In this chapter the authors focused on the Indian diaspora in Italy, considering Hindu and Sikh houses of worship as crucial settings where home-making takes place, i.e. where these groups try to ease their migratory process through a ritual environment. On one hand mandirs and gurdwaras provide a safe base for the community itself; on the other, they contribute to their social emplacement in the destination country (Bertolani et al., 2011; Gallo, 2012; Gallo & Sai, 2013). The argument presented here emerged from a distinctive ethnographic approach, which considers houses of worship as semi-public homes and insists on the challenges of entering such religious spaces and exploring their manifold social functions. Drawing on our research visits to gurdwaras and mandirs in northern Italy, we have proposed two analytical perspectives. The first is a socio-spatial analysis of the thresholds of access to places of worship, while the second deals with positionality and navigation of identity politics in the field. In practice, these two lines of inquiry feed into each other, since the internal complexity and social stratification, as manifest in a worship house, can affect the ethnographer's role as a visitor or a guest.

Houses of worship can be considered as an ongoing space of thresholding, where degrees of openness/closure and inside(rs)/outside(rs) are being produced. As the authors have argued with reference to gurdwaras in London's Southall (Bertolani et al., 2021), approaching a minority house of worship as a collective home in a diasporic context means to capture how the devotees attach to such spaces positive domestic connotations, such as familiarity, safety and comfort. Moreover, a minority place of worship "works out as a proxy of home away from home – both of the homeland and the dwelling abroad –" (ibidem: 4) as it reproduces specific historical and cultural legacies. Last, the heterogeneity of the Indian diaspora, which combines an ethnic minority status together with Sikh and Hindu religious belongings, called us to observe places of worship as spaces of complex identity reaffirmation vis-à-vis the mainstream society.

Following Kilde's (2013) overview on the study of religious spaces we have fallen back to the classical work by Smith (1992). The latter theorises ritual as a process which literally 'takes place', exploring the political contexts (internal and external) in which a place of worship is sacralised. As we maintain in this chapter, the construction of a minority religious space provides a vital infrastructure for the group identity in relation to the majority society. However, the same religious space designates hierarchies and power relations across group members. There are therefore two spatial fronts (internal/external) where ritual actions and meanings take place, which may be considered separately but happen jointly, thereby revealing the inherent duality of places of worship as semi-public homes. Although we have mainly focused on the internal space, the external one, which has only been hinted at here, is no less important in the study of places of worship. Such an approach has systematically informed our visits to minority temples, invariably questioning our ability to have access and stay in those home-like spaces – in other words, our positionality as researchers. At the beginning of the chapter, we asked why it is important to enter and do research within mandirs and gurdwaras. Our experience as ethnographers suggests that entering houses of worship is fundamental to better understand the social differentiations and tensions within ethnic-religious communities that would otherwise remain under-addressed in migration and diaspora studies (McLoughlin, 2009). Querying the analogy between a ritual space and a communal home also meant to further expose the critical roles and positionalities that visiting ethnographers may take up, eventually shifting the thresholds of domesticity before them under continuous reshuffle.

References

Baumann, M. (2009). Templeisation: Continuity and change of Hindu traditions in diaspora. *Journal of Religion in Europe, 2*(2), 149–179.

Beck, G. L. (2012). *Sonic liturgy: Ritual and music in Hindu tradition*. University of South Carolina Press.

Bertolani, B. (2015). Punjabis in Italy: The role of ethnic and family networks in immigration and economic integration. In I. Rajan, V. J. Varghese, & A. Kumar Nanda (Eds.), *Migration, mobility and multiple affiliations* (pp. 319–337). Cambridge University Press.

Bertolani, B. (2020). Women and Sikhism in theory and practice: Normative discourses, seva performances, and agency in the case study of some young Sikh women in northern Italy. *Religions, 11*, 91.

Bertolani, B., & Singh, I. (2012). The journey of Guru Granth Sahib to Italian Sikhs: Defining "national" leadership in transnational mass media. In K. A. Jacobsen & K. Myrvold (Eds.), *Sikhs across borders* (pp. 211–231). Bloomsbury.

Bertolani, B., Ferraris, F., & Perocco, F. (2011). Mirror games: A fresco of Sikh settlements among Italian local societies. In K. A. Jacobsen & K. Myrvold (Eds.), *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, identities and representations* (pp. 133–161). Ashgate.

Bertolani, B., Bonfanti, S., & Boccagni, P. (2021). At home in the gurdwara? Religious space and the resonance with domesticity in a London suburb. *Religion, 51*(3), 423–442.

Boccagni, P., & Brighenti, A. M. (2017). Immigrants and home in the making: Thresholds of domesticity, commonality and publicness. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 32*, 1–11.

Bonfanti, S. (2016). Dislocating Punjabiyat: Gendered mobilities among Indian diasporas in Italy. In I. Goetz et al. (Eds.), *Bounded mobilities* (pp. 183–206). Transcript-Verlag.

Bonfanti, S. (2020). Tying the turban: Gendered religious fashion among Sikh diaspora. In S.-J. Page & K. Pilcher (Eds.), *Embodying religion, gender and sexuality* (pp. 217–234). Routledge.

Buchli, V. (Ed.). (2013). *An anthropology of architecture*. Bloomsbury.

Bush, H., Williams, R., Bradby, H., Anderson, A., & Lean, M. (1998). Family hospitality and ethnic tradition among South Asian, Italian and general population women in the West of Scotland. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 20*(3), 351–380.

CARITAS and MIGRANTES (2019). *XXVIII Rapporto Immigrazione 2018–2019*. Centro Studi Idos.

Chacko, E. (2004). Positionality and praxis: Fieldwork experiences in rural India. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 25*(1), 51–63.

Dohmen, R. (2004). The home in the world: Women, threshold design and performative relations in contemporary Tamil Nadu, South India. *Cultural Geographies, 11*, 7–25.

Dwyer, C. (2016). Why does religion matter for cultural geographers? *Social & Cultural Geography, 17*(6), 758–762.

Evans, M. (2003). The sacred: Differentiating, clarifying and extending concepts. *Review of Religious Research, 45*(1), 32–47.

Gale, R., & Naylor, N. (2002). Religion, planning and the city. *Ethnicities, 2*(3), 387–409.

Gallo, E. (2012). Creating Gurdwaras, narrating histories: Perspectives on the Sikh diaspora in Italy. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Online], 6 | 2012, Online since 28 December 2012, connection on 02 May 2019. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3431; https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.3431

Gallo, E., & Falzon, M. A. (Eds.). (2013). *South Asian migration and religion in a European context*. Ashgate.

Gallo, E., & Sai, S. (2013). Should we talk about religions? Migrant associations, local politics and representations of religious diversity: The case of Sikh communities in central Italy. In J. Mapril & R. Blanes (Eds.), *The best of all gods: The sites and politics of religious diversity in southern Europe*. Brill.

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

Hausner, S. L., & Garnett, J. (Eds.). (2015). *Religion in diaspora: Cultures of citizenship*. Springer.

Herod, A. (1999). Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: Praxis, positionality, validity and the cult of the insider. *Geoforum, 30*(4), 313–327.

Hirvi, L., & Snellman, H. (2012). *Where is the field?* Finnish Literature Society.

Jacobsen, K. A., & Myrvold, K. (Eds.). (2012). *Sikhs across borders: Transnational practices of European Sikhs*. Continuum Books.

Johnson, P. C. (2012). Religion and diaspora. *Religion and Society, 3*(1), 95–114.

Kilde, J. H. (2013). Approaching religious space: An overview of theories, methods, and challenges in religious studies. *Religion & Theology, 20*, 183–201.
Knott, K. (2010). Religion, space, and place: The spatial turn in research on religion. *Religion and Society, 1*(1), 29–43.
Kumar, P. (Ed.). (2015). *Indian diaspora: Socio-cultural and religious worlds*. Brill.
Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
Lenhard, J., & Samanani, F. (Eds.). (2020). *Home: Ethnographic encounters*. Routledge.
Lum, K. (2012). *Indian Diversities in Italy: Italian case study* (Migration Policy Centre, CARIM-India Research Report, 2012/02).
Magolda, P. M. (2000). Accessing, waiting, plunging in, wondering, and writing: Retrospective sense-making of fieldwork. *Fields Methods, 12*(3), 209–234.
McDowell, L. (1992). Doing gender: Feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 17*(4), 399–416.
McLoughlin, S. (2009). Religion and diaspora. In *The Routledge companion to the study of religion* (pp. 572–594). Routledge.
Meer, N., Martineau, W., & Thompson, S. (2012). Misrecognition and ethno-religious diversity. *Ethnicities, 12*(2), 131–141.
Michell, G. (1988). *The Hindu temple: An introduction to its meaning and forms*. University of Chicago Press.
Miranda-Nieto, A., Massa, A., & Bonfanti, S. (2020). *Ethnographies of home and mobility: Shifting roofs*. Routledge.
Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum, 30*(4), 337–350.
Nesbitt, E. (2005). *Sikhism: A very short introduction*. OUP.
Peterson, M. (2017). Living with difference in hyper-diverse areas. *Social and Cultural Geographies, 18*(8), 1067–1085.
Ramey, S. (2008). *Hindu, Sufi, or Sikh: Contested practices and identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and beyond*. Springer.
Salemink, O. (2015). Securing access. In R. Dingwall & M. B. McDonnell (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of research and management*. Sage.
Sanghera, G. S., & Thapar-Björkert, S. (2008). Methodological dilemmas: Gatekeepers and positionality in Bradford. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 31*(3), 543–562.
Saunders, J. B., Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E., & Snyder, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Intersections of religion and migration: Issues at the global crossroads*. Palgrave.
Searle-Chatterjee, M. (2013). The guru in South Asia: New interdisciplinary perspectives. *Contemporary South Asia, 21*(3), 353–354.
Selwyn, T. (2001). An anthropology of hospitality. In C. Lashley & A. Morrison (Eds.), *In search of hospitality* (pp. 18–37). Heinemann.
Singh, G. (2006). Gurdwaras and community-building among British Sikhs. *Contemporary South Asia, 15*(2), 147–164.
Smith, J. Z. (1992). *To take place: Toward theory in ritual*. University of Chicago Press.
Vari-Lavoisier, I., Boccagni, P., Belloni, M., Bonfanti, S., Massa, A., Miranda, A., & Pérez-Murcia, L. E. (2019). Collective thinking in the field: Distributed cognition in large-scale qualitative research. *Espaces et societes, 178*(3), 103–120.
Vertovec, S. (1997). Three meanings of "diaspora," exemplified among South Asian religions. *Diaspora, 6*(3), 277–299.
Waghmore, S. (2020). Modernity without alterity: Caste associations and Hindu cosmopolitanism in contemporary Mumbai. In S. Waghmore & H. Gorringe (Eds.), *Civility in crisis: Democracy, equality and the majoritarian challenge in India* (pp. 93–114). Routledge India.
Williams, A. P. J. (2016). Residential ethnography, mixed loyalties, and religious power: Ethical dilemmas in faith-based addiction treatment. *Social & Cultural Geography, 18*(7), 1016–1038.

Chapter 11
Transnational Circulation of Home Through Objects: A Multisited Ethnography in Peruvian 'Homes'

Luis Eduardo Pérez Murcia

11.1 Introduction

What is the added value of visiting migrants' current and previous houses when investigating the transnational circulation of home? This chapter addresses this question, drawing on ethnographic research in houses inhabited by Peruvian migrants in England and Spain and by their relatives living back in Peru. I argue that an ethnographic engagement with people's domestic space is not only desirable. It is actually irreplaceable to capture the transnational circulation of home, both conceptually and empirically.

The notion of 'transnational circulation of home' involves a large set of practices adopted by families to keep themselves sentimentally connected despite the geographical distance between the places they inhabit, including the circulation of 'care' (Baldassar, 2007; Brandhorst et al., 2020), 'housing design' (Van der Horst, 2010; Boccagni & Pérez Murcia, 2020), and particular objects (Povrzanovic Frykman & Humbracht, 2013). For the remit of this chapter, my analysis is focused on the latter aspect. It is my contention that by looking at participant's domestic spaces and their everyday social and cultural practices we can better understand how migration shapes transnational families' experiences of home. More specifically, based on previous research on the role of objects in transnational homemaking (Buffel, 2015; Vullnetari, 2016; Walsh, 2016), I argue that through the analysis of how the domestic space is organised and how individuals interact with their everyday materialities we can better understand the transnational circulation of home. Some objects can help those living at both ends of a migration system to feel emotionally and symbolically connected.

Methodologically speaking, by gaining access to the participants' 'home', as a 'sphere of practice and experience in its own right' (Ferguson, 2018: 65), we can

L. E. Pérez Murcia (✉)
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy
e-mail: lepm50@gmail.com

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_11

better understand the intimacy that individuals create and nurture with objects and other people. As Miller (2001, 2010) suggests, by observing the ways in which people nurture relationships with their objects we can gain insights of how people relate to other people. Both interactions, as I illustrate in the empirical section of the chapter, are vital for comprehending how home is lived and experienced all across a migration corridor.

The idea of gaining access to people's 'home' deserves a special note. We can visit a person's house or domestic space but cannot take for granted that these spaces constitute a home for him or her. Home is made through everyday social and cultural practices (Hammond, 2004), and as discussed below, mundane materialities can play a significant role in transforming people's houses and domestic spaces into meaningful homes. Based on this consideration, the term 'home visit' is reserved, in this chapter, for those participants who attach ideas, emotions or senses of home to the houses and domestic spaces they inhabit. In other cases, the terms 'housing visits' or 'domestic visits' are preferred.

Following this introduction, Sect. 11.2 briefly discusses the notions of home and everyday materialities and Sect. 11.3 provides details about the methodology, research context and ethics of my study. I then advance the critical argument of this chapter in Sect. 11.4 with empirical examples from England, Spain and Peru. The chapter ends by discussing the added value of engaging with people's domestic space to advance the debate on the circulation of home from the specific angle of the circulation of objects. It also highlights the significance of doing fieldwork in both migrants' current domestic spaces and in the places they used to call, or still call, home. At the end, as this chapter stresses, understanding transnational families' experiences of home entails an ethnographic engagement with more than one 'home'.

11.2 Linking Home, Migration and Everyday Materialities

Although the theoretical debate on the nexus between home, migration and objects is beyond the scope of this chapter, the following paragraphs briefly discuss the use of these concepts in this research. The notion of 'home' denotes a material and symbolic space (Blunt & Dowling, 2006) where individuals attach ideas of safety, familiarity and comfort (Hage, 1997; Papastergiadis, 1998; Boccagni, 2017), 'ontological security' (Handel, 2019), personal and group identity (Lucas & Purkayastha, 2007), and establish and nurture meaningful social relationships. As discussed later in the chapter with the narrative of Dala, home is not necessarily a place of 'love and belonging' (cf. Papastergiadis, 1998). It can also be a place of estrangement where individuals experience loneliness and isolation.

The critical question examined in this chapter is how the positive and negative experiences of home are shaped by migration and what role objects have in mediating this relationship. Previous research by Tolia-Kelly (2004, 2006), and more recently by Walsh (2018) and Pérez Murcia and Boccagni (2022) show that objects play a critical role in migrants' attempts to remake and reproduce home on the

move. As Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht (2013: 50) suggest, mundane objects such as an espresso moka can help migrants to reproduce 'home' and give them a sense of 'normalcy and continuity'. In fact, objects can play a wide range of different but interrelated functions: they may bring memories of previous homes (Ratnam, 2018; Trabert, 2020); connect migrant's current physical dwellings with the places and people left behind (Marschall, 2019); and even keep alive the memories of those who passed away but were vital in making migrants feel at home (Tiaynen-Qadir, 2016). More broadly, 'objects allow migrants to integrate themselves into new social networks while still maintaining connections to their previous communities' (Trabert, 2020: 98).

None of these accounts explicitly reflects on the conceptual value of entering migrant's 'homes' for unveiling the role of objects in the transnational circulation of home. As stressed in the introduction, ethnography in people's domestic space constitutes a unique opportunity to understand their everyday social and cultural practices and the extent to which those living within transnational arrangements keep or circulate objects to mediate the physical absence of their relatives and feel at home. Moreover, none of these accounts engage with the migrants' distant kin's domestic spaces when looking at how home is shaped by transnational migration.[1] The opportunity to observe the domestic space migrants are currently inhabiting and those they left behind, instead, helps us to appreciate the disposition of everyday materialities and the multiple ways in which individuals interact and even nurture an affective relationship with them. As discussed in the subsequent empirical sections, some of these objects help geographically distant family members to retain their everyday routines of home. A simple glass or kitchen cabinet, for instance, can help a mother to feel the co-presence of her physically absent daughter. Before going into details of how my empirical findings contribute to fill these conceptual gaps, a discussion on methods, context and ethics is in order.

11.3 Methods, Context and Ethics

This chapter draws on over three years of ethnographic research with Peruvian migrants in England and Spain, and with some of their relatives back in Peru. The data is part of a broader research project exploring the interplay between home and migration. For the purpose of this analysis I selected a set of 21 interviews and life stories that I collected in the migrants and their relatives' domestic space in Manchester, Madrid, Lima (including the districts of *El Callao* and *Ventanilla*) and Pisco. Most data were gathered between April 2018 and March 2019. After that, I conducted online follow up interviews with key informants in 2020 and early 2021. Interviews and life stories were gathered in Spanish, which is the mother tongue of

[1] Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht (2013) drew on ethnographic research with migrants and their kin in countries of origin but their article did only include the migrants' objects and narratives.

both research participants and the researcher. Only selected quotes have been translated into English for this chapter.

Entering the research participant's domestic space was by no means a straightforward process. Rapport and even a sense of friendship (Huisman, 2008; Hall, 2009) were needed before my participants would spontaneously invite me into their domestic space. I initially recruited participants in Manchester and Madrid. This facilitated my connection with their relatives and friends back in Peru. As I had initially asked all participants to choose the location for the interview, some of them selected precisely their domiciles. After building rapport with them, which was generally a matter of weeks or months, 21 out of 34 spontaneously invited me to visit their houses.

In all visits to participants' domestic space I asked formal permission to look at their objects and engaged in conversations about the history of those they mentioned when talking about home. I also enquired about the history of the mundane materialities that captured my attention for the ways in which they were displayed in the domestic space; for instance, religious icons next to the photos of family members living abroad. When participants became more aware of my interest in their material cultures, many of them were keen to bring objects from their private spaces or call my attention to items I would not have noticed otherwise. A glass and kitchen cabinet, for example.

With eight out of the 21 participants, I also filmed the housing visit with a mobile phone. I recorded short videos, between 30 s and 3 min of length, asking people to show me significant places of their houses and/or talk about their objects and the ways they bring memories of their families. As I had the opportunity to travel back to England and Spain, participants interviewed in Peru recorded those videos as a present to their families. Following Evans and Jones's (2011) reflections about the walking interviews in people's domestic spaces, I asked participants to feel free to keep private areas away from the camera. Similar approaches have been adopted by Pink (2004, 2009) when encouraging researchers to use visual methods in the home space and more recently by Ratnam and Drozdzewski (2020). Those accounts have shown the significance of visual material for engaging with people's domestic spaces and to understand the ways they relate to specific places and material cultures. The videos were then shared with research participants in Europe and their emotional responses were included in the data. I dedicated special attention to their reactions when they were looking at their previous domestic space and the objects their relatives and friends were talking about.

As my experience also shows, ethics is central in gaining space to participant's domestic spaces. The observation of participants in their everyday settings does not require only the building of a sense of friendship and intimacy between ethnographers and participants. It also demands their willingness to mutually share emotions and respect each other's intimacy. As Hall (2014: 2176) stresses, 'it is through emotions that relationships with participants are made'. In the same vein, I contend that ethnography in participants' domestic space creates opportunities for emotions to be disclosed and intimacy to be unsettled. This is not only because by being welcomed in participant's domestic space, especially after several visits, ethnographers

may be involved in family life (see Iverson, 2009; Gabb, 2010). It is also because participants may perceive the intimacy of the domestic space as a secure environment to share their emotions. As Hall (2009: 2177) rightly asserts, "by welcoming the researcher into their homes and lives, families may expose themselves and their relationships in ways they have never done before. It is in this environment that participants feel increasingly comfortable and are likely to reveal personal information about themselves and other family members". What is observed in people's domestic space and what is shared with others, for example in conferences and publications, therefore, deserve close consideration. For ethnographers to be invited to participants' domestic space does not mean that they are allowed to share all what they observe and hear. Although the boundaries between what can be shared are often complicated to trace, the basic rule of respecting people's intimacy must be privileged in all circumstances.

In my case study, all participants gave written consent for being interviewed and their life stories being collected. All participants were asked to choose a pseudonym. Although most participants asked me to use their real names, only pseudonyms were used to safeguard confidentiality. They also gave consent for video recording and photos of their houses and objects being taken. In terms of positionality, I am a Colombian male who is familiar with many of the social and cultural practices of Peruvians. To avoid gender imbalances during interviews, I allowed both men and women to elaborate their narratives and asked questions around whether and how they experience migration and home differently. Although the level of education between research participants and the researcher is not the same, most participants not having a bachelor's degree, I asked questions in plain language so as to facilitate participants to elaborate and share their ideas. In order to prevent any potential problem related to interviewing people in their houses, particularly with young adults and the elderly, I conducted domestic visits only when research participants were not alone. When needed, I formulated follow-up questions to double-check my full understanding of participants' expressions.

When doing fieldwork with couples, in particular it was common that they would ask me about my marital status and would extend the invitation to visit their house to my partner. In those cases, the distinction between doing ethnographic research in people's domestic spaces and visiting friends were notably blurred. Although doing fieldwork with family members can both open opportunities for close engagement with participants or disturb the research environment (Korpela et al., 2016), in this particular case doing fieldwork with my partner facilitated the emergence of spontaneous conversations about home and home-making. By sharing our ideas, interests, food and more generally our everyday practices to make ourselves at home, I learnt things I would not have been able to know if I had not visited the place, or probably if I had visited it on my own. The sense of friendship between couples opened the door to talk about intimate aspects and their significance for understanding home.

11.4 Understanding the Role of Objects in the Transnational Circulation of Home

Ethnographic research in people's domestic spaces has the potential to advance knowledge on the transnational circulation of home in multiple directions. Although, as already said, the transnational circulation of home encompasses a large set of aspects such as the circulation of care and housing design, I focus my analysis on the role of domestic visits to advance conceptual debates on transnational home-making through everyday materialities. By entering the domestic spaces of migrants and of their left-behind relatives, ethnographers access to a privileged point of reference to understand the personal connection between individuals and objects. As the narratives of those who took part in this research show, the connections between individuals and objects help families living in different houses to feel part of the same home, regardless of geographical distance.

I deliberately present only few cases in the empirical discussion with a view to provide the reader with the necessary details about how I engaged with the participant's domestic space. This will enable me to better illustrate the value of domestic visits to advance research on transnational home-making trough objects.

11.4.1 A Baby Jesus Sculpture

Liisa is a Peruvian migrant living in Spain for thirteen years. I visited her house in South Madrid in 2018. I had interviewed Pilar, one of her work colleagues and friends in Madrid, and Pilar had encouraged her to take part in my research. This certainly facilitated the process of building rapport. When asked about the venue for the interview, she kindly invited me to her flat.

What first called my attention is that symbols of Peru were displayed all across the living room. Most notably, the country's national flag and traditional Peruvian handcrafts. Liisa recounted that upon leaving Peru she had put the flag into the suitcase as a way to bring her country and identity to Spain. The remaining objects had been gathered in different holidays she had enjoyed in Peru. Beyond these rather paradigmatic representations of her country, Liisa said that all the stuff she has in her house is somehow related to her feelings towards home. When talking about home, however, she was not talking about Peru but primarily about the flat she has been living in for many years in Spain. As she put it, '*The bed I rest daily, the table I share food with my family, the TV and radio I hear news. All these objects make me feel somehow at home'*. But what does Liisa find in these objects, beyond the comfort they bring? Leaving aside their material value, Liisa has nurtured a symbolic relationship with them (Appadurai, 1986). They are a reminder of the different moments she has gone through in Spain. She arrived with a suitcase and step by step, relying on her work as caregiver, has been able to equip the house with the facilities she needs to feel at home. While the 'ethnic' objects, notably the flag, help

her to keep a connection with her home-land (see Povrzanovic Frykman & Humbracht, 2013), the mundane materialities she was talking about help her to feel at home in her host-land.

No other specific object was mentioned by Liisa when I asked her about the role of objects in her sense and experiences of home in Madrid. When visiting her relatives in Lima, however, I realised that I had forgot to ask a simple but important question to further understand the connections between objects, migration, and home - *Is there any object you left in Peru that says something about your sense of home*?

While entering the room in which Liisa dwells when visiting her relatives back in Peru, I noticed that the room was not so empty as one may expect for a room a migrant only visits once every four years or so. Consistent with the research findings of Pistrick (2013) on the rooms left by Albanian migrants, and with my own findings on other Ecuadorian and Peruvian migrants (Pérez Murcia, 2022), Liisa's room was fully decorated. Everything was tidy and fresh as if she was dwelling there. What most captured my attention was however the presence of a baby Jesus sculpture on the bed. When enquired about its meaning, Liisa's cousin, Cecil, said: '*This is the most important connection Liisa has in Peru. She has a house she inherited from her mother but she does not care much about it. She cares about him* [the baby Jesus]'. Then, she added:

> Liisa went to Spain and left him with us. She knows we look well after him and he looks after us. He [*the baby Jesus*] spends his time between Liisa's room and our living room. Like us, he is always waiting for Liisa's visit. She knows this house is her home in Lima. (Fig. 11.1)

Judging from the way in which Cecil talks about the sculpture, one would expect that she is talking about a person rather than an object. By being there, in the family domestic space, I could see how individuals personify objects as a way to keep present their relatives living abroad in their everyday life. To some extent therefore objects are meant to embody people.

The baby Jesus statue keeps Liisa present and at the same time absent in the house and in the home. As I shared time and coffee with the family, they proudly showed me the altar they have made in the living room for the baby Jesus and the different outfits they have made for him. By looking after Liisa's *'most important connection in Peru'*, Cecil and her mother were also somehow looking after Liisa in Spain. By taking care of particular objects, as a way to (indirectly) take care about people, they were enacting a form of transnational care (Brandhorst et al., 2020).

Before leaving Cecil's house, I asked her to send a message to Liisa and permission to record it. Cecil and her mother sat on the sofa and put the baby Jesus statue in the middle of them. Part of the message said: '*Liisa, your family is here and this will always be your home. Baby Jesus is always looking after your room'*.

When I delivered the present to Liisa, her emotional reaction was significant. She was looking at the three characters in the video as if they were all real persons. I asked: 'What does the baby Jesus in Cecil's house mean to you'? '*He is very important',* Liisa replied:

Fig. 11.1 Baby Jesus looking after Liisa's room in Lima. (Author's picture)

> My brother asked me to look after the baby Jesus before he died. I wanted to bring him [*the statue*] to Spain but could not. It is so big. It was a hard decision to make because he meant a lot for my brother and, since he died, for me. He is like a bond between us [*brother and sister*].

Then, I asked: Does the baby Jesus say something about your idea of home?

> Yes, I think about the baby Jesus very often. When I go to my local church in Madrid, I ask him [*the baby Jesus*] to protect my brother and my mother [*the mother also passed away*]. While praying in the church I feel that we are all together, here in Madrid, as a family.

The memory of the dead brother and mother and the left-behind baby Jesus seem to help Liisa to feel at home in Madrid, notably in the church. Liisa and Cecil's reflections about the significance of the baby Jesus statue in their experiences of home would have probably never been captured without visiting their houses and looking at their everyday materialities. By being 'there', in their domestic spaces, I was able to build the necessary intimacy to talk about objects that have assume very personal spiritual connections. I learnt that the baby Jesus is much more than an object. "He" has rather become a personified/humanized object. The family talks about him like a person and this 'person' seems to transnationally connect their domestic spaces and senses of home. He, the baby Jesus, seems even to connect Liisa with her passed away mother and sibling.

11.4.2 Looking at My Daughter Through a Kitchen Cabinet

Dala, interviewed in Lima, is the mother of Lili, a Peruvian migrant living in Manchester since 2007. When interviewing Dala in her house, the fact that her daughter was present in every corner of the house captured my attention. Photos of her at different stages of her life were displayed in the living room and in the room in which her daughter used to dwell. Beyond those photos, one object was particularly remarkable – the first clothing of her granddaughter. She had left the country when she was only two months old and Dala wanted to keep her clothing. In fact, the clothing is displayed next to some of the toys Lili had a special bond with in her childhood (Fig. 11.2).

Dala mentioned that "home" for her, means "family". The first granddaughter's clothing and the photo and toys of her daughter alleviate the pain of living away from her family. These objects represent Dala's memories of home but remind at the same time that the people who make her feel at home no longer live with her. Indeed, since her son died and her daughter migrated, Dala struggles to experience her house as home. '*For many years I did not feel at home in this house. I did not want to come here* [the house] *after work. I did not want to be alone'*. Then, Dala went on to say that by looking after those objects she felt somehow accompanied by her family. As Pistrick (2013: 67) stresses: "it is through their absence that persons, souvenirs and memories develop a powerful presence in the lives of those who have remained in the [*places left behind*]".

Besides illuminating the value of these everyday objects in Dala's sense of home, the visit to her domestic space was significant for unveiling how Lili is present in her mother's everyday life through ordinary materialities. When Dala was asked about a particular object that recalls her daughter in the house, she said:

> Every object in this house reminds me of my daughter. She is in every corner of the house. You see this cabinet [*the one in the kitchen*]. When I look at the cabinet, I see my daughter

Fig. 11.2 Dala's granddaughter's first clothing. (Author's picture)

> opening it and grabbing a glass to bring me water. That is why it is difficult to live in this house without her.

It was not necessary for Dala to stand up, open the cabinet and grab the glass, for me to see the underlying point –how those everyday family interactions she has missed for over fourteen years often make her feel homeless. By being there, on her sofa, looking attentively at how she pointed out with her finger to that particular domestic corner, I could myself imagine seeing Lili serving water for her mother. The cabinet, as many other objects in the house, tells something about the sentimental connection between a mother and her daughter. By observing how Dala looks after these everyday materialities and touches them, something I would have missed if not for entering her domestic space, I learned that these objects create an ambivalent experience of home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). They bring about happy memories of a daughter serving water to her mother and sad memories at the same time, as they are a constant reminder that Lili no longer lives with her and there is little hope for her to return. The relationship Dala has nurtured with these objects shows us that they play a role in Dala's mixed feelings towards home. They can help her to feel at home at one time and homeless at another. The latter feeling seemed to be alleviated by the love and affection that these two women express for each other. They cannot be present in each other's everyday life and therefore cannot mutually provide hands-in-care. They, however, use technology to keep regularly connected and care for each other, despite the geographical distance between the places in which they live (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

My visit to Dala's house ended with a very significant ethnographic experience. She asked me to bring her daughter a present she cannot deliver by herself because of the distance between Peru and England and because of migration regulations. Dala's visa application to visit her daughter in England has been rejected twice and she has only been able to meet her daughter a couple of times in about 14 years when she visits Peru. The present was a hug and it was actually a real hug, sent with real physical contact. I found myself embraced by a woman I had never met before and receiving detailed instructions on how to deliver the present. It was an emotional moment that helped me capture further both the value of the tangible copresence and the symbolic meaning of transnational practices and experiences of home and home-making. Although, as Skrbiš (2008) argues, physical immediacy may not be a prerequisite or even sufficient to sustain a sense of family and I would add a sense of home, it stills an ambition for many of those living in transnational arrangements. The need for some form of bodily co-presence, at least intermittent, was explicitly expressed by Dala. Indeed, when I arrived at her house, she embraced me and mentioned that I was welcome to her house because I had visited Lili's house in Manchester and thus I was bringing part of her 'essence' there. By virtue of the possibility I had to enter both houses, the daughter's and the mother's, I was somehow embedded with the 'power' of bringing families together and transnationally carrying their expressions of affect. Unfortunately, the hug is still waiting to be delivered. I could not meet Lili before the covid-19 lockdowns in England and now online hugs have become the 'norm'. I hope to deliver the present in the near future because

I know firsthand that this is not what Dala means by a hug. In short, home visits – and research into them – have also a very bodily dimension that should not go unnoticed.

11.4.3 Creating a Corner for the Dead in the Domestic Space

Chela is a Peruvian migrant living in Madrid for over twenty years. I interviewed her nephew in Manchester and two of her cousins in Madrid. My interview with her was directly arranged by her cousin who kindly brought me to Chela's house. As soon as I arrived, she noticed that '*it is good to have a friend of my nephew at home'*. It was clearly the sense of friendship I had been building with her relatives that gave me access to her place, from our very first encounter.

Chela's apartment has a wall displaying photos of herself and her family back in Peru. When asked about any objects she would connect with ideas of home, she explicitly referred to the wall and its photos. These showed their parents and siblings and some of them were displayed next to Peruvian handcrafts. Moreover, a display cabinet placed in the corner of the living room caught my attention because it was decorated with traditional religious images that Chela had brought from Peru. A closer look at the cabinet revealed two mugs with votive candles being placed amongst the religious images. The mugs were stamped with the photos of two different elderly women, her mother and her mother-in-law. By looking at her material stuff and enquiring about its meaning, I learnt that the two women had passed away and that Chela had not been able to attend their funerals (Pérez Murcia, 2022). When asked about the meanings of those objects Chela became utterly emotional but decided to continue the conversation anyway. '*Those mugs are perhaps the most important belongings you can find in this place. My mother was the most important person in my life and with her I always felt loved and safe'*. The display cabinet was indeed an altar for the Peruvians virgins and saints, as well as for Chela's mother and mother-in-law (Fig. 11.3). Similar religious iconographies, equally revealing of migrants' transnational connections, were found by Tiaynen-Qadir (2016) amongst Russian grandmothers in Finland.

By looking at the corner of Chela's house and how she interacts with both the religious icons and the two mugs, I did learn what was confirmed later in the interview: that corner is the part of the domestic space in which Chela feels more at home. As she said, '*I feel at home everywhere in this house but this is a special corner. This is my place for praying and keeping a connection with my mother'*. This is the place where she regularly starts and ends her daily routines. She expressed a spiritual need to say good morning to her mother and pray for her and also the need to say 'good night mom' every night. By looking at this corner, I learnt how the impossibility to attend her mother and mother-in-law's funerals has shaped her sense of home in Spain and back in Peru. Only by visiting the domestic space was I able to learn about the death of her closest relatives and how such a loss and the impossibility to attend their funerals had shaped Chela's experience of home.

Fig. 11.3 Chela's altar. (Author's picture)

During the interview she expressed that she rarely shares her intimate affections with strangers and that that corner of her house is not only a personal but also a sacred space. I was already there, however, able and allowed to see the space and capture her emotional reactions. I was in a position to see how her mother and mother-in-law are present in her everyday life despite they had both passed away. The mugs and the religious icons displayed in the cabinet show that they are not only remembered by Chela. She talks with them every day and they are still their main companions in Madrid.

11.5 Discussion and Final Remarks: On the Added Value of Doing Ethnography in the Domestic Space

This chapter has illustrated the significance of ethnographic engagement with peoples' domestic spaces to advance the understanding of the role of mundane objects in migrants and their kin's experiences of home. Drawing on the narratives of Peruvians in England and Spain and their relatives back in Peru, I have showed how the domestic space provides a unique point of reference to unveil the symbiosis between the material and the symbolic for understanding home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

These empirical findings provide new insights to advance two distinct and yet interrelated lines of research. First, they show the multiple roles played by ordinary

materialities in keeping families connected across transnational spaces (Levitt, 2003; Horn, 2019). By entering into people's houses, researchers do not only engage with the very space participants spend a significant part of their lives in. The domestic space allows researchers to better understand how ideas and practices of home travel across borders and the role of mundane materialities in the making and reproduction of home (Pérez Murcia & Boccagni, 2022). As Povrzanovic Frykman and Humbracht (2013: 43) stress, 'by being used, or by merely being present, objects bestow continuity in migrants' practices and in places'.

Second, the findings reveal the significance of everyday materialities in keeping migrants connected not only to the family members who stayed put but also to those who passed away. Those who died in the places left behind, and who used to provide a sense of home to those who migrated, are often present through the objects migrants use to decorate their current dwellings and the practices they celebrate with them. This is notably the case of the altar Chela has created in Madrid to pray for her mother and mother-in-law who passed away in Lima (Tiaynen-Qadir, 2016). More generally, these findings show how the domestic space helps migration and home scholars to understand the intimate and even spiritual connections individuals establish with their material cultures, the baby Jesus sculpture being only one example, and how those materialities connect people's experiences of home across the transnational space.

We could then wonder what we are actually missing, if we conceptualize transnational home-making without engaging with people's domestic spaces. In short, we would be missing the opportunity to observe the emotional and even spiritual connections that people establish with those objects and with people that no longer dwell with them under the same roof. By visiting their domestic spaces, scholars can get a better understanding of how both those who stay and those who move use and even transform their houses and rooms to make those who are physically absent present in their everyday life. By entering the houses of migrants and of their left-behind relatives we can better appreciate how families living transnationally display their objects, look after them and communicate with them, thereby reproducing memories of previous homes in people's current places of settlement (Ratnam, 2018).

Furthermore, the opportunity to be *there*, at both ends of a migration corridor, enables researchers to nuance their understanding of how migrants and their relatives experience home. By looking at how people use and relate to their domestic spaces, we can unveil the multiple meanings people attach to their dwellings. This includes the role of unoccupied rooms in making the absent person 'visible and present' at the same time (Pistrick, 2013), and the significance of their material cultures on their ideas of home. The domestic space is therefore a privileged site to appreciate the intimate relationships individuals nurture with their objects; in essence, to understand the 'secret life' some individuals built with their objects. This is something they would only feel comfortable to recreate at 'home', as it protects them from being judged or misrepresented.

The significance of domestic visits for understanding the meaning of home is by no means a prerogative of migrant communities and of those affected by their mobility. However, domestic visits, especially when conducted at both sides of a

migration corridor, can provide us a better understanding of how people make sense of their places of dwelling when living away from their families and places of origin. At the end, as Ferguson (2018) stresses, a 'home visit' is an embodied practice that involves all the senses and emotions. Both senses and emotions, as contended in this chapter, are central to conceptualise further the role of objects in nurturing transnational family connections and their experiences of home.

References

Appadurai, A. (1986). Introduction; commodities and the politics of value. In A. Appadurai (Ed.), *The social life of things* (pp. 3–63). Cambridge University Press.

Baldassar, L. (2007). Transnational families and aged care: The mobility of care and the migrancy of ageing. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 33*(2), 275–297.

Baldassar, L., & Merla, L. (2014). *Transnational families, migration and the circulation of care. Understanding mobility and absence in family life*. Routledge.

Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006). *Home*. Routledge.

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home*. Palgrave.

Boccagni, P., & Pérez Murcia, L. E. (2020). Fixed places, shifting distances: Remittance houses and migrants' negotiation of home in Ecuador. *Migration Studies, 9*(1), 47–64.

Brandhorst, R., Baldassar, L., & Wilding, R. (2020). Introduction to the special issue: "Transnational family care 'on hold'? Intergenerational relationships and obligations in the context of immobility regimes". *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 18*(3), 261–280.

Buffel, T. (2015). Ageing migrants and the creation of home: Mobility and the maintenance of transnational ties. *Population, Space and Place, 23*(5), 1994.

Evans, J., & Jones, P. (2011). The walking interview: Methodology, mobility and place. *Applied Geography, 31*(2), 849–858.

Ferguson, H. (2018). Making home visits: Creativity and the embodied practices of home visiting in social work and child protection. *Qualitative Social Work, 17*(1), 65–80.

Gabb, J. (2010). Home truths: Ethical issues in family research. *Qualitative Research, 10*, 461–478.

Hage, G. (1997). At home in the entrails of the west: Multiculturalism, ethnic food and migrant home-building. In H. Grace et al. (Eds.), *Home/world: Space, community and marginality in Sydney's west* (pp. 99–153). Pluto.

Hall, S. M. (2009). 'Private life' and 'work life': Difficulties and dilemmas when making and maintaining friendships with ethnographic participants. *Area, 41*, 263–272.

Hall, S. M. (2014). Ethics of ethnography with families: A geographical perspective. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 46*(9), 2175–2194.

Hammond, L. (2004). *This place will become home: Refugee repatriation to Ethiopia*. Cornell University Press.

Handel, A. (2019). What's in a home? Toward a critical theory of housing/dwelling. *Politics and Space, 37*(6), 1045–1062.

Horn, V. (2019). *Aging within transnational families: The case of older Peruvians*. Anthem Press.

Huisman, K. (2008). 'Does this mean you're not going to come visit me anymore?': An inquiry into an ethics of reciprocity and positionality in feminist ethnographic research. *Sociological Inquiry, 78*, 372–396.

Iverson, R. R. (2009). 'Getting out' in ethnography. *Qualitative Social Work, 8*(1), 9–26.

Korpela, M., Hirvi, L., & Tawah, S. (2016). Not alone: Doing fieldwork in the company of family members. *Suomen Antropologi. Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society, 41*(3), 4–20.

Levitt, P. (2003). Keeping feet in both worlds: Transnational practices and immigrant incorporation in the United States. In C. Joppke & E. Morawska (Eds.), *Toward assimilation and citizenship*. Palgrave.

Lucas, S., & Purkayastha, B. (2007). "Where is home?" Here and there: Transnational experiences of home among Canadian migrants in the United States. *GeoJournal, 68*(2/3), 243–251.

Marschall, S. (2019). 'Memory objects': Material objects and memories of home in the context of intra-African mobility. *Journal of Material Culture, 24*(3), 253–269.

Miller, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Home possessions. Material culture behind closed doors*. Berg.

Miller, D. (2010). *Stuff*. Polity.

Papastergiadis, N. (1998). *Dialogues in diasporas: Essays and conversations on cultural identity*. Rivers Orman.

Pérez Murcia, L. E. (2022). 'My soul stills hurts': Bringing death and funerals into the ageing-migration-home nexus. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* online first.

Pérez Murcia, L. E., & Boccagni, P. (2022). Do objects (re)produce home among international migrants? Unveiling the social functions of domestic possessions in Peruvian and Ecuadorian migration. *International Journal of Intercultural Studies, 43*(5), 589–605.

Pink, S. (2004). *Home trust: Gender, domestic objects and everyday life*. Berg.

Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. Sage.

Pistrick, E. (2013). Performing absences. Seasonal returns in south Albanian villages. *Ethnologie Française, 43*(1), 65–75.

Povrzanovic Frykman, M., & Humbracht, M. (2013). Making palpable connections: Objects in migrants' transnational lives. Malmö högskola, Faculty of Culture and Society (KS), Department of Global Political Studies (GPS). *Ethnologia Scandinavica, 43*, 47–67.

Ralph, D., & Staeheli, L. A. (2011). Home and migration: Mobilities, belongings and identities. *Geography Compass, 5*, 517–530.

Ratnam, C. (2018). Creating home: Intersections of memory and identity. *Geography Compass, 12*(4).

Ratnam, C., & Drozdzewski, D. (2020). Detour: Bodies, memories, and mobilities in and around the home. *Mobilities, 15*(6), 757–775.

Skrbiš, Z. (2008). Transnational families: Theorising migration, emotions and belonging. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 29*(3), 231–246.

Tiaynen-Qadir, T. (2016). Transnational grandmothers making their multi-sited homes between Finland and Russia. In K. Walsh & L. Näre (Eds.), *Transnational migration and home in older age* (pp. 25–37). Routledge.

Tolia-Kelly, D. (2004). Locating processes of identification: Studying the precipitates of re-memory through artefacts in the British Asian home. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 29*(3), 314–329.

Tolia-Kelly, D. (2006). Mobility/stability: British Asian cultures of 'landscape and Englishness'. *Environment and Planning A, 38*, 341–358.

Trabert, S. (2020). Understanding the significance of migrants' material culture. *Journal of Social Archaeology, 20*(1), 95–115.

Van der Horst, H. (2010). Dwellings in transnational lives: A biographical perspective on "Turkish–Dutch" houses in Turkey. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 36*(7), 1175–1192.

Vullnetari, J. (2016). 'Home to go': Albanian older parents in transnational social fields. In K. Walsh & L. Näre (Eds.), *Transnational migration and home in older age* (pp. 38–49). Routledge.

Walsh, K. (2016). Expatriate belongings: Traces of lives 'abroad' in the home-making of English returnees in later life. In K. Walsh & L. Näre (Eds.), *Transnational migration and home in older age* (pp. 139–150). Routledge.

Walsh, K. (2018). Materialities and imaginaries of home: Geographies of British returnees in later life. *Area, 50*(4), 476–482.

Chapter 12
Migrant Domestic Space as Kinship Space: Dwelling in the "Distant Home" of One's in-Laws

Barbara Bertolani

12.1 Introduction

> We are in my mother-in-law's bedroom, the only one with air conditioning – a "remittance gift" that my husband installed a few months ago. She's sitting in her favorite armchair by the side of her bed. I face her in a chair borrowed from the small dining room, while my husband, who's translating what we are saying, sits next to me on an old upholstered sofa. A small TV and some photos hang on the wall: a few of them were made in our home in Italy and portray our family, along with those of her other migrant child who lives in Switzerland. During the last two hours she has been telling me her life story sharing intimate and moving memories, while I have collected important data for my research and have also learned a lot about this distant part of my family. The interview has been emotionally demanding. Now, as she's smiling at me, she's both tired and serene. I ask my husband to tell her that the interview is over. Time to say thanks to her, in my bad Punjabi, and turn off the recorder. After so many words, now I can be just her daughter-in-law and start again to communicate as we usually do: with gestures I ask her how she feels, get up and hug her. (Field notes, August 2019)

In 2019 I conducted a few weeks of intense fieldwork in semi-rural Punjab as a part of HOMInG, a comparative research project on migration and homemaking. As the wife of a Punjabi men spending the summer holidays with her husband and children, I had the chance to live with my relatives and share their daily routines by being a family guest. As a white Western female researcher, I had the possibility to interview them as a "honorary insider" (Carling et al., 2014) – a temporary yet semi-familiar presence who was allowed to dwell in their intimate domestic spaces, normally inaccessible to outsiders. Doing participant and ethnographic observation was not without methodological and ethical dilemmas. I was a trusted presence, but cultural expectations and issues obvious to any insider often needed to be explained to me, not to mention the language barrier. Moreover, it was necessary to negotiate how much of what had been said and seen should remain confidential or could

B. Bertolani (✉)
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_12

become part of my study, in order not to jeopardize mutual relationships. I experienced the riddles and complexities of doing research *with* the family (Starrs et al., 2001), as the presence of my teenage children raised a number of concrete and logistical problems and changed the perception that my informants had of me. At the same time, I did research *through* the family, as my Indian relatives became my first informants and gatekeepers, putting me in contact with other acquaintances, friends and in-laws, many of them living in Italy as well. In addition, the access to the field in India (and later on in Italy) was often mediated by my husband, who acted as an intercultural mediator with non-English and non-Italian-speaking relatives and informants. This resulted in 53 in-depth and semi-structured interviews (of which 22 were conducted in Punjab, 21 in Italy and 10 via Whatsapp or Skype to people residing in other countries of the diaspora). In short, this research design had its own dilemmas, particularly in terms of reflexivity. My multiple positioning influenced the type of information collected and had to be situationally defined and adapted, along with mutual expectations and responsibilities.

This chapter deals with these topics starting from my personal experience as a researcher with Punjabi people in India and in Italy. In the first section I mainly discuss questions of positionality, while in the second I focus on what we can better understand about homing and migration by conducting research in domestic settings, compared with different ones.

12.2 On Positionality and Reflexivity

My personal motivations for going to Indian Punjab were threefold (Sherif, 2001). First of all, I had to conduct research on homing practices among Indian immigrants living in Italy and their left-behinds in India. Moreover, this part of my fieldwork had to be organized during summer holidays and foresaw the presence of my children and husband. Finally, I wanted to learn more about the Punjabi part of my family. I had decided to focus my research on Indian Punjabis because I knew that I would dwell in the homes of my in-laws as if they were my "distant homes", which was consistent with the topic of my study. I also knew that I could take advantage of the social capital (Coleman, 1988) of my extended family in terms of information, contacts, trust and cultural interpretation, getting to know other people with relative ease and in a short time. Thus, I did not experience isolation or lack of social acceptance on the field, nor strong social pressures due to behavioral expectations (Sherif, 2001). For the short period of my stay in Punjab, any culturally unorthodox behavior of mine was tolerated with humor. On the other hand, I knew that my positioning would allow me to "see" some things and not others. For example, it would have provided me with an analytical perspective from inside homes and from within the relationships in which I was embedded, at the expense of a more macrosocial or political analysis. My children as well limited the type of field-experiences that could otherwise have been made, possibly making them less adventurous. On the other hand, sometimes their presence transformed my work into family visits to

distant relatives, turning the interview into a pretext for collective discussions between generations that otherwise would not have taken place. We were often allowed to see how and by whom some private areas of the house were used, according to gender and seniority as well as the rural or urban context. However, we were also asked to take part in family life as kin, and to engage with conflicts and subtle dynamics of control: family is anything but a safe haven and should not be romanticized when doing family-based research (Hall, 2014). All this required a certain methodological discipline and continuous awareness about one's positioning and shifting boundaries across multiple roles. Needless to say, the design of my research went beyond the traditional methodological assumption that a researcher needs to remain distant from participants in order to retain objectivity, analytical sharpness and critical mind (Gabb, 2010). From a methodological point of view, this only made sense by recognizing that the researcher's "Self" influences every aspect of the research process, from ideation to final interpretation. In the relationship between the "Self" and the "Other" there is no clear binary opposition (Sherif, 2001).

12.2.1 Beyond the Insider/Outsider Divide

Migration research has long engaged with the advantages and disadvantages connected to the researcher's being an insider or an outsider, relative to the group under study. The general conclusion is that this dualism is not as stable as it is often assumed to be, and that each of these positions does not in itself imply better knowledge (Herod, 1999; Mullings, 1999; Chako, 2004). The insider/outsider divide has been questioned as a discursive reality that is constructed in a relational, context-specific way and as a result of the interplay between the researcher's characteristics and particular social contexts. An ethnographer can be positioned by the interlocutors according to more or less visible and specific "markers" that are linked to the researcher's person and behavior. Markers vary in terms of their visibility to informants and the researcher's ability to modify them. They can be selectively communicated depending on the situation, opening up to a series of possible "third positions" in migration research (Carling et al., 2014: 49). Being married to a Punjabi, I was an "honorary insider" to his kin (Ibidem: 50). This position allowed me continuous interaction with them. As a result, the process of knowledge production was dialogic and intersubjective (van Stapele, 2014). My third position, however, changed through time depending on the social and national context where I was conducting research (Carling et al., 2014). In Punjab I was the guest who went to her relatives' homes and struggled to comply with very different customs and symbols, while in Italy this balance was reversed. I tried to make the most of my insider/outsider position to gain information, going beyond what was taken for granted, to "uncover hidden layers and unpack self-evidences and alternative meanings" (van Stapele, 2014: 15). In Punjab, everyone expected me to be quite ignorant about some cultural and behavioral habits. Sometimes I used my attributed positioning in order to ask for explanations, relying on advice in certain circumstances,

enhancing the expertise of my interlocutors (Sherif, 2001). If I gave proof of knowing a few words of Punjabi, I would arouse reactions of surprise and satisfaction, while my shortcomings became an opportunity to discuss the different ways of conceiving the house and its spaces. In any case, my non-binary positioning has imposed a constant reflection on relational boundaries and thresholds, including when these should be built, moved and blurred and therefore how to manage research control, rapport maintenance, confidentiality and disengagement from the field.

12.2.2 Relational Thresholds

By "relational thresholds" I refer to the communicative expedients I used, in various situations, to distinguish my roles with my interlocutors or to manage information. This helped to sort out ethical dilemmas that could arise when the spatial and temporal boundaries of the setting were not so clear, or to define and switch from one to another: was I asking something as a researcher or as a relative? Could I use this for my research? Was our informal dialogue something that should remain confidential or not? In the most ethically thorny situations, I clearly and directly agreed with people on how and to what extent to use the information I had received, with the aim of not compromising our relational bond. I also attended to the confidentiality of the participants by using pseudonyms. To a certain extent, this has rebalanced the disparity of power that exists between researcher and informants, introducing a principle of agency on their part (Mullings, 1999). In other words, following Goffman's metaphor of everyday life as a representation (Goffman, 1959), I tried to experiment with a series of "staging", and to define the situation in an explicit and agreed way. Some communicative expedients, objects and rituals made it possible to determine the boundaries between an interview and different settings. For example, during interviews I asked my relatives not to use kinship designations when referring to our common family members but instead personal names or professional qualifications. Many family stories needed to be retold to me, I added, as what was known to all might not be known to me, or it had to be made explicit for research purposes. I would also take advantage of some traditional cultural practices linked to Punjabi hospitality as a relational threshold to circumscribe a transition space and time. For instance, the offer of *chai* (the traditional spiced milk tea), fruit juices and food usually marked the beginning and the end of the interviews, limiting the phases of "representation".

My relationship with the cultural mediator – my husband and part of the family network – also required attention. We agreed at the beginning of the research that during the interviews we would not behave as husband and wife but rather as professionals. A cultural mediator exercises a power that presupposes a very high level of awareness and reflexivity. He is concerned with the selection of information, the translation and interpretation of situations and cultural meanings (Barberis & Boccagni, 2017). In some cases, this involved "leadership adjustments" during interviews. As a researcher I was responsible for conducting the interview, while he

as a cultural mediator could suggest how to deal with certain situations and ask certain questions. In our case, short sentences or words in Italian, as well as mutual knowledge and trust allowed us to consciously make the necessary tunings.

Maintaining confidentiality for participants living or operating within the same community is considered a challenge in ethnographic research (Hall, 2014; Ellis, 1995), even more so in my case. The privacy of each informant within the same family and also between different families was particularly at stake during group interviews. These typically occurred in unexpected ways: sometimes just before starting an interview I was asked if other family members might be present. Or possibly, during the interview neighbors or other relatives passed by on an unexpected visit. These situations occurred especially in villages, showing the porosity of domestic spaces and home thresholds (Baxter & Brickell, 2014) and the pervasive influence of collective life within rural contexts (Hershman, 1981). Sometimes family and friends remained silent, whereas in other cases they decided to join the discussion. In both scenarios, the presence of other people would undermine the relational threshold of confidentiality. It was not easy, then, to decide when it was best to accept the audience's presence or insist on a separate conversation without sounding impolite. As Hall claims (2014: 2182), "group interviews can be a site for the renegotiation of family relationships, identities and intimacies". In my case, these "performances" were also used to share and transmit a family narrative to the children, or to disclose past conflicts within extended families resulting in the division of the house and in the construction of new homes (Bertolani & Boccagni, 2021). At the same time, group interviews were not always easy to manage, leading to unexpected situations and revealing latent conflicts between elderly parents and children.

> During the interview the whole family of Narinder Singh is present: in addition to his wife, his mother who has just arrived from India and an elderly relative who has suddenly come to visit her. At first, I don't understand why my interlocutor seems uncomfortable as he answers seemingly trivial questions about his father's house in Punjab. Then the older guest begins to contest his answers and to put moral pressure on him in Punjabi. Narinder's answers, in his view, are disrespectful towards his old father. I could not have predicted that there would be an intergenerational conflict in that family. I am sorry to see that my questions embarrass my interlocutor. On our way home, the cultural mediator tells me it would have been better to insist on having the interview separately, in the kitchen. (Field notes, Italy, November 2020)

As the families in my network of relatives and friends knew who was being interviewed, it became clear to me that they had particular expectations about it. Getting involved in the research was seen like a sign of respect for one's influence within the family. Being excluded, instead, could make them seem less authoritative in the eyes of their kin. In these cases, I found myself balancing two contrasting needs, i.e. maintaining complete control over the research vs preserving the rapport with my guests, accepting compromises. In fact, as I realized, adjustments and exceptions are inevitable upon fieldwork. They are precisely what allows it to progress (Hall, 2014).

> My sister-in-law thought I wanted to interview her too, as I had already interviewed her husband along with other in-laws, and she was the only elderly woman I hadn't spoken to yet. So, she decided where, when and how we would conduct the interview. She agreed to take us to her niece's house for a scheduled interview and she informed me that she would be interviewed in the car during the trip, "so we don't waste time." I accepted because refusing would be rude, but also because this same request had already revealed something about her home. (Field notes, Punjab, August 2019)

Maintaining the relationship also meant choosing carefully how, to whom and when to reciprocate, in the context of a family exchange of small gifts and counter-gifts (Mauss, 1954). This was especially true at the end of my stay in Punjab. Disengagement from the field (Hall, 2014) can be an emotionally intense experience (Snow, 1980). In my case it was not a question of interrupting relationships but of continuing them while *physically* leaving the field in Punjab (Ellis, 1995) and entering a connected research field in Italy. This meant switching to a previously tested remote communication through Skype or Whatsapp calls and typing, along with the exchange of pictures, drawings and audio-messages. The night before we returned to Italy, my sister-in-law had invited the entire extended family to dinner. That afternoon I had asked my niece to help me buy some *sutes*, the traditional Punjabi women's dress, as a gift for the hostess and also for my mother-in-law. Indeed, I wanted to reciprocate their help in my research. It soon became clear to me that, since I was going to give the gift during the dinner, my choice had to be culturally appropriate and respect the family hierarchy in order not to create embarrassment. As my niece explained to me, "Your sister-in-law knows exactly the price of each *sute* according to its quality. If your gift is considered too cheap for her, it can be interpreted as an act of ignorance or as rude or provocative, but if it is too expensive, this will create problems for *your* mother-in-law, to whom you have to show respect." Soon the choice of the gift turned from a pleasant event into a diplomatic matter. However, that trivial experience made me test the dynamics of control within extended families that underlie home (un)making practices in semi-rural Punjab (Bertolani & Boccagni, 2021). I could not have understood all of this if the research had not been conducted in their homes.

12.3 Inside Homes

Before talking about the homes of those I interviewed and lived with in Punjab and Italy, a few notes are necessary on my own home. Whenever my mother-in-law comes to Italy and lives with us for a few weeks, the house undergoes a series of transformations to make her feel more "at home". Unsurprisingly, her presence attracts other relatives and acquaintances who wish to pay her a visit. This immediately changes the thresholds of my home, making them more permeable to the outside. Guests pass by without precise arrival and departure times and often without notice. Their presence requires a number of adjustments concerning its objects and affordances. I remember the first times when my sister-in-law and my

mother-in-law, being strict vegetarians and wanting to cook some Punjabi food for us, opened my fridge to close it immediately afterwards, laughing embarrassed to find eggs, ham and various types of meat. As a matter of fact, the presence of my Punjabi kin causes some things to temporarily leave the house (or to be hidden) and others to enter, or some spaces and objects to be used in another way. The pantry and the fridge get filled with Punjabi vegetables and our palates get used to savoring the flavor of spices every day. The television broadcasts Bollywood films or *kirtan* (Sikh religious hymns) that are performed directly from the Golden Temple of Amritsar in Punjab, while the air smells of incense and the sofa becomes the place for reading the breviary every few hours. In other words, different sound-, smell-, visual-, taste- and touch- scapes are recreated (Hirvi, 2016) that connect in a multi-sensorial way my house in Italy with those of my relatives (Ahmed, 1999). Stuff and spaces of the house change their function according to the moments of the day and the people who occupy them (Miranda-Nieto, 2021a; Bonfanti, 2021). Certain objects are then used to reproduce an ecstatic atmosphere (Bille, 2017), allowing for different visceral experiences (Longhurst et al., 2009). Some of these habits I have also found in the homes of my Punjabi informants in Italy but, curiously, I have not noticed them in Punjab. For example, in the houses I visited or lived in I rarely found the radio or television turned on to listen to *kirtan*, or incense sticks that perfumed the air. In a way, there was no need to materialize through the senses one's distinctive identity within the home, relative to the outer environment. So, what can we understand about migrants' life experience by doing research within their domestic spaces? As a way to address this question I will turn to the houses I lived in while being in Punjab and which I visited while conducting interviews in Italy.

12.3.1 Food, Everyday Habits and Space Control as Ways of Home-Making and Unmaking in Punjab

My research involved the use of semi-structured and informal interviews, along with participant observation. However, I soon found myself also using participatory visual research tools, such as photos, videos, drawings and maps to record the material interactions between inhabitants, their pets, objects and domestic spaces. These audiovisual materials provided the pretext for further in-depth analysis as they documented how the "home atmosphere" was produced (or jeopardized) through the (un)making of routines (Pink & Mackley, 2016) and space control. Audiovisual data enabled a better analysis of the interplay between human and nonhuman actors like rooms, objects and affordances (Latour, 1993), as they mutually constituted one another through the lived experience of the domestic space (Vellinga, 2007). It was precisely the existence of home-rituals, as well as the profound knowledge of the domestic environment and the arrangement of objects – unknown to a guest like me – that created a sense of intimacy for the inhabitants, allowing spontaneous movements in space. As I reported in my fieldnotes:

> Surinder Kaur, my sister-in-law, "admitted" me in her kitchen because she wanted to teach me some Punjabi recipes. She moves naturally in this space, grabs objects with her eyes closed because she knows where she has stored them, gives me short and precise commands on what to do with nods, hand gestures or pointing, while she is busy with the stove. Her cooking class includes almost no words but only precise and confident gestures, while I'm slow and clumsy. (Field notes, August 2019)

While dwelling in my relatives' homes at various times of the day I observed the "backstage" of domestic representations (Goffman, 1959) and the discrepancies between the official narratives about home and the actions performed unknowingly by its inhabitants. Latent conflicts among the members of the household became evident in body language or in space "detours" (Ratnam & Drozdzewski, 2020). Family members deliberately avoided staying in certain common parts of the house, like the courtyard or the lobby, as if these were crossed by invisible boundaries. Or they purposely moved (or instead, avoided touching) certain objects from one place to another, thereby marking the portion of the domestic space that was under their control, playing a silent game of mutual mortification and communicating without words the state of each other's relationships. In other words, the functions and meanings attributed to nonhuman entities affected the daily life of my interlocutors and their efforts to create a sense of security, comfort and control while relating with them (Handel, 2019). The house itself was sometimes turned into a "battlefield" (Bertolani & Boccagni, 2021) between contrasting practices and moralities about home, as some dwellers could use objects and modify spaces to the detriment of others, starting from unequal power positions.

> There is a clear hierarchy between the women of this house. The one who washes the dishes is always Surinder's young daughter-in-law, as Surinder hates washing dishes. Her small kitchen hosts a new dishwasher, a very rare luxury item in Indian villages and an anniversary gift from her husband a few years ago. This is placed at the centre of the small kitchen and is covered with a sheet because, in practice, it is never used. It represents Surinder's authority precisely because it is immobile and silent. If it were used, it would affect the distribution of tasks and the exercise of female power. (Field notes, August 2019)

Doing research within homes also meant using my own body as a research tool (Crang, 2003; Longhurst et al., 2008). By being there, I was actively involved in the sensorial co-production of the home: the scents or stinks, the flavors of food and all the visual and auditory stimuli that created memories and a homely atmosphere, or possibly prevented it, among my interlocutors (Ahmed, 1999; Longhurst et al., 2009). For example, during my stay in Punjab, the food I was offered as a family guest proved to be a powerful tool to articulate power relationships and home-making practices. Within the same extended family in semi-rural contexts, the tasks related to food preparation were the basis of precise hierarchies and responsibilities among the women of the house. The older woman was in charge of cooking the *daal* (the traditional lentil soup) and the *sabji* (the main vegetarian course). Instead, the younger ones had to stay in the kitchen to prepare hot *rotis* (wholemeal flour wraps, grilled) and *chai* (spiced milk tea). In practice, they were the last to eat, once all the others had finished to do so. Moreover, the kind of food and the ways it was served displayed contrasting views of home adequacy, depending on the local context, but

also on the degree of intimacy between host and guest. For example, I remember sharing appetizing meals prepared by my mother-in-law and served directly inside the pots in which they were cooked, sitting at the table in front of her small kitchen. The absence of formalities and the care of this intimate, home-cooked lunch communicated affection and familiarity towards me. At the same time, dinners at other relatives' homes were also an opportunity for them to emphasize, in relation to ourselves as guests, their distinctive backgrounds and lifestyles. In other words, the "visceral" concerns relationships, along with feelings and memories (Longhurst et al., 2009):

> My cousin's family lives in a village in the countryside. For the occasion, dinner is served in formica plates instead of traditional steel ones, and the water is served in a glass jug. My niece compliments her hostess on her "modern" tableware by asking where she bought it. Apparently, the food was cooked with few spices specially for us, but it is still so spicy that I can hardly eat it. This causes a certain hilarity: the spicy taste and the ability to bear it symbolize strength and resistance, the typical qualities of rural life in contrast with city life. The hostess knows that we were also invited by her sister-in-law, who lives in the city. It looks like she wants to highlight the differences between the two houses (and families). In fact, the meal that had been served to us in the other house was brought from the Chinese rotisserie and symbolized a more urban and cosmopolitan (but inevitably more anonymous) lifestyle. (Field notes, August 2019)

Focusing on food to do research on homes and migration involved paying attention to emotions linked to sensory experiences (Longhurst et al., 2008; Bennett, 2004; Longhurst, 2001; Rose, 1997) and to the attendant relationships. These enabled translocal and "transtemporal" connections between different homes. It was not by chance, then, that my husband made a singular request to his aunt for her dinner invitation: he asked for *saag* (a spinach purée) accompanied by cornmeal wraps. Most important, he asked that the food be cooked in the earthenware pot over the wood fire of the *chulla*, the traditional Punjabi earthenware hearth. He knew that his aunt kept the *chulla* in an abandoned corner of the courtyard of her house. In his opinion, that was the "original taste" of the *saag* that his grandmother made for him as a child, and was not comparable to the one cooked on the gas stove. If the *chulla* had been destroyed, it would have been a great disappointment for him, as he would have lost a piece of those memories that recalled his past home (Fig. 12.1).

12.3.2 Empty Migrant Rooms in Remittance Houses

"You must own a house, otherwise when you return to Punjab where would you sleep – in the hotel?" asked one of my informants during an interview in Italy. This apparently obvious statement sums up all the contradictions of migrants' double absence (Sayad, 2002). Some of the remittance houses I visited in Punjab seemed to me to perform their function precisely because they could not be used by the owners, except for short periods of the year. They symbolized the promise of a future return that was always delayed in time. Indeed, they manifested a presence that

Fig. 12.1 The *chulla* in an abandoned corner of the aunt's house. (Author's picture)

implied a necessary absence, since in order to build and maintain them it was necessary to live abroad. Along with their "Italian" counterparts, these houses formed a tangible and well-structured transnational social space (Levin & Fincher, 2010). For some, however, remittance houses seemed to have fallen short of expectations especially if permanently uninhabited, that is, emptied of those relationships that could make them feel like "homes". Sukhwinder Kaur, a 40-year-old entrepreneur for many years in Italy, had summarized this concept during her interview, by comparing her childhood home in the countryside with the house that she had built over time in a new residential neighborhood, arisen out of nowhere and full of similar buildings:

> When we were children, we all lived in one room. Now our houses are full of rooms, but they're empty. My house is finished but it is without furniture and it's closed. Every now and then, when I go to Punjab, I go to see it and meet neighbors who don't know me. None of my children wants to live there, not even my father who doesn't want to leave his old home. When I go there, I live with him because I want to be close to him. My children have no idea of returning to India and recently asked me "mom, what are you doing with it?" I thought about selling it. (Italy, July 2021)

Research on homemaking and migration cannot ignore remittance houses. There is now an extensive literature on them (Boccagni & Bivand-Erdal, 2021). For example, they have been analyzed as tangible symbols of economic success and social redemption and competition (Taylor, 2013a). Or possibly as connections with one's

family and country of origin and as relational places, in practical and symbolic ways (Bivand-Erdal, 2012, Taylor, 2013b), as well as ambiguous artefacts with respect to local development (Taylor et al., 2007). With the term "remittance houses" I refer to all those buildings that have been rebuilt, enlarged, restored or modernized thanks to migrant remittances. While doing research in Punjab, I got the chance to visit and to live inside some of them. Considering their spaces and objects, I was intrigued by empty migrants' rooms therein not only in themselves, but for the rapports and family expectations that they implied and suggested. From my point of view, remittance houses were a sort of family representation made of brick and concrete, embodied relationships and mutual expectations between family members.

Among the many houses I have visited, three of them had been built from scratch with remitted money. They reflected in their spaces the structure of the traditional patrilocal and agnatic Punjabi enlarged household, where different nuclear families live together under the same roof (Ballard, 1982): elderly parents, sons with their families and unmarried daughters, whereas women should move to their in-laws after marriage and become part of their husband's family. Traditionally, especially in rural contexts, the house of their parents (as well as any real estate inheritance) does not belong to them but is passed to their brothers, as women are given a part of the family patrimony through the dowry at marriage. Grown-up daughters may come back to their parents' house only in case of divorce or widowhood. Under these circumstances they are entitled to live in their father's house (Hershman, 1981).

One of the houses I visited had been built in a rural village about twenty years ago by Sukhwinder Singh, a 60-year-old man who had spent many years in Saudi Arabia and Italy, had reunited there with his family, and eventually decided to come back to Punjab for retirement with his two daughters and wife. His son still lived in Italy and economically supported his parents. When I met him, he was living in his house with his wife, his unmarried daughter and his mother-in-law. His elderly and married daughter was temporarily there for a visit, while his son was supposed to come during winter holidays. I was impressed by the fact that Sukhwinder's daughters had never had any private bedroom in that house. Instead, the son had a room that remained permanently empty. The two young women were sleeping with their grandmother, or together with their cousins in other nearby-houses. The fully furnished room of the migrant son stayed constantly empty and unused, waiting for him and his family. It was well kept and clean, the double bed was made, and the air conditioning was on as if he could arrive at any moment (cf. Boccagni & Echeverria, Chap. 13). An unlit flat-screen television stood on a wall, surrounded by a series of photos of the adult son, his wife and children. At the same time, this room was fix and immobile as a museum of nostalgia (Pistrick & Bachmeier, 2016) whose primary function was to memorialize: no object out of place, no mess, only emptiness frozen in time and the presence of the absent ones through this uninhabited space. When I came back to Italy, I met Sukhwinder Singh's son and his family and had the chance to visit his Italian house. The young man was torn by divergent family expectations. His father expected him to return to India for good and join him in the small family business, living in the house that was waiting for him as soon as possible. His wife, on the other hand, wanted to go to Canada and reunite there with her

sister. He instead preferred to stay in Italy, where he had a stable and well-paid job and where he was paying the mortgage on another dwelling. His Italian house reflected those family conflicts and his unclear migratory project: it had already been stripped of its furnishings to be destined for sale some years ago according to his elderly father's will, but then the family project had changed and it was once again dwelled by the family, "as my father realized that I still had to save some money to be able to return to India". For this reason, the Italian house was only partially furnished, and yet permanently inhabited. "In this moment, I don't have enough money to buy new furnishings", he said to me. He then added that this "suspension" was also due to the uncertainty of his migratory project. Even the house in Italy, therefore, despite being inhabited, was immobile, almost waiting. The comparison with the empty but fully furnished bedroom waiting for him in the Punjabi house was striking.

Another house I visited was inhabited by an old lady, Harpreet Kaur, and her widowed daughter. Married to a soldier, Harpreet was very soon a widow and had to raise four children by herself, facing significant financial difficulties. The house had been built about twenty years before in a little town by her elderly son, who had emigrated to the Philippines and was still living there with his family, running his own trade business. The house was a large three-storey building with numerous terraces, standing in the centre of the town in a privileged position. When it was built, it had been the first building of its kind in town, as she was keen to point out, and was still "the tallest". With its large courtyard area, it was a symbol of economic redemption and a form of social security for the widowed and lonely mother and sister. From the outside, it was newly plastered and well cared for. However, inside many rooms were semi-empty or used as warehouses. The only well-furnished, clean and "alive" rooms consisted of the kitchen, the mother's and the landlord's bedrooms. Again, despite the abundance of space and empty rooms, the adult daughter did not have her bedroom but she slept with her old mother, also to take care of her. The living room was equally well cared for, but the shelves and the most precious objects were covered with newspaper sheets to protect them against dust and wear. It was almost as if it were an uninhabited house, at any time ready to be put back into use, in case of visits by the landlord. In the room of the absent son there was his old scooter, parked there and covered with a sheet, to preserve it from someone else of the extended family in the village using it. Its only function was to symbolically embody a presence and a promise of return. Like many other objects and spaces in that house, the scooter had deteriorated for not being used. However, and more important, it had been preserved, pending the return of the rightful owner, as it attested to the care of the relationship with the landlord, through the conservation of his material goods. In this case, the increased symbolic value of the house, its objects and affordances seemed to be linked to its diminished function or use value (Lopez, 2010).

Yet another house I visited was inhabited by a widowed woman in her sixties, Kulwinder Kaur, with her two daughters. The eldest, Manjit Kaur, had come back to her parents' house with her child after divorce; the second was still unmarried. This house belonged to Kulwinder's eldest son, who lived in Dubai, managing his own

truck company together with his brother. The three-storey building was built on the foundations of the old family house. It stood in the centre of a small town and was finished one year ago after three years of building under the supervision of Manjit. With the help of an architect and interior designer, she had planned a series of innovative and "modern" solutions to optimize the inner spaces (i.e. built-in wardrobes with sliding or revolving doors, double foldaway beds), which she proudly showed me upon my visit. She had been inspired by many furniture magazines and also by the furnishings of the houses in Italy, where she had lived when she was still married. In this house every member of the family had its own space, except for the unmarried daughter that slept together with her mother. The house was completely furnished and well kept. All bedrooms seemed to be in use and were made with elegant sheets, and the bathrooms were clean and furnished. Everything was well-ordered and clean.

On the wall of the landlord's bedroom, a photo of his wedding was hanging. However, the bride did not live in that house nor in Dubai. Due to a conflict with Manjit over the control of the family ménage, she has returned to her parents' house with her newly born child, leaving only a few accessories in the wardrobes. Nothing really personal, just a few nail polishes that could have belonged to anyone, testified to the still-unresolved family conflict, frozen in time (Pistrick & Bachmeier, 2016), and also to the bride's material absence.

12.3.3 Memory Objects within Punjabi Homes

In addition to remittance houses as such, during my stay in Punjab I was also struck by what I call "memory objects", that is all that stuff whose primary function is to trigger recollections (Cieraad, 2010). There is an extensive literature on the importance of objects for people, influencing human behavior (Bourdieu, 1970) and being constitutive of social identity. Materialities may be the depositories of feelings, memories and desires (Noble, 2012). They may turn the dwelling into a home through the way they are selected and arranged, made meaningful and deployed in everyday activities (Bonfanti, 2021; Cieraad, 1999; Miller, 2001; Pink, 2004). For migrants, they may prove the search for steadiness while living abroad or being on the move (Boccagni, 2017; Pechurina, Chap. 6). For the left behinds, objects within homes – especially gifts and pictures – may symbolize a persisting rapport with their distant relatives and friends. Visiting and living in the houses in Punjab, I was able to investigate them above all from the point of view of the relationships and bonds they implied.

In every house I visited, the pictures of the absent ones were *present*. Some of those portrayed had died, and many others had just emigrated. These images were normally displayed in living rooms as well as in more private spaces like bedrooms, depending on their meanings and functions (Pérez Murcia, Chap. 11). If placed in the interior "public" space of the home, pictures had often been taken during rites of passage like wedding ceremonies. They were like a way to fix the family tree over

time in one single shot. These objects were significant reminders of one's identity and relationships, as they showed foreign people (as well as kin) the history of the family and its current composition, the members' authority and their roles, despite the physical absence of some of them. If placed in more private spaces, these pictures testified to the identity, as well as to the relational and emotional points of reference for the person sleeping in that room. In this case, there were several images taken at different moments in life. In the bedroom of Harpreet Kaur, the reciprocal positioning of every single picture was important. They were displayed together with a wall clock and flat-screen television, testifying to modernity in coexistence with the past. In practice, they were a visual representation of the life course of that person, through her affections. In her own words, they represented "where I started from and where I arrived" (Fig. 12.2).

Other "memory objects" were old gifts that no longer had any practical function. They were nevertheless maintained in showcases or sideboards and put on display in the living room or in the house corridors: old automated toys (like robots, walkie talkies, and game-boys), headphones and outdated cell phones. Some of them had seldom been used, in order not to spoil them. They seemed to be like relics, useless in their original functions but still crucial in themselves as reminders, to witness the long-lasting emotional bond with people's emigrated family members. These

Fig. 12.2 Pictures and objects representing Harpreet's life course. (Author's picture)

Fig. 12.3 Memory objects in domestic showcases. (Author's picture)

objects made sense simply by being there (Pistrick & Bachmeier, 2016), next to family photos, trophies or traditional furnishings and local souvenirs as they worked as material substitutes of the absent ones (Fig. 12.3).

Harpreet Kaur, for example, wanted to show me her wooden cane and a large digital clock that was placed on the central shelf of the living room. These objects had been gifted to her by her son and symbolized his affection and care. The cane, on which she could lean at every step, was meant to replace the arm of the distant son. The clock illuminated at night the living room and corridor with the green light of its numbers, "So I can wake up without turning the light on and waking up my daughter who sleeps next to me". Like an animated object (Latour, 1993) and a permanent luminous link, it guided her, while inexorably marking the time passing (Fig. 12.4).

12.3.4 From Punjab to Italy and Back: Circulation and Multiscalarity within Homes

"I built this house with my own sacrifices," Harinder Singh peremptorily said during the interview. "My two sons live in Italy but the things you will find here are all Punjabi – there are no objects from there!," he continued. A small inspection in his

Fig. 12.4 Harpreet's luminous clock covered by newspapers sheets as a protection against wear and the time passing. (Author's picture)

kitchen a few minutes earlier had suggested the opposite. In plain sight there was a five-liter can of extra virgin olive oil and various Italian brand appliances, the writings in Italian on their packaging unequivocally identifying their origin. In the dining room I had seen a lamp in the shape of a Pisa tower and the *chai* had just been served to us on a formica tray that I knew well, because it could only be obtained by collecting points from a famous Italian biscuit brand. Despite my host's little lies, this stuff demonstrated the porosity of the boundaries of his home (Baxter & Brickell, 2014) and the circulation between his dwelling in Punjab and those of his sons in Italy (Ahmed et al., 2003). However, his fierce opposition communicated the existence of a family conflict: on the one hand the sons who insisted that their parents should leave Punjab and move permanently to Italy with them, and on the other the father's desire to continue living in that house. Upon entering I noticed the presence of cameras that silently filmed every corner of the courtyard, in particular the vegetable garden where the elderly spent many hours of their day. These were not anti-intrusion objects, but "eyes" with which the sons could monitor their parents at any time, since "they are worried that something might happen to us". The cameras, which had been the result of a painful compromise, streamed a piece of the Punjabi house into the Italian one, effectively making both of them porous (Baxter & Brickell, 2014), connected and multiscalar (Miranda-Nieto, 2021b).

In many of the houses I visited in Punjab I found items that came from homes in Italy, especially kitchen utensils and appliances, as well as Italian food. For instance, in my mother-in-law's kitchen, the coffee is prepared only with the typical moka pot, taken from my home during one of her stays in Italy. In the houses of other relatives, who also live in Italy, there is a small Italian oven for making pizzas that is used whenever they come back to Punjab, always carrying *mozzarella* in their suitcase. Much more often, however, I have noticed the presence of Punjabi items (dresses and fabrics, pots, furnishings and food) in the homes of migrants in Italy. Indeed, the home – especially the migrant one – is a repository of artifacts, affordances and situated practices that play an important role for identity continuity and cultural transmission (Boccagni, 2017). Within the Italian homes of my informants, domestic material cultures seemed to operate as transitional tools (Metha & Belk, 1991; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), connecting people with other meaningful past and present places and relationships. Furniture and furnishings contextually redefined the morals of adequacy and comfort (Hadjiyanni, 2007), while religious objects played an "intermediary role" (Cieraad, 2010) as they triggered personal memories and emotions and reminded practices and situations linked to other homes or to people's past lives. Overall, as my fieldwork shows, migrant homes in Italy are much more multiscalar than their Punjabi counterparts, since they are strongly connected with different spatial and temporal settings of home identification (Miranda-Nieto, 2021b).

Again, food is an example. Although alternated with pizza and pasta, Punjabi fresh spiced vegetarian food accompanied by homemade *rotis* is part of my informants' daily routine in Italy. To prepare it, groceries are bought in local Indian shops, although some ingredients such as spices or some accessories like mortars, *tawas* (special pans for preparing *rotis*) and pressure cookers are often brought from India: even if available locally, they are considered to be tastier or more functional if they are *original*. Indeed, it is not just the food that is ingested, but especially the relationships, the care and affection, as well as the memories and the emotions that it implies (Cieraad, 2010). Through food, a transnational association with one's homeland and with other distant homes is stimulated, as they get materially reproduced thousands of miles away (Taylor, 2013c; Miranda-Nieto & Boccagni, 2020).

Religious objects and spaces for prayer and meditation within homes in Italy seem to perform an analogous linking function. They connect migrants' present lives with experiences and relationships that occurred elsewhere in the past, with other family members and in different homes (Bertolani & Boccagni, 2022). Religious practice at home becomes even more important wherever the outer environment refers to a completely different cultural identity and where gurdwaras are much less close to home than in Punjab. This practice becomes a way to make home anew, as it may change the way the house is conceived, temporally and spatially organized and lived by its inhabitants. Specific objects like breviaries, *rumallas* (richly decorated fabrics that wrap the religious texts) and the gurus' images are very frequent in Sikh Punjabi homes in Italy. These pictures, along with photographs of sacred places and pilgrimage destinations such as Amritsar's Golden Temple, visually distinguish the Sikh domestic space from the one of other South

Asians. They become a "visual vocabulary" for the diaspora (Tolia-Kelly, 2004) which renders the home aesthetically suitable to Sikh values (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). On the other hand, breviaries become precious relics within the diasporic homes due to the narratives tied to them or the relationships they embody and disclose (Cieraad, 2010). If they were gifted from other family members in Punjab, they become enacted memories passed on, artifacts for family or for personal re-memory (Tolia-Kelly, 2004) serving as conductive threads of one's entire life. At the same time, they may be critical affordances for the portability of home and its circulation. It was not by coincidence that some of my informants never left their breviaries at home but brought them from one house to the other while travelling from Italy to Punjab. Ravinder Kaur, a 30-year-old woman, told me that they would not leave the breviaries in their house when it was closed as they were a part of their family and home and because otherwise no one would take care of them. "To leave them there alone it's not good! [*They must*] be in the middle of where the family is. When you leave, they come away", she added. Like the heart of the home, these little books were installed in the Indian home for the time of the stay, only to be taken back home again to Italy upon return. In cases like this, the domestic religious practice presupposed the circulation of objects. This created, in turn, a translocal circulation between the houses.

12.4 Conclusions

> I'm in my cousin's kitchen, with my niece. The two women are chatting and preparing *rotis* for dinner. They quickly alternate between the table – where they roll out the dough with a rolling pin – and the hot pan– where they make it swell. While they cook, they exchange jokes, confidences, laughs and also try to teach me how to do it. In the dining room I hear our husbands chatting and joking, and from the bedroom comes the laughter of the children, who have been playing a board game for hours. It is a moment of great intimacy. I am grateful and touched, as it feels like being at home. (Field notes, August 2019)

Doing research as an honorary insider in my Indian relatives' homes in Punjab involved many challenges from a methodological point of view. Communicative expedients were used as "relational thresholds" to distinguish my roles with my interlocutors or to manage information, sorting out possible ethical dilemmas. From this positionality, I was able to have direct experience of their domestic space, by inhabiting it. I was also able to focus my analytical attention on the relationships between habitual dwellers, which influenced their way of conceiving what the "home" was for them, along with their ways of relating to domestic objects and spaces. At the same time, my positionality implied a strong emotional involvement (Longhurst et al., 2008), as a consequence of the sensory and relational experiences in which I was engaged. Indeed, emotions were part of the research process (Longhurst, 2001), as much as reflexivity was.

Later on, back to Italy, I visited the homes of the relatives of those I had met in Punjab. This allowed me to grasp the links, but also the contradictions and conflicts

that unfold transnationally between different but connected domestic spaces. My attention focused, in particular, on the objects in house interiors – many of which of a common type or linked to religious practice -, on their circulation between houses and on the porosity between domestic environments. Again, many of these objects from Punjabi homes were hybrid stuff imbued with memories and emotions (Cieraad, 2010; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). They took on different layers of meaning, adapting and transforming the space of homes in Italy (Trabert, 2020). In essence, doing research while staying inside the houses allowed me to analyze the spaces, objects and domestic practices through the relationships that tied me to my relatives, and that connected them between Italy and Punjab.

References

Ahmed, S. (1999). Home and away. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 2*(3), 329–347.

Ahmed, S., et al. (Eds.). (2003). *Uprootings/regroundings. Questions of home and migration*. Routledge.

Ballard, R. (1982). South Asian families. In R. Rapoport et al. (Eds.), *Families in Britain* (pp. 179–204). Routledge.

Barberis, E., & Boccagni, P. (2017). *Il lavoro sociale con le persone immigrate*. Maggioli.

Baxter, R., & Brickell, K. (2014). For home unmaking. *Home Cultures, 11*, 133–144.

Bennett, K. (2004). Emotionally intelligent research. *Area, 36*, 414–422.

Bertolani, B., & Boccagni, P. (2021). Two houses, one family, and the battlefield of home: A housing story of home unmaking in rural Punjab. *Geoforum, 127*, 57–66.

Bertolani, B., & Boccagni, P. (2022). Domestic religion and the migrant home. *Ethnicities, 0*(0), 1-22 .

Bille, M. (2017). Ecstatic things. *Home Cultures, 14*(1), 25–49.

Bivand-Erdal, M. (2012). A place to stay in Pakistan: Why migrants build houses in their country of origin. *Population, Space and Place, 18*, 629–641.

Boccagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home*. Palgrave.

Boccagni, P., & Bivand-Erdal, M. (2021). On the theoretical potential of remittance houses. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47*(5), 1066–1083.

Bonfanti, S. (2021). Im(materiality). In A. Miranda-Nieto, A. Massa, et al. (Eds.), *Ethnographies of home and mobility* (pp. 39–65). Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1970). The Berber house, or the world reversed. *Social Science Information, 9*, 151–170.

Carling, J., et al. (2014). Beyond the insider–outsider divide in migration research. *Migration Studies, 2*(1), 36–54.

Chako, E. (2004). Positionality and praxis: Fieldwork experiences in rural India. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 25*(1), 51–63.

Cieraad, I. (Ed.). (1999). *At home: An anthropology of domestic space*. Syracuse University Press.

Cieraad, I. (2010). Homes from home: Memories and projections. *Home Cultures, 7*(1), 85–102.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95–120.

Crang, M. (2003). Qualitative methods: Touchy, feely, look-see? *Progress in Human Geography, 27*(4), 494–504.

Ellis, C. (1995). Emotional and ethical quagmires in returning to the field. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 24*, 68–98.

Gabb, J. (2010). Home truths: Ethical issues in family research. *Qualitative Research, 10*(4), 461–478.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.
Hadjiyanni, T. (2007). Bounded choices. *Journal of Interior Design, 32*(2), 13–27.
Hall, S. M. (2014). Ethics of ethnography with families: A geographical perspective. *Environment and Planning A, 46*, 2175–2194.
Handel, A. (2019). What's in a home? *Politics and Space, 37*(6), 1045–1062.
Herod, A. (1999). Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: Praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider. *Geoforum, 30*, 313–327.
Hershman, P. (1981). *Punjabi kinship and marriage*. Hindustan Publishing Corporation.
Hirvi, L. (2016). Exploring the domestic homes of Sikhs in Finland as a "cosmos of senses". *Home Cultures, 13*(1), 23–37.
Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Pearson.
Levin, I., & Fincher, R. (2010). Tangible transnational links in the houses of Italian immigrants in Melbourne. *Global Networks, 10*(3), 401–423.
Longhurst, R. (2001). *Bodies: Exploring fluid boundaries*. Routledge.
Longhurst, R., et al. (2008). Using 'the body' as an 'instrument of research': kimch'i and pavlova. *Area, 40*(2), 208–217.
Longhurst, R., et al. (2009). A visceral approach: Cooking 'at home' with migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 34*(3), 333–345.
Lopez, S. L. (2010). The remittance house: Architecture of migration in rural Mexico. *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum, 17*(2), 33–52.
Mauss, M. (1954). *The gift*. Cohen and West.
Mazumdar, S., & Mazumdar, S. (2004). Articulation of religion in domestic space. *Journal of Ritual Studies, 18*(2), 74–85.
Metha, R., & Belk, R. W. (1991). Artifacts, identity and transition: Favorite possessions of Indians and Indian immigrants in the United States. *The Journal of Consumer Research, 17*(4), 398–411.
Miller, D. (Ed.). (2001). *Home possessions: Material culture behind closed doors*. Berg.
Miranda-Nieto, A. (2021a). Temporalities. In A. Miranda-Nieto, A. Massa, et al. (Eds.), *Ethnographies of home and mobility* (pp. 91–114). Routledge.
Miranda-Nieto, A. (2021b). Scales. In A. Miranda-Nieto, A. Massa, et al. (Eds.), *Ethnographies of home and mobility* (pp. 15–37). Routledge.
Miranda-Nieto, A., & Boccagni, P. (2020). At home in the restaurant. *Sociology, 54*(5), 1022–1040.
Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum, 30*, 337–350.
Noble, G. (2012). Home objects. In S. Smith (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of housing and home* (pp. 434–438). Elsevier.
Pink, S. (2004). *Home truths. Gender, domestic objects and everyday life*. Bloomsbury.
Pink, S., & Mackley, K. L. (2016). Moving, making and atmosphere: Routines of home as sites for mundane improvisation. *Mobilities, 11*(2), 171–187.
Pistrick, E., & Bachmeier, P. (2016). Empty migrant rooms: An anthropology of absence through the camera lens. *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology, 3*(2), 121–294.
Ratnam, C., & Drozdzewski, D. (2020). Detour: Bodies, memories, and mobilities in and around the home. *Mobilities, 15*(6), 757–775.
Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography, 21*, 305–320.
Sayad, A. (2002). *La doppia assenza*. Raffaello Cortina Editore.
Sherif, B. (2001). The ambiguity of boundaries in the fieldwork experience: Establishing rapport and negotiating insider/outsider status. *Qualitative Inquiry, 7*(4), 436–447.
Snow, D. A. (1980). The disengagement process: A neglected problem in participant observation research. *Qualitative Sociology, 3*, 100–122.
Starrs, P., et al. (2001). Fieldwork… with family. *The Geographical Review, 91*(1–2), 74–87.
Taylor, S. (2013a). 'Home is never fully achieved … even when we are in it': Migration, belonging and social exclusion within Punjabi transnational mobility. *Mobilities, 10*(2), 193–210.

Taylor, S. (2013b). Transnational emotion work: Punjabi migration, caste and identity. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion, 5*(3), 281–295.
Taylor, S. (2013c). Searching for ontological security. *Contributions to Indian Sociology, 47*(3), 395–422.
Taylor, S., et al. (2007). Migration, development and inequality: Eastern Punjabi transnationalism. *Global Networks, 7*(3), 328–347.
Tolia-Kelly, D. (2004). Locating processes of identification; studying the precipitates of re-memory through artefacts in the British Asian home. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 29*(3), 314–329.
Trabert, S. (2020). Understanding the significance of migrants' material culture. *Journal of Social Archaeology, 20*(1), 95–115.
Twigger-Ross, C. L., & Uzzell, D. L. (1996). Place and identity processes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 16*, 205–220.
van Stapele, N. (2014). Intersubjectivity, self-reflexivity and agency: Narrating about 'self' and 'other' in feminist research. *Women's Studies International Forum, 43*, 13–21.
Vellinga, M. (2007). Anthropology and the materiality of architecture. *American Ethnologist, 34*(4), 756–766.

Chapter 13
Whose Homes? Approaching the Lived Experience of "Remittance Houses" from Within

Paolo Boccagni and Gabriel Echeverria

13.1 Introduction

What does it mean, and what implications has, visiting the houses of people who usually live far away and had them built from a distance, as a way to offset their physical absence with the material presence of a building? This chapter explores migrants' engagement in transnational housing from the inner side of its domestic reproduction, based on ethnographic fieldwork in so-called remittance houses (Lopez, 2015; Lozanovska, 2019; Boccagni & Bivand-Erdal, 2021). Drawing on our visits and stays in migrant houses in Ecuador over the last fifteen years, we discuss what "entering home(s)" means, and what it enables a researcher-as-guest to understand, when a house embodies migrants' efforts to improve their life conditions and make this visible in their local communities of origin.

The chapter unfolds in a dual register – conceptual and methodological – nourished by our fieldwork and textwork on a variety of housing and domestic settings shaped by migration in different ways. This follows our protracted rapport with their owners, who may be physically absent (that is, migrants) or present (as returnees). By situating our case studies into the overarching theoretical picture of this book, we show how an ethnographic approach to remittance houses illuminates broader debates, primarily in three respects: first, *hospitality,* as a moral regime of mutual expectations under which the ethnographic encounter takes meaning and shape; second, the *ways of (in)visibilization of the absent ones,* or how migrants' emplaced memories are reproduced or contested through domestic routines and material cultures, in a place that testifies to their influence by its very existence;

P. Boccagni (✉)
Università di Trento, Trento, Italy
e-mail: paolo.boccagni@unitn.it

G. Echeverria
Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, Madrid, Spain

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_13

third, *kin work and house work across distance,* as everyday ways to manage the domestic space are negotiated between co-dwellers and across distant relations, with little space for mutual control and, perhaps, understanding. Questions and dilemmas about care, "autonomy", "fixity" and "normality" creep across our home visits, as we eventually discuss. This leads us to yet another, more fundamental and ambiguous question – whose homes these actually are, and what difference this makes in practice. Prior to our fieldwork analysis, some theoretical and methodological notes are in order.

13.2 A Theoretical and Methodological Background

There is no paucity of literature, by now, on migrant transnational housing investments and on their impact back on the built environment, and beyond. So-called remittance houses sit on a unique point of intersection and friction between local and transnational, domestic and public, individual and collective, as well as past and future. Relative to the housing arrangements already analyzed in this book, migrant houses in the countries of origin stand out in several respects (cf. Bertolani, Chap. 12). On one hand, they articulate various degrees of distinction from vernacular housing standards in terms of architectural style, size, construction materials and aesthetics. On the other hand, they may not be domestic space in an ordinary sense, unless for some family members of migrants, or for the latter as returnees. Put differently, these buildings articulate the tension between two opposite pressures: migrants' physical distance from their previous everyday life contexts, and their attempts to overcome it in space (through ongoing investments and attachments) and in time (by paving the way for a future return option, whether this comes true or not).

Against this background, what is the need, and the promise, of a specific ethnographic investment into these housing settings? How to research them, and what difference does it make, to whom? For one thing, a domestic way of ethnography affords us to address the gap between the external appearance of these houses, which is what drives much public interest in them, and their insider experience. Furthermore, doing ethnography in these housing arrangements is part and parcel of research on transnational family life (e.g. Fog-Olwig, 2007; Oso & Ribas-Mateos, 2013; Baldassar & Merla, 2014). Interestingly, though, this literature seldom takes the domestic space as a research object in itself (with major exceptions such as Lopez, 2015; Sandoval-Cervantes, 2017; Lozanovska, 2019). Such a domestic space may assume profound and paradoxical meanings. It may be telling of people and life circumstances located elsewhere (i.e. in immigration countries), as well as of local ones. Overall, a remittance house is at the very least a privileged setting for in-depth interviews and richer data collection (Boccagni, 2023). More ambitiously, it can become a research subject in itself, to explore broader societal and migration-related questions (Boccagni & Bivand-Erdal, 2021; Klaufus, 2023).

In a fundamental sense, these houses are domestic settings like any other. At the same time, they are unique as long as they formally belong to someone who often is *not* there and might never become an ordinary and permanent dweller. Under these conditions, one's research engagement is contingent on previous relationships with the migrant owners, and then with those who happen to dwell there – family members, caretakers, or migrants themselves as returnees. Once a researcher is invited in, he or she is essentially a guest. It was with such a status that we negotiated our access into several migrant houses in Ecuador, including those discussed below. Both our fieldwork and the subsequent analysis are informed by distinct backgrounds and positionalities: Boccagni, as an Italian ethnographer with a long-term engagement with Ecuadorian migrants and their domestic spaces; Echeverria, as a dual citizen (Ecuadorian and Italian) who approached his informants with closer commonalities language, and possibly culture wise, although typically not in social class or education. In either case, this is no fieldwork from scratch. It started from our pre-existent expertise in Ecuadorian migration and our familiarity with all the selected dwellers, who made for a highly diverse set of participants in terms of gender, education, social class, territorial and ethnic background. This eventually resulted in parallel ethnographic trajectories that unfolded between 2019 and 2021. Out of the five tales from the field that follow, four are referred to Southern coastal Ecuador, an area which Boccagni visited several times, and where Echeverría did a more recent follow up. The last case is referred, instead, to Otavalo, an Andean indigenous community that is unique for the reach of its migration and for its visibility in the literature. Here again, we build on a repertoire of previous acquaintances and visits. Our ethnographic fieldwork has followed the ethical protocols of the HOMInG project. All our conversations and interviews have been held in Spanish. The identities of our participants have been fully anonymyzed.

While we deliberately zoom down on particular migrant families, we need also to briefly mention the bigger picture of Ecuadorian labour migration. This has taken a certain relevance, with the US as primary destination, since the sixties of the last century. It has however gone through a drastic acceleration and diversification later on, after the systemic crisis of the country in the late nineties (De La Torre & Strifler, 2009). In just a few year time, this resulted in what scholars called a "migration stampede" (Ramirez & Ramirez, 2005), out of a widespread "panic to leave" (Jokisch & Pribilsky, 2002). More recently, international migration has taken more oscillant and mixed patterns, including significant inflows from neighbouring countries – Colombia, Peru, and eventually Venezuela (Ledesma, 2019).

Across the ebbs and flows of international migration, the built environment has grown and changed in ways that talk to its faceted and complex societal impact. In that regard, our fieldwork accounts resonate with much research on the migration housing landscape in different Ecuadorian locations (Klaufus, 2012; Mata-Codesal, 2014; Boccagni & Pérez-Murcia, 2021) and elsewhere in Latin America (Lopez, 2015; Pauli & Bedorf, 2018). At the same time, they are as specific and distinctive as the underlying relationship with the domestic space – an intimate question that may be appreciated, and made sense of, only by being in a house.

13.3 Approaching Migration and Family Life from the Inside-Out: Five Tales of Migrant Houses

Visits to migrant houses and short periods as guests in them have been a central feature of our recent and parallel fieldwork in Ecuador. In what follows we discuss insights out of the lived experience of five houses, as recounted respectively by Boccagni (the first three) and by Echeverria (the last ones). While our case selection is partial and limited, relative to the scope of our research, it illustrates different facets of the same fundamental process: the everyday negotiation between pre-existing housing and household arrangements and migration-driven transformation. While each house has a degree of fixity (albeit it does change over time), such negotiations are irremediably a work in progress, as is typical of transnational family life. In the final section we advance further the conceptual and methodological conversation that informed our comparative research design.

13.3.1 It Stays Here, and Needs Everyday Care: The Family House of a "Non-Migrant"

It is important to acknowledge, against the risk to exceptionalize migrants (Dahinden, 2016) even in a housing domain, that family migration affects the underlying domestic spaces in myriad ways. These may regard both domestic interiors and the external layout and infrastructural development of a house. In essence, newly-built and ostentatious remittance houses, whether completed and inhabited or not, are only the tip of the iceberg. That a decade-long migration family history influences the pre-existing domestic and built environment also in subtler ways, which are visible only from the inside-out, is a key lesson I (Boccagni) learnt through my periodical encounters with Jorge, in his hometown in southern Ecuador. Jorge has been a key informant and friend for my fieldwork among Ecuadorian migrants over the last fifteen years. My visits to Ecuador have also been visits to his dwelling place – the old family house where he is the only permanent resident by now, while his kin have long been to Italy and his old mother commutes between the two countries. Taking care of the house is part and parcel of his daily routines. This means also spending money for its security, including a better alarm system and electric barbed wire on the outer wall, against the risk of robberies – something that occasionally happens, and raises especial concerns whenever Jorge's mother is in. "I could never leave until she's here", he repeatedly points out. Contrary to his brothers and sister, Jorge has never shown too much of an interest in moving to Italy – unless for the prospect of making more money, at least for a while. At the same time, dwelling there for him is intimately connected with questions of care, both personal (his older mother) and material (the housing property in which they live) (Schaab & Wagner, 2020).

Unlike many houses around, Jorge's is one-floor only. It is made of a relatively large space under a basic tin roof, with a back patio and external toilets. Its exuberant inner decoration, furnishing and material culture make it more hospitable than

the infrastructure in itself would possibly allow. There is very little separation between distinct domestic environments, or between the latter and the street outside. As a matter of fact, the internal soundscape is seamless in itself – whenever the TV is on, there is no way to ignore it from any corner of the home. It is also pervasively connected with the outer street, in ways that the new and bigger external gate cannot stem (nor, perhaps, is it meant to).

"We did improve it, little by little", Jorge recounts to me, whenever I'm back. The floor is tiled by now, many appliances are new, the plaster on the external wall is better quality than "in the past" (that is, the apparently still time before her sister left first, i.e. twenty years earlier). However, adds Jorge with a certain pride, "we didn't make a *casote",* the stereotypically big migrant house (Klaufus, 2012; Boccagni & Pérez-Murcia, 2021). There is no grand façade in this house – nothing so remarkable from the outside, as a result of major infrastructural investments. While one of his brothers would like to buy the adjacent terrain and cultivate it, this is apparently more for leisure than for a productive investment.

From the outside, therefore, the house would go rather unnoticed. However, the semi-public interior space, a large sitting room, is far from unremarkable. Besides being accurately clean and well in order, it is dotted with markers of Italy – souvenirs, pictures, towels. As I realize after staying in for some days, there is a corner in the sitting room that is more intimate – in a way, sacred – than the rest (Fig. 13.1). This is a small table with a couple of chairs around. It hosts several pictures of the

Fig. 13.1 A "special corner" in Jorge's place. (Picture by Boccagni)

family, most of them *prior* to migration. A picture of the seven of them all wearing football clothing, standing in front of the camera to mimic a football team, soon captures my attention. Right beside, another picture (and a dedication card with a prayer in Italian) is for Jimena, Jorge's sister-in-law, who passed away in Italy some years ago.

Aside from the exceptional circumstances of family visits from Italy, once per year at most, the house and its interiors seem to be ever the same, one day after another. To that extent, they comply with the basic task of self-reproduction that lies at the ontological core of the home, as a functional environment (Douglas, 1991). Everyday life goes on, for most people like Jorge, regardless of migration – or of "those who live abroad", as people usually say. However, not every space in the interior is equal to the rest, or holds the same value or flavour for the dwellers. For Jorge's mother there is a special place in the house, as she tells me at some point. Contrary to my gendered expectations, this is not the kitchen, nor her bedroom. It is, instead, the small back garden. This includes a few trees with a flowerbed around them, surrounded by a concrete floor and, more recently, a new porch that Jorge got built (once again, he insists, out of his own money; it seems to be more and more infrequent, as time goes by, that his migrant siblings send him money, unless in extraordinary cases). There is a bit of the fragrance and freedom of the natural environment in that corner, to the eyes of Jorge's mother. Yet, it still falls within the safe boundaries – the tangible bricks and mortar – of her own dwelling space. As for Jorge, the house itself is a special place, relative to the outside world. Once in, he can be more of himself – relax, rest and enjoy the cool, separate from the outside frenzy, as he puts it. At the same time, what makes him feel at home is simply the possibility to lay down wherever, with the mobile in his hands, and carry on an online life that seems to be hardly less rich and busy than the offline one.

13.3.2 In Transition: Dwelling in the House of a Potential Returnee

Diego, an Ecuadorian in his early fifties who has been to Italy for seventeen years, has kindly offered to host me (Boccagni) for a few days upon my last visit to El Oro, coastal Ecuador (2019). I can be a guest in what he actually presents as "Antonia's house". It was fundamentally his wife who got it built out of her savings as a live-in care worker in Italy. I remember about Diego and his wife, and so do they, since the times of my PhD fieldwork on Ecuadorian immigrant associations in Italy. I have not met him since, nor have I seen before the new, three storey building their family now owns downtown – one of the many new, large, somehow out-of-scale houses that dot the urbanscape. Coming from Jorge's house, I have immediately a sense of closer middle-class comfort – whether for the marbles at the entrance, the tinted windows, the privacy enabled by the single room available for me, or the striking view of downtown from the roof floor (Fig. 13.2).

Fig. 13.2 The upper floor in the house of Diego. (Picture by Boccagni)

There is something unexpected and intriguing in the internal layout of this house – well beyond the visual references to immigrant family members, Italian symbols or lifestyles (e.g. paintings), or the use of "Italian" affordances and appliances in the kitchen. As I realize after some informal home tours with Diego, his daughter and grandson, there is another interesting fact here. The spatial organization of the interior is not the same as in most houses I have visited so far. The collective and semi-public space of the sitting room is far more narrow and less "peopled" than the spacious private rooms, each of them with its own bathroom. "This is the American style, you know?", he will tell me at some point. While Diego and his family members and friends do gather up for some chats and drinks every now and then, particularly at night, they tend to do so by taking some chairs out of the door, under the external porch, rather than inside the house. "It's cooler outside", says Diego. Indeed, turning the public space out of the doorstep in a temporary sitting room is a very ordinary and spontaneous practice among my acquaintances in town – at least those living in the safer and better lit central areas. However, it is also a way to foreground the divide between public life – where sociability and leisure with friends takes place – and the intimate, less accessible realm of private life.

These days, Diego is immersed in frenetic negotiation with some potential commercial partners to start up an import-export business in Ecuador. The ground floor of the building includes a space that has been precisely left empty for a new retail of international clothing. In fact, things are not going so smoothly as he had initially

planned, when in Italy. Several thousand dollars already lost along the way, apparently unreliable partners, all sorts of bureaucratic traps and complications. It seems like their second family attempt toward homecoming has no more chances of success than the first one, when, the previous year, Diego's wife had returned – in her intentions, for good. Enough with care work in Italy, she thought. In fact, a few months after the savings were over and she was back to look for a care job in Italy. At the end of my stay, Diego seems very likely to do the same – get back in a couple of months, when spring arrives in Italy, and resume his bricklayer job. And yet, in the meantime, their property – so much better, larger and more comfortable than their rented apartment in Italy – is there. Almost finished, and possibly about to get empty again, if only Diego's daughter can make her way back to Italy, as she hopes. "It's a beautiful house - isn't it?"

13.3.3 Left Behind? One Empty Remittance House, from Within

The Ecuadorian house of Jacqueline is a four-storey building in a peripheral urban district. It was built on the terrain of a pre-existing, smaller one-floor family unit. It is *of* Jacqueline, as she is the legal owner – she got it built in just a few years through her savings as a care worker and cleaner, while her mother was still living there. However, Jacqueline has never lived in the house, unless on holiday. She is by now rather sceptical on the possibility that she ever will, after spending two decades in Italy, getting dual citizenship and remaking her own family, after the reunification of her old mother. Her house is probably the one I am most familiar with. I was invited there already on my first visit to Ecuador, and was hosted there before Jacqueline was ever physically back. I have systematically returned since. This put me in a fortunate position of witness and beneficiary of the main fruits of her endeavours to "move forward" *(salir adelante)* abroad (Boccagni, 2014).

Upon my visits, over time, I have associated a distinctive emotional experience with that built environment, which was expected to make tangible, and instrumentally effective, the social presence of someone who was physically absent. It was a place in which I could relax and have a safe conversation with Jacqueline's mother, sipping together a cup of coffee, while bearing gifts and small parcels from, and to, Italy (cf. Mata-Codesal & Abranches, 2017). More subtly, it was certainly a homelike place, as long as it enabled us to reconstruct the story of Jacqueline's past life, and make sense of her migrant struggle far away from home. Furthermore, being there felt like being in a special and separate place – so more quiet, clean and cosy than the outer, unsafe neighbourhood, as Jacqueline and her mother constantly warned me. As I realized over time, this sense of inclusive domesticity had little to do with the building as such. Whenever I looked at it from the outside, let alone in the pictures, it was just one half-finished remittance house like thousands more around. It was the presence of Jacqueline's mother, hence the emplacement of an

intimate tie with Jacqueline, what made that house a proxy of home – in an ephemeral and short-lived way, for me; in a deeper and existential sense, and yet one hard to turn into everyday dwelling, for Jacqueline as a distant owner.

Interestingly, on my most recent visit the house does resemble, for the first time, the trope of a virtually empty migrant house (Pauli & Bedorf, 2018). Jacqueline's mother has joined her in Italy at last. A brother of hers is renting their older one-floor apartment – at a ridiculous price, Jacqueline says – while taking care of the house that has grown over it. It is not totally clear what "care" should mean in practice (Schaab & Wagner, 2020), but it has probably to do with keeping the apartments clean, wiping dust, watering the gorgeous plants on the roof floor, and making sure that the property is not at risk of looting. Under the new circumstances, my request to Jacqueline to visit the house again has little to do with the previous regime of transnational hospitality. It still makes perfect sense to her, as she is familiar with, and still curious about, my research work. However, it is also a novel engagement in a play role, with myself acting as Jacqueline's emissary and her uncle-in-residence to play a dual role – good host to me and, indirectly, good and reliable house-keeper to the eyes of Jacqueline and her mother. This makes for a surreal interaction, in fact just an example of the subtleties and ambiguities that shape the lived experience of transnational housing (Boccagni & Pérez-Murcia, 2021). Most remarkably, I realize once I'm back in, house interiors that have been uninhabited for years keep speaking about Jacqueline and her mother, at least for someone who knows them well. This has all to do with material culture (Davidson, 2009), but not with blatant or ostentatious markers – say, pictures of Italy, national flags, or the like. There is a subtlety to the local reproduction of transnational ties and memories that one can capture only from the inside out, in a moral economy of cumulative relations with the absent ones – Jacqueline and her mother (cf. Pistrick & Bachmeier, 2016; Pérez-Murcia, Chap. 11). On one hand, the interiors being in a perfect order, with transparent plastic sheets to cover the armchairs and one bible left open on the table, give me the sense of a still, immobile, almost "musealized" present – one, however, that is always open to the possibility that a dweller be back and easily resume her routines. On the other hand, my question "How can I tell that this is Jacqueline's place - and not of anybody else?" finds an answer only ex post, back to Italy. This is when the two of us watch the videos I have taken upon Jacqueline's request. The answer has to do with her own choices in furnishing the interiors – how she channeled her remittances to buy and set up beds, wardrobes, tables and chairs with certain characteristics. "They must be simple, functional and cheap", Jacqueline invariably stresses. No space for displaying the stereotypical emigrant wealth or ostentatious consumption. As it happens, "the poorer people are, the bigger the house they want to make", adds Jacqueline ironically, only to make clear that she does not go with the mainstream, even while considering her family a "poor" one. As we are watching once again a video taken in "her" room, Jacqueline suddenly stops and points to the skirting – a detail I would have never noticed alone (Fig. 13.3).

> Can you see it? It's decorated with black and white waves. I bought it because it was cheaper than the other ones with gold and stuff, but also because it reminded me of […]. She's an Arab woman, you know? We've helped her a lot, with our association.

Fig. 13.3 Jacqueline's bedroom in her house in Ecuador. (Picture by Boccagni)

This is a small charity for food collection that Jacqueline has set up in Italy over time. Here emerges a circularity between aesthetics, selected memories and moral commitments, as embedded in Jacqueline's room, which can be appreciated even from the most mundane details – as long as one is in and has the trustworthy access of a friend who is being hosted, while being also, incidentally, an ethnographer.

13.3.4 Back Home for Good: From the Dream House to Living-Together-Apart

Yet another home visit in the coastal province of El Oro, Southern Ecuador. I (Echeverria) have an appointment with Don Antonio in the city centre. He gets there with his massive, brand-new pick-up. It takes a while for him to recognize me. He does, though, once I share a couple of anecdotes about the past. I had interviewed him in Amsterdam several years ago (cf. Echeverría, 2020), a few days before he would leave the Netherlands for good through an IOM voluntary return scheme. Antonio must be in his mid-sixties by now. He first drives me around town. He wants to show me how fast things have changed – so many new buildings, including

in the portal district with its promenade. Generally speaking, returning was ok for him – "the correct decision". Now he can stay close to his daughters and granddaughters. "The best thing was to invest in their education". One daughter graduated and is working by now. The other is about to end university. As for him, he has dedicated himself to home repairing, a bit of a carpenter or of a plumber. The good thing is that he carried along his machinery and tools from the Netherlands. Moreover, he works as a chauffeur. He bought the pick-up which he is driving right now and transports people and parcels around the country. "It's a good job", says Antonio. Sometimes he gets tired, but "you take your own rhythm". Enough to live safely. This is also true, interestingly, for the house he built while living in the Netherlands.

The family is what matters the most, repeats Antonio. He had a good time in the Netherlands, but he was always clear on one fact – he would return, and he eventually did. Return "is not so easy as one would think", but he did find a way to get back to his routines. He has rejoined his small club. He can go there to play cards, have beers and dedicate to *ecuavóley*, his real passion. Catching up with friends again, having good food, staying close to his daughters, keeping busy and seeing his granddaughters – this way he got back to a "normal" life. "Nowadays", he concludes, "I feel home again. I'm so grateful to the Netherlands, but I'm happy I made it back". When I first interviewed him, still in Europe, I had the sense of a serious, methodic and pragmatic guy – one with his feet on the ground. He had long been undocumented, living in a room on rental from an Antillean-Dutch lady. He had never got into trouble, everybody seemed to get along well with him. Maybe that has to do with age too. He was almost forty when he left Ecuador – not that young, for a migrant standard. Now, I'm curious to see his house in town. I still remember his room in Amsterdam. It looked like the typical accommodation of those who live with the luggage done, ready to return "soon". No decoration, only the strictly necessary things around, everything well in order. The place of someone who intimately knows, or maybe hopes, that this is not home for him. It's rather a place in transition, for a temporary stay, even while the years are passing by (cf. Miranda-Nieto, Chap. 5).

Antonio's house is in a new *barrio*, away from the city centre. It's a popular one, and it has expanded a lot, he tells me. As a matter of fact, there are many new and big "migrant houses" around, as he adds. His own house, seen from the outside, is rather simple. A one-storey building surrounded by a wall and an internal *patio*. There are some concrete columns with their iron bars popping up in the middle – a not uncommon view in migrant houses (Boccagni & Pérez-Murcia, 2021). These were to be the columns to expand the house, as he was planning to do, when in the Netherlands. However, at some point he gave it up. "So much money… for what? I preferred to send [*money*] for my daughters' education". The house skeleton is still there, like a monument to the dream house (Fletcher, 1999) that could have been, and was not. Antonio invites me to sit with him under a gazebo in the courtyard. "You see – this is where I like staying… just have a beer and see my granddaughters playing around". In fact, the house is made of three separate units. "In one lives my daughter. I live in another one. My ex-wife is in the last one". A long and detailed

story about their separation follows suit. It sounds like a sad story – money, lawyers, cheating. At some point, his ex-wife comes out to bring some stuff into the washing machine, on the opposite corner of the patio. "You fucking dwarf", I hear her muttering. They split up while he was in the Netherlands, recounts Antonio. "Migration puts a couple in trouble. One goes, the other stays, they have a good time, and the family is over. Maybe it's the price one has to pay". The daughters were right in the middle of the conjugal conflict. By now, he says, nobody speaks with his ex-wife.

By all likelihood, the ex-wife herself – whom I was unable to reach out – would give a radically different version of the story, and possibly of this house. Whatever the case, the big house is here around the courtyard where we are sitting. It seems to provide enough space for the three of them and for their parallel lives. Thanks to the money gained in the Netherlands, the two daughters had access to an expensive higher education. This has not come without a price, though. Antonio and his wife left for the Netherlands, albeit in different moments, as a couple. They were back as singles, carrying along the fear of missing their daughter's growing up.

At last, Antonio invites me in. His apartment is relatively small, and yet comfortable and well-organized – the place of a practical guy who lives alone. His room in the Netherlands could have been the room of anybody. A bare and impersonal domestic space, where he perceived himself as only in transit. Here, instead, the place talks about him. There are all sorts of objects that have a value for him in the bookshelf: books, a car wash liquid, an iron, some toys for his granddaughters, plumber tools, a couple of bottles of whisky. There is also, well visible, a set of typically Dutch miniature houses. This was a collection one could get with KLM, as Antonio explains. In fact, they were originally small spirit bottles. This is not his only souvenir from the Netherlands though. There is also, hanging on the wall, an engraving with an Amsterdam canal – a present from his old boss at work – with two hats hanging just below (Fig. 13.4). This is what visually remains of such an important part of his life. It feels somewhat melancholic, at least to me. "Let's go in the kitchen", Antonio promptly says. There is chicken with mushrooms in the frying pan. He offers a bit to me. "You see? I learnt this in the Netherlands too. No problem for me to cook now!"

In short, after migration one family house has grown and split into three separate houses. New spaces, roles and family balances have been negotiated inside them. What this house would be like now, if people had not migrated, is a hard and ultimately pointless question. For sure, don Antonio would not be cooking chicken with mushrooms for me. Meanwhile, as I'm looking out of the window, the naked columns are still there – a powerful symbol of the multiple options migration opened up, and of the choices eventually made by its protagonists (Sandoval-Cervantes, 2017). The "success" of his daughters was his major reward, Antonio proudly repeats, "happy" to be back and stay with "his" people. Now, he's just about to go and play *ecuavoley*. He can give me a lift back to the centre, if I like.

Fig. 13.4 A wall in Antonio's sitting room. (Picture by Echeverria)

13.3.5 Leave, Stay or Return: The Safe Haven Is There, and Expands over Time

Upon my latest visit in Ecuador, I (Echeverria) was hosted in the house of the Sanchez, an indigenous transnational family with a three-decade long history of migration to Europe. I have long been familiar with them. The house and their entire lives prior to migration lie in Peguche, Otavalo – the area of origin of a well-studied migration flow of "transnational peasants" (Kyle, 2003), in fact mainly musicians and handicraft retailers (Ordóñez, 2017; Ordonez & Colmenares, 2019). Pedrito, the father, was among the first to leave Peguche for Europe in the early 1990s. Four of his sons and daughters were to follow his steps in search of better opportunities. Several years later, the family network includes returnees, immigrant permanent stayers (two of them being married to Italian citizens) and circular migrants, the father being one of the latter.

As I approach their family house, walking along the dusty roads of the village, many questions puzzle in my mind. Seen from the outside, this is a relatively old building with a sober façade. It is made out of traditional materials: bricks, tiles,

wood. In that respect, it does not share much with the new (migrant) houses around, which tend to display modern aesthetics, unusual geometrical shapes, large mirrored windows and flashy colors. Yadira, Pedrito's younger daughter, receives me at the front door and takes me into a long corridor toward a large internal patio. Her mother, Jamila, is waiting for us there. Unlike yadira, she wears the traditional Kiwcha-otavalo outfit. After greetings and chatting a bit, Jamila proudly shows the cage with the *cuyes* (guinea pigs), the hens, the dogs and cats. Looking around, I realize that the house is made of different, semi-independent sections in a horseshoe shape around the patio. Each of them is unlike the others, as if they had been built at different times. Yadira confirms my guess: "that part was built by Pablo [*a long-resident in Italy*]; that is Juan's; this was finished last year and Antonio [*a "circular" migrant to Italy*] lives in with his family." In a nutshell, the house as we see it now is the result of a family-driven patchwork, parallel to the course of migration, with each member abroad sending back the resources to build up a new part over the years. Each section of the built environment embodies the life trajectories of the owners, present or absent, with all the attendant memories and emotions. Each part of the house is for a different family member. This gives them a degree of autonomy, even while they stay under the same roof. The patio, like a junction between separate parts, creates a fundamental coherence between them. Its "ruler", the mother, embodies the unity of the house and probably of the home. Interestingly, she is the only one that has never migrated.

We move into the living room, which has a rather basic outlook, as if it were still to be completed. Relative to the whole house, it is rather small, perhaps 3×3 meters. A fireplace lies at one corner, close to a few armchairs and a small table with a television on top. The walls are almost entirely bare, unless for a couple of things hanging up, possibly the only clear markers of a migration background. A small frame includes a fabric with some sentences in Italian: "The rules of the house: who opens, closes; who empties, refills; if something falls, pick it up; if someone rings, answer; if someone is sad, comfort him; who dirties, must clean!". Close to it is a collection of four plates representing the four seasons. Overall, taking care of the house interiors, or articulating a certain aesthetic or self-representation through them, does not seem to be a priority. The house infrastructure as a whole has something inconsistent. There are parts in which the levels of the floors and ceilings do not match. In several areas, including the sitting room, the floor has no tiles – only concrete. However, this has to do less with a lack of resources – many family members have long lived and worked abroad – than with a lack of interest. The house, I realize, is perceived as a location that fulfills key instrumental functions for its dwellers, rather than as an intimate setting for beautification, comfort, and warm domesticity (Municipio del Distrito Metropolitano de Quito & Cordero, 2003; del Pino, 2010).

It is also remarkable to see how people use the different rooms on the ground floor. This house is far more than a dwelling place, for the family to rest and have leisure. It also accomplishes broader and more pragmatic functions. Some spaces are visibly meant to be "productive": in one room there is a loom, in another, overlooking the street, a small shop. On the back side there are some machines to make stamps on t-shirts. The patio itself has little of a domestic garden. It is rather a space

to breed animals, dry textiles, do the washing, and store objects. As is typical of rural and traditional housing, one and the same place combines domestic and productive life – two aspects that in more "modern" dwelling tend to lie on opposite sides of the doorstep, although in far from irreversible ways (as the pandemic has further revealed). This conflation between domestic and productive may be the reason for the lack of decoration in the interior. The spaces dedicated to sleeping, eating and spending time together are very much the same in which people weave, cook, or store things. A straightforward and functional approach to the use of domestic space governs the Sanchez's house, regardless of migration. This can be perceived even in the kitchen, as I'm standing at its big window that looks on the patio, while having a coffee with Jamila. This is perhaps the most embellished place of the house, and yet it follows the same functional patterns. In one corner, a semi-industrial oven is used to make bread to be sold in the shop. On the opposite corner lies a big refrigerator, on a long wall the kitchen furniture. As I eventually find out, Jamila has recently travelled for the first time to Europe, to join her daughter who was about to give birth. Italy was so nice, she says. Moreover, she was so happy to be at her daughter's side in such an important moment. However, after a few days she started to miss her house, Peguche, her animals. It was time to come back.

As I am about to leave, I ask Jamila if I can take a picture with her. "Yes, of course", she says, and soon adds: "do you want to take a picture of the *cuys* (guinea pigs) too?". After our final hug, the image of the old woman with her traditional dress in the middle of the patio, with the cage of the *cuys* and all the dogs and cats around, remains impressed in my mind. The home has grown around her and the patio, the only two fixed elements in a place and a family that the migratory experience has radically changed. There is a clearly gendered and traditional, ultimately unequal domesticity embedded in this house. It is thanks to it, however, that the house has retained its multifunctional purpose and navigated across the ups and downs of migration, instead of turning into the empty shell of yet another remittance house.

13.4 Entering the House, Moving Out, Moving Forward: A Discussion

The short housing tales presented above are primarily the stories of Jorge, Diego, Jacqueline, Antonio, and the Sanchez family – and of the places they call or would like to call home. However, these stories speak to questions and dilemmas of broader societal and existential resonance, in several respects.

Methodologically speaking, our case studies stress once again the added value of *being in* when it comes to connecting people's narrated biographies with their everyday practices, the main stage on which they take place, and the material cultures that articulate their ties with people located elsewhere in space and time. All this being said, there is another question that cuts across our fieldwork: the critical

embeddedness of this way of doing research into mutual regimes of hospitality (cf. Bonfanti, Chap. 4; Pechurina, Chap. 6). Whenever we were hosted in the place of some migrant acquaintance or friend, we were there to share some moments of their lives, as their guests. No room for academic detachment, all room for engaging in some form of reciprocity as good guests are expected to do, incidentally co-producing an account that has (also) an academic significance. While being in the house of someone else has all to do with a host-guest relation, any form of proper ethnography hinges on a certain way of hospitality – the researcher being accepted as a guest in the lifeworlds of their interlocutors as hosts – to be viable and meaningful (cf Harney, Afterword). A guest position is not without limitations and contradictions, as many of the previous chapters have illustrated. Nevertheless, nourishing it in a not merely instrumental, ad-hoc or predatory way is a requisite for good knowledge production, no less than for ethical accountability.

Interestingly, such a guest status reveals a parallel with the position migrants themselves may end up occupying, whenever they are back after many years. This is the condition of those who no longer feel at home, or are entitled to, in their native place. Edith, an Italian-Ecuadorian citizen and a long-term informant of Boccagni, has successfully invested in transnational housing since the outset of her migration career. Twenty years later, her affective, family and professional life is deeply rooted in Italy, whereas Ecuador is essentially a place for vacation. What this feels like in practice is nicely captured by her own words:

> If I go back there, all the houses I have are on rental - I can't even return to my- *my* - place, you know? Either I go to my mother's or to my in-laws. But I'm just a guest there, it's not home! If I want to get a glass of water, I need to ask for permission. It's not like at home, where I can do whatever I like. […] And then, after a while, you're no more used to that… and want to get back here. Here, by now, we are - what's the word? - integrated. It takes time - you need to speak the language well, get used to things, have a job… but home is here by now.

This reconnects with another tension that creeps across our narratives, regarding the ultimate limits of migrants' transnational connectedness; or, seen from the other end, the relative autonomy of a community of origin *as a community,* "of origin" being one peripheral attribute among others (that is, a reductionist and insufficient category to make sense of it). Of course, migration does affect life back "home" in many critical ways, mainly as a result of remittances. At the same time, as soon as one gets out of a migrant house, they will easily breathe a sense of normality, or business as usual, in all that has to do with everyday life there. On the "sending" side of any migration corridor, life goes on in its own way. This is not necessarily the same as when migrants used to be there, nor the one they dream of while living elsewhere. What for most migrants ends up being only a place for holiday, for non-migrants is simply the ordinary place to inhabit one day after another. Daily routines of time consumption, including work (or perhaps the search for it), shopping, leisure and thus forth, keep on in spite of the absent ones – possibly at rhythms lower than those to which migrants have got accustomed to abroad and, many of them would add, with more of a live-the-day attitude and little ambition to improve further. In this perspective, migrants and their counterparts may well be connected

through the internet and social media, potentially at any point of time and with minor efforts and costs. Nevertheless, their experiential worlds and their temporalities need not be in sync with each other. There is a simultaneity, in this, that is much more layered and contradictory than the image of a linear relation would suggest. In a similar way, migrant houses visualize and coalesce several contrasting temporalities and their evolution over time, as all our case studies show (cf. Boccagni, 2023). In short, a "successful" migrant may have built their houses as planned, and possibly made some profit out of that. However, *their* place – where one associates the intimate feeling and freedom of home, and is acknowledged as in-place (Pérez-Murcia & Boccagni, 2022) – may be no longer there. This, in turns, opens up the debate on return migration, as a major topic for research, policy and biographical purposes (Anghel et al., 2019).

Houses like those described in our fieldwork lie at the core of the prospects and dilemmas of return – indeed, of the sustainability and perceived success of one's future life after migration. It is a pervasive and reasonable assumption for a migrant to invest in new or anyway better housing, as a precondition to make it safely back. No one among our informants would have probably questioned it, in principle. Nevertheless, the idealized view of a new house as a key target of migration, laden as it is with so many simultaneous expectations (investment, improvement, belonging, prestige, protection, etc.), may obscure more than it reveals for migrants themselves. There is a subtle but fundamental tension between house building or refurbishment as a value in itself, and as a component of a broader strategy of social re-inclusion. Migrants may have a hard time as returnees if they are not in a position to disentangle this tension in due course. "No house will ever feed you", as one informant of Echeverria poignantly puts it: "if you've nothing to live off, the house is of no use – it's actually a problem". In a nutshell, unless a migrant (family) is long-sighted and lucky enough to invest remittances in more "productive" ways, the house they (re)built there has little chances to turn into a home, as a permanently lived dwelling place (Lopez, 2015; Boccagni, 2020). It may even occur that the dream of the house "kills the home" (Echeverría, 2021), whenever migrant future projects are not, and possibly cannot be anchored into economically and socially sustainable life prospects.

And yet, the house is there and matters, in a way or another (Boccagni & Yapo, 2022). No way to dismiss this, as long as transnational migration holds sway, either for a migrant or for a scholar in migration.

13.5 To Conclude

Overall, our fieldwork reveals meaningful parallels, resemblances and mirrorings between the life course of each house and of its inhabitants. There is more than an abstract and evocative metaphor at stake here (Marcus, 1995). At a very practical level, the ways in which a house is built, refurbished and used, or possibly neglected, are like a palimpsest on which a researcher can reconstruct a whole story of family

migration – depending also, of course, on in-depth relational engagement with the protagonists. Unlike in a palimpsest, however, the biographical layers left by migration into a house do not strictly overlap with each other, so that each new layer would make the previous ones invisible. We can rather observe a cumulation between different layers and traces of migration, just like in the vertical or horizontal expansion of the physical infrastructure of the houses in which we stayed. Old and new elements are deeply entangled with each other, and so are the memories and emotions associated with the household members. Against this backdrop, operating a respectful disentanglement – through domestic material cultures, routines and narratives – affords to enrich our understanding of people's housing and migration pathways.

Being in a house, including a migrant house, is a condition to epistemologically unpack it from the inside-out, beyond the bricks and mortar. As a bounded region of a larger space, a house cannot stand in isolation from the outer environment. While it does need to interact with it, for its infrastructural survival, it also participates in external social change and makes it visible at a miniature level. The peculiarity, here, is that the relevant external environment is both a local and a transnational one. As a special container of space, moreover, a house is no monolithic entity. Its interior is invariably stratified and marked by different thresholds of comfort, intimacy and personal meaningfulness. This includes more or less tangible boundaries and special places, whether these are practiced (by day-to-day dwellers) or imagined (by those migrants who are owners, but only occasional dwellers). As important, a remittance house, just like any infrastructure, can also be an "actant". It does things to those involved with it and to the broader community around. This holds true and needs to be acknowledged even when a house "does" nothing else than staying there, sometimes in a dilapidated state, thereby tacitly showing that the earlier dreams or ambitions attached to it were not accomplished.

As long as a house stays there, whether it is inhabited or not, we can still ask something more fundamental – *whose home* ultimately is it? Such a question encounters different and context-specific responses across our fieldwork. All of them show that the question is worthwhile, not so much for a matter of legal ownership, which is relatively uncontentious. The question has all to do, instead, with domestic use, presence, attachment and appropriation – or lack thereof. The point worth investigating is who, and under what conditions, is interested and enabled to attach a positive sense of home to a certain house – that is, to a portion of space that may afford some of the normative attributes that are predominantly attached to home in the literature (i.e. protection, intimacy, security, and thus forth). An entire constellation of actors, including migrants, may be in a position to do so at different moments. However, it is equally plausible that none of them really does – perhaps because migrants (and/or their left-behinds) have no more resources, interests or reason to care for the house; or possibly because their current inhabitants have much the same sense of temporariness and disregard for domesticity that is not uncommon among immigrant newcomers; or, still different, because their inherited cultural background involves little concern with Western-centric idea(l)s of domesticity. All these possible developments, which would demand more connections with

research on home unmaking and displacement, have been exemplified through our fieldwork. How the materiality of home is then emplaced or not across migration, who has a right to do so, and why, are all crucial questions for further comparative research on the lived experience of remittance houses, along the conceptual and methodological lines suggested in this chapter.

References

Anghel, R., et al. (Eds.). (2019). *Transnational return and social change*. Anthem.

Baldassar, L., & Merla, L. (Eds.). (2014). *Transnational families, migration and the circulation of care*. Routledge.

Boccagni, P. (2014). What's in a migrant house? *Housing, Theory and Society, 31*(3), 277–293.

Boccagni, P. (2020). So many houses, as many homes? In T. Bastja & R. Skeldon (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of migration and development*. Routledge.

Boccagni, P. (2023). One essential home ("Ecuador"), another existential home ("with my mother"), many houses in-between. In L. E. Pérez-Murcia & S. Bonfanti (Eds.), *Finding home in Europe*. Berghahn.

Boccagni, P., & Bivand-Erdal, M. (2021). On the theoretical potential of 'remittance houses'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47*, 1066–1083.

Boccagni, P., & Pérez-Murcia, L. E. (2021). Fixed places, shifting distances. *Migration Studies, 9*(1), 47–64.

Boccagni, P., & Yapo, S. (2022). "You're always in transit, but the house stays": Remitting, restoring and remaking home in a migrant family house in Cuenca, Ecuador. *Housing, Theory and Society, 39*(5), 611–629.

Dahinden, J. (2016). A plea for the 'demigranticization' of research on migration and integration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39*(13), 2207–2225.

Davidson, T. (2009). The role of domestic architecture in the structuring of memory. *Space and Culture, 12*(3), 332–342.

De La Torre, C., & Strifler, S. (Eds.). (2009). *The Ecuador reader. History, culture, politics*. Duke UP.

del Pino, I. (2010). *La casa popular de Quito. «Otra» estética, «otra» vida*. Abya Yala.

Douglas, M. (1991). The idea of a home: A kind of space. *Social Research, 58*(1), 287–307.

Echeverría, G. (2020). *Towards a systemic theory of irregular migration: Explaining Ecuadorian irregular migration in Amsterdam and Madrid*. Springer.

Echeverría, G. (2021). When the house kills the home. *HOMInG blog post,* available online, homing.soc.unitn.it

Fletcher, P. (1999). *La casa de mis suenos: Dreams of Home in a Transnational Mexican Community*. Westview Press.

Fog-Olwig, K. (2007). *Caribbean journeys: An ethnography of migration and home in three family networks*. Duke University Press.

Jokisch, B., & Pribilsky, J. (2002). The panic to leave: Economic crisis and the 'New emigration' from Ecuador. *International Migration, 40*(4), 75–101.

Klaufus, C. (2012). *Urban residence: Housing and social transformations in globalizing Ecuador*. Berghahn.

Klaufus, C. (2023). Norms and forms of the remittance landscape in Latin America. In P. Boccagni (Ed.), *Handbook on home and migration*. Edward Elgar.

Kyle, D. (2003). *Transnational peasants: Migrations, networks and ethnicities in Andean Ecuador*. Johns Hopkins UP.

Ledesma, N. (2019). Ecuador migration trends. Inter-American Dialogue. Available online.

Lopez, S. L. (2015). *The remittance landscape: Spaces of migration in rural Mexico and urban USA*. UCP.
Lozanovska, M. (2019). *Migrant housing*. Routledge.
Marcus, C. (1995). *House as a mirror of self*. Conari Press.
Mata-Codesal, D. (2014). From 'mud houses' to 'wasted houses': Remittances and housing in rural highland Ecuador. *REMHU, 22*(42), 263–280.
Mata-Codesal, D., & Abranches, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Food parcels in international migration*. Springer.
Municipio del Distrito Metropolitano de Quito, & Cordero, J. (2003). *Casa Ecuatoriana*. Ed. Cobol Servicios Gráficos.
Ordóñez, A. (2017). *La migración transnacional en Peguche, Ecuador, y la fiesta del Pawkar Raymi*. Abya-Yala.
Ordonez, J. T., & Colmenares, F. A. (2019). Tres generaciones del transnacionalismo kichwa-otavalo. *Migraciones Internacionales, 10*(6), 1–24.
Oso, L., & Ribas-Mateos, N. (Eds.). (2013). *The international handbook on gender, migration and transnationalism*. Edward Elgar.
Pauli, J., & Bedorf, F. (2018). Retiring home? House construction, age inscriptions, and the building of belonging among Mexican migrants and their families in Chicago and Rural Mexico. *Anthropology & Aging, 39*(1), 48–65.
Pérez-Murcia, L. E., & Boccagni, P. (2022). Of home-comings and home-scales. Reframing return migration through a multiscalar understanding of home. *Global Networks 22*(3), 499–513.
Pistrick, E., & Bachmeier, F. (2016). Empty migrant rooms: An anthropology of absence through the camera lens. *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology, 3*(2), 2015–2215.
Ramirez, F., & Ramirez, J. (2005). *La estampida migratoria ecuatoriana*. Abya Yala.
Sandoval-Cervantes, I. (2017). Uncertain futures: The unfinished houses of undocumented migrants in Oaxaca, Mexico. *American Anthropologist, 119*(2), 209–222.
Schaab, T., & Wagner, L. (2020). Expanding transnational care networks: Comparing caring for families with caring for homes. *Global Networks, 20*(1), 190–207.

Afterword: The Expansiveness of Home: Hospitality, Publicness, and Ethnography

Nicholas DeMaria Harney

In the chapters in *Migration and domestic space: Ethnographies of home in the making*, the authors provide us with the always-already social confrontation with difference and sameness that occurs through a foundational challenge for people and communities in the migration processes, between a universal need to make, belong and feel at home, and the particularities and exclusivity of those spaces. By grounding this research in ethnographic practice, these examples lay bare how not just knowledge but 'homes' are mutually constituted through everyday encounters in material and imaginative places. These chapters also make clear that thinking about 'home' is one of the central, if latent meta-themes of migration studies, a project that can elucidate the subtleties of socially destructive forces such as essentialism, racism, and ethnic and religious discrimination, but also reveal social practices of mutuality, commonality and sharing.

The chapters in this collection bring us directly into the intimate spaces of migrants and refugees through and across diverse sites of domesticity ranging from condominium blocks, to shared flats, to transnational spaces, to make-shift shelters, informal settlements, to asylum seeker institutional spaces and more. The very plethora of spaces in which people construct forms of domesticity speaks to the foundational homemaking process in people's life journeys even for those who may otherwise be superficially categorised as displaced or dislocated. These spaces of living are presented to us through the intimate, anxious, tenuous, and humane process of ethnography, which serves as a critical entry into how even with movement we try to all feel at home. These chapters reveal how productive ethnography is as a method, sensibility, and process for engaging with the traces of domesticity and intimacy, unearthing the desires of making a home in new places, which are rarely under a person's control. Yet, what is even further remarkable is how effective these authors are in collapsing and destabilising scholarly binary assumptions about the

N. D. Harney
University of Western Ontario, London, ON, Canada
e-mail: nharney@uwo.ca

P. Boccagni, S. Bonfanti (eds.), *Migration and Domestic Space*, IMISCOE Research Series, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4

division between public and private through their detailed and nuanced ethnographic attention to these varied domestic spaces produced by and lived in by migrants and refugees.

What surfaces in these chapters is that making home for migrants and refugees is a process of degrees of collaboration, reciprocity, shared creation, and mutuality. Even in the intimate (private) space of domestic encounters, ethnography draws out an emergent commonality or publicness which is visible, accessible, and potentially destabilising (Brighenti, 2010). These three components in turn lead us to a metonym that circulates in and through these chapters and that is the cultural idiom of hospitality. This idiom does double-work in these chapters. Hospitality operates as both a conceptual frame and a metaphor to examine the cultural practices through which encounters with strangers have been construed across different scales of social interaction. Hospitality has also become a common device to frame the asymmetrical relationships between 'host' countries and migrant and asylum-seeking populations. In addition to the conceptual work of hospitality and stranger-host relationships in migration situations, these chapters demonstrate how this cultural idiom is central to the constitution of knowledge in ethnographic practice. As Boccagni's chapter in an asylum center reveals, the power of culturally practiced rules of hospitality provides a myriad of productive uncertainties in social encounters in this institutional setting. This lets him break through thresholds and enter social and physical spaces of encounter and meaning making with his asylum seeker interlocutors.

In the remainder of this afterword I wish to address three issues that emerged together in conversation across this richly detailed set of investigations into migrant homemaking practices: hospitality, publicness, and ethnography. These chapters reveal the power of ethnography not only to present nuanced depictions of conditions of the materiality of movement but also trenchant critical understandings of ways we can conceptualize what Massey (2005: 160) called 'throwntogetherness'. By this she means the coalescing of people and things in movement at a particular time. This idea can be productive when we also think about people on the move across borders, living together in difference, in varied communal and domestic physical spaces as well as imaginative places. We must include the transnational lives that connect many places and times all at once; for example, depicted here in remittance houses (Boccagni and Echeverría; Bertolani), the circulation of home through objects, religious symbols, photographs, souvenirs, and food (Pérez Murcia; Pechurina; Cancellieri).

Hospitality Double Work: Concept and Ethnography's Shadow

Coming together in space is rarely, if ever, a neutral encounter. This is especially so with respect to social encounters in domestic spaces, which in these chapters are presented simultaneously as spaces that are private, intimate, communal, shared,

semi-public or perhaps, we might say, with various degrees of publicness. As contested, worked over, and lived, these living spaces are marked by precedent – who can claim priority, authority, sovereignty, and ultimately how will those assertions be negotiated through social interaction? It is here where we turn to the seemingly universal cultural idiom of hospitality. Hospitality is a cultural idiom that provides a set of practices to lessen the perceived threat of difference with the arrival of a stranger (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 1997; Candea & da Col, 2012; Harney & Boccagni, 2022; Herzfeld, 1987; Pitt-Rivers, 1968). The host uses hospitable practices and language to sustain a sense of control over space and time within a specific spatial domain. As much as possible, this framing seeks to ensure the continuation of the current social order in the context of the threat of change that accompanies encounters with strangers or outsiders to that physical and, at least by assertion, 'sovereign' space of the host.

Hospitality has become then a word and concept that is asked to do a lot of work in its popular usage, its culturally specific deployment, and its scalar dimensions. Politicians and states adopt it to signal the unequal, yet putatively generous, relationship between state resources used to host migrants and asylum seekers. The chapters here though also entwine the conceptual force of hospitality with the methodological question of entry, threshold passing, persistence of inequality and ultimately degrees of acceptance as researchers in their field sites. Hospitable encounters always contain a degree of risk and hence the need by participants to assert control through cultural signals – risk that the stranger will not understand 'their place'; will not recognize the rules of hospitality at play; will force change on host. If we think about these risks with respect to the chapters in this collection, the opportunity for misinterpretation cuts to the very core of hospitalities both universal yet culturally particular qualities. All cultures may have cultural practices or social 'laws' that govern or guide the role of guest, host and indeed the expectations of the performance of hospitality – laws, one should add, that must be constantly performed, adjusted and negotiated within groups. That is, hospitality is also about accepting friction and negotiated arrangements even with actors within a common cultural frame. There is a risk that one's values, perceptions and conventions can be transformed by the encounter with the stranger. This risk has significant resonance then in intercultural dynamics through shared spaces (Cancellieri, Vietti, Miranda-Nieto, Boccagni, Bonfanti and Bertolani).

How can one be sure that 'your' laws are theirs? Or, does one just assume that they are? These negotiations of difference through a process of hospitality can create risk, tension, conflict or mutual understanding and transformation. A further challenge that unsettles assumptions about the universality of hospitality in the context of migration is the under-appreciation of gender as a source of tension and misapprehension. The universal migrant figure tends to be a normative non-gendered (hence male). Several chapters reveal how gender intersects and inflects the research process but also the focus on domestic spaces, traditionally framed as gendered female unsettled by a number of these chapters that both reveal gender dynamics that are continually contested.

It is this issue of gender that points to another theme I wish to briefly address here. This has significant implications for how we think about entering homes, examine the use of space and consider the ambiguities of hospitality with respect to migrant and asylum seeker experiences. While these chapters all seek to illuminate the ways in which people make a sense of home in domestic, intimate spaces, what they reveal is also that these spaces are relational, shared and open to various degrees. They effectively explode the simple binary between public and private and the conceptual assumptions behind that distinction. Publicness emerges through the expansion of a shared communicative space, replete with intersectional difference and inequality, and yet still offering opportunity for mutual understanding and intercultural engagement.

Visibility and Shared Space: The Publicness of Home

Fravega's keen observations of the shared, multi-use spaces of the social in the makeshift rural migrant settlements upends simple notions of thinking of the domestic as private, closed space. Rather, it forces us to think about mutuality, sharedness and degrees of visibility, openness, or *publicness* in how migrants make homes (Brighenti, 2010; Habermas, 1989; Goffman, 1971). That we speak of publicness does not suggest that asymmetry and power inequalities do not exist. As Kadim's use of hospitality as a mode of inviting the researcher into this shared (domestic) space indicates, there is still a dynamic of control, however polite. Similarly, Vietti's extended engagement with his positionality in a condominium in Turin that he calls home but also collapses into a field site beautifully weaves together his positionality with insights into publicness with a discussion of the way Maryna, Lucia and Fatima use the courtyard. Each destabilises the public/private dichotomy and expands the frame of the domestic. When an ethnographer is a friend, acquaintance, neighbor, resident, a researcher and also a guest, his domestic is both individual apartments but also the condominium as a whole as a shared space. Or, we can see in Cancellieri's multicultural condominium a continuum of publicness that challenges simple notions of the private. The contestations in the *mandir* that Bonfanti and Bertolani recount demonstrate the extension of the domestic beyond the home also a publicness – tentatively engaged in a circumscribed communicative space with the politics of inequality and gender. Furthermore, Giudici reminds us that there are limits to our ethnographic entry and our access to other people's domesticity, but even here this squatter settlement undermines the clarity of categories and the productiveness of uncertainty. The micro-analyses of shared flats (Miranda-Nieto), asylum seeker rooms (Boccagni), or so-called remittance houses (Boccagni and Echeverría), while adhering to some sense of privacy and intimacy also point to a sharedness and openness of physical spaces with strangers that speaks to an expansion of publicness.

Ethnography's Promise

The ethnographic project insists upon a dynamic of human interaction that can be discomforting, arrhythmic and unsettling for researcher and participants alike because it requires the researcher to be *invited* into the lived worlds of people who have their own issues, challenges, desires and hopes to cope with every day. Invitation implies a sense of inequality and crossing of thresholds that others control. In that sense, the idiom of hospitality serves as a very clear 'universal' way to manage these social relations. As all fieldworkers know, those encounters are filled with embarrassing silences, awkward conversations, uncertainty about bodily posture, closeness, and presence as well as hesitant approaches, which point to our awareness that 'rules', or situated cultural conventions, may well be transgressed. Each speaks to the friction in hospitable dynamics and to the lack of 'knowing' that inheres to meeting with difference. It is however only through the risk of the unknown guided by the unmarked, or self-conscious but also improvisational cultural knowledge that we have that shared meaning and understanding emerges. The chapters in this collection brilliantly expose the expansiveness and openness of the domestic for the reader by making 'home' accessible and visible across spaces and social forms.

References

Brighenti, A. M. (2010). The publicness of public space on the public domain, *Quaderno* 49, Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale. Trento.

Candea, M., & da Col, G. (2012). The return of hospitality. *JRAI (N.S.) Special Issue: The Return to Hospitality: Strangers, Guests, and Ambiguous Encounters* (M. Candea & G. Da Col, Eds.) (pp. S1–S19).

Derrida, J., & Dufourmantelle, A. (1997). *De l'hospitalité*. Calmann-Lévy.

Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public: Microstudies of the public order*. Basic Books.

Habermas, J. (1989 [1962]). *Structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. MIT Press.

Harney, N. D., & Boccagni, P. (2022). Calibrating home, hospitality and reciprocity in migration. *Anthropological Theory*, online first.

Herzfeld, M. (1987). 'As in your own house': Hospitality, ethnography, and the stereotype of Mediterranean society. In D. D. Gilmore (Ed.), *Honor and shame and the unity of the Mediterranean* (pp. 75–89). American Anthropological Association.

Massey, D. (2005). *For space*. Sage.

Pitt-Rivers, J. (1968). The stranger, the guest and the hostile host: Introduction to the study of the laws of hospitality. In J. G. Peristiany (Ed.), *Contributions to Mediterranean sociology: Mediterranean rural communities and social change* (pp. 13–30). Mouton.