Article

Constructing Home through Unhome: Narratives of Resistance by an Iranian Asylum Seeker in Germany

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Abstract: The recent COVID-19 pandemic uncovered some already existing but somewhat hidden inequalities in different countries. Many features of inequalities that pre-existed the COVID-19 pandemic for a long time were uncovered due to this radical shift in living arrangements globally. This paper focuses on one particular feature of these inequalities: housing situation of one Iranian asylum seeker in a heim (refugee accommodation) in Germany. Contributing to an understanding of how political resistance can be exercised through personal biographies, the paper differentiates between the notion of 'unhome' from home by discussing three factors: choice, anchor and the significant of others. The paper contributes to the growing scholarships around home in migration and its intersection with personal narratives.

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic there were various arguments about the notion of home. One of the important messages about 'staying at home' aiming to control the spread of the virus was globally widespread. Most countries that were hit by the virus used different translations of this phrase which also generated popular hashtags in the social media. In some countries those who stayed at home were hailed as heroes and those who left their homes were fined, publicly shamed or at the very least, were reprimanded. The message simply invited all to stay at a place called home, a place that is supposedly safe and free from outside threats. This message presumed that the public space was unsafe by the spread of the virus but more importantly the domestic space was a safe haven. It is the latter assumption that is at the heart of this paper. Is the private space of home (any home) always safer than the outside? What are the boundaries of home? And is home experienced by all in a similar way? This is particularly important in the case of those who live in 'unconventional' living arrangements such as student accommodations, public housing for asylum seekers, or shelters for the homeless.

This underlying meaning of 'home' in relation to structural inequalities is not new and my interest in the notion of home among migrants dates back well before the pandemic. However, within the pandemic lockdowns and through multiple conversations I have had with some of my research participants who were mainly asylum seekers and refugees from different backgrounds in Ireland, the UK and Germany, I came to know that home is not experienced in the same way when the rules of the public space is supposedly equal for everyone.

This paper is based on the life story of one Iranian asylum seeker. Touraj, (his real name following his own request) who has been living in a *heim* (an accommodation system in Germany designed for asylum seekers and refugees) for about three and half years describes his various homes. He compares the practices that he has had to engage in to reveal the stark difference between the realities of home and imaginations of home (Boccagni 2017). It is through these comparisons between reality of home and the idea

of home, that this paper focuses on how political resistance emerges from personal and private stories and manifests in the imageries of a future life. For this purpose, I will unpack the notion of unhome as an antithesis of home. But through doing this, I will discuss how living in an unhome is seen as an act of resistance towards the structural inequalities that are experienced by asylum seekers transnationally.

This paper first discusses the notion of home in relation to belonging and recognition in recent and growing literature on home. In order to understand 'unhome' it is vital to understand how these three concepts (home, belonging and recognition) are related. It will move on to present the importance of choice as an anchor and the significance of 'others' in such relationship. Finally, the paper contains a discussion section about how living in an unhome is an act of resistance that ties the stark present in-limbo situation to a hope for a better future. In other words, the paper's contribution is that through resisting—in time and space—against exiting housing (and other) inequalities, Touraj constructs a narrative of active participation and inclusion within the German society. Hence, he links home and belonging to a future life that is not yet achieved but is potentially more sedentary which could feel more secure (good for conclusion nor here).

2. What Is Home?

Home, is a central concept in sociology and geography and has attracted much attention in recent years (Ahmed et al. 2003; Boccagni 2014, 2017; Duyvendak 2011; Kochan 2016; Ralph and Staeheli 2011; Walsh 2011). Home can be understood in a wider sense than a house or dwelling (Mallett 2004) because it does not refer to the physicality of a home (such as an apartment, a house or structure of a dwelling). Home can be conceptualised as a site of belonging and familiarity as Sarah Ahmed (1999) argues. Whilst home is mainly counted as a place of comfort, control and privacy which can evoke positive emotions, it can—at the same time—represent a place where negative and ambiguous feelings are developed and experienced (Brickell 2012b). In fact, the wealth of research in feminist studies (that focus on domestic violence), for years have been pointing out this dark aspect of home and have tried to expose the unequal power relations that usually cause so much pain for victims (mostly women) of domestic violence (Blunt and Varley 2004). In this literature, home, is argued to be a place of danger and threat rather than stability, comfort and control. It is against this backdrop that one needs to think of a place which has the capacity to be/become home and unhome at the same time. Notwithstanding, the quest for home with its spatial, physical and emotional aspects reminds us that home is never a finished project (Fathi and Ní Laoire 2021). The ongoing process of seeking, making and rebuilding home, or what Boccagni (2017) calls 'homing' is about everyday practices of cultivating home rather than achieving a stage or end of a process (Boccagni and Brighenti 2017). This process of homing, a notion that was earlier used in a similar sense by Avtar Brah (1996) or homemaking (Boccagni 2017), is tightly linked to the sense of belonging.

3. Home, Belonging and Recognition

Reducing migration to physical movements and journeys masks a variety of experiences by migrants who aim to have a place that is called home. Treating migration as a mechanical movement, deprives migrants of agency from the process of displacement and emplacement. Sara Ahmed argues that, for many, home can become a 'site of practised belonging' (Ahmed 1999). Vanessa May (2017) proposes that home can be a space of unbelongingness. Both statements confirm the strong relationship between the notion of home and belonging. Much of the sense of belongingness or unbelongingness that is experienced in relation to home is in fact relational and multi-scalar (Brickell 2012a, 2012b). Because home is understood through scales: micro (family, personal relationships and domestic space); meso (community and neighbourhoods) and macro factors (being part of a nation or living in a country). Migrants' identifications with multiple homes at these scales in fact represent a desire to secure a place of being and belonging at various levels (Tolia-Kelly 2004) and whilst the majority of migrants want that sense of inclusion at meso and macro

levels, it is always the first scale, the immediate surrounding of one, that is part of the everyday experience of a migrant. Hence, the structure of living place, becomes extremely important in narratives of home and how its arrangements evoke the sense of belonging.

On the other hand, homeland becomes emblematic in how migrants understand belonging (Antonsich 2010). However, country of origin is not the sole point of identification and the feelings of belonging whilst it informs practices and feelings after migration to a great degree (Flynn 2007). Home also encompasses 'sensory world of everyday experience' (Ahmed 1999, p. 341; see also Accarigi 2017) and these senses that are embedded within the tacit knowledge migrants obtain after migration are always made in relation to past lives and homes.

These diverse attributes of home highlight two important complexities in relation to home and belonging. The first is that home in migration in essence is a contradictory term. Whilst home is related to the notion of settlement and growing roots in a particular place, migration refers to movement, uprooting and departures (Ahmed et al. 2003). Conceptualising home-in-migration through focusing on practices and the processes of home-making (homing), has tended to overcome this contradiction (Brah 1996; Boccagni 2017). I have highlighted the urgency of examining this contradiction between home and migration concepts in a recent publication given the mass number of people on the move and the international policies that call for 'managed migration' (citation deleted for peer review). Home and migration as such raise important questions about belonging. Where is home? How is it experienced? When does a place such as a city, a country or a structure of a dwelling begin or cease to be a home? The answer to these questions is not easy but can usefully direct us towards some paths to understand the relationship between home and belonging.

Secondly, although migrants may be regarded as 'successful' in creating a *physical* home such as building a place, renting a house, furnishing a space, moving furniture and other meaningful materials across borders, there are spatial, temporal and embodied belongings that need to be considered in relation to these physical aspects of home (Yuval-Davis 2006). This complexity of home refers to belonging that is achieved through interaction with others and receiving a sense of recognition from them (Fathi 2017; Valentine 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006). In other words, when individuals move onwards and particularly when become displaced through routes of migration and asylum systems, the foundations of what constitutes home for them changes. They lose the recognition they used to get (at the very least as citizens of a country). The 'sense of recognition', a lengthy process, is a much-rooted concept that is at the heart of home and belonging (Fathi 2015). The sense of recognition also needs official approval (in the form of a refugee status, visa, or citizenship), or what Yuval-Davis calls 'the politics of belonging' (2006). This official recognition facilitates the stay in a country although the feeling is always accompanied with feelings of uncertainty (Fathi 2017). Recognition is at the heart of interpersonal relationships and it is practised in the public spaces, structures and institutions within a society. As Nancy Fraser (1997, p. 280) put it 'misrecognition is an institutionalized social relation, not a psychological state'. In other words, misrecognition is never a one-sided feeling that migrants experience but it is embedded within the social relations of members in a society that systematically facilitates some people feel belonging or not. It is usually the misrecognition (both official and relational) that directs us to the importance of unhome.

4. What Is Unhome?

Unhome, as a concept has recently gained attention in human geography and critical geographies of home (Brickell 2012a; Nethercote 2022). It refers to the process or the situation that actively and systematically deprives people of making a home (Brickell 2012a; Nethercote 2022). As discussed above, home and belonging are related and intertwined. There is a third element important in the notion of unhome and that is power. Blunt and Dowling (2006) in their seminal book, *Home*, propose the concept of 'critical geographies of home' that interrogate the link between home, power and identity. They argue that critical

geographies of home shift attention away from the concept of home as a place of living that is devoid of any power structures and directs our attention to power relations that make a place 'homely' or 'unhomely'. Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue that contradictory emotional narratives about home (both in terms of materiality and concept) refer to a vital aspect of experiences of home that needs contextualisation: the role of power in these interrelations. Brickell (2012a) connects emotional engagements driven from materialities to home and argues how as researchers we can 'do' critical geographies of home. She concludes that focusing on unequal power positions in the domestic space is key to 'doing' critical geographies of home. She particularly encourages us to think critically about the experiences of those who live in 'the margins of home' (p. 227) at different scales of home: domestic, private, global and local. Experiences of unhome, or those at the margins of home, are not positive or warm. These spaces lack authority, control and are often racialised (Nethercote 2022). Indeed, acknowledging negative emotions associated with power and home when intersected with racial inequalities are encapsulated within some recent discussions about capitalism, racism and home (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Nethercote 2022). Nethercote (2022), in particular, argues that forceful denial of home that targets specific groups in society leads to 'racial capitalism' (Jenkins and Leroy 2021). To sum up so far, home and belonging are tightly related, but when located within power relations that govern living conditions within the structures of a place, together they contribute to the notion of unhome. This is particularly true in the case of asylum seekers' housing condition.

5. Methodology

This paper follows a constructionist approach to narrative analysis (Esin et al. 2013). The method is focused on small stories narrated within a large life history of an individual and focuses on the dialogue that takes place between the researcher and the participant. As during the pandemic, there was no opportunity to travel nor to conduct face-to-face research, I explored using internet as a medidum of research. Touraj was introduced through a common friend, and after an initial conversation on the phone, we agreed to have long conversations to discuss the notion of home, homeland, migration and belonging. Each interview took about one to two hours and in total there were four of such interviews. The interviews were recorded, and parts of them were transcribed by myself. In the follow up interviews, further questions and new topics were being developed. In this context, Touraj was indeed a co-researcher, actively leading the debate, and later on co-authored a paper with myself and participated at a conference where the same paper was presented (both in 2021).

6. *Heims*: Unhomes in Action

Heim in German means home but in this context *Heim*(s) are referred to accommodations that are provided by the German federal state for asylum seekers. Touraj, an Iranian asylum seeker in his late 40s lives in one of these heims in Berlin. He has a brother in Germany and a sister and a mother who live in Tehran. All family members are political activists and at different times, they have been arrested and imprisoned in Iran several times. Touraj himself left Iran about 10 years ago (2012), first fled to Turkey, and then paid a human trafficker to go to Greece. He lived in Greece for seven years and applied for asylum in Greece first. His application was rejected several times before he moved onwards to Germany. Whilst in Greece, Touraj was engaged in some activities for asylum seekers' rights as he described the 'awful housing conditions in Athens'. Upon arriving in Germany in 2019, just before a series of pandemic lockdowns, he was housed in a heim, little did he know that the structures of the heim was the only image of Germany he could see for a couple of years.

According to Touraj, heims are usually temporary accommodations and are made available to asylum seekers whilst their applications for refugee status is being processed, a period that can last up several years. Rooms within a *heim* are shared among 2–3 individuals and kitchens and bathrooms by people who live on the same floor, sometimes up to 15–

20. Each building is composed of 4–5 floors and each floor has up to 10 rooms. *Heims* in general are cold and unwelcoming spaces. These characteristics became accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar characteristics of cold, unhomely and empty spaces are devoid of physical and emotional contacts. Similar imagery is reported about Direct Provision centres in Ireland–structures which are used to host asylum seekers for a temporary period but lack adequate standard of housing (Breen 2008).

He described how people were locked in rooms and were only allowed to leave the room for the sporadic uses of bathrooms in the lockdowns. A guard responsible for several rooms, would sit in the corridor and allocate particular slots for the use of bathrooms. This rule alone caused much anxiety and distress among the residents living with Touraj in this heim and the anxiety soon led to hostility amongst the residents and between residents and the guards. Touraj became vocal about the injustices that he witnessed during the lockdowns in this (and other heims) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Touraj was unlucky as within a few months of arriving in Germany, COVID-19 hit and everywhere went into lock down. The isolation and his lack of interaction with others made him reflect on the notion of *unhome* and encouraged him to engage in this collaborative work. We had one initial conversation followed by three long interviews online throughout the last year about the notion of home. In the second interview, sharing the above photo (Only those who have a home can stay at home), he told me that many refugees and asylum seekers who live in heims in Germany feel they are locked not only in the rooms but in an 'accommodation system' that does not facilitate their integration and have turned the home into a prison.

Touraj's idea of home and unhome comes down to three factors: choice, anchor and the presence or absence of the significant others. In the following sections, I discuss these points.

6.1. Choice

Quite often, migrants engage with transnational activities that show their allegiances to places where they live or places of past homes. In any case, the power of choice in the activities that they engage reinforce their home-making practices with such as sending

remittances and building houses in home countries (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015; Van Hear 2004; Sandu 2013). Other examples would be organising family reunions despite costs and challenges (Ramirez et al. 2007); or through transnational caring for older generations who stayed put (Belford and Lahiri-Roy 2019). As Boccagni and Nieto (2021) argue most critiques of home do not engage with the underlying questions that refer to a space. Choice as the main function of making a home must be present otherwise a place with most potential in making a sense of belonging can become a place of unhome.

Touraj refers to the notion of choice a lot in his interviews. He started his last interview by a Persian expression:

> Touraj: We have an expression in Farsi which says: 'chahar divari, ekhtiari'. It means within the four walls of your home, you can do whatever you want. I believe that ideally the four walls need to protect you from the outside, from the danger.

Touraj is describing here the foundation of what a home entails. It is a place that is separated from the rest of the world and is excluded by what is counted as the 'outside' or the public. But he subtly refers to what is important within these four walls, and that is the control and the power to chose or exercise autonomy. This in Farsi is called 'ekhtiar'. Home according to Paolo Boccagni (2017) is mostly a place where one feels safe and secure. We see how Touraj's idealisation of home here is about feelings of being safe from the outside world. Porteous's (1976) early distinction between a home and non-home shows what makes a difference between the two concepts is the extent to which one can control the space (inside versus outside). The place is also associated with having control over the settings and being in the company of familiar people with whom home-making practices become meaningful (Walsh 2011). Porteous's distinction draws a boundary between the enclosed versus the open space, where being enclosed brings one closer to safety and control. However, we know through the wealth of research in home in migration that due to quick changes in migrants' lives, the notion of home and the safety driven from that is not long lasting. As Boccagni (2017) argues, 'life events such as international migration shows how fictious that expected permanency [of a home] is in practice' (pp. 72–73). Because although on one hand a migrant needs a sense of permanency that is implied within the notion of home, their movements deconstruct the notion of home and challenges home as a safe, stable and permanent place. This volatile and in process characteristic of home, migrants often speak of an anchor, that implies a fixed memory of a home.

The first issue about choice that migrants in a *heim* deal with is the accommodation itself. Most asylum seekers in Germany must stay in heims during the time they are waiting for the outcome of their refugee application. They are not prevented from renting a place outside a heim and leave the accommodation system. However, there are several obstacles in living outside a heim which forces most migrants staying in heim. The first problem is that there are high rents in the private sector, which most asylum seekers cannot afford (residents a heim pay rent, although considerably lower than the market average). Landlords normally request tenants to provide them with job contracts that last more than six months in order to make sure that tenant can afford the rent. But based on Touraj's observation and experience, no employer offers a contract which is more than six months. The reason for short contracts is for firms not to commit to keep individuals in case their asylum application is rejected. Finally, if someone gives up their accommodation in a heim, it is very bureaucratic to acquire the accommodation again, usually combined with lots of paperwork in German language, if the resident plans to return to live in a heim (which may not be necessarily the same building, risking losing touch with some newfriends). As a result, the person might be risking becoming homeless.

Such a limbo and temporary situation can last for years, but at the very least, it takes away a chance of living outside the heim if the migrant choses to do so. Choice here becomes a luxury for displaced people as Kabachnik et al. (2010) argue.

The second issue with choice in heims experience is about not having autonomy about with whom one likes to share the space. Touraj argues that: 'the dream about a home that I have is to have *the* key to the place not *a* key, but the key'. He contemplates about the issue that he does not have the choice about who to share the room with whilst he knows that there is no corner of private life that he can enjoy. Because, according to him, even if he could chose who to share the room with, living with another stranger in the room was exposing.

The right to have a private space in many countries are taken away from asylum seekers. The living arrangements very soon turn into hostile environments and migrants have to live in conditions that make their stay unpleasant at the very least. This 'permanent impermanence' (Brun 2012) that asylum seekers have to deal with over the years, creates what Touraj describes as a 'place of survival' rather than a place of living.

He argues that although the heim where they live has the basic components of a home (it is a shelter, it is warm in winter months, there is a toilet, shower and a kitchen), it is the politics around a heim that makes the place an unhome. O'Reilly (2020), in a research with asylum seekers in Direct Provision or DP (similar asylum accommodation in Ireland) observes a similar situation. She argues that lack of choice and control over basic everyday practices, such as cooking, alienates the residents from the structure of the DP dwelling. O'Reilly (2020, pp. 137–38) argues that the policies that structure Direct Provision have located it, and the people who reside in it for varying lengths of time, in an 'in-between space', between inclusion and exclusion, between hospitality and hostility, between citizenship and non-citizenship and between place and non-place'.

Whilst it is important to understand the perspectives of heim in Germany, it becomes clear that similar policies about housing of asylum seekers and refugees are enforced across Europe and beyond. Such policies need to be read within a wider European approach to asylum housing and home provision as O'Reilly (2020) rightly argues. As such in this section, what can be concluded is that choice is often taken away from migrants as part of a concerted effort towards creating structural inequality that impacts migrants' sense of self-worth and belonging. The removal of choice encourages one to look for an anchor, or what people together although they may be physically apart.

6.2. Anchor

It is inevitable to discuss an anchor in relation to past homes. As fleeting as they could be, memories of past homes can work towards giving a feeling of embeddedness to a person who lives in a current state of limbo. Touraj, explains how in Iran, through eventually buying a flat as a family, they managed to end an ongoing and constant series of removals between different rental homes. The apartment that was bought in Karaj (a small city near Tehran) becomes a safe nest for the family and a *langar* or anchor for him. Comparing home to an anchor is important for Touraj as the space of home for him, with both parents alive (his father passed away recently), was in stark contrast to the unsafe public space of Iran, as a political activist.

> Touraj: We were tenants for years and we were changing homes very frequently. We managed to buy this place eventually. It is a very ordinary flat, in a block of flats. It is 90 square meters. It has a living room, it has a large kitchen, a toilet and bathroom and two bedrooms. It doesn't even have a balcony. But somehow the memories from previous home have evaporated from my brain and the only memories I have [of a home] is from this flat.

Touraj explains that because this flat was purchased as opposed to others that were all rented, the family members could make changes to the structure of the house.

Touraj: this was the first time my parents owned somewhere. I even did some construction work for this house. I don't think the sense of a home is about a neighbourhood. No, but it is the last place [I lived in when I was in Iran]. That is why I remember this place so vividly.

Anchor, here, encapsulates the memories of the past. Past home as anchor, is one with a fixed image for Touraj, one that keeps coming back within the fleeting images of current unhomes:

Touraj: Our country is our home. For me home is both my country and a home where I lived, the 'paternal home' or khaneye pedari. I have a place, a room in migration that is mine but when I think about it [home] carefully, the paternal home comes to my mind, although it is only my mum who is left in that house. It is as if it is my last strong of home I can grab in my life. That place, is the only memory that has stayed with me from a real home. I think if that place is lost, I won't know anywhere else as home. Last week, my sister told me they are thinking of selling that place... It really hit me although I did not live in that house for a long time. Maybe one or two years. Then, I left Iran and dad died. It was the last place I lived with the rest of my family in Iran, it was the last place I saw dad alive... and the memories of the house has stayed with me.

When he was asked what constitutes a home for him, he defined a home in relation to the sense of security and belonging that comes with a variety of warm feelings such as safety, belonging and inclusion (Boccagni 2017), even though that Touraj refers here to the public space of home country rather than an enclosed space unlike his description of home in Germany that is mostly about the physical space of the private home.

Touraj: what constitutes home is not out there. What makes a place home, is whether or not that place pleases us or not. We migrated because in our country, we gradually lost the things that make Iran a home.

He then argues that having the choice to live in a place, the way one desires to is key component of a home. Although having the choice to make a home, for a migrant, poses an important contradiction. I have argued about this contradiction between home and migration above. Because the essence of making a home is about permanency that comes with a sense of security and staying put whilst migration refers to uprooting and movements. When uprooting is enforced (such as forced displacement), it leads to long-term and protracted dislocation of a social positioning. Here, choice becomes important. The transition from a home that is reminiscent of the past to an ideal one that is aspired and is directed towards the future passes through present homes that are lived at the moment.

Touraj: I do not have an image of my home in Germany. I do not even think about a home in Germany. But wherever that home is, I want it to have a toilet for my own, one that I exclusively use. Other characteristics are not important for me. I want a small corner (room) where I can set my own rules.

What lies behind an anchor, is power and control of elements of home, that are missing from the current housing situation. Touraj talks about his home in Germany in terms of power and control. He says these are 'taken for granted components of a home'. A toilet, a quiet corner, having the liberty to come and go at any time one desires as bare minimums of a place to call home, are necessities that have become absent luxuries, but work towards a longer term attachment in the same way that 'significant others' can make one.

6.3. The Significant Others

Heims are unhomes in practice also because they are excluded from the society. Such accommodations are placed in locations outside cities and towns, that geographically

places the residents further away from the fabric of the society. Refugee camps set up in Greece and detention centres in the UK are also other examples of geographically distanced locations chosen for accommodating asylum seekers. This physical distance makes it even harder for people outside the *heim* to access the buildings. Touraj describes how his brother who has lived longer that Touraj in Germany finds it difficult to visit him at the heim where Touraj lives. The relationship we make to a place we call home develops in multiple directions but as Somerville (1997) and Allen (2008) argue, it mostly revolves around the co-presence with significant others.

During the pandemic, three people within Touraj's *heim* were tested positive with COVID-19 virus. All residents were subsequently quarantined inside their rooms for 14 days, whilst Touraj and some other men were transported to another *heim* to be quarantined for 14 days separated from the residents in their residence heim. He equated the experiences of being quarantined in the second *heim* as being in a solitary sell within a prison. He said: 'I have experiences of being imprisoned in Iran, this one [being quarantined inside another *heim*] was much worse'. This is because the physical distance he experienced between himself and the world he barely got to know (the first heim) became even greater in the absence of ways of communication not knowing the language and not having access to the same social network which existed in the first heim. His only interactions during this time were with a security guard who was sitting at a distance and would shout at anyone trying to leave their room. The sense of loneliness and exclusion is evident in his account. One of the fundamental aspects of the relationship a person makes to a space is the history one makes through these temporal connections (Lawrence 1985, p. 130). Touraj got used to the first heim as he got to know residents but being forcefully evicted from there, he argues that the unhome in practice is constantly and continually made and remade by systematic exclusion.

'Residential histories' (the time a person spends in a place) here are intertwined with biographical histories. It is the significant others and their biographies that are making a place, even an unhome, significant to us. When this connection between the person and history is cut, the process of displacement evokes a variety of negative feelings as a response to the physical and emotional exclusion one experiences. Although the first *heim* was already an unhome, being sent to a different one created a rupture to residential biography that Touraj and others like him. The loss of significant others are the opposite feelings of inclusion in a grouping or affinity towards a transnational space (Ehrkamp 2005). So in the process of making a space as unhome for a group (usually through forceful removal of a home or denial of a home), the sense of belonging and misrecognition is evoked. This is at the heart of my discussion about Touraj's attempts at making a home in an unhome setting.

Earlier in the interview he had described the place. It was an ordinary flat with two bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen. He mentioned that there is not even a balcony, to emphasise the ordinariness of the place. But as we see from the above extract, what made this place significant and important in his recounting of home, is the family members that lived there.

Touraj: 'Sometimes these conditions [to call a place home] are all financial but many times, the structure of a home is emotional. It is the need to be loved and to love someone'.

Touraj here vividly refers to the importance of significant others in the composition of a space as home. He lives alone in a room, and for that, he counts himself lucky that he does not need to share the room with someone. The following photo shows his room which he tried to make homely by growing plants and adding some small touches.

But he said when it comes down to it, this place cannot be called home, as there is not a person whose relationship can give meaning to the practices within the room. When I asked him whether he counts his place as his home, he answered:

> Touraj: So to answer your question whether I count this place home, I need to say that I have this room and I have a key, but it is not the only key. Someone else has the key to this room and it means that it is not entirely mine. Ownership of this space is an issue for me. I pay rent here, but I share the key with someone else and for me this is a half home. It is not complete although it has the factors I mentioned above.

What is ultimately characteristic of Touraj's narrative is that vacillation back and forth to past homes (Iran, Turkey and Greece and Germany). What is striking is that from these places he was forced to move onwards due to arrests and rejections in asylum applications but this fact did not leave him to have positive feelings about these places, indicating how significant others can play a role in one's attachment to a place of residence. We see that narratives of home and unhome in this case, are not purely related to post migration. Home is an elusive concept that does not know boundaries and can take a form of memory, reality of present and aspiration of future.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, I tried to show the importance of the domestic space of home, inequalities and the sense of belonging and how they shape discourses of political resistance. The politics around the control and maintenance, allocation and provision of housing for asylum seekers is accompanied with lack of control and agency. Accommodation provision for asylum seekers in Germany (like other European contexts) create an in-between space between permanence and impermanence not fulfilling the needed autonomy one needs from the domestic space of a home. As such, these public accommodations that are shaped and developed based on 'practicality' of accommodating refugees show features of unhomes.

What differentiates a home from an unhome lies in a variety of structural and personal factors. Structural inequalities have a persisting impact on personal lives in relation to their

feelings of inclusion and belonging, personal attachments to spaces (domestic, public, local and global). On the other hand, personal factors are more fluid and based on memory and feelings. The three factors discussed in this paper, were the importance of choice, anchor and significance of others that differentiate between home and unhome. At the same time, it is the personal biographies combined with residential histories that help create connections to a place.

Unhome, as an analytical concept, a place that one is forced to stay (lack of choice) and one that is devoid of any emotional relationships to people or spaces (anchors) and is usually physically empty and excluded (absence of significant others), helps us to understand the experiences of displacement and homemaking better. Because of these charactristics, unhome attributes to resistance. We saw above how Touraj's sense of belonging that emanates from his connections to his multiple homes, encourages him to become vocal and active in different countries that he lived. Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) argues that it is when the routine everyday aspect of life is disrupted, the sense of belonging is evoked. This is true about much of the personal acts as well as public movements. An effective trigger can be displacement of a place, house, city or a country that evokes one's feelings of belonging and inclusion.

Whilst unhome is a negative concept that usually is placed opposite home, it still has characteristics that are useful in analysing personal biographies of migrants such as resistance towards spatial inequalities in terms of housing, employment, travel and movement across borders. The circumstance around the notion of unhome are also tied to the personal and sensorial elements such as how migrants feel towards a particular place.

Through Touraj's life story, I discussed how the process of an unhome is done through forceful eviction or displacement of an individual. Movements across borders and in one occasion from one shelter to another, three factors of choice, anchor and significant others were discussed as important in making a home.

The first point discussed here is choice. Whilst choice is counted as a luxury in migrants' lives by Touraj and as it appears in Kabachnik et al.'s (2010) work, it is yet a present component of narratives of home. In Touraj's case, choice was present in the past homes and narratives of home in Iran, whilst its absence in his home in Germany, gave him a juxtaposition to highlight its importance. In a recent paper, the importance of choice was highlighted by Boccagni and Nieto (2021). They argued that the absence of choice is leaving their participants (young migrants from outside EU living in European countries) to refuse calling their place of residence as home. Touraj similarly uses the word home to refer to an imaginary place in future where he can live on his own, where he exclusively has the 'key' or where he can enjoy having a private toilet. By this, he points out that choice is intersected with ownership of a place and the exclusivity of that place to a close circle of known people.

The second point discussed by Touraj was anchor. I argued that anchor in past homes allows migrants to find some form of permanency in imageries of home. These imageries are used to protect oneself from the volatile present conditions and the unknown of the future life.

The last point discussed by Touraj referred to the importance of significant others. Living in refugee camps that lie at the margins of larger cities in Germany and being struck by multiple lockdowns during the pandemic, Touraj refers to the importance of significant others in transforming an unhome to a place that could temporarily called home. Here we see how the interrelationships between people occupying a place and the spaces are shaping home. A home is only actualised when one can control that space by choosing the have and let certain groups of people enter. Although the control is not his key focus, he believes that by controlling the space, he can benefit from the presence of others as a relational quality of a home that is at the heart of reinforcing residential histories of a place.

To conclude this paper aimed to contribute to understanding how the notion of resistance is practised through living in an unhome. As is evident from this life story, resistance against structural inequalities is always combined with individual agency and is

achieved through small acts of everyday life. The contribution hence lies in the argument that it is through personal biographies—in time and space—that we can learn about resistance against exiting housing (and other) inequalities. Persosnal biographies are particularly important for those who are living on the margins of society, those who experience unhome for example. Touraj constructs a narrative of active participation and inclusion by taking us to memories of past homes and his aspiration for a future home. By doing this, he relates spatial and temporal elements of home to his own personal life and shows that how personal is political and how narrative can be turned into an act of political resistance.

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