

# Archiving Displacement and Identities: Recording Struggles of the Displaced Re/making Home in Britain

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## Abstract

This chapter analyses extracts from ten life histories of displaced men and women who migrated from seven countries in the Global South to Britain before 2016<sup>2</sup>. Seeking safety, they faced challenges in re/making home under restrictive immigration practices and changing policies framed within the “Hostile Environment”. We explore identity, memories of “home” and loss, and analyse lived experiences of the displaced re/making “home” in England and Scotland, and their struggles over identities and belonging within British immigration policies. We recognise the different meanings of “home” and address challenges to identity by taking Mbembe’s (2015) suggestion to decolonise knowledge in the archive. In addition, a non-essentialist intersectional approach to identity, migration and diaspora helps us to comprehend the paradoxical, relational, multiple, and complex meanings of “home” and identity to different generations and the “race” of irregular migrant women and men<sup>3</sup>. We

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<sup>2</sup> This is an outcome of a pilot project funded by the University of East London’s internal fund under the Grant of Civic Engagement Fund 2015 (number: 1214).

<sup>3</sup> The term “race” is used to indicate racial hierarchy and people struck by unjust race relations. Race plays an important role in the discriminatory experiences of the displaced people we spoke to. The discussion in this chapter includes many examples of these. We used inverted comma for the term “race” (rather than race per se) to appreciate race relations and racialisation of the displaced. All other mentions of

argue, however, home to the displaced is not solely about materiality or spatiality. Home and identity are influenced by the policies of the host country, immigration practices, *race* and other structural power relations, and politics of belonging to some extent.

## Introduction

Archiving oral histories and documenting life narratives through digitalising archives are essential for preserving and making accessible the original stories of displacement and the struggles of the displaced. Until recently, the concept of history of the displaced was slow to gain power in Britain within the wider discourse of refugee and forced migration studies (Gatrell, 2017). There has been a dearth of archives of oral histories of the displaced (Dudman, 2017; 2019). The archiving and digitalising of oral histories of those facing border struggles should inform policy, and oral history is a compelling approach to document the powerful and collective memories of the displaced (Hashem and Dudman, 2016). This chapter draws on oral histories to present evidence of how displaced people with undocumented or irregular status have experienced identity crises and hostility when attempting to re/make “home” in London, Oxford, Bristol, and Glasgow. The extracts are drawn from stories preserved in a digitalised “Refugee Archive”, called the “Living Refugee Archive” (LRA), piloted through community collaboration<sup>4</sup>. They substantiate that “in an era of global movement and global conflict the meaning of home to the displaced is *complex* and *multiple*, while an aspired home is often denied, and that the displaced identities are being constructed as ‘Other’” (Hashem and Dudman, 2016, p.1).

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race without inverted commas refer to race generally. Our mention of the term “race” is informed by the deconstructive notion of social categories which suggests that race could mean many different things, and that race in academic research should not be randomly used as this enables legitimisation of racialisation of non-white people. For a theoretical discussion on racialisation, racism, and race relations, see also Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992).

<sup>4</sup> In early 2015 we were awarded a civic engagement community outreach fund from the University of East London to conduct a small exploratory research project through community collaboration and for developing a digitalised “Refugee Archive” for the preservation of and access to the displaced people and all interested in this field. The pilot project, called “Democratic Access or Privileged Exclusion? Civic Engagement through the Preservation of and Access to Refugee Archives” was undertaken in collaboration with the Refugee Council Archive and the Centre for Migration, Refugees, and Belonging by focusing on the documentation and preservation of displaced life histories and authentic narrative of lived experiences of the displaced in Britain.

The word “displaced” here refers to an individual who has fled and is on the move because of their circumstances in their country of origin. The displaced have moved to the UK because of their circumstances, not by choice. Displacement is either a consequence of forced displacement or other circumstances such as religious persecution or gender-based violence that led the person to flee home (see Marfleet, 2021). Displacement refers to moving away from one’s original home and place being forced to leave or self-exiled under persecution and circumstances. This definition is grasped from co-working with displaced participants in LRA. The LRA represented an innovative new approach as the portal would act as a digital library documenting the lived experience of displacement, simultaneously presenting a collaborative tool for active engagement with living histories of displacement through community outreach. Some of these excerpts of the life histories were disseminated through a launch event of the “Democratic Access or Privileged Exclusion?” project in 2015 and on the website of LRA. The discussion at the workshop highlighted the concern in relation to the “*refugee voice*” within the *archive*, and the ethics of how we should ensure these voices be heard in a *genuine* form, without prejudice or censor. This discussion, later, generated interest in how we, as an archival repository, determine what we mean by “the archive” and how we can move beyond established definitions to document the experiences of *the displaced*.

The chapter investigates five questions: how do documented and undocumented women and men of different ages, races, genders, and nationalities experience belonging and identity crisis? What makes it harder for participants in large cities to re/make home? What are the specific challenges that displaced men and women face in London and Glasgow, and how do they navigate them in their daily life? How do we challenge the official narratives of displaced experiences within the established archival space?

The discussion shows that meanings and experiences of home to the displaced *vary* based on their social categories and that there are considerable differences in the ways that individuals experience the process of re/making home. As the discussion below reveals London as a complex home, Black displaced men and Syrian displaced women are attempting to reconstruct their lives in the city and looking for a safe home; yet they are not allowed to rent a home and are reconstructed as “Other” within the restrictive immigration policies and multi-layered power relations in British society. Conversely, other displaced women and men, who have brighter skin colour, high English proficiency, and the same immigration status, may be able to access better support services and a safer home. Making home for irregular migrants from the Global South is not only difficult but often unattainable within the current climate in Britain (Hashem and Dudman, 2019).

Through analysing these extracts, we put forward four key arguments: first, the meaning of home to the displaced is relational, complex, and multiple, and displaced peoples’ experiences of home are affected by their everyday life struggles over identities and politics of belonging in the host country. Second, struggles of the displaced over re/making home must be understood within the effect of power relations and political structures and their implications. Third, the different experiences of individual irregular migrants should be analysed by the use of a bottom-up oral history method combined with experience-centred narratology. Finally,

recording life stories associated with loss, cultural and political memories, and *archiving oral histories* about lived experiences, struggles over identities and home for the displaced who simultaneously negotiate uncertainties and hostility in their host countries, is important for documenting and establishing a counter-narrative led by the displaced and their history of displacement.

### **Recording life histories through civic engagement in the archive: Methods and methodology**

We worked directly with displaced individuals and community groups from the Global South, and researchers, practitioners, oral historians, scholars, students, and archivists who were then living in London and other large cities in Britain. Participants include both documented and undocumented adults. The project engaged with women and men from Bangladesh, Colombia, Morocco, Iran, Kuwait, Latin America, North Sudan, Somalia, and Syria. This chapter draws on ten narratives from the latter seven countries which focused on issues of home, identity, belonging, and work. The speakers here include one Latin American born Irish-Jewish Scottish woman, one Iranian Shia' Muslim man, one Iranian Sunni Muslim woman, one Moroccan-indigenous Muslim born atheist man, one Latin American born Catholic woman, one Sudanese Sunni Muslim man, one Suni Muslim man from Kuwait, one Somalian Sunni Muslim woman, one Syrian (Shia') Muslim man, and one Syrian woman. All of them self-identified as passionate about secularism and transnationalism. Their ages range between 20 and 50 years. The meetings lasted between one and three hours. All participants spoke in English, and none required an interpreter.

We listened to the stories, and recorded, preserved, and made available some of these stories in anonymous form through a launch event. We wanted to publish all stories on the website of LRA, but the publication was put on hold after a long discussion on ethical considerations about research with the displaced and irregular migrants. The oral histories are placed within University of East London's Data Repository for secure storage until all participants experience safety in terms of refuge.

Since the displaced are marginalised communities in any society, research with the displaced involves important ethical considerations. We used a critical anti-oppressive methodology (Dominguez, 2008 cited in Hashem, 2014) to reach out to the participants, for networking, consultations, interviews and to balance power relations between researcher and the participants<sup>5</sup>. Life history interviews were

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<sup>5</sup> The first author, Rumana, as a displaced (self-exiled) international immigrant activist-researcher, conducted outreach with displaced participants, arranging and conducting one to one interviews. She coded and analysed these oral histories, which were then edited and further analysed by the second authors using the archival research framework.

used as a primary method of data collection. A shared empathy with the participants was established in the meetings as the lead researcher was an immigrant without a work permit (who was working pro-bono at that time), which helped facilitate trust as the researcher was seen as “a displaced person of colour rather than an established scholar” (to quote Shahosh, 12 June 2015). For recording life histories, we relied on decolonised and oral study methodology which enabled us to document the narratives without distortion, and to engage communities with trust. We engaged pre-established oral history methods (Smith, 2002) but took a bottom-up approach by combining this method with an experience-centred narrative method (Squire, 2008 cited in Hashem, 2014) where participants led the discussions. This methodology allowed us to draw on knowledge from below.

Our participants are the speakers in the research and the co-producers of knowledge. The interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, and we followed an anti-oppressive approach in the meetings in which participants were able to speak about anything they like, for as long as they like, and could withdraw at any time. For example, one participant suggested changing the topic and refused to answer a question regarding her work status. This means that power was two way and communication was reciprocal.

Conversations took place in dialogical format rather than an interview setting. The dialogical aspect is important to ensure that the research is accountable and the process of data collection and analysis are reflexive and situated in the context – such as the Brexit vote in 2015 and 2016, hostile environment in post-Brexit Britain (2017-2019), ISIS and the “refugee crisis” in Europe. The research was co-conducted, and interview questions were co-designed with participants during the first civic engagement project. For the sake of safeguarding participants’ anonymity, we use pseudonyms - although most participants emphasised that they would like to be named in the research.

The narratives were archived and digitalised to preserve the narrative of displacement within the wider historical record. Of the ten, five accounts demonstrate that experiences of the displaced vary based on their ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, cultural heritage, specific disability, and geo-political context. All of them talked about belonging, home (former homes associated with trauma), loss, right to work, and collective and political memories of place, and subversion and struggles over identity and home under restrictive immigration regulations and border policies in Britain. The launch event of LRA was attended by some participants (anonymously) who actively contributed to the discussions on ethics and risks in archiving oral history.

## **Archiving “moving memories” of home to the displaced**

At the beginning of our civic engagement project in 2015, we considered how traditional archival paradigms could be re-conceptualised to better document and

represent the narratives and knowledge of displaced persons<sup>6</sup>. When describing memories of home and identity, our first irregular displaced speaker, Shahosh, emphasised that:

“These are ‘moving memories’. They are ‘moving’ because I am moving from one place to another, I am on the move, and my memories are also moving as I am moving for very long time. Some of my memories have faded away, and new memories are coming in mind as I am talking to you, and these memories are not fixed. These will also change as time will pass and I will move, grow, and learn new things about the world. So my memories are constantly moving, the memories about my home and the past life are not exactly the same as some years ago when I was in Morocco. My journey is complex. And it has changed the meaning of my homeland, home, and the landscape that I left behind.”

The speaker from Morocco is an indigenous-Black young man who moved away from home under religious persecution and sought asylum in the UK when he was 24 years old. He was fluent in English, eloquent in describing his lived experience, and we were moved by his life story. He had no formal education after primary school and moved to the UK in 2014 for safety and “in search of enlightenment” but was not allowed to study until 2018. He was forced to go to Madrasa in Morocco, which he could not cope with. In his words:

“I escaped home when I was teenage. I starved many days, there was no safety, there was nowhere to go in heat and wave. The Empire is highly discriminatory. The resources are controlled by the Empire. I come from a family where everybody submitted to Islamic dictatorship and *Madrasah* education. [...] I would run away from *Madrasah* and they would complain to my parents, and my family would torture and send me back to that harmful educational institution where they taught nothing but Arabic holy texts that made no sense to me. I read and re-read, recited and rehearsed the Quran so many times. I memorised the whole Noble Quran perfectly. Then they wanted me to read books full of many types of Hadith every day, for months. The rules in *Madrasah* was impossible. I got really sick at one point. The Imam and other religious teachers had known that I was not their ideal student, I would not be an ideal Imam in the future, but they would not let me go. When they realised that I was not convinced by the Holy texts, they imposed harsher rules on me to control me. I told them that they can’t keep me in that prison. My parents did not understand. My family was blind to Islamic education. They wanted me to continue anyway. They became brutal and let the state torture me. [...] I love Morocco. But I could not have stayed there. [...] I spent days, weeks and months under open sky, hiding in the Mountains. The Mountains know my sufferings. [...] Morocco is full of Mountains. The country has beautiful stunning landscape. The Mountains witnessed my pain, the torture I had been through in my homeland. I love the Mountain and I love my homeland but I could not go back. I had to flee to this United Kingdom, the country which is controlling the politico and economic leadership of Morocco and sub-Saharan Afrika, forcing many aboriginals from the region to move in the UK. I miss Morocco. Morocco has rich cultural history. I don’t miss my family home. It makes me so angry.”

Such narratives are powerful or “moving”. They are powerful because of their essence. This story provides a glimpse of Shahosh’s youth life back home, his

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on traditional archives, see, for example, Schwartz and Cook (2002).

deprivation, and struggles as a *Black* and *indigenous* man in Morocco. It reveals many contradictions and tensions with his family, religion, and Islamic education, and the cruelty that he faced, while simultaneously describing his attachment, political positioning, and pride and love for Morocco (as a landscape) and its political history. It also shows how his move to Britain is *complex*. He doesn't miss his family home but misses his home country, Morocco. He is aware of the colonial history of Morocco and stressed that he was exiled in the country that controlled Moroccan political economy which makes him angry. Such "moving" narrative of what Shahosh called, "moving memories" need little analysis for readers to understand why their preservation is important. The narrative partially substantiates Taylor's (2015, p.3) suggestion that the displaced are likely to maintain "a deep emotional attachment to the lost home" that they left behind – simultaneously making a new and safer home in the new place, that is, their country of exile. The loss of "home" that Shahosh describes, however, is the loss of Morocco – his homeland and home. His understanding of home is not fixed. He refers to a collective home of a collectivity – indigenous black Moroccans who are conquered by the Islamic dictatorship in Morocco – that he lost.

Shahosh's two-hour long-life narrative reconstructs the social history of Morocco, showing the division created by European colonisation in a sub-Saharan region, and the politics of international development which Shahosh believes had "facilitated the establishment of Islamic dictatorship in Morocco". His life history reveals many *contradictions* related to the sense of belonging to home, spatiality, attachment and complexities, cultural identities and the intersectionality between class, language, "race", religion, and nationality. For example, one contradiction related to belonging to the lost home is obvious in his saying that: "I love Morocco. But I could not have stayed there. [...] I love the Mountain and I love my homeland but I could not go back." Another key contradiction to belonging to home in exile is clear in his statement that "I had to flee to this United Kingdom, the country which is controlling the politico and economic leadership of Morocco and sub-Saharan Afrika, forcing many aboriginals from the region to move in the UK. I miss Morocco." Shahosh's first language is Arabic, and he has a Madrasa education, but he does not want to be an Imam. He believes in transnationalism, humanity, and enlightenment, and wants to resist colonisation in sub-Saharan Afrika<sup>7</sup>. His loss is not merely personal; the loss of home in his narrative is more of a collective loss. He mentioned homeland many times throughout the two hours. His account is powerful and at the same time shifting. In recording and archiving this

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<sup>7</sup> Shahosh's narrative is moving as it is full of struggles, tensions, and contradictions. His emphasis on "enlightenment" makes it clear that these contradictions are meaningful. He migrated because he rejects Madrasa education, which for him is too religious, yet simultaneously blind to Islamic education. He faced brutality when he rejected the Islamic education offered in Morocco. He loves the Arabic language but refuses to submit to a Madrasa education. At the same time, he rejects the colonial history and practices of the West, but he moved to the UK in search of freedom of speech and human rights (as he explains above).

and other collective and “moving” memories about their home and life, we preserve the words of our displaced speakers in the archive.

The term “moving memories” is used here for appreciating the displaced home in their country of origin, and the term “moving narrative” (powerful and shifting narrative) is to understand and contextualise their lived experiences in the host country, Britain. The term “moving memories” is a metaphor, representing both the powerful resonance of these narratives to evoke the feelings of displacement, but also the very memories themselves represent the movement and mobility of the narrator reflecting the transient nature of their experiences. The word “moving” is used interchangeably as it was first used by Shahosh to indicate the two together – memories and narrative of the displaced are constantly shifting and are powerful. For Shahosh, the word “moving” refers to “powerful” and at the same time “shifting”. As he explains, it is shifting because his “memories move, meanings change” as he moves places and as time passes by, and he remembers “different things” and makes “different meanings of these memories and new experiences”. Memories are not fixed for Shahosh but are powerful and constantly shifting. In considering the metaphor “moving”, this chapter analyses *moving narratives* and *moving memories* as critical in informing the policies and conversations around “refugee and migrants” in the hostile environment. Our notion of knowledge from below “considers the knowledge of the displaced is more important than the knowledge produced by researchers and experts who reinterpret data following a pre-existing paradigm” (Hashem and Dudman, 2016, p.3).

Meanings of home to most of our respondents are, however, *paradoxical*, multiple, often *complex*, relational and “in constant process” (Taylor 2015, p.7). Individual irregular *migrants of colour* and undocumented women’s experiences of the process of re/making home in Britain vary, however, based on their identities. For instance, Neela, a 37-year-old undocumented displaced woman from Latin America, left home in the face of domestic violence and sexual violence when she was 19. She escaped her father’s home, her hometown, and the entire home country, and moved to England via Lebanon and Scotland in 1997 after her mum died at “home”. When talking about “home” in America, Neela stated:

“I could never do this [walk alone at night] in my home town in America. [...] It was very violent to women. You have to carry a knife when you go to date...hmm [...]. I don’t want to go back. I don’t have any reason to look back. The place is violent. There was no safety. My mum died. I could die there. [...] My father is a scientist, but he was brutal to me. I don’t miss that home. But I miss the landscape and nature. The nature across the border of my homeland is beautiful. I miss the environmental attachment to the whole place where I grew up.”

These risks and attachment - the sense of belonging to Neela’s home - are paradoxical which make the meaning of home to the displaced complex, and “moving”. Neela does not want to remember her family home in South America, in particular, because of violence. She was suffering from epilepsy but received no support from the family and school at home in the absence of her mother. Neela’s account of home shows that home is a gendered construct and is the place where the socialisation of children usually occurs and causes isolation for some. “It is



also contradictory, capable of being a place of nurture, safety and security as well as having the potential to be the location of oppression, subjugation and violence, especially for women” (Korac 2009, p.26; Tolia-Kelly 2010, p.28 cited in Taylor, 2015, p. 4). For those who have been forced to move away, this contradiction is often writ large, as the lost home is the setting for the good experiences of the past and memories of family and friends, but it is also a place where bad things happened, where the protection of the state failed, and neighbours could no longer be trusted. The home in exile is similarly capable of being a place of refuge, at the same time as being a place of alienation and discrimination.

Moving away from a violent home implies embracing uncertainty. Whether we embrace the displacement through self-exile or being forcefully evicted from home, displacement is always alienating and isolating. Neela and Shahosh’s isolation led to both vulnerability and emancipation, which affects their identities.

### **Remembering “Home”: Which Home?**

Two common questions that the London based displaced speakers were asked in interviews for this research are: Do you live in London? Where is your home? The answer to the second question was misunderstood by most participants. They often asked, “which home?” – as they were negotiating hostility here in Britain where they are unwelcomed, and still feeling emotional attachment to the lost home and a strong sense of belonging to the family home they left behind. Except two, others have responded in detail that home to them is a place of safety and it is the spatial home that they remember in their home country which they left behind. Most of them have talked *proudly* about the home in home country and talked less about the home they inhabit in Britain, which also substantiates home is “intimately connected to our identity and an emotional sense of belonging” (Sirriyeh 2013, p.5, cited in Taylor, 201, p.3). When they described their home, there was often a pride, an affection, and a strong sense of belonging in that description. For example, when historians have written all about conflict in Morocco Shahosh as an exiled young indigenous man of Moroccan heritage narrates his collective memories about political struggles of Morocco with pride, that:

“My original home country Morocco has a rich history about which I am proud. The dictatorship and empire today ruined the country. But the Moroccan past political history is rich. [...] I’m proud to be a Moroccan because they have refused to accept western domination and refused the colonisers ...”

Shahosh described the political history of his original home for 25 minutes, despite his personal life struggle and religious persecution that he faced at home and that led him to flee his home. He challenged the history and research done by the western and white Moroccan scholars, which he called is “distorted and colonial knowledge that denies the existence of indigenous Moroccans and resources”.

Here, home to Shahosh is complex but also it substantiates Taylor's (2015) concept of a relational home. The relational home is the one where home to people means other people rather than a place or a location. His collective memory about home is resourceful – although brutal in terms of politics of human rights and development. While his individual memory of home is painful and forced him to flee home and embrace uncertainty, a strong sense of belonging and ownership is still noticeable in his assertion that “Morocco has a rich history”. This rich history is upheld by Shahosh and it influences his identity and belonging, even though he is distant from “home”.

Similar attachments and collective memories of home were highlighted by Sazia, Ahammad and Snafa about their lost “home” in countries of origin. Ahammad is from Sudanese heritage and is proud of his home in North Sudan too but he is also happy in Glasgow. Home for Ahammad is fluid because he could not be sure where his permanent home can be. But Jishan, one 28-year-old man coming from a background of secular middle-class journalist and Syrian heritage, who crossed the sea by boat for four months to come to the British shore via Greece, Turkey, Germany, and France saw home as “the diverse city London”. He used the word “diverse city of London” and “human rights” several times in his account. It seems that diversity in connection with home for Jishan is about a place/space that “many groups of people” from different social and ethnic backgrounds can “inhabit with dignity”. Jishan stated that he “craved for a diverse home” and he was happy to be here. He stated:

“I came here because UK has a reputation for diversity and multiculturalism. There was no security in Syria. It was too unsafe for me. I could have stayed in Turkey as I was offered good accommodation, but I am an atheist. I decided to move on and come to [the] UK because this is an open, multicultural and diverse society, at least from what I have heard. I hope, I am right. I would like to belong to British society. I have no prejudice.”

In his construction of home, Jishan was clear about a possible spatial home and he already built a temporal home in the same form that Taylor (2015) discussed in the context of Cypriot people's narratives in London. The temporal home was also expressed by Humira, 27-year-old woman from Somalian heritage who was granted asylum before we met in 2016 and was allowed to take GCSE exam. For Humira, home means her current home in Britain. She explains:

“I am an immigrant from Somalia who has the wish to develop a higher educational profile. I have completed GCSE math in the UK. I am currently studying English functional skills level 2, and I have also completed my accounting AAT level 1 and level 2. I am also attending the University's Open Learning Initiative course for refugees and asylum seekers. I have a permanent residence permit in the UK. I am still uncertain about where and how I can access Higher Education.”

Humira aspires to a better home and recognises her position in society in relation to education and higher studies. Her narrative is “moving” as she expresses possessiveness in her temporal home at the same time as conveying her feelings of an uncertain and unpredictable future in the new place. The temporal home for Humira means Bristol where she celebrates birthdays, educational achievements,

and religious events, goes to the mosque, and aspires to prospects in life. Despite Humira's aspiration and resilience, her anxiety and uncertainty about a suitable job and long-term home were noticeable.

## The Displaced and “Crisis of Reception”

The *moving narrative* of the displaced speakers substantiates that a sense of belonging to home – whether in the host country or country of origin – cannot always be attainable. Even if belonging is something intrinsic to being human, the displaced can have attachments to a place only if they are allowed to hold onto that sense of belonging. For example, Shahosh stated that:

“I'm Proud to be a Moroccan [...] but I am too black to be a Moroccan. The Moroccan people that you see and hear speaking about Morocco in academic seminar in the UK are all white Muslims. The indigenous Moroccan are not invited to any western conference since the Empire took over the state power.”

This statement suggests that the right to belong for an indigenous Moroccan has been brought into question more harshly than the experiences of other Moroccans. Shahosh is seen as “out of place” because of his *race*. He had been denied access to education, healthcare, and work for two years since he arrived in Britain. Unlike Jishan, who received warm clothes, medicine, and a blanket on arrival, Shahosh did not receive a warm welcome when he arrived in Britain in his *Jillaba*. “Nobody has asked how are you” when he went to Home Office in Croydon, although he mentioned to the officers that he has a condition. Shahosh described how he has been forced to practice “so called British values” of what he calls “a name of a joke”<sup>8</sup>. Shahosh's experience in British society points to the “crisis of reception”, not of migration, as discussed in theories of transnationalism (Yuval-Davis, 2007 cited in Yuval-Davis, 2010). Shahosh could not belong to a society that requires him to prove “how to hold a knife and a fork”, “what clothes to wear to suit British multicultural society”, and “what jokes to make when someone is upset by the Home Office's maltreatment”. Arguably more than a sense of belonging, it is the *politics of belonging* and the *policies of the host country* that influence the meaning of “home” and redefine the identity of the displaced. For Shahosh, there is no space to grow a sense of belonging in his host country.

Most of our respondents, except Zeba and Jishan, reported that during the process of seeking sanctuary they were living on social welfare. Their legal status within the immigration framework in Britain was influenced by *race* and *ethnicity* and made them easy targets of the exclusionary practices and direct discrimination of the Home Office. Shahosh explained:

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<sup>8</sup> See, for a detailed discussion on this, Hashem and Dudman (2016).

“I don’t receive any health service in this country. As an asylum seeker I am not allowed to have free medical service. There’s no surgery in London that I could register to. When I went to give interview for asylum at the UKBA office, the officer had asked me about my health and fitness. I said that I don’t know how fit I am because I didn’t see a doctor for over eleven months. I don’t know if any disease is spreading into my body. Guess what he said: ‘it’s okay. I didn’t go to doctor for months also. You are okay’. Ha ha, he compared his status with me. You know what he actually meant? He meant that you cannot complain about anything as an asylum seeker. A refugee does not need any health service.”

Likewise, Ahammad explained that during his asylum process he underwent incredible hardship, anxiety, and depression. He was made homeless soon after asylum was granted:

“The uncertainty is depressing. The asylum process is impossible. The Home Office does not give me any clue about a possible date. If I had known about a date or a month when it [refuge] will be granted, I could plan something. I could not plan anything. I could not hope for anything.”

Ahammad moved to London in 2016 and was awaiting asylum when we first met. He studied Software Development and Wireless Communications and had obtained a Master’s degree at a Kuwaiti University before coming to the UK. The uncertainty about Ahammad’s refuge eventually ended as he was granted asylum in summer 2017. Yet his uncertainty about home was not over. Soon after he received the letter from Home Office about his asylum, Ahammad was told to leave the refugee home on the day after he was granted asylum:

“I will have no place to live from the day after tomorrow. Yesterday the Refugee Home [sic] told me that I will be kicked out of the Home if I didn’t leave in three days. It is because my asylum was granted two days ago, and I must find a place to move out now. But I don’t have an income, I don’t have a job. I don’t have a relative go to. Where would I go. There is no home for me in London”.

Ahammad’s experience shows that making home in London becomes impossible “within conditions of restrictive immigration practices framed within the Hostile Environment” (to use Wilkins, 2019:18 cited in Dudman, 2020). The positive news of a grant of asylum became a dilemma for the *Black* Afrikan Muslim man who moved for safety in Britain from North Sudan. The hostility to the displaced after asylum in the host country created a new problem for him. The Home Office restricted the space for belonging by evicting him from the temporary home. He was prevented from remaking home and creating a sense of belonging. A “crisis of reception” is noticeable here, too. Making home for a “refugee” in London in particular is almost impossible within the hostile immigration policies and the framework for resettlement and housing for “refugees”. Despite holding a Master’s degree and having good English language proficiency, remaking home for Ahammad in London became unattainable. He was forced to unbelong and move to Scotland where this interview took place.

Ahammad’s experience is not unique. Others have also spoken about the housing crisis for refugees and the Home Office’s reluctance to support additional housing. The home of the displaced can also be conceptualised as a “displaced

home”. The displaced home refers to both the home *there* that they have lost and a home *here* that the displaced are trying to re/make. The displaced home is always *complex* and *in process*. Snafa, a 50-year-old who fled Iran, is trying to remake home in the Midlands:

“I was an entrepreneur. I left my business and home behind. My husband and children are still there. Part of myself is here, the other part is there. I am displaced. My home is displaced. I am anxious. Always in anxiety. The home in the countryside where I am living here [East Midlands] is not like my home. I go there, the Refugee Home [sic] to rest. I am sort of in between here and there. I sleep here but think about the home in my country. It is difficult to feel at home here. It is difficult to think about the home there. I wait [sic] asylum and hope to see my husband and children one day. Who knows if you [sic] we can remake home.”

Snafa has no real sense of attachment to her home in Oxfordshire. She thinks about her lost home but does not want to go home because that home is displaced. In addition to her displacement and separation from the rest of her family, the reception she received under the hostile environment in Britain has made her reflect on home as an unsettled or displaced home. It may be that the living conditions in her current residence (the Reception Centre) contributed to her disorientation and lack of belonging in Britain. She also finds herself “awkward in the UK” because “people don’t understand” her language. This was a discussion point that came up in conversations with other speakers who felt the same, despite having a settled position after asylum was granted. They could neither feel at home, settled, nor think of going back to the home from where they had been displaced. It is important to acknowledge the sense of loss and isolation, alongside the achievements, that displaced people encounter in their new home and in a new place, within hostile immigration policies in particular.

## **London as a Complex Home: Identities of Sudanese, Syrian and Moroccan Displaced Men**

Remaking home for the displaced means reconstructing life, place, and identity (Korac, 2009). It means negotiating many challenges posed by the policies and framework of the host countries, moving away from their original home to embrace uncertainty, and coping with policies about displacement and “refugee” identities in the host country, when they are also negotiating uncertainties and hostility in their host countries. Reconstructing life, identity and home in a hostile environment has become impossible for some of these speakers, including Sazia and Ahammad, in London. Ahammad argues:

“London is busy, rushing, expensive and there was no job and study support for me. Making home for me in London would be difficult. I moved over to Scotland for house rent and

education. It's cheaper and nice here. People are friendly. I like it. I feel welcome and happy person."

Home is also an intersection of space, time, and social relations (Korac, 2009, p.26) which is evident in the story of Ahammad, Neela, Snafa and Jishan. There are others who are still trying to make home in London and faced with differential acculturation and direct prejudice. Shahosh mentioned that people on the streets of London asked him if they can touch his curly hair which made him feel embarrassed. He stated that he feels like:

"A monkey in the zoo. Curiosity or fantasy of people in London is incredible. Why would anybody want to touch my hair? Could you imagine what would happen if I asked the same question to them: 'can I touch your hair?'"

This curiosity and expectation about the *Other* is familiar to other participants too. While it is done almost without an intention to harass the person, it causes embarrassment and *hurt*. Such intrusiveness in a developed society is an irony, and a familiar form of orientalism and stereotyping, if not hostility, prevails in London which undermines transnational social values and diversity. Similar experiences were recounted by an irregular migrant respondent from Kuwait who arrived in the UK during the Brexit vote campaign. He explains:

"It is hard to feel at home in London. People look at me like I am a stranger. On tube people don't like me, I think because of my dress. I don't have many clothes. I wear the same shirts and trousers. I don't look smart. My accent is another trouble. When I speak people always ask me: where are you from. It is embarrassing."

Zakaria is a 34-year-old man. The extra *curiosity* of people on London's underground and streets led him to believe that he lacks something. He is isolated and deprived of a sense of belonging to these streets where he would be embarrassed by unexpected scrutiny over his outfit and gestures. Re/making home in such conditions is almost impossible.

Sazia, a single mother of three female children from Syrian heritage who was a wealthy business entrepreneur before ISIS launched war in Syria, explained:

"I got refused to let a house with four kids. I have three daughters who just arrived from Germany after two months separation since we fled home. My husband is still stuck in Syria. I need a safe home for my beautiful daughters. One is 8 years old, one 12 years old, and the eldest one is 16 years old. I am going from door to door for them to rent a house in London, but no one let me in. I am carrying £40K cash in my handbag as you can see. I went to view several properties and the landlords are all fine at the start. As soon as they heard that I am a refugee, awaiting asylum, they said: 'We do not let home to refugees. I am sorry. You got to find somewhere else.' I don't believe this. I could not believe it that a normal person here in a developed country who speaks big about human rights won't let me rent a flat for my daughters just because I am a refugee. I even told them that I am a lone parent and new in this country. My daughters are not well, the little one has got high fever, I need to take them to a healthy home urgently. I offered 12 months advance rent. But nobody listened to me. What do this British think of themselves? How could Home

Office not find a safe home for my daughters. Where would I go with my three girls in a strange country? Is there no human rights in the UK?"

Arguably, Sazia's narrative is informed by the discourse of the "good immigrant" and "bad immigrant" (see Shukla, 2016). The politics of who can and should belong *here* is obvious in this narrative. Sazia arrived in London four months before we met in 2018. She was awaiting asylum and has enrolled in the University's Open Learning Programme. Her daughters joined her two months later. Sazia was offered initial housing in London by the Home Office which was unsuitable for the family. Under the current scheme, asylum seekers are not able to choose where they live. Sazia wanted to rent a better accommodation when her three daughters arrived in London because the initial housing is not suitable for her children. Sazia was concerned about her children's education, physical and mental health and well-being, and safety as any other mother would have thought. She first requested for a safe and healthy family housing to the Home Office, which the Home Office failed to provide. Sazia believed that the Home Office was reluctant to grant her request for a healthy home for her daughters from a preconception that a Yazidi mother is not a good immigrant and would not have much to offer to the UK. In the absence of Sazia's husband, she found it difficult to look for private housing and approached her teachers at the University, one of whom has volunteered to help search for properties in London. Sazia and her teacher looked for property for weeks, but the Landlords were not interested in letting a Syrian asylum-seeker and her daughters on their property. Sazia and her daughters were first neglected by the Home Office, and she was further denied the right to rent a property when she approached the landlords with the help of the University staff who volunteered to look for her accommodation. According to the staff who accompanied Sazia, the landlords shut their doors abruptly when they heard that she was undergoing asylum process. A material home was denied, making it impossible for Sazia and her daughters to develop a sense of belonging to this country. This assimilation of a displaced mother of colour and her three war-traumatized daughters in London marks London as a hostile place for Syrian refugee women.

Making and remaking home in a second or third place is hard for anybody, as argues Korac (2009), but it seems more challenging in the hostile environment in Britain for those coming from the *Global South*. The displaced people from the Global South are targeted by a range of exclusionary policies on the one hand, and the populist anti-immigrant discourse on the other hand. Sazia, Shahosh, Ahammad, Humira, and Snafa negotiate the harsh reality, the structural power relations and race relations in their everyday lives in Britain. Paradoxically, Shahosh also commented that London as a locality or a temporary home is safer and better than other parts of England:

"A better place. It is better than my home country. London is better for its diversity, its political dimension, its democratic value".

The relational aspect of "home" identified here is combined with the material home. Shahosh's statement also validates Al-Ali and Koser's suggestion that "concepts of home are not static but dynamic processes, involving the acts of

imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, loosing and moving homes” (2002, p.6 cited in Taylor, 2015, p. 4). Shahosh originally reported loss and hostility in London while simultaneously imagining and creating a safer home in the city. He did not try to move to other cities. Jishan, who works for the Guardian as a freelance journalist, also stated:

“I never received anything but solidarity as a refugee in the UK. [...] So far UK is a good, friendly and hospitable country to me. When I arrived in the UK the first question that I was asked at Calais is: “Do you need a Doctor”? I was moved and compelled by the warmth of the question in a strange country that I came without knowing anybody, any connection, any dream or hope. I did not expect such warm welcome in a country where I didn’t have any relative. Everywhere everyone, all people, atheist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, English and non-English people have given me support and love, showed solidarity, they came with some help [...] I feel lucky to be here.”

Jishan’s account shows that Britain can be a good home to *some people* and can welcome some Syrian people. Hence, it is arguable that his experience is informed by the discourse of *good immigrants*. Jishan, as a freelance journalist, has social networks that he established through mainstream media, such as the Guardian and BBC for whom he worked before coming to Britain. His social networks have enabled him a special place in British society, which Sazia, Shahosh, Snafa, Zeba and others could not access. However, London has been seen as a safer and better home than the original home of the displaced.

Neela commented that “as a ‘home’, London is a much better place to live in”. Neela’s statement was supported by four others who suggested that the diversity, democracy, freedom of expression and multicultural aspects of the city of London is worthwhile to make a “home” for any refugee – regardless of Asian, Caribbean, White, Black, Muslim, or Jewish background. Shahosh emphasised that:

“It is a politically diverse “place” which allows me to participate in activism, to share views openly and to express solidarity with others. London offers a politically diverse community which is what I needed to live.”

However, the identity of a *Black Moroccan* displaced man and Syrian women in London make them unwelcome and the place itself a complex and paradoxical home. We argue that re/making home is most challenging for irregular migrants from the *Global South*. The reality in Glasgow, Bristol, and Oxfordshire seems neither welcoming nor too harsh for the displaced who spoke to us. It was not clear whether London is the harshest place to remake home. The *paradox* of the city of London, its *complexity*, and *rushing* atmosphere have been emphasised and felt as “harsh” by all participants including those who travelled from Bristol, Glasgow, and Midlands for the purpose of study.



## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we find that remaking home in Britain is particularly difficult for the *Black displaced* men and women from the *Global South*, and making home in London is harder than other cities. The differential experiences of the displaced and direct discriminations against displaced people from the Global South were key discussions in all the life narratives that we collected because they were denied access to home in the famously multicultural city of London. The hostile environment and immigration framework enables spaces for direct exclusions and the denial of fundamental human rights for the displaced in large cities, where they can experience rejection and homelessness in London. These stories must be archived and documented in their *original format* to challenge official narratives, and the inauthentic and distorted narratives about irregular migrants and their home countries.

These narratives also substantiate that a one-dimensional appreciation of home is not adequate. Many paradoxical meanings and contradictory experiences of home become obvious in the discussion, suggesting the significance of the oral history approach to displacement and re/making home. *Moving memories* of home and displacement of the speakers above reflect both a sense of loss and memories of happiness and affection for some, and collective memories of cultural heritage, landscapes, and political struggles for others. These memories of home in displacement are significant and valuable, even though some of these are painful and associated with trauma and loss that many displaced people find hard to bear. Meanings of home to our respondents are, however, *paradoxical, multiple, often complex, relational, and in a constant process*. These meanings given by the speakers here relate in many ways to Taylor's (2015) conceptualisation of meaning of home to Cypriots in London. At the same time, the testimonies shows that there are considerable differences between the definitions of home to different displaced individuals, such as Ahammad, Sazia and Snafa, who struggle to re/make home in London. Individual irregular migrants of colour and undocumented women's experiences of the process of re/making home in Britain *vary* based on their identities. Immigration policies, and transcultural encounters with English and Scottish British nationals, sanctuary and home in London, the right to work and study in a hostile environment in Britain affect their views of home in the host country and their countries of origin.

The testimonies of Shahosh, Jishan and Humira also relate to temporal home. However, the term "temporal home" is insufficient to grasp the depth and power of the narrative and memories of the displaced home. The narratives are *moving* and can be changed as life goes by and the person moves on. Certain aspects of the narrative told by a participant can become complicated in their later discussion or at some point when they would talk about a different incidence in the same "place" (such as London, Glasgow, or the Islamic state of Morocco). It is necessary, following Mbembe (2015), to refuse any pre-existing paradigm to avoid shaping and reshaping of data of the displaced identity and their narratives. In rejecting pre-existing paradigms, we can deconstruct narratives in the archives. The

meaning given by the participants about their life histories helps us analyse the history genuinely. In drawing on knowledge from below, one can see that the oral history told by the participants themselves is a lived reality in a particular socio-political and historically specific cultural context, which should not be distorted or reinterpreted. There is much more recorded life histories and extracts that we could not discuss in this chapter, but which should be archived and preserved.

“Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies” (Schwartz and Cook, 2002 cited in Dudman, 2019, p.33). We should continue to *archive* and digitalise the authentic narrative and record complex meanings of re/making home. The Living Refugee Archive continues to develop, and our engagement with displaced authors, artists, activists, scholars, and practitioners continue to help us shape and adapt what is meant by a participatory, living archive documenting the lived experiences of displacement. This has led us to consider the role of the Refugee Archives as a counter-archive, challenging the traditional notions of archival management to provide a living archive which is resonant to displaced communities, documenting their stories in the way they wish them to be told.

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